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THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
A Translation for the 21st Century

Part I – Books
Volume 13:
On Genesis

THE WORKS OF SAINT AUGUSTINE
A Translation for the 21st Century

On Genesis:

On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees
Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis
The Literal Meaning of Genesis

I/13

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stormy waves of the world, and "the flying things of heaven," voices that is to say by which heavenly truths are proclaimed. On the sixth day, however, we produce "live soul from the earth"; that is, from the stronghold of our minds, where we already have the spiritual fruit of good thoughts and ideas, we direct all the movements of our spirit so that it may be "a live soul," one at the service, that is, of reason and justice, not of foolhardiness and sin. In this way too may the man be made to the image and likeness of God, male and female, which here means understanding and activity; and may these be mated to fill the earth with spiritual offspring, that is, to subdue the flesh and do all the other things which have been mentioned above as belonging to human perfection. In all these days of this sort evening consists in the completion or perfection of the various works, and morning in the start of the ones that follow.

After the works of this sort of six days, works that are very good, we should be hoping for everlasting rest, and should understand what it really means that *God rested on the seventh day from all his works* (Gn 2:2), because not only is he the one who works these good works in us, ordering us to work them, but it is also he that is rightly said to rest, because at the end of all these works he bestows himself on us as our rest. Just as a householder, you see, is rightly said to build a house, when he does it, not by the work of his own hands but of those whose services he commands, so too is he rightly said to rest from his works when the building is completed and he permits the men he was employing to have a holiday and to enjoy themselves in merrymaking.

Book II

A more detailed account of the creation of the man, to be taken figuratively, not literally

1, 1. The listing of the seven days and the presentation of their works is given a kind of conclusion, in which everything that has been said already is called *the book of the creating of heaven and earth* (Gn 2:4), even though it is only a small part of the book as a whole. But still it was entirely appropriate to give it this name, because these seven days furnish us with a miniature symbolic picture of the entire span of world history from start to finish. Then it goes on to tell the story of the man in more detail; and this whole account is to be analyzed in figurative, not literal terms, to put the minds of those who seek the truth through their paces, and lure them away from the business of the world and the flesh to the business of the spirit. This, you see, is how it goes:

This is the book of the creating of heaven and earth, when the day had been made on which God made heaven and earth, and all the greenery of the field before it was upon the earth, and all the fodder of the field before it sprouted. For God had not yet rained upon the earth, nor was there a man to work on it. But a spring was coming up from the earth, and was watering all the face of the earth. And then God fashioned the man from the mud of the earth and blew into his face the puff of life, and the man was made into a living soul. And then God planted Paradise¹ in Eden to the east, and put the man there whom he had fashioned. And God still produced from the earth every tree that had a beautiful look about it, and was good for eating; and he planted the tree of life in the middle of Paradise, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Now a river was coming forth out of Eden, and was watering Paradise; from there it is divided into four parts. The name of one, Pishon; this is the one which goes round the whole land of Havilah; there is gold there, indeed the gold of that land is the best; there is carbuncle there and leek-green stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon; this goes round the whole land of Ethiopia. And the

1. Whenever Augustine is using "paradise" as a proper name for that original enchanted garden, as we also do in English, I give it a capital P. But whenever it has to be translated with an article, definite or indefinite, as in a phrase like "the paradise of pleasure," I give it a lower case p, because then it is being used in its original (Persian) sense of a park, nearly always a royal one.

third river is the Tigris; this is the one that streams down over against the Assyrians. And the fourth river is called the Euphrates.

And the Lord God took the man whom he had made and put him in Paradise to work there, and to guard it. And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying: From every tree that is in Paradise you shall eat for food; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you all shall not eat from it; for on the day you all eat from it, you all shall die the death.

And the Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a help like him. And whatever God had fashioned, from every kind of cattle and from every kind of beasts of the field, and from every kind of flying things flying under heaven, he brought them to Adam, for him to see what to call them;² and what Adam called them all, live soul, that is its name. And after this Adam called out the names of all cattle and of all the birds of heaven and of all the beasts of the field; and according to what Adam called them, that is their name until the present day.

But for Adam himself there was not yet any help like him. And God sent a slumber on Adam, and he fell asleep; and God took one of his ribs, and filled up its place with flesh, and God formed the rib which he had taken from Adam into a woman. And he brought her to Adam to see what he would call her. And Adam said: This now bone out of my bones and flesh from my flesh, this shall be called woman since she was taken from her man; and she shall be my help. For this reason a man shall leave father and mother and shall be joined to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh. And they were both naked, Adam and his woman, and they were not embarrassed.

2. Now the serpent was wiser than all the beasts which were upon the earth which the Lord God had made. And the serpent said to the woman: Why did God say that you are not to eat from every tree that is in Paradise? And the woman said to the serpent: From every tree that is in Paradise we do eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of Paradise God said we are not to eat, not even to touch it, lest we die. And the serpent said to the woman: You will not die the death; for God knew that on the day you take a bite from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and that it was good for the eyes to see and to gain knowledge; and she took fruit from that tree and took a bite, and gave to her man; and Adam accepted it and took a bite; and their eyes were opened, and then they knew that they were naked; and they took fig-leaves for themselves and made themselves aprons. And when they heard the voice of the Lord strolling in Paradise at evening, Adam and his woman hid themselves

2. From 9,16 below it does seem as if this is how Augustine at this stage of his study of Genesis understood the phrase: that God brought the animals to Adam, not so that he, God, might see what Adam would call them, but so that Adam might see what he himself should call them.

from before the face of the Lord God at that tree which was in the middle of Paradise.

And the Lord God called Adam and said to him: Adam, where are you? And he said to him: I heard your voice, Lord, in Paradise, and I was afraid, and I hid myself because I am naked. And the Lord God said: Who told you that you are naked—unless it's that you have taken a bite from that tree from which I had told you from it alone not to take a bite? And Adam said: The woman whom you gave me, she gave it me to eat, and I took a bite. And God said to the woman: Why did you do this? And the woman said: The serpent led me astray, and I took a bite.

And the Lord God said to the serpent: Accursed are you from all cattle and every kind of beasts. Upon your bosom and your belly shall you crawl, and earth shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will set enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and between her seed. She will look out for your head, and you for her heel.

And to the woman he said: Multiplying I will multiply your pains and your sighs, and in pains shall you bring forth children, and your turning round shall be towards your man, and he shall lord it over you.

And then God said to Adam: Because you have listened to the voice of your woman, and have taken a bite from the tree about which I commanded you from it alone not to eat, accursed shall the earth be to you in all your works, and in your sadness and groaning shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the fodder of your field. In the sweat of your countenance shall you eat your bread, until you turn back into the earth from which you were taken; because earth you are and into earth you shall go.

And then Adam laid upon his wife the name Life, because she is the mother of all the living. And then the Lord God made Adam and his woman tunics of skin and clothed them. And God said: Behold, Adam has become as if one of us for the knowledge of getting to know good and evil. And then lest Adam stretch out his hand to the tree of life and take from there for himself and eat and live forever, the Lord God sent him away from the paradise of delight, to work the earth from which he had been taken. And on being thrown out outside Paradise, he lingered over against the paradise of pleasure. And the Cherubim and that flaming sword which turns, these God set to guard the way to the tree of life (Gn 2:4—3:24).³

3. It is to be noted that this text of chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis differs in several particulars from the one Augustine comments on in his greater work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Sometimes this one looks like a closer translation, and sometimes it seems to incorporate little comments, or amplifications of the text.

Without prejudice to the study of the literal, historical sense, he is going to search out the figurative meaning of this story

2, 3. If the Manichees were willing to discuss the hidden meaning of these words in a spirit of reverent inquiry rather than of captious fault-finding, then they would of course not be Manichees, but as they asked it would be given them, and as they sought they would find, as they knocked it would be opened up to them.⁴ The fact is, you see, people who have a genuine religious interest in learning put far more questions about this text than these irreligious wretches; but the difference between them is that the former seek in order to find, while the latter are at no pains at all to do anything except not to find what they are seeking.

So then, this whole text must first be discussed in terms of history, and then in terms of prophecy. In terms of history deeds and events are being related, in terms of prophecy future events are being foretold. One should not look with a jaundiced eye, to be sure, on anyone who wants to take everything that is said here absolutely literally, and who can avoid blasphemy in so doing, and present everything as in accordance with Catholic faith; on the contrary one should hold up such a person as an outstanding and wholly admirable understander of the text.

If, however, no other way is available of reaching an understanding of what is written that is religious and worthy of God, except by supposing that it has all been set before us in a figurative sense and in riddles, we have the authority of the apostles for doing this, seeing that they solved so many riddles in the books of the Old Testament in this manner.⁵ Let us then stick to this way which we have in mind, assisted by the one who urges us to ask, to seek and to knock; let us in fact unravel all these figurative statements in accordance with Catholic faith, whether they are statements of history or of prophecy, without prejudice to any better and more diligent commentary, whether by ourselves or by any others to whom the Lord may be good enough to reveal the meaning of the text.

The greenery of the field and the fodder, Genesis 2:5, means the soul

3, 4. So then, *the day was made on which God made heaven and earth, and all the greenery of the field before it was upon the earth, and all the fodder of the field* (Gn 2:5). In the previous chapter seven days are counted; now it is said to be one day on which God made heaven and earth, and all the greenery of the field and all the fodder of the field. Under the name of this single day we can reason-

4. See Lk 11:9.

5. The only obvious example of such apostolic authority is Paul's treatment of the story of Sarah and Hagar and their children, Gal 4:21-31.

ably understand the whole of time to be signified. God, after all, made the whole of time simultaneously with the whole time-bound creation, the visible creation which is signified under the name of "heaven and earth." What should prompt our questioning, though, is that after naming the day which was made, and heaven and earth, he also added *all the greenery of the field and all the fodder*.

You see, when it said, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1), it didn't also say that all the greenery of the field and all the fodder was made then; it's plainly there for us to read, after all, that all the greenery and fodder of the field was made on the third day, while the statement that *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* does not belong to any of those seven days. As yet, you see, he was calling the basic material out of which everything was made by the name of "heaven and earth," or else, more likely, he had first set before us the whole of creation under the name of heaven and earth when he said, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*; and after that he expounded God's works one by one consecutively through the sequence of days, in a way required by their prophetic significance, as we explained in the first book.⁶

So what else can it mean, then, that after naming heaven and earth he now added the greenery of the field and the fodder, and kept quiet about all the rest, so much of it, which is to be found in heaven and on earth, or even in the sea, but that by the greenery of the field he wished the invisible creation to be understood, such as the soul? It is usual in the scriptures, you see, for the world to be called a field; I mean, the Lord himself said, *The field is this world* (Mt 13:38), when he was explaining that parable in which dandelion was mixed in with the good seed. So then he calls the spiritual and invisible creation the greenery of the field because of its vigor and vitality, and we naturally give the same interpretation to the word "fodder" as sustaining life.⁷

4, 5. His adding next, *before it was upon the earth*, is to be understood as meaning before the soul sinned. When it has befouled itself with earthy lusts, after all, it is rightly said to have been born upon the earth, or to be upon the earth. And that is why he added: *For God had not yet rained upon the earth* (Gn 2:5)—because nowadays too God makes the greenery of the field, but by raining upon the earth. That is, he makes souls grow green again and flourish through his word; but he waters them from the clouds, that is, from the scriptures of the prophets and apostles. These are rightly called clouds because their words, which are over and done with as soon as uttered aloud over the air, become clouds of a sort when the obscurity of allegories is added to them like a kind of fog or mist; and then, when their meaning is squeezed out in commentaries and

6. The seven days of creation as representing the six ages of the world and the final, eternal day of the new heaven and the new earth. 1,22,33—23,42.

7. See his comment on this interpretation of fodder in the extract from *Revisions* 3, placed at the beginning of this work.

bible studies, they pour down something like showers of truth on people of good understanding.

But this was not yet the case before the soul sinned, that is, before the greenery of the field was upon the earth. *For God had not yet rained upon the earth, nor was there a man to work on it* (Gn 2:5). A man working on the land, after all, needs the showers from the clouds, and about these enough has already been said. But after his sin the man began to work on the land, and to have those necessary clouds. Before he sinned, however, when God had made the greenery of the field and the fodder, which we have said mean the invisible creature, he was watering this creature from an inner spring, speaking directly to its understanding, so that it would not have to take in words from outside, like rain from the aforementioned clouds, but would be drenched from its own spring, that is, from the truth welling up from its innermost being.

The spring coming up from the earth, Genesis 2:6

5, 6. *For a spring*, he says, *was coming up from the earth and watering the whole face of the earth* (Gn 2:6)—from the earth, that is from the land about which it says: *It is you that are my hope, my portion in the land of the living* (Ps 142:5). When the soul was being watered by such a spring as that, it had not yet “cast out its innards” through pride. *The beginning*, you see, *of man’s pride is to apostatize from God* (Sir 10:12); and since his swelling out through pride to exterior things has put a stop to his being watered from that interior spring, he is very properly jeered at by these words of the prophet, and told: *What has earth and ashes to be proud of, since in its lifetime it has cast out its innards?* (Sir 10:9).⁸ What else is pride, after all, but leaving the inner sanctum of conscience and wishing to be seen outwardly as what in fact one isn’t? And that is why, as the soul toils away now on the land, it stands in need of rain from the clouds, that is, of teaching by human words, so that even by such means, from being parched and withered like that, it may grow green and flourish again, and once more become the greenery of the field.

But if only it were willing and happy to catch the rain of truth, at least from these very clouds! It was on its account, after all, that our Lord agreed to assume our cloudy flesh and shed upon us that most abundant of all showers, the gospel itself, and then went on to promise that anyone who drank of its water would come back to that innermost spring and no longer need to look for rain from outside. He says, you see: *It will become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life* (Jn 4:14). It was this spring, in my opinion, that before sin was coming up from the earth and watering all the face of the earth, because it was an

8. See the comment on thus treating the words of Sirach as those of a prophet, in the passage from *Revisions*, 3, placed at the beginning of this work.

interior source, and not desiring help from the clouds. *For God had not yet rained upon the earth, nor was there a man to work on it* (Gn 2:5). After saying, you see, *God had not yet rained upon the earth*, he also added the reason why he had not: *because there was not a man to work on it*.

The time, though, when the man started working on the land was when he had been sent away after his sin from the life of bliss he had enjoyed in Paradise. That, you see, is what is written: *And the Lord God sent him away from the paradise of delight, to work the earth from which he had been taken* (Gn 3:23); we shall look into this when we come to it in due course.⁹ I have just mentioned it now so that we may realize that for humanity toiling away on the land, confined that is to say in the parched earth of its sins, divine teaching is essential from human words, like rain from the clouds. This sort of knowledge, however, *will be done away with* (1 Cor 13:8). *For we see now in a riddle*, as if seeking satisfying nourishment in the clouds; *but then it will be face to face* (1 Cor 13:12), when the whole face of our earth will be watered by an inner spring of gushing water. I mean to say, if we wanted to take it as meaning some spring of this visible water, when it says, *Now a spring was coming up from the earth, and was watering all the face of the earth*—well, it’s hardly likely that, with so many perennial springs of streams and great rivers found throughout the earth, this one alone, which was watering all the face of the earth, should have dried up.

Summing up the exposition of Genesis 2:4-6

6, 7. In these few words, then, we have been presented with the whole of creation as it was before the sin of the soul. By the term “heaven and earth” the whole visible creation was signified; by the term “day” the whole of time; by the expression “the greenery and fodder of the field” the invisible creation; and by the spring coming up and watering all the face of the earth, the flood of truth drenching the soul before sin. Now this day, which we are saying signifies the whole of time, is suggesting to us that the invisible creation too, as well as the visible one, can experience time; as for the soul’s being subject to alteration by time, this is indeed obvious to us from the great variety of its moods, and also from the fall itself by which it was made wretched, and again from its renewal, restoring it once more to happiness.

And that is why it did not just say, *When the day had been made, the day on which God made heaven and earth*, terms that refer to the visible creation, but also added *the greenery and the fodder of the field*, terms by which we have been saying that the invisible creature, such as the soul, is being signified, on account of its vigor and vitality. And accordingly it said: *When the day had been made,*

9. See below, 22,34

the day on which God made heaven and earth, and all the greenery and fodder of the field (Gn 2:5), so that we might in this way realize that invisible as well as visible creatures belong to time, being subject to change because God alone is unchangeable, God who is before all times.

On the making of the man from the mud of the earth

7. 8. Now at long last, after being informed about the whole of creation, invisible as well as visible, and about the benefit conferred by the divine spring on the whole invisible creation, let us see what special information we are being given about the man, the matter that concerns us first and foremost. The first question, you see, that is usually raised by *God's fashioning the man from the mud of the earth* (Gn 2:7) is what sort of mud it was, or what material was being signified by the word "mud." These enemies, though, of the books of the Old Testament,¹⁰ looking at everything in a fleshly, literal-minded way, and therefore always getting everything wrong, are in the habit of commenting sarcastically even on this point, that God fashioned the man from mud. What they say, you see, is: "Why did God make the man from mud? Did he not have anything better, celestial material for example, from which to make the man, so that he was reduced to making him, so fragile and mortal, from the muck of the earth?" What they fail to understand from the start is how many meanings both earth or water are given in the scriptures—mud, you see, being a mixture of water and earth.

What we are saying, you see, is that only after sin did the human body begin to be fragile and subject to decay and destined to die; the only thing in our bodies, after all, that horrifies these people is their mortality, to which we have been deservedly condemned. What in any case was so strange or difficult for God, even if he did make the man from the mud of this earth, about contriving a body for him that would not have been subject to decay, had the man kept God's commandment and not been willing to sin? After all, if we say that the beauty of the sky itself was made from nothing or from unformed material, because we believe its Craftsman to be all-powerful, what's so odd about the possibility of the body, which was made from any sort of mud you like, being made by the all-powerful Craftsman of such a kind that before the man's sin it would never cause him any trouble or excruciating pain or pester him with its defects, and would never be injured or go into a decline and fade away?

9. And so it is quite unnecessary to ask what God made the man's body from—if, that is, it is now just talking about the formation of the body. That, you see, is how I have heard that some of our people understand the text. They say that the reason it didn't add "to his image and likeness," after saying *God fash-*

10. He just says "of the old books."

ioned the man from the mud of the earth, is that now it is only talking about the formation of the body, while the moment when the interior man was being referred to was when it said: *God made the man to the image and likeness of God* (Gn 1:27).

But even if we understand that at this point too the man was made of body and soul, not in the sense that some altogether new work was being undertaken, but that what had been stated in summary form earlier on was here being unwrapped in a more detailed account; so if, as I am saying, we understand that in this place the man was made of body and soul, it was by no means absurd to give that mixture the name of mud. Just as water, you see, collects earth and sticks and holds it together when mud is made by mixing it in, so too the soul by animating the material of the body shapes it into a harmonious unity, and does not permit it to fall apart into its constituent elements.

On the blowing of the spirit of life into the man

8. 10. As for the way the text goes on: *And he blew into him the spirit of life, and the man was made into a living soul* (Gn 2:7); if he was still only a body, we must understand the soul being joined to the body in this place, whether it had already been made but was so to say in God's mouth, that is, in his Truth or Wisdom,¹¹ or whether it was made at the moment when God blew the spirit of life into that clay model; in this case God's so doing would signify his actual work of making the soul in the man by the spirit of his power. If on the other hand the man who had been made was already body and soul, God's breathing into him added sensation to the soul itself when the man was made into a living soul—not that God's breathing was turned into the living soul, but that it got to work on the living soul.

We ought not, all the same, to take the man who had been made into a living soul as being already spiritual or "enspirited," but still as merely animated, "ensouled."¹² The point, you see, at which he was "enspirited" or made spiritual was when he was placed in Paradise, that is, in the life of bliss and blessedness, and also received the command of perfection, so that he might be brought to finished completion by the word of God.¹³ And so after he had sinned, turning his back on God's command, and had been sent away from Paradise, he

11. From which, however, it did not depart as though separated by space when it was blown into him, seeing that God is not contained in any place, but is present everywhere.

12. See note 4 on the extract from the *Revisions*, 3, put at the head of Book I of this work.

13. That is, I take it, first by his keeping the word of God, as uttered in the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and finally through his being given by the eternal Word the knowledge he had refrained from grabbing. The manuscripts of the ancient world made no use of the distinction between upper case and lower case letters, to distinguish here between word and Word, as we do today; and neither, very properly, does the printed Latin text.

remained merely "ensouled" and "soulish." And that is why all of us who have been born of him after that sin first act out the "soulish" man, until we gain the spiritual, "enspirited" Adam, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ *who did not commit any sin* (1 Pt 2:22), and why on being created anew and brought to life by him we are restored to Paradise, where that thief earned the right to be with him, on the very day he finished this life.¹⁴ This after all is what the apostle says: *But not first what is "enspirited" or spiritual, but what is "ensouled" or "soulish."* *For the first Adam was made into a living soul, the last Adam into a life-giving spirit* (1 Cor 15:46).

11. So that then is how we ought to understand this passage. We are certainly not to suppose that because it said, *He blew into him the spirit of life and the man was made into a living soul*, something like a part of God's nature was turned into the man's soul, and so be obliged to say that God's nature is subject to change—the error about which the truth presses hardest on these Manichees. Pride, you see, being the mother of all heretics, these have had the nerve to say that the soul is identical with God's nature. And on this point they are harried by us, when we say to them, "Therefore God's nature goes astray, and is wretched, and is riddled with vices, and commits sin, or even, as you yourselves say, is defiled by contamination with the filth of an opposing nature—and other such things, which it is impious to believe about the nature of God."

That the soul, you see, was made by the all-powerful God, and that accordingly it is not a part of God or identical with his nature, is stated quite plainly in another passage of scripture, where the prophet says: *And the one who fashioned the spirit for them all, he it is that knows all things* (Ps 33:15), and in another place: *who fashioned the spirit of man within him* (Zech 12:1). So then, that the spirit of the man was made is definitively proved by these texts. But the scriptures give the name of "the spirit of man" to the soul's power of reason, which distinguishes him from the animals and gives him mastery over them by natural law. It is about this spirit that the apostle says: *Nobody knows what a man has except the spirit of the man which is in him* (1 Cor 2:11).

I quote this in case there might still be people who say that while these texts prove that the soul was made, the spirit of the man was not made, and who insist that this spirit is identical with God's nature, and say that a part of God was turned into the man's spirit when God did that blowing. This also is utterly rejected by sound teaching, because the spirit of man too sometimes errs and sometimes has the right ideas, and so declares itself to be changeable, which in no way whatsoever is it lawful to suppose about the nature of God. Now there surely cannot be a surer sign of pride than for a human soul to claim to be what God is, when it is still groaning under such a huge pile of vices and miseries.

14. See Lk 23:43.

What is signified by the delights of Paradise

9, 12. Now at last let us take a look at the blissful state of the man, which is signified by the name of Paradise. Since people are accustomed, after all, to enjoy delicious rest in parks, and light dawns upon our bodily senses from the east, and the sky, a body high above our bodies and altogether more sublime, arches up from there: all that is the reason why the spiritual delights which go with the life of bliss are also being figuratively displayed by these words, and why Paradise is planted to the east. Let us take it then that our spiritual joys are signified by every tree that is beautiful to the gaze of the understanding, and good for eating, being the imperishable food on which blessed souls feed. The Lord too says, after all: *Work for the food which does not perish* (Jn 6:27), such as every idea which is food for the soul.

"To the east": to the light of wisdom in Eden, that is, in the immortal delights of the mind.¹⁵ Delights, you see, or pleasure, or feasting is what this word is said to mean, if translated from Hebrew into English.¹⁶ But it is left untranslated like this in order to give the impression of being a place, and to make the style of the whole passage more figurative. Every tree produced from the earth, then, we take as being every spiritual joy, the kind, that is, that overtops the earth, and is not wrapped up and overwhelmed in the entanglements of earthy lusts.

The tree of life, though, planted in the middle of Paradise signifies the wisdom by which the soul is made to understand that it has been set at a kind of mid-point in the whole order of things, so that although it has every material, bodily nature subject to it, it has to realize that the nature of God is still above itself. So it must not turn aside either to the right, by claiming to be what it is not, or to the left, by being slack and indifferent about living up to what it is.¹⁷ That then is the tree of life, planted in the middle of Paradise.

As for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, again it is the halfway centrality of the soul, its integrity in the due order of things, that it signifies. This tree too, after all, was planted in the middle of Paradise; and the reason it is called the tree of distinguishing between good and evil is that if the soul¹⁸ turns to itself with its back to God and wants to enjoy its own power without any reference to God, it swells up with pride, which is *the starting point of all sin* (Sir 10:13). And when the penalty follows upon this sin of the soul's, it learns by experience what

15. Literally, "in immortal and intelligible delights." Augustine is still, only a few years after his conversion, living and expressing himself in a platonic frame of thought, in which the truly real world is that of intelligible, unchanging ideas (*rationes* for Augustine; he has just used the word), as distinct from the only half-real, shadow world of appearances, which we observe with our senses.

16. Latin, of course, in the text.

17. See Is 30:21; Dt 5:32.

18. Which should be "stretching out to what lies ahead," that is, to God, "and forgetting what lies behind" (Phil 3:13).

the difference is between the good which it has turned its back on and the evil into which it has fallen. And this will be its tasting of the fruit of the tree of distinguishing between good and evil. So then, it is commanded to eat of every tree that is in Paradise, but not to eat of the tree in which good and evil are distinguished; that is, not to enjoy it in such a way as to violate and corrupt, as if by chewing it to pieces, the duly ordered integrity of its own nature.

What the rivers of Paradise indicate

10. 13. *Now a river was coming forth out of Eden* (Gn 2:10), that is from delights and pleasure and feasting, the river the prophet has in mind in the psalms, when he says: *You will give them to drink from the torrent of your pleasure* (Ps 36:8); Eden, you see, means "pleasure" in English. This river is divided into four parts and thus signifies the four virtues, prudence, fortitude, temperance and justice.¹⁹ The Pishon, though, is said to be the Ganges, the Gihon the Nile, which can also be noticed in the prophet Jeremiah.²⁰ These two are now called by other names, like the river which is now called the Tiber, but was once called the Albula,²¹ while the Tigris and Euphrates still have the same names.

By these names, however, as I was saying, spiritual virtues are signified, as even the translation of the names themselves will indicate, if you bear in mind the Hebrew or Syriac language, just as Jerusalem, while being a visible place on earth, still means spiritually "City of Peace," and Zion, while being a mountain on earth, nonetheless means "Contemplation." This name is often applied in scriptural allegories to the understanding of spiritual things. And that man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, as the Lord says,²² and was attacked on the road and wounded and left half dead by robbers, certainly obliges us to understand these places, although historically speaking they are to be found on earth, in a spiritual sense.

14. So then prudence, which stands for an actual contemplation of Truth that is totally foreign to any human lips, because it is inexpressible, so that if you wished to utter it you would be in labor with it rather than actually bringing it

19. The four cardinal, or hinge, virtues of ancient Greek ethics, duly incorporated into Christian moral theology. I give them their traditional names, in this following the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (article, "Cardinal Virtues"), though they cover a somewhat wider ground than these names now signify in contemporary English.

20. There is no mention of this river, or its identity with the Nile, anywhere in Jeremiah; but it is mentioned in Sirach 24:27, where after naming the other three rivers of paradise, the author says that instruction will come forth like Gihon at the time of vintage—a possible allusion to the flooding of the Nile. Augustine's memory, for once, is playing him tricks.

21. See Virgil's *Aeneid*, VIII.332. See also Augustine's greater work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, VIII.7.13, and note 25 there.

22. See Lk 10:30.

forth;²³ so this prudence then goes round the land which has gold and carbuncle and leek-green stone, that is, a discipline of life that glistens brightly as if refined from all earthly dross, like the best gold; and truth which no falsehood can overcome, like the brilliance of the carbuncle which is not overcome by night; and eternal life, which is signified by the greenness of the leek-green stone, because of its vigor that never withers.

Next, that river which goes round the land of Ethiopia, very hot and steamy, signifies fortitude, stirred by the heat of action and never slackening. The third one, the Tigris, streams over against the Assyrians, and signifies temperance, which stands up to lust, the great adversary of prudent counsels; so the Assyrians are frequently mentioned in the scriptures as the arch-adversaries. Finally, of the fourth river nothing is said about what it streams over against, or what land it goes round; justice, you see, belongs to all parts of the soul, because it is the very order and balance of the soul, by which these three are bound together in concord—the first, prudence; the second, fortitude; the third, temperance; and in this total bonding and order, justice.

What the man did in Paradise, and his need for help

11. 15. As for the man being put in Paradise precisely to work there and guard it, that much more laudable kind of work was not in the least toilsome. Work in Paradise, I mean to say, is one thing, and work on the land, to which he was condemned after sinning, quite another. In fact what sort of work it was, is indicated by the addition of *and to guard it*. In the peaceful tranquillity, you see, of the life of bliss, where there is no death, work consists entirely in guarding what you hold.

He also received a commandment, which we have just dealt with above. Now the conclusion of the commandment clearly shows it was not addressed just to one person; what he says, you see, is this: *but on the day you all*²⁴ *take a bite from it, you all shall die the death* (Gn 2:17). He is already starting on the explanation of how the woman came to be made, and how she is said to have been made as a help for the man, so that by a spiritual coupling she might bring forth spiritual offspring, that is, the good works of divine praise; while he directs, she complies; he is directed by wisdom, she by the man, for *the head of the man is Christ, and the head of the woman the man* (1 Cor 11:3). And that is why it says: *It is not good for the man to be alone* (Gn 2:18). There still remained, after all, something for him to become, so that not only should the soul lord it over the body (the body's status being that of a slave), but that the manly reason should also have subject to itself its "animal" part, to be its help in ordering the body about.

23. Because the apostle too heard inexpressible words there "which it is not lawful for man to utter" (2 Cor 12:4).

24. This, I understand, is an idiom of the southern United States to indicate the second person plural, a most useful and necessary idiom in a case like this.

It was to provide an example of this that the woman was made, whom the natural order of things makes subject to the man. In this way what can be seen more clearly in two human beings, that is, in male and female, may be considered in a single person; that the interior mind, like the manly reason, should have as its subject the soul's appetite or desire, through which we put the limbs and parts of the body to work, and by a just law should keep its help within bounds—just as a man ought to govern his wife, and not let her lord it over her husband, because where this happens the result is a topsy turvy and miserable household indeed.

The stages by which God provided a help for Adam

16. So first of all, then, God demonstrated to the man how much better he was than cattle, and all brute animals; and this is the meaning of what it says next, that all the animals were brought to him, for him to see what to call them, and to label them with their names. This, you see, shows that man is better, in virtue of his rationality, than the beasts, because to distinguish them and differentiate between them by naming them is something only reason can do by making a judgment about them. This, however, is an easy step for reason to take; human beings soon realize, after all, that they are better than animals. The difficult step for reason is for us to realize that in ourselves the rational power which should govern is one thing, the "animal" power (appetite or desire) which should be governed by it, another.

The slumber of Adam from which Eve was made

12. And since it is by a more hidden kind of wisdom that we see this, the hidden sight of it is signified, in my opinion, by the slumber which God sent upon Adam, when the woman was made for him.

To see this, after all, we do not need these bodily eyes; but the more we withdraw our attention from these visible things to the inner world of the intelligence (and that is a kind of falling asleep), the better and more authentic is our sight of this. The very realization, you see, by which we come to understand that in us what exercises a rational mastery is one thing, what yields compliance to reason another, so this very realization then is a kind of producing of the woman from the man's rib, to signify their being joined together.

Next, so that each of us may exercise a proper lordship or mastery over this part of ourselves, and become a kind of wedded couple in the very self, with the flesh not warring against the spirit with its desires²⁵ but submitting to it, that is, the desire of the flesh not opposing reason but rather complying with it and thus

25. See Gal 5:17.

ceasing to be of the flesh—for all this we stand in need of perfect wisdom. The contemplation of this being more inward and hidden, and as far removed as can be from any of the bodily senses, this too can suitably be understood under the name of slumber. Then indeed, you see, is the man with the most complete propriety the head of the woman, when the head of the man is Christ,²⁶ who is *the Wisdom of God* (1 Cor 1:24).

17. It's true that he filled up the place of that rib with flesh, to suggest by this word the loving affection with which we should love our own souls, and not be harsh in blaming them for things, with which²⁷ we should love those we are in charge of. Flesh, you see, is not being mentioned in this place as signifying the desires of the flesh, but rather in the way the prophet talks about the people having the heart of stone taken away from them and being given instead a heart of flesh.²⁸ In the same way, after all, the apostle also says: *Not on tablets of stone, but on the fleshly tablets of the heart* (2 Cor 3:3). It is the difference in fact between a straightforward literal way of talking and a figurative one, such as the way we are dealing with here and now.

Accordingly, even if the real, visible woman was made, historically speaking, from the body of the first man by the Lord God, it was surely not without reason that she was made like that—it must have been to suggest some hidden truth. Was there any shortage of mud, after all, for the woman to be formed from, or couldn't the Lord, had he so wished, have painlessly removed the man's rib from him while he was still awake? So whether all this was said in a figurative way, or whether it was even done in a figurative way, it was certainly not pointlessly that it was said or done like this. No, it is all assuredly pointing to mysteries and sacraments,²⁹ whether in the way I with my slender capacities am attempting to explain it, or whether it is to be interpreted and understood in some other and better way, but still in accordance with sound faith.

The relationship between the man and the woman

13. 18. So then, the man said what his woman was to be called, as a boss might say of a minion, and said: *This now is bone out of my bones, and flesh from my flesh*. "Bone out of my bones," possibly alluding to fortitude, and "flesh from my flesh," alluding to temperance. These two virtues, you see, are commonly held to

26. See 1 Cor 11:3.

27. Reading *quo* instead of the text's *quod*, which would give the sense, "because we should love those we are in charge of"; and also I suggest changing the mood of the verb from the indicative, *diligit*, to the subjunctive, *diligat*.

28. See Ez 11:19.

29. In the altogether wider meaning of the term current in Christian writings of Augustine's time, when it meant any sacred or hidden truth or reality signified by some other thing mentioned in scripture.

belong to the lower part of the spirit, which is governed by the prudence of reason. As for what it goes on to say: *this shall be called woman, since she was taken from her man* (Gn 2:23), this explanation of the origin of the name is not evident in the Latin language; no similarity, after all, is to be noted between the word *mulier* and the word *vir*. But in Hebrew it is said to sound as if we were to say in Latin, "This shall be called *virago*, because she was taken from her *vir*."³⁰ *Virago*, after all, or rather *virgo*, does have some resemblance to the word *vir* which *mulier* doesn't. But this, as I remarked, is the effect of diversity of language.

19. As for what it goes on to add: *A man shall leave father and mother and stick to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24), I can find no way of referring this to history, except that this is what usually happens with the human race. But in fact the whole thing is a prophecy, as the apostle reminds us, when he says: *For this reason a man shall leave father and mother and stick to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh. This is a great sacrament; but I mean in Christ and in the Church* (Eph 5:31-32). If the Manichees, who use the apostle's letters to take many people in, were not blind when they read this, they would understand in what way the scriptures of the Old Testament are to be taken, and not have the effrontery to bring charges with their sacrilegious cries against something they know nothing about at all.

But that Adam and his wife were naked and not embarrassed signifies simplicity of soul and chastity. This you see is what the apostle too has to say: *I attached you to one man, to present you to Christ as a chaste virgin; but I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve with his slyness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity and chastity which is in Christ* (2 Cor 11:2-3).

The devil represented by the serpent

14, 20. Coming now to the serpent, it represents the devil, who certainly wasn't simple. That he was said, you see, to be wiser than all beasts is a figurative way of stating his slyness. It does not, however, say that the serpent was in paradise, but that the serpent was among the beasts which God had made. Paradise, after all, as I said above,³¹ stands for the blessed life of bliss in which there was no longer a serpent, because it was already the devil; and he had fallen from his blessed state, because *he did not stand in the truth* (Jn 8:44). Nor is there anything strange about the way he could talk to the woman, though she was in

30. "She shall be called *ishshah*, because she was taken from her *ish*"; which we get very conveniently in English with "woman" and "man." Augustine cannot at the time of writing have been familiar with Jerome's Vulgate translation; but there it is in fact rendered, *haec vocabitur virago, quoniam de viro sumpta est*.

31. See 9,12 above.

Paradise and he was not; she was not in Paradise, you see, in a local sense, but rather as regards her blissful feeling of blessedness. Or even if there is such a place called Paradise, where Adam and the woman were actually living in the body, are we to understand the devil also making his approach there in the body? Not at all, but he made it as a spirit, as the apostle says: *According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is now at work in the children of unbelief* (Eph 2:2).

So then, he doesn't appear visibly, does he, to those in whom he is at work, or approach them by a kind of bodily movement in material places? No, of course not, but in mysterious ways he suggests whatever he can to their thoughts. These suggestions are resisted by those who can truly say what again the apostle says: *We are not unaware of his wiles* (2 Cor 2:11). How, in any case, did he approach Judas, when he persuaded him to betray the Lord? Not by local movement, surely, not in a way to be seen by him with these eyes? But of course, as it says, he entered into his heart.³²

The man will repel him, however, if he guards Paradise. God, you see, put the man in paradise *to work there and guard it* (Gn 2:15). In fact that is more or less what is said about the Church in the Song of Songs: *A garden enclosed, a fountain sealed* (4:12), into which that persuader of perversity naturally does not gain admittance. But all the same he did take in the woman, because our reason too can only be brought down to consenting to sin, when pleasurable anticipation is roused in that part of the spirit which ought to take its lead from the reason, as from its husband and guide.

21. Even now, when any of us slide down into sin, nothing else takes place but what then occurred with those three, the serpent, the woman and the man. First of all, you see, comes the suggestion, either in the thoughts, or through the body's senses, by seeing or touching or hearing or tasting or smelling something. If, when the suggestion has taken shape, our desire or greed is not roused to sin, the serpent's cunning will be blocked; if it is roused, though, it's as if the woman has already been persuaded. But sometimes the reason valiantly puts the brake on greed even when it has been roused, and brings it to a halt. When this happens, we don't slide into sin, but win the prize with a certain amount of struggle. If however the reason does consent and decide that what lust or greed is urging on it should be done, then the man is expelled from the entire life of bliss, as from paradise. Sin is already put down to his account, you see, even if the actual deed doesn't follow, since the conscience incurs guilt just by consent.

32. See Lk 22:3, Jn 13:2.

The value of noting how the serpent succeeded

15. 22. The way, though, in which the serpent succeeded in putting across the sin calls for careful consideration, as it directly concerns our salvation; the reason all this is written down, after all, is to put us on our guard against such things at the present time. So when the woman told him in answer to his question what command they had been given, he came back with: *You will not die the death; for God knew that on the day you take a bite from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil* (Gn 3:4-5). In these words we can see it was through pride that the sin was put across—I mean, that's the catch in the words, *you will be like gods*. As also with the whole assertion, *for God knew that on the day you take a bite from it your eyes will be opened*; what else is to be understood but a suggestion that they should refuse to be under God any longer, but should be their own masters instead without the Lord, that they should not keep a rule apparently laid down by him out of a jealous refusal to let them be in control of their own lives, no longer needing inner enlightenment from him, but using their own wits, their own eyes so to say, to tell the difference between good and evil, which he had wanted to stop them doing?

So that then is how it was put across to them to be too fond of their own power, and by wishing to be God's equals, to make bad use of that halfway centrality, represented by the fruit of the tree set in the middle of paradise, by which they were subject to God, and had their own bodies subject to themselves; to act, that is, against God's law, and so forfeit what they had received, while they had wanted to grab what they had not received. Human nature, you see, did not receive the power to enjoy the state of bliss independently of God's control, because only God is able to enjoy blessedness and bliss by his own power independently of anyone else's control.

23. *And the woman saw, he says, that the tree was good for eating, and that it was good for the eyes to see and to gain knowledge* (Gn 3:6). How could she see, if their eyes were closed? But what we are meant to understand by these words is that after they had taken some of the fruit for themselves, those eyes were opened with which they saw that they were naked and were displeased at the sight: the eyes, that is, of cunning which are displeased at simplicity. When anybody falls away from that innermost, hidden light of truth, there is nothing that pride is ready to be pleased with except fraudulent pretenses. This is where hypocrisy too is born, which makes people think they are very clever, when they can deceive and take in anyone they want to.

The woman, you see, gave to her husband, and they both took a bite, and their eyes were opened, eyes we have just explained. And that is when they saw that they were naked, but with eyes askint, to which the simplicity signified by nakedness seemed something to be ashamed of. And so, as they were no longer simple, they made themselves aprons from fig leaves, to cover their private

parts, that is to conceal their simplicity, of which cunning pride was now ashamed. Fig leaves, though, signify a kind of itch (if the word can properly be applied in the incorporeal sphere) which the spirit in astonishing ways can be afflicted with, out of greed and a delight in telling lies. This is also why people who love playing the fool are said to be salty, *salsi* in Latin. Pretense, after all, is the principal element in tomfoolery.³³

The meaning of their encounter with God in Paradise

16. 24. And so when God was strolling in Paradise at evening—that is, he was strolling in Paradise when he was already coming to pass judgment on them even before their punishment³⁴—they heard his voice, and hid themselves from his sight. Who are the ones who hide themselves from the sight of God, but those who have turned their backs on him and are beginning to love what is their very own? You see, they already had a covering for their falsehood, and anyone who utters falsehood is *speaking from what is his own* (Jn 8:44). And that is why they are said to have hidden themselves at the tree which was in the middle of paradise, that is, at themselves, ranged as they were in the middle of things, below God and above bodies.

So then they hid themselves at themselves, in order to be troubled with miserable errors after forsaking the light of truth, which they themselves were definitely not. The human soul, after all, can participate in truth, but Truth itself is God, unchanging above the soul. So then, turn away if you will from this Truth and turn to yourself, and exult in your own seemingly free movements rather than in being directed and enlightened by God; but you will be plunged in the darkness of falsehood, since whoever speaks falsehood is speaking from what is his own. And so you will be troubled in that way, and illustrate the truth of the prophet's words: *My soul is troubled at myself* (Ps 42:6).

And so Adam is now questioned by God, not because God doesn't know where he is, but in order to oblige him to confess his sin.³⁵ And he answered that when he heard his voice he hid himself, since he was naked. His very answer was already an instance of a truly miserable error—as though his being naked, as God himself had made him, could displease God! But it is the very essence of error to assume that what is displeasing to oneself also displeases God. What the

³³. And salt is used to conceal the unpleasant taste of food, to help the meat pretend it isn't bad—is that the idea behind this odd illustration of the point?

³⁴. That is, the divine presence was in a kind of way being shaken about in them, when they themselves were not steady in keeping his commandment; and very properly at evening, that is, when the sun was already setting on them, that is, that inner light of truth was being taken away from them.

³⁵. The Lord Jesus Christ, after all, asked any number of questions, but not because he didn't know the answers.

Lord said in reply, though, is to be seen as really sublime: *Who told you that you are naked—unless it's that you have taken a bite from the tree from which I had told you from it alone not to take a bite?* (Gn 3:11). He had been naked, you see, of pretense, but clothed with divine light. Having turned away from this and turned to himself, which is the meaning of taking a bite from that tree, he saw his own nakedness, and was displeased with himself as not having anything he could call his very own.

Putting the blame on others, in the last resort on God

17, 25. Next, as is the way with pride, he doesn't plead guilty to being the woman's accomplice, but instead puts all the blame for his own fault on the woman; and in this way, with a subtlety seeming to spring from the cunning the poor wretch had conceived, he wanted to lay his sinning at the door of God himself. He didn't just say, you see, "The woman gave it to me," but more fully: *The woman whom you gave me* (Gn 3:12). Indeed nothing is so characteristic of sinners as wishing to put whatever they are accused of down to God. This comes from that vein of pride by which the man sinned in wishing to be equal to God, free that is from his control just as God, being the Lord and master of all things, is free from any outside control. But because the man was simply unable to be God's equal in majesty and greatness, as he lay there in the sin he had fallen into, he attempted to make God his equal, or indeed his inferior, by showing that God had sinned while he himself was innocent.

And when the woman is questioned, she puts the blame on the serpent. So in each case it's as if the man had received a wife in order to comply with her directions instead of making her comply with his, or as if she had been unable to keep God's command instead of going along with the serpent's words.

The sentence passed on the serpent, representing the devil

26. The serpent for his part is not questioned, but immediately has sentence passed on him, because he is incapable of confessing to sin, and also has absolutely no possible excuse. It is not here, though, a matter of that condemnation of the devil which is being reserved for the last judgment, referred to by the Lord when he says: *Go into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41); but it is the reason why he is to be shunned by us that is here said to be his punishment. His punishment consists, you see, in his having in his power those who ignore God's commandments. This is in fact clearly hinted at in the very words in which sentence is passed on him; and what makes the punishment all the greater is that he actually rejoices in this oh so unlucky power

of his, he who was accustomed before he fell to enjoy the sublime truth in which he did not stand.³⁶ And that is why even the cattle are ranked above him, not in power but in the way they keep to their nature. They didn't lose any heavenly bliss or blessedness, which they never had in the first place; but they pass their lives according to the nature which they did receive.

So then, this one is told: *Upon your bosom and your belly shall you crawl* (Gn 3:14), something indeed to be observed in snakes, which is now being taken from those visible animals and applied figuratively to this invisible enemy of ours. The word "bosom" signifies pride because that is where the driving force of the spirit resides, while by the word "belly" is signified fleshly desire, because this is perceived as the softer part of the body. And it is because he crawls by means of these vices toward those whom he wishes to deceive that it says: "Upon your bosom and your belly shall you crawl."

The meaning of Genesis 3:14

18, 27. *And earth*, he says, *shall you eat all the days of your life* (Gn 3:14), that is, all the days on which he exercises this power, before he receives that final punishment on the day of judgment; this, after all, appears to be the life he enjoys and boasts about. So then, there are two ways in which we can understand "earth shall you eat." Either it means that those you take in through earthy greed, that is sinners who are signified by the word "earth," will belong to you; or else, more likely, it is the third kind of temptation that is represented by these words, and that is curiosity.³⁷ One who eats earth, you see, penetrates deep and dark places, which are still for all that time-bound and earthly.

28. Enmity though will not be set between him and the man, but between him and the woman. This is surely not because he doesn't tempt men and take them in, is it? It's perfectly obvious that he does. Or is it because he didn't take Adam in but his wife? But that doesn't mean, does it, that he is not the enemy of the man, who was affected by that deceit through his wife—above all because it is here referring to the future: *I will set enmity between you and the woman* (Gn 3:15)? If however it's just that he didn't thereafter take Adam in, then he didn't thereafter take Eve in either.³⁸

³⁶ See Jn 8:44.

³⁷ He means the curiosity that leads people to the practice of divination, and prying into the occult, something he is more inclined to accuse the Neoplatonists of than the Manichees. But the Manichees did, he also says, try to entice people to join them by promising them knowledge of the mysteries of the universe.

³⁸ In this very dense paragraph he is arguing that it is difficult, to say the least, to make sense of any literal, "historical" interpretation of this point. But take it as having a figurative significance, and all becomes clear.

So why then is it stated like this, if not to show clearly that the only way we can be tempted by the devil is through that animal or "soulish" part which the author has shown to exist in every single human being, represented by the likeness or model of a woman, about which we have already had much to say? As for enmity, though, being set between the seed of the devil and the seed of the woman, the seed of the devil stands for his perverted suggestions, while the seed of the woman means the fruit of good works that resist these perverted suggestions. And that is why he looks out for the woman's heel, in order to catch her if unlawful pleasure creeps in; and she looks out for his head, in order to cut him off at the very beginning of his evil persuasive suggestions.

The penalty paid by the woman

19. 29. We come now to the woman's punishment, and find it raises no problem. The pains she has, after all, are manifestly multiplied, not to mention her sighs and tears over the disasters of this life. And while her bringing forth children in pain is something also undergone by the woman we can see, it still draws our attention back to that other one hidden inside each one of us. After all, female animals too bring forth their offspring in pain, and in them this is simply a consequence of their being mortal rather than a punishment for sin; so it can also be the case that in female human beings this is just a consequence of their bodies being mortal. But the severity of the punishment lies in this, that they come to this mortal condition of their bodies from that earlier state of immortality.

There is, all the same, a symbolic significance of great importance³⁹ in this sentence, and that is that restraining the will from any desire of the flesh is always painful to begin with, until it has been drilled into a better habit. When this has occurred, it is as if a child has been born, when, that is, the good habit has disposed one to good works. For this good habit to be born, the bad habit has to be fought against with pain. And then there is what is said after childbirth: *and your turning round shall be toward your man, and he shall lord it over you* (Gn 3:16). Do not most, if not almost all women give birth without their husbands being present, and so in fact they do not turn around toward them after delivery? As for those proud women who in fact lord it over their husbands, do they give up this vice after giving birth and allow their husbands to lord it over them? On the contrary, they assume that becoming mothers has given them a kind of added dignity and frequently become prouder than ever.

So then, what can be the meaning of its adding, *after in pain shall you bring forth children*, the words *and your turning round shall be toward your man, and he will lord it over you*? What else, but that when that part of the soul, which is

39. *Magnum sacramentum*.

taken up with the joys of the flesh, wishes to overcome some bad habit, it experiences difficulty and pain, and in this way brings forth a good habit; and that this now makes it all the more careful and eager to submit to the reason as to its husband; and that now, as though taught a lesson by the pains themselves, it turns around to the reason, and willingly follows its instructions, to avoid again trickling away into some destructive habit? So then, what seem to be curses here are in fact commandments, if we take care not to read what is spiritual in a carnal manner; for *the law, you see, is spiritual* (Rom 7:14).

The penalty paid by the man

20. 30. Then again, what are we to say about this sentence passed on the man himself? Are the wealthy by any chance, who get their living in the easiest way imaginable without ever working on the land, to be thought of as having escaped this punishment? This after all is how it is described: *Accursed shall the earth be to you in all your works, and in your sadness and groaning shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the fodder of your field. In the sweat of your countenance shall you eat your bread, until you turn back into the earth from which you were taken, because earth you are and into earth you shall go* (Gn 3:17-19).

But if anything is certain, it is that nobody may escape this sentence. The very fact, after all, that everyone born in this life finds the search for truth impeded by the perishable body⁴⁰ is what is meant by the toil and grief which the man gets from the earth; and the thorns and thistles are the pricks and scratches of tortuous, intractable problems, or else the anxious thoughts about providing for this life, which frequently choke the word and stop it bearing any fruit in a man, unless they are uprooted and thrown out of God's field, as the Lord says in the gospel.⁴¹

And then it is through these eyes and these ears that we are instructed about the truth itself, and there is the difficulty of withstanding the fancies and notions which enter the soul through these same senses, although it is also through them that instruction about the truth enters in; so in this perplexity, whose countenance will not be sweating so that he may munch his bread?⁴² All this we are going to suffer all the days of our life—of this life, that is, which is going to pass away. And what that man was told, who would soon be cultivating his own field, was that he was to endure all this until he turned back into the earth from which he was taken, that is, until he finished this life. Those of us, you see, who culti-

40. A.: Solomon says, you see: "The body that is perishing weighs down the soul, and the dwelling made of earth oppresses the mind as it thinks about many things" (Wis 9:15).

41. See Mk 4:18-19.

42. That is, in figurative terms, feed upon the truth.

vate this interior field, and get our bread even though with much toil, can suffer such toil to the end of this life; but after this life there is no need to suffer it. Those however who perhaps fail to cultivate the field, and allow it to be overrun with thorns and thistles, have the curse of the earth on all their works in this life, and after this life will have to face either the fires of purgatory or eternal punishment. Thus nobody escapes this sentence; but one has to take steps to see that at least it is only sensed,⁴³ only experienced, in this life alone.

On Adam giving his wife the name of Life, and on God clothing them with tunics of skin

21. 31. Can anyone though help being puzzled when reading that after God had passed these judicial sentences, Adam calls his woman Life, *because she is the mother of all the living* (Gn 3:20), and this after she has earned death and is destined to bear mortal offspring? This surely can only be because Scripture is thinking of how, after she has given birth to her offspring in pain, her turning back to her husband will take place and he will lord it over her. About this offspring we have spoken above.⁴⁴ That, you see, is how there is life in her, and she is the mother of the living, because the life lived in sins is habitually called death in the scriptures, as when the apostle says that *the widow who lives for pleasure is dead* (1 Tm 5:6); and we also find sin itself signified by a dead man, where it says: *Whoever is baptized by a dead man and again touches him, what does he profit from his bath? So too the one who fasts over his sins, and walks away again doing the same things* (Sir 34:25-26). He put a dead man for sin, you see, while treating restraint and fasting from sin as a kind of baptism, that is, as purification from the dead man, and going back again to sinning as again touching the dead man.

So why then should that "soulish" part of us, which ought to submit to reason as to a husband, not be called Life, when through the reason itself it has conceived the burden of right living by the Word of life; and when, after the pains and groans of the labor of self-restraint with which it has withstood an evil habit, it has given birth to a good habit of acting rightly, why should it not be called the mother of the living, that is, of rightly performed actions, the opposite of which are the sins, which we have just maintained can be signified under the name of dead men?

32. This death, you see, which all of us who are born of Adam have owed to nature from the start, and with which God threatened Adam when he gave the command that the fruit of that tree was not to be eaten, so then this death is

43. Word play on *sententiam* and *sentiat*. The whole sentence runs: *lia nemo evadit istam sententiam; sed agendum est ut saltem in hac tantum vita sentiat*.

44. See above, 19.29.

presented under the figure of the skin tunics. They themselves, you see, had made aprons out of fig-leaves for themselves, and God made them tunics of skin; that is, they set their hearts on the pleasures of lying after turning their backs on the face of Truth, and God changed their bodies into this mortal flesh, in which lying hearts are concealed.

It is not to be supposed, after all, that thoughts can remain hidden in celestial bodies in the same way as they do in these present bodies of ours; but just as some at least of our inner thoughts and feelings are revealed by the expression on our faces, and especially by our eyes, so I am convinced that in a similar way no feelings and thoughts of the spirit whatsoever are concealed in the transparent simplicity of heavenly bodies. And so such a dwelling place and such a change into angelic form will be earned by those people who even in this life, when it has been possible for them to conceal lies under tunics of skin, have still hated and avoided such falsehood out of a most ardent love of truth, and who only keep covered up what their listeners are unable to bear;⁴⁵ but lies they never tell at all. The time will come, you see, when nothing will be covered up; *for nothing is hidden which will not be made manifest* (Lk 12:2).

But these two continued to remain in Paradise, even though now under the sentence of God's condemnation, until it came to the tunics of skin, that is, to the mortal condition of this life. What more effective indication, after all, can be given of the death, which we are aware of in the body, than skins which are flayed as a rule from dead cattle? And so when the man went against the commandment and sought to be God, not by lawful imitation but by unlawful pride, he was cast down into the mortal condition of monstrous beasts.

Two ways of taking "Adam has become like one of us"

33. That is why the divine law mocks him from the mouth of God in the following way, mockery by which we in our turn are being advised as much as ever we can to beware of pride.

22. *Behold, Adam has become as if one of us for the knowledge of getting to know good and evil* (Gn 3:22). This ambiguous expression involves a figure of speech,⁴⁶ because "has become as if one of us" can be understood in two ways. In the first way, "one of us" as though he himself has also become God (and that is where the mockery comes in), as you can say "one of the senators," meaning of course "a senator." Or else it is because he would indeed have been a god, though

45. An allusion, it seems, to Jn 16:12: *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*.

46. The ambiguous expression is "as if one of us," and only ambiguous by stretching to the limits a point in the Latin, *tanquam unus ex nobis*, as I hope will become clear shortly. I think the figure of speech it involves (*facit figuram*) must be irony.

by his creator's generosity, not by nature, if he had been willing to remain under his authority, that it says "of us," *ex nobis*, in the way one calls someone an *ex-magistrate* or *ex-governor* who no longer is one.

But to what end has he become as if one of us? "For the knowledge of getting to know good and evil," so that this fellow might learn by experience what the difference is as he undergoes the evil, while God knows it by wisdom; and so that he might also learn by his punishment that there is no escaping the Almighty's authority, which he had refused to submit to by happily consenting to it.

34. *And then, lest Adam stretch out his hand to the tree of life, and live for ever, God sent him away from paradise* (Gn 3:22-23). Notice the nice choice of words, *he sent him away*, not "he shut him out," so that he could be seen to be as good as shoved out by the pressure of his own sins to the only place he was fit for. This is something a bad man often experiences when he begins to live among good people and refuses to change his ways for the better; it is by the pressure of his bad habits and associations that he is driven out of the company of these good people; they don't exclude him against his will, but he is only too glad to be sent on his way by them.

As for its saying, *lest Adam stretch out his hand to the tree of life*, here too we have an ambiguous expression.⁴⁷ This is how we speak, you see, when we say: "This is why I am admonishing you, lest you should do again what you have done," clearly wanting him not to do it; and again we can say: "This is why I am admonishing you, lest there be a chance of your being good"—that is, I am admonishing you because I don't despair of your being able to be good. That is how the apostle is speaking when he says: *Lest there be a chance of God giving them repentance so as to come to know the truth* (2 Tm 2:25).

So then it can appear that the reason the man was sent away to the wearisome labors of this life was in order that at some time or other he might indeed stretch out his hand to the tree of life and live for ever. The stretching out of the hand, surely, is an excellent symbol of the cross, through which eternal life is regained. Though even if we understand *lest he stretch out his hand and live for ever* in that other way, it was an entirely fair punishment that he should be barred from access to wisdom after his sin, until by God's mercy in the course of time the one who was dead might come to life again, and the one who was lost might be found.⁴⁸

47. Again, the ambiguity lies in the Latin, in the negative conjunction *ne*; in English we don't really employ "lest" in the ambiguous way he goes on to illustrate. In the text he proceeds to quote from 2 Timothy the older versions, which stick close to the Greek and Latin, render the *nequando* of the Vulgate, Augustine's *ne forte*, by "if peradventure." Even more than in the previous case of "ambiguity" (previous section and note), we do seem to have the recently retired professor of rhetoric displaying a misplaced professional ingenuity in reading ambiguity into his text.

48. See Lk 15:32, the conclusion of the parable of the prodigal son.

So then, he was sent away from the paradise of delight to work the earth from which he had been taken, that is, to toil in this body and there if he could to save up merit and earn the right to return. He lingered, though, over against Paradise in misery, which is of course "over against" the blessed life of bliss. In my opinion, you see, the blessed life of bliss is signified by the word "paradise."

The Cherubim and the flaming sword

23. 35. *Now God set the Cherubim and the flaming sword which turns, or, in one word, the flaming "whirling"⁴⁹ sword, to guard the way to the tree of life* (Gn 3:24). According to those who have given us translations of the Hebrew words in the scriptures, "Cherubim" means "Fullness of knowledge."⁵⁰ By the flaming, whirling sword, on the other hand, are to be understood temporal punishments and pains, since time goes whirling and spinning along. The reason it is also said to be flaming is that all tribulation burns us up in one way or another. But being burned up to be got rid of is one thing, being burned up to be purified another. Even the apostle says, after all: *Who is being tripped up, and I am not being burned up?* (2 Cor 11:29). But this painful feeling was purifying rather than destroying him, because it was coming from charity. And the trials and tribulations which are suffered by the just belong to this flaming sword, *since gold and silver is tested by fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation* (Sir 2:5). And again: *The potter's vessels are tested by the kiln, and just men by the trial of tribulation* (Sir 27:5). So then, since *whom God loves he disciplines, and gives every son whom he receives a beating* (Heb 12:6), we know, as the apostle says, *that tribulation produces patience, patience through testing* (Rom 5:3-4). Thus we both read and hear, and must certainly believe, that the tree of life is being guarded by fullness of knowledge and the flaming sword. Nobody therefore can get to the tree of life except through these two, that is, through putting up with troubles and having the fullness of knowledge.

36. Yes, but putting up with troubles is something that practically everyone who is stretching out to the tree of life has to undergo in this life, while the fullness of knowledge seems to fall to the lot of far fewer people. So it's as if by no means all who reach the tree of life get there through fullness of knowledge, though all know what it is to put up with troubles, that is the flaming, whirling sword. But let us pay attention to what the apostle says: *But the fullness of the law*

49. *Versatilis*, which of course derives immediately from the verb in the phrase *quae versatur*, "which turns."

50. The same interpretation of the word is given by Augustine in his *Expositions of the Psalms*, on Ps 71(72), and on Ps 98(99); also in his *Questions on Exodus*, II, q.105. It would seem to have been a commonplace among his "learned" contemporaries. There is not the slightest warrant for it in the Hebrew word, on the origin and etymology of which the scholars are not agreed.

is charity (Rom 13:10), and let us see this same love contained in that twin commandment: *You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself; on these two commandments hangs the whole law, and the prophets* (Mt 22:37,39-40). Then we can take it without the slightest hesitation that one does not only come to the tree of life through the flaming, whirling sword, that is, through the endurance of temporal troubles, but also through the fullness of knowledge, that is, through charity; because *if I do not have charity, he says, I am nothing* (1 Cor 13:2).

The story is also prophetic of Christ and the Church

24, 37. But I promised⁵¹ that in this book I would consider first the account of things that have happened, which I think has now been unfolded, and go on to consider next what they prophesy; and this still remains to be considered briefly. I don't reckon, you see, that this will take us very long once we have set up a kind of clear signpost which will direct us through everything else. The apostle, you see, says that there is a great sacrament in the text which says: *For this reason a man shall leave father and mother and stick to his wife; and they shall be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24). He explains what he means by adding: *But I mean in Christ and in the Church* (Eph 5:31-32). So then, what as a matter of history was fulfilled in Adam, as a matter of prophecy signifies Christ, who left his Father when he said: *I came out from the Father and have come into this world* (Jn 16:28). He didn't leave the Father spatially, because God is not contained in a space, nor by turning away from him in sin, in the way apostates leave God; but by appearing among human beings as a man, when *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us* (Jn 1:14). This again doesn't signify any change in the nature of God, but the taking on of the nature of a lower, that is, of a human, person. That is also the force of the statement, *he emptied himself* (Phil 2:7), because he did not show himself to us in the honor and rank he enjoys with the Father, but cosseted our weakness while we did not yet have hearts and minds clean enough to see the Word as God with God. So what else do we mean by saying he left the Father, but that he forbore to appear to us as he is with the Father?

Again, he also left his mother, that is, the Synagogue and her old literal observance of the law, his mother *from the seed of David according to the flesh* (Rom 1:3), and stuck to his wife, that is, to the Church, so that they might be two in one flesh. The apostle after all calls him the head of the Church, and the Church his body.⁵² And so he too was put to sleep, falling asleep in death, in order that his

consort the Church might be formed for him. Of this falling asleep the prophet sings as he says: *I fell asleep and took my rest* (Ps 3:5). So then the Church was formed for him as his consort from his side, that is, from faith in his death and in baptism, because his side was pierced with a lance and poured out blood and water.⁵³ He was made, however, as I have just remarked, *from the seed of David according to the flesh*, as the apostle says, that is, as though from the mud of the earth when there was no man to work on the earth, because no man "worked" on the Virgin of whom Christ was born. *But a spring was coming up from the earth, and was watering all the face of the earth* (Gn 2:6). It is entirely appropriate and right to take the face of the earth, that is, the dignity and worth of the earth, as being the Lord's mother the Virgin Mary, watered by the Holy Spirit, who is given the name of spring and water in the gospel;⁵⁴ so that from that kind of mud, as it were, that man might be made who was set up in paradise to work there and guard it—that is, set up in the will of his Father to fulfill it and keep it.

Heretics, especially Manichees, prophetically signified by the serpent

25, 38. The instruction which he received, after all, we too received in him, because every Christian not inappropriately represents the person and plays the part of Christ, seeing that the Lord says himself: *What you did to one of the least of mine you did to me* (Mt 25:40). And if only we did just enjoy, as he was told to, the fruit of every tree in Paradise, which all together signify spiritual delights (the fruit of the Spirit, as the apostle says, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control), and did not touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil planted in the middle of Paradise, did not want, that is, to be over-proud of our own nature, which as we have already remarked is just a mid-point in the scheme of things! If only, that is, we hadn't been led astray and so learned by bitter experience what the difference is between single-minded Catholic faith and the deceptions of heretics! That, you see, is how we came to distinguish between good and evil. *For there also have to be heresies*, he says, *so that those who are of approved worth among you may show up* (1 Cor 11:19).

For indeed in terms of prophecy that serpent signifies the various heretical poisons, and above all the one of these Manichees, and any others which are opposed to the Old Testament. I am convinced, you see, that nothing is more manifestly foreshadowed in that serpent than this crew—or rather that it is he

51. See II.2.3 above.

52. See Col 1:18.

53. See Jn 19:34. The blood has traditionally been taken to represent the eucharist, and the water baptism, the two sacraments that as it were constitute the Church; but Augustine here seems to take them both as signifying baptism, no doubt having 1 John 5:6 in mind: *This is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ, not in water only but in water and blood.*

54. See Jn 7:37-39; 4:14.

who is to be shunned in them. There are none, you see, who are more boastful and talkative than they are in promising knowledge of good and evil, and presumptuously assuming that they are going to demonstrate this distinction in the human person, as in the tree which was planted in the middle of paradise. And then as for the words, *You shall be like gods* (Gn 3:5), who else say it more often than these people, striving with their proud nonsense to lead others into the same kind of pride, and affirming that the soul is by nature what God is? And who more than these are responsible for the opening of the eyes of the flesh, forsaking as they do the inner light of wisdom, and imposing on their followers the worship of this sun which is reached by the eyes of the body? But as a matter of fact all heretics in general lead people astray with the promise of knowledge, and severely criticize those they find to be simple believers; and because the wares they are hawking are altogether the values of the world and the flesh, it's as if they are striving to bring people to the opening of the eyes of the flesh, in order to blind the inner eye of the heart.

26. But these people even find their own bodies displeasing, not because they bear the punishment of mortality which we earned by sinning, but to the extent of denying that God is the maker of bodies, as if finding their nakedness displeasing when their eyes of flesh were opened.

The Manichees tell lies about Christ and also declare that he told lies himself

39. But nothing more inexorably points to these people and picks them out than the serpent saying: *You will not die the death; for God knew that on the day you eat your eyes will be opened* (Gn 3:4-5). You see, what these people believe about this bit is that the serpent was Christ, and the story they stick to is that it was some god or other of a race of darkness (that's their expression) who gave that command, as though he begrudged human beings the knowledge of good and evil. This opinion, I imagine, gave birth also to the snake people, whatever they are,⁵⁵ who are said to worship the serpent as Christ, and who ignore what the apostle says: *I am afraid that just as the serpent led Eve astray by his cunning, so your good sense too may be corrupted* (2 Cor 11:3). So these then are the ones who, I reckon, were prefigured in this prophecy. Now what is led astray by the words of this serpent is our fleshly desire, and through it Adam is deceived, not Christ but the Christian.

You see, if he were willing to keep God's command, and persevered in living by faith⁵⁶ until he became capable of really understanding the truth, that is, if he

55. Ophites, a group of Gnostics who did identify Christ with the serpent of Genesis, and about whom Augustine would have learned, in all probability, from the handbook *Heresies* of the professional heresy detector of that age, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus.

56. See Rom 1:17. The Christian he has in mind, evidently, is the one who is taken in by the Manichees and goes along with them, as he had done himself not so very long before.

worked in paradise and guarded what he had received, he wouldn't come to that deformed state of mind which would lead him, when displeased with the flesh as with his nakedness, to put together worldly, carnal coverings of lies, like fig-leaves with which to make himself an apron. That after all is what these people do when they tell lies about Christ and declare that he also told lies. And the way they hide themselves from the face of God is by turning away from his truth to their own lies. As the apostle says, *And they turn their ears indeed away from the truth, while they turn towards fables themselves* (2 Tm 4:4).

40. And indeed that serpent, to wit that error of the heretics which tempts the Church, against which that snake charmer, the apostle, sings his spell when he says: *I am afraid that just as the serpent led Eve astray by his cunning, so your good sense too may be corrupted* (2 Cor 11:3), so then that error crawls along on its bosom and belly, and eats earth. The only ones it takes in, you see, are either the proud, who arrogate to themselves a status that is not theirs, and readily come to believe that God most high and the human soul share one and the same nature, or else those tangled up in the desires of the flesh, who are only too happy to hear that whatever they do as they kick over the traces is not being done by themselves but by the race of darkness, or else finally the curious and inquisitive, who are worldly wise and enjoy the taste of earthly things, and go looking for the spiritual with a fleshly eye.⁵⁷

There will be enmity though between this error and the woman, and between its seed and the woman's seed, if she gives birth to children, even though with pain, and turns toward her man, so that he may lord it over her. That, you see, is when the truth can begin to dawn on us that there is not one part of us belonging to God as its author, and another belonging to the race of darkness, as these people say, but rather that both that in us which has the right to govern and that lower element which has to be governed come from God, as the apostle says: *The man indeed ought not to veil his head, as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man; in fact the man was not created for the woman's sake, but the woman for the man's. That is why the woman ought to have a veil over her head, for the sake of the angels. However, neither woman without man nor man without woman in the Lord; for just as the woman was from the man, so is the man through the woman, while all things are from God* (1 Cor 11:7-12).

57. See above, 17.26 for how the serpent's bosom represents the proud and its belly the lascivious; and xviii.27 and note 32 there, for the curious or inquisitive being signified by its eating earth.

Adam's fall and punishment interpreted allegorically

27, 41. Now let Adam get to work in his own field, and understand that the earth is yielding him thorns and thistles as a punishment, not as a mere fact of nature. And let him put this down to a divine judgment, not to heaven knows what race of darkness, because the golden rule of justice is to grant to each what is his own. Let him give the woman heavenly food, which he has received from his head, who is Christ; let him not receive forbidden fruit from her, the deceitful doctrine, that is, of the heretics with its great promise of knowledge, and the disclosure of some marvelous secrets or other, as a kind of seasoning to make the error more attractive—and effective. It is indeed the proud and prying greed of heretics which is crying out in the book of Proverbs under the figure of a woman, and saying: *Whoever is foolish, let him turn aside to me; and inviting in those lacking in sense with the words: Enjoy eating bread in secret, and find stolen water sweet to drink* (Prov 9:16-17).

And when anybody does, for all that, believe all this nonsense, brought to it by a lust for lying which lets him believe that Christ also told lies, it is absolutely unavoidable that by a divine judgment he should also receive a tunic of skin. What is prophetically signified by this, it seems to me, is not the mortality of the body, which is the historical signification we have already dealt with, but the fancies and imaginations drawn in from the senses of the flesh, which in consequence of his flesh-bound lies are imposed as a covering on the liar by a divine law. And in this garb he is sent away from Paradise, that is, from Catholic faith and truth, destined to live over against Paradise, that is to say, to work and speak against the same faith.

But should the time come that he turns back to God through the flaming sword, that is, through the troubles time brings, by acknowledging and grieving for his sins, and no longer blaming them on some extraneous nature (which doesn't exist) but on himself, in order to be worthy of pardon, and also through the fullness of knowledge, which is charity, by loving God who is supreme above all things and never changes, and by loving him with his whole heart and whole soul and whole mind, and by loving his neighbor as himself, then he will come through to the tree of life, and live for ever.

Conclusion: summary answers to Manichee objections

28, 42. So then, what do these people find to criticize in these passages of the Old Testament? Let them interrogate us in their usual manner, and let us give the answers the Lord may be pleased to grant us.

"Why did God make the man," they say, "knowing he was going to sin?"

Because even from a sinner he could produce many good results, allotting him his due place according to the standard of his justice, and because his sin

didn't put any obstacle in God's way, seeing that if he didn't sin, there wouldn't be any death, and that because in fact he did sin, other mortals are set right as a result of his sin. Nothing, after all, is so effective in deterring people from sin as the thought of their imminent death.⁵⁸

"He should have made him," they say, "in such a way that he wouldn't sin."

Well, but that's precisely what he did do; the man was so made, after all, that if he hadn't wanted to, he wouldn't sin.

"The devil," they say, "should not have been given access to the man's woman."

On the contrary, it's she who shouldn't have given the devil access to herself. She was so made, after all, that if she hadn't wanted to she wouldn't have done so.

"The woman," they say, "shouldn't have been made."

That amounts to saying that something good should not have been made, because she too of course is something good, and such a great good that the apostle says she is the glory of the man, and that all things come from God.

Again they say: "Who made the devil?"

He did himself; it is not, you see, by nature but by sinning that he became the devil.⁵⁹

"Well at any rate," they say, "God should not have made him if he knew he was going to sin."

On the contrary, why should he not have made him, when through his justice and providence he uses the devil's malice to set many people right? Or perhaps you haven't heard the apostle Paul saying: *Whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme* (1 Tm 1:20)? And about himself he says: *And lest my head should be swollen by the greatness of the revelations, there was given me a goad of the flesh, an angel of Satan to box my ears* (2 Cor 12:7).

"So then," they say, "the devil is good, because he is useful, eh?"

On the contrary, he is bad insofar as he is the devil. But God is good and almighty, able to bring about much goodness and justice from the devil's malice. The only thing, after all, that is credited to the devil is his own will by which he strives to work evil; God's providence, which makes good use of him, is not to his credit.

58. As Dr. Johnson, I believe, is supposed to have said: "Nothing so concentrates the mind as knowing that you are going to be hanged in the morning."

59. "Devil" from *diabolus*, of which the primary meaning in Greek is "accuser," "prosecutor," "adversary"; and it is an accurate translation of the Hebrew *satan*, as is evident from the first two chapters of the book of Job, where Satan really appears as the public prosecutor in the heavenly court, also combining with that role the work of *agent provocateur*, which makes him in due course the tempter.

The nature of God

29, 43. Finally, what is at issue between the Manichees and ourselves is a question of religion, and *the* religious question is how to think about God in a godly way. Now since we cannot deny that the human race is sunk in the sorry state of sin, *they* say that God's nature is sunk in a sorry state, while *we* deny that, and say that the nature which God made out of nothing is sunk in a sorry state, and has come to this pass, not by being forced into it but through its will to sin. *They* say that God's nature is forced by God himself to repent of sins; *we* deny this, but say instead that the nature which God made out of nothing is obliged after it has sinned to repent of its sins. *They* say that the nature of God receives pardon from God himself; *we* deny this, but say instead that the nature which God made out of nothing, if it turns back to its God from its sins, receives pardon for its sins. *They* say that God's nature is subject to the necessity of change; *we* deny this, but say that the nature which God made out of nothing is changed by its own will. *They* say that God's nature is injured by the sins of others; *we* deny this, but say instead that no nature is harmed by any sins except its own; and we say that God is so good, so just, so immune to harm, that he neither sins, nor does any harm to anyone who has refused to sin, and neither does anyone who has decided to sin do any harm to him.

They say that there is a nature of evil to which God was forced to hand over a part of his own nature to be tortured. *We* say that there is no natural evil, but that all natures are good, and God himself is the supreme nature and all other natures come from him; and all are good insofar as they exist, since God made all things *very good* (Gn 1:31), but ranged them in an order of graded distinctions, so that one is better than another; and in this way the whole universe is completed out of every kind of good thing, and with some of them being perfect, others imperfect, is itself a perfect whole, which God its founder and author does not for a moment cease to administer in a completely just regime. The one who chose to make all things good by his will is not subject to any necessity of evil, seeing that since his will presides over all things, he does not experience anything in any shape or form against his will.

So then, since *they* say all that, and *we* say all this, let everyone choose which side to support. I for my part have been speaking in good faith before God, and so without any love of confrontation, without any wavering over the truth, and without prejudice to any more careful and thorough treatment of the subject, I have set out what seemed to me to be right.

Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis

The Literal Meaning of Genesis

Book I

Genesis 1:1-5: Creation of heaven and earth; the work of the first day

The multiple meanings of scripture

1. I. All divine scripture is twofold, as the Lord points out when he says, *A scribe learned in the kingdom of heaven is like a householder bringing forth from his treasury new things and old* (Mt 13:52), which are also said to be the two testaments. In all the holy books, however, one ought to note what eternal realities are there suggested, what deeds are recounted, what future events foretold, what actions commanded or advised. So then, in accounts of things done, what one asks is whether they are all to be taken as only having a figurative meaning, or whether they are also to be asserted and defended as a faithful account of what actually happened. No Christian, I mean, will have the nerve to say that they should not be taken in a figurative sense, if he pays attention to what the apostle says: *All these things, however, happened among them in figure* (1 Cor 10:11), and to his commending what is written in Genesis, *And they shall be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24), as a great sacrament in Christ and in the Church (Eph 5:32).¹

Genesis 1:1-2: the state of the question

2. So if that text has to be treated in both ways, what is meant, apart from its allegorical significance, by *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1)? Does it mean in the beginning of time, or because it was the first of all things, or in the beginning, which is the Word of God, the only begotten Son? And how could it be shown that God produced changeable and time-bound works without any change in himself? And what may be meant by the name

1. The real twofold quality of scripture, he is saying, is not its obvious division into two testaments, but its all having both a figurative and a literal meaning. His giving priority to the figurative or spiritual meaning is in line with the practice of most of the Fathers, from Origen onward, but is the exact opposite, of course, of contemporary exegetical orthodoxy today—and indeed of the line Augustine is taking in this work.

heaven and earth? Was it the total spiritual and bodily creation that was termed heaven and earth, or only the bodily sort? In that case one would have to understand that in this book he kept quiet about the spiritual kind, and said *heaven and earth* in such a way as intending to signify the whole bodily creation, both the higher and the lower. Or was it the unformed basic material of both kinds that was called heaven and earth; namely, spiritual life as it can be in itself without having turned to the creator—it is by so turning, you see, that it is formed and perfected, while if it does not so turn it is formless, deformed; and bodily being, if it can be understood as lacking every kind of bodily quality, which is manifested in material that has been formed, when there are already various kinds of bodies, perceptible either by sight or by any of the body's senses?²

3. Or is "heaven" to be understood as meaning the spiritual creation, from the moment in which it was made, in all its perfection and everlasting blessedness, while "earth" means bodily material, still unfinished? Because *the earth*, he goes on, *was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss* (Gn 1:2), words in which he seems to indicate the unformed state of bodily being. Or is the unformed state of each kind of being indicated by these subsequent words—of the bodily sort where it says *the earth was invisible and shapeless*, of the spiritual where it says *and there was darkness over the abyss*? In this case we would interpret the dark abyss to mean the nature of life as being unformed unless it turns to the creator, which is the only way it can be formed so as not to be the abyss, and enlightened so as not to be dark. And in what sense does it say, *there was darkness over the abyss*? Is it just because there was no light? If there had been, it would of course have been over it and would as it were have poured over it; this is what happens with the spiritual creation when it turns to the unchangeable and incorporeal light, which God is.

In what way did God "say" things?

2, 4. And in what way did God say, *Let light be made* (Gn 1:3)? Was it in time, or in the eternity of the Word? And if it was in time, then of course it involved change. So how could God be understood to have said this except through some created being? He himself, clearly, is not subject to change. And if it was through a created being that God said *Let light be made*, how can light be the first thing created, if there already was a created being through which God said *Let light be made*? Or is light not the first thing created, because it has already said *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*? And could some voice have been produced in a temporal process involving change through some heavenly created being, to say, *Let light be made*? If that is the case, then it was this bodily

2. The Aristotelian concept of "prime matter."

light that we perceive with our bodily eyes which was made, when God said through a spiritual creature (which God had already made when he made heaven and earth in the beginning), *Let light be made*; said in a way in which through the interior and hidden motion of such a creature the words "Let light be made" could be said by divine inspiration.

5. Or did the voice of God, saying *Let light be made*, also make an audible sound, as did the voice of God when he said, *You are my Son, the beloved* (Mk 1:11); and this too through some bodily creature, which God had made when he made heaven and earth in the beginning, before light had been made, which was then made at the audible utterance of this voice? And if that is the case, what language was this voice speaking when God said *Let light be made*, since there was no diversity of languages yet, something that came about later on at the building of the tower after the flood?³ What was the one and only language in which God spoke the words, "Let light be made"? And who was there, who needed to hear and understand, to whom this sort of utterance would be addressed? Or is this an altogether absurd and literal-minded, fleshly, train of thought and conjecture?

6. So what are we to say, then? Is the voice of God best understood as being the intelligible meaning of the audible utterance, *Let light be made*, and not the audible utterance itself? And the question then arises whether this does not belong to the very nature of his Word, about which it is said, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and it is God that the Word was* (Jn 1:1)? Seeing that it is said about him, *All things were made through him* (Jn 1:3), it is evident enough that light also was made through him, when God said, "Let light be made." If that is the case, then God's saying *Let light be made* is something eternal, because the Word of God, God with God, the only Son of God, is co-eternal with the Father, although when God said this in the eternal Word, a time-bound creature was made. While "when" and "some time" are time words, all the same the time when something should be made is eternal for the Word of God, and it is then made when it is in that Word that it should have been made, in the Word in which there is no "when" nor "some time," because that whole Word is eternal.

Is the light spiritual, corporeal, or both?

3. 7. And what is this light that was made? Something spiritual or something bodily? If something spiritual, you see, it could be the first thing created, which had first been called heaven, when it said, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1), and was now perfected by this utterance; so that the text here,

3. See Gn 11:1-9.

God said, Let light be made; and light was made (Gn 1:3), should be understood as its being converted and enlightened, by its creator calling it back to himself.

8. And why is it put like this: *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*, and not like this: *In the beginning God said, Let heaven and earth be made; and heaven and earth were made*, in the same way as the account of light is given: *God said, Let light be made; and light was made*? Is it that first of all what God made had to be universally embraced and presented under the name of "heaven and earth," and then this had to be followed up piecemeal by how he made it, when it says of things one by one, *God said*; meaning that it was through his Word that he made whatever he did make?

Why God did not say "Let it be made" about the unformed basic material

4. 9. Or is it that when the unformed basic material, whether of spiritual or bodily being, was first being made, it was not appropriate to say *God said, Let it be made*, because it is by the Word, always adhering to the Father, that God eternally says everything, not with the sound of a voice nor with thoughts running through the time which sounds take, but with the light, co-eternal with himself, of the Wisdom he has begotten; and imperfection or incompleteness does not imitate the form of this Word, being unlike that which supremely and originally is, and tending by its very want of form toward nothing? Rather, it is when it turns, everything in the way suited to its kind, to that which truly and always is, to the creator that is to say of its own being, that it really imitates the form of the Word which always and unchangingly adheres to the Father, and receives its own form, and becomes a perfect, complete creature. Accordingly, where scripture states, *God said, Let it be made*, we should understand an incorporeal utterance of God in the substance of his co-eternal Word, calling back to himself the imperfection of the creation, so that it should not be formless, but should be formed, each element on the particular lines which follow in due order.

By so turning back and being formed creation imitates, every element in its own way, God the Word, that is the Son of God who always adheres to the Father in complete likeness and equality of being, by which he and the Father are one;⁴ but it does not imitate this form of the Word if it turns away from the creator and remains formless and imperfect, incomplete. That is why allusion is made to the Son, not because he is the Word but only because he is the beginning, when it says, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1); here he is being suggested as the source of creation still in its formless imperfection. But the Son is being alluded to as being also the Word where the text runs *God said, Let it be made*. Thus his being the beginning implies his being the source of creation as it

4. See Jn 10:30.

comes into being from him while still imperfect, while his being the Word implies his conferring perfection on creation by calling it back to himself, so that it may be given form by adhering to the creator, and by imitating in its own measure the form which adheres eternally and unchangingly to the Father, and which instantly gets from him to be the same thing as he is.⁵

What spiritual formlessness might be, and how it is formed

5. 10. The Son, after all, the Word, does not have an unformed life, seeing that for him not only is it the same thing to be as to live, but to live is for him the same as to live wisely and blessedly. A creature, on the other hand, even a spiritual and intelligent or rational one, which seems to be closer to that Word than others, can have an unformed life, because while for it also to be is the same as to live, to live is not the same as to live wisely and blessedly; if it turns away from the unchangeable Wisdom, after all, it lives foolishly and miserably. It is formed, however, by turning to the unchangeable light of Wisdom, the Word of God; it is to the one, you see, from whom it received existence, just to be and to live anyhow, that it turns in order to live wisely and blessedly. Eternal Wisdom, of course, is the origin or beginning of the intelligent creation; this beginning, while abiding unchangeably in itself, would certainly never cease to speak to the creature for which it is the beginning and summon it by some hidden inspiration it turn to that from which it derived its being, because in no other way could it possibly be formed and perfected. That is why, when he was asked who he was, he replied, *The beginning, because I am also speaking to you* (Jn 8:25).

11. Now what the Son speaks the Father speaks, because when the Father speaks, a Word is uttered which is the Son, with God uttering in an eternal manner, if "manner" it can be called, a co-eternal Word. For in God there is a supreme and holy and just courtesy and a kind of love in his activity which comes not from any need on his part but from generosity. That is why, before scripture came to the text, *God said, Let light be made* (Gn 1:3), it preceded it by saying, *And the Spirit of God was being borne over the water* (Gn 1:2). Now it may have wanted to call by the name of "water" the whole basic material of the bodily creation, to suggest in this way what all things which we can distinguish according to their kind were made and formed from, calling it water because we observe all things on earth to be formed and to grow in their various species from humid matter; or it may have wished to indicate a kind of spiritual life in a fluid, shifting state, as it were, before the form given it by its conversion. In either case, to be sure, the Spirit of God was being borne over it, because whichever it was that he had initiated, ready to be formed and perfected, it was subject to the good

5. The Word being eternally uttered by the Father is the same as the Son being eternally born of the Father, and so being God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.

will of the creator. This means that when God said in his Word, *Let light be made*, and so on, what was made would abide in his good will, that is, would meet with his approval according to the measure of its kind. And thus it is right, because it met with God's approval, with scripture saying, *And light was made; and God saw the light that it was good* (Gn 1:3-4).

How the mystery of the Trinity is hinted at in these verses

6. 12. Just as at the very start of his beginning creation, which was mentioned under the name of "heaven and earth" on account of what was to be completed from it, the "threeness" of the creator is suggested, so too in creation's. Thus when scripture says: *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1), we understand the Father in the word "God" and the Son in the word "beginning"; the beginning, not for the Father but for the creation created at the start through himself, and chiefly for the spiritual, and consequently for the totality of creation; while with scripture saying: *And the Spirit of God was being borne over the water* (Gn 1:2), we recognize the complete indication of the Trinity being converted and perfected in order to be distributed into its various species, the same "threeness" should be suggested, of the Word of God, that is to say, and the Word's begetter, when it says *God said*; and of the holy goodness, by which God is pleased with whatever pleases him on its being perfected in its own small, natural way, when it says, *God saw that it was good*.

7. 13. But why did it first mention creation as incomplete and imperfect, and only mention the Spirit of God after that, with scripture saying: *Now the earth was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss*, and then continuing: *and the Spirit of God was being borne over the water* (Gn 1:2)? Was it because a love that is needy and in want loves in such a way that it is subjected to the things it loves; and so for that reason, when the Spirit of God was to be mentioned, in which his holy benevolence and love is understood, it is said to be borne over what he loves, in case it should be thought that it was out of the compulsion of his needs that God loved the things which were to be made, rather than out of the abundance of his generosity? With this very thing in mind, the apostle is going to say about charity that he will point out *an overwhelming way* (1 Cor 12:31), and in another place he says, *the charity of Christ that overwhelms knowledge* (Eph 3:19).

8. 14. Thus it was that when things also had been perfected and formed from that primal origin, *God saw that it was good*; it was out of the same genial courtesy, after all, that he took pleasure in what had been made, as that it had pleased him that it should be made. There are two things, in fact, on account of which God loves his creation: in order that it should be, and in order that it should abide. So in order that there should be something to abide, *the Spirit of God was being*

borne over the water; while in order that it should abide, *God saw that it was good*. And what was said about light was said about everything else. Some things, you see, abide by soaring over all the whole rolling wheel of time in the widest range of holiness under God; while other things do so according to the limits of their time, and thus it is through things giving way to and taking the place of one another that the beautiful tapestry of the ages is woven.

The question of time; when did God say, Let light be made?

9, 15. So then, as for what God said: *Let light be made; and light was made* (Gn 1:3); did he say it on some day, or before any day? If, you see, he said it in the Word co-eternal with himself, he said it, clearly, in a timeless manner; but if he said it in a time-bound manner, he did not say it in the Word co-eternal with himself, but through some time-bound creation. And in this case light will not be the first thing created, because there was already another thing through which could be said, in time, *Let light be made*. Besides, what is understood to have been made before any day is that about which it says, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1), where by the name of "heaven" is to be understood the spiritual creation already made and formed, as being the heaven of this heaven, which is the highest thing among bodies. Now it was on the second day that the solid structure was made, which again he called "heaven";⁶ while by the name of earth, invisible and shapeless, and by the dark abyss⁷ the incompleteness and lack of perfection of bodily reality was signified, out of which those time-bound things would be made, the first of them being light.

16. How, though, it was possible, through a creature which he made before time, for God to say in time *Let light be made*, it is rather difficult to work out. We do not, after all, accept that it was said with the utterance of a voice, because whatever such a thing as that is, it is certainly corporeal. Or did he make from that primal bodily substance in its incomplete state some corporeal voice with which to utter *Let light be made*? So then, some voice-producing body was created and formed before light. But if that is the case, there was already time for the voice to run through, and for the spaces occupied by the successive syllables to pass along. Now if time was already there before light was made, in what time would the voice have been made with which to utter *Let light be made*: to what day did that time belong? The count, after all, begins with the one day, and that the first, on which light was made.⁸ Or does the whole space of time, on which both the voice-producing body was made through which to utter *Let light be*

made, and on which the light itself was made, belong to that day? But every such voice is produced by the speaker on account of some listener's sense of hearing; this, I mean, has been so made as to perceive vibrations in the air. And so did that, whatever it was, invisible and shapeless matter have a sense of hearing, to which God could thus bellow and say, *Let light be made*? Well then, perish this absurdity from any thoughtful mind!

17. So was there some spiritual but still time-measured movement by which we are to understand that *Let light be made* was said, a movement produced by the eternal God through the co-eternal Word in the spiritual creation, which he had already made when, as it says, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*; produced, that is, in that heaven of heaven? Or is this utterance too to be understood as not only made without any sound but also without any time-measured movement of the spiritual creation, while being somehow or other fixed and impressed on its mind and reason, by the Word, co-eternal with the Father, so that then, following this utterance, that lower, dark and unformed corporeal nature would be set in motion and turned toward the appropriate species, and light would be made?

But this really is problematic; here we have the spiritual creation which in its contemplation of Truth is beyond all time, and God giving an order outside time, and the spiritual creation hearing it outside time, but having these formulae⁹ mentally impressed upon it from God's unchanging Wisdom like so many intelligible utterances, and then transmitting them to lower levels so that time-measured movements should be set up in time-measured things, whether for giving them specific form or for controlling them; how this could happen it is practically impossible to grasp. If, however, light, which was the first thing of which it was said that it should be made, and then it was made, is also to be taken as holding the first place in creation, then it is itself that intellectual, intelligent life, which would be in a formlessly fluid state unless it turned to the creator to be enlightened. But when it did turn to him and was enlightened, then that happened which was said in the Word of God: *Let light be made* (Gn 1:3).

How day number one was spent

10, 18. Nonetheless, if this was said timelessly, because time has no place in the Word, co-eternal with the Father, someone may perhaps wonder whether it also happened timelessly. But how can this be supposed, when after the light was made and divided from the darkness and they were labeled "day" and "night," scripture goes on to say: *And there was made evening, and there was made morning, one day* (Gn 1:5)? From this it appears that this work of God took up

6. See Gn 1:6-8. This is the "bodily heaven," not the spiritual heaven which is above it as its own heaven. For this idea of a "heaven of heaven" see note 19 below.

7. See Gn 1:2.

8. See Gn 1:5.

9. *Rationes* in the Latin; a word that will almost dominate this whole treatise, and for which no single satisfactory translation can be provided.

the space of a day, and when this had been spent like that, evening came on, which is the beginning of the night. And then again when the space of a night had passed, the whole day was completed, so that morning could be made.

19. Indeed now, this really is astonishing: when God said, *Let light be made*, without any spacing of syllables, as an idea of his eternal Word, why it should take such a long time to make light, until the space of a whole day had passed, and evening could be made. Or was the light, perhaps, indeed made instantly, but the whole space of daytime could still be taken up in distinguishing it from the darkness, and giving each of them, once distinguished, their respective labels? It would be astonishing if this too could take God even as long to do as it takes us to say it. The distinction of light and darkness, surely, was *ipso facto* a consequence of the light being made; it could not, after all be light, unless it were distinguished from darkness.

20. As for *God calling the light day and the darkness night*, how long could this have taken, even if he had done it with the sound of a voice, syllable by syllable? No longer, surely, than it takes us to say "Let light be called day and darkness be called night." Unless of course anyone should be so crazy as to assume that because God is greater than everything else, even the fewest syllables uttered by the divine mouth could be spread over a whole day. What it comes to is this, that in fact it was by a word co-eternal with himself, that is with the inner and eternal ideas¹⁰ of unchanging Wisdom, that *God called the light day and the darkness night*. Again, you see, it could be asked, if he did the calling with the words we use, what language he did it in, and what need there was for transient sounds where there was nobody's bodily sense of hearing, and no answer to the question could be found.

21. Or must it be said that as soon as this work of God had been performed, the light remained without night following it until a full day-time period had passed, and that the night which followed the day remained until a full night-time period had passed, and morning could be made of the next day with one day, and that the first, completed? But if I say that, I am afraid I will be laughed at by those who know for certain, and by those who can easily work out, that during the time when it is night with us the presence of light is illuminating those parts of the world past which the sun is returning from its setting to its rising, and that thus during the entire twenty-four hours, while it circles through its whole round, there is always day-time somewhere, night-time somewhere else.

So then, are we really going to station God in some part where evening can be made for him, while the light withdraws from that part to another? For it is also written in the book called Sirach as follows: *And the sun rises, and the sun sets, and leads on to its place*, that is to the place from which it rose. It continues, you

see, and says, *Rising it proceeds thither to the south and circles round to the north* (Sir 1:5-6). So when the southern part of the sky has the sun it is day-time for us, but when in its circuit it reaches the northern part, it is night-time for us; yet that does not mean it is not day-time in the other part where the sun is present—unless maybe our hearts are inclined to accept the poetic fiction, so that we really believe the sun sinks into the sea and rises, well washed, on the other side.¹¹ Though if this were the case, the abyss itself would be lit up by the presence of the sun, and it would be day-time there. I mean, it would be able to illuminate even the waters, seeing that it could not be extinguished by them. But this is a monstrous supposition. Why? Because there was not yet even any sun.

22. Accordingly, if the light that was made on the first day was spiritual, surely it never set, did it, to be succeeded by night? While if it was corporeal, what then is that light which we can no longer see when the sun has set—because there was as yet no moon nor any stars? Or if it is always in the same part of the sky as the sun, not as the light of the sun, but as a kind of companion to it, always joined to it in such a way that it cannot be distinguished and identified apart from it, we come back to the same difficulty in solving this problem, because this light too as the sun's companion circles round in the same way as the sun from its setting to its rising, and is in the other part of the world during the time that this part in which we find ourselves darkens into night. This obliges us to believe—perish the thought!—that God was in one part, a part this light would desert so that evening might be made for him. Or had he, perhaps, made the light in that part of the world in which he was going to make man, and that is why, when the light had departed from that part, evening is said to have been made, even when that light which had left there was in the other part, ready to rise in the morning after completing its round?

The function of the sun on the fourth day

11. 23. So why was the sun made *with authority over the day* (Ps 136:8), *to give light upon the earth* (Gn 1:17), if that light which had also been called "day" had been sufficient for the making of the day? Or was that earlier light illuminating higher regions far from the earth, so that it could not be perceived on earth, and thus it was necessary for the sun to be made, and through its agency for day-time to be manifested to the lower parts of the cosmos? This can also be said, that the brilliance of the day was increased by the addition of the sun, so that a

[1]. Augustine probably had Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 2 in mind, the beginning of which is devoted to myths about the sun. But in the classical myths of the sun that deity (or Titan) traveled in a chariot, drawn by the horses of the sun; and it is these horses that really needed washing in the ocean after their day's work, and received it, after being given an evening feed on some kind of ambrosian hay in the Hesperides, the western islands of the blessed.

[10]. *Rationes* in the Latin.

day less brilliant than it is now may be supposed to have come into being through that light.

Then I know that this also has been said by someone: that first of all the essence of light was introduced in the work of the creator, by the words, *Let light be made; and light was made*; while later on when it talks of the luminous bodies, it relates what was made out of that light in the due order of days, in which it seemed good to the creator that all things should be made. But where this essence of light passed along to when evening was made, so that night in turn might run its course, this person did not say and neither do I think it can easily be ascertained.¹² It can scarcely be supposed, after all, that it was put out so that nocturnal darkness might follow, and then lit again so that morning might be made, before the sun took on this task, which as the same text testifies was made to begin on the fourth day.

How did evening and morning follow each other during the first three days?

12, 24. It is hard to work out and explain on what kind of circuit, before this happened, they could follow each other, those three days and nights of the light which was first made, while it retained its nature, if it is a bodily light that we must understand as being made then. Unless perhaps one were to say that some earthy and watery mass, before these elements were sorted out from each other, which the text tells us happened on the third day, was called darkness by God on account of its grosser thickness which light could not penetrate, or on account of the dense shadow which such a mass would necessarily cast if it was lighted up on the other side. The place, after all, which the mass of any body stops light reaching, is in shadow place lacking the light which would illuminate it unless an intervening body obstructed it; that is all that is meant by "shadow." If the mass of a body casts a shadow big enough to occupy as much space on the earth as daylight occupies on the other side, it is called night. Not any and every darkness, after all, is night; I mean in vast caves too, where light is prevented from breaking through by some obstructive mass of rock, it is certainly pitch dark, because there is no light there, and the whole of that space lacks light. Darkness of that sort, though, has never been called night, but only the sort which covers the part of the earth from which the day has been withdrawn. In the same way not every light is called day—after all, light comes from the moon and the stars and lamps and phosphorescence, and anything that glows—but only that light is called day which comes before night and is followed by it as it bows out itself.

25. But if that primordial light had been poured round the mass of the earth on all sides to cover it all, whether it was stationary or circling round, there would

12. Not only does Augustine not tell us who this person was, but neither do any of his learned editors, neither the Maurists nor their predecessors, nor the editors of the CSEL.

have been no part in which it could let night in to follow it, because it would not itself have withdrawn from anywhere to make room for it. Or was it just made on one side of the earth, so that as it circled round it would allow night from the other side to circle round too in its wake? Since water, you see, was still covering the whole earth, there was nothing to stop the mass of this watery globe from causing day on one side from the presence of light, and night on the other from the absence of light, which would follow round to the first side at the time of evening, while the light sank down to the other side.

As the water under heaven had first covered the whole earth, where did it recede to, for the dry land to appear?

26. So then, where were the waters collected together, if they had previously occupied the whole surface of the earth—those waters, that is to say, which were drawn aside so that the earth could be laid bare, what part were they collected into?¹³ If there was already, you see, a piece of bare earth where they could be collected, the dry land had already appeared, and the abyss did not occupy the whole surface of the earth; but if it had occupied the whole surface, what was the place for the waters to be collected in for the earth to appear as dry? They were not, surely, collected into a pile, as happens on the threshing floor when the harvest that has been threshed is winnowed and then swept into a heap, and so lays bare the place it had been spread over and covered?

Who would ever say such a thing, when they can see the fields of the sea¹⁴ spread out level on all sides, because even when waves raise up what seem like mountains of water, they are smoothed out again the moment the storm abates? And even if some shores are more extensively laid bare by the ebbing tide, it cannot be said that there are no other spaces of land where what has been drawn away from somewhere else can go to, and then return again to the place it had departed from.¹⁵ But since it was quite simply the whole earth that was covered by the surges of the watery element, where would this retreat to in order to lay bare some parts? Or perhaps it was a more rarified water-like mist that was covering all the lands, and this was collected together by being condensed, so that out of many parts it could lay bare those in which the dry land might appear? Though again, the earth too, by subsiding and sinking far and wide, could have provided hollow places to receive the waters flowing together into them in

13. See Gn 1:9.

14. A poetic expression, not exactly quoted, but in all probability derived from Virgil's *Aeneid*, 10.214, which has *campos salis*. But it was a common kind of expression in classical poetic literature.

15. The only sea Augustine had experience of was the Mediterranean, which is almost tideless. But he will have known of course about Atlantic tides beyond the Pillars of Hercules—the straits of Gibraltar.

torrents, and in this way dry land could have appeared in those parts from which the wet had departed.

27. Basic material, however, in which even something as minimally specific as mist has appeared, is not absolutely shapeless and without form.

When had earth and water been created?

13. And therefore the question can still be asked: when did God create these visible species and qualities of the waters and the lands of the earth; I mean, there is no record of them in any of the six days. And so suppose that he did it before any day, according to what is written before these first days are mentioned; *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (Gn 1:1). So we could understand by the word "earth" the earth species already formed and in essence visible, but with the waters manifestly covering all of it. Then we would not think of any formlessness of basic material in the words of scripture which follow: *Now the earth was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss; and the Spirit of God was being borne over the water* (Gn 1:2), but of earth and water without light (which had not yet been made), but established with those qualities we are now so familiar with. So we could take it that the reason the earth was said to be invisible was that being covered with water it could not be seen, even if there had been anyone there to see it, while the reason it was called shapeless was that it had not yet been distinguished from the sea and girded with its shores and embellished with its fruits and animals.

So if that is the case, why were these particular species, which are unquestionably bodily, made before any day? Why does the text not run: "God said, Let the earth be made; and the earth was made," and again, "God said, Let the water be made; and the water was made"? Or both of them together, if they are both contained under what you could call the law of the lowest place: "God said, Let the earth and water¹⁶ be made; and thus it was made"?

14. Why does it not say, when this had been done, "God saw that it was good"?

Why did God not "see that it was good" after creating formless matter, in verse 2?

28. It is, after all, obvious (that everything changeable is given form or shape out of something lacking form or shape) and at the same time Catholic faith prescribes and reason indubitably teaches that there could have been no basic material for any specific natures, unless it came from God the initiator and

16. The CSEL text omits "and water," which is there in the Maurist text—and required by the general sense of the passage. In neither edition is there any note in the apparatus, so I conclude that the CSEL omission is merely the result of a printer's oversight.

creator of all things, both formed and formable, about which one passage of scripture says to him: *You that made the world out of formless matter* (Wis 11:18). It is considerations of this sort, you see, that have convinced me that it was this basic material that was indicated by those words which spiritual foresight adapted even to less quick-witted readers or listeners, and which say before coming to any counting of days, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*, and so on until it comes to *And God said*, so that from there on the order of things given form and shape might follow.

Formless matter prior as a source, but not prior in time, to the things formed out of it

15. 29. It is not because formless matter is prior in time to things formed from it, since they are both created simultaneously together, both the thing made and what it was made out of; but because that which something is made out of is still prior as its source, even if not in time, to what is made from it, that scripture could divide in the time it takes to state them what God did not divide in the time it took to make them. Just as a voice, after all, is the basic material for words, while words are what a voice is formed into, but the speaker does not first give vent to an unformed voice which he can later on gather up and form into words, so too God the creator did not first make formless material and later on form it, on second thoughts as it were, into every kind of nature; no, he created formed and fashioned material. If the question were asked, I mean, whether we make a voice from words or words from a voice, it would not be easy to find anyone so slow of wit as not to answer that it is rather words which are made from a voice. So too, although the speaker makes them both simultaneously, it is clear enough, on a moment's reflection, what he makes out of which.

For this reason, since God made them simultaneously, both the material which he formed and the things into which he formed it, and since both had to be mentioned by scripture and both could not be mentioned simultaneously, can anybody doubt that what something was made out of had rightly to be mentioned before what was made out of it? Because even when we just say "matter" and "form," we understand them as being together simultaneously, and we are unable to state them simultaneously. Now just as it happens in a very short space of time, when we utter these two words, that we utter them one before the other, so too in the longer form of a narrative, one thing had to be mentioned before the other, although God made each of them, as we have said, simultaneously. Thus what came first in the making solely as source comes first also in time in the telling. If two things of which neither is in any way prior to the other cannot be named simultaneously, how much less can their stories be told simultaneously! So then, there can be no doubt at all that this formless basic material, almost the

same as nothingness though it be, was still made by none but God, and was simultaneously created with the things that were formed from it.

30. Let us take it as granted, then, that this formless basic material may be said to be signified by the words, *Now the earth was invisible and shapeless, and there was darkness over the abyss; and the Spirit of God was being borne over the water* (Gn 1:2), and that apart from what is put there about the Spirit of God, we are to understand the other words, while indeed being the names of visible things, as intended to suggest that formlessness as best it could be done to the less quick-witted, because these two elements, earth that is and water, are more manageable than the others in the hands of workmen for making things, and that is why this formlessness was the more suitably suggested by these names.

16 But if this is the most probable interpretation, there was no formed mass there which the light could illuminate on one side and on the other produce darkness, so that night could follow the departing day.

A suggestion that during the first three days night and day mean contraction and emission of light

31. We might, however, wish to understand the emission and contraction of that light as constituting day and night; but if so, we cannot see any reason why it should be done like that—there were no animals yet, after all, for whom this beneficial alternation could be arranged, and for whom, now that they have evolved, we see that it is arranged by the circling of the sun; nor does any example spring to mind which would enable us to accept as in the least likely such an emission and contraction of light for bringing about the alternation of night and day. Yes, the darting out of rays from our eyes is indeed the darting out of a kind of light, and it can be contracted when we fix our gaze on the air that is nearest to our eyes, and emitted when we turn our attention along the same line to things that are further away.¹⁷ Nor does it cease, to be sure, to see things further away when it is contracted, but it certainly sees them more hazily than when the glance is emitted directly at them. But still, the light which is in the sense of the seeing subject is so slight, we are informed, that unless it was assisted by the light outside, we would be able to see nothing; and since it cannot be distinguished from that external light, it is hard, as I said, to find an example by which the emission of light into day and its contraction into night could be demonstrated.

17. The common theory of vision at the time—at least, the one Augustine took for granted—was that it is achieved by the eyes emitting rays which touch the objects seen and then transmit the impression back to the sense of sight: something like the antennae of certain insects—or the headlights of a motor car!

What can evening and morning, night and day, be for spiritual light?

17, 32. But if it was a spiritual light that was made when God said *Let light be made* (Gn 1:3), it is not that true light, co-eternal with the Father, that is to be understood, through which all things were made, and which enlightens every human being,¹⁸ but that about which it could be said: *Before all things there was created wisdom* (Sir 1:4). When that eternal and unchangeable Wisdom, you see, which was begotten, not made, transfers itself into spiritual and rational creatures, as it does into holy souls, so that being thus enlightened they can themselves become sources of light, there is produced in them a kind of infection of shining, glowing intelligence; and this can be taken as made light, made when God said, *Let light be made*, provided there was already a spiritual creation, which was signified by the word “heaven,” where it is written, *In the beginning God made heaven and earth*. This was not a corporeal heaven but the incorporeal heaven of the corporeal heaven,¹⁹ set that is above every kind of body, not by degrees of space, but by the sublimity of its nature. How they could be made simultaneously, however, both what was being enlightened and its actual enlightenment, while being given different times in the narrative, we were explaining a short while ago when dealing with the basic material of things.

33. But on what terms are we to understand the night succeeding this kind of light, so that evening might be made? From what sort of darkness, for that matter, could this sort of light be divided, where scripture says: *And God divided between the light and the darkness* (Gn 1:4)? There were not any sinners and fools already, were there, falling away from the light of truth, between whom and those abiding in the same light God could divide, as between the light and the dark, and by calling the light day and the darkness night could show that he is not the operative cause of sins, but is still in control of them by the appropriate distribution of rewards and punishments? Or is “day” here the name for the whole of time, and is the roll of all the ages included in this word, and is that why it is not called the first day, but one day? *And there was made evening*, you see, it says, *and there was made morning, one day* (Gn 1:5). So if we take it like this, the making of evening would seem to signify the sin of rational creatures, while the making of morning would mean their restoration.

34. But this is an interpretation on the lines of prophetic allegory, which is not what we have undertaken in this work. We undertook, you see, to talk here about the scriptures according to their proper meaning of what actually happened, not according to their riddling, enigmatic reference to future events. So then, with

18. See Jn 1:3,9.

19. He is here echoing the biblical expression “the heaven of heaven” as in Ps 115:16, in the Latin Vulgate: *Caelum caeli Domini*; see also Dt 10:14. He has made the same allusion earlier on, in IX, 15, 17.

reference to the actual making and establishing of specific natures, how can we find any evening and morning in spiritual light?²⁰ Or is the division of the light from the darkness indeed the distinction of the formed from the formless thing, while the calling of them day and night suggests their ordered succession, to indicate that God leaves nothing unordered and unregulated, and that the very formlessness through which things change from species to species by a kind of transition is not something uncatered for, and that the retreats and advances registered in creation, by which time-bound things follow one another in turn, have their contribution to add to the splendor of the universe?²¹ Night, after all, is regulated, ordered darkness.

35. This, though, is the reason why it said "God saw the light that it was good" immediately after the light had been made, when he could have said this after all the things mentioned on this day; that is, after setting out, one by one, *God said, Let light be made; and light was made; and God divided between the light and the darkness; and God called the light day and the darkness he called night*, he could then have said, *And God saw that it was good*, and then added, *And there was made evening, and there was made morning*, as he does in the other works to which he gives names. So the reason he did not do it like that here is that the point of that formlessness being distinguished from the formed reality was to show that this was not the end of its formation, but that there still remained some of it to be formed through the rest of creation, the bodily part now. And so, if it had said *God saw that it was good* after they had been distinguished from each other by that division and by those labels attached to them, we would have taken it to apply to these things done, to which in their own kind there was nothing now to be added. But because light was the only thing God had completely made in this way, *God saw the light*, he says, *that it was good*, and then distinguished it from the darkness by dividing and naming them.

Nor did it then say *God saw that it was good*; the reason, after all, why that formlessness had been separated was so that other things could still be formed from it. As for this sort of night that we are so familiar with—it's the sun's circuit, after all, that brings it on over all lands—it is when it is separated from the day by the distribution of the luminous bodies, it is after that division of day

20. We nowadays would regard such an expression as "spiritual light," and even a more usual expression like "the light of reason," as involving the figurative, or metaphorical (if not enigmatic) use of the word "light." But for Augustine it was within the word's proper range of meaning. If he was here extending that proper range, he was only anticipating, "prefiguring," what modern physicists do, so I was told in an argument I was having with a younger mathematician here. They extend the word "light," in technical use, to cover such phenomena as X-rays, Gamma rays—any rays you like to mention.

21. These meanings suggested for the calling of the light and the darkness day and night hardly seem to apply to the spiritual light which he is here preoccupied with. It is all questions, to be sure, not answers—but a certain mildly regrettable incoherence here in the questions! But perhaps he will go some way to meeting this criticism in the next section.

and night that the text says, *God saw that it was good*. This night, you see, is not some formless substance from which still other things might be formed, but a space full of air which lacks the light of day; and to this night, obviously, there was nothing of its own sort to be added to make it more specially beautiful or distinct. Evening, though, in the whole of those three days before the heavenly bodies were made, is not unreasonably, I think, to be understood as the end of a finished work; while morning on the other hand points to a work that is yet to come.

In what way God works

18. 36. But above all we have to remember, a point we have already made several times, that God does not work by time-measured movements, so to say, of soul or body, as do human beings and angels, but by the eternal and unchanging, stable formulae of his Word, co-eternal with himself, and by a kind of brooding, if I may so put it, of his equally co-eternal Holy Spirit. For what is said here in the Greek and Latin versions about the Spirit of God, that *it was being borne over the water*, according to the Syriac which is a language closely related to Hebrew (this is how a learned Christian Syrian²² is said to have explained the word) is reported to mean not *was being borne over* but *was brooding over the water* in the way birds brood over their eggs,²³ where that warmth of the mother's body in some way also supports the forming of the chicks through a kind of influence of her own kind of love.

And so let us never think in a literal-minded, fleshly way of utterances in time throughout these days of divine works. The reason, I mean to say, why the very Wisdom of God took our weakness upon herself and came to gather the children of Jerusalem under her wings as a hen gathers her chicks was not that we should always remain little children, but that while being babies in malice we should cease to be childish in mind.²⁴

37. And in discussing obscure matters that are far removed from our eyes and our experience, which are patient of various explanations that do not contradict the faith we are imbued with, let us never, if we read anything on them in the divine scriptures, throw ourselves head over heels into the headstrong assertion

22. This was very probably Saint Ephrem, a deacon of the Church of Edessa, who founded a school of theology there, and died in 373.

23. The words I have translated as "brooding" are first the noun *fotus*, and then the verb *fovebat*. These have a much wider range of meaning in Latin, to cover the whole notion of fostering or cherishing; and the primary meaning, indeed, of *fotus* is the application of a *fomentum* or poultice to sores and wounds. So Augustine here says a little more than I translate: "was fostering the water; not as swellings or wounds in the body are fostered by cold or suitably warmed compresses, but as eggs are fostered by birds . . ."

24. See Lk 13:34; 1 Cor 14:20.

of any one of them. Perhaps the truth, emerging from a more thorough discussion of the point, may definitively overturn that opinion, and then we will find ourselves overthrown, championing what is not the cause of the divine scriptures but our own, in such a way that we want it to be that of the scriptures, when we should rather be wanting the cause of the scriptures to be our own.

Augustine's method in this commentary

19. 38. Now with this text, *And God said, Let light be made; and light was made* (Gn 1:3): let us suppose that one person was of the opinion that it was bodily light that was made, and another that it was the spiritual sort. That there is a spiritual light in the spiritual creation is something our faith has no doubts about, but that there is a special celestial or cosmic light, or even one that is above the sky or was there before the sky, which could be followed by night—well, it is not against the faith for just as long as it is not proved with absolute certainty to be untrue. If this does happen, then this is not what divine scripture contained, but what human ignorance had opined.

Should reason, on the other hand, definitively demonstrate that this is true, it will still be uncertain whether it is what the writer wished to be understood by those words of the sacred books, or whether he had in mind something else that is no less true. While if the whole context of the passage proves that he did not have this in mind, that does not mean that what he did wish to be understood by them will be false; no, it will be both true and more worth knowing. If, however, the scriptural context does not tell against the writer having intended this meaning, it still remains to inquire whether he could not also have meant something else. And should we find that he could have done, then it will be uncertain which of them he actually did intend. And it can be held not unreasonably that he intended both meanings, if all the other details lend support to each of them.

39. There is knowledge to be had, after all, about the earth, about the sky, about the other elements of this world, about the movements and revolutions or even the magnitude and distances of the constellations, about the predictable eclipses of moon and sun, about the cycles of years and seasons, about the nature of animals, fruits, stones and everything else of this kind. And it frequently happens that even non-Christians will have knowledge of this sort in a way that they can substantiate with scientific arguments or experiments. Now it is quite disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on one's guard against at all costs, that they should ever hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics, and talking such nonsense that they can scarcely contain their laughter when they see them to be *toto caelo*, as the saying goes, wide of the mark. And what is so vexing is not that misguided people should be laughed at, as that our authors should be assumed by outsiders to have held such views and, to the great detriment of those about whose salvation we are

so concerned, should be written off and consigned to the waste paper basket as so many ignoramuses.

Whenever, you see, they catch out some members of the Christian community making mistakes on a subject which they know inside out, and defending their hollow opinions on the authority of our books, on what grounds are they going to trust those books on the resurrection of the dead and the hope of eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, when they suppose they include any number of mistakes and fallacies on matters which they themselves have been able to master either by experiment or by the surest of calculations? It is impossible to say what trouble and grief such rash, self-assured know-alls cause the more cautious and experienced brothers and sisters. Whenever they find themselves challenged and taken to task for some shaky and false theory of theirs by people who do not recognize the authority of our books, they try to defend what they have aired with the most frivolous temerity and patent falsehood by bringing forward these same sacred books to justify it. Or they even quote from memory many things said in them which they imagine will provide them with valid evidence, *not understanding either what they are saying, or the matters on which they are asserting themselves* (1 Tm 1:7).

Stating all possible meanings by way of questions

20. 40. It is in order to take account of this state of things that I have, to the best of my ability, winkled out and presented a great variety of possible meanings to the words of the book of Genesis which have been darkly expressed in order to put us through our paces. I have avoided affirming anything hastily in a way that would rule out any alternative explanation that may be a better one, so leaving everyone free to choose whichever they can grasp most readily in their turn, and when they cannot understand, let them give honor to God's scripture,²⁵ keeping fear for themselves. But since the words of scripture that we have been dealing with can be explained along so many lines, let those people now restrain themselves, who are so puffed up with their knowledge of secular literature, that they scornfully dismiss as something crude and unrefined these texts which are all expressed in a way designed to nourish devout hearts.²⁶ You could say they are crawling along the ground without wings, and poking fun at the nests of birds that are going to fly.

Some of the weaker brothers and sisters, however, are in danger of going astray more seriously when they hear these godless people holding forth

25. So the Maurists, with the support of most manuscripts, reading *ubi intelligere non potest, scripturae Dei det honorem*. The CSEL text reads . . . *non potest scripturam. Deo det honorem*—where they cannot understand the scripture, let them give honor to God.

26. The sort of person he had been himself before his conversion.

expertly and fluently on the "music of the spheres,"²⁷ or on any questions you care to mention about the elements of this cosmos. They wilt and lose heart, putting these pundits before themselves, and while regarding them as great authorities, they turn back with a weary distaste to the books of salutary godliness, and can scarcely bring themselves to touch the volumes they should be devouring with delight—shrinking from the roughness of the husks of the wheat and eagerly eyeing the flowers of the thistles. After all, they have no time to *be still* (Ps 46:11), and to *see how sweet is the Lord* (Ps 34:8), nor are they *hungry on the sabbath* (Mt 12:1); and that is why they are too lazy to use the authority they have received from the Lord to pluck the ears of wheat and go on rubbing them in their hands until they come to what they can eat.

What have we gotten from his "rubbing the grain in his hands" like this?

21, 41. Someone is going to say, "What about you, with all this rubbing of corn in this essay, how much grain have you extracted? What have you winnowed? Why is practically everything hidden still in a heap of questions? Affirm some of the many meanings you have argued can be understood."

To which I reply that I have happily reached this very food: namely that I have learned that we should not hesitate to give the answers that have to be given, in line with the faith, to people who make every effort to discredit the books our salvation depends on. So we should show that whatever they have been able to demonstrate from reliable sources about the world of nature is not contrary to our literature, while whatever they may have produced from any of their volumes that is contrary to this literature of ours, that is, to the Catholic faith, we must either show with some ease, or else believe without any hesitation, to be entirely false. And we should so hold onto our mediator, *in whom are stored up all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge* (Col 2:3), that we are neither seduced by the chatter of false philosophy, nor frightened out of our wits by the superstitions of false religion.

And when we read in the divine books such a vast array of true meanings,²⁸ which can be extracted from a few words, and which are backed by sound Catholic faith, we should pick above all the one which can certainly be shown to have been held by the author we are reading; while if this is hidden from us, then surely one which the scriptural context does not rule out and which is agreeable to sound faith; but if even the scriptural context cannot be worked out and

assessed, then at least only one which sound faith prescribes. It is one thing, after all, not to be able to work out what the writer is most likely to have meant, quite another to stray from the road sign-posted by godliness. Should each defect be avoided, the reader's work has won its complete reward, while if each cannot be avoided, even though the writer's intention should remain in doubt, it will not be without value to have extracted a sense that accords with sound faith.

27. Literally, "on the numbers of the heavenly bodies"; but I am sure he does not mean the count of heavenly bodies, how many there are—nothing so banal. He means the harmonies of their motions.

28. He actually writes, "when we read the divine books in such a vast array . . ."; I think I am justified in switching the preposition.