

## BOOK IV

### *Manichee and Astrologer*

i (1) During this same period of nine years, from my nineteenth to my twenty-eighth year, our life was one of being seduced and seducing, being deceived and deceiving (2 Tim. 3: 13), in a variety of desires. Publicly I was a teacher of the arts which they call liberal;<sup>1</sup> privately I professed a false religion—in the former role arrogant, in the latter superstitious, in everything vain. On the one side we pursued the empty glory of popularity, ambitious for the applause of the audience at the theatre when entering for verse competitions to win a garland of mere grass, concerned with the follies of public entertainments and unrestrained lusts. On the other side, we sought to purge ourselves of that filth by supplying food to those whose title was the Elect and Holy, so that in the workshop of their stomach they could manufacture for us angels and gods to bring us liberation.<sup>2</sup> This was how my life was spent, and these were the activities of myself and my friends who had been deceived through me and with me.

Proud people may laugh at me. As yet they have not themselves been prostrated and brought low for their soul's health by you, my God. But I shall nevertheless confess to you my shame, since it is for your praise (Ps. 105: 47). Allow me, I pray you, grant me leave to run through my memory, as it is in the present, of the past twistings of my mistaken life and to sacrifice to you 'a victim of jubilation' (Ps. 26: 6). Without you, what am I to myself but a guide to my own self-destruction? When all is well with me, what am I but an infant sucking your milk and feeding on you, 'the food that is incorruptible' (John 6: 27)? What is a human being (name anyone you may please) when he is merely a man? So let the mighty and powerful

<sup>1</sup> Literature, rhetoric and dialectic, leading on to the mathematical studies of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy; called 'liberal' because they were the mark of a cultivated gentleman.

<sup>2</sup> In Manichee texts, every meal of the Elect is a holy feeding on particles of light concealed in fruits and plants, helping to gain remission of sins for those Hearers who prepare it. Above, III. x (18).

laugh at our expense. In our weakness and indigence (Ps. 73: 21), we may make our confession to you.

ii (2) In those years I used to teach the art of rhetoric. Overcome by greed myself, I used to sell the eloquence that would overcome an opponent. Nevertheless, Lord, as you know (Ps. 68: 6), I preferred to have virtuous students (virtuous as they are commonly called). Without any resort to a trick I taught them the tricks of rhetoric, not that they should use them against the life of an innocent man, but that sometimes they might save the life of a guilty person.<sup>3</sup> God, from far off you saw me falling about on slippery ground and in the midst of much smoke (Isa. 42: 3) discerned the spark of my integrity which in my teaching office I manifested to people who 'loved vanity and sought after a lie' (Ps. 4: 3).

In those years I had a woman. She was not my partner in what is called lawful marriage. I had found her in my state of wandering desire and lack of prudence. Nevertheless, she was the only girl for me, and I was faithful to her. With her I learnt by direct experience how wide a difference there is between the partnership of marriage entered into for the sake of having a family and the mutual consent of those whose love is a matter of physical sex, and for whom the birth of a child is contrary to their intention—even though, if offspring arrive, they compel their parents to love them.

(3) I also recall how, when I had decided to enter for a poetry competition at the theatre, a soothsayer of some sort sent to ask what fee I would give him to ensure victory. But I replied that I hated and abominated those vile mysteries, and that even if the crown were immortal and made of gold, I would not allow a fly to be killed to bring about my success.<sup>4</sup> For in his mysteries he would be going to kill animals, and by offering these creatures in honour of daemons, his intention was to gain their support for my winning. Yet my rejection of this evil proposition was not motivated by respect for the purity which you enjoy, 'God of my heart' (Ps. 72: 26). I knew nothing about love for you, of whom I had no conception other

<sup>3</sup> Augustine formulates the principle that an advocate should not throw dust in the eyes of the court, but is entitled to require that the prosecution prove their case, even when he may think his client guilty. He holds that it is worse for an innocent person to be condemned than for a guilty person to be acquitted. The theme is already in Cicero, *De officiis* 2. 51.

<sup>4</sup> Manichees wholly rejected animal sacrifices, and regarded the Old Testament requirement of such sacrifices as one of the stronger arguments against its authority.

than of physical objects luminous with light. In sighing after such fictions does not the soul 'commit fornication against you' (Ps. 72: 27) and 'trust in lies and feed the winds' (Prov. 10: 4)? I refused sacrifice to daemons on my behalf; yet by adherence to that superstition I sacrificed myself to them. What is it to 'feed the winds' if not to feed the spirits, that is, by one's errors to become an object of delight and derision to them?

iii (4) On the same ground I did not cease openly to consult those impostors called astrologers, because they offered, so to speak, no sacrifices, and no prayers were addressed to any spirit for the purpose of divining the future. Yet a true Christian piety consistently rejects and condemns this art. It is good to make confession to you, Lord, and to say 'Have mercy on me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you' (Ps. 40: 5; 91: 2). I must not abuse your mercy so as to make it a licence for sin (Ecclus. 15: 21), but remember the Lord's saying 'Look, you are made whole, now do not sin, lest something worse happen to you' (John 5: 14). Astrologers try to destroy this entire saving doctrine when they say: 'The reason for your sinning is determined by the heaven', and 'Venus or Saturn or Mars was responsible for this act'.<sup>5</sup> They make a man not in the least responsible for his faults, but mere flesh and blood and putrid pride, so that the blame lies with the Creator and orderer of the heaven and stars. And who is this but our God, sweetness and source of justice, who 'will render to every man according to his works, and does not despise a contrite and humble heart'? (Rom. 2: 6; Ps. 50: 19).

(5) At that time there was a man of good judgement, very skilled in the art of medicine and in that respect of high reputation.<sup>6</sup> By virtue of his office as proconsul, not as a medical expert, he had with his own hand placed the crown in the poetry contest upon my sick head; for you alone are the healer of the disease that afflicted

<sup>5</sup> Plotinus (2. 3. 6) condemns the utter irrationality of supposing Mars or Venus responsible for adulteries.

<sup>6</sup> Helvius Vindicianus, named in vii. vi (8), was physician to the emperor Valentinian I, and a well-known medical authority of the time, author of textbooks. His rejection of astrology and divination was not characteristic of ancient physicians, who could normally consult almanacs or employ witch's spells before treating patients. Vindicianus held office as proconsul c. 379–82; a change of career not unparalleled at this time; Symmachus (*ep.* 1. 66) records an eminent physician Gelasius promoted to take charge of revenue for imperial estates in Africa in the year 380.

me, you who resist the proud but give grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5: 5; Jas. 4: 6). Nevertheless even by means of that old man you did not fail to help me or miss the opportunity of bringing healing to my soul. I came to know him well and became an assiduous and regular listener to his conversation; although his prose style was not highly cultured, his opinions were lively and expressed in a delightful and serious manner. From my remarks he discovered that I was addicted to the books of those who cast horoscopes. In a kind and fatherly way he advised me to throw them away and not to waste on that nonsense the care and labour required for useful matters. He told me that he had himself studied astrology so far that in his early years he had intended to take it up formally as a way of earning his living, saying that if he had the capacity to understand Hippocrates, he would be able to understand these books also. Nevertheless he had given up the subject and pursued medicine for the simple reason that he discovered astrology to be utterly bogus. Being a serious-minded person, he did not wish to make a living out of deceiving people. 'But you', he said, 'have the profession of a teacher of rhetoric, by which you earn your living in human society. You are pursuing this delusory subject in your free time, not out of any necessity to raise additional income. You should be the more ready to believe my view of the matter, considering that I worked hard to acquire so thorough a knowledge of astrology as to wish to earn my living exclusively from this source.'

I asked him why it was that many of their forecasts turned out to be correct. He replied that the best answer he could give was the power apparent in lots, a power everywhere diffused in the nature of things. So when someone happens to consult the pages of a poet whose verses and intention are concerned with a quite different subject, in a wonderful way a verse often emerges appropriate to the decision under discussion. He used to say that it was no wonder if from the human soul, by some higher instinct that does not know what goes on within itself, some utterance emerges not by art but by 'chance' which is in sympathy with the affairs or actions of the inquirer.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Vindicianus' arguments failed to dissuade Augustine (vii. vi (8)). His position was not that a correct astrological prediction is the result of a purely random chance, but that 'chance' is our name for a cause we do not know, and in this instance the correctness of prediction is the result of the internal sympathy of all parts of the cosmos. So also

of light for our salvation. I could believe of him only what my vain imagination could picture. I thought a nature such as his could not be born of the Virgin Mary without being mingled with flesh. That he could be mixed with us and not polluted I did not see, because my mental picture was what it was. I was afraid to believe him incarnate lest I had to believe him to be defiled by the flesh. Today your spiritual believers will kindly and lovingly laugh at me when they read these my confessions. Nevertheless that was the state of my mind.

xi (21) I did not think there was any defence against the Manichees' criticisms of your scriptures. Sometimes, however, I desired to debate particular points with someone very learned in those books, and to discover what he thought about these questions. At Carthage the lectures of a certain Elpidius, who publicly spoke and debated against the Manichees, began to disturb me, when he cited matter from the scriptures to which there was no easy reply. The Manichee answer seemed to me weak. They did not easily produce their response before the public but did so to us in private. They asserted that the scriptures of the New Testament had been tampered with by persons unknown, who wanted to insert the Jews' law into the Christian faith. They were incapable of producing any uncorrupted copies. But the principal things which held me captive and somehow suffocated me, as long as I thought only in physical terms, were those vast masses. Gasping under their weight I could not breathe the pure and simple breeze of your truth.

xii (22) I began to be busy about the task of teaching the art of rhetoric for which I had come to Rome. I first gathered some pupils at my lodging, and with them and through them I began to be known. I quickly discovered that at Rome students behaved in a way which I would never have had to endure in Africa. Acts of vandalism, it was true, by young hooligans did not occur at Rome; that was made clear to me. But, people told me, to avoid paying the teacher his fee, numbers of young men would suddenly club together and transfer themselves to another tutor,<sup>20</sup> breaking their word and

<sup>20</sup> Augustine's contemporary, a pagan Alexandrian schoolmaster named Palladas, has the identical complaint about his pupils, who would leave him for another teacher just as they were due to pay the annual fee of one gold *solidus* (*The Greek Anthology* 9, 174). At Antioch Libanius circumvented pupils' dishonesty by making a contract with their parents (*oratio* 43). A teacher with 40 pupils would be doing reasonably well, but was not

out of love of money treating fairness as something to be flouted. I cordially detested them, but not 'with a perfect hatred' (Ps. 138: 22); for I probably felt more resentment for what I personally was to suffer from them than for the wrong they were doing to anyone and everyone. Certainly such people are a disgrace and 'commit fornication against you' (Ps. 72: 27). They love the passing, transient amusements and the filthy lucre which dirties the hand when it is touched. They embrace a world which is fleeing away. They despise you, though you abide and call the prodigal back and pardon the human soul for its harlotry when it returns to you. Today too I hate such wicked and perverted people, though I love them as people in need of correction, so that instead of money they may prefer the doctrine which they learn and, above the doctrine, may prefer you, God, the truth, the abundant source of assured goodness and most chaste peace. But at that time I was determined not to put up with badly behaved people more out of my own interest than because I wanted them to become good for your sake.

xiii (23) So after a notification came from Milan to Rome to the city prefect saying that at Milan a teacher of rhetoric was to be appointed with his travel provided by the government service, I myself applied through the mediation of those intoxicated with Manichee follies. My move there was to end my association with them, but neither of us knew that. An oration I gave on a prescribed topic was approved by the then prefect Symmachus,<sup>21</sup> who sent me to Milan.

And so I came to Milan to Ambrose the bishop, known throughout the world as among the best of men, devout in your worship. At that time his eloquence valiantly ministered to your people 'the abundance of your sustenance' and 'the gladness of oil' (Ps. 44: 8; 80: 17; 147: 14), and the sober intoxication of your wine.<sup>22</sup> I was led to him by you, unaware that through him, in full awareness, I might be led to

wealthy; moreover, he had to pay something to an usher to guard the entrance veil. Salaries and fees would be higher in larger cities (see above, I. xvi (26)). Elsewhere Augustine says that in small towns there was only a single teacher; the market perhaps would not have supported a second.

<sup>21</sup> Symmachus, a prominent and opulent pagan, became prefect of Rome in September 384. Augustine's arrival at Milan was probably in October.

<sup>22</sup> 'Sober intoxication', describing the ecstasy of a knowledge of God lying beyond reason, occurs in Ambrose and, before him, in the Jewish theologian Philo of Alexandria. Also Plotinus 6.7. 35. 27.

you. That 'man of God' (2 Kgs. 1: 9) received me like a father and expressed pleasure at my coming with a kindness most fitting in a bishop. I began to like him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth, for I had absolutely no confidence in your Church, but as a human being who was kind to me. I used enthusiastically to listen to him preaching to the people, not with the intention which I ought to have had, but as if testing out his oratorical skill to see whether it merited the reputation it enjoyed or whether his fluency was better or inferior than it was reported to be. I hung on his diction in rapt attention, but remained bored and contemptuous of the subject-matter. My pleasure was in the charm of his language. It was more learned than that of Faustus, but less witty and entertaining, as far as the manner of his speaking went. But in content there could be no comparison. Through Manichee deceits Faustus wandered astray. Ambrose taught the sound doctrine of salvation. From sinners such as I was at that time, salvation is far distant. Nevertheless, gradually, though I did not realize it, I was drawing closer.

xiv (24) I was not interested in learning what he was talking about. My ears were only for his rhetorical technique; this empty concern was all that remained with me after I had lost any hope that a way to you might lie open for man. Nevertheless together with the words which I was enjoying, the subject matter, in which I was unconcerned, came to make an entry into my mind. I could not separate them. While I opened my heart in noting the eloquence with which he spoke, there also entered no less the truth which he affirmed, though only gradually. First what he said began to seem defensible, and I did not now think it impudent to assert the Catholic faith, which I had thought defenceless against Manichee critics. Above all, I heard first one, then another, then many difficult passages in the Old Testament scriptures figuratively interpreted, where I, by taking them literally, had found them to kill (2 Cor. 3: 6). So after several passages in the Old Testament had been expounded spiritually, I now found fault with that despair of mine, caused by my belief that the law and the prophets could not be defended at all against the mockery of hostile critics. However, even so I did not think the Catholic faith something I ought to accept. Granted it could have educated people who asserted its claims and refuted objections with abundant argument and without absurdity. But that was not

sufficient ground to condemn what I was holding. There could be an equally valid defence for both. So to me the Catholic faith appeared not to have been defeated but also not yet to be the conqueror.

(25) I then energetically applied my critical faculty to see if there were decisive arguments by which I could somehow prove the Manichees wrong. If I had been able to conceive of spiritual substance, at once all their imagined inventions would have collapsed and my mind would have rejected them. But I could not. However, in regard to the physical world and all the natural order accessible to the bodily senses, consideration and comparison more and more convinced me that numerous philosophers held opinions much more probable than theirs. Accordingly, after the manner of the Academics, as popularly understood, I doubted everything, and in the fluctuating state of total suspense of judgement I decided I must leave the Manichees, thinking at that period of my scepticism that I should not remain a member of a sect to which I was now preferring certain philosophers. But to these philosophers, who were without Christ's saving name, I altogether refused to entrust the healing of my soul's sickness. I therefore decided for the time being to be a catechumen in the Catholic Church, which the precedent of my parents recommended to me, until some clear light should come by which I could direct my course.



now seek a wife and had no ambition for success in this world. I stood firm upon that rule of faith on which many years before you had revealed me to her.<sup>23</sup> You 'changed her grief into joy' (Ps. 29: 12) far more abundantly than she desired, far dearer and more chaste than she expected when she looked for grandchildren begotten of my body.

<sup>23</sup> See above, III. xi (19-20).

## BOOK IX

### *Cassiciacum: to Monica's death*

i (i) 'O Lord, I am your servant, I am your servant and the son of your handmaid. You have snapped my chains. I will sacrifice to you the offering of praise' (Ps. 115: 16-17). Let my heart praise you and my tongue, and 'let all my bones say, Lord who is like you?' (Ps. 34: 10). Let them speak, answer me, and say to my soul 'I am your salvation' (Ps. 34: 3).

Who am I and what am I? What was not evil in my deeds or, if not deeds, in my words or, if not words, in my intention? But you, Lord, 'are good and merciful' (Ps. 102: 8). Your right hand had regard to the depth of my dead condition, and from the bottom of my heart had drawn out a trough of corruption. The nub of the problem was to reject my own will and to desire yours. But where through so many years was my freedom of will? From what deep and hidden recess was it called out in a moment? Thereby I submitted my neck to your easy yoke and my shoulders to your light burden (Matt. 11: 30), O Christ Jesus 'my helper and redeemer' (Ps. 18: 15). Suddenly it had become sweet to me to be without the sweets of folly. What I once feared to lose was now a delight to dismiss. You turned them out and entered to take their place, pleasanter than any pleasure but not to flesh and blood, brighter than all light yet more inward than any secret recess, higher than any honour but not to those who think themselves sublime. Already my mind was free of 'the biting cares'<sup>1</sup> of place-seeking, of desire for gain, of wallowing in self-indulgence, of scratching the itch of lust. And I was now talking with you, Lord my God, my radiance, my wealth, and my salvation.

ii (2) I made a decision 'in your sight' (Ps. 18: 15) not to break off teaching with an abrupt renunciation, but quietly to retire from my post as a salesman of words in the markets of rhetoric. I did not wish my pupils, who were giving their minds not to your law (Ps. 118: 70) nor to your peace, but to frenzied lies and lawcourt squabbles, to

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Odes* 1. 18. 4.

buy from my mouth weapons for their madness. Fortunately there were only a few days left before the Vintage Vacation [22 August-15 October]. I decided to put up with them so that I could resign with due formality. Redeemed by you, I was not now going to return to putting my skills up for sale. Our plan was formed with your knowledge but was not publicly known, except to our intimate circle. It was agreed among us that it was not to be published generally. Meanwhile, to us who were climbing out of the 'valley of tears' (Ps. 83: 6 f.) and singing a 'song of steps' (Ps. 119-33), you had given 'sharp arrows and destroying coals' to answer any deceitful tongues of criticism (Ps. 119: 3 f.). Tongues that appear to be offering helpful advice can actually be hostile opponents and, in offering love, may devour us in the way people consume food.<sup>2</sup>

(3) You pierced my heart with the arrow of your love,<sup>3</sup> and we carried your words transfixing my innermost being (cf. Ps. 37: 3). The examples given by your servants whom you had transformed from black to shining white and from death to life, crowded in upon my thoughts. They burnt away and destroyed my heavy sluggishness, preventing me from being dragged down to low things. They set me on fire with such force that every breath of opposition from any 'deceitful tongue' (Ps. 119: 2 f.) had the power not to dampen my zeal but to inflame it the more. However, because of your name which you have sanctified throughout the earth (Ezek. 36: 23), my vow and profession would no doubt have some to approve it. So it would have seemed like ostentation if, rather than waiting for the imminent vacation period, I were prematurely to resign from a public position which had a high profile before everyone. The consequence would be that everyone would turn their scrutiny on what I had done in deliberately anticipating the coming day of the Vacation, and there would be much gossip that I was ambitious to appear important. What gain was it for me that people should be thinking and disputing about my state of mind and that a decision which was good to me should be evil spoken of? (Rom. 14: 16).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above II. ix (17).

<sup>3</sup> The symbol of Christ as heavenly Eros was familiar from the Latin version of Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs. Augustine's African critic, Arnobius the younger, could write of 'Christ our Cupid'. Cf. below x. vi (8).

<sup>4</sup> The argument answers the implied criticism of puritan Christians that if his conversion had been 100 per cent real, he would immediately and dramatically have

(4) Furthermore, during that summer in consequence of too heavy a teaching load in literary studies, my lungs had begun to weaken. Breathing became difficult. Pains on the chest were symptoms of the lesion, and deprived me of power to speak clearly or for any length of time. At first this worried me because it was virtually enforcing the necessity of resigning the burden of my teaching responsibility or, if I could be cured and recover strength, at least taking some time off. But now that a total intention to 'be at leisure and see that you are God' (Ps. 45: 11) was born in me and had become quite firm (that you knew, my God), I also began to be pleased that my indisposition was a genuine excuse which softened the irritation felt by people who, being concerned for the education of their sons, were unwilling that I should ever be free. Full of joy in this regard, therefore, I tolerated that interval of time until it was over—it may have been about twenty days. Yet it required courage to be tolerant, because I no longer had the interest in money which ordinarily enabled me to endure a heavy work-load. In continuing my work I would have felt quite crushed if the desire for profit had not been replaced by patience. One of your servants, my brothers, might say that I had sinned in this matter, in that with my heart already fully determined upon your service, I had allowed myself to sit for even one hour in the seat of mendacity (Ps. 1: 1). I would not contest that. But, most merciful God, did you not grant pardon and remission for this fault together with my other horrendous and mortal sins,<sup>5</sup> in the holy water of baptism?

iii (5) Verecundus was torn by anxiety at the happiness which had come to us because he was firmly tied by the chains of his obligations and saw himself losing our society. He was not yet a Christian, but his wife was a baptized believer. Fettered by her more than anything else, he was held back from the journey on which we had embarked. He used to say that he did not wish to be a Christian except in the

renounced so profane a profession. The criticism from other secular professors of literature he had already scorned: I. xiii (22).

<sup>5</sup> Augustine followed I John 5: 16-17 in the distinction between pardonable sins and 'sins unto death' and the early Christian interpretation of the latter to mean major sins (apostasy, murder, adultery) bringing shame on the community, not only the individual; the major sins required some formal act by the Church to give full restoration after penitential discipline had manifested serious sorrow. But Augustine also saw that no clear-cut line can be drawn between venial and mortal (*City of God* 21. 27).

element. For instance, our eyes may happen on a person known to us or we may think of him, and we try to recall his name. Other names that occur will not fit the case, because we are not in the habit of associating them with him, and so we reject them until that one comes up which at once corresponds to the familiarly known and is accepted as correct. Where does the right name come from if not from memory itself? Even when we recognize it after being prompted by someone else, memory is its source. We do not believe it as something we are hearing for the first time but, because we remember it, agree that the name mentioned is correct. If, however, it were wholly effaced from the mind, we would not remember even when prompted. When at least we remember ourselves to have forgotten, we have not totally forgotten. But if we have completely forgotten, we cannot even search for what has been lost.

xx (29) How then am I to seek for you, Lord? When I seek for you, my God, my quest is for the happy life. I will seek you that 'my soul may live' (Isa. 55: 3), for my body derives life from my soul, and my soul derives life from you. How then shall I seek for the happy life? It is not mine until I say: 'It is enough, it is there.' But then I ought to say how my quest proceeds; is it by remembering, as if I had forgotten it and still recall that I had forgotten? Or is it through an urge to learn something quite unknown, whether I never had known it or had so forgotten it that I do not even remember having forgotten it? Is not the happy life that which all desire, which indeed no one fails to desire? But how have they known about it so as to want it? Where did they see it to love it? Certainly we have the desire for it, but how I do not know. There is also another sense in which a person who has it is happy at a particular time, and there are some who are happy in hope of becoming so. The kind of happiness they have is inferior to that of those who have the real thing. But they are better than those who are happy neither in actuality nor in hope. Even they would not wish to be happy unless they had some idea of happiness. That this is what they want is quite certain, but how they came to know it I do not know. So also I do not know what kind of knowledge is theirs when they have it. My inquiry is whether this knowing is in the memory because, if it is there, we had happiness once. I do not now ask whether we were all happy individually or only corporately in that

man who first sinned, in whom we all died [Adam, 1 Cor. 15: 22] and from whom we were all born into a condition of misery.<sup>20</sup> My question is whether the happy life is in the memory. For we would not love it if we did not know what it is. We have heard the term, and all of us acknowledge that we are looking for the thing. The sound is not the cause of our pleasure. When a Greek hears the Latin term, it gives him no pleasure when he does not understand what has been said. But we are given pleasure, as he would be too if he heard this expressed in Greek. The thing itself is neither Greek nor Latin. Greeks and Latins and people of other languages yearn to acquire it. Therefore it is known to everyone. If they could be asked if they want to be happy, without hesitation they would answer with one voice that they so wish. That would not be the case unless the thing itself, to which this term refers, was being held in the memory.

xxi (30) That is surely not the way in which a person who has seen Carthage remembers it. For the happy life is not seen by the eyes, because it is no physical entity. It is surely not the way in which we remember numbers. A person who has a grasp of numbers does not still seek to acquire this knowledge. But the happy life we already have in our knowledge, and so we love it; and yet we still wish to acquire it so that we may be happy. Surely it is not the way in which we remember eloquence? No. When this word is heard, the thing itself is recalled by those who, though not yet eloquent, in many cases desire to be so. That shows that they already have a knowledge of it. It is through the bodily senses that they have seen other people who were eloquent, were given pleasure, and desired to possess it too. Yet without the basis of inward knowledge, they would not have been pleased nor wished to be eloquent unless they were given pleasure. But it is not by any bodily sense that we discern the happy life in others.

Surely this is not the way in which we recall joy? Well, perhaps it is. For even when sad, I remember my times of joy, like a wretched person thinking of the happy life. It is never by bodily sense that I have seen my joy or heard or smelt or tasted or touched it. I experienced it in my mind when I was glad, and the knowledge of it

<sup>20</sup> For Augustine Adam was not merely the start of the human race, but the representative of humanity, so that 'we are all Adam'.

stuck in my memory, so that I could remind myself of it, sometimes with scorn, sometimes with desire, according to the varied character of the things which I remember myself delighting in. For I derived a sprinkling of pleasure even from discreditable acts which I now recall with hatred and execration. But sometimes my delight was in good and honourable things, which I recall with longing even though they are no longer part of my life. In this sense I am sad as I remember joy of long ago.

(31) Where and when, then, have I experienced the happy life for myself, so that I can remember and love and long for it? The desire for happiness is not in myself alone or in a few friends, but is found in everybody.<sup>21</sup> If we did not know this with certain knowledge, we would not want it with determination in our will. But what does this mean? If two people are asked if they want to serve in the army, it may turn out that one of them replies that he would like to do so, while the other would not. But if they are asked whether they would like to be happy, each would at once say without the least hesitation that he would choose to be so. And the reason why one would wish to be a soldier and the other would not is only that they want to be happy. Is it then the case that one person finds joy in one way, another in a different way? What all agree upon is that they want to be happy, just as they would concur, if asked, that they want to experience joy and would call that joy the happy life. Even if one person pursues it in one way, and another in a different way, yet there is one goal which all are striving to attain, namely to experience joy. Since no one can say that this is a matter outside experience, the happy life is found in the memory and is recognized when the words are uttered.

xxii (32) Far be it from me, Lord, far from the heart of your servant who is making confession to you, far be it from me to think myself happy, whatever be the joy in which I take my delight. There is a delight which is given not to the wicked (Isa. 48: 22), but to those who worship you for no reward save the joy that you yourself are to them. That is the authentic happy life, to set one's joy on you, grounded in you and caused by you. That is the real thing, and there is no other. Those who think that the happy life is found

<sup>21</sup> From Cicero's *Hortensius*; cf. *Tusculan Disputations* 5. 28.

elsewhere, pursue another joy and not the true one. Nevertheless their will remains drawn towards some image of the true joy.<sup>22</sup>

xxiii (33) It is uncertain, then, that all want to be happy since there are those who do not want to find in you their source of joy. That is the sole happy life, but they do not really want it. But perhaps everyone does have a desire for it and yet, because 'the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh so that they do not do what they wish' (Gal. 5: 17), they relapse into whatever they have the strength to do, and acquiesce in that, because in that for which they lack the strength their will is insufficient to give them the strength. For if I put the question to anyone whether he prefers to find joy in the truth or in falsehood, he does not hesitate to say that he prefers the truth, just as he does not hesitate to say he wants to be happy. The happy life is joy based on the truth. This is joy grounded in you, O God, who are the truth, 'my illumination, the salvation of my face, my God' (Ps. 26: 1; 41: 12). This happy life everyone desires; joy in the truth everyone wants. I have met with many people who wished to deceive, none who wished to be deceived. How then did they know about this happy life unless in the same way that they knew about the truth? They love the truth because they have no wish to be deceived, and when they love the happy life (which is none other than joy grounded in truth) they are unquestionably loving the truth. And they would have no love for it unless there were some knowledge of it in their memory. Why then do they not find their joy in this? Why are they not happy? It is because they are more occupied in other things which make them more wretched than their tenuous consciousness of the truth makes them happy. For among humanity there is 'still a little light'. May they walk, may they indeed walk, 'so that the darkness does not capture them' (John 12: 35).

(34) But why is it that 'truth engenders hatred'?<sup>23</sup> Why does your man who preaches what is true become to them an enemy (Gal. 4: 16) when they love the happy life which is simply joy grounded on truth? The answer must be this: their love for truth takes the form that they love something else and want this object of their love to be

<sup>22</sup> Plotinus 3. 5. 9. 47 writes of the sense of need, aspiration, and the memory of rational principles coming together in the soul to direct it towards the good.

<sup>23</sup> Terence, *Andria* 68.

the truth; and because they do not wish to be deceived, they do not wish to be persuaded that they are mistaken. And so they hate the truth for the sake of the object which they love instead of the truth. They love truth for the light it sheds, but hate it when it shows them up as being wrong (John 3: 20; 5: 35). Because they do not wish to be deceived but wish to deceive, they love truth when it shows itself to them but hate it when its evidence goes against them. Retribution will come to them on this principle: those who resist being refuted the truth will make manifest against their will, and yet to them it will not be manifest. Yes indeed: the human mind, so blind and languid, shamefully and dishonourably wishes to hide, and yet does not wish anything to be concealed from itself. But it is repaid on the principle that while the human mind lies open to the truth, truth remains hidden from it. Yet even thus, in its miserable condition, it prefers to find joy in true rather than in false things. It will be happy if it comes to find joy only in that truth by which all things are true—without any distraction interfering.

xxiv (35) See how widely I have ranged, Lord, searching for you in my memory. I have not found you outside it. For I have found nothing coming from you which I have not stored in my memory since the time I first learnt of you. Since the day I learnt of you, I have never forgotten you. Where I discovered the truth there I found my God, truth itself, which from the time I learnt it, I have not forgotten. And so, since the time I learnt of you, you remain in my consciousness, and there I find you when I recall you and delight in you. These my holy delights you have given me, in your mercy looking upon my poverty.

xxv (36) But where in my consciousness, Lord, do you dwell? Where in it do you make your home? What resting-place have you made for yourself? What kind of sanctuary have you built for yourself? You conferred this honour on my memory that you should dwell in it. But the question I have to consider is, In what part of it do you dwell? In recalling you I rose above those parts of the memory which animals also share, because I did not find you among the images of physical objects. I came to the parts of my memory where I stored the emotions of my mind, and I did not find you there. I entered into the very seat of my mind, which is located in my memory, since the mind also remembers itself. But you were

not there because, just as you are not a bodily image nor the emotional feeling of a living person such as we experience when glad or sad, or when we desire, fear, remember, forget, and anything of that kind, so also you are not the mind itself. For you are the Lord God of the mind. All these things are liable to change. But you remain immutable above all things, and yet have deigned to dwell in my memory since the time I learnt about you.

Why do I ask in which area of my memory you dwell, as if there really are places there? Surely my memory is where you dwell, because I remember you since first I learnt of you, and I find you there when I think about you.

xxvi (37) Where then did I find you to be able to learn of you? You were not already in my memory before I learnt of you. Where then did I find you so that I could learn of you if not in the fact that you transcend me? There is no place, whether we go backwards or forwards;<sup>24</sup> there can be no question of place. O truth, everywhere you preside over all who ask counsel of you. You respond at one and the same time to all, even though they are consulting you on different subjects. You reply clearly, but not all hear you clearly. All ask your counsel on what they desire, but do not always hear what they would wish. Your best servant is the person who does not attend so much to hearing what he himself wants as to willing what he has heard from you.

xxvii (38) Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Echo of Plotinus 4. 4. 10. 5 (of time).

<sup>25</sup> Augustine's Latin in this chapter is a work of high art, with rhymes and poetic rhythms not reproducible in translation. He is fusing imagery from the Song of Solomon with Neoplatonic reflection on Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, and simultaneously summarizing the central themes of the *Confessions*. For the five spiritual senses see above x. vi (8).

xxviii (39) When I shall have adhered (Ps. 72: 28) to you with the whole of myself, I shall never have 'pain and toil' (Ps. 89: 10), and my entire life will be full of you. You lift up the person whom you fill. But for the present, because I am not full of you, I am a burden to myself. There is a struggle between joys over which I should be weeping and regrets at matters over which I ought to be rejoicing, and which side has the victory I do not know. There is a struggle between my regrets at my evil past and my memories of good joys, and which side has the victory I do not know. Alas, 'Lord have mercy upon me' (Ps. 30: 10), wretch that I am. See, I do not hide my wounds. You are the physician, I am the patient. You are pitiful, I am the object of pity. Is not human life, on earth a trial (Job 7: 1)? Who desires troubles and difficulties? You command that they should be endured, not loved. No one loves what he endures, even if he loves to be able to endure it. Although he is glad he can endure it, he would prefer that what he endures should not be there. In adversities I desire prosperity, in prosperous times I fear adversities. Between these two is there a middle ground where human life is not a trial? Cursed are the prosperities of the world, not once but twice over, because of the fear of adversity and the corruption of success. Cursed are the adversities of the world, not once or twice but thrice, because of the longing for prosperity, because adversity itself is hard, and because of the possibility that one's endurance may crack. Is not human life on earth a trial in which there is no respite?

xxix (40) My entire hope is exclusively in your very great mercy. Grant what you command, and command what you will. You require continence. A certain writer has said (Wisd. 8: 21): 'As I knew that no one can be continent except God grants it, and this very thing is part of wisdom, to know whose gift this is.' By continence we are collected together and brought to the unity from which we disintegrated into multiplicity.<sup>26</sup> He loves you less who together with you loves something which he does not love for your sake. O love, you ever burn and are never extinguished. O charity, my God, set me on fire. You command continence; grant what you command, and command what you will.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Plotinus 4. 3. 32. 20: the higher soul gathers multiplicity into one: 1. 2. 5. 6: the soul collects itself apart from the body, aware of pleasure only when it has to be.

<sup>27</sup> This passage was quoted in the ears of Pelagius, the British monk, by a bishop who

xxx (41) You command me without question to abstain 'from the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the ambition of the secular world' (1 John 2: 16). You commanded me to abstain from sleeping with a girl-friend and, in regard to marriage itself, you advised me to adopt a better way of life than you have allowed (1 Cor. 7: 38). And because you granted me strength, this was done even before I became a dispenser of your sacrament. But in my memory of which I have spoken at length, there still live images of acts which were fixed there by my sexual habit. These images attack me. While I am awake they have no force, but in sleep they not only arouse pleasure but even elicit consent, and are very like the actual act. The illusory image within the soul has such force upon my flesh that false dreams have an effect on me when asleep, which the reality could not have when I am awake. During this time of sleep surely it is not my true self, Lord my God? Yet how great a difference between myself at the time when I am asleep and myself when I return to the waking state. Where then is reason which, when wide-awake, resists such suggestive thoughts, and would remain unmoved if the actual reality were to be presented to it? Surely reason does not shut down as the eyes close. It can hardly fall asleep with the bodily senses. For if that were so, how could it come about that often in sleep we resist and, mindful of our avowed commitment and adhering to it with strict chastity, we give no assent to such seductions? Yet there is a difference so great that, when it happens otherwise than we would wish, when we wake up we return to peace in our conscience. From the wide gulf between the occurrences and our will, we discover that we did not actively do what, to our regret, has somehow been done in us.<sup>28</sup>

(42) It cannot be the case, almighty God, that your hand is not strong enough to cure all the sicknesses of my soul and, by a more abundant outflow of your grace, to extinguish the lascivious impulses of my sleep. You will more and more increase your gifts in me, Lord, so that my soul, rid of the glue of lust, may follow me to you,

appeared to be condoning the number of Christians whose sexual life appeared unregenerate. The incident marked the start of the Pelagian controversy, Pelagius being the unqualified advocate of an ethical perfectionism as a requirement of the gospel and the opponent of the passivity in Augustine's understanding of grace.

<sup>28</sup> Porphyry also held that nocturnal emissions do not pollute the conscience. An epigram in the Greek Anthology (5. 2) turns on the greater vividness of an erotic dream in comparison with actuality.

neither mouth nor tongue as instruments and utters no audible syllables. It would say: 'What he is saying is true.'<sup>7</sup> And I being forthwith assured would say with confidence to the man possessed by you: 'What you say is true.' But since I cannot question him, I ask you who filled him when he declared what is true; you my God I ask. 'Spare my sins' (Job 14: 16). You have granted to your servant to utter these things; grant also to me the power to understand them.

iv (6) See, heaven and earth exist, they cry aloud that they are made, for they suffer change and variation. But in anything which is not made and yet is, there is nothing which previously was not present. To be what once was not the case is to be subject to change and variation. They also cry aloud that they have not made themselves: 'The manner of our existence shows that we are made. For before we came to be, we did not exist to be able to make ourselves.' And the voice with which they speak is self-evidence. You, Lord, who are beautiful, made them for they are beautiful. You are good, for they are good. You are, for they are. Yet they are not beautiful or good or possessed of being in the sense that you their Maker are. In comparison with you they are deficient in beauty and goodness and being. Thanks to you, we know this; and yet our knowledge is ignorance in comparison with yours.<sup>8</sup>

v (7) How did you make heaven and earth, and what machine did you use for so vast an operation? You were not like a craftsman who makes one physical object out of another by an act of personal choice in his mind, which has the power to impose the form which by an inner eye it can see within itself. This capacity it has only because you have so made it. He imposes form on what already exists and possesses being, such as earth or stone or wood or gold or any material of that sort. And these materials exist only because you had first made them. By your creation the craftsman has a body, a mind by which he commands its members, material out of which he makes something, a skill by which he masters his art and sees inwardly what he is making outwardly. From your creation come the bodily senses which he uses to translate his mental concept into the material objects he is making, and to report back to

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus 4. 3. 18. 13 ff. In the intelligible world they use no words, but communicate by intuition.

<sup>8</sup> The argument is close to Plotinus' vindication of providence: 3. 2. 3.

the mind what has been made, so that the mind within may deliberate with the truth presiding over it to consider whether the work has been well done.<sup>9</sup> All these praise you, the creator of everything. But how do you make them? The way, God, in which you made heaven and earth was not that you made them either in heaven or on earth. Nor was it in air or in water, for these belong to heaven and earth. Nor did you make the universe within the framework of the universe. There was nowhere for it to be made before it was brought into existence.<sup>10</sup> Nor did you have any tool in your hand to make heaven and earth. How could you obtain anything you had not made as a tool for making something? What is it for something to be unless it is because you are? Therefore you spoke and they were made, and by your word you made them (Ps. 32: 9, 6).

vi (8) But how did you speak? Surely not in the way a voice came out of the cloud saying, 'This is my beloved Son' (Matt. 17: 5). That voice is past and done with; it began and is ended. The syllables sounded and have passed away, the second after the first, the third after the second, and so on in order until, after all the others, the last one came, and after the last silence followed. Therefore it is clear and evident that the utterance came through the movement of some created thing, serving your eternal will but itself temporal. And these your words, made for temporal succession, were reported by the external ear to the judicious mind whose internal ear is disposed to hear your eternal word. But that mind would compare these words, sounding in time, with your eternal word in silence, and say: 'It is very different, the difference is enormous. The sounds are far inferior to me, and have no being, because they are fleeting and transient. But the word of my God is superior to me and abides for ever' (Isa. 40: 8). If therefore it was with words which sound and pass away that you said that heaven and earth should be made, and if this was how you made heaven and earth, then a created entity belonging to the physical realm existed prior to heaven and earth; and that utterance took time to deliver, and involved temporal changes.<sup>11</sup> However, no physical

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Plotinus 5. 8. 1 (beauty first in the designing artist's mind).

<sup>10</sup> Similarly Plotinus 5. 5. 9. 28 (no place existed before the world); 6. 8. 7. 26 (Nothing can bring itself into existence).

<sup>11</sup> Plotinus (5. 3. 17. 24) stresses the temporal successiveness of human words. See above IV. x (15); IX. x (24).

entity existed before heaven and earth; at least if any such existed, you had made it without using a transient utterance, which could then be used as a basis for another transient utterance, declaring that heaven and earth be made. Whatever it might have been which became the basis for such an utterance, unless it was created by you, it could not exist. Therefore for the creation of a physical entity to become the basis for those words, what kind of word would you have used?

vii (9) You call us, therefore, to understand the Word, God who is with you God (John 1: 1). That word is spoken eternally, and by it all things are uttered eternally. It is not the case that what was being said comes to an end, and something else is then said, so that everything is uttered in a succession with a conclusion, but everything is said in the simultaneity of eternity. Otherwise time and change would already exist, and there would not be a true eternity and true immortality. This I know, my God, and give thanks. I know and confess it to you, Lord, and everyone who is not ungrateful for assured truth knows it with me and blesses you. We know this, Lord, we know. A thing dies and comes into being inasmuch as it is not what it was and becomes what it was not. No element of your word yields place or succeeds to something else, since it is truly immortal and eternal. And so by the Word coeternal with yourself, you say all that you say in simultaneity and eternity, and whatever you say will come about does come about. You do not cause it to exist other than by speaking. Yet not all that you cause to exist by speaking is made in simultaneity and eternity.

viii (10) Why, I ask, Lord my God? In some degree I see it, but how to express it I do not know,<sup>12</sup> unless to say that everything which begins to be and ceases to be begins and ends its existence at that moment when, in the eternal reason where nothing begins or ends, it is known that it is right for it to begin and end. This reason is your Word, which is also the Beginning in that it also speaks to us. Thus in the gospel the Word speaks through the flesh, and this sounded externally in human ears, so that it should be believed and sought inwardly, found in the eternal truth where the Master who alone is good (Matt. 19: 16) teaches all his disciples. There, Lord, I hear your voice speaking to me, for one who teaches us speaks to

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps an echo of Plotinus 6. 8. 19. 1–3 who says the same.

us, but one who does not teach us, even though he may speak, does not speak to us. Who is our teacher except the reliable truth? Even when we are instructed through some mutable creature, we are led to reliable truth when we are learning truly by standing still and listening to him. We then 'rejoice with joy because of the voice of the bridegroom' (John 3: 29), and give ourselves to the source whence we have our being. And in this way he is the Beginning because, unless he were constant, there would be no fixed point to which we could return. But when we return from error, it is by knowing that we return. He teaches us so that we may know; for he is the Beginning, and he speaks to us.<sup>13</sup>

ix (11) In this Beginning, God, you made heaven and earth, in your Word, in your Son, in your power, in your wisdom, in your truth speaking in a wonderful way and making in a wonderful way. Who can comprehend it? Who will give an account of it in words? What is the light which shines right through me and strikes my heart without hurting? It fills me with terror and burning love:<sup>14</sup> with terror inasmuch as I am utterly other than it, with burning love in that I am akin to it. Wisdom, wisdom it is which shines right through me, cutting a path through the cloudiness which returns to cover me as I fall away under the darkness and the load of my punishments. For 'my strength is weakened by poverty' (Ps. 30: 11), so that I cannot maintain my goodness until you, Lord, who 'have become merciful to all my iniquities, also heal all my sicknesses'. You will redeem my life from corruption and crown me with mercy and compassion, and satisfy my longing with good things, in that my youth will be renewed like an eagle's (Ps. 102: 3–5). For 'by hope we are saved', and we await your promises in patience (Rom. 8: 24–5). Let the person who can hear you speaking within listen. Confident on the ground of your inspired utterance, I will cry out: 'How magnificent are

<sup>13</sup> The argument here has analogies in Plotinus 5. 5. 9, and especially 6. 5. 7 on knowledge as the route of return to true being. But Augustine has inserted the incarnate Lord as the revealer.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly vii. x (16) above; Plotinus 1. 6. 7. Throughout this section Augustine wants to interpret the 'beginning' of Gen. 1: 1 to mean the Word or Son of God, to escape the temporal implications of 'beginning'. Books XI–XIII offer a diffidently exploratory exposition of Genesis 1, partly in refutation of Manicheism, but partly also against Catholic interpreters unconvinced by his Neoplatonic language about the transition from unformed to formed matter and about the spiritual (non-material) creation not mentioned in Genesis. He had more Catholic tradition behind him in discerning the Trinity working in the creation.



your works, Lord, you have made all things in wisdom' (Ps. 103:24). Wisdom is the beginning; and in that beginning you made heaven and earth.

x (12) See how full of old errors are those who say to us: 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth? If he was unoccupied', they say, 'and doing nothing, why does he not always remain the same for ever, just as before creation he abstained from work? For if in God any new development took place and any new intention, so as to make a creation which he had never made before, how then can there be a true eternity in which a will, not there previously, comes into existence? For God's will is not a creature, but is prior to the created order, since nothing would be created unless the Creator's will preceded it. Therefore God's will belongs to his very substance.<sup>15</sup> If in the substance of God anything has come into being which was not present before, that substance cannot truthfully be called eternal. But if it was God's everlasting will that the created order exist, why is not the creation also everlasting?'<sup>16</sup>

xi (13) People who say this do not yet understand you, O wisdom of God; light of minds. They do not yet understand how things were made which came to be through you and in you. They attempt to taste eternity when their heart is still flitting about in the realm where things change and have a past and future; it is still 'vain' (Ps. 5: 10). Who can lay hold on the heart and give it fixity, so that for some little moment it may be stable, and for a fraction of time may grasp the splendour of a constant eternity? Then it may compare eternity with temporal successiveness which never has any constancy, and will see there is no comparison possible. It will see that a long time is long only because constituted of many successive movements which cannot be simultaneously extended. In the eternal, nothing is transient, but the whole is present.<sup>17</sup> But no time is wholly present. It will see that all past time is driven backwards by the future, and

<sup>15</sup> Below XII. xv (18); Plotinus 6. 8. 13. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine's argument against Porphyry's Neoplatonic contention that the Incarnation is impossible because it implies change in God is here taken to be a principle equally affecting Creation. The argument is given a masterly statement at greater length in *City of God* 12.

<sup>17</sup> So also Plotinus 3. 7. 3.

all future time is the consequent of the past, and all past and future are created and set on their course by that which is always present. Who will lay hold on the human heart to make it still, so that it can see how eternity, in which there is neither future nor past, stands still and dictates future and past times? Can my hand have the strength for this? (Gen. 31: 29). Can the hand of my mouth by mere speech achieve so great a thing?

xii (14) This is my reply to anyone who asks: 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?' My reply is not that which someone is said to have given as a joke to evade the force of the question. He said: 'He was preparing hells for people who inquire into profundities.' It is one thing to laugh, another to see the point at issue, and this reply I reject. I would have preferred him to answer 'I am ignorant of what I do not know' rather than reply so as to ridicule someone who has asked a deep question and to win approval for an answer which is a mistake.

No, I say that you, our God, are the Creator of every created being, and assuming that by 'heaven and earth' is meant every created thing I boldly declare: Before God made heaven and earth, he was not making anything. If he was making anything, it could only be something created. I only wish that other useful matters which I long to be sure about I could know with an assurance equal to that with which I know that no created being was made before any creature came into being.

xiii (15) If, however, someone's mind is flitting and wandering over images of past times, and is astonished that you, all powerful, all creating, and all sustaining God, artificer of heaven and earth, abstained for unnumbered ages from this work before you actually made it, he should wake up and take note that his surprise rests on a mistake. How would innumerable ages pass, which you yourself had not made? You are the originator and creator of all ages. What times existed which were not brought into being by you? Or how could they pass if they never had existence? Since, therefore, you are the cause of all times, if any time existed before you made heaven and earth, how can anyone say that you abstained from working? You have made time itself. Time could not elapse before you made time. But if time did not exist before heaven and earth,

why do people ask what you were then doing? There was no 'then' when there was no time.<sup>18</sup>

(16) It is not in time that you precede times. Otherwise you would not precede all times. In the sublimity of an eternity which is always in the present, you are before all things past and transcend all things future, because they are still to come, and when they have come they are past. 'But you are the same and your years do not fail' (Ps. 101: 28). Your 'years' neither go nor come. Ours come and go so that all may come in succession. All your 'years' subsist in simultaneity, because they do not change; those going away are not thrust out by those coming in. But the years which are ours will not all be until all years have ceased to be. Your 'years' are 'one day' (Ps. 89: 4; 2 Pet. 3: 8), and your 'day' is not any and every day but Today, because your Today does not yield to a tomorrow, nor did it follow on a yesterday. Your Today is eternity. So you begot one coeternal with you, to whom you said: 'Today I have begotten you' (Ps. 2: 7; Heb. 5: 5). You created all times and you exist before all times. Nor was there any time when time did not exist.

xiv (17) There was therefore no time when you had not made something, because you made time itself. No times are coeternal with you since you are permanent. If they were permanent, they would not be times.

What is time? Who can explain this easily and briefly? Who can comprehend this even in thought so as to articulate the answer in words? Yet what do we speak of, in our familiar everyday conversation, more than of time? We surely know what we mean when we speak of it. We also know what is meant when we hear someone else talking about it. What then is time? Provided that no one asks me, I know.<sup>19</sup> If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know. But I

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12: 6: 'Time cannot come into being or cease to be; if time did not exist, there could be no before and after.'

Philo, the Alexandrian Jew of St Paul's time, maintains that time was created with the cosmos (*De opificio mundi* 26). Several early Christians say the same, including Ambrose. Plotinus (3. 9. 8. 1 ff.) says that the question why the Creator creates is asked by people who are assuming that that which always is had a beginning in time. Like Augustine, Plotinus thinks time does not antedate the cosmos (3. 7. 12. 23; as Plato, *Timaeus* 38b6).

<sup>19</sup> Plotinus (3. 7. 1. 1-13) observes that we think we know what time is until we begin to think about it in depth. Augustine's discussion of time contains many echoes of philosophical debates among Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics, but is remarkable for its affinity with the Sceptical or 'Academic' position that for the human mind the question is unanswerable. At least Augustine does not answer it. His question is

confidently affirm myself to know that if nothing passes away, there is no past time, and if nothing arrives, there is no future time, and if nothing existed there would be no present time. Take the two tenses, past and future. How can they 'be' when the past is not now present and the future is not yet present? Yet if the present were always present, it would not pass into the past: it would not be time but eternity. If then, in order to be time at all, the present is so made that it passes into the past, how can we say that this present also 'is'? The cause of its being is that it will cease to be. So indeed we cannot truly say that time exists except in the sense that it tends towards non-existence.

xv (18) Nevertheless we speak of 'a long time' and 'a short time', and it is only of the past or the future that we say this. Of the past we speak of 'a long time', when, for example, it is more than a hundred years ago. 'A long time' in the future may mean a hundred years ahead. By 'a short time ago' we would mean, say, ten days back, and 'a short time ahead' might mean 'in ten days' time'. But how can something be long or short which does not exist? For the past now has no existence and the future is not yet. So we ought not to say of the past 'It is long', but 'it was long', and of the future 'it will be long'. My Lord, my light, does not your truth mock humanity at this point? This time past which was long, was it long when it was past or when it was still present? It could be long only when it existed to be long. Once past, it no longer was. Therefore it could not be long if it had entirely ceased to exist.

Therefore let us not say 'The time past was long'. For we cannot discover anything to be long when, after it has become past, it has ceased to be. But let us say 'That time once present was long' because it was long at the time when it was present. For it had not yet passed away into non-existence. It existed so as to be able to be long. But after it had passed away, it simultaneously ceased to be long because it ceased to be.

(19) Human soul, let us see whether present time can be long. To you the power is granted to be aware of intervals of time, and to

characteristically less philosophical than religious: what sense can we make of the chaos of history and the apparent meaninglessness of successive events? Between past and future humanity experiences what he will call a distending, a stretching out on a rack. Hence he picks up Aristotle's suggestion (*Physics* 4. 14) that time is an experience of the soul, but gives this idea a new development by seeing 'memory' as cardinal to the comprehension of time.

measure them. What answer will you give me? Are a hundred years in the present a long time? Consider first whether a hundred years can be present. For if the first year of the series is current, it is present; but ninety-nine are future, and so do not yet exist. If the second year is current, one is already past, the second is present, the remainder lie in the future. And so between the extremes, whatever year of this century we assume to be present, there will be some years before it which lie in the past, some in the future to come after it. It follows that a century could never be present.

Consider then whether if a single year is current, that can be present. If in this year the first month is current, the others lie in the future; if the second, then the first lies in the past and the rest do not yet exist. Therefore even a current year is not entirely present; and if it is not entirely present, it is not a year which is present. A year is twelve months, of which any month which is current is present; the others are either past or future. Moreover, not even a month which is current is present, but one day. If the first day, the others are future; if the last day, the others are past; any intermediary day falls between past and future.

(20) See.—present time, which alone we find capable of being called long, is contracted to the space of hardly a single day. But let us examine that also; for not even one day is entirely present. All the hours of night and day add up to twenty-four. The first of them has the others in the future, the last has them in the past. Any hour between these has past hours before it, future hours after it. One hour is itself constituted of fugitive moments. Whatever part of it has flown away is past. What remains to it is future. If we can think of some bit of time which cannot be divided into even the smallest instantaneous moments, that alone is what we can call 'present'. And this time flies so quickly from future into past that it is an interval with no duration. If it has duration, it is divisible into past and future. But the present occupies no space.<sup>20</sup>

Where then is the time which we call long? Is it future? We do not really mean 'It is long', since it does not yet exist to be long, but

<sup>20</sup> The argument reflects older debates in the philosophical schools, e.g. that if time cannot properly be divided into past, present, and future, then only its indivisibility remains a live option. Sextus Empiricus (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3. 143–5) preserves summaries of the Sceptical arguments that all discussions of time end in nonsense, so that nothing can be known for certain in this regard.

we mean it will be long. When will it be long? If it will then still lie in the future, it will not be long, since it will not yet exist to be long. But if it will be long at the time when, out of the future which does not yet exist, it begins to have being and will become present fact, so that it has the potentiality to be long, the present cries out in words already used that it cannot be long.

xvi (21) Nevertheless, Lord, we are conscious of intervals of time, and compare them with each other, and call some longer, others shorter. We also measure how much longer or shorter one period is than another, and answer that the one is twice or three times as much as the other, or that the two periods are equal. Moreover, we are measuring times which are past when our perception is the basis of measurement. But who can measure the past which does not now exist or the future which does not yet exist, unless perhaps someone dares to assert that he can measure what has no existence? At the moment when time is passing, it can be perceived and measured. But when it has passed and is not present, it cannot be.

xvii (22) I am investigating, Father, not making assertions. My God, protect me and rule me (Ps. 22: 1; 27: 9). Who will tell me that there are not three times, past, present, and future, as we learnt when children and as we have taught children, but only the present, because the other two have no existence? Or do they exist in the sense that, when the present emerges from the future, time comes out of some secret store, and then recedes into some secret place when the past comes out of the present? Where did those who sang prophecies see these events if they do not yet exist? To see what has no existence is impossible. And those who narrate past history would surely not be telling a true story if they did not discern events by their soul's insight. If the past were non-existent, it could not be discerned at all. Therefore both future and past events exist.

xviii (23) Allow me, Lord, to take my investigation further. My hope, let not my attention be distracted.<sup>21</sup> If future and past events exist, I want to know where they are. If I have not the strength to discover the answer, at least I know that wherever they are, they are not there as future or past, but as present. For if there also they are future, they will not yet be there. If there also they are past, they

<sup>21</sup> See below, xi. xxix (39) on the inherent 'distraction of multiplicity' in thinking about past, present, and future, when the reality of eternity is simultaneity in the present.

are no longer there. Therefore, wherever they are, whatever they are, they do not exist except in the present. When a true narrative of the past is related, the memory produces not the actual events which have passed away but words conceived from images of them, which they fixed in the mind like imprints as they passed through the senses. Thus my boyhood, which is no longer, lies in past time which is no longer. But when I am recollecting and telling my story, I am looking on its image in present time, since it is still in my memory. Whether a similar cause is operative, in predictions of the future, in the sense that images of realities which do not yet exist are presented as already in existence, I confess, my God, I do not know. At least I know this much: we frequently think out in advance our future actions, and that premeditation is in the present; but the action which we premeditate is not yet in being because it lies in the future. But when we have embarked on the action and what we were premeditating begins to be put into effect, then that action will have existence, since then it will be not future but present.

(24) Whatever may be the way in which the hidden presentiment of the future is known, nothing can be seen if it does not exist. Now that which already exists is not future but present. When therefore people speak of knowing the future, what is seen is not events which do not yet exist (that is, they really are future), but perhaps their causes or signs which already exist.<sup>22</sup> In this way, to those who see them they are not future but present, and that is the basis on which the future can be conceived in the mind and made the subject of prediction.

Again, these concepts already exist, and those who predict the future see these concepts as if already present to their minds.

Among a great mass of examples, let me mention one instance. I look at the dawn. I forecast that the sun will rise. What I am looking at is present, what I am forecasting is future. It is not the sun which lies in the future (it already exists) but its rise, which has not yet arrived. Yet unless I were mentally imagining its rise, as now when I am speaking about it, I could not predict it. But the dawn glow which I see in the sky is not sunrise, which it precedes, nor is the

<sup>22</sup> Like Plotinus (4. 4. 12. 28-32), Augustine allows for the interpretation of foreknowledge of the future as inspired insight into the meaning of events rather than a mantic ecstasy with suspension of reason.

imagining of sunrise in my mind the actuality. These are both discerned as present so that the coming sunrise may be foretold.

So future events do not yet exist, and if they are not yet present, they do not exist; and if they have no being, they cannot be seen at all. But they can be predicted from present events which are already present and can be seen.

xix (25) Governor of your creation, what is the way by which you inform souls what lies in the future? For you instructed your prophets. By what method then do you give information about the future—you to whom nothing is future? Is it rather that you inform how to read the future in the light of the present? What does not exist, certainly cannot be the subject of information. This method is far beyond my power of vision. 'It is too mighty for me, I cannot attain it' (Ps. 138: 6). But it would be in my power with your help if you granted it, sweet light of my uncomprehending eyes.

xx (26) What is by now evident and clear is that neither future nor past exists, and it is inexact language to speak of three times—past, present, and future.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps it would be exact to say: there are three times, a present of things past, a present of things present, a present of things to come. In the soul there are these three aspects of time, and I do not see them anywhere else. The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation. If we are allowed to use such language, I see three times, and I admit they are three. Moreover, we may say, There are three times, past, present, and future. This customary way of speaking is incorrect, but it is common usage. Let us accept the usage. I do not object and offer no opposition or criticism, as long as what is said is being understood, namely that neither the future nor the past is now present. There are few usages of everyday speech which are exact, and most of our language is inexact. Yet what we mean is communicated.

xxi (27) A little earlier I observed that we measure past periods of time so that we can say that one period is twice as long as another or equal to it, and likewise of other periods of time which we are capable of measuring and reporting. Therefore, as I was saying, we measure periods of time as they are passing, and if anyone says to

<sup>23</sup> Augustine's view was anticipated by the Stoics.

me. 'How do you know?' I reply: I know it because we do measure time and cannot measure what has no being; and past and future have none. But how do we measure present time when it has no extension? It is measured when it passes, but not when it has passed, because then there will be nothing there to measure.

When time is measured, where does it come from, by what route does it pass, and where does it go? It must come out of the future, pass by the present, and go into the past; so it comes from what as yet does not exist, passes through that which lacks extension, and goes into that which is now non-existent. Yet what do we measure but time over some extension? When we speak of lengths of time as single, duple, triple, and equal, or any other temporal relation of this kind, we must be speaking of periods of time possessing extension. In what extension then do we measure time as it is passing? Is it in the future out of which it comes to pass by? No, for we do not measure what does not yet exist. Is it in the present through which it passes? No, for we cannot measure that which has no extension. Is it in the past into which it is moving? No, for we cannot measure what now does not exist.

xxii (28) My mind is on fire to solve this very intricate enigma. Do not shut the door, Lord my God. Good Father, through Christ I beg you, do not shut the door on my longing to understand these things which are both familiar and obscure. Do not prevent me, Lord, from penetrating them and seeing them illuminated by the light of your mercy. Whom shall I ask about them? And to whom but you shall I more profitably confess my incompetence? You are not irritated by the burning zeal with which I study your scriptures. Grant what I love. For I love, and this love was your gift. Grant it, Father. You truly know how to give good gifts to your children (Matt. 7: 11). Grant it, since I have undertaken to acquire understanding and 'the labour is too much for me' (Ps. 72: 16) until you open the way. Through Christ I beg you, in the name of him who is the holy of holy ones, let no one obstruct my inquiry. 'I also have believed, and therefore speak' (Ps. 115: 1; 2 Cor. 4: 13).<sup>24</sup> This is my hope. For this I live 'that I may contemplate the delight of the Lord' (Ps. 26: 4). 'Behold you have made my days subject to ageing'

<sup>24</sup> Augustine forestalls Christian critics who may think his abstruse inquiries remote from his proper task of biblical exegesis, and invokes the mediation of Christ the high-priest who gives access to the Father's mysteries.

(Ps. 38: 6). They pass away, and how I do not know. And we repeatedly speak of time and time, of times and times: 'How long ago did he say this?' 'How long ago did he do this?' 'For how long a time did I fail to see that?' And 'These syllables take twice the time of that single, short syllable.' We speak in this way, and hear people saying this, and we are understood and we understand. These usages are utterly commonplace and everyday. Yet they are deeply obscure and the discovery of the solution is new.

xxiii (29) I have heard a learned person say that the movements of sun, moon, and stars in themselves constitute time.<sup>25</sup> But I could not agree. Why should not time consist rather of the movement of all physical objects? If the heavenly bodies were to cease and a potter's wheel were revolving, would there be no time by which we could measure its gyrations, and say that its revolutions were equal; or if at one time it moved more slowly and at another time faster, that some rotations took longer, others less? And when we utter these words do not we also speak in time? In our words some syllables are long, others short, in that the sounding of the former requires a longer time, whereas the latter are shorter.

God grant to human minds to discern in a small thing universal truths valid for both small and great matters. There are stars and heavenly luminaries to be 'for signs and for times, and for days and for years' (Gen. 1: 14). But I would not say that a revolution of that wooden wheel is a day; and that learned friend could not assert that its rotation was not a period of time.

(30) I desire to understand the power and the nature of time, which enables us to measure the motions of bodies and to say that, for instance, this movement requires twice as long as that. I have this question to raise: the word 'day' is used not only of the interval of time when the sun is up over the earth, so that day is one thing, night another, but also of the sun's entire circuit from east to west, as when we say 'so many days have passed' where 'so many days' includes the nights, and the periods of night-time are not counted

<sup>25</sup> Plotinus (3. 7. 8. 8–19) likewise rejects this view. The opinion is to be found in St Basil. But Augustine may have in mind Plato's *Timaeus* (39 cd) which was available in Cicero's Latin version. Numerous ancient writers, from the author of Genesis 1: 14 onwards, observed that our years, months, and days are based on the cycle of heavenly bodies. But Augustine's argument is that no clue about the nature of time can be derived from this, or from the movement of any physical body. Time is not identical with the units by which we ordinarily measure it.

separately. So a complete day is marked by the movement and circuit of the sun from east to west. My question then is whether the sun's movement itself constitutes the day?<sup>26</sup> or the actual interval of time during which it is accomplished? or both?

In the first instance, it would still be a day even if the sun completed its course in the space of a single hour. In the second case, it would not be a day if from one sunrise to the next so short an interval as one hour passed, but only if the sun completed a day of twenty-four hours. In the third case—a day being both the circuit and the time taken—it could not be called a day if the sun completed its entire circuit in an hour, nor if the sun ceased to move and the length of time passed were the twenty-four hours normally taken by the sun in completing its entire course from sunrise to sunrise. I will not, therefore, now investigate what it is which we call a day, but the nature of time by which we can measure the sun's circuit and by which we might say that, if all was accomplished in twelve hours, the sun had completed its course in half the usual time. I ask what time is when we make a comparison and say that one interval is single and another double, even if the sun were to make its transit from east to west sometimes in single time, sometimes in twice the time.

Let no one tell me then that time is the movements of heavenly bodies. At a man's prayer the sun stood still, so that a battle could be carried through to victory (Josh. 10: 12 ff.): the sun stopped but time went on. That battle was fought and completed in its own space of time such as was sufficient for it. I therefore see that time is some kind of extension. But do I really see that? Or do I imagine that I see? You, light and truth, will show me.

xxiv (31) Do you command me to concur if someone says time is the movement of a physical entity? You do not. For I learn that no body can be moved except in time. You tell me so, but I do not learn that the actual movement of a body constitutes time. That is not what you tell me. For when a body is moved, it is by time that I measure the duration of the movement, from the moment it begins until it ends. Unless I have observed the point when it begins, and if its movement is continuous so that I cannot observe when it ceases, I am unable to measure except for the period from the beginning to

<sup>26</sup> Plotinus (3. 7. 12. 34) has the same illustration.

the end of my observation. If my observing lasts for a considerable time, I can only report that a long time passed, but not precisely how much. When we say how much, we are making a comparison—as, for example, 'This period was of the same length as that', or 'This period was twice as long as that', or some such relationship.

If, however, we have been able to note the points in space from which and to which a moving body passes, or the parts of a body when it is spinning on its axis, then we can say how much time the movement of the body or its parts required to move from one point to another. It follows that a body's movement is one thing, the period by which we measure is another. It is self-evident which of these is to be described as time. Moreover, a body may sometimes be moving, sometimes be at rest. We measure by time and say 'It was standing still for the same time that it was in movement', or 'It was still for two or three times as long as it was in movement', or any other measurement we may make, either by precise observation or by a rough estimate (we customarily say 'more or less'). Therefore time is not the movement of a body.

xxv (32) I confess to you, Lord, that I still do not know what time is, and I further confess to you, Lord, that as I say this I know myself to be conditioned by time. For a long period already I have been speaking about time, and that long period can only be an interval of time. So how do I know this, when I do not know what time is? Perhaps what I do not know is how to articulate what I do know. My condition is not good if I do not even know what it is I do not know. See, my God, 'before you I do not lie' (Gal. 1: 21). As I speak, so is my heart. You, Lord, 'will light my lamp'. Lord, my God, 'you will lighten my darknesses' (Ps. 17: 29).

xxvi (33) My confession to you is surely truthful when my soul declares that times are measured by me. So my God, I measure, and do not know what I am measuring. I measure the motion of a body by time. Then am I not measuring time itself? I could not measure the movement of a body, its period of transit and how long it takes to go from A to B, unless I were measuring the time in which this movement occurs. How then do I measure time itself? Or do we use a shorter time to measure a longer time, as when, for example, we measure a transom by using a cubit length? So we can be seen to use the length of a short syllable as a measure when we

say that a long syllable is twice its length. By this method we measure poems by the number of lines, lines by the number of feet, feet by the number of syllables, and long vowels by short, not by the number of pages (for that would give us a measure of space, not of time). The criterion is the time words occupy in recitation, so that we say 'That is a long poem, for it consists of so many lines. The lines are long, for they consist of so many feet. The feet are long for they extend over so many syllables. The syllable is long, for it is double the length of a short one.'

Nevertheless, even so we have not reached a reliable measure of time. It may happen that a short line, if pronounced slowly, takes longer to read aloud than a longer line taken faster. The same principle applies to a poem or a foot or a syllable. That is why I have come to think that time is simply a distension.<sup>27</sup> But of what is it a distension? I do not know, but it would be surprising if it is not that of the mind itself. What do I measure, I beg you, my God, when I say without precision 'This period is longer than that', or with precision 'This is twice as long as that'? That I am measuring time I know. But I am not measuring the future which does not yet exist, nor the present which has no extension, nor the past which is no longer in being. What then am I measuring? Time as it passes but not time past? That is what I affirmed earlier.

xxvii (34) Stand firm, my mind, concentrate with resolution. 'God is our help, he has made us and not we ourselves' (Ps. 61: 9; 99: 3). Concentrate on the point where truth is beginning to dawn. For example, a physical voice begins to sound. It sounds. It continues to sound, and then ceases. Silence has now come, and the voice is past. There is now no sound. Before it sounded it lay in the future. It could not be measured because it did not exist; and now it cannot be measured because it has ceased to be. At the time when it was sounding, it was possible because at that time it existed to be

<sup>27</sup> Plotinus 3. 7. 11. 41 (tr. Armstrong) speaks of time as 'a spreading out (*diastasis*) of life . . . the life of the soul in a movement of passage from one way of life to another'. This text may have influenced Augustine's coining of the term *distentio*. But in Augustine this psychological experience of the spreading out of the soul in successiveness and in diverse directions is a painful and anxious experience, so that he can speak of salvation as deliverance from time (cf. above, IX. iv (10)). The theme is developed below, especially in XI. xxix (39) where St Paul's language about 'being stretched' (Phil. 3: 13) becomes linked with the thought of Plotinus (6. 6. 1. 5) that multiplicity is a falling from the One and is 'extended in a scattering'.

measured. Yet even then it had no permanence. It came and went. Did this make it more possible to measure? In process of passing away it was extended through a certain space of time by which, it could be measured, since the present occupies no length of time. Therefore during that transient process it could be measured. But take, for example, another voice. It begins to sound and continues to do so unflinching without any interruption. Let us measure it while it is sounding; when it has ceased to sound, it will be past and will not exist to be measurable. Evidently we may at that stage measure it by saying how long it lasted. But if it is still sounding, it cannot be measured except from the starting moment when it began to sound to the finish when it ceased. What we measure is the actual interval from the beginning to the end. That is why a sound which has not yet ended cannot be measured: one cannot say how long or how short it is, nor that it is equal to some other length of time or that in relation to another it is single or double or any such proportion. But when it has come to an end, then it will already have ceased to be. By what method then can it be measured?

Nevertheless we do measure periods of time. And yet the times we measure are not those which do not yet exist, nor those which already have no existence, nor those which extend over no interval of time, nor those which reach no conclusions. So the times we measure are not future nor past nor present nor those in process of passing away. Yet we measure periods of time.

(35) 'God, Creator of all things'—*Deus Creator omnium*<sup>28</sup>—the line consists of eight syllables, in which short and long syllables alternate. So the four which are short (the first, third, fifth, and seventh) are single in relation to the four long syllables (the second, fourth, sixth and eighth). Each of the long syllables has twice the time of the short. As I recite the words, I also observe that this is so; for it is evident to sense-perception. To the degree that the sense-perception is unambiguous, I measure the long syllable by the short one, and perceive it to be twice the length. But when one syllable sounds after another, the short first, the long after it, how shall I keep my hold on the short, and how use it to apply a measure to the long, so as to verify that the long is twice as much? The long does not begin to sound unless the short has ceased to sound. I can

<sup>28</sup> Ambrose's evening hymn.

hardly measure the long during the presence of its sound, as measuring becomes possible only after it has ended. When it is finished, it has gone into the past. What then is it which I measure? Where is the short syllable with which I am making my measurement? Where is the long which I am measuring? Both have sounded; they have flown away; they belong to the past. They now do not exist. And I offer my measurement and declare as confidently as a practised sense-perception will allow, that the short is single, the long double—I mean in the time they occupy. I can do this only because they are past and gone. Therefore it is not the syllables which I am measuring, but something in my memory which stays fixed there.

(36) So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time.<sup>29</sup> Do not distract me; that is, do not allow yourself to be distracted by the hubbub of the impressions being made upon you. In you, I affirm, I measure periods of time. The impression which passing events make upon you abides when they are gone. That present consciousness is what I am measuring, not the stream of past events which have caused it. When I measure periods of time, that is what I am actually measuring. Therefore, either this is what time is, or time is not what I am measuring.

What happens when we measure silences and say that a given period of silence lasted as long as a given sound? Do we direct our attention to measuring it as if a sound occurred, so that we are enabled to judge the intervals of the silences within the space of time concerned? For without any sound or utterance we mentally recite poems and lines and speeches, and we assess the lengths of their movements and the relative amounts of time they occupy, no differently from the way we would speak if we were actually making sounds. Suppose someone wished to utter a sound lasting a long time, and decided in advance how long that was going to be. He would have planned that space of time in silence. Entrusting that to his memory he would begin to utter the sound which continues until it has reached the intended end. It would be more accurate to say the utterance has sounded and will sound. For the part of it which is complete has sounded, but what remains will sound, and

<sup>29</sup> Plotinus (3. 7. 11): Time is the soul's passing from one state of life to another, and is not outside the soul.

so the action is being accomplished as present attention transfers the future into the past. The future diminishes as the past grows, until the future has completely gone and everything is in the past.

xxviii (37) But how does this future, which does not yet exist, diminish or become consumed? Or how does the past, which now has no being, grow, unless there are three processes in the mind which in this is the active agent? For the mind expects and attends and remembers, so that what it expects passes through what has its attention to what it remembers. Who therefore can deny that the future does not yet exist? Yet already in the mind there is an expectation of the future. Who can deny that the past does not now exist? Yet there is still in the mind a memory of the past. None can deny that present time lacks any extension because it passes in a flash. Yet attention is continuous, and it is through this that what will be present progresses towards being absent. So the future, which does not exist, is not a long period of time. A long future is a long expectation of the future. And the past, which has no existence, is not a long period of time. A long past is a long memory of the past.

(38) Suppose I am about to recite a psalm which I know. Before I begin, my expectation is directed towards the whole. But when I have begun, the verses from it which I take into the past become the object of my memory. The life of this act of mine is stretched two ways, into my memory because of the words I have already said and into my expectation because of those which I am about to say. But my attention is on what is present: by that the future is transferred to become the past. As the action advances further and further, the shorter the expectation and the longer the memory, until all expectation is consumed, the entire action is finished, and it has passed into the memory. What occurs in the psalm as a whole occurs in its particular pieces and its individual syllables. The same is true of a longer action in which perhaps that psalm is a part. It is also valid of the entire life of an individual person, where all actions are parts of a whole, and of the total history of 'the sons of men' (Ps. 30: 20) where all human lives are but parts.

xxix (39) 'Because your mercy is more than lives' (Ps. 62: 4), see how my life is a distension<sup>30</sup> in several directions. 'Your right hand

<sup>30</sup> See above xi. xxvi (33).



upheld me' (Ps. 17: 36; 62: 9) in my Lord, the Son of man who is mediator between you the One and us the many, who live in a multiplicity of distractions by many things; so 'I might apprehend him in whom also I am apprehended' (Phil. 3: 12–14), and leaving behind the old days I might be gathered to follow the One, 'forgetting the past' and moving not towards those future things which are transitory but to 'the things which are before' me, not stretched out in distraction but extended in reach, not by being 'pulled apart but by concentration. So I 'pursue the prize of the high calling' where I 'may hear the voice of praise' and 'contemplate your delight' (Ps. 25: 7; 26: 4) which neither comes nor goes. But now 'my years pass in groans' (Ps. 30: 11) and you, Lord, are my consolation. You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your 'love, I flow together'<sup>31</sup> to merge into you.

xxx (40) Then shall I find stability and solidity in you, in your truth which imparts form to me. I shall not have to endure the questions of people who suffer from a disease which brings its own punishment and want to drink more than they have the capacity to hold. They say 'What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?', or 'Why did he ever conceive the thought of making something when he had never made anything before?'<sup>32</sup> Grant them, Lord, to consider carefully what they are saying and to make the discovery that where there is no time, one cannot use the word 'never'. To say that God has never done something is to say that there is no time when he did it. Let them therefore see that without the creation no time can exist, and let them cease to speak that vanity (Ps. 143: 8). Let them also be 'extended' towards 'those things which are before' (Phil. 3: 13), and understand that before all times you are eternal Creator of all time. Nor are any times or created thing coeternal with you, even if there is an order of creation which transcends time.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Augustine's image of the historical process is that of a flowing river or rivers, with many stormy cataraacts. Underlying this passage is the language of Plotinus (6. 6. 1. 5) about the fall away from the One as a scattering and an extending. Temporal successiveness is an experience of disintegration; the ascent to divine eternity is a recovery of unity.

<sup>32</sup> See XI. xii (14), above.

<sup>33</sup> That is, the order of angels: *City of God* 12. 16. See below XII. ix (9).

xxx (41) Lord my God, how deep is your profound mystery, and how far away from it have I been thrust by the consequences of my sins. Heal my eyes and let me rejoice with your light. Certainly if there were a mind endowed with such great knowledge and prescience that all things past and future could be known in the way I know a very familiar psalm, this mind would be utterly miraculous and amazing to the point of inducing awe. From such a mind nothing of the past would be hidden, nor anything of what remaining ages have in store, just as I have full knowledge of that psalm I sing. I know by heart what and how much of it has passed since the beginning, and what and how much remains until the end. But far be it from you, Creator of the universe, creator of souls and bodies, far be it from you to know all future and past events in this kind of sense. You know them in a much more wonderful and much more mysterious way. A person singing or listening to a song he knows well suffers a distension or stretching in feeling and in sense-perception from the expectation of future sounds and the memory of past sound. With you it is otherwise. You are unchangeably eternal, that is the truly eternal Creator of minds. Just as you knew heaven and earth in the beginning without that bringing any variation into your knowing, so you made heaven and earth in the beginning without that meaning a tension between past and future in your activity. Let the person who understands this make confession to you. Let him who fails to understand it make confession to you. How exalted you are, and the humble in heart are your house (Ps. 137: 6; 145: 8). You lift up those who are cast down (Ps. 144: 14; 145: 8), and those whom you raise to that summit which is yourself do not fall.

## BOOK XII

### *Platonic and Christian Creation*

i (1) In my needy life, Lord, my heart is much exercised under the impact made by the words of your holy scripture. All too frequently the poverty of human intelligence has plenty to say, for inquiry employs more words than the discovery of the solution; it takes longer to state a request than to have it granted, and the hand which knocks has more work to do than the hand which receives.<sup>1</sup> We hold on to the promise, which none can make null and void. 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (Rom. 8: 31). 'Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and the door is opened to the one who knocks' (Matt. 7: 7-8). These are your promises, and when the promise is given by the Truth, who fears to be deceived?

ii (2) My humble tongue makes confession to your transcendent majesty that you were maker of heaven and earth—this heaven which I see, the earth which I tread under foot and is the source of the earthly body which I carry. You were their maker. But where is the 'heaven of heaven', Lord, of which we have heard in the words of the psalm: 'The heaven of heaven belongs to the Lord, but the earth he has given to the sons of men' (Ps. 113: 16)? Where is the heaven which we do not see, compared with which everything we can see is earth? For this physical totality, which is not in its entirety present in every part of it,<sup>2</sup> has received a beautiful form in its very lowest things, and at the bottom is our earth. But in comparison with 'the heaven of heaven', even the heaven of our earth is earth. And it is not absurd to affirm that both of these vast physical systems are earth in relation to that heaven whose nature lies beyond knowledge, which belongs to the Lord, not to the sons of men.

<sup>1</sup> An echo of Cicero's *Hortensius*, cited in VIII. vii (17).

<sup>2</sup> The idea is in Plotinus 2. 3. 13. 'That even the lowest things have their proper beauty is in 3. 2. 7. 42-3. The citation from the Psalter is one of very few to be marked as such.'

iii (3) Certainly this earth 'was invisible and unorganized' (Gen. 1: 2), a kind of deep abyss over which there was no light because it had no form. So at your command it was written that 'darkness was over the abyss'. This simply means the absence of light. For if light existed, it could only be above, shining down from on high. Where, then, light did not yet exist, the presence of darkness was the lack of light. That is why the darkness was 'above', because the light above it was not present, just as when there is no sound there is silence, and the place where there is silence, is the place where there is no sound. Is it not you, Lord, who instructed the soul which is making confession to you? Do I not owe to you the insight that before you gave form and particularity to that 'unformed matter' (Wisd. 11: 18), there was nothing—no colour, no shape, no body, no spirit? Yet it was not absolute nothingness. It was a kind of formlessness without any definition.

iv (4) To give slower minds some notion of the meaning here no word is available except that of familiar usage. But among all the parts of the world what can be found to be closer to total formlessness than earth and abyss? For because of their lowly position they are less beautiful than all other things which are full of light and radiance. I have no reason to doubt that the formlessness of matter, which by your creation was made lacking in all definition and was that out of which you made so lovely a world, is conveniently described for human minds in the words 'the earth invisible and unorganized'.

v (5) In this matter thought seeks to grasp what perception has touched, and says to itself: 'It is not an intellectual form like life or justice, because it is matter out of which bodies are made. Nor is it accessible to sense-perception, since in what is invisible and unorganized there is nothing of what we see and perceive.' Human thinking employs words in this way; but its attempts are either a knowing which is aware of what is not knowable or an ignorance based on knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The language and ideas here are in Plotinus 2. 4. 10 (the indefiniteness of matter cannot be the object of definite knowledge; yet the not knowing is capable of positive statement).

In a later letter (130) Augustine epigrammatically sums up his view of the inadequacy of human talk about God in the phrase 'learned ignorance'.

vi (6) For myself, Lord, if I am to confess to you with my mouth and my pen everything you have taught me about this question of matter, the truth is that earlier in life I heard the word but did not understand it, and those who spoke to me about it [the Manichees] did not understand it either. I used to think of it as having countless and varied shapes,<sup>4</sup> and therefore I was not thinking about matter at all. My mind envisaged foul and horrible forms nevertheless. I used to use the word formless not for that which lacked form but for that which had a form such that, if it had appeared, my mind would have experienced revulsion from its extraordinary and bizarre shape, and my human weakness would have been plunged into confusion. But the picture I had in my mind was not the privation of all form, but that which is relatively formless by comparison with more beautiful shapes. True reasoning convinced me that I should wholly subtract all remnants of every kind of form if I wished to conceive the absolutely formless.<sup>5</sup> I could not achieve this. I found it easier to suppose something deprived of all form to be non-existent than to think something could stand between form and nothingness, neither endowed with form nor nothing, but formless and so almost nothing.

From this point onwards my mind ceased to question my spirit which was full of images of bodies endowed with forms which it could change and vary at will. I concentrated attention on the bodies, themselves and gave a more critical examination to the mutability by which they cease to be what they were and begin to be what they were not. I suspected that this passing from form to form took place by means of something that had no form, yet was not absolutely nothing. I wanted to know, not to suspect. If my voice and pen were to confess to you all that you disentangled for me in examining this question, no reader would have the patience to follow the argument. Nevertheless my heart will never cease to give you honour for this, and to sing your praises for this, which I have not strength to express. For the mutability of changeable things is itself capable of receiving all forms into which mutable things can be changed. But what is this mutability? Surely not mind? Surely

<sup>4</sup> Simplicius *Commentary on Epictetus* 34 (27 p. 168 Salmasius) reports that Mani's Prince of Darkness has 5 shapes: lion's head, eagle's shoulders, serpent's stomach, fish's tail, demon's feet. The concept of matter in Manicheism is wholly different from that in Neoplatonism. For Plotinus 3. 6. 10–13 matter is so distinct from form as to be as immutable as God.

<sup>5</sup> The process of intellectual abstraction is described by Plotinus 1. 8. 9.

not body? Surely not the appearances of mind and body? If one could speak of 'a nothing something' or 'a being which is non-being', that is what I would say. Nevertheless it must have had some kind of prior existence to be able to receive the visible and ordered forms.<sup>6</sup>

vii (7) Where could this capacity come from except from you, from whom everything has being insofar as it has being? But the further away from you things are, the more unlike you they become<sup>7</sup>—though this distance is not spatial. And so you, Lord, are not one thing here, another thing there, but the selfsame, very being itself, 'holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty' (Isa. 6: 3; Rev. 4: 8). In the beginning, that is from yourself, in your wisdom which is begotten of your substance, you made something and made it out of nothing. For you made heaven and earth not out of your own self, or it would be equal to your only-begotten Son and therefore to yourself. It cannot possibly be right for anything which is not of you to be equal to you. Moreover, there was nothing apart from you out of which you could make them, God one in three and three in one.<sup>8</sup> That is why you made heaven and earth out of nothing, a great thing and a little thing, since you, both omnipotent and good, make all things good, a great heaven and a little earth. You were, the rest was nothing. Out of nothing you made heaven and earth, two entities, one close to you, the other close to being nothing; the one to which only you are superior, the other to which what is inferior is nothingness.

viii (8) But the 'heaven of heaven' is yours, Lord. The earth which you gave to the sons of men to see and to touch was not such as we now see and touch. For it was 'invisible and unorganized', and an abyss above which there was no light. 'Darkness above the abyss' implies more darkness than 'in' the abyss. This abyss, now of visible waters, has even in its depths a light of its own, which is somehow visible to fish and to living creatures creeping along its bottom. But at that first stage the whole was almost nothing because

<sup>6</sup> Plotinus 3. 6 argues that only things with body are possible; not only are souls always active, never passive, but matter also is unaffected by form, incorporeal and ghostly, an underlying substrate which is non-being, apparently seeming to be either soul or body without being either (3. 6. 7).

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus 6. 9. 12: we exist more as we turn to him, less as we turn away.

<sup>8</sup> 'Una trinitas et trina unitas'. Cf. below XIII. xxii (32).

it was still totally formless. However, it was already capable of receiving form. For you, Lord, 'made the world of formless matter' (Wisd. 11: 18). You made this next-to-nothing out of nothing, and from it you made great things at which the sons of men wonder. An extraordinary wonder is the physical heaven, the solid firmament or barrier put between water and water on the second day after the creating of light, when you said 'Let it be made' and so it was made. This firmament you called 'heaven', but a heaven to this earth and sea, which you made on the third day by giving visible shape to formless matter which you made before any day existed at all. Already you made heaven before any day, and that is the 'heaven of this heaven', because in the beginning you had made heaven and earth. But the earth itself which you had made was formless matter; for it was 'invisible and unorganized and darkness was above the abyss'. From the invisible and unorganized earth, from this formlessness, from this next-to-nothing, you made all these things of which this mutable world consists, yet in a state of flux. Its mutability is apparent in the fact that passing time can be perceived and measured. For the changes of things make time as their forms undergo variation and change. The matter underlying them is the 'invisible' earth' of which I have been speaking.

ix (9) That is why the Spirit, the teacher of your servant (Moses), in relating that in the beginning you made heaven and earth, says nothing about time and is silent about days. No doubt the 'heaven of heaven' which you made in the beginning is a kind of creation in the realm of the intellect.<sup>9</sup> Without being coeternal with you, O Trinity, it nevertheless participates in your eternity. From the sweet happiness of contemplating you, it finds power to check its mutability. Without any lapse to which its createdness makes it liable, by cleaving to you it escapes all the revolving vicissitudes of the temporal process. But even that formlessness, the 'invisible and unorganized earth', is not counted among the days of creation week. For where there is no form, no order, nothing comes or goes into the past, and where this does not happen, there are obviously no days and nothing of the coming and passing of temporal periods.

x (10) May the truth, the light of my heart, not my darkness,

<sup>9</sup> Augustine interprets Genesis 1 not to describe any material creation, but the intelligible realm of mind. His 'heaven of heaven' is, like the world-soul in Porphyry (*Sententiae* 30), created but eternally contemplating the divine.

speak to me. I slipped down into the dark and was plunged into obscurity. Yet from there, even from there I loved you. 'I erred and I remembered you' (Ps. 118: 176). 'I heard your voice behind me' (Ezek. 3: 12) calling me to return. And I could hardly hear because of the hubbub of people who know no peace. Now, see, I am returning hot and panting to your spring. Let no one stand in my path. Let me drink this and live by it. May I not be my own life. On my own resources I lived evilly. To myself I was death. In you I am recovering life. Speak to me, instruct me, I have put faith in your books. And their words are mysteries indeed.

xi (11) Already you have said to me, Lord, with a loud voice in my inner ear, that you are eternal. 'You alone have immortality' (1 Tim. 6: 16), for you are changed by no form or movement, nor does your will undergo any variation at different times. For that is not an immortal will which is first one thing and then another. 'In your sight' (Ps. 18: 15) this truth is clear to me. Let it become more and more evident, I pray you, and as it becomes manifest may I dwell calmly under your wings (cf. Ps. 35: 8).

Again you said to me, Lord, with a loud voice to my inner ear, that you created all natures and substances which are not what you are and nevertheless exist. The only thing that is not from you is what has no existence. The movement of the will away from you, who are, is movement towards that which has less being. A movement of this nature is a fault and a sin, and no one's sin harms you or disturbs the order of your rule, either on high or down below. 'In your presence' (Ps. 18: 15) this truth is clear to me. Let it become more and more evident, I pray you, and as it becomes manifest may I dwell calmly under your wings.

(12) Again you said to me, in a loud voice to my inner ear, that not even that created realm, the 'heaven of heaven', is coeternal with you. Its delight is exclusively in you. In an unailing purity it satiates its thirst in you. It never at any point betrays its mutability. You are always present to it, and it concentrates all its affection on you. It has no future to expect. It suffers no variation and experiences no distending in the successiveness of time:<sup>10</sup> O blessed creature, if there be such: happy in cleaving to your felicity, happy to have you as eternal inhabitant and its source of light! I do not find any better

<sup>10</sup> Above, xi. xxix (39).

namè for the Lord's 'heaven of heaven' (Ps. 113: 16) than your House. There your delight is contemplated without any failure or wandering away to something else. The pure heart enjoys absolute concord and unity in the unshakeable peace of holy spirits, the citizens of your city in the heavens above the visible heavens.

(13) From this may the soul, whose pilgrimage is far off, understand if it has the experience of thirsting for you. Already its tears have become its bread, while each day someone says to it: 'Where is your God?' (Ps. 41: 3-4, 11). It now begs of you and makes this single request, that it 'may dwell in your house all the days of its life' (Ps. 26: 4)—and what is its life but you? and what are your 'days' but your eternity, as are 'your years which do not fail, because you are the same'? (Ps. 101: 28). From this, then, may the soul with power to understand grasp how far above time you are in your eternity, seeing that your House, which is not wandering in alien realms, although not coeternal with you, nevertheless experiences none of the vicissitudes of time because, ceaselessly and unfaillingly, it cleaves to you. In your sight this truth is clear to me. May it become more and more evident, and as it becomes manifest may I dwell calmly under your wings.

(14) There is an inexpressible formlessness in the changes undergone by the lowest and most inferior creatures. Only a person whose empty heart makes his mind roll and reel with private fantasies would try to tell me that temporal successiveness can still be manifested after all form has been subtracted and annihilated, so that the only remaining element is formlessness, through the medium of which a thing is changed and transformed from one species to another. It is absolutely impossible for time to exist without changes and movements. And where there is no form, there can be no changes.<sup>11</sup>

xii (15) In the light of these reflections, in the measure that you grant me understanding, Lord, in that you stir me to knock and open to my knocking, I find there are two things created by you which lie outside time, though neither is coeternal with you. One of them is so given form that, although mutable, yet without any cessation of

its contemplation, without any interruption caused by change, it experiences unswerving enjoyment of your eternity and immutability. The other is so formless that it has no means, either in movement or in a state of rest, of moving from one form to another,<sup>12</sup> which is synonymous with being subject to time. But you did not leave it to its formless state since, before any day was created, in the beginning you made heaven and earth, and they are the two of which I have been speaking. 'Now the earth was invisible and unorganized, and darkness was above the abyss.' These words suggest the notion of formlessness to help people who cannot conceive of any kind of privation of form which falls short of utter nothingness. Out of this were made a second heaven and a visible ordered earth and beautiful waters and everything else mentioned in the creation narrative after days had come into existence. These things are such that they are subject to ordered changes of movement and form, and so are subject to the successiveness of time.

xiii (16) This is my provisional understanding, my God, when I hear your scripture saying 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth. Now the earth was invisible and unorganized and darkness was above the abyss' (Gen. 1: 1-21). It does not mention a day as the time when you did this. My provisional interpretation of that is that 'heaven' means the 'heaven of heaven', the intellectual, non-physical heaven where the intelligence's knowing is a matter of simultaneity—not in part, not in an enigma, not through a mirror, but complete, in total openness, 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13: 12). This knowing is not of one thing at one moment and of another thing at another moment, but is concurrent without any temporal successiveness. 'Earth' I take to mean the invisible and unorganized earth which experiences no temporal succession in which first this happens, then that. Where there is no form, there can be no differentiation of this and that. So my interim judgement is that when scripture mentions no days in saying 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth', the reason for this is that it is referring to these two things. The one is endowed with form from the very first, the other is utterly formless; the one, 'heaven' being the 'heaven of heaven', the other, 'earth', being 'the earth invisible and unorganized'. For scripture immediately goes on to mention the 'earth' to which it was

<sup>11</sup> In a section far from easy to follow Plotinus argued that matter, in the sense of the ultimate formless sludge out of which particular things come to take shape and form, is immune from change (3. 6. 10-13).

In XI. xxiv (31) above, Augustine has argued that no change can occur except in time.

<sup>12</sup> Plotinus (3. 6. 7. 19) speaks of the total impotence of 'matter'.

-referring. The fact that scripture says the firmament was made on the second day and calls it heaven suggests what heaven is being referred to in the earlier text where no days are mentioned.

xiv (17) What wonderful profundity there is in your utterances! The surface meaning lies open before us and charms beginners. Yet the depth is amazing, my God, the depth is amazing.<sup>13</sup> To concentrate on it is to experience awe—the awe of adoration before its transcendence and the trembling of love.<sup>14</sup> Scripture's enemies I vehemently hate' (Ps. 138: 22). I wish that you would slay them with a two-edged sword (Ps. 149: 6); then they would no longer be its enemies. The sense in which I wish them 'dead' is this: I love them that they may die to themselves and live to you (Rom. 14: 7–8; 2 Cor. 5: 14–15).

But see, there are others who find no fault with the book of Genesis and indeed admire it. Yet they say: 'The Spirit of God who wrote this by Moses his servant did not intend this meaning by these words; he did not mean what you are saying, but another meaning which is our interpretation.'<sup>15</sup> Submitting to you as arbiter, God of all of us, this is my reply to them.

xv (18) You will surely not assert to be false what the truth proclaims with a loud voice to my inner ear concerning the true eternity of the Creator, namely that his nature will never vary at different times; and his will is not external to his nature. It follows that he does not will one thing at one time, and another thing at another time. Once and for all and simultaneously, he wills everything that he wills. He does not need to renew his resolution. He does not want this now and that then, nor does he later come to will what formerly he did not will, or reject what previously he wished. For such a will is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal. 'But our God is eternal' (Ps. 47: 15).

Again, surely you would not deny what he speaks to me in my inner ear, that the expectation of future events becomes direct apprehension when they are happening, and this same apprehension becomes memory when they have passed.

<sup>13</sup> Above, III. v (9).

<sup>14</sup> Above, VII. xvii (23); XI. ix (11).

<sup>15</sup> Augustine now turns his critique not on Manichees but on Catholic critics (unidentifiable), dissatisfied perhaps with his exposition of Genesis 1 in his book *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, written in 388–9.

But every act of attention which undergoes change in this way is mutable, and anything mutable cannot be eternal. But 'our God is eternal'. I put together these propositions, make an inference, and find that my God, the eternal God, did not experience a new act of will when he made the creation, and his knowledge admits no transient element.

(19) What then will you who contradict me say? Are these propositions untrue? 'No', they say. What then? Surely it is not false that the only source of all nature endowed with form and matter capable of form is he who is supremely good because he supremely is. They say, 'We do not deny that.' What then? Do you deny that there is a sublime created realm cleaving with such pure love to the true and truly eternal God that, though not coeternal with him, it never detaches itself from him and slips away into the changes and successiveness of time, but rests in utterly authentic contemplation of him alone? For as it loves you to the extent you command, you, God, show yourself to it and are sufficient for it.<sup>16</sup> So it does not decline from you into self-concern. This House of God is not made of earth, nor is it corporeal made from any celestial mass, but is spiritual and participates in your eternity, because it is without stain for ever. For you have 'established it for ever and ever'; you have 'appointed a law and it will never pass away' (Ps. 148: 6). Yet it is not coeternal with you, because it had a beginning; for it belongs to the created order.

(20) We do not find that time existed before this created realm, for 'wisdom was created before everything' (Ecclus. 1: 4). Obviously that does not mean your wisdom, our God, father of the created wisdom. Your wisdom is manifestly coeternal and equal with you, by whom all things were created, and is the 'beginning' in which you made heaven and earth. Evidently 'wisdom' in this text is that which is created, an intellectual nature which is light from contemplation of the light.<sup>17</sup> For although created, it is itself called wisdom. But just as there is a difference between light which illuminates and that which is illuminated, so also there is an equivalent difference between the wisdom which creates and that which is created, as

<sup>16</sup> Analogous language in Plotinus 5. 3. 8. 31 f. on Soul's relation to Mind.

<sup>17</sup> Plotinus 4. 3. 17. 13 and 6: 4. 7. 27 has 'light from light', the derived light (unlike that of the Nicene creed) being inferior.

also between the justice which justifies and the justice created by justification.<sup>18</sup> For even we are said to be your justice. A certain servant of yours says 'That we may be the justice of God in him' (2 Cor. 5: 21). So there was a wisdom created before all things which is a created thing, the rational and intellectual mind of your pure city, our 'mother which is above and is free' (Gal. 4: 6) and is 'eternal in the heavens' (2 Cor. 5: 1). In this text 'heavens' can only be 'the heavens of heavens' which praise you (Ps. 148: 4); this is also the Lord's 'heaven of heaven' (Ps. 113: 16). We do not find there was time before it, because it precedes the creation of time; yet it is created first of all things. However, prior to it is the eternity of the Creator himself. On being created by him it took its beginning—not a beginning in time, since time did not yet exist, but one belonging to its own special condition.

(21) Therefore it is derived from you, our God, but in such a way as to be wholly other than you and not Being itself. We do not find time either before it or even in it, because it is capable of continually seeing your face and of never being deflected from it. This has the consequence that it never undergoes variation or change. Nevertheless in principle mutability is inherent in it. That is why it would grow dark and cold if it were not lit and warmed by you as a perpetual noonday sun (Isa. 58: 10) because it cleaves to you with a great love. O House full of light and beauty! 'I have loved your beauty and the place of the habitation of the glory of my Lord' (Ps. 25: 7-9), who built you and owns you. During my wandering may my longing be for you! I ask him who made you that he will also make me his property in you, since he also made me. 'I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost' (Ps. 118: 176). But on the shoulders of my shepherd, who built you, I hope to be carried back to you (Luke 15: 4 f.).

(22) What do you say to me, you opponents whom I was addressing? You contradict my interpretation, though you believe Moses to be God's devout servant and his books to be oracles of the Holy Spirit. Is not this House of God, though not coeternal with God, nevertheless in its own way 'eternal in the heavens' (2 Cor. 5: 1) where you look in vain for the successiveness of time because it is not to be found

<sup>18</sup> Augustine distinguishes here (and elsewhere) between the act of God in justification to which there is no human contribution, and the righteousness that grace imparts to transform the co-operating will.

there? For it transcends all distension between past and future, and all the fleeting transience of time. 'It is good for it always to cleave to God' (Ps. 72: 28). 'It is', they say. Which then of those things which 'my heart cried out to my God' (Ps. 17: 7) when it heard inwardly 'the voice of his praise' (Ps. 25: 7), do you now contend to be untrue? Is it that there was a formless matter and that because there was no form there was no order? But where no order existed, there could be no temporal successiveness. And yet this almost nothing, to the degree to which it was not absolutely nothing, was source of whatever exists, insofar as it is anything at all. 'This also', they say, 'we do not deny.'

xvi (23) Those with whom I wish to argue in your presence, my God, are those who grant the correctness of all these things which your truth utters in my inner mind. Those who deny them may bark as much as they like and by their shouting discredit themselves. I will try to persuade them to be quiet and to allow your word to find a way to them. If they refuse and repel me, I beg you, my God, not to 'stay away from me in silence' (Ps. 27: 1). Speak truth in my heart; you alone speak so. I will leave my critics gasping in the dust, and blowing the soil up into their eyes. I will 'enter my chamber' (Matt. 6: 6) and will sing you songs of love,<sup>19</sup> groaning with inexpressible groanings (Rom. 8: 20) on my wanderer's path, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart lifted up towards it—Jerusalem my home land, Jerusalem my mother (Gal. 4: 26), and above it yourself, ruler, illuminator, father, tutor, husband, pure and strong delights and solid joy and all good things to an unexpressible degree, all being enjoyed in simultaneity because you are the one supreme and true Good. I shall not turn away until in that peace of this dearest mother, where are the firstfruits of my spirit (Rom. 8: 23) and the source of my certainties; you gather all that I am from my dispersed and distorted state to reshape and strengthen me for ever, 'my God my mercy' (Ps. 58: 18). But with those who do not criticize as false all those points which are true, who honour your holy scripture written by that holy man Moses and agree with us that we should follow its supreme authority, but who on some point contradict us, my position is this: You, our God, shall be arbiter between my confessions and their contradictions.

<sup>19</sup> Among Manichee hymns there was one called 'Love Song' to God.

xvii (24) They say: 'Although this may be true, yet Moses did not have these two things in mind when by the revelation of the Spirit he said: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" (Gen. 1: 1). By the word "heaven" he did not mean the spiritual or intellectual creation which continually looks on God's face, nor by the word "earth" did he intend formless matter.' What then? They say: 'What that man had in mind was what we say he meant, and this is what he expressed in those words.'

And what is that?

'By the phrase "heaven and earth"', they say, 'Moses meant to signify in general and concise terms the entire visible world, so that thereafter under the successive days he could arrange one by one each category which it pleased the Holy Spirit to list in this way. The character of the people addressed was rough and carnal, and so he decided to present to them only the visible works of God.'

They agree, however, that if one understands formless matter to be referred to as 'the earth invisible and unorganized' and a 'dark abyss', there is no incongruity. For it was from this that in the following verses all the visible things, known to everyone, are shown to be created and ordered during those days.

(25) What is to be said? Another interpretation may propose that the phrase 'heaven and earth' is used by anticipation to mean this formless and chaotic matter, because out of that the visible world was created and perfected with all the natures which are clearly evident to us; and this world is by common custom often called 'heaven and earth'. A yet further interpretation could be that 'heaven and earth' is a proper way to describe invisible and visible nature, and that by this phrase there is included in these two words the entire created order which God made in wisdom, that is, in the beginning. Nevertheless, all things were made not of the very substance of God but out of nothing, because they are not being itself, as God is, and a certain mutability is inherent in all things, whether they are permanent like the eternal House of God or if they suffer change, like the human soul and body. So the common material of all things invisible and visible, when still formless but of course receptive of form, is that from which heaven and earth originate—that is the invisible and visible creation formed of both elements. On this view this formless creation is intended by the

words 'the earth invisible and unorganized' and 'darkness above the abyss', but with the difference that 'the invisible and unorganized earth' means physical matter before it was given the quality of form, whereas 'darkness above the abyss' means the spiritual realm before its uncontrolled fluidity was checked<sup>20</sup> and before it was illuminated by wisdom.

(26) There is a further interpretation that one can hold if one is so inclined, namely that in the text 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth', the words 'heaven and earth' do not mean already perfect and formed visible or invisible natures, but a still unformed beginning of things; what these words refer to is a matter capable of being formed and open to creativeness. In this inchoate state things were confused, not yet distinct in qualities and forms, which now are divided into their own orders and are called 'heaven and earth', the former meaning the spiritual creation, the latter the physical.

xviii (27) After hearing and considering all these interpretations, I do not wish to 'quarrel about words, for that is good for nothing but the subversion of the hearers' (2 Tim. 2: 14). Moreover, 'the law is good' for edification 'if it is lawfully used, since its end is love out of a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith.' (1 Tim. 1: 8, 5). Our Master well knows on which two precepts he hung all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22: 40).<sup>21</sup> My God, light of my eyes in that which is obscure, I ardently affirm these things in my confession to you. So what difficulty is it for me when these words [of Genesis] can be interpreted in various ways, provided only that the interpretations are true? What difficulty is it for me, I say, if I understand the text in a way different from someone else, who understands the scriptural author in another sense? In Bible study all of us are trying to find and grasp the meaning of the author we are reading, and when we believe him to be revealing truth, we do not dare to think he said anything which we either know or think to be incorrect. As long as each interpreter is endeavouring to find in the holy scriptures the meaning of the author who wrote it, what evil is it if an exegesis he gives is one shown to be true by you, light of all sincere souls,

<sup>20</sup> Plotinus (5. 3. 8. 37) says the light of Intellect (Nous) does not allow the soul to disperse.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine regarded the two commandments to love God and to love one's neighbour as the central principle for the interpretation of all scripture. See below XII. xxv (35).



even if the author whom he is reading did not have that idea and, though he had grasped a truth, had not discerned that seen by the interpreter?

xix (28) It is true, Lord, that you made heaven and earth. It is true that the 'beginning' means your wisdom, in which you made all things (Ps. 103: 24). It is true that the visible world has its vast constituent parts, called heaven and earth in summary description of all natures made and created. It is also true that everything mutable implies for us the notion of a kind of formlessness, which allows it to receive form or to undergo change and modification. It is true that no experience of time can ever touch what has so close an adherence to immutable form that, although mutable, it undergoes no changes. It is true that formlessness, which is next to nothing, cannot suffer temporal successiveness. It is true that the source from which something is made can by a certain mode of speaking bear the name of the thing which is made from it. Hence the kind of formlessness from which heaven and earth are made can be called 'heaven and earth'. It is true that, of all things with form, nothing is closer to the formless than earth and the abyss. It is true that you made not only whatever is created and endowed with form but also whatever is capable of being created and receiving form. From you all things have their existence (1 Cor. 8: 6). It is true that everything which from being formless acquires form, is first formless and is then given form.

xxi (29) All these true propositions are no matters of doubt to those to whom you have granted insight to see them with their inward eye, and who unmoveably believe that your servant Moses spoke 'in the spirit of truth' (John 14: 17). On the basis of all these axioms, a view may be urged to this effect: 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth' means that by his Word coeternal with himself God made the intelligible and sensible (or spiritual and corporeal) worlds. Another view could be that 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth' means that by his Word coeternal with himself, God made the universal mass of this physical world with all the natures it contains, manifest and well known to us. A third view might be that 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth' means that by his Word coeternal with himself he made the formless matter of the spiritual and physical creation. A fourth view

might be that 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth' means that by his Word coeternal with himself God made the formless matter of the physical creation, when heaven and earth were still chaotic, though now we perceive them to be distinct and endowed with form in the physical mass of the world. A fifth view might say, 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth' means that at the very start of his making and working, God made formless matter containing in a confused condition heaven and earth, but now they are given form and are manifest to us, with all the things that are in them.

xxi (30) In regard to the interpretation of the words which then follow, on the basis of all those true propositions, a view may be urged to this effect: 'Now the earth was invisible and unorganized and darkness was above the abyss' (Gen. 1: 2) means that the physical stuff which God made was still the formless matter of corporeal things without order or light. Another interpretation would say the text means that this totality called heaven and earth was still formless and dark matter, and out of it were made the physical heaven and physical earth with all the objects in it perceived by the bodily senses. Another interpretation would say that the text means that this totality called heaven and earth was still formless and dark matter, out of which was made the intelligible heaven, elsewhere called 'the heaven of heaven', and the earth, meaning the entire physical world of nature, including under that title the physical heaven also; that is, it was the source for the entire creation, invisible and visible. A yet further view would say the text does not mean that scripture called that formlessness by the name 'heaven and earth; for, it is urged, the formlessness was already in existence and was called 'the invisible and unorganized earth and the abyss', and the scripture had already said that God made heaven and earth, meaning the spiritual and physical creation. Another interpretation is that which says the text means there already existed a kind of formlessness, a matter out of which, scripture previously said, God made heaven and earth, that is the entire physical mass of the world divided into two very large parts, one above, the other below, with all the created beings in them familiar and known to us.

xxii (31) One might be tempted to object to these last two opinions as follows: 'If you reject the view that this formlessness of matter is

called heaven and earth, then something existed which God had not made, out of which he made heaven and earth. For scripture has not recorded that God made this formless matter unless we understand it to be referred to as heaven and earth or as earth alone in the words "In the beginning God made heaven and earth". In the words which come next "Now the earth was invisible and unorganized", though this is how scripture describes formless matter, we shall not understand this except as referring to that which God made, as in the previous text "he made heaven and earth".

When these objections are heard by those who maintain these two opinions which we have put last in the list, or one or other of them, their reply will be along the following lines: 'We do not deny that the matter made by God was formless, though from God come all things and they are very good (Gen. 1: 31). Just as we say that what is created and given form has more of goodness, so we concede that there is less good in what is created and receptive of form. Nevertheless, it is good. Although scripture has not mentioned that God made this formlessness, it is also true that it has not mentioned the creation of Cherubim and Seraphim, and those powers separately enumerated by the apostle—"thrones, dominations, principalities, powers" (Col. 1: 16). Yet it is evident that God made them all. If in the sentence "he made heaven and earth", everything is included, what are we to say about the waters above which the Spirit was borne (Gen. 1: 2)? If the waters are understood to be included in the heading "earth", how can "earth" then be taken to mean formless matter, when we see how beautiful waters are? Or, if we do accept that exegesis, why does scripture say that out of this formlessness the firmament was made and called heaven, and why does it not say that the waters were made? For waters are not still formless and "invisible". We see them looking beautiful as they flow. If it is being suggested that they received their beauty at the time when God said "Let the water which is under the firmament be gathered together", understanding this gathering to be the bestowing of form, what reply can be made about "the waters which are above the firmament"? They would not have deserved to receive so honourable a position had they lacked form, and scripture does not record the utterance by which they received form. Genesis may be silent on God's making of something; yet sound faith and sure reasoning put it beyond any doubt that God made it. So also no sensible

teaching will dare to say that the waters are coeternal with God on the ground that we hear about them in the narrative of the book of Genesis but find no record of when they were made. Why then with truth as our teacher may we not understand that the matter which this text of scripture calls "invisible and unorganized" and "a dark abyss", is formless, made by God out of nothing, and therefore not coeternal with him, even though the narrative omitted to record when it was made?

xxiii (32) After hearing and considering these views to the best of my weak capacity, which I confess to you, my God, who know it, I see that two areas of disagreement can arise, when something is recorded by truthful reporters using signs.<sup>22</sup> The first concerns the truth of the matter in question. The second concerns the intention of the writer. It is one thing to inquire into the truth about the origin of the creation. It is another to ask what understanding of the words on the part of a reader and hearer was intended by Moses, a distinguished servant of your faith. In the first category I will not be associated with all those who think they know things but are actually wrong. In the second category I will have nothing to do with all those who think Moses could have said anything untrue. But in you, Lord, those with whom I wish to be associated, and 'in you take my delight' (Ps. 103: 34), are those who feed on your truth in the breadth of charity (Eph. 3: 18-19). Together with them I would approach the words of your book to seek in them your will through the intention of your servant, by whose pen you imparted them to us.

xxiv (33) Among many truths which are met by inquiring minds in those words which are variously interpreted, which of us can discover your will with such assurance that he can confidently say 'This is what Moses meant and this was his meaning in that narrative' as confidently as he can say, 'Whether Moses meant this or something else, this is true'? See, our God, 'I am your servant' (Ps. 115: 16). I have vowed a sacrifice of confession in this book, and I pray that, of

<sup>22</sup> Augustine was very aware that words mean different things to different people; the 'signs' which are words are ambivalent. His theory of signs enabled him to integrate principles of biblical interpretation with ideas about grammar, rhetoric, and logic; but biblical 'signs' convey sacred mysteries and therefore are particularly open to varied interpretation.

with utter confidence that in your immutable Word you made all things invisible and visible. I cannot say with equal assurance that this was exactly what Moses had in mind when he wrote 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth'. Though in your truth I see the proposition to be certain, yet I cannot see in Moses' mind that this is what he was thinking when he wrote this. When he wrote 'In the beginning', he could have been thinking of the initial start of the making process. In the words about heaven and earth in this text, he could also have meant not a nature endowed with form and perfection, whether spiritual or physical, but one both inchoate and still formless. I see of course that all the propositions stated above can be true statements. But which of them Moses had in mind in writing these words, I do not see so clearly. Nevertheless, whether it was one of these propositions or some other which I have failed to mention, which that great man had in mind when he uttered these words, I do not doubt that what he saw was true and that his articulation of it in words was appropriate.

xxv (34) 'Let no one trouble me' (Gal. 6: 17) by telling me: 'Moses did not have in mind what you say, but meant what I say'. If someone were to say to me 'How do you know Moses thought what you make his words mean?' I should have to take it in good part and reply perhaps as I have replied above, or at rather greater length if the critic were harder to convince. But when he says 'He did not have in mind what you say but what I say', yet does not deny that what each of us is saying is true, then my God, life of the poor, in whose bosom there is no contradiction, pour a softening rain into my heart that I may bear such critics with patience. They do not say this to me because they possess second sight and have seen in the heart of your servant the meaning which they assert, but because they are proud. They have no knowledge of Moses' opinion at all, but love their own opinion not because it is true, but because it is their own. Otherwise they would equally respect another true interpretation as valid, just as I respect what they say when their affirmation is true, not because it is theirs, but because it is true. And indeed if it is true, it cannot be merely their private property. If they respect an affirmation because it is true, then it is already both theirs and mine, shared by all lovers of the truth. But their contention that

Moses did not mean what I say but what they say, I reject. I do not respect that. Even if they were right, yet their position would be the temerity not of knowledge but of audacity. It would be the product not of insight but of conceit. Lord, 'your judgements are to be feared' (Ps. 118: 120); for your truth does not belong to me nor to anyone else, but to us all whom you call to share it as a public possession. With terrifying words you warn against regarding it as a private possession, or we may lose it (Matt. 25: 14-30). Anyone who claims for his own property what you offer for all to enjoy, and wishes to have exclusive rights to what belongs to everyone, is driven from the common truth to his own private ideas, that is from truth to a lie. For 'he who speaks a lie' speaks 'from his own' (John 8: 44).

(35) Listen, best of judges, God, truth itself, listen to what I say to this opponent, listen. Before you I speak and before my brothers who 'use the law lawfully for the end of charity' (1 Tim. 1: 8, 5). Listen to what I say to him and see (Lam. 1: 9-12) if it is pleasing to you. This is the brotherly and conciliatory reply which I make to him. 'If both of us see that what you say is true and that what I say is true, then where, I ask, do we see this? I do not see it in you, nor you in me, but both of us see it in the immutable truth which is higher than our minds. If then we do not quarrel about the light from the Lord our God, why should we quarrel about the ideas of our neighbour, which we cannot see as clearly as the immutable truth is seen. If Moses himself had appeared to us and said "This is my meaning", even so we would not see it but believe. Therefore "let no one be puffed up for one against another beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4: 6). "Let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves" (Matt. 22: 37-9). On the basis of those two commandments of love, Moses meant whatever he meant in those books. If we do not believe, we make the Lord a liar (1 John 1: 10; 5: 10) because we attribute to the mind of a fellow servant a notion other than that which he taught. See now how stupid it is, among so large a mass of entirely correct interpretations which can be elicited from those words, rashly to assert that a particular one has the best claim to be Moses' view, and by destructive disputes to offend against charity itself, which is the principle of everything he said in the texts we are attempting to expound.'

xxvi (36) And yet, for my part, my God—you raise high my humble self and give rest to my toil, you hear my confessions and forgive my sins—since you bid me love my neighbour as myself, I cannot believe you gave a lesser gift to your most faithful servant Moses than I would wish and desire to be granted by you, if I had been born at the same time as he, and if you had appointed me to his position. I would wish that through the service of my heart and tongue those books should be published, which later were to be of such assistance to all nations and, throughout the entire world, would conquer by weight of authority the words of all false and proud doctrines. We all come 'from the same lump' (Rom. 9: 21) and 'what is man except that you are mindful of him?' (Ps. 8: 5). So had I been Moses—had I been what he was, and had been commissioned by you to write the book of Genesis, I would have wished to be granted such skill in eloquence and facility of style that those unable to understand how God creates would not set aside the language as beyond their power to grasp; that those who had this ability and by reflection had attained to some true opinions would find in some terse words used by your servant that their true perceptions were not left out of account; and that if, in the light of the truth, another exegete saw a different meaning, that also would not be found absent from the meaning of the same words.

xxvii (37) A spring confined in a small space rises with more power and distributes its flow through more channels over a wider expanse than a single stream rising from the same spring even if it flows down over many places.<sup>23</sup> So also the account given by your minister, which was to benefit many expositions, uses a small measure of words to pour out a spate of clear truth. From this each commentator, to the best of his ability in these things, may draw what is true, one this way, another that, using longer and more complex channels of discourse.

When they read or hear these texts, some people think of God as if he were a human being or a power immanent in a vast mass which, by some new and sudden decision external to itself, as if located in remote places, made heaven and earth, two huge bodies, one high, the other low, containing everything. When they hear 'God said, Let there be that, and that is made', they think of words

<sup>23</sup> Plotinus 3. 8. 10. 5 uses the illustration of a spring, but for a different point.

with beginnings and endings, making a sound in time and passing away. They suppose that after the words have ceased, at once there exists that which was commanded to exist, and have other similar notions which they hold because of their familiarity with the fleshly order of things. In such people who are still infants without higher insight, faith is built up in a healthy way, while in their state of weakness they are carried as if at their mother's breast by an utterly simple kind of language. By their faith they hold and maintain with assurance that God made all the natures which their senses perceive around them in all their wonderful variety. If any among them comes to scorn the humble style of biblical language and in proud weakness pushes himself outside the nest in which he was raised, he will fall, poor wretch.<sup>24</sup> 'Lord God, have mercy' (Ps. 55: 2); protect the chick without wings from being trodden on the path by passers-by. Send your angel (Matt. 18: 10) to replace it in the nest, so that it may live until it can fly.

xxviii (38) There are others for whom these words are no nest but a dark thicket. They see fruit concealed in them, to which they fly in delight, chirping as they seek for it and pluck it. For when they read or hear these words of yours, eternal God, they see that by your stable permanence you transcend all past and future time, and yet there is nothing in the time-conditioned creation which you have not made. Your will, which is identical with your self,<sup>25</sup> has made all things by a choice which in no sense manifests change or the emergence of anything not present before. You did not make the creation out of yourself in your own likeness, the form of all things, but out of nothing, which is a formless dissimilarity<sup>26</sup> to you, though, nevertheless, given form through your likeness. So it returns to you, the One, according to the appointed capacity granted to each entity according to its genus. And all things are very good, whether they abide close to you or, in the graded hierarchy of being, stand further away from you in time and space, in beautiful modifications which they either actively cause or passively receive.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine has himself in mind.

<sup>25</sup> Plotinus 6. 8. 21. 13 says God's will is his substance.

<sup>26</sup> On 'the region of dissimilarity' see above, VII. x (16). The sentence here is remarkable for interpreting 'out of nothing' to mean out of next-to-nothing, relative but not absolute non-being.

To the limited extent that they can grasp the light of your truth in this life those who see these things rejoice.

(39) One interpreter gives attention to the text 'In the beginning God made' and interprets wisdom to be the 'beginning' because this also 'speaks' to us (John 8: 25). Another interpreter of the same text understands 'beginning' to mean the starting-point of the creation and takes 'in the beginning he made' to mean 'first he made'. Moreover, among those who understand 'in the beginning' to mean 'in wisdom you made heaven and earth', one of them may believe 'heaven and earth' to mean the matter out of which heaven and earth is capable of being created, while another takes the phrase to refer to already formed and distinct natures. Yet another thinks one nature called 'heaven' is endowed with form and spiritual, while the other called 'earth' is formless physical matter. But those who understand 'heaven and earth' to be formless matter do not hold the same interpretation. On one view this is the source from which the intelligible and sensible creation are brought to perfection. On another view it is merely the source from which came the sensible physical mass containing within its vast womb the natures now evident and apparent to our eyes. Furthermore, those who believe that 'heaven and earth' in this passage means that the creatures were made already ordered and distinct, do not interpret this in only one sense. On one view this includes the invisible as well as the visible realm; on another view it refers only to the visible creation, in which we contemplate the heaven as source of light and the dark earth, together with everything they contain.

xxix (40) However, the interpreter who takes 'in the beginning he made' simply to mean 'first he made' has no alternative but to understand 'heaven and earth' to refer to the matter of heaven and earth—that is, the entire intelligible and physical creation. If he tries to make it mean the entire creation already formed, the question will rightly be put to him what, if God made this first, he went on to make next. After the universe he will find nothing left to create, and will not be pleased to hear the question 'How did he make this first if later he did nothing?'

But if he says that first he made the formless creation, and then that with form, his position is not absurd—not at least if he is capable of distinguishing priority in eternity, priority in time, priority

in preference, priority in origin.<sup>27</sup> An instance of priority in eternity would be that of God's priority to everything; of priority in time, that of the blossom to the fruit; of preference that of the fruit to the blossom; of origin, that of sound to song. In these four, the first and last which I have mentioned are the hardest to understand, the middle two very easy. For it is rare to see and very hard to sustain the insight, Lord, of your eternity immutably making a mutable world, and in this sense being anterior. And then who has a sufficiently acute mental discernment to be able to recognize, without intense toil, how sound is prior to song? The difficulty lies in the point that song is formed sound, and something not endowed with form can of course exist, but can what does not exist receive form? In this sense matter is prior to that which is made out of it. It is not prior in the sense that it actively makes; it is rather that it is made. Nor is priority one of temporal interval here. For it is not that first we emit unformed sound without it being song, and later adapt or shape it into the form of a song, in the way we make a box out of wood or a vase out of silver. In the latter instances the materials are in time anterior to the forms of the things made out of them, whereas in the case of a song, that is not so. When a song is sung, the sound is heard simultaneously. It is not that unformed sound comes first and is then shaped into song. Any sound that is made first passes away, and you will find no remnant of it which you can recover to impart coherence to it with artistic skill. That is why a song has its being in the sound it embodies, and its sound is its matter. The matter is given form to be a song. In this sense, as I was saying, the matter of making sound is prior to the form of singing. The priority does not consist in the potentiality to make song. The sound is not the maker causing the singing, but is provided by the body for the singer's soul to turn into song. It is not prior in time. It is emitted at the same time as the song. It is not prior in preference, for sound is not something preferred to song; seeing that song is not merely sound but also beautiful-sound. But there is priority in

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle (*Categories* 12. 14a 26 ff.) distinguished five kinds of priority, including Augustine's second, third, and fourth, but not first which has a strongly Neoplatonic ring. The question, also discussed with a different list by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (4. 11. 1018b 9 ff.), was important in the debate whether universals are prior to particulars or vice versa. Plotinus alludes to the discussion in 1. 4. 3. 18; 6. 1. 25. 17; 6. 2. 17. 17. Porphyry's commentary on the *Categories* does not survive for this chapter, but is no doubt a likely source for Augustine here.

origin; for a song is not endowed with form to become sound, but sound receives form to become song.

This illustration may help any who can understand that the matter of things was made first and called 'heaven and earth' because heaven and earth were made out of this. But the matter was not made first in a temporal sense, because the forms of things provide the originating cause of the time process. This matter was formless, but now in time matter and form are perceived simultaneously. Nevertheless it is impossible to put into words any statement about formless matter without speaking as if it were prior in time.<sup>28</sup> In value it is on the lowest level, since obviously things with form are better than formless things. It is preceded by the Creator's eternity, so that the material out of which anything is made is itself out of nothing.

xxx (41) In this diversity of true views, may truth itself engender concord, and may our God have mercy upon us that we may 'use the law lawfully', for the 'end of the precept, pure love' (1 Tim. 1: 8, 5). On this principle if anyone asks me which view was held by Moses your great servant, I would not be using the language of my confessions if I fail to confess to you that I do not know. Yet I know that those interpretations are true except for the carnal notions of which I have given my opinion as I thought right. But those immature in the faith, who are of good hope, are not alarmed by the language of your book, humbly profound and rich in meaning contained in few words. May all of us who, as I allow, perceive and affirm that these texts contain various truths, show love to one another, and equally may we love you, our God, fount of truth—if truth is what we are thirsting after and not vanity. And may we agree in so honouring your servant, the minister of this scripture, full of your Holy Spirit, that we believe him to have written this under your revelation and to have intended that meaning which supremely corresponds both to the light of truth and to the reader's spiritual profit.

xxxi (42) So when one person has said 'Moses thought what I say', and another 'No, what I say', I think it more religious in spirit to say 'Why not rather say both, if both are true?' And if anyone sees a

third or fourth and a further truth in these words, why not believe that Moses discerned all these things? For through him the one God has tempered the sacred books to the interpretations of many, who could come to see a diversity of truths. Certainly, to make a bold declaration from my heart, if I myself were to be writing something at this supreme level of authority I would choose to write so that my words would sound out with whatever diverse truth in these matters each reader was able to grasp, rather than to give a quite explicit statement of a single true view of this question in such a way as to exclude other views—provided there was no false doctrine to offend me. Therefore my God, I do not want to be so rash as not to believe that Moses obtained this gift from you. When he wrote this passage, he perfectly perceived and had in mind all the truth we have been able to find here, and all the truth that could be found in it which we have not been able, or have not as yet been able, to discover.

xxxii (43) Finally, Lord—who are God and not flesh and blood—even if human insight perceived less than the truth, surely whatever you were intending to reveal to later readers by those words could not be hidden from 'your good Spirit who will lead me into the right land' (Ps. 142: 10). This must be true, even if it were the case that Moses, through whom this was said, had in mind perhaps only one out of the many true interpretations. If this was so, we may allow that the meaning which he had in his mind was superior to all others. Lord, we beg you to show us either what that one meaning is or some other true meaning of your choice. Make clear to us either the understanding possessed by your servant or some other meaning suggested by the same texts, that we may feed on you and not be led astray by error.

My Lord God, I pray you, see how much we have written, how much indeed on only a few words! How much energy and time would at this rate be required to expound all your books! Grant me therefore to make confession to you more briefly in commenting on these words, and to select some one truth which you have inspired, certain and good, even though many meanings have occurred to me where several interpretations are possible. The understanding presupposed in my confessions is that if I have said what your minister meant, that is correct and the best interpretation; and that is the

<sup>28</sup> Likewise Plotinus 5. 9. 8. 20.

attempt I have to make. But if I have been unsuccessful in that endeavour, I pray that nevertheless I may say what, occasioned by his words, your truth wished me to say. For that Truth also spoke what it wished to him.

## BOOK XIII

*Finding the Church in Genesis I*

i (1) I call upon you, my God, my mercy (Ps. 58: 18). You made me and, when I forgot you, you did not forget me, I call you into my soul which you are preparing to receive you through the longing which you have inspired in it. Do not desert me now that I am calling on you. Before I called to you, you were there before me.<sup>1</sup> With mounting frequency by voices of many kinds you put pressure on me, so that from far off I heard and was converted and called upon you as you were calling to me. Moreover, Lord, you wiped out all the evils which merited punishment, so as not to bring the due reward upon my hands (Ps. 17: 21), by which I fell away from you. In any good actions of mine you were there before me; in my merits you were rewarding 'the work of your own hands by which you made me' (Ps. 118: 73). Before I existed you were, and I had no being to which you could grant existence. Nevertheless here I am as a result of your goodness, which goes before all that you made me to be and all out of which you made me. You had no need of me. I do not possess such goodness as to give you help, my Lord and my God. It is not as if I could so serve you as to prevent you becoming weary in your work, or that your power is diminished if it lacks my homage. Nor do I cultivate you like land, in the sense that you would have no one to worship you if I were not doing so. But I serve and worship you so that from you good may come to me. To you I owe my being and the goodness of my being.

ii (2) Your creation has its being from the fullness of your goodness. In consequence a good which confers no benefit on you, and which not being from you yourself is not on your level, can nevertheless have its existence caused by you and so will not lack being. Before you what merit have heaven and earth, which you made in the beginning? Let the spiritual and physical creation, which you made in your wisdom, tell us what merit they have before you. On your wisdom depended even embryonic and formless things, all of which

<sup>1</sup> The theme of i. ii (2) is resumed.