SALVATION
AND
SIN

Augustine, Langland, and Fourteenth-Century Theology

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“That is soth,” y saide, “and so y beknowe
That y haue ytynyt tyme and tyme myspened;
Ac yt y hope, as he þat ofte hath ychaaffared
And ay loste and loste and at þe laste hym happed
A boute such a bargayn he was þe bet euere
And sette his los as a leef at the laste ende,
Such a wynnyng hym warth thorw wyrdes of grace:
Simile est regnum colorum thesauro abscondito in agro;
Mulier que invenit dragnam.
So hope y to haue of hym þat is almyghty
A gobet of his grace and bigynne a tyme
That alle tymes of my tyme to profit shal turne.”
“Y rede the,” quod resoun tho, “rape the to bigynne
The lyf þat is louable and leele to thy soule.”
“Se! and continwe,” quod Conscience, “and to þe kyrke yvende.”

William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, V.92–104

The epigraph to this preface is a gripping moment in a work that is central to this book, a moment of conversion and summons into the Church. But *Piers Plowman* unfolds a more complicated account of the processes of conversion than the penitent Wille anticipates. He prays for the divine grace that alone can redeem time laid waste and lost. Conscience tells him that the place of beginnings to which his reason urges him is the Church in which he had already been born in baptism. In the
lines following the epigraph Wille obeys. But gradually Langland discloses the opacity of the converted will to the introspective powers of the soul and its unacknowledged resistance to the gifts of redemption. He also discloses how the gift of God in which Wille is called to redeem the time, “pe kyrke” founded by the sublime acts of Christ and the Holy Spirit, is also historically constituted by the acts and habits of sinners (chapter 4).

So here the interactions of agency become extremely complex and desperately opaque to Wille as he searches for what he finds and loses, what is present and absent, revealed and hidden. Perhaps drawn on by Langland, Salvation and Sin explores different models of the mysterious relations between divine and human agency together with models of sin and its consequences. Theologies of grace, versions of Christian identity, and versions of community, especially the Church, are its pervasive concerns. I am especially interested in figurations of how God found out a remedy that would bring the long-wandering prodigal from a distant, insatiably hungry and warring land “to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12.22).¹ As Shakespeare’s Isabella (in Measure for Measure) tries to remind the godly and revolutionary judge of Vienna who has just insisted that her brother “is a forfeit of the law”:

Alas, alas!
Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once,
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy.²

About to enter the cloister, Isabella evokes an extraordinarily powerful image of salvation and the consequences of sin. In a poetry of radiant beauty she grasps how human salvation is inextricably bound up with divine patience. The divine judge, he who “is the top of judgement” (2.2.76), the lord of time, patiently took time to find a way that would be “the remedy” to sin and its catastrophic consequences. The remedy she invokes is the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ (Phil. 2.6–11). In the face of the magistrate’s reintroduction of the death penalty for sexual unions outside marriage, she recalls the transformation of the relations between law, justice, justification, and mercy in Christ: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”
Her recollection invites the human judge, Angelo, to consider the entailments of worshiping the God who enacts this humility, patience, and self-abandoning service. Angelo rejects her invitation to take the time he has been given to find out these entailments for himself and the polity he governs. In doing so he rejects an invitation to conversion. This charged scene identifies some central preoccupations in Salvation and Sin. How do the writers it studies envisage the consequences of sin, the conversion of sinners, and the resistances to conversion?

Four chapters of Salvation and Sin are on fourteenth-century writers, two of whom wrote in Latin, two in English (although one of these, as the epigraph illustrates, makes use of Latin). But the book sets out with Augustine, who died on August 28, 430. His presence, however, is not confined to the first chapter, for he becomes a major interlocutor throughout Salvation and Sin. The first chapter shows the reading of Augustine relevant to this book while it introduces a vocabulary and grammar that will help me to explore representations of divine and human agency, grace, and sin in all the other writers explored here. Augustine's role in shaping my inquiries should not set up expectations that I have any interest in contributing to a history of putative "Augustinianism." Augustine was certainly a major authority in medieval Christianity, but investigating the extremely complex mediations of his work, and others' work thought to be by him, is not my task. I do hope, however, that the first chapter, together with the later readings of Augustine (especially in chapters 4 and 5), may recollect fascinating strands of Augustine's work that have largely been occluded from literary studies. Indeed, I hope that literary scholars, both medievalists and early modernists, may be encouraged to expand their engagement with Augustine's perpetually searching, monumentally intelligent, and endlessly generative range of writings (including his abundant homilies) and to do so before deciding what is or isn't "Augustinian" (chapter 4).

The second chapter begins the book's engagement with fourteenth-century theological writing. This chapter was the outcome of research provoked by the current scholarly consensus that Langland's theology is "semi-Pelagian" or "Pelagian" and that his most important affiliations are with "modern" theologians ("moderni") and especially with William of Ockham. My own previous engagements with Ockham, Langland, and Augustine had not given me confidence in this thesis, but it clearly
dealt with matters central to the present project. So I decided to explore an especially relevant cluster of issues in Ockham’s theology. These are his understanding of grace (including sacramental grace), human agency, sin, divine forgiveness, and salvation together with his versions of freedom. Both Augustine and Aquinas help me to bring out the consequences of Ockham’s model of grace, in which salvation is cut off from both the network of mediations displayed by Augustine (chapter 1) and any substantive Christology. This, it will emerge in chapter 4, is a very different theology from Langland’s.

From Ockham I turn in chapter 3 to a theologian generally considered to be “Augustinian” and engaged in a battle with fourteenth-century “modern” theology and what he took to be its incorrigible Pelagianism. Recent scholarship on Thomas Bradwardine has been particularly concerned with scientific interests (physics, natural philosophy, astrology, astronomy), together with his work in mathematics, logic, and metaphysics. But my own engagement is restricted to aspects of his treatment of sin and salvation, conversion, and the Church’s sacraments. Once more my questions are facilitated by my reading of Langland, Augustine, and St. Thomas. Given the customary classification of Bradwardine as “Augustinian,” a judgment doubtless encouraged by his copious quotations from Augustine, I was particularly surprised to find a thoroughly un-Augustinian sidelong of Christology in the massive work undertaken on behalf of the God worshiped by Christians, De Causa Dei. This, so it seems to me, is accompanied by an equally un-Augustinian approach to the mysterious relations between divine and human agency in the processes of conversion and lives of Christian discipleship.

Having considered a “modern” theologian and a renowned anti-“modern” one, I move to Langland’s theology of sin, grace, and reconciliation in Piers Plowman, a long multigeneric poem written and rewritten in the later fourteenth century. I concentrate both on the distinctive dialectical strategies of Langland’s poem and on some minute particulars that illuminate his understanding of sin’s consequences, individual sin, and collective sin. Such attention is essential because the poem’s modes of writing are intrinsic to its theology. Christian doctrine is never simply independent of the forms of writing and practice in which it is manifested, but Langland’s work compels theologians to remember a fact that their habitual procedures have often occluded, a fact to which
Aquinas drew attention in his exposition of the Lord’s Prayer: Langland is profoundly and pervasively attentive to the person and work of Christ in whom God is revealed. Here I show some of the ways in which his theological understanding, to which his ethics belongs, is shaped by his Christology. In doing so, I hope to suggest how arguments about “Pelagianism” are inextricably bound up with Christology, although this seems to have been largely forgotten. But it is not forgotten by Langland or Augustine.

Anyone trying to write a historical survey of Langland’s relations with fourteenth-century theology would doubtless follow up these considerations with accounts of other theologians. But I have no such ambitions, a fact further manifested by the subject and modes of discussion in the book’s final chapter. This brings Julian of Norwich’s profound, compassionate, and much-admired theology into conversation with Langland and Augustine. I confess that I found the processes and outcome of this really gripping. The conversation unfolds important difficulties in Julian’s account of agency and sin as these relate to salvation and Christology in the Showings. I hope this critical engagement with Julian’s great work encourages further exploration of her thinking about human agency together with her theology of sin and the reconciliation between God and humanity effected in Christ (2 Cor. 5.16–21).

Salvation and Sin has been written from both an English department and a divinity school. It is indebted to discussions in courses taught across a customarily sharp divide, courses that included both students in theology and ones in English medieval studies, courses such as one exploring theologies of grace from Augustine to Luther through Langland. The book’s choices of texts, preoccupations, and modes of inquiry reflect this site of production. So it is unsurprising that Salvation and Sin is more theological in its arguments than work habitually done in English departments, even when this work addresses Christian writing in the Middle Ages or the Reformation. But Piers Plowman is not known in divinity schools, yet it plays a central role in Salvation and Sin. Moreover, the book often attends to the minute particulars of the text in a manner that suggests an apprenticeship in literary studies. I appreciate that this may cause problems for some theologians who have never encountered Piers Plowman. Such problems are an inevitable part of any attempt to work across disciplinary divides that are alien to the medieval and early modern
writings and practices we study. My hope is that what is shown of Piers Plowman in chapter 4 will encourage those who have not read the poem to do so and to ruminate on it. But perhaps some who come from a divinity school or department of theology without having met Piers Plowman may find it helpful to go from the chapter on Augustine (chapter 1) to the chapter on Langland (chapter 4). This will at least give some substance to the passing allusions to Langland in the chapters on Ockham and Bradwardine.

I have written and ordered Salvation and Sin as an inquiry into different models of salvation and sin, setting out from Augustine, whose presence pervades the book. But it is neither a historical narrative nor, as I have already indicated, a historical survey. Because the book is an exploration of different writers, of peculiar force, addressing common and central topics in Christian teaching and forms of life, it is possible to read its interlocking chapters, after the Augustinian prelude, in an order other than the one I prefer. It does seem to me, however, that were Piers Plowman to be studied in divinity schools or theology departments it might elicit a fruitful exploration of the fate of Christian teaching and practice in the modes of theological reasoning propagated by Ockham, Bradwardine, and their successors. Be that as it may, I hope that my attempts to engage with the works I explore will convey something of the joy I have received from them and will encourage others to develop congruent critical practices.8

In the notes to this book I have tried to acknowledge those to whom I know I am indebted, past and present. I want to thank with especial gratitude the two people who have been most closely involved and most sustaining in the making of this book, Stanley Hauerwas and Sarah Beckwith. Stanley Hauerwas commented on everything here. He brought his capacious learning and intense theological concentration to the task of helping me understand what I want to do. My debts to him, his friendship, and his generosity are immense. Sarah Beckwith also read everything. I have benefited hugely from her creative and critical intelligence at all stages of composing this book. I am fortunate indeed that she remains at Duke University. I thank Derek Pearsall and Denise Baker for reading early versions of material on Langland, Kate Crassons
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That bread which you can see on the altar, sanctified by the word of God, is the body of Christ. That cup, or rather what the cup contains, sanctified by the word of God, is the blood of Christ. It was by means of these things that the Lord Christ wished to present us with his body and blood, which he shed for our sake for the forgiveness of sins. If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle says, 
We, being many are one loaf, one body (1 Corinthians 10.17).
—Augustine, Sermon 227

In this chapter I will consider some aspects of Augustine’s writing about conversion as a way of approaching his theology of agency, grace, sin, and salvation. This account will be developed in some later chapters (chapters 4 and 5), but it offers a framework for my explorations of fourteenth-century writing on forms of agency, sin, and salvation. Here I set out from The City of God (413–26/27), where Augustine envisages history through the figure of two cities, the earthly city and the city
of God. Augustine’s understanding of conversion and the agency involved in conversion has to meditate on these differences: From what forms of life are Christians converted? And to what forms of life, to what practices will they be drawn?

In the earthly city people live according to “the rule of self” (secundum se ipsum): that is, by a rule that imagines humans as autonomous subjects independent of God (CG XIV.3). Its peace is correspondingly defined in terms of the distribution and possession of material goods mediated by contingent cultural values, such as a cult of honor or a cult of glory derived from military triumphs or civic works (XIV.1). In the earthly city, exemplified at its providentially shaped best by Rome, people’s wills, their loves, are fixed on glorification of the self (“amor sui,” XIV.28). In seeking to secure themselves they seek dominion over others, and their lust for dominion comes to dominate their lives (“dominandi libido dominatur,” XIV.28). The rulers of the earthly city are “interested not in the morality but the docility of their subjects,” and laws are organized around the protection of property and its accumulation. This is called freedom (II.20). Those who challenge this version of the virtues will be attacked as a public enemy (“publicus inimicus”), and the licentious multitude (“libera multitudo”) will exile or kill them (II.20). In fact the earthly city normalizes and institutionalizes the roots of sin. Adam’s will to autonomy from God and Cain’s city founded on fratricide are its origins (XIII.13–15; XV.1, 5–8).

Not that the earthly city necessarily rejects religion. On the contrary, it fosters the worship of gods and the generation of many kinds of mediator. Augustine exhibits this in a sustained account of religion and ritual in Rome. The city’s gods and their cult are shown to function as ideological and social cement in the compromise of conflicting wills and competing lust for dominion. Even Platonic philosophers participate in their polity’s religion. For through the shared worship of demonic mediators and pagan gods competing citizens are bound together. It thus becomes virtually impossible for “a weak and ignorant individual” nurtured in such a culture to escape from its social and demonic ties (IV.32). The cultural norms are internalized and secured in collective worship (VI.4). Furthermore, worship itself is directed to sustain “the enjoyments of vices and an earthly peace,” to prolong the dominion over others (XV.7). All this description and critical analysis is elaborated with a theological herme-
neutic centered on the one true mediator between the triune God and humanity.8

What then is the city to which Christians are converted, those forms of life that Augustine calls the city of God? Whereas the earthly city embodies love of self becoming contempt of God, the city of God is made by the love of God becoming the contempt of self, a love whose fulfillment and glory are not in a putatively autonomous self but in God (XIV.28). This city fashions well-directed wills that make emotions (“motus”), the acts of will, praiseworthy (XIV.6).9 Such duly directed wills love God, their truly felicitous end, and they love their neighbors not according to human determinations (“non secundum hominem”) but according to God (“secundum Deum”). In Scripture this is usually called charity (“caritas”), though it is also known as love (“amor,” XIV.7). But the power and detail of Augustine’s vision of the earthly city, instantiated by Rome, pose the question of how anybody formed in this city could find, let alone pursue, those very different and strange forms of life called the city of God, the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Christ.10 To put the question in terms shared by Langland and Augustine (as we shall see in chapter 4), how can the half-alive/half-dead man of Jesus’s parable, the man attacked by thieves, stripped naked, bound up, and left lying in a wilderness, how can such a person become a free member of the city of God (Luke 10.29–37)? Is the requisite conversion perhaps totally inward? Could it be a totally inward act taking the Christian into an invisible city, a Wycliffite version of the true Church?11

There are certainly powerful accounts of Augustine that go along such lines. Adapting his Neoplatonic heritage, Augustine calls people to a turn away from the temporal and material world in which they have been fragmented and entrapped, a turn inward on a contemplative journey that will return them to God. Perhaps, like Milton’s Archangel Michael, Augustine calls Adam to find “A paradise within thee, happier far” (Paradise Lost, XII.587).12 One of the most widely diffused readings of Augustine in this direction appears in Charles Taylor’s monumental Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity.13 According to Taylor, Augustine invents a core component of “modern identity,” the one Taylor calls “inwardness.” Indeed, Augustine’s invention of “inwardness” anticipates Descartes.14 He quotes from Augustine’s early work On True Religion (De Vera Religione): “Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward
man dwells the truth.” Not without reason, Taylor comments: “Augustine is always calling us within. What we need lies ‘intus,’ he tells us again and again.”15 For Augustine, “inward lies the road to God” (129). In fact, Augustine’s turn to the self was a turn to “radical reflexivity” (131).16

In an important review of Sources of the Self, Stanley Hauerwas and David Matzko offer criticisms of Taylor’s version of Augustine. They argue that this version entirely displaces the story of the city of God as “a counter-commonwealth of forgiveness and peace.” Taylor, they maintain, fails to grasp the role of the city of God in Augustine’s understanding of the “inward” route to God.17 If this criticism is warranted, as I believe it to be, it still leaves us with the question I put two paragraphs above: How can those of us who are habituated dwellers in the earthly city even perceive the city of God, let alone become its citizens? Augustine has shown that we are preoccupied by temporal goods, power, and honor, that we generate multiple strategies for shoring up our anxious selves against others, against death, and against God. In these preoccupations are we not likely to support our city’s means of self-defense, its military power on which our own security against assorted barbarians depends? Do not ties of patriotic solidarity, sacrifice, and collective glory bind us together into our earthly city? Yes, of course they do. So could not “radical reflexivity,” that famous inward turn, merely contribute to these given desires, anxieties, and bonds? Could it not actually shore up the very self produced by, in, and for the earthly city? And when I make the inward turn is there any good reason to think I will not find a god made in the image of the earthly city that has taught me how to honor the gods together with myself? Might not the earthly city even have taught me how to meditate? Taylor’s inquiry does not ask these questions. Yet they are among the very questions Augustine’s City of God has taught us to ask and has actually taught us to make central in any study of the self and its loves. In book VII of the Confessions, considering the converted Christian, Augustine says that while such a person may delight in God’s law according to the inward person (“secundum interiorem hominem”), and so show himself to be a rebel within the earthly city, “what will he do with ‘the other law in his members fighting against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity under the law of sin, which is in his members?’” (Confessions, VII.21.27, quoting from Rom. 7.22–23).18 Unlike some of his readers,
Augustine does not give us good reason to trust that the “radical reflexivity” of the “inward” turn will take us to God. It is salutary to remember that one of the features of the kingdom of God, the heavenly city, is the supersession of privatized, deep, secret interiorities: “The thoughts of our minds will lie open to each other” (CG XXII.29). In fact the fall of humanity is inextricably bound up with forms of privatization, with a rejection of common goods, the bonds of community, and transparency. So we may suspect that far from being “the principal route to God,” “radical reflexivity” could become bound up with the forms of privatization and inwardness cultivated in the earthly city as a means of accommodation with its life. Far from inciting conversion, such inwardness could integrate us more comfortably and resourcefully in the earthly city.

Conversion from this city, the “kingdom of death” (CG XVI.1), to the city of God will involve not so much a privatized inward journey as the conversion of the whole person from one home (“domus”) to another. It will mean converting from a city seeking an earthly peace structured on the will for dominion and dismissal of the triune God to a city whose members understand themselves as pilgrims in a foreign land worshiping this God. And the triune God has given the promise of redemption in the divine judge who was crucified by the judges of the earthly city (“under Pontius Pilate,” as the Nicene Creed states), the risen Son of God reconciling God and humanity in the Church, itself a divine gift. This city, Augustine says, calls out citizens from all nations to join a society of aliens (“peregrinam colligit societatem”) that has its own religious laws (“religionis leges”) and remains indifferent to the customs, laws, and institutions of the earthly city with which it lives. This indifference, however, will necessarily involve not inward emigration but dissent. And dissent will encounter anger, hatred, assaults, and persecution (XIX.17). So conversion is not to a city that is only invisible, a home in a privatized interiority.

Conversion is to the city of charity (CG XIV.7). This is the Christian religion itself (“ipsam religionem Christianam, ipsam civitatem Dei”), whose king and founder is Christ (“cuius rex est et conditor Christus,” XVII.4). Here all sacrifice is directed to the triune God revealed in Christ. It is offered “in every act which is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship,” present and future. These sacrificial acts are acts of
“compassion” involving neighbors and self, inseparably collective and individual, offered to Christ, the community’s “great Priest” (X.6). They constitute and build up the city that is the Church, the body of Christ. Augustine quotes Paul: “We are many, but we make up one body in Christ” (X.6; Rom. 12.3–6). And here, characteristically, he turns to the Eucharist: “This is the sacrifice which the Church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, a sacrament well-known to the faithful where it is shown to the Church that she herself is offered in the offering which she presents to God” (X.6). This brings us toward the heart of conversion in Augustine’s theology. Conversion is into the embodied life and story of the Catholic Church in which Augustine held the office of bishop. As he says, pagan philosophers were right in thinking that the wise man’s life is social. But Augustine insists on affirming this “much more strongly than they do.” As Oliver O’Donovan notes, Augustine wishes to stress the “distinctive” capacity of Christian thought “to break free of an individualist vision of the good” and develop “a social one.” For the city of God from “its first start” through its pilgrimage in this historical world could not “attain its appointed end [debitos fines] if the life of the saints were not social [socialis]” (XIX.5). And so, living a life in history, “as a civitas, the Church is for Augustine itself a ‘political’ reality.”

Here it is necessary to acknowledge a contested area in readings of the City of God: the relations between the Catholic Church and the city of God. My own view will already have emerged implicitly, but I think it should be articulated, however briefly. The Church is both visible and invisible, a city and a mystical body, the body and bride of Christ. Augustine explains his understanding of the relation between the Catholic Church and the kingdom of heaven, the New Jerusalem, in a sermon preached around 414. He tells his congregation that “the Church which now is,” “this Church, which gathers in good and bad together,” is also “called the kingdom of heaven.” It is the net of Christ’s parable, given to collect all kinds of fish into a truly mixed body until the Last Judgment (Matt. 13.47–50). Augustine stresses that Christians teaching good things but “doing bad things” are certainly, for now, “in the kingdom of heaven, that is, in the Church as it is in this time.” Similarly in book VIII of the City of God he writes that the city of God, which is the holy Church, “is now being built in the whole world,” built of those who once converted become like living stones (VIII.24; 1 Pet. 2.5). The Church includes both
“tares” and “wheat,” which the Lord allows to grow together until the final harvest. God’s “kingdom” thus includes “stumbling-blocks,” yet it is “the Church in this world” (XX.9; Matt. 13.39–43). Such locutions resist any dichotomization of visible and invisible Church. Augustine observes that his book is a defense of “the City of God, that is to say, God’s Church” [defendimus civitatem Dei, hoc est eius ecclesiam] (XIII.16). So Catholic Christians are “the citizens of the Holy City of God” who are “in the pilgrimage of this present life” (XIV.9). Our allegorical reading of the Old Testament must always be practiced “with reference to Christ and the Church, which is the City of God,” both within and beyond history (XVI.2). The Church is certainly the heavenly city on pilgrimage, a determinate community of historical beings. But as we have noted, it is equally certainly a mixed body. Against the Donists’ fantasies of a pure Church, Augustine insisted that the Church in its pilgrimage has wrinkles and spots, unlike the bride of Christ in her final form (Eph. 5.25–27). Just as Augustine’s language resists dichotomization of visible and invisible Church, so it resists any simple, unqualified identification of the city of God and the Catholic Church. The Church both already is the city of God and is not yet the city of God. This is a structure of theological reflection pervading Christian understanding of the relations between the kingdom of God already revealed in Christ and the kingdom of God prayed for and awaited, an eschatological event. In history, with its wrinkles, spots, tares, and wickedness, “the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven,” albeit a kingdom “at war” (XX.9).

With this reading of Augustine’s language concerning the Church and the city of God in mind, I return to the issue of conversion from the earthly city, that kingdom of death (CG XIV.1), to the city of God. This undoubtedly includes some kind of return to oneself from being assimilated to “externals” [foris]. But this moment must not be isolated from the movement into the community that constitutes the city of God in its historical pilgrimage. It must involve the whole, embodied person in a process that is never completed in this life. Conversion is from a home in a city organized around fragile compromises over wills competing for dominion and wealth to one centered on the promises of redemption, the precepts and gift of God, namely the Church (XIX.17). And it entails the public act of baptism. In a sermon preached around 419–20
Augustine tells his congregation that in the Church sins are forgiven that “are not forgiven apart from the Church.”35 Indeed, sins “must be forgiven in that Spirit by which the Church is gathered together in a unit” (71.28). Why? “Because the Church has received this gift, of sins being forgiven in her in the Holy Spirit.” Indeed, “You can tell you have received the Holy Spirit if you are held in the bond of peace of the Church, which is spread out among all nations. That’s why the apostle says, Eager to preserve the unity of the Spirit in this bond of peace (Ephesians 4.3)” (71.28). As for training in what Taylor called “radical reflexivity,”36 Augustine emphasizes that baptism into the Church, with the gift of divine forgiveness constituting this act, is conversion even if the Christians do not yet perceive that they have actually received the Holy Spirit (71.30–31). He reflects, characteristically, on the limits of our self-awareness: “Nor should it strike you as odd that someone should have something and be ignorant of what it is they have. To say nothing of the power of the Almighty and the unity of the unchangeable Trinity, who can easily grasp by knowledge what the soul is?” (71.31).

Time and again, in different genres of writing, Augustine affirms that “the words of God,” represented in Scripture, “make it perfectly clear that, apart from community with Christ, no one can attain eternal life and salvation.” And that, he writes in The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones (411–12), is why we baptize people, however young.37 Through this sacrament “they are joined to the body and members of Christ” (III.4.7). Christ himself “willed that this rebirth be brought about by baptism” and instituted this sacrament of conversion (I.18.23). So while God “is the light of the interior human being,” he “helps us to turn to him” (II.5.5) in the ways he has given people in the Church, which is his body. Conversion “begins with the forgiveness of sins,” but this “interior” renewal continues from day to day (2 Cor. 4.16) in the Catholic Church, where the fruits of the Holy Spirit are bestowed (II.7.9). Preaching to his congregations in the Church at once very visible and invisible, he often stresses that if the forgiveness of sins in Christ “were not to be had in the Church, there would be no hope of a future life and eternal liberation. We thank God, who gave his Church such a gift,” the gift of the baptismal sacrament.38 And, of course, thanks are given for the sacrament of unity where Christians are daily incorporated in the body of Christ.”39