

v (6) Here in an enigmatic image (1 Cor. 13: 12) I discern the Trinity, which you are, my God. For in the beginning of our wisdom which is your wisdom, Father, begotten of your self, equal to you and coeternal, that is in your Son, you 'made heaven and earth' (Gen. 1: 1). We have said a lot about 'the heaven of heaven' (Ps. 113: 24), about 'the earth invisible and unorganized', and about the 'dark abyss'. It is dark because of the disordered flux of spiritual formlessness; but it became converted to him from whom it derived the humble quality of life it had, and from that illumination became a life of beauty. So it was the heaven of that heaven which was subsequently made to take its place between water and water (Gen. 1: 7). And now where the name of God occurs, I have come to see the Father who made these things; where the 'Beginning' is mentioned, I see the Son by whom he made these things. Believing that my God is Trinity, in accordance with my belief I searched in God's holy oracles and found your Spirit to be borne above the waters. There is the Trinity, my God—Father and Son and Holy Spirit, Creator of the entire creation.⁷

13. vi (7) I bring my heart to you, Light that teaches truth. Let not my heart tell me vain fantasies. Disperse its darkness, and tell me—I beg you by love, our mother,⁸ I beg you tell me: what was the reason why your scripture mentioned your Spirit only after it had mentioned heaven and earth 'invisible and unorganized' and 'darkness above the abyss'? Was it necessary for him to be brought in at this point so that he could be described as being 'borne above'? This could not be said unless first there was a reference to that above which your Spirit could be understood to be borne. For he was not borne above the Father and the Son, and he could not properly be said to be borne above anything if there was nothing above which he could be borne. First, therefore, it was necessary to say what it was that he was borne above, and then to speak of the Spirit, who could not have been described other than as being 'borne above'. Why, therefore, was it inappropriate to introduce the Spirit except with the words that he was 'borne above'?

vii (8) Against this background the able reader can grasp your apostle's meaning when he is saying that 'love is diffused in our

⁷ Ambrose (*Hexameron* 1. 8. 29) gives a similar exegesis of Genesis 1.

⁸ 'Mother Charity' is a phrase liked by Augustine, also used by him elsewhere.

hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us' (Rom. 5: 5). Teaching us concerning the things of the Spirit he demonstrates that the way of charity is 'supereminent' (1 Cor. 12: 1). Moreover, he bows the knee for us to you that we may know 'the supereminent knowledge of the love of Christ' (Eph. 3. 14, 19). And so the Spirit, supereminent from the beginning, was 'borne above the waters.' To whom can I expound, and with what words can I express, the weight of cupidity pulling us downwards into the precipitous abyss and the lifting up of love given by your Spirit who was 'borne above the waters'? To whom can I communicate this? How can I speak about it? For it is not about literal places where we sink down and rise up. This symbolic language contains a resemblance, but also a difference. It means our feelings and our loves. The impurity of our spirit flows downwards because of our love of anxieties, and the holiness which is yours draws us upwards in a love of freedom from anxiety. So we may lift up our heart⁹ and hold it to you, where your Spirit is 'borne above the waters', and we come to the supereminent resting-place when our soul has passed over 'the waters that are without substance' (Ps. 123: 5).¹⁰

viii (9) The angel fell, the human soul fell, and thereby showed that the abyss would have held the entire spiritual creation in deep darkness unless from the beginning you had said 'Let there be light, and light was created' (Gen. 1: 3). Every intellectual being in your heavenly city obediently adhered to you, and rested in your Spirit which is immutably borne above all that is mutable. Otherwise the very 'heaven of heaven' would have been a dark abyss in itself. But now it is 'light in the Lord' (Eph. 5: 8). By the wretched restlessness of fallen spirits, manifesting their darkness as they are stripped naked of the garment of your light, you show how great a thing is the rational creature you have made. Whatever is less than you can never be sufficient to provide itself with the rest of contentment, and for this reason it is not even a source of contentment to itself. For you, our God 'will lighten our darkness' (Ps. 17: 29). From you comes our clothing (Isa. 61: 10), and our darkness will become as midday (Isa. 58: 10).

⁹ The African eucharistic liturgy, echoed here, had 'Lift up your heart' (singular).

¹⁰ Augustine's homily on this psalm explains that these waters are sins. His Old Latin version differs from the Vulgate.

My God, give me yourself, restore yourself to me. See, I love you, and if it is too little, let me love you more strongly. I can conceive no measure by which to know how far my love falls short of that which is enough to make my life run to your embraces, and not to turn away until it lies hidden 'in the secret place of your presence' (Ps. 30: 21). This alone I know: without you it is evil for me, not only in external things but within my being, and all my abundance which is other than my God is mere indigence.

ix (10) Surely no one supposes that either the Father or the Son was borne above the waters. Indeed if one understands this of a body in space, neither was the Holy Spirit. But if it means the transcendence of immutable divinity above all that is mutable, then Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were borne above the waters. Why then is this said only of the Holy Spirit? Why is it said exclusively of him as if there were a place where he then was, though it is not a place? Of him alone is it said that he is your 'gift' (Acts 2: 38).

In your gift we find our rest. There are you our joy. Our rest is our peace.

Love lifts us there, and 'your good Spirit' (Ps. 142: 10) exalts 'our humble estate from the gates of death' (Ps. 9, 15). In a good will is our peace.¹¹ A body by its weight tends to move towards its proper place. The weight's movement is not necessarily downwards, but to its appropriate position: fire tends to move upwards, a stone downwards.¹² They are acted on by their respective weights; they seek their own place. Oil poured under water is drawn up to the surface on top of the water. Water poured on top of oil sinks below the oil. They are acted on by their respective densities, they seek their own place. Things which are not in their intended position are restless. Once they are in their ordered position, they are at rest.

My weight is my love. Wherever I am carried,¹³ my love is carrying me. By your gift we are set on fire and carried upwards: we grow red hot and ascend. We climb 'the ascents in our heart' (Ps. 83: 6), and sing 'the song of steps' (Ps. 119: 1). Lit by your fire, your good fire, we grow red-hot and ascend, as we move upwards 'to the peace of Jerusalem' (Ps. 121: 6). 'For I was glad when they said to

¹¹ Echoed in Dante, *Paradiso* 3. 85.

¹² Similar analogy for the soul finding its proper habitat in Plotinus 2. 1. 3. On 'good will' cf. Plotinus 6. 8. 6. 32 ff.; 6. 8. 13. 12 ff.

¹³ Plotinus (6. 8. 1. 26) also speaks of the will being 'carried away'.

me, let us go to the house of the Lord' (Ps. 121: 1). There we will be brought to our place by a good will, so that we want nothing but to stay there for ever.

x (11) Happy is that created realm which has known nothing other than bliss. Yet the story would have been different unless, by your gift which is 'borne above' all that is mutable, immediately upon its creation it was elevated with no interval of time by that call 'Let there be light,' and it became light. For in us there are distinct moments of time since at one stage we were darkness and then were made light (Eph. 5: 8). But concerning the higher creation, scripture only says what it would have been had it not received light; and the wording of the text speaks as if at an earlier stage it had been in flux and darkness, to emphasize the cause by which it was made to become different. That is, it became light by being turned towards the light that can never fail. Let him who can, understand this. Let him seek help from you and not 'trouble me' (Gal. 6: 17) as if it were in my power 'to light any man coming into this world' (John 1: 9).

13. xi (12) Who can understand the omnipotent Trinity? Yet everyone speaks about the subject, if indeed it can be the matter of discourse. It is a rare soul who knows what he is talking about when he is speaking of it. People debate and quarrel, and without peace no one sees that vision. I wish that human disputants would reflect upon the triad within their own selves. These three aspects of the self are very different from the Trinity, but I may make the observation that on this triad they could well exercise their minds and examine the problem, thereby becoming aware how far distant they are from it. The three aspects I mean are being, knowing, willing. For I am and I know and I will. Knowing and willing I am. I know that I am and I will. I will to be and to know.¹⁴

In these three, therefore, let him who is capable of so doing contemplate how inseparable in life they are: one life, one mind, and one essence, yet ultimately there is distinction, for they are inseparable, yet distinct. The fact is certain to anyone by introspection. Let him consider himself and reflect and tell me what is there. When, however, through his investigation of these three, he has

¹⁴ Augustine announces the theme of his large work *On the Trinity*, begun a year or two after the completion of the *Confessions*, but requiring many years to complete. Some of the terminology has affinities with Plotinus (e.g. 6. 4. 14).

found something out and has made his report on that, he should not suppose that he discovered the immutable that transcends them—that which immutably is, immutably knows, and immutably wills. It baffles thought to inquire whether these three functions are the ground which constitutes the divine Trinity, or whether the three components are present in each Person, so that each Person has all three, or whether both these alternatives are true, in the sense that, in ways beyond finite understanding, the ultimate Being exists in both simplicity and multiplicity, the Persons being defined by relation to each other, yet infinite in themselves. So the divine being is and knows itself and is immutably sufficient to itself, because of the overflowing greatness of the unity.¹⁵ Who can find a way to give expression to that? Who would venture in any way whatever to make a rash pronouncement on the subject?

xii (13) Proceed with your confession, my faith. Say to the Lord your God: 'Holy, holy, holy', Lord my God (Isa. 6: 3; Rev. 4: 8). In your name we are baptized, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28: 19); in your name we baptize, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Among us also in his Christ God has made a heaven and an earth, meaning the spiritual and carnal members of his Church. Moreover, before our earth received form, imparted by doctrine, it was 'invisible and unorganized' (Gen. 1: 2), and we were covered by the darkness (Ps. 54: 6) of ignorance. For you 'corrected man for his iniquity', and 'your judgements are like the great abyss' (Ps. 38: 12; 35: 7). But because your 'Spirit was borne above the waters', your mercy did not abandon our misery, and you said: 'Let there be light' (Gen. 1: 3). 'Do penitence, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near' (Matt. 3: 2; 4: 17). Because our soul was 'disturbed' within ourselves, we 'remembered you, Lord from the land of Jordan and from the mountain', which is equal to you (Phil. 2, 6) but for our sakes became 'little' (cf. Ps. 41: 7). Our darknesses displeased us. We were converted to you (Ps. 50: 15), light was created, and suddenly we 'who were once darkness are now light in the Lord' (Eph. 5: 8).

xiii (14) Nevertheless we still act on faith, not yet on sight, 'For by hope we have been saved' (2 Cor. 5: 7). 'Hope which is seen is not hope' (Rom. 8: 24). 'Deep' still 'calls to deep', but now 'with the

¹⁵ Plotinus 6. 8. 17. 25: The one is wholly self-related. 6. 5. 9. 35: It possesses multiplicity 'by itself and from itself'.

voice of your cataracts' (Ps. 41: 8). In this life even he who says 'I could not speak to you as spiritual but as carnal' (1 Cor. 3: 1) does not think that he himself has comprehended. He 'forgets the things behind and stretches out to those things which lie ahead' (Phil. 3: 13). Weighed down he groans (2 Cor. 5: 4); 'his soul thirsts for the living God, like a hart for the springs of waters', and says 'when shall I come?' (Ps. 41: 2-3). He wishes to 'put on his habitation from heaven' (2 Cor. 5: 2). To the lower abyss he calls in the words 'Be not conformed to this world, but be reformed in the newness of your mind' (Rom. 12: 2), and 'Be not children in mind but be infants in malice that you may be fully adult in mind' (1 Cor. 14: 20), and 'O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?' (Gal. 3: 1). But now he is speaking not with his own voice but with yours. 'You sent your Spirit from on high' (Wisd. 9: 17) through him who 'ascended on high' (Ps. 67: 19), and opened the 'cataracts' of his gifts (Mal. 3: 10), so that 'the flood waters of the river made glad your city' (Ps. 45: 5). For that city the bridegroom's friend (John 3: 29) sighs, having already the firstfruits of the spirit within him; but he still groans within himself 'waiting for the adoption, the redemption of his body' (Rom. 8: 23). For that city he sighs, for he is a member of the bride. For her he is jealous, for he is the bridegroom's friend; for her he is jealous, not for himself. 'By the sound of your cataracts' (Ps. 41: 8), not by his own voice, he calls to the other deep. In his jealousy for it he fears lest 'as the serpent deceived Eve by his subtlety, so also their mind may be corrupted to lose chastity' (2 Cor. 11: 2) which is in our bridegroom, your unique Son. What a beautiful light that will be when 'we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3: 2), and there 'shall pass away the tears which have become my bread day and night, while it is daily said to me, Where is your God?' (Ps. 41: 4).

xiv (15) I also say: My God, where are you? I see you are there, but I sigh for you a little (Job 32: 20) when I 'pour out my soul upon myself in the voice of exultation and confession, the sound of one celebrating a festival' (Ps. 41: 6). Yet still my soul is sad because it slips back and becomes a 'deep', or rather feels itself still to be a deep. My faith, which you have kindled to be a light before my feet (Ps. 118: 105) in the night, says to it: 'Why are you sad, soul, and why do you disturb me? Hope in the Lord' (Ps. 41: 6). 'His word is a light to your feet' (Ps. 118: 105). Hope and persevere