

**Aurelii Augustini**

**De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber**

CPL 268<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This translation was made by Isabella Image and released by her into the public domain in 2020. This is revision 4 of the translation, with minor edits by Roger Pearse. The Latin text (PL34, col. 219) may be found online [here](#). Another, very literal, English translation may be found online [here](#). The text may also be found in CSEL 28, p. 457-503.

## AUGUSTINE

### ***The Literal Interpretation of Genesis: Unfinished Book***

[Translated by Isabella Image]

*Augustine attempts to interpret the book of Genesis in light of the science of his day*

#### **Introduction**

**(1.1)** When we deal with the mysteries of Nature (which, we believe, is God Almighty's workmanship), our methodology should be to ask questions rather than to make claims. This is particularly true when we study these mysteries using Scripture, which is divinely authoritative. If we arrogantly make claims based on our questionable, debatable opinions, then it is hard to avoid committing blasphemy; but if we ask questions, our investigation necessarily remains within the bounds of the catholic faith.

A great many heretics interpret divine Scriptures according to their own beliefs in contradiction to catholic teaching; so before I tackle the subject of this book, I must briefly present the catholic faith.

**(1.2)** It is as follows. The Almighty Father God made the whole of creation, and established it through his only-begotten Son (who was his Wisdom and Power, consubstantial and co-eternal with him), and united with the Holy Spirit (who is himself consubstantial and co-eternal with them).

Catholic teaching bids us to call this Trinity one single God, who made and created all things which exist (where they really do exist). Every created being was made by God, not from God's nature, but out of nothing [*ex nihilo*]; this holds whether it is spiritual or bodily (or, to put it more simply in the words of divine Scripture, 'whether invisible or visible'). Creatures have nothing in common with the Trinity, except that they are exactly as the Trinity made them to be. That it is why it is wrong to say or believe that any part of creation shares God's substance or is co-eternal with him.

**(1.3)** Everything which God made is excellent; there is definitely nothing which is evil by nature. Everything called 'evil' is either sin or the punishment for sin. And sin is merely our free will assenting inappropriately, when we incline towards something righteousness forbids and which we could freely abstain from. Put differently, sin is not in things themselves, but in using them the wrong way.

Using things the right way is when the soul remains under God's law and submits to God alone with complete love; and when the soul keeps control over her domain without being possessive or infatuated, i.e. the way God requires it. That way, the soul will keep order extremely smoothly and happily, with no problems or stress.

The punishment of sin is for the soul to be tortured when other things are not under her control, just as she herself is not under God's; things obey the soul when she herself obeys God. Fire is not bad, because it was created by God; but we are fragile and it burns us, due to our sin.

Still, sins can be called 'natural' because we cannot help committing them once sinful free choice in this life has made us fall – until we encounter God's mercy.

**(1.4)** Humankind was restored through Jesus Christ our Lord, when God's unutterable and unchangeable Wisdom deigned to assume an entire human, and be born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the virgin; to be crucified, buried and rise again, and to ascend to heaven (which he had made). He will come to judge the living and the dead at the end of the age, at the fleshly resurrection of the dead which is yet to come. The Holy Spirit is given to those who believe in him. He established Mother Church; she is called 'catholic' [universal] because she is universally perfect, she never falters, and she is scattered throughout the whole world. Previous sins are forgiven to those who repent, and they are promised eternal life and the kingdom of heaven.

### **Interpretations of Scripture**

**(2.5)** As we investigate and debate whatever we can in this book [Genesis], we must do so in keeping with the aforementioned creed.

*In the beginning, God made heaven and earth...* Those who have studied Scripture have handed down four methods of interpretation: according to history, allegory, analogy, and aetiology. I will give the Greek words, and define and explain them in Latin. 'History' means actual deeds (either by God or by men) are described; 'allegory' means that the words are to be understood symbolically; 'analogy' is when parallels between the Old and New Testaments are shown; and 'aetiology' is when the reasons for phrases or facts are given.

### **The beginning (Gen. 1:1)**

**(3.6)** So with this text, *in the beginning God made heaven and earth*, we should ask whether this should only be interpreted in a historical-literal way; whether it also means something symbolic; how it agrees with the Gospel; and why the book starts like this.

Let's start with history. We should ask whether 'in the beginning' refers to the beginning of time, or the beginning of God's Wisdom itself. After all God's Son called himself the 'beginning', when he was asked *Who are you?* and he answered, *I the Beginning, am speaking to you* [Jn. 8:25]. There is a 'Beginning un-begun' and a 'Beginning which had a beginning'. Only the Father is 'Beginning un-begun', and it is our faith that all things come from one sole Beginning. In the Son's case, he is Beginning but he came from the Father.

(Indeed, the first intellectual creature can be called 'beginning' of God's creatures: she is their head [Prov. 8:22]. It is appropriate to call a beginning 'head'; the Apostle used the same ranking system when he said that women are not anyone's head. He said that man is the head of woman, and Christ is the head of man, and God is the head of Christ [1Cor. 11:3], and thus every creature is ranked under God.)

**(3.7)** Does *In the beginning* indicate that heaven and earth were made first? If the angels and all spiritual beings were made first, can't heaven and earth have been included at this first stage? We must believe that angels are part of God's creation too, and that he made

them. In Psalm 148 the Psalmist is including the angels when he says: *He gave the order, and they were made; he commanded and they were created* [Ps. 148:5].

Assuming the angels were made first, then were they made within time; or before all time; or at the start of time?

If they were made within time, then there was a time before any angels existed; and because time too is created, this implies something was created before the angels. If we say they were made at the start of time, and that time began with them, then this disproves the hypothesis that time began when heaven and earth started.

**(3.8)** But if the angels were created before time, then what does this later text mean?: *And God said, let there be heavenly bodies in the vault of heaven to illuminate the earth, and divide night from day, and to indicate times and days and years* [Gen. 1:14]. One could presume time began at that point, when the sky and the luminaries began to run their prescribed orbits. But in that case, days existed before time did! Time arises from the orbit of the luminaries, but Scripture says they were not made until the fourth day.

Was the sequence of so-called 'days' merely a necessary narrative device? That is how divine concepts are introduced to simple mortals: every discussion has to have a beginning, middle and end.

Or does it mean the luminaries were actually created within time? Humans measure time by how long it takes for physical bodies to move. If there were no luminaries moving, then there was no time of this sort; and this is the meaning of 'time' most obvious to humans. Granted, but then we should ask whether time could be measured by the movement of unbodily creatures (like the soul, or the mind itself) rather than in the movement of physical bodies. The mind 'moves', of course, when it thinks, and therefore has different states 'before' and 'after'. This can only be understood as a time interval.

If we accept this, then we can deduce time did exist before the heaven and earth as long as angels were made first. Then there were already creatures with non-bodily movements, which implies time existed. If this logic applies for the human soul (despite it being accustomed to bodily movements due to its bodily senses) then it applies all the more for the angels. But then again, perhaps the angels and higher beings did not exist before heaven and earth?

This is all quite baffling and impossible for humans to understand. But at any rate and whatever the explanation, we must certainly take the following statement on trust even if it is beyond us: every creature had a beginning, and time itself is created and had a beginning, and time is not co-eternal with the Creator.

### **Heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1)**

**(3.9)** The phrase 'heaven and earth' may designate everything created.

It could be that 'heaven' refers to the visible vault of the sky as well as the part of creation encompassing the invisible higher powers, while 'earth' refers to the lower part of the world inhabited by animals.

Alternatively, 'heaven' refers to all the beautiful invisible creatures, and 'earth' of course to all the visible ones; that would be another way that the text *In the beginning God created heaven and earth* can be understood as referring to the whole of creation. Of course, if the invisible part of creation is being called 'heaven' then perhaps it is quite

appropriate to call visible creatures 'earth' to distinguish them. Indeed, the soul is invisible; but even that is called 'earth' when it lusts for visible things or gloats at getting them. As Scripture says, *What do earth and ash have to be proud about?* [Sir. 10:9].

**(3.10)** But we can ask: did the phrase *heaven and earth* refer to everything already marked out and assembled? Or was the writer referring to the shapeless primordial matter, which at God's unarticulated command was later assembled into the present well-arranged forms? (It's true that Scripture tells us *You made the world from shapeless matter* [Wis. 11:18]. But it was still God who created that matter, regardless of what form it took -- because our creed and belief tell us he created everything.)

In that case, 'world' means that he composed and arranged each individual thing that had to be shaped and set apart. So in fact 'heaven and earth' refers to the primordial matter which is the embryo of heaven and earth. The 'heaven and earth' were all muddled and mixed together as it were, ready for the Creator God to shape things out of it.

Everything I've said so far about the phrase *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* is only a hypothesis; it would be arrogant to claim for certain what it truly means.

### **'The earth was invisible' (Gen. 1:2)**

**(4.11)** *Now the earth was invisible and formless, and there was darkness over the abyss; and God's Spirit passed over the waters.*

Heretics who reject the Old Testament tend to throw scorn on this passage, saying "How did God make heaven and earth in the beginning, if the earth already existed!?" They don't realize that this part was put in to explain 'earth' in the previous sentence. This is how we should take it: the 'earth' God 'made' was invisible and shapeless until God himself disentangled it and transformed it from a muddle into an ordered system.

Alternatively, a better way to understand this may be that the same primordial material from the first sentence (there called 'heaven and earth') is mentioned again in the next one. So the sentence *God made heaven and earth* means he made an earth which was *invisible and formless with darkness over the abyss*. In other words, it refers to a muddle of matter, from which the world was created when the two great parts (namely heaven and earth) were separated and configured as they are now. Ordinary people should understand a reference to this jumbled primordial matter whenever words like 'invisible' earth are used, or 'unformed' or 'disordered' or 'unprepared', or 'shadows above the abyss' -- 'abyss' means an immense depth. (Or perhaps it was called 'abyss' because it is impenetrable for anyone to understand, due to being shapeless.)

### **'Darkness above the abyss' (Gen. 1:2)**

**(4.12)** *And there was darkness above the abyss.* Does this mean there was an abyss below and darkness above, like two different places?

Alternatively, since Scripture is still explaining the jumbled matter -- which is called *chaos* in Greek -- does the phrase mean that there was no light yet? If there had been it certainly would have been higher up, to be more obvious and to lighten what was below. In fact, anyone considering carefully what darkness is will realize it is merely the absence of

light; so the phrase *darkness was over the abyss* is the same as saying ‘there was no light over the abyss’. That explains why this primordial matter (which God subsequently disentangled and structured) was called an ‘invisible’ and unformed’ earth, and a ‘depth’ with no light. When it was called ‘heaven and earth’ earlier, this meant the embryo of heaven and earth, as I have already said.

Or again, by ‘heaven and earth’ the writer may have wished to denote creation as a whole, so that he could describe the underlying matter first and then go on to discuss the individual parts.

### **‘Water’ (Gen. 1:2)**

**(4.13)** *And God’s Spirit passed above the water.* It has not yet said that God made the water. Still, we should certainly believe that God made the water, and that it did not exist before he made it. He is the one *from whom and through whom and in whom all things come* [Rom. 11:36], as the Apostle says. So God made the water, and it is a huge mistake to believe otherwise.

But why doesn’t it say that God made the water?

Is water included in the primordial matter which he called ‘heaven and earth’ and ‘invisible unformed earth’ and ‘abyss’? (It might just as well be called ‘earth’ as ‘water’, because at this point earth had not been disentangled and shaped, and neither had anything else.)

But perhaps there is a reason why it was called ‘heaven and earth’ the first time, ‘unformed earth and dark abyss’ the second time, and ‘water’ the third time. The first phrase ‘heaven and earth’ points to the all-encompassing scope of the underlying matter, made of absolutely nothing [*ex nihilo*] for this purpose. The second phrase (‘unformed earth and abyss’) suggests its shapelessness, because earth is the least defined of the elements and reflects light the least. The third phrase suggests the matter when subjected to the Craftsman’s work; water is more pliable than earth, so when worked by Craftsman the matter was called ‘water’ rather than ‘earth’ to suggest it was easy to work and mould.

**(4.14)** Admittedly air is more pliable than water; and indeed we can reasonably assume that ether is even more pliable than air. But ‘air’ and ‘ether’ are less appropriate words to describe matter. These two elements are more active than passive, whereas the reverse is the case for earth and water. This may not be immediately apparent, but it is I think extremely obvious that wind moves water, and occasionally parts of earth too; yet wind is just air moving in ebbs and flows. And air obviously moves water; but it is unclear what moves air, to make it wind. So who would doubt that pliable matter is better called ‘water’ (which is movable) rather than ‘air’ (which moves other things)? To be moved is to undergo an action, but to move something else is to perform an action.

In addition, anything that grows in earth needs water to sprout and thrive; it almost seems as if water is transformed into sprouting plants.

In summary, ‘water’ is a better name for the primordial matter than ‘air’ because it suggests something that the Craftsman could work on, which is pliable and transforms into sprouting bodies. The word ‘air’ only indicates pliability and not the primordial matter’s other properties, so this matter it is better expressed with other terms.

So the whole meaning is as follows: *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* (i.e. primordial matter which could take the form of heaven and earth); and the matter was *invisible and unformed earth* (i.e. it was an unshaped depth with no light); and when the Craftsman worked on it and moulded it, it was called *water* because it yielded to being modelled.

**(4.15)** So with the phrases Scripture uses for this primordial matter, the first suggests the purpose for which it was made; the second its shapelessness; and the third the fact that the Craftsman uses it and works on it. That is why it is first called 'heaven and earth' (because they were made from this matter), secondly 'invisible unformed earth and shadows above the abyss' (i.e. shapeless and without light, which explains why it is 'invisible'), and thirdly 'water' (which the Spirit will work on to give it form and shape).

Thus *God's spirit passed over the water*: we should understand the 'spirit' as doing the crafting and 'water' as the material being crafted, since it is workable.

If we want phrases that describe the same matter in three ways – that it will make the world, is shapeless, and is workable – then the first is well expressed by heaven and earth; the second by darkness, chaos, depth, shadows; and the third by malleability so that the Craftsman's Spirit can pass over it and fashion it.

### **'The Spirit passed' (Gen. 1:2)**

**(4.16)** *And God's Spirit passed over the water*. It did not 'pass over' like oil on water or water on the earth, where the liquid is contained. If physical analogies are to be used, then a better one is that it passed like sunlight or moonlight over the bodies they illuminate. These bodies do not contain the light; the sky contains the light, which 'passes over' the bodies.

Also, we should be careful not to think that God's Spirit 'passed over' the primordial matter like through physical space. Rather, it was like a power that creates and crafts what it passes over, the way a craftsman's intention passes over wood or whatever he is working on – or indeed over his own limbs as he moves them to do the work.

This last simile is better than any other physical one, but it is still poor, indeed almost useless in explaining how God's Spirit 'passes' while fashioning the world-matter. But I can't think of a better or closer analogy for this out of things more or less intelligible to humans. For this kind of reflection we do best to stick to Scripture: *Bless the Lord and exalt him as much as you can; he shall always pass over you* [Sir. 43:30].

All this applies if the 'spirit of God' in this passage means the Holy Spirit, whom we honour as a member of the indescribable and unchangeable Trinity.

**(4.17)** But we could also understand this reference a different way. 'God's spirit' could mean a created thing – the breath of life – which fills this entire visible world and all bodily things, and gives them motion; God Almighty gave it a power to serve him by working in things that reproduce. It is not unreasonable to call this spirit or breath 'God's' because it is even more excellent than any of the luminaries (invisible created things always come before visible ones). After all, what is not God's? He made everything, even the earth itself: *The earth is the Lord's and everything in it* [Ps. 23:1]. The following text embraces the whole cosmos: *For all things are yours, O Lord who loves souls* [Wis. 11:27].



It only works to take 'spirit' this way if the words *In the beginning God made heaven and earth* refer to the visible creation. Then this invisible spirit or breath can be understood as moving over the raw material as it was first fashioned into visible things. But this spirit was itself created – not God, but a nature made and established by God.

However, if we take the word 'water' as denoting *all* creation whether spiritual, animal, or bodily, then the words 'God's spirit' here can only be understood as the unchanging Holy Spirit: it 'passed over' the matter underlying all things which God then made and established.

**(4.18)** There could be a third possibility about this 'spirit' [breath], which is that the word designates the element air; the text thus indicates the four elements of the visible world, namely sky, earth, water, and air. These elements were not yet separated and arranged, but the terminology indicates they would arise from that matter although it was currently unshaped and muddled. The unshaped muddle was described with the words 'shadows' and 'abyss'.

At any rate, whichever of these various theories is correct, we must believe that God created and fashioned all things, whether visible or invisible. He made their natures, but he did not make their faults (which are contrary to nature). There is no creature whatsoever which is not begun and completed in him, in terms of both its species and individual substance.

### **'And God said...' (Gen. 1:3)**

**(5.19)** *God said, Let there be light; and there was light.*

When God said 'let there be light', we should not think of his speech as a sound coming from the lungs or from tongue or teeth. This is a fleshly way of thinking, but *the mind governed by the flesh is death* [Rom. 8:6]. Rather, the words 'let there be light' were spoken without being articulated aloud.

Next, let us ask whether the words were spoken to the Only-Begotten Son, or whether the words were themselves the Only-Begotten Son; after all he is called God's Word, *through whom all things were made* [Jn. 1:2]. At the same time, we should avoid the sacrilege of believing that the Only-Begotten Son God's Word is a sound like the ones we humans articulate. No! God's Word – through whom all things were made – has neither beginning nor end. He was begotten, but had no beginning because he is co-eternal with the Father.

So the phrase 'let there be light' is more likely to have been spoken by the Son than to have been the Son, since it began and then ended. On the other hand, it was spoken without being articulated; we should not imagine something physical, and trouble our devout awareness that this is a spiritual occurrence. It is arrogant and dangerous to believe that anything in God's nature actually begins and ends (however, we must be charitable and excuse fleshly people or small children if they do believe this – as long as they don't remain in error, but grow from there). Whenever God is said to 'begin' or 'stop' something, it should on no account be taken as referring to his own nature but rather to that of his creature, who submits to him admirably.

### **Light (Gen. 1:3)**



**(5.20)** *And God said, Let there be light.*

Does this mean the light which is visible to our bodily eyes, or a hidden one which we can't physically see? And if it is hidden, then is it: physical, spreading through space in the world's higher planes; unbodily, like the one in the soul, which investigates the world through the bodily senses so as to know what to avoid and what to pursue (even animals have this kind); or the higher light which we perceive by contemplation, the beginning of all creation [Prov. 8:22]?

At any rate, we must believe this 'light' was made and created. God's own Wisdom [the Son] is a shining light, but one that was begotten rather than made; otherwise we'd think God had no light before the one he created, which is the one we are now talking about.

**(5.21)** People are often concerned about how there could have been physical light before the sky or its luminaries existed, since these are only mentioned later. As if it were easy – or indeed at all possible – for humans to ascertain whether there was some other light beyond the sky, when it is in different places and scattered through space and surrounds the world! But at any rate, the words 'let there be light' could also include unbodily light – since this book [Genesis] deals with all of creation, not just visible creation. So we don't need to waste any more time on this issue.

Another option is that the light here refers to the angels; people sometimes ask when they were made. If so the mention is somewhat concise, but it is not inappropriate or unsuitable to refer to angels like this.

### **Light and darkness (Gen. 1:4)**

**(5.22)** *God saw that the light was good.* We should not understand this sentence as meaning God had some unexpected pleasure, but that he was pleased with his work. The most helpful way to speak of God is with language humans use amongst themselves, like 'he said, he made, he was pleased'. 'He said' reveals his command; 'he made' reveals his power; 'he was pleased' reveals his goodness. These indescribable things had to be expressed somehow, by one human [the writer] for other humans, so that everyone could benefit from them.

**(5.23)** *And God separated the light from the darkness.* This shows us how easy it was for God to accomplish his work! No-one would think that light was created mixed up with darkness, and needed separating as a subsequent stage. Rather, the act of creating light naturally led to darkness as a separate thing. *For what fellowship does light have with darkness* [2Cor. 6:14]? *God separated light from darkness* inasmuch as he made light, and its absence is called darkness. The relationship between light and darkness is the same as that between clothing and nakedness, or being full and being empty, and other such examples.

**(5.24)** Earlier I discussed various ways of understanding 'light'. The absence of these can be called kinds of 'darkness'.

Firstly, there is the physical light seen by our physical eyes. Examples include light from the sun, moon, stars, and so on; its corresponding darkness is when any physical place has no light.

Secondly, there is a light which animals use for perception and for distinguishing signals which the body sends the mind to be assessed: black and white, melodious and discordant, fragrant and foul-smelling, sweet and bitter, hot and cold, and so on. (The light perceived by the eyes is different from the one which uses the eyes for perception; the former is physical, but the latter is in the mind, even though it uses the body to perceive). The corresponding 'darkness' is a sort of lack of perception or (more accurately) of feeling – an inability to sense, even when objects are present that could be sensed by those who do have the perceptive light. This is not a physical deficiency as with blind or deaf people, since their minds still have the type of light we're currently discussing despite their physical disability. Nor is it like when a sound cannot be heard in the midst of silence, because in this case the mind still has the perceptive light and the physical ability, but does not pick up anything. In these instances, perceptive light is not missing. Rather, it is missing when the mind *cannot* sense – although then it can't be called a 'mind' really, just a living thing like a vine or a tree or any plant, if indeed plants can be said to 'live' in the same sense. (Actually some heretics think, although it is utterly ridiculous, that plants not only have physical senses – namely seeing, hearing, sensing temperature and heat – but even have rational thought and can think like we do! But that's another issue entirely.) Thus lack of perception is the 'darkness' corresponding to the light of perception, and it occurs in living things with no sense faculty.

(If light is defined as something that brings clarity to things, that still applies for this particular light. When we say 'this is clearly a melody, this is clearly sweet, this is clearly cold' or the like, then what makes these clear is a light; it is definitely in the mind, even though it is the body which perceives the sense-objects.)

A third kind of light can be understood in creatures – the one by which we reason. Its corresponding 'darkness' is the lack of reason, like the minds of animals.

**(5.25)** Regardless of the type of light (whether it was in the upper ether, or was the perception-light used by minds, or the reasoning-light possessed by angels and men), this text tells us that light was the very first thing created. We should accept that God distinguished light from darkness by the very act of creating light, since light is one thing and its absence quite another. God decreed this absence should be the 'darkness'.

It does not say anywhere that God created the darkness. God created actual things; he did not create absences, which are part of the nothingness from which the divine Craftsman drew all things. However, although he did not *create* absences, the phrase 'God separated the light from the darkness' teaches us that he did give them a place. God manages and governs everything, even the absence of things!

In singing, there are silent pauses at fixed points; skilled singers place them properly and they contribute to the charm of the whole piece of music, even though they are an *absence* of sound. In painting, shadows help to bring out the highlights, and give pleasure not because they are shadows *per se* but because of the way they are placed. God did not create our faults, but he gave them a place when he condemned sinners and made them suffer what they deserve. This is also illustrated by parable of the sheep put on the right and the goats on the left [Mt. 25:33]. God both created and gave a place to the former; the latter were merely given a place. The righteous he both creates and gives a place to; as for

sinners, he does not create them to be sinners, but merely gives them a place. Of course, when he put the former on the right, and the latter on the left and ordered them into the eternal fire, this illustrates the place they deserve. In conclusion, actual things and natures he both creates and places; he does not however create absences or deficiencies, but only gives them a place.

So he said: 'Let there be light!', and there was light. He did not say 'Let there be darkness', resulting in darkness. God made the former but not the latter; he only gave it a place, when he separated darkness from light. The things he created are beautiful individually; and his placement of things is beautiful as a whole.

### **Day and night (Gen. 1:5)**

**(6.26)** *God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'.* The names 'light' and 'day' refer to the same thing, and the names 'darkness' and 'night' refer to the same thing. We should deduce two names were given so that the thing in question could be designated with either name (obviously). So it says God called the light 'day' but you could just as well say it the other way round: "God called the day 'light', and the night he called 'darkness'".

Someone might ask me: was the light given the name 'day', or was the day given the name 'light'? (Both are certainly names, inasmuch as both are words used to designate things.) Likewise one could ask about the other two terms: was the darkness given the name 'night', or was the night given the name 'darkness'? Scripture settles the matter: clearly, light was given the name 'day' and night was called 'darkness'.

When Scripture says *God made the light and separated the light from the darkness*, the terminology was not yet important. Afterwards the names 'day' and 'night' were given. (Admittedly 'light' and 'darkness' are also names which designate things.) Should we assume that these things could not be designated with their first name, so another was needed?

No; the separation of light and darkness was the reason for this new terminology. Not all light is day, nor is all darkness night. But when light and darkness are separated and put in their respective places alternating with each other, then they are called 'day' and 'night'. The very point of any word, of course, is to distinguish it from other things. (Indeed, the word 'name' [*nomen*] comes from the fact that it 'marks out' things [*notare*], as if with their own 'mark' [*notamen*]; it 'marks out' a thing in the sense that it distinguishes it, and helps anyone mentioning it to identify it.) So perhaps the act of calling the light 'day' and the darkness 'night' itself was the separation of light and darkness: giving them names was the same as allocating them their places.

Another possibility is that the later terms were meant to specify what exactly which light and darkness were being referred to. It's as if Scripture were saying: "God made light; he divided light from darkness; the light in question was the day, and the darkness in question was the night. Don't think that any other type of light or darkness are being referred to here." After all, if every light was 'day' and every darkness could be thought of as 'night' then there would be no need for the statement *God called the light 'day' and the darkness he called 'night'*.

**(6.27)** This begs the question what exactly was meant by 'day' and 'night'. There's no way this could refer to the day which lasts from sunrise to sunset, or to the night which lasts

from sunset until sunrise, since the luminaries in the sky had not yet been created! Or maybe the appropriate time periods could still be called 'days' and 'nights' even when not demarcated by light and darkness?

Alternatively, if 'light' here refers to the light of reason or the light of perception, how does it alternate in the way suggested by the words 'day' and 'night'? Maybe it indicates not what *was* happening but what *could* happen, inasmuch as error can follow reason, and dullness can follow perceptiveness?

### **Evening and morning (Gen. 1:5)**

**(7.28)** *And evening was made, and morning was made: one day.* This is a different kind of day from earlier; this one is a day in the sense as when for example we say that a month has thirty days. This definition of day includes nights, whereas earlier 'day' was the opposite of night. The text suggests that God made day while it was light, so accordingly the text continues by saying *evening was made and morning was made: one day*. This 'one day' is the period from the start of one day until the start of the next, i.e. from daybreak to daybreak; as I mentioned, we include nights when we define days in this way.

But how were evening and morning made? When God made light and *separated light from darkness*, did that take a time span as long as our daylight hours (excluding night time)? But then why does Scripture say: *You can do anything the moment you wish to* [Wis. 12:18], if God needs a period of time to get things done?! Isn't it more likely that God skilfully and rationally accomplished it all, not over some time period, but with the same power he used to create things which we experience as transient while himself remaining anchored!?

When we talk, words pass and others follow. In the art of oratory, on the other hand, the whole speech is present in its entirety, anchored in the orator's mind. Similarly God creates from outside time (since 'he can do anything the moment he wishes to'), but temporal creatures still pursue their business within time. So perhaps the words '*Evening was made and morning was made, one day*' anticipate that this logically should or could be the case, and are not a comment on the time that passed. [The writer of Ecclesiasticus] applied this same logic when contemplating on God's creation while divinely inspired; this is why it says: *The One who dwells in eternity created everything instantaneously* [Sir. 18.1].

In the current book [Genesis] however, the story helpfully proceeds as if God created things in steps, one after the other. We weaker souls cannot take in the process all at once; the narrative is arranged in steps so that we may visualize it as if before our eyes.

### **The vault (firmament) (Gen. 1:6)**

**(8.29)** *And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters, and let it divide the waters from each other." And it was done: and God made the vault, and divided the waters below the vault from the waters above it.*

Are the 'waters' above the vault the same as physical water below the vault? This appears to be the same 'water' which the Spirit passed over, and which we interpreted as

the world's primordial matter. So should we here take it that the vault divided up this 'water', with physical matter below, and spiritual matter above? For what he calls 'vault' here, he later calls 'sky'. But there is no body more noble than the ones in the sky. Bodies on earth and in the sky are completely different [1Cor. 15:40]. And of course, the latter are more noble: they are the most excellent natures that can still be called a physical body.

(There is a possible exception if we count as a 'body' the rational capacity that we use to recognize God and Truth. It would be appropriate for Holy Scripture to call this 'water' because it seems almost material, inasmuch as it may be shaped when we are righteous and sensible, and this gives it an alertness which stabilizes it and prevents it from being volatile. Despite being here on earth this mental capacity is better than the bodies in the sky, because it is incorporeal.)

He called the vault 'sky' ['heaven']; everything there is calm and stable, so logically we can interpret anything below it as more likely to change and disintegrate.

There used to be some who believed that the surface of the sky was made up of actual cold water, until physical matter of this sort was separated into individual forms and designated as 'under the vault'. They tried to prove it from the fact one of the seven planets is slower than the others [Saturn]. It is higher than the others, and is called *Phainōn* in Greek, and takes thirty years to trace its orbit through the zodiac; they claim it is slow because it is closer to the cold waters which are above the sky. I have no idea how they can defend their hypothesis against astronomical experts. One should not arrogantly state theories like this; they should all be researched carefully and sensibly.

### **'And it was done' (Gen. 1:7)**

**(8.30)** *And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters, and let it divide the waters from each other." And it was done...*

After saying 'it was done', why did the writer need to add: *And God made the vault, and divided the water which was below the vault from the water which was above the vault?* Earlier the writer said, *And God said 'Let there be light', and there was light;* but he didn't then add, "And God made light". But here, after he said *God said 'let there be'... and there was...*, he then adds that God did it.

Does this indicate that light should not be thought of as physical, which is why God (by which I mean the Trinity) created it without the intermediary of another creature; whereas the sky's vault, being physical, can be assumed to have received its nature and shape via some spiritual intermediary? Under this theory, as a first stage Truth imprinted the sky's vault onto something spiritual using Reason, and this imprint was then reproduced in the physical realm. That could explain the words, *And God said 'let it happen'... and it was done;* it may have been made first on a rational being, and then that was used to make the physical vault.

**(9.30)** But it also adds: *God made the vault, and divided the waters below the vault from the waters above it.* Does this refer to God working the primordial material himself to make the physical sky? Or was it just for variety that the writer put here something different from before – to avoid the narrative becoming boring? We shouldn't over-analyze the text! Take your pick; but just don't be arrogant and claim you know things you don't. Remember you are only human, and that you only investigate God's handiwork because he lets you.

### **'God saw it was good' (Gen. 1:8)**

**(9.31)** *And God called the vault 'sky'.* I have already discussed the issue of God naming things, and it applies here too: not every vault is the same as the sky.

*And God saw that it was good.* I could just repeat what I said earlier on this phrase, but I realize the narrative comes in a different order. Earlier it says *God saw the light was good*, and then that *God divided the light from the darkness; and God called the light 'day' and the darkness he called 'night'.* But here, the phrase *God saw that it was good* comes \*after\* the statement that vault was made, and was called 'sky'.

Unless the writer is just varying the text to avoid being boring, we must definitely take this in the sense that God 'created everything instantaneously' [Sir. 18:1]. The first time, he saw something was good and then named it; so why does it say here he acted the other way round? The similarity must mean that God works outside time (even though these precise creations are subject to time!) A narrative has to be told in stages with one thing happening and then the next, but God achieved it all instantaneously.

*And there was evening, and there was morning: the second day.* I have dealt with this above, and I believe the same logic holds here too.

### **The appearance of the dry places (Gen. 1:9-10)**

**(10.32)** *And God said, Let the waters under the sky gather together in one mass, and let dry places appear. And it was done.*

This makes it more likely that the 'water' mentioned earlier is the primordial matter, as I thought. If the cosmos was full of real water, where could it gather from, and where would it go? But if the writer used the word 'water' to refer to the muddle of primordial matter, then this 'gathering' must refer to the act of forming it into the physical water which we recognize. And the phrase 'let dry places appear' can be understood as land being formed, to give it the appearance which we recognize. Before it was formed into individual shapes, the primordial matter was called invisible and disordered. So God's words 'Let the water under the sky be gathered' meant the physical matter should be rendered into the substance water that we see.

*In one mass.* The key property of any form is expressed by this word 'one'. Forming something means exactly that it is reduced into a single thing. After all, every form begins with the One who is above all things.

*And let the dry land appear.* In other words 'let it take a visible appearance', distinct from the muddled primordial matter. It makes sense that water 'gathered' so that dry places could appear; in other words, fluid matter is held back in order to reveal things that were hidden.

*And thus it happened.* Perhaps it 'happened' first in the intellectual or rational realm. In this case the subsequent phrase is not superfluous (with the words 'thus it happened' being followed by 'the water gathered together in one mass and the dry land appeared'); rather, it indicates that the physical things were created after rational and spiritual ones.



**(10.33)** *And God called the dry place 'land', and the gathering of water he called 'sea'.* These names are given to help us out. Not all water is sea, and not every dry place is land; so the words were needed to specify which water and which dry place were meant. Further, it is reasonable to suggest that when God named them, this was the same as the very act of distinguishing and shaping them.

*And God saw that it was good.* This phrase comes in the same position as before; so my observations elsewhere on this phrase apply here too.

### **Plants (Gen. 1:11-13)**

**(11.34)** *And God said, Let the earth bring forth different kinds of plants to eat, each bearing seed like it, and fruit trees bearing fruit containing seed like it.*

Earlier the earth and sea were made and named and endorsed (although I have frequently pointed out we should take all this as instantaneous, because God's indescribable actions do not happen at separate points in time).

After this, it does not say straightaway *There was evening, and there was morning, the third day*, as it had for the two previous days. Instead, there is another action: *God said, Let the earth bring forth different kinds of plants to eat, each bearing seed like it, and different kinds of fruit trees bearing fruit containing seed like it.*

Nothing like this was said for the light or vault, for the water or dry part. Light does not propagate, nor is sky born of sky, nor do earth and sea generate other seas and earths to follow after them. But in this case each new generation continues the species of the old one, so it was necessary to say 'each bearing seed like it', and 'different kinds'.

**(11.35)** All these things are connected to the earth by the roots, somehow continuous with the earth while still separate. So I think the narrative means that plants share their nature with earth. The plants were created on the same day as the earth; but still, God spoke a second time to make the earth sprout.

Also, the text again says 'and so it happened', and then after that (following the same rule as previously with this phrase) we are also told that it actually happened; and then again it says, *God saw it was good.* In all, earth and plants are connected by being created on one day, and God's usual statements separate this day from the ones on either side. This was not done for the earth and sea, but I think it was done here to mark plant natures more clearly, in that they sprout and die and thus need to reproduce.

Or alternatively [another reason why God may have given two commands]: earth and sea could be made immediately -- not only their rational, spiritual creation where everything happens instantaneously, but even in their physical activity. But trees and plants could not sprout unless there was already earth for them to sprout in. Is that why God gave two commands -- to distinguish the creation of earth from that of plants, while at the same time they had to be on the same day because plants are continuous with the earth and fixed by the roots?

We should also query why God did not name them. Did he miss this out because there were too many of them to make it practicable? It is better to consider this later, when we discuss the other things that God did not name (unlike the light, the sky, the earth and the sea).

*And there was evening, and there was morning: the third day.*



### **The luminaries (Gen. 1:14-15)**

**(12.36)** *And God said, Let there be luminaries in the sky's vault, and let them illuminate the earth, and separate the day from the night; and let them indicate signs and times, days and years; and let them shine in the sky's vault, and illuminate the earth.*

The words 'let them indicate days' refer to the luminary bodies which were created on the fourth day. So how could three days have passed without them? Why are they needed to indicate days, if days could exist without them?

Was it so that humans could mark the passage of time more easily by the movement of the luminaries?

Or does the count of days and nights serve to distinguish between things and their absence, so 'morning' refers to specific natures God has made and 'evening' refers to their absence? All natures are beautiful and lovely inasmuch as God made them; but they can fail, because they were made from nothing [*ex nihilo*]. If they prosper it is not because of their underlying matter (since they were made from nothing) but because of the Most Highest, who made every species and put them in their place.

**(12.37)** *And God said, Let there be luminaries in the sky's vault to bring illumination. Does this only refer to the fixed stars, or does it include the planets? The 'greater' and 'lesser' luminary [the sun and moon] certainly do not count as fixed. The planets each have their own individual sphere and orbit, so how can they all have been made in the vault?*

Or alternatively: we read in Scripture of sky in the singular and skies in the plural; here 'sky' and 'vault' are singular. So should we take this section as meaning the whole edifice of heaven which contains all the stars? Below it reigns a peaceful atmosphere, pure and calm; and below that again, on our level, rough stormy winds.

*...to illuminate the earth, and to separate day from night...* Surely God has already separated light from darkness, and has already called the light 'day' and the darkness 'night'? So it seems he had already separated day and night! Why does it now say the luminaries were to separate day from night?

Maybe the luminaries separate them now, so that humans can see them using their physical eyes? God did separate day and night before the luminaries' orbits of course, but few humans realize this, if guided by the Holy Spirit and calm logic.

Or alternatively, maybe God earlier separated a different 'day' and 'night': maybe he separated the individual forms he had stamped from the rest of the primordial matter which had not yet been shaped? This is different from the day and night in the current passage, of course: they alternate as the sky rotates, and only exist because the sun rises and sets.

**(13.38)** *...and let them indicate signs and times, days and years.*

I reckon the word 'times' explains the word 'signs'; we should take them as meaning the same thing. Time involves distinct periods but points to a changeless eternity beyond. The writer calls it a 'sign'; in other words time hints at eternity!

He explains 'times' by adding *days and years*. Days occur by the revolution of the fixed stars. The years we know best are expressed as the sun follows its course through the zodiac. The orbit of each planet makes its own year too, although these are not as well

known. Perhaps he does not say 'months' because a month is the moon's year. There are twelve of these to the sun's year (the Greeks call the sun *Phaeton*), and there are thirty sun-years to *Phainōn's* [Saturn's] year. And when all the stars have returned to the same place, then the 'Great Year' will have passed. Many have spoken of it at length [Plato *Timaeus* 39d].

Or maybe *signs* are for showing the true route when navigating ships, but *times* are seasons like spring, summer, autumn and winter (these too change with this cycle of the stars, and each has its place and order)? *Days and years* should still be taken as I already suggested.

**(13.39)** *And let them shine in the sky's vault, and illuminate the earth.* Above it already said: *Let there be luminaries in the sky's vault, to illuminate the earth.* So why was this repeated? For plants it said that they should produce seed to reproduce similar plants of the same species. Maybe it is the opposite here. For the luminaries he says *Let it happen... and let them be....* In other words they do not reproduce, but are themselves what they are.

*And so it happened.* This phrase comes in its usual position.

### **Sun and moon (Gen. 1:16-19)**

**(13.40)** *God made two lights, a greater light to start the day, and a lesser light to start the night, and the stars.*

I shall discuss in a moment what it means to 'start' the day or night. But the extra bit about the stars is unclear: do they also command the night, or not? Some think this means the moon was created as a full moon, because the full moon rises at the start of the night (i.e. straight after the sun has set). But this is ridiculous, because then we are beginning to count half way through the month rather than at the beginning.

Nor is there any validity in the argument that it must have been a full moon because it would have been created complete; it is always complete, but this is only visible to humans when they are facing the part directly opposite the sun. The sun determines what we see. When the moon is below the sun it looks as if it is waning, but it is still a complete moon; it is merely being illuminated from another direction which cannot be seen by those below, i.e. living on earth. This is hard to describe concisely, and needs detailed explanations and diagrams.

**(13.41)** *God placed them in the sky's vault, to give light to the earth.* Earlier it said 'let them be in the vault', so why does it now say, 'God made the luminaries and placed them in the vault'? It's as if they were made elsewhere and put in the vault at a later point, although he had already said that they were there!

Yet again this may suggest that God does not create the way humans do, but it was narrated in the only way possible for humans. In other words, for humans 'making' and 'placing' are different things, but for God they are the same thing: he places when he makes, and makes when he places.

**(13.42)** *And let them rule over the day and night, and separate the day from the night.* Previously it said 'to start the day' and 'to start the night'. This is now explained with the

phrase *Let them rule over the day and night*. So we should understand 'start' as meaning they predominate; after all, in the daytime there is nothing brighter than the sun, and at night nothing is brighter than the moon or stars. This also resolves the ambiguity about the stars: they were placed to 'start the night', i.e. they too predominate at night.

*And God saw that was good*. This in the same position as before.

I should mention of course that God had still not given them names. It could have said 'God called the luminaries 'stars'', but not every luminary is a star.

**(13.43)** *And there was evening, and there was morning: the fourth day*. If you count a day as marked out by sunrise and sunset, this is not the fourth but perhaps the first day! We humans count this as the time it took for the sun to rise (when it was created) and then set (when the other stars were made). But the sun is elsewhere at night, and there is night elsewhere when the sun is with us; once one realizes this, one can track the days of creation in a more profound way.

### **Water (Gen. 1:20-23)**

**(14.44)** *And God said: Let the waters produce living reptiles, and flying creatures above the earth under the sky's vault. And so it happened*. Animals that swim are called 'reptiles' ['crawling creatures'] because they have no legs; or maybe because they crawl under water, on the bottom.

Do we include fish (whether scaly or not) among the flying creatures, since they propel themselves by their wings [fins]? I don't think they can be counted as birds here. In fact, it's a moot point why birds are produced by 'waters' and not 'air'. I can't accept this passage is only talking about water-birds, like diverbirds, ducks, and so on. If the writer only meant these, he would have mentioned other birds elsewhere; and some birds are so far from water that they never even drink.

Perhaps the writer is calling the air nearest to the earth 'water', because of the damp dew on clear nights, and the fact it condenses into clouds. A cloud is just water, as everyone knows if they have travelled through mountain fogs, or through mists in fields. This is precisely the air that birds fly in. They cannot actually fly in the higher, cleaner zone that people refer to as air; it is too thin to bear their weight.

Up there, it is claimed, there are no clouds or turbulence. The summit of Mount Olympus is reportedly higher than the zone of damp air; there is so little wind at that level that religious pilgrims write letters in the dust, and find them unspoiled and intact when they climb the legendary mountain again a year later.

**(14.45)** The phrase 'sky's vault' in divine Scripture can reasonably be taken as including this upper zone, so that the calmest, purest air is part of the vault. In fact the very word 'vault' can symbolize this calm, and most other such things.

I reckon that's why it says in several psalms: *And your truth reaches down to the clouds* [Ps. 35.6; Ps. 56.11]. There is nothing more stable or peaceful than Truth! Clouds on the other hand condense below the calmest zone of air. The Psalmist is speaking metaphorically, but his language is based on parallels with real things; so it is appropriate to symbolize Truth as an unchanging, pure bird in the zone between the sky's summit and the clouds (i.e. the gloomy, turbulent, damp air). It is practical to call this lower air 'water'; so it

is practical to say that birds who fly above the earth but below the sky's vault belong to the 'waters'.

We can also deduce why nothing has been said about how or when air was created: the lower zone of air is included as 'water', and the upper zone as the 'vault', so nothing important has been missed out.

**(14.46)** We took 'let the waters gather' as referring to the primordial muddled matter, and God called this gathering the 'sea'. But someone might object: If this is so, then how do we understand this air made later, which can be called 'water' but is not called 'sea'?!

I suppose the phrase *Let dry places appear* involves not only the earth but also the heavier parts of our air. The earth is illuminated through this air, so we can see it. So this one phrase '*let them appear*' implies everything needed for the dry places to appear: the dry land itself, and the waters exposing it, and the air pouring over it, and the light passing to it through the air from the world's upper zones.

Or maybe the words *let the waters gather* refers to the lower air, because it creates water when it condenses? Perhaps 'gathering waters' and 'sea' merely refer to the condensation of air. Under this theory, any air that did not 'gather' is lighter and floats above; this too is 'water', which can carry birds as they fly. It can be called either lighter water or heavier air. But why does it not say when this was done?

Or maybe it is true what some claim: evaporation of moisture off the sea and earth makes the winds heavier than the fluid air above, so that they can support the flight of birds; but of course this condensed 'water' is lighter than the water we wash with, so that by comparison we experience it as dry, like air from the upper zone. Earth and sea had already been mentioned, so there was no need to speak of what evaporates from them (i.e. the 'waters' used by birds) since we already knew that the cleanest, calmest air belongs to the vault.

**(14.47)** Nothing is said about how springs and rivers were made. Experts in these things say that a fine mist evaporates unseen from the sea as air blows over it, and rises imperceptibly. It is this that condenses into clouds. Next the rain falls on the earth and gathers in hidden cavities; when enough is soaked up, it is forced out through various channels and bursts out in springs – some small, others large enough to create rivers.

They say a proof of this is that if one collects the steam of cooked seafood in a curved pan-lid, then the distilled liquid is sweet to the taste. And it's obvious to just about everyone that springs dry up when there is no rain.

Scripture testifies to it too, when Elijah interceded for rain during a drought. He ordered Elisha to wait for him by the sea while he prayed. When the latter saw a tiny cloud rising up, he told the anxious king that rain was on its way. The king ran away, but the rain soaked him as fled [1Kgs. 18:41-6]. Elsewhere David says: *Lord, you summon the sea-water, and pour it upon the face of the earth* [Am. 5:8, 9:6].

All in all, it would have been superfluous to mention other waters once he had named the sea. This includes those that bring dew, and the lighter ones that make air for birds to fly through, and those of springs and rivers – since the latter evaporate, and in turn the former burst out when rain is absorbed by the earth.

### **'Creeping animals' and 'flying creatures' (Gen. 1:24)**

**(15.48)** *Let the waters produce reptiles, living animals.* What is the point of adding ‘living animals’? All animals are alive! Maybe the writer is trying to emphasize that sentient animals have a more obvious type of life than plants do.

*...and the flying creatures above the earth, below the sky’s vault.* Birds don’t fly in the purest ether, where there are no clouds, so that air clearly belongs to the vault; because it says the birds fly above the earth *below* the sky’s vault.

*And it was done.* This phrase comes in the same position as before. It comes after every section, except for the creation of light at the beginning.

**(15.49)** *And God made great whales and different kinds of creeping animal which the waters produced, and all kinds of winged flying creature.* I have already mentioned that ‘every kind’ refers to creatures which reproduce sexually, although last time it referred to grasses and trees.

*...and all kinds of winged flying creature.* Why does it add ‘winged’? Are there any flying creatures that don’t have wings? (If there are, God certainly made them; but then why doesn’t it say when they were made?) But there isn’t anything that can fly without wings. Even creatures without feathers still have wings, like bats and locusts and flies. The text adds the word ‘winged’ to teach us this is not only about birds. Fish have wings [fins], and can fly ‘above the earth’ while underwater. That is why it does not refer to birds but to flying creatures in general: *winged flying creatures.*

*And God saw it was good.* This should be interpreted in the same way as elsewhere.

### **‘Increase and multiply’ (Gen. 1:22)**

**(15.50)** *And he blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply and fill the waters of the sea; and let the flying creatures multiply above the earth.*

This blessing was intended to make the creatures fertile and produce offspring. They were created fragile and mortal, but by this blessing each species would be preserved through new births. But why didn’t he bless the plants, since they too sprout and die? Is it because they have no senses, and thus certainly no reason?

Perhaps there is a reason why God used the second person at the start of the blessing, so as somehow to command these animals as if they could hear what he was saying: *Increase and multiply, and fill the waters of the sea!* But he does not use the second person at the end of the blessing, which continues: *and let the flying creatures multiply upon earth* (not a command: ‘you flying creatures, multiply!’). Perhaps this indicates that animal perception does not have enough reasoning to understand commands well, unlike humans who can understand and reason.

**(15.51)** *And so it happened.* This should wake up anyone too dull-witted to have realized what kind of day we’re talking about!

God fixed each animal’s pattern of reproduction, and it is amazing how consistent this is across generations: each species has a set number of days for pregnancy or to brood their eggs. This natural law is kept constant by God’s wisdom, which reaches *with power from one end of the earth to the other, and orders all things well* [Wis. 8:1].

Since this is the case, how could they have conceived, become pregnant, given birth, and nourished their young to fill the sea and multiply on the land – all on one day?! After all, we are told '*it happened*' before evening had even arrived!

Without doubt, when it says '*there was evening*' it is referring to unformed matter; when he says '*there was morning*', it refers to the form stamped onto that matter by God's action. This completes the day that has passed after the action takes place. However, God did not say 'let there be evening' or 'let there be morning'. The text is merely referring shorthand to what was created, and the words 'evening' and 'morning' symbolize the matter and form of whatever God has of course already made.

Created things have the fundamental defect that form tends to chaos and to nothingness. If I was right that all this is implied by the word 'night', we should note that night was not made by God but given a place, as indicated above: *God separated the light from the darkness*. So the word 'evening' symbolizes the unformed matter, which is made from nothing [*ex nihilo*] but still exists, and can take on various shapes and forms. We can also take the word 'darkness' as referring to complete nothingness. God did not make it, but in his unspeakable goodness he made from it whatever he thought fit. He made everything out of nothing, which is what makes him Almighty!

**(15.52)** *And there was evening, and there was morning: the fifth day.* After the words *And so it happened*, the writer did not follow his usual practice and add a description of it happening; it would have looked as if were happening twice, since it had already been mentioned.

Moreover the blessing to produce offspring did not create any new beings; God merely preserved the things he had already created, through regeneration.

That is also why it does not say, 'And God saw that it was good'. We already know he was pleased at the newly-created natures, and this section is only about them being preserved through their young. So he did not repeat anything here except the words *and so it happened*, and immediately added the words about the evening and morning. I have already said that these symbolize how the unformed matter was worked and stamped with a form. (Perhaps other scholars can come up with a better or more profound explanation than this.)

### **The beasts of the earth (Gen. 1:24-5)**

**(15.53)** *And God said, Let the earth produce different kinds of living animal: quadrupeds, and serpents, and different kinds of beasts of the earth, and different kinds of livestock. And so it happened.*

Why was the word 'living' added to the word 'animal'? What does 'different kinds' mean? What is meant by the usual ending 'and so it happened'? I discussed these questions earlier; the same answers should be consulted and applied here.

The word 'beast' designates all irrational animals in general, but here we should distinguish the types. We should take 'quadrupeds' as being beasts of burden; 'snakes' refers to all reptiles; '(wild) beasts' refers to untamed quadrupeds; and 'livestock' refers to quadrupeds which do not help humankind by working but still provide some benefit to those who feed them.



**(16.54)** *And God made different kinds of beasts of the earth, and different kinds of livestock, and all kinds of snakes of the earth.*

This sentence starting *And God made* is merely a repetition of the previous one, coming after *And so it happened*. The same rule as above applies. Of course, I think the word 'livestock' includes all quadrupeds which are reared by humans.

*And God saw it was good*. This should be understood in the usual way.

### **'Let us make humankind' (Gen. 1:26-27)**

**(16.55)** *And God said, let us make humankind in our image and likeness.*

We should note here that humans are both linked to and distinguished from other animals. The text says he created humans on the same day as the beasts; all animals of the earth are created at the same time. But humans have superior reason, which is why they are said to be made in God's image and likeness. Hence they are discussed separately, after the words 'God saw it was good' which ended the section about other earthly animals.

**(16.56)** Elsewhere God said 'let there be... and it happened', but here he said 'let us make': we must reflect why. This was another way by which the Holy Spirit wished to indicate that humans have superior natures.

Who was he talking to when he said 'let us make'? To the same One to whom he said 'let it happen'! *All things are made through him, and nothing was made without him* [Jn. 1:3].

So why does he use different words here? I reckon 'Let there be' meant the Word was carrying out the Father's command himself, but 'Let us make' meant they were doing it together. Or alternatively [another explanation]: The Father creates everything through the Son, and Scripture was composed for humans. So did he say 'let us make' to show humans that the Father participates in whatever he has told the Son to do – using their own creation as an example? Elsewhere it says 'let there be ... and it happened', and I've explained that the speech and the action occurred simultaneously; so is it the same here when it says 'Let us make'?

### **Likeness (Gen. 1:26)**

**(16.57)** *And God said, Let us make humans in our image and likeness.*

Every image is 'like' its original, but not everything 'like' something is its image. For example, mirror reflections and paintings are images, so they must be 'like' their originals; but if two humans are like each other, they still cannot be called each other's image (unless one is the other's child). So the word 'image' means it is a copy of something.

But then why is the word 'likeness' used in addition to the word 'image'? As if an image could be unlike! It would have been enough to say 'in our image'. Or is the answer found in the fact that being 'like' something is different to the concept of 'Likeness'? For example, a chaste man is one thing, and Chastity another; a strong man is one thing, and Strength another. Whatever is strong has Strength, and whatever is chaste has Chastity; so whatever is like has Likeness.



Yet a picture of me cannot be called my exact 'Likeness', even if it really resembles me. This Likeness makes things alike, just as Chastity makes things chaste. But Chastity is an abstract concept which doesn't need chaste things; to the contrary, chaste things need Chastity in order to be chaste. God has that Chastity, and also Wisdom. Wisdom is not Wisdom because of wise things, but to the contrary it makes other creatures wise when they access it. So the 'likeness of God', through whom all things were made, is absolute Likeness: it does not need things that are alike, but is itself absolute Likeness.

So all things that God made through his Likeness are themselves like each other.

**(16.58)** Perhaps 'likeness' was added after 'image' as an clarification. It shows that the image was not merely like God (i.e., participating in the concept of likeness) but that the image was itself the absolute Likeness that makes all other things alike. This is similar to the Chastity which makes chaste souls chaste, or the Wisdom which makes wise souls wise, or the Beauty which makes beautiful things beautiful.

If God had only said 'likeness', this would not have indicated that he generated it. If God had only said 'image', we would understand he had generated it but there would be no indication that it was not just 'like' but Likeness itself. We don't say there is anything chaster than Chastity itself, or wiser than Wisdom itself, or more beautiful than Beauty itself. In the same way we don't say anything is more like than Likeness itself; it cannot be conceived of, and cannot occur.

From this we can deduce that the Father is so like his Likeness that he permeates its nature completely and entirely.

**(16.59)** Through God's Likeness all things were made. How far was it involved in creating different species of things? Admittedly this question is far beyond human understanding, but we can still approach an answer by considering that every category and species of thing (whether sentient or rational) is made up of similar individuals formed on a single model.

Rational souls are called 'wise' because of God's wisdom. This label 'wise' is not applicable any further: we do not apply it to any beast, and far less to trees; nor to fire, air, water, or earth (although all these things are certainly manifestations of God's wisdom, insofar as they exist). But when it comes to Likeness, we definitely say stones are like each other, and animals, and humans, and angels.

This is true for individual categories too. Earth is earth, inasmuch as different examples of it are alike. Water -- whatever its form and wherever it is -- is like other cases of it, and cannot be anything but water. Air, however different it is from other things, can under no condition be different from air. Fire, even the tiniest spark of light, is what it is because it is like other examples of it. For every single stone and tree and animal body, we can see that it is only because each specimen is alike that they belong to a generic species, and that they are themselves what they are. A specimen is thought 'fine' if it matches other examples of its species.

And of course similarity leads to happiness for souls. This occurs when a group of souls are similar, and friendship arises through having similar interests. Also, an individual soul cannot be steady unless activities and virtues are harmonized; this is a sign of the happy life.

Of course, all these things demonstrate likeness, but we can't say they are Likeness itself. A species is made up of things similar to each other: each one is what it is, but all contribute to the whole, which God both established and continues to oversee. They were

certainly made this way by God's Likeness [the Word], which is why each one's beauty comes from being like its species. It was God's Likeness who established everything; he is unchanging and undefiled, and surpasses everything!

However, creation *in* God's Likeness refers only to rational beings, nothing else. Everything was created *by* God's Likeness, but not *in* God's Likeness.

**(16.60)** Rational beings on the other hand were created *by* God's Likeness but also *in* his Likeness. No other nature stands between them: the human mind embraces only Truth itself (although it only senses Truth when it is truly pure and blissful). That Truth is called the Father's 'likeness and image' and his 'Wisdom'. So the words 'Let us make humankind in our image and likeness' should be taken as referring to the innermost, most important part of humans: their mind. The value of humans is in this most important feature, the part which distinguishes us from the beasts. All other human features are certainly fine in themselves, but they are shared with the beasts so we should downplay them in humans.

Perhaps there is something to the belief that the human body itself is like God, since humans stand upright to gaze at heaven. Humans are turned to heaven just as the absolute Likeness is turned to his Father, and unlike other animals whose backs are to heaven as they lie flat on their belly. Still, this theory is not entirely satisfactory. Our body is very different from heaven, but the Likeness who is the Son cannot be different in any way from the One he is similar to. Other things are similar within their species while still having differences; but there is nothing different in absolute Likeness.

(All the same, the Father and the Son are still separate. True, the Son is called 'Likeness' to show there is no difference whatsoever between them; but at the same time the word also indicates the Father is not by himself, because he has his Likeness with him.)

### **Likeness: later thoughts (Gen. 1:26)**

*Note: In Retractions 1.18, Augustine tells us he added 16.61-62 at a later date, but still could not bring himself to finish the book beyond this.*

**(16.61)** *And God said, Let us make humankind in our image and likeness.*

What I've already said is enough explain God's words here, that the 'likeness' which God made humans in can be understood as referring to God's own Word, the Onlybegotten Son. It certainly does not mean that humans \*themselves\* are the image and likeness, equal to the Father. (Humans certainly are God's image, as the Apostle Paul clearly indicates when he says, *Man should not cover his head, since he is God's image and glory* [1Cor. 11:7]. But that image was made '*in the image*'; it is not equal and co-eternal with its prototype and never could be, even if it were entirely sinless.)

But we should take God's words in another sense and realize that they were spoken in the plural, not the singular: humans were made in the image not of just the Father, or just the Son, or just the Holy Spirit, but of the Trinity itself. The Trinity is formed in such a way that it is one God; and the one God is formed in a way so as to be Trinity. God did not say to the Son 'Let us make humankind in *your* image', or 'in *my* image', but in the plural: 'in *our* image and likeness'. And given the plural, it would be rash not to include the Holy Spirit! But this plural should be taken as indicating not three gods but One God, which is why Scripture next stated in the singular: 'God made humans in God's image'.

This is so we would not understand God the Father as making humans in the image of Son. The words 'in *our* image' would be false if humans were only made only in the Son's image! No: God spoke the truth when he said 'in our image'. So the words 'God made humans in God's image' mean the image of the Trinity itself.

**(16.62)** Now, the term 'likeness' is not repeated; the text is not 'And God made humans in God's image *and likeness*'. Some people think this is because humans were only made in his 'image', while 'likeness' to him is reserved afterwards for the resurrection of the dead. As if it is possible to be the image of something without being like it! If something is not entirely like its prototype, then obviously it is not an image. However, I am not just relying on common sense here. We should also rely on the authority of the Apostle James; when he spoke about human language he said: *We bless God with it, and we curse humans with it although they are made in God's likeness* [Jas. 3:9].

**\*\* The End \*\***