

Book 12

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St. Augustine Index Previous Next

THE CONFESSIONS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE BOOK XII

My heart, O Lord, touched with the words of Thy Holy Scripture, is much busied, amid this poverty of my life. And therefore most times, is the poverty of human understanding copious in words, because enquiring hath more to say than discovering, and demanding is longer than obtaining, and our hand that knocks, hath more work to do, than our hand that receives. We hold the promise, who shall make it null? If God be for us, who can be against us? Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, shall it be opened. These be Thine own promises: and who need fear to be deceived, when the Truth promiseth?

The lowliness of my tongue confesseth unto Thy Highness, that Thou madest heaven and earth; this heaven which I see, and this earth that I tread upon, whence is this earth that I bear about me; Thou madest it. But where is that heaven of heavens, O Lord, which we hear of in the words of the Psalm. The heaven of heavens are the Lord's; but the earth hath He given to the children of men? Where is that heaven which we see not, to which all this which we see is earth? For this corporeal whole, not being wholly every where, hath in such wise received its portion of beauty in these lower parts, whereof the lowest is this our earth; but to that heaven of heavens, even the heaven of our earth, is but earth: yea both these great bodies, may not absurdly be called earth, to that unknown heaven, which is the Lord's, not the sons' of men.

And now this earth was invisible and without form, and there was I know not what depth of abyss, upon which there was no light, because it had no shape. Therefore didst Thou command it to be written, that darkness was upon the face of the deep; what else than the absence of light? For had there been light, where should it have been but by being over all, aloft, and enlightening? Where then light was not, what was the presence of darkness, but the absence of light? Darkness therefore was upon it, because light was not upon it; as where sound is not, there is silence. And what is it to have silence there, but to have no sound there? Hast not Thou, O Lord, taught his soul, which confesseth unto Thee? Hast not Thou taught me, Lord, that before Thou formedst and diversifiedst this formless matter, there was nothing, neither colour, nor figure, nor body, nor spirit? and yet not altogether nothing; for there was a certain formlessness, without any beauty.

How then should it be called, that it might be in some measure conveyed to those of duller mind, but by some ordinary word? And what, among all parts of the world can be found nearer to an absolute formlessness, than earth and deep? For, occupying the lowest stage, they are less beautiful than the other higher parts are, transparent all and shining. Wherefore then may I not conceive the

formlessness of matter (which Thou hadst created without beauty, whereof to make this beautiful world) to be suitably intimated unto men, by the name of earth invisible and without form.

So that when thought seeketh what the sense may conceive under this, and saith to itself, "It is no intellectual form, as life, or justice; because it is the matter of bodies; nor object of sense, because being invisible, and without form, there was in it no object of sight or sense";- while man's thought thus saith to itself, it may endeavour either to know it, by being ignorant of it; or to be ignorant, by knowing it.

But I, Lord, if I would, by my tongue and my pen, confess unto Thee the whole, whatever Thyself hath taught me of that matter, -the name whereof hearing before, and not understanding, when they who understood it not, told me of it, so I conceived of it as having innumerable forms and diverse, and therefore did not conceive it at all, my mind tossed up and down foul and horrible "forms" out of all order, but yet "forms" and I called it without form not that it wanted all form, but because it had such as my mind would, if presented to it, turn from, as unwonted and jarring, and human frailness would be troubled at. And still that which I conceived, was without form, not as being deprived of all form, but in comparison of more beautiful forms; and true reason did persuade me, that I must utterly uncase it of all remnants of form whatsoever, if I would conceive matter absolutely without form; and I could not; for sooner could I imagine that not to be at all, which should be deprived of all form, than conceive a thing betwixt form and nothing, neither formed, nor nothing, a formless almost nothing. So my mind gave over to question thereupon with my spirit, it being filled with the images of formed bodies, and changing and varying them, as it willed; and I bent myself to the bodies themselves, and looked more deeply into their changeableness, by which they cease to be what they have been, and begin to be what they were not; and this same shifting from form to form, I suspected to be through a certain formless state, not through a mere nothing; yet this I longed to know, not to suspect only.-If then my voice and pen would confess unto Thee the whole, whatsoever knots Thou didst open for me in this question, what reader would hold out to take in the whole? Nor shall my heart for all this cease to give Thee honour, and a song of praise, for those things which it is not able to express. For the changeableness of changeable things, is itself capable of all those forms, into which these changeable things are changed. And this changeableness, what is it? Is it soul? Is it body? Is it that which constituteth soul or body? Might one say, "a nothing something", an "is, is not," I would say, this were it: and yet in some way was it even then, as being capable of receiving these visible and compound figures.

But whence had it this degree of being, but from Thee, from Whom are all things, so far forth as they are? But so much the further from Thee, as the unliker Thee; for it is not farness of place. Thou therefore, Lord, Who art not one in one place, and otherwise in another, but the Self-same, and the Self-same, and the Self-same, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, didst in the Beginning, which is of Thee, in Thy Wisdom, which was born of Thine own Substance, create something, and that out of nothing. For Thou createdst heaven

and earth; not out of Thyself, for so should they have been equal to Thine Only Begotten Son, and thereby to Thee also; whereas no way were it right that aught should be equal to Thee, which was not of Thee. And aught else besides Thee was there not, whereof Thou mightest create them, O God, One Trinity, and Trine Unity; and therefore out of nothing didst Thou create heaven and earth; a great thing, and a small thing; for Thou art Almighty and Good, to make all things good, even the great heaven, and the petty earth. Thou wert, and nothing was there besides, out of which Thou createdst heaven and earth; things of two sorts; one near Thee, the other near to nothing; one to which Thou alone shouldest be superior; the other, to which nothing should be inferior.

But that heaven of heavens was for Thyself, O Lord; but the earth which Thou gavest to the sons of men, to be seen and felt, was not such as we now see and feel. For it was invisible, without form, and there was a deep, upon which there was no light; or, darkness was above the deep, that is, more than in the deep. Because this deep of waters, visible now, hath even in his depths, a light proper for its nature; perceivable in whatever degree unto the fishes, and creeping things in the bottom of it. But that whole deep was almost nothing, because hitherto it was altogether without form; yet there was already that which could be formed. For Thou, Lord, madest the world of a matter without form, which out of nothing, Thou madest next to nothing, thereof to make those great things, which we sons of men wonder at. For very wonderful is this corporeal heaven; of which firmament between water and water, the second day, after the creation of light, Thou saidst, Let it be made, and it was made. Which firmament Thou calledst heaven; the heaven, that is, to this earth and sea, which Thou madest the third day, by giving a visible figure to the formless matter, which Thou madest before all days. For already hadst Thou made both an heaven, before all days; but that was the heaven of this heaven; because In the beginning Thou hadst made heaven and earth. But this same earth which Thou madest was formless matter, because it was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep, of which invisible earth and without form, of which formlessness, of which almost nothing, Thou mightest make all these things of which this changeable world consists, but subsists not; whose very changeableness appears therein, that times can be observed and numbered in it. For times are made by the alterations of things, while the figures, the matter whereof is the invisible earth aforesaid, are varied and turned. And therefore the Spirit, the Teacher of Thy servant, when It recounts Thee to have In the Beginning created heaven and earth, speaks nothing of times, nothing of days. For verily that heaven of heavens which Thou createdst in the Beginning, is some intellectual creature, which, although no ways coeternal unto Thee, the Trinity, yet partaketh of Thy eternity, and doth through the sweetness of that most happy contemplation of Thyself, strongly restrain its own changeableness; and without any fall since its first creation, cleaving close unto Thee, is placed beyond all the rolling vicissitude of times. Yea, neither is this very formlessness of the earth, invisible, and without form, numbered among the days. For where no figure nor order is, there does nothing come, or go; and where this is not, there plainly are no days, nor any vicissitude of spaces of times.

O let the Light, the Truth, the Light of my heart, not mine own darkness, speak unto me. I fell off into that, and became darkened; but even thence, even thence I loved Thee. I went astray, and remembered Thee. I heard Thy voice behind me, calling to me to return, and scarcely heard it, through the tumultuousness of the enemies of peace. And now, behold, I return in distress and panting after Thy fountain. Let no man forbid me! of this will I drink, and so live. Let me not be mine own life; from myself I lived ill, death was I to myself; and I revive in Thee. Do Thou speak unto me, do Thou discourse unto me. I have believed Thy Books, and their words be most full of mystery.

Already Thou hast told me with a strong voice, O Lord, in my inner ear, that Thou art eternal, Who only hast immortality; since Thou canst not be changed as to figure or motion, nor is Thy will altered by times: seeing no will which varies is immortal. This is in Thy sight clear to me, and let it be more and more cleared to me, I beseech Thee; and in the manifestation thereof, let me with sobriety abide under Thy wings. Thou hast told me also with a strong voice, O Lord, in my inner ear, that Thou hast made all natures and substances, which are not what Thyself is, and yet are; and that only is not from Thee, which is not, and the motion of the will from Thee who art, unto that which in a less degree is, because such motion is transgression and sin; and that no man's sin doth either hurt Thee, or disturb the order of Thy government, first or last. This is in Thy sight clear unto me, and let it be more and more cleared to me, I beseech Thee: and in the manifestation thereof, let me with sobriety abide under Thy wings.

Thou hast told me also with a strong voice, in my inner ear, that neither is that creature coeternal unto Thyself, whose happiness Thou only art, and which with a most persevering purity, drawing its nourishment from Thee, doth in no place and at no time put forth its natural mutability; and, Thyself being ever present with it, unto Whom with its whole affection it keeps itself, having neither future to expect, nor conveying into the past what it remembereth, is neither altered by any change, nor distracted into any times. O blessed creature, if such there be, for cleaving unto Thy Blessedness; blest in Thee, its eternal Inhabitant and its Enlightener! Nor do I find by what name I may the rather call the heaven of heavens which is the Lord's, than Thine house, which contemplateth Thy delights without any defection of going forth to another; one pure mind, most harmoniously one, by that settled estate of peace of holy spirits, the citizens of Thy city in heavenly places; far above those heavenly places that we see.

By this may the soul, whose pilgrimage is made long and far away, by this may she understand, if she now thirsts for Thee, if her tears be now become her bread, while they daily say unto her, Where is Thy God? if she now seeks of Thee one thing, and desireth it, that she may dwell in Thy house all the days of her life (and what is her life, but Thou? and what Thy days, but Thy eternity, as Thy years which fail not, because Thou art ever the same?); by this then may the soul that is able, understand how far Thou art, above all times, eternal; seeing Thy house which at no time went into a far country, although it be not coeternal with Thee, yet by continually and unfailingly cleaving unto Thee, suffers no changeableness of times. This is in Thy sight

clear unto me, and let it be more and more cleared unto me, I beseech Thee, and in the manifestation thereof, let me with sobriety abide under Thy wings.

There is, behold, I know not what formlessness in those changes of these last and lowest creatures; and who shall tell me (unless such a one as through the emptiness of his own heart, wonders and tosses himself up and down amid his own fancies?), who but such a one would tell me, that if all figure be so wasted and consumed away, that there should only remain that formlessness, through which the thing was changed and turned from one figure to another, that that could exhibit the vicissitudes of times? For plainly it could not, because, without the variety of motions, there are no times: and no variety, where there is no figure.

These things considered, as much as Thou givest, O my God, as much as Thou stirrest me up to knock, and as much as Thou openest to me knocking, two things I find that Thou hast made, not within the compass of time, neither of which is coeternal with Thee. One, which is so formed, that without any ceasing of contemplation, without any interval of change, though changeable, yet not changed, it may thoroughly enjoy Thy eternity and unchangeableness; the other which was so formless, that it had not that, which could be changed from one form into another, whether of motion, or of repose, so as to become subject unto time. But this Thou didst not leave thus formless, because before all days, Thou in the Beginning didst create Heaven and Earth; the two things that I spake of. But the Earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep. In which words, is the formlessness conveyed unto us (that such capacities may hereby be drawn on by degrees, as are not able to conceive an utter privation of all form, without yet coming to nothing), out of which another Heaven might be created, together with a visible and well-formed earth: and the waters diversly ordered, and whatsoever further is in the formation of the world, recorded to have been, not without days, created; and that, as being of such nature, that the successive changes of times may take place in them, as being subject to appointed alterations of motions and of forms.

This then is what I conceive, O my God, when I hear Thy Scripture saying, In the beginning God made Heaven and Earth: and the Earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep, and not mentioning what day Thou createdst them; this is what I conceive, that because of the Heaven of heavens, -that intellectual Heaven, whose Intelligences know all at once, not in part, not darkly, not through a glass, but as a whole, in manifestation, face to face; not, this thing now, and that thing anon; but (as I said) know all at once, without any succession of times; -and because of the earth invisible and without form, without any succession of times, which succession presents "this thing now, that thing anon"; because where is no form, there is no distinction of things: -it is, then, on account of these two, a primitive formed, and a primitive formless; the one, heaven but the Heaven of heaven, the other earth but the earth invisible and without form; because of these two do I conceive, did Thy Scripture say without mention of days, In the Beginning God created Heaven and Earth. For forthwith it subjoined what earth it spake of; and also, in that the Firmament is recorded to be created the second day, and called Heaven, it conveys to us of which Heaven He before spake, without mention of

days.

Wondrous depth of Thy words! whose surface, behold! is before us, inviting to little ones; yet are they a wondrous depth. O my God, a wondrous depth! It is awful to look therein; an awfulness of honour, and a trembling of love. The enemies thereof I hate vehemently; oh that Thou wouldest slay them with Thy two-edged sword, that they might no longer be enemies unto it: for so do I love to have them slain unto themselves, that they may live unto Thee. But behold others not faultfinders, but extollers of the book of Genesis; "The Spirit of God," say they, "Who by His servant Moses wrote these things, would not have those words thus understood; He would not have it understood, as thou sayest, but otherwise, as we say." Unto Whom Thyself, O Thou God all, being judge, do I thus answer.

"Will you affirm that to be false, which with a strong voice Truth tells me in my inner ear, concerning the Eternity of the Creator, that His substance is no ways changed by time, nor His will separate from His substance? Wherefore He willeth not one thing now, another anon, but once, and at once, and always, He willeth all things that He willeth; not again and again, nor now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards, what before He willed not, nor willeth not, what before He willed; because such a will is and no mutable thing is eternal: but our God is eternal. Again, what He tells me in my inner ear, the expectation of things to come becomes sight, when they are come, and this same sight becomes memory, when they be past. Now all thought which thus varies is mutable; and is eternal: but our God is eternal." These things I infer, and put together, and find that my God, the eternal God, hath not upon any new will made any creature, nor doth His knowledge admit of any thing transitory. "What will ye say then, O ye gainsayers? Are these things false?" "No," they say; "What then? Is it false, that every nature already formed, or matter capable of form, is not, but from Him Who is supremely good, because He is supremely?" "Neither do we deny this," say they. "What then? do you deny this, that there is a certain sublime creature, with so chaste a love cleaving unto the true and truly eternal God, that although not coeternal with Him, yet is it not detached from Him, nor dissolved into the variety and vicissitude of times, but repositeth in the most true contemplation of Him only?" Because Thou, O God, unto him that loveth Thee so much as Thou commandest, dost show Thyself, and sufficest him; and therefore doth he not decline from Thee, nor toward himself. This is the house of God, not of earthly mould, nor of celestial bulk corporeal but spiritual, and partaker of Thy eternity, because without defection for ever. For Thou hast made it fast for ever and ever, Thou hast given it a law which it shall not pass. Nor yet is it coeternal with Thee, O God, because not without beginning; for it was made.

For although we find no time before it, for wisdom was created before all things; not that Wisdom which is altogether equal and coeternal unto Thee, our God, His Father, and by Whom all things were created, and in Whom, as the Beginning, Thou createdst heaven and earth; but that wisdom which is created, that is, the intellectual nature, which by contemplating the light, is light.

For this, though created, is also called wisdom. But what difference there is betwixt the Light which enlighteneth, and which is enlightened, so much is

there betwixt the Wisdom that createth, and that created; as betwixt the Righteousness which justifieth, and the righteousness which is made by justification. For we also are called Thy righteousness; for so saith a certain servant of Thine, That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Therefore since a certain created wisdom was created before all things, the rational and intellectual mind of that chaste city of Thine, our mother which is above, and is free and eternal in the heavens (in what heavens, if not in those that praise Thee, the Heaven of heavens? Because this is also the Heaven of heavens for the Lord); -though we find no time before it (because that which hath been created before all things, precedeth also the creature of time), yet is the Eternity of the Creator Himself before it, from Whom, being created, it took the beginning, not indeed of time (for time itself was not yet), but of its creation.

Hence it is so of Thee, our God, as to be altogether other than Thou, and not the Self-same: because though we find time neither before it, nor even in it (it being meet ever to behold Thy face, nor is ever drawn away from it, wherefore it is not varied by any change), yet is there in it a liability to change, whence it would wax dark, and chill, but that by a strong affection cleaving unto Thee, like perpetual noon, it shineth and gloweth from Thee. O house most lightsome and delightsome! I have loved thy beauty, and the place of the habitation of the glory of my Lord, thy builder and possessor. Let my wayfaring sigh after thee, and I say to Him that made thee, let Him take possession of me also in thee, seeing He hath made me likewise. I have gone astray like a lost sheep: yet upon the shoulders of my Shepherd, thy builder, hope I to be brought back to thee.

"What say ye to me, O ye gainsayers that I was speaking unto, who yet believe Moses to have been the holy servant of God, and his books the oracles of the Holy Ghost? Is not this house of God, not coeternal indeed with God, yet after its measure, eternal in the heavens, when you seek for changes of times in vain, because you will not find them? For that, to which it is ever good to cleave fast to God, surpasses all extension, and all revolving periods of time." "It is," say they. "What then of all that which my heart loudly uttered unto my God, when inwardly it heard the voice of His praise, what part thereof do you affirm to be false? Is it that the matter was without form, in which because there was no form, there was no order? But where no order was, there could be no vicissitude of times: and yet this almost nothing,' inasmuch as it was not altogether nothing, was from Him certainly, from Whom is whatsoever is, in what degree soever it is." "This also," say they, "do we not deny."

With these I now parley a little in Thy presence, O my God, who grant all these things to be true, which Thy Truth whispers unto my soul. For those who deny these things, let them bark and deafen themselves as much as they please; I will essay to persuade them to quiet, and to open in them a way for Thy word. But if they refuse, and repel me; I beseech, O my God, be not Thou silent to me. Speak Thou truly in my heart; for only Thou so speakest: and I will let them alone blowing upon the dust without, and raising it up into their own eyes: and myself will enter my chamber, and sing there a song of loves unto Thee; groaning with groanings unutterable, in my wayfaring, and remembering

Jerusalem, with heart lifted up towards it, Jerusalem my country, Jerusalem my mother, and Thyself that rulest over it, the Enlightener, Father, Guardian, Husband, the pure and strong delight, and solid joy, and all good things unspeakable, yea all at once, because the One Sovereign and true Good. Nor will I be turned away, until Thou gather all that I am, from this dispersed and disordered estate, into the peace of that our most dear mother, where the first-fruits of my spirit be already (whence I am ascertained of these things), and Thou conform and confirm it for ever, O my God, my Mercy. But those who do not affirm all these truths to be false, who honour Thy holy Scripture, set forth by holy Moses, placing it, as we, on the summit of authority to be followed, and do yet contradict me in some thing, I answer thus; By Thyself judge, O our God, between my Confessions and these men's contradictions. For they say, "Though these things be true, yet did not Moses intend those two, when, by revelation of the Spirit, he said, In the beginning God created heaven and earth. He did not under the name of heaven, signify that spiritual or intellectual creature which always beholds the face of God; nor under the name of earth, that formless matter." "What then?" "That man of God," say they, "meant as we say, this declared he by those words." "What?" "By the name of heaven and earth would he first signify," say they, "universally and compendiously, all this visible world; so as afterwards by the enumeration of the several days, to arrange in detail, and, as it were, piece by piece, all those things, which it pleased the Holy Ghost thus to enounce. For such were that rude and carnal people to which he spake, that he thought them fit to be entrusted with the knowledge of such works of God only as were visible." They agree, however, that under the words earth invisible and without form, and that darksome deep (out of which it is subsequently shown, that all these visible things which we all know, were made and arranged during those "days") may, not incongruously, be understood of this formless first matter.

What now if another should say that "this same formlessness and confusedness of matter, was for this reason first conveyed under the name of heaven and earth, because out of it was this visible world with all those natures which most manifestly appear in it, which is oftentimes called by the name of heaven and earth, created and perfected?" What again if another say that "invisible and visible nature is not indeed inappropriately called heaven and earth; and so, that the universal creation, which God made in His Wisdom, that is, in the Beginning, was comprehended under those two words? Notwithstanding, since all things be made not of the substance of God, but out of nothing (because they are not the same that God is, and there is a mutable nature in them all, whether they abide, as doth the eternal house of God, or be changed, as the soul and body of man are): therefore the common matter of all things visible and invisible (as yet unformed though capable of form), out of which was to be created both heaven and earth (i. the invisible and visible creature when formed), was entitled by the same names given to the earth invisible and without form and the darkness upon the deep, but with this distinction, that by the earth invisible and without form is understood corporeal matter, antecedent to its being qualified by any form; and by the darkness upon the deep, spiritual matter, before it underwent any restraint of its unlimited fluidness,

or received any light from Wisdom?"

It yet remains for a man to say, if he will, that "the already perfected and formed natures, visible and invisible, are not signified under the name of heaven and earth, when we read, In the beginning God made heaven and earth, but that the yet unformed commencement of things, the stuff apt to receive form and making, was called by these names, because therein were confusedly contained, not as yet distinguished by their qualities and forms, all those things which being now digested into order, are called Heaven and Earth, the one being the spiritual, the other the corporeal, creation."

All which things being heard and well considered, I will not strive about words: for that is profitable to nothing, but the subversion of the hearers. But the law is good to edify, if a man use it lawfully: for that the end of it is charity, out of a pure heart and good conscience, and faith unfeigned. And well did our Master know, upon which two commandments He hung all the Law and the Prophets. And what doth it prejudice me, O my God, Thou light of my eyes in secret, zealously confessing these things, since divers things may be understood under these words which yet are all true, -what, I say, doth it prejudice me, if I think otherwise than another thinketh the writer thought?

All we readers verily strive to trace out and to understand his meaning whom we read; and seeing we believe him to speak truly, we dare not imagine him to have said any thing, which ourselves either know or think to be false. While every man endeavours then to understand in the Holy Scriptures, the same as the writer understood, what hurt is it, if a man understand what Thou, the light of all true-speaking minds, dost show him to be true, although he whom he reads, understood not this, seeing he also understood a Truth, though not this truth? For true it is, O Lord, that Thou madest heaven and earth; and it is true too, that the Beginning is Thy Wisdom, in Which Thou createst all: and true again, that this visible world hath for its greater part the heaven and the earth, which briefly comprise all made and created natures. And true too, that whatsoever is mutable, gives us to understand a certain want of form, whereby it receiveth a form, or is changed, or turned. It is true, that that is subject to no times, which so cleaveth to the unchangeable Form, as though subject to change, never to be changed. It is true, that that formlessness which is almost nothing, cannot be subject to the alteration of times. It is true, that that whereof a thing is made, may by a certain mode of speech, be called by the name of the thing made of it; whence that formlessness, whereof heaven and earth were made, might be called heaven and earth. It is true, that of things having form, there is not any nearer to having no form, than the earth and the deep. It is true, that not only every created and formed thing, but whatsoever is capable of being created and formed, Thou madest, of Whom are all things. It is true, that whatsoever is formed out of that which had no form, was unformed before it was formed.

Out of these truths, of which they doubt not whose inward eye Thou hast enabled to see such things, and who unshakenly believe Thy servant Moses to have spoken in the Spirit of truth; -of all these then, he taketh one, who saith, In the Beginning God made the heaven and the earth; that is, "in His Word coeternal with Himself, God made the intelligible and the sensible, or the spiritual and

the corporeal creature." He another, that saith, In the Beginning God made heaven and earth; that is, "in His Word coeternal with Himself, did God make the universal bulk of this corporeal world, together with all those apparent and known creatures, which it containeth." He another, that saith, In the Beginning God made heaven and earth; that is, "in His Word coeternal with Himself, did God make the formless matter of creatures spiritual and corporeal." He another, that saith, In the Beginning God created heaven and earth; that is, "in His Word coeternal with Himself, did God create the formless matter of the creature corporeal, wherein heaven and earth lay as yet confused, which, being now distinguished and formed, we at this day see in the bulk of this world." He another, who saith, In the Beginning God made heaven and earth; that is, "in the very beginning of creating and working, did God make that formless matter, confusedly containing in itself both heaven and earth; out of which, being formed, do they now stand out, and are apparent, with all that is in them."

And with regard to the understanding of the words following, out of all those truths, he chooses one to himself, who saith, But the earth was invisible, and without form, and darkness was upon the deep; that is, "that corporeal thing that God made, was as yet a formless matter of corporeal things, without order, without light." Another he who says, The earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep; that is, "this all, which is called heaven and earth, was still a formless and darksome matter, of which the corporeal heaven and the corporeal earth were to be made, with all things in them, which are known to our corporeal senses." Another he who says, The earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep; that is, "this all, which is called heaven and earth, was still a formless and a darksome matter; out of which was to be made, both that intelligible heaven, elsewhere called the Heaven of heavens, and the earth, that is, the whole corporeal nature, under which name is comprised this corporeal heaven also; in a word, out of which every visible and invisible creature was to be created." Another he who says, The earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep, "the Scripture did not call that formlessness by the name of heaven and earth; but that formlessness, saith he, already was, which he called the earth invisible without form, and darkness upon the deep; of which he had before said, that God had made heaven and earth, namely, the spiritual and corporeal creature." Another he who says, The earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was upon the deep; that is, "there already was a certain formless matter, of which the Scripture said before, that God made heaven and earth; namely, the whole corporeal bulk of the world, divided into two great parts, upper and lower, with all the common and known creatures in them."

For should any attempt to dispute against these two last opinions, thus, "If you will not allow, that this formlessness of matter seems to be called by the name of heaven and earth; Ergo, there was something which God had not made, out of which to make heaven and earth; for neither hath Scripture told us, that God made this matter, unless we understand it to be signified by the name of heaven and earth, or of earth alone, when it is said, In the Beginning God made the heaven and earth; that so in what follows, and the earth was invisible and

without form (although it pleased Him so to call the formless matter), we are to understand no other matter, but that which God made, whereof is written above, God made heaven and earth." The maintainers of either of those two latter opinions will, upon hearing this, return for answer, "we do not deny this formless matter to be indeed created by God, that God of Whom are all things, very good; for as we affirm that to be a greater good, which is created and formed, so we confess that to be a lesser good which is made capable of creation and form, yet still good. We say however that Scripture hath not set down, that God made this formlessness, as also it hath not many others; as the Cherubim, and Seraphim, and those which the Apostle distinctly speaks of, Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers. All which that God made, is most apparent. Or if in that which is said, He made heaven and earth, all things be comprehended, what shall we say of the waters, upon which the Spirit of God moved? For if they be comprised in this word earth; how then can formless matter be meant in that name of earth, when we see the waters so beautiful? Or if it be so taken; why then is it written, that out of the same formlessness, the firmament was made, and called heaven; and that the waters were made, is not written? For the waters remain not formless and invisible, seeing we behold them flowing in so comely a manner. But if they then received that beauty, when God said, Let the waters under the firmament be gathered together, that so the gathering together be itself the forming of them; what will be said as to those waters above the firmament? Seeing neither if formless would they have been worthy of so honourable a seat, nor is it written, by what word they were formed. If then Genesis is silent as to God's making of any thing, which yet that God did make neither sound faith nor well-grounded understanding doubteth, nor again will any sober teaching dare to affirm these waters to be coeternal with God, on the ground that we find them to be mentioned in the hook of Genesis, but when they were created, we do not find; why (seeing truth teaches us) should we not understand that formless matter (which this Scripture calls the earth invisible and without form, and darksome deep) to have been created of God out of nothing, and therefore not to be coeternal to Him;

notwithstanding this history hath omitted to show when it was created?"

These things then being heard and perceived, according to the weakness of my capacity (which I confess unto Thee, O Lord, that knowest it), two sorts of disagreements I see may arise, when a thing is in words related by true reporters; one, concerning the truth of the things, the other, concerning the meaning of the relater. For we enquire one way about the making of the creature, what is true; another way, what Moses, that excellent minister of Thy Faith, would have his reader and hearer understand by those words. For the first sort, away with all those who imagine themselves to know as a truth, what is false; and for this other, away with all them too, which imagine Moses to have written things that be false. But let me be united in Thee, O Lord, with those and delight myself in Thee, with them that feed on Thy truth, in the largeness of charity, and let us approach together unto the words of Thy book, and seek in them for Thy meaning, through the meaning of Thy servant, by whose pen Thou hast dispensed them.

But which of us shall, among those so many truths, which occur to enquirers in

those words, as they are differently understood, so discover that one meaning, as to affirm, "this Moses thought," and "this would he have understood in that history"; with the same confidence as he would, "this is true," whether Moses thought this or that? For behold, O my God, I Thy servant, who have in this book vowed a sacrifice of confession unto Thee, and pray, that by Thy mercy I may pay my vows unto Thee, can I, with the same confidence wherewith I affirm, that in Thy incommutable world Thou createdst all things visible and invisible, affirm also, that Moses meant no other than this, when he wrote, In the Beginning God made heaven and earth? No. Because I see not in his mind, that he thought of this when he wrote these things, as I do see it in Thy truth to be certain. For he might have his thoughts upon God's commencement of creating, when he said In the beginning; and by heaven and earth, in this place he might intend no formed and perfected nature whether spiritual or corporeal, but both of them inchoate and as yet formless. For I perceive, that whichsoever of the two had been said, it might have been truly said; but which of the two he thought of in these words, I do not so perceive. Although, whether it were either of these, or any sense beside (that I have not here mentioned), which this so great man saw in his mind, when he uttered these words, I doubt not but that he saw it truly, and expressed it aptly.

Let no man harass me then, by saying, Moses thought not as you say, but as I say: for if he should ask me, "How know you that Moses thought that which you infer out of his words?" I ought to take it in good part, and would answer perchance as I have above, or something more at large, if he were unyielding. But when he saith, "Moses meant not what you say, but what I say," yet denieth not that what each of us say, may both be true, O my God, life of the poor, in Whose bosom is no contradiction, pour down a softening dew into my heart, that I may patiently bear with such as say this to me, not because they have a divine Spirit, and have seen in the heart of Thy servant what they speak, but because they be proud; not knowing Moses' opinion, but loving their own, not because it is truth, but because it is theirs. Otherwise they would equally love another true opinion, as I love what they say, when they say true: not because it is theirs, but because it is true; and on that very ground not theirs because it is true. But if they therefore love it, because it is true, then is it both theirs, and mine; as being in common to all lovers of truth. But whereas they contend that Moses did not mean what I say, but what they say, this I like not, love not: for though it were so, yet that their rashness belongs not to knowledge, but to overboldness, and not insight but vanity was its parent. And therefore, O Lord, are Thy judgements terrible; seeing Thy truth is neither mine, nor his, nor another's; but belonging to us all, whom Thou callest publicly to partake of it, warning us terribly, not to account it private to ourselves, lest we be deprived of it. For whosoever challenges that as proper to himself, which Thou propoundest to all to enjoy, and would have that his own which belongs to all, is driven from what is in common to his own; that is, from truth, to a lie. For he that speaketh a lie, speaketh it of his own.

Hearken, O God, Thou best judge; Truth Itself, hearken to what I shall say to this gainsayer, hearken, for before Thee do I speak, and before my brethren,

who employ Thy law lawfully, to the end of charity: hearken and behold, if it please Thee, what I shall say to him. For this brotherly and peaceful word do I return unto Him: "If we both see that to be true that Thou sayest, and both see that to be true that I say, where, I pray Thee, do we see it? Neither I in thee, nor thou in me; but both in the unchangeable Truth itself, which is above our souls." Seeing then we strive not about the very light of the Lord God, why strive we about the thoughts of our neighbour which we cannot so see, as the unchangeable Truth is seen: for that, if Moses himself had appeared to us and said, "This I meant"; neither so should we see it, but should believe it. Let us not then be puffed up for one against another, above that which is written: let us love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind: and our neighbour as ourself. With a view to which two precepts of charity, unless we believe that Moses meant, whatsoever in those books he did mean, we shall make God a liar, imagining otherwise of our fellow servant's mind, than he hath taught us. Behold now, how foolish it is, in such abundance of most true meanings, as may be extracted out of those words, rashly to affirm, which of them Moses principally meant; and with pernicious contentions to offend charity itself, for whose sake he spake every thing, whose words we go about to expound.

And yet I, O my God, Thou lifter up of my humility, and rest of my labour, Who hearest my confessions, and forgivest my sins: seeing Thou commandest me to love my neighbour as myself, I cannot believe that Thou gavest a less gift unto Moses Thy faithful servant, than I would wish or desire Thee to have given me, had I been born in the time he was, and hadst Thou set me in that office, that by the service of my heart and tongue those books might be dispensed, which for so long after were to profit all nations, and through the whole world from such an eminence of authority, were to surmount all sayings of false and proud teachings. I should have desired verily, had I then been Moses (for we all come from the same lump, and what is man, saving that Thou art mindful of him?), I would then, had I been then what he was, and been enjoined by Thee to write the book of Genesis, have desired such a power of expression and such a style to be given me, that neither they who cannot yet understand how God created, might reject the sayings, as beyond their capacity; and they who had attained thereto, might find what true opinion soever they had by thought arrived at, not passed over in those few words of that Thy servant: and should another man by the light of truth have discovered another, neither should that fail of being discoverable in those same words.

For as a fountain within a narrow compass, is more plentiful, and supplies a tide for more streams over larger spaces, than any one of those streams, which, after a wide interval, is derived from the same fountain; so the relation of that dispenser of Thine, which was to benefit many who were to discourse thereon, does out of a narrow scantling of language, overflow into streams of clearest truth, whence every man may draw out for himself such truth as he can upon these subjects, one, one truth, another, another, by larger circumlocutions of discourse. For some, when they read, or hear these words, conceive that God like a man or some mass endued with unbounded power, by some new and sudden resolution, did, exterior to itself, as it were at a certain

distance, create heaven and earth, two great bodies above and below, wherein all things were to be contained. And when they hear, God said, Let it be made, and it was made; they conceive of words begun and ended, sounding in time, and passing away; after whose departure, that came into being, which was commanded so to do; and whatever of the like sort, men's acquaintance with the material world would suggest. In whom, being yet little ones and carnal, while their weakness is by this humble kind of speech, carried on, as in a mother's bosom, their faith is wholesomely built up, whereby they hold assured, that God made all natures, which in admirable variety their eye beholdeth around. Which words, if any despising, as too simple, with a proud weakness, shall stretch himself beyond the guardian nest; he will, alas, fall miserably. Have pity, O Lord God, lest they who go by the way trample on the unfledged bird, and send Thine angel to replace it into the nest, that it may live, till it can fly.

But others, unto whom these words are no longer a nest, but deep shady fruit-bowers, see the fruits concealed therein, fly joyously around, and with cheerful notes seek out, and pluck them. For reading or hearing these words, they see that all times past and to come, are surpassed by Thy eternal and stable abiding; and yet that there is no creature formed in time, not of Thy making. Whose will, because it is the same that Thou art, Thou madest all things, not by any change of will, nor by a will, which before was not, and that these things were not out of Thyself, in Thine own likeness, which is the form of all things; but out of nothing, a formless unlikeness, which should be formed by Thy likeness (recurring to Thy Unity, according to their appointed capacity, so far as is given to each thing in his kind), and might all be made very good; whether they abide around Thee, or being in gradation removed in time and place, made or undergo the beautiful variations of the Universe. These things they see, and rejoice, in the little degree they here may, in the light of Thy truth.

Another bends his mind on that which is said, In the Beginning God made heaven and earth; and beholdeth therein Wisdom, the Beginning because It also speaketh unto us. Another likewise bends his mind on the same words, and by Beginning understands the commencement of things created; In the beginning He made, as if it were said, He at first made. And among them that understand In the Beginning to mean, "In Thy Wisdom Thou createdst heaven and earth," one believes the matter out of which the heaven and earth were to be created, to be there called heaven and earth; another, natures already formed and distinguished; another, one formed nature, and that a spiritual, under the name Heaven, the other formless, a corporeal matter, under the name Earth. They again who by the names heaven and earth, understand matter as yet formless, out of which heaven and earth were to be formed, neither do they understand it in one way; but the one, that matter out of which both the intelligible and the sensible creature were to be perfected; another, that only, out of which this sensible corporeal mass was to be made, containing in its vast bosom these visible and ordinary natures. Neither do they, who believe the creatures already ordered and arranged, to be in this place called heaven and earth, understand the same; but the one, both the invisible and visible, the other, the visible only, in which we behold this lightsome heaven, and darksome earth, with the things in them

contained.

But he that no otherwise understands In the Beginning He made, than if it were said, At first He made, can only truly understand heaven and earth of the matter of heaven and earth, that is, of the universal intelligible and corporeal creation. For if he would understand thereby the universe, as already formed, it may be rightly demanded of him, "If God made this first, what made He afterwards?" and after the universe, he will find nothing; whereupon must he against his will hear another question; "How did God make this first, if nothing after?" But when he says, God made matter first formless, then formed, there is no absurdity, if he be but qualified to discern, what precedes by eternity, what by time, what by choice, and what in original. By eternity, as God is before all things; by time, as the flower before the fruit; by choice, as the fruit before the flower; by original, as the sound before the tune. Of these four, the first and last mentioned, are with extreme difficulty understood, the two middle, easily. For a rare and too lofty a vision is it, to behold Thy Eternity, O Lord, unchangeably making things changeable; and thereby before them. And who, again, is of so sharp-sighted understanding, as to be able without great pains to discern, how the sound is therefore before the tune; because a tune is a formed sound; and a thing not formed, may exist; whereas that which existeth not, cannot be formed. Thus is the matter before the thing made; not because it maketh it, seeing itself is rather made; nor is it before by interval of time; for we do not first in time utter formless sounds without singing, and subsequently adapt or fashion them into the form of a chant, as wood or silver, whereof a chest or vessel is fashioned. For such materials do by time also precede the forms of the things made of them, but in singing it is not so; for when it is sung, its sound is heard; for there is not first a formless sound, which is afterwards formed into a chant. For each sound, so soon as made, passeth away, nor canst thou find ought to recall and by art to compose. So then the chant is concentrated in its sound, which sound of his is his matter. And this indeed is formed, that it may be a tune; and therefore (as I said) the matter of the sound is before the form of the tune; not before, through any power it hath to make it a tune; for a sound is no way the workmaster of the tune; but is something corporeal, subjected to the soul which singeth, whereof to make a tune. Nor is it first in time; for it is given forth together with the tune; nor first in choice, for a sound is not better than a tune, a tune being not only a sound, but a beautiful sound. But it is first in original, because a tune receives not form to become a sound, but a sound receives a form to become a tune. By this example, let him that is able, understand how the matter of things was first made, and called heaven and earth, because heaven and earth were made out of it. Yet was it not made first in time; because the forms of things give rise to time; but that was without form, but now is, in time, an object of sense together with its form. And yet nothing can be related of that matter, but as though prior in time, whereas in value it is last (because things formed are superior to things without form) and is preceded by the Eternity of the Creator: that so there might be out of nothing, whereof somewhat might be created.

In this diversity of the true opinions, let Truth herself produce concord. And

our God have mercy upon us, that we may use the law lawfully, the end of the commandment, pure charity. By this if man demands of me, "which of these was the meaning of Thy servant Moses"; this were not the language of my Confessions, should I not confess unto Thee, "I know not"; and yet I know that those senses are true, those carnal ones excepted, of which I have spoken what seemed necessary. And even those hopeful little ones who so think, have this benefit, that the words of Thy Book affright them not, delivering high things lowly, and with few words a copious meaning. And all we who, I confess, see and express the truth delivered in those words, let us love one another, and jointly love Thee our God, the fountain of truth, if we are athirst for it, and not for vanities; yea, let us so honour this Thy servant, the dispenser of this Scripture, full of Thy Spirit, as to believe that, when by Thy revelation he wrote these things, he intended that, which among them chiefly excels both for light of truth, and fruitfulness of profit.

So when one says, "Moses meant as I do"; and another, "Nay, but as I do," I suppose that I speak more reverently, "Why not rather as both, if both be true?" And if there be a third, or a fourth, yea if any other seeth any other truth in those words, why may not he be believed to have seen all these, through whom the One God hath tempered the holy Scriptures to the senses of many, who should see therein things true but divers? For I certainly (and fearlessly I speak it from my heart), that were I to indite any thing to have supreme authority, I should prefer so to write, that whatever truth any could apprehend on those matters, might he conveyed in my words, rather than set down my own meaning so clearly as to exclude the rest, which not being false, could not offend me. I will not therefore, O my God, be so rash, as not to believe, that Thou vouchsafedst as much to that great man. He without doubt, when he wrote those words, perceived and thought on what truth soever we have been able to find, yea and whatsoever we have not been able, nor yet are, but which may be found in them.

Lastly, O Lord, who art God and not flesh and blood, if man did see less, could any thing be concealed from Thy good Spirit (who shall lead me into the land of uprightness), which Thou Thyself by those words wert about to reveal to readers in times to come, though he through whom they were spoken, perhaps among many true meanings, thought on some one? which if so it be, let that which he thought on be of all the highest. But to us, O Lord, do Thou, either reveal that same, or any other true one which Thou pleasest; that so, whether Thou discoverest the same to us, as to that Thy servant, or some other by occasion of those words, yet Thou mayest feed us, not error deceive us. Behold, O Lord my God, how much we have written upon a few words, how much I beseech Thee! What strength of ours, yea what ages would suffice for all Thy books in this manner? Permit me then in these more briefly to confess unto Thee, and to choose some one true, certain, and good sense that Thou shalt inspire me, although many should occur, where many may occur; this being the law my confession, that if I should say that which Thy minister intended, that is right and best; for this should I endeavour, which if I should not attain, yet I should say that, which Thy Truth willed by his words to tell me, which revealed also unto him, what It willed.

