

Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

BOOK ELEVEN

Chapter 1

Since eternity is Thine, O Lord, dost Thou not know what I am saying to Thee, or dost Thou see what is going on in time, in relation to time? Why, then, do I tell Thee the detailed story of so many things? Certainly, not for Thee to learn them through me, but to arouse my feeling of love toward Thee, and that of those who read these pages, so that we may all say: 'Thou art great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised.'

I have already said it, and I shall say it again: in the love of Thy Love am I doing this. For, while indeed we pray, the Truth Says: 'your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.'³ So, we lay open our feeling of love by confessing to Thee our own miseries and Thy mercies upon us, so that Thou mayest deliver us completely. For, Thou hast started us out, so that we may cease to be wretched in ourselves and that we may become happy in Thee; Thou hast called us, so that we may be poor in spirit, meek, mournful, hungry and thirsty for justice, merciful, pure of heart, and peacemakers.

Behold, I have told Thee many things, to the extent that I could and would, because Thou didst first will that I should confess unto Thee, my Lord God, 'for Thou art good, for Thy mercy endureth for ever.'

Chapter 2

(2) But, when can the voice of my pen be adequate to the task of proclaiming all Thy encouragements, all Thy terrors, consolations, and guidances, whereby Thou hast brought me to the point of preaching Thy Word and administering Thy sacrament to Thy people? And, if I am adequate to the task of setting them forth in orderly detail, then time's drops⁷ are precious to me.

Now, I have for a long time been developing an ardent desire to meditate on Thy Law and to confess to Thee the extent of my knowledge and lack of skill in it, the beginnings of Thy illumination and the things which remain in darkness for me, until my weakness may be engulfed in Thy strength. I do not want the hours to flow away which I find free from the necessary tasks of replenishing the body and of mental attention and service which we owe to men and that which we give even though we do not owe it.

(3) O Lord my God, 'be attentive to my prayer,' and let Thy mercy hear my desire, because it burns with concern, not for myself only, but wishes to be of service in fraternal charity: and Thou dost see in my heart that it is so. May I offer up to Thee the service of

my thought and tongue, and do Thou grant what I may offer to Thee. 'For I am needy and poor,'¹⁰ while 'Thou art rich towards all who call upon Thee,' Thou who, being without care, dost take care of us. From all temerity and all lying, circumcize my lips,¹² internal and external. Let Thy Scriptures be my chaste delights, to the end that I be not deceived in them and that I not deceive others through them. O Lord, listen and be merciful, O Lord my God, Light of the blind and Strength of the weak, and at the same time, Light of those who see and Strength of those who are strong, listen to my soul and hear it crying out from the depths. For, if Thy ears are not present with us even in the depths, where shall we go? To what place shall we cry out?

'Thine is the day, and Thine is the night': at Thy nod, the moments fly away. Be liberal in giving of them the time for our meditations on the secrets of Thy Law and do not close it against those who knock. For, Thou didst not will so many pages of dark secrets¹⁶ to be written in vain; nor are those forests without their stags, taking refuge in them, recovering, walking about and feeding, lying down and ruminating. O Lord, perfect me and reveal those pages to me. Behold, Thy voice is my joy, Thy voice is greater than an abundance of pleasures. Grant what I love, for I do love it. And this love also Thou hast given. Abandon not Thy gifts, nor spurn Thy grass when it is thirsty. Let me confess unto Thee whatever I shall discover in Thy books, and 'may I hear the voice of Thy praise'¹⁸ and drink Thee in and 'consider the wondrous things of Thy law,' from the very beginning, when Thou didst make heaven and earth, unto the perpetual reign of Thy holy city with Thee.

(4) 'O Lord, have mercy on me and hear' my desire. For, I am not thinking of anything on the earth, or of gold, silver, and precious stones, or attractive clothes, or honors, high positions, or pleasures of the flesh, or of what is needful to the body or to this our life of pilgrimage—all which are added to us when we seek Thy kingdom and Thy justice.²¹

See, O my God, whence arises my desire. 'The wicked have told me their pleasures, but not as Thy law,' O Lord. See, it is from this²³ that my desire arises. See, O Father, look and see and approve. May it be pleasing in the sight of Thy mercy for me to find grace before Thee, so that the inner parts of Thy words may be opened unto me as I knock. I beg it through our Lord, Jesus Christ, Thy Son, 'the Man of Thy right hand, the Son of man Whom Thou hast confirmed for Thyself,' as Thy Mediator and ours before Thee, through whom Thou didst seek us out when we were not seeking Thee, but Thou didst seek so that we might seek Thee—Thy Word, through whom Thou hast made all things, including also myself—Thy only Son, through whom Thou hast called unto adoption the society²⁵ of believers, including also myself. I beseech Thee through Him 'Who sits at Thy right hand' and intercedes with Thee for us, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and science. These do I seek in Thy books. Moses wrote about Him:²⁷ He says this Himself; the Truth says this.

Chapter 3

(5) Let me hear and understand how in the beginning Thou didst 'make heaven and earth.' Moses wrote this; he wrote it and went away; he passed hence, from Thee to Thee, and now he is not before me. For, if he were, I should hold him, and beg him, and beseech him through Thee to throw these words open before me. I would offer the ears of my body to the sounds bursting forth from his mouth. If he were to speak in Hebrew, it would impinge upon my sense to no avail, nor would any part of it reach my mind,²⁹ but, if in Latin, I should know what he said. But, from what source would I know whether he told the truth? And, if I did know even this, would I come to know it from him? Inside myself, in fact, inside in the dwelling place of cogitation, truth, which is neither Hebrew, Greek, Latin, nor any foreign language, would say, without the instrumentality of mouth or tongue and without the sound of syllables: 'He tells the truth,' and I would immediately say to that servant of Thine, with confidence in my certainty: 'You are telling the truth.'

So, since I cannot ask this question of Moses, I ask Thee, by whom he was filled with the truths he has told. O Truth, O my God, I beseech Thee, 'spare my sins,' and Thou who hast granted to that servant of Thine to say these things, grant unto me, also, the ability to understand them.

Chapter 4

(6) See, heaven and earth do exist; they cry out that they have been made; for they undergo change and variation. Now, in the case of any being whatever that was not made and yet is, there is nothing in it that was not there before; for this latter is the condition of being changed and varied.

They also cry out that they have not made themselves: 'The reason why we exist is that we have been made; therefore, we did not exist, before we were in being, in such a way that we could have been made by ourselves.' And the voice of the speakers is their own evident appearance.

So, Thou, O Lord, didst make them: Thou who art beautiful, for they are beautiful; Thou who art good, for they are good; Thou who doth exist,³⁴ for they exist, too. Yet, they are not beautiful, they are not good, they do not exist, in the same way as Thou, their Creator; in comparison with Thee, they are neither beautiful, nor good, nor do they even exist. We know this, thanks to Thee, yet our knowledge, in comparison with Thy knowledge, is but ignorance.

Chapter 5

(7) Now, how didst Thou make heaven and earth, and what was the mechanism of such a great working of Thine? For, it was not like a human artificer, who forms one body from another, by taking thought within his soul—which is capable of imposing any form which it discerns in its very nature with its inner eyes (and how would it be capable of this, unless Thou hadst made it so?)—and who then imposes the form on something already existing and is in possession of being, for instance, on earth, on stone, on wood, on gold, or anything whatever of that sort. Where would these things come from, if Thou hadst not created them? It is Thou who didst make a body for the artisan, a mind which controls his members, a matter from which he makes anything, a talent whereby to grasp his art and see within what he may make externally, a bodily sense as a medium through which he may project his artefact from mind to matter and bring back a report of what has been made to the mind, so that he may consult the truth presiding within himself as to whether it has been well made.

All these things praise Thee as the Creator of all. But, how dost Thou make them? How, my God, didst Thou make heaven and earth? Certainly, Thou didst not make heaven and earth, in the heavens, or on the earth, nor yet in the air, or upon the waters, since these also belong to heaven and earth. Nor didst Thou make the whole world in the whole world, because there was no place where it might be made, before it was made to exist. Nor didst Thou hold anything in Thy hand from which to make heaven and earth, for, from where would that matter, not made by Thee, have come to Thee, wherefrom Thou mightest make something? For, what exists which does not depend on the fact that Thou art? And so, Thou didst ‘speak and they were made,’³⁷ and in Thy Word didst Thou make them.

Chapter 6

(8) But, how didst Thou speak? Was it in the same way that a voice was produced from the heavens, saying: “This is my beloved Son?” That voice was produced and then was completed; it began and it ended. The syllables sounded and then they passed away; the second followed the first, the third followed the second, and so on in order, until the last syllable followed the rest; then, silence followed the last. From this it is clear and evident that the movement of a creature³⁹ produced it, in obedience to Thy eternal will, but itself in the temporal order. And the external ear reported these words of Thine, which were made for time, to the prudently reasoning mind whose internal ear is attuned to Thy eternal Word. But this mind compared these words which sound in time with Thy Word, eternal in its silence, and it proclaimed: ‘It is different; it is far different. These words are far below me; they do not even exist, for they are fleeting and transitory: “But the Word of My God endureth above me forever.”’⁴¹

So, if Thou didst say by means of sounding and transitory words that heaven and earth were to come into being, and in that way made heaven and earth, there was already a corporeal creature existing before heaven and earth, and that voice took its temporal course through the temporal movements of that creature. Now, there was no body existing before heaven and earth, or, if there were, then certainly Thou hadst made it, without a transitory voice whereby to make a transitory voice by which Thou mightest say that heaven and earth were to come into being. For, whatever that thing might be, from which such a voice might be produced, it would not have existed at all unless it had been made by Thee. What Word, then, didst Thou use to create that body whereby those words might be produced?

Chapter 7

(9) And so, Thou dost call upon us to understand the Word which is God along with Thee, O God, which is spoken sempiternally, and in which all things are said sempiternally. For there is no ending in Its speech, in the sense that one thing has been said, and then another is said, so that all could be said; rather, all are together and in eternity. Otherwise, it is already time, and change, and not true eternity, or true immortality.

This I know, O my God, and 'I give thanks.' I know and I confess unto Thee, O Lord, and whoever is not unthankful for the assured Truth knows it along with me and blesses Thee. We do know, O Lord, we know that in so far as anything which was in existence stops existing, and anything which was not in existence starts existing, to that extent does it die or come into being. And so, no part of Thy Word ceases, or takes the place of another, for It is indeed immortal⁴⁴ and eternal. And so it is by the Word, co-eternal with Thee, that Thou dost say, at once and eternally, what Thou dost say, and whatever Thou dost say that it is to be made is made. Nor dost Thou make in any other way than by saying; yet, all the things which Thou dost make by saying do not come into being at once and eternally.

Chapter 8

(10) Why, I entreat Thee, O Lord my God? I see it to some extent, but I do not know how to express it, unless it be that everything which begins to be, or ceases to be, begins and ceases to be at that very time at which it is known in the Eternal Reason that it should begin or cease, while in It nothing either begins or ceases. For, It is Thy Word which is also the Beginning, for so does He speak to us. Thus, in the Gospel, He spoke through the flesh and this was conveyed by external sounds to the ears of men, that it

might be believed and sought within, and discovered in the eternal Truth, in which the good and only Teacher⁴⁷ teaches all His disciples.

There do I hear Thy voice, O Lord, as of one speaking to me, because He who teaches us does speak to us, but he who does not teach us does not really speak to us, even if he does speak. Now, then, who teaches us, except the stable Truth? Because, even when we are admonished by mutable creation, we are brought to the stable Truth, where we truly learn, as we ‘stand and listen to Him and rejoice exceedingly at the voice of the Bridegroom,’ restoring ourselves to the Source whence we came. And so He is the Principle, for, unless He remained, there would be nothing to return to, when we wander off in error. But, when we return from error it is certainly by acquiring knowledge that we return; now, in order that we may know, He teaches us, for He is the Principle and He speaks to us.

Chapter 9

(11) In this Principle, O God, hast Thou made heaven and earth in Thy Word, in Thy Son, in Thy Power, in Thy Wisdom, in Thy Truth—speaking in a wondrous way and making in a wondrous way. Who will understand it? Who will give an account of it? What is that Light which shines intermittently within me and pierces my heart without any wound? I am moved to feel both terror and ardor: I feel terror in so far as I am unlike it, ardor in so far as I am like it. Wisdom, it is Wisdom Itself which comes at times to enlighten me, cutting through my beclouded darkness which again covers me up, because I am weakened by that cloud and by the piling up of my punishments. Thus is my strength wasted away in insufficiency, so that I cannot bear my good, until Thou, O Lord, ‘Who forgiveth all my iniquities, wilt even heal all my diseases, for Thou also shalt redeem my life from destruction, and shalt crown me with compassion and mercy and shalt satisfy my desire with good things, because my youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s.’⁵¹ ‘For in hope were we saved,’ and for Thy promises ‘we wait with patience.’ Let him who can, hear Thee discoursing within him! I myself cry out in confidence arising from Thy oracle: ‘How magnified are Thy works, O Lord; Thou hast made all things in wisdom!’⁵³ This Wisdom is the Principle and in this Beginning hast Thou made heaven and earth.

Chapter 10

(12) Now, are those people not full of the ‘old Enemy’⁵⁶ who ask us; ‘What did God do before He made heaven and earth?’ ‘For, if He were idle,’ they say, ‘and did not work, why did He not remain so, always and forever, just as before He had abstained constantly

from working? For, if any new motion sprang up in God, and a new will to establish the world of creatures, which He had never before established, how, then, is it a true eternity when a will-act, which did not exist, arises? The will of God is not a creature, but is prior to creation, since nothing would be created if the will of the Creator did not precede it. So, His will pertains to the very substance of God. And if anything arose in the substance of God, which did not exist before, that substance is not truthfully called eternal. But, if God's will that creation should exist were eternal, why, then, is creation not also eternal?

Chapter 11

(13) Those who say these things do not understand Thee as yet, O Wisdom of God, Light of minds; they do not yet understand how things are done, which are done through Thee and in Thee. They try to get the taste of eternal things, but their heart still flutters in the past and future fluctuations of things and is still vain.⁵⁹

Who will hold it and keep it still, so that it may stand for a little while and catch for a moment the splendor of eternity which stands still forever, and compare this with temporal moments which never stand still, and see that it is incomparable. It may see, too, that a long time cannot become long, except by virtue of many passing motions which cannot be prolonged together; while in eternity nothing passes away, but the whole is present. Now, no part of time is wholly present. So, it may see that every part of the past is forced out by the future, and every part of the future follows upon the past, and every past and future moment is created and flows from That which is the everlasting Present? Who will hold the heart of man, that it may stand and see how eternity, as it stands still and is neither past nor future, determines future and past times?

Is my hand capable of this, or can the 'hand' of my mouth do such a great task by means of words?

Chapter 12

(14) Here is my answer to him who says: 'What did God do before He made heaven and earth?'

I do not give that answer which some man is said to have offered as a jest, evading the force of the question: 'He was making hell ready,' he said, 'for those who pry into these deep questions!' It is one thing to see; quite another thing to laugh. This is not my answer. Now, I should much prefer to reply: 'I do not know,' when I really do not know, than [to accept] the answer which gives occasion to ridicule a man who asked a profound question and commendation of one who gave a false answer.

But, I say that Thou, our God, art the Creator of every creature, and, if every creature be understood under the name, heaven and earth, then I make bold to say this: before God made heaven and earth, He did not make anything. For, if He made anything, what did He make, except a creature? And I wish I knew every useful thing I yearn to know as well as I know that no creature was made before any creature was made.

Chapter 13

(15) But, if any flighty mind is wandering backwards through images of different periods of time, and if he is amazed that Thou, the all-powerful, all-creating and all-sustaining God, the Artificer of heaven and earth, desisted throughout uncountable ages, from so great a work, before making it, then let him wake up and pay attention, for he is amazed at falsities.

Indeed, how could uncountable ages pass by, which Thou hadst not made, when Thou art the Author and Creator of all ages? Or, what periods of time existed, which were not established by Thee? Or, how could they have passed away, if they never existed?

Therefore, since Thou art the Maker of all periods of time, if there were any time before Thou madest heaven and earth, why is it said that Thou didst rest from work? For, Thou hadst made time itself, and no periods of time could pass by, before Thou madest the periods of time. If, on the contrary, there was no time before heaven and earth, why the question: What didst Thou make 'then'? For, there was no 'then' when there was no time.

(16) Nor dost Thou precede in time the periods of time. Rather, Thou dost precede all past periods, in the sublimity of an ever-present eternity, and Thou dost extend beyond all future periods because they are yet to be, and, when they come, they will be past periods; 'but Thou art always the Selfsame, and Thy years shall not fail.'⁶⁶ Thy years do not come and go; while these years of ours do come and go, in order that they all may come. All Thy years stand together, for they stand still, nor are those going away cut off by those coming, for they do not pass away, but these years of ours shall all be when they are all no more. Thy years are but one day, and Thy day is not a daily recurrent, but today; Thy present day does not give place to tomorrow, nor, indeed, does it take the place of yesterday. Thy present day is eternity; so, Thou didst generate a co-eternal Being, to whom Thou didst say: 'This day have I begotten Thee.'⁶⁹ Thou hast made all periods of time and Thou art before all periods of time, and there never was a time when time did not exist.

Chapter 14

(17) So, at no time hadst Thou not made anything, for Thou hadst made time itself. And no periods of time are co-eternal with Thee, for Thou dost abide, but they, if they abided, would not be periods of time.

For, what is time? Who can explain it easily and briefly? Who can grasp this, even in cogitation, so as to offer a verbal explanation of it? Yet, what do we mention, in speaking, more familiarly and knowingly than time? And we certainly understand it when we talk about it; we even understand it when we hear another person speaking about it.

What, then, is time? If no one asks me, I know; but, if I want to explain it to a questioner, I do not know. Yet, I say with confidence that I know that, if nothing passed away, there would be no past time; if nothing were coming, there would be no future time; and if nothing were existing, there would be no present time.

Then, how do those two periods of time, the past and the future, exist, when the past is already not existing, and the future does not yet exist? And again, the present would not pass away into the past, if it were always present; indeed, it would not be time but eternity. So, if the present, in order to be time, must be such that it passes over into the past, then, how can we say that it *is*; for, the sole reason for its existence is the fact that it will stop being, that is to say, can we not truly say that time *is*, only because it inclines not to be?

Chapter 15

(18) Still, we speak of a long time and a short time, and we only say this of the past or future. For instance, we call a hundred years ago a long past time, and, likewise, a hundred years ahead a long future time. But, we say, for example, that ten days ago is a short past time, and ten days hence is a short future. But, how is something long or short which does not exist? For, the past does not now exist and the future does not yet exist. So, let us not say: it *is* long; rather, let us say of past time: it *was* long; and of the future: it *will be* long.

My Lord, my Light, will not Thy Truth here also make sport of man? For, was that past time long, in the sense that it was long when already past, or when it was still present? Of course, it could have been long only at the time when that existed which was capable of being long, but as past, it was already not existing; hence, it could not be long, for it was wholly non-existent.

So, let us not say past time was long; for, we will discover nothing which could have been long, since, from the fact that it is past, it does not exist. Rather, let us say: 'That present time was long,' for, when it was present, it was long. For, it had not yet passed away into non-existence, and so there was something which could be long. But, once it passed away, it also ceased immediately to be long, for it ceased to be.

(19) Let us see, then, O human soul, whether present time can be long; for the ability to perceive periods of time, and to measure them, has been given thee. What wilt thou answer me?

Is a hundred present years a long time? First of all, see whether there can be a hundred present years. If the first of these years is going on, it is present, but ninety-nine are still in the future, and so they do not yet exist. But, if the second year is going on, one is already past, another is present, and the rest are in the future. And this is so, no matter which of the intervening years of this century we take to be present: the preceding years will be past, the succeeding ones future. For that reason, there cannot be a hundred present years.

Now, see whether even the one which is going on may itself be present. If, now, the first month in it is going on, the rest are future; if the second is, then the first is now past and the rest do not yet exist. Therefore, the year which is now going on is not present as a whole, and, if it is not present as a whole, then the year is not present. For, a year is twelve months, and whatever one of these months is now going on, that one is present; the rest are either past or future. Yet, neither is the month which is now going on present, but one day: if the first, the rest are future; if the last, the rest are past; if any intermediate one, it is between the past and future ones.

(20) See how the present time, which we found the only one worthy of being called long, has been contracted to scarcely the extent of one day. But, let us look at this carefully, for not even one day is present as a whole. It is made up of all twenty-four hours of night and day. The first of these regards the rest as future, the last one regards them as past; and the intermediate ones are, to those preceding, as to the past; to those coming after, as to the future. And this one hour itself goes on by means of fleeting little parts: whatever part of it has flown by is the past; whatever remains to it is the future. If one can conceive any part of time which could not be divided into even the most minute moments, then, that alone is what may be called the present; and this flies over from the future into the past so quickly that it does not extend over the slightest instant. For, if it has any extension, it is divided into past and future. But, the present has no length.

Where, then, is the time which we may call long? Is it the future? In fact, we do not say: it is long, for it does not yet exist, so as to be long; rather, we say: it will be long. When will it be so? For, if at a certain instant when it will be still the future, then it will not be long, because that which is capable of being long does not yet exist. But, if it will be long at the instant when it will just start to exist, as something from the non-existent future, and will have become the present, in order that it be something that could be long—then, in our remarks above, present time cries out that it cannot be long!

(21) Nevertheless, O Lord, we do perceive intervals of time; we compare them among themselves, and we say that some are longer and others shorter. We even measure how much longer or shorter one period of time is than another; we can answer that this period is double or triple, while that is single, that is, just as long as another. But, we measure periods of time as they are passing by; we do this measuring at the time of sense perception. So, who can measure the past periods which are already out of existence, or the future ones which do not yet exist—unless, perhaps, someone is going to dare to say that the non-existent can be measured? Therefore, while time is passing into the past, it can be perceived and measured; but, when it has passed away, it cannot, for it does not exist.

Chapter 17

(22) I am looking for information, O Father, not making an affirmation: O my God, counsel me and rule me.

Who is there who will tell me that there are not three periods of time (just as we learned when children and as we have taught the children): past, present and future, but that there is only the present because the other two do not exist? Or, do they also exist, but, when the present comes out of the future, does it proceed from something secret, and, when the past comes about from the present, does it recede into something hidden? Indeed, where have the people who have foretold the future seen those things, if they are not yet in existence? For, what does not exist cannot be seen. And those who tell about past events would certainly not tell the truth, if they did not see these things with their mind. And if these were not in existence, they could not be seen at all. Therefore, both future things and past things do exist.

Chapter 18

(23) Permit me, O Lord, to seek further information; 'O my Hope,' let not my effort be confounded.

If future and past things exist, I would like to know where they are. And, if that is impossible for me, at least I do know that, wherever they are, they are not there as future or past things, but as present. For, if they are there also as future things, they are not yet there; and, if they are there as past things, they are already not there. So, wherever they are, whatever they are, they do not exist unless as present things. Yet, when past things are recounted as true, they are brought forth from memory, not as the actual things which went on in the past, but as words formed from images of these things; and these things have left their traces, as it were, in the mind while passing through sense

perception. In fact, my boyhood, which is not now in existence, is in past time, which does not now exist; but, when I recall and tell about it, I see its image in present time, for it is still in my memory.

Whether the same explanation also may be given for the prediction of things so that presently existing images of things which do not yet exist are perceived beforehand, I confess, O my God, that I do not know. This I know clearly: we often think ahead about our future actions and this premeditation is present, while the action which we think over beforehand is not yet in existence, for it is in the future. When we shall have reached it and have begun to do what we were thinking of before, then that action will be in existence, since it will then be not in the future but present.

(24) So, in whatever way this mysterious pre-perception of future things goes on, it is not possible for a thing to be seen unless it is something existing. What exists now is not a future thing, but present. Therefore, when future things are said to be seen, the things themselves which do not yet exist, that is, the future things, are not seen, but rather their causes or signs, perhaps, which now exist. And so, they are not future things, but things now present to those who are seeing, from which they foretell future things as conceived by their mind. Again, these conceptions exist now, and those who predict such things see them as present within themselves.

Now, let the abundance of such cases suggest some example to me.

I see the dawn: I foretell that the sun will rise. What I see is present, what I foretell is future; not that the sun is future—it exists now—but rather its rising which is not yet occurring. Yet, unless I form an image in my mind of this rising, as I do at this instant when I speak about it, I could not predict it. But the dawn which I see in the sky is not the rising of the sun, though it precedes it, nor is the act of forming the image in my mind that rising; these two present things are discerned so that that future thing may be foretold.

Therefore, future things do not yet exist, and, if they do not yet exist, they are not existing; if they are not existing, they cannot possibly be seen. But, they can be predicted from present things which already exist and are seen.

Chapter 19

(25) And so, what is the mode by which Thou, the Ruler of Thy creation, dost teach souls about things which are to be in the future? For, Thou hast taught Thy prophets. What, then, is this mode by which Thou teachest the things of the future—Thou to whom nothing is to come? Or, is it rather that Thou teachest present things about future events? For, that which does not exist cannot, of course, be taught. This mode is too far away

from my mental gaze; it has become too great for me, I cannot reach it; but with Thy help I can,⁸⁰ when Thou wilt grant it, O sweet Light of my hidden eyes.

Chapter 20

(26) What is now plain and clear is that neither future nor past things are in existence, and that it is not correct to say there are three periods of time: past, present and future. Perhaps it would be proper to say there are three periods of time: the present of things past, the present of things present, the present of things future. For, these three are in the soul and I do not see them elsewhere: the present of things past is memory; the present of things present is immediate vision; the present of future things is expectation. If we are permitted to say this, I see three periods of time and I admit there are three.

Still, it may be said three periods of time do exist—past, present and future—just as custom falsely put it; it may be so expressed. See, I do not care, or make any opposition or criticism—provided the statement be understood: that there is no existing now either of what is to be in the future or that which is past. There are few things which we express properly; more frequent are those that we express improperly, though making our intentions understood.

Chapter 21

(27) So, I said, a little while ago, that, as periods of time are passing by, we measure them, being thus able to say that this period of time is double that single one, or this is just as long as that, and whatever else we can express by measuring concerning the relationship of the parts of time.

For this reason, as I was saying, we do measure periods of time as they are passing by. If anyone say to me: ‘How do you know this?’ I may reply: ‘I know, because we do measure them, and we cannot measure things which do not exist, yet past and future things do not exist.’ But, how do we measure present time, when it has no length? Therefore, it is measured as it is passing by, when it has passed away, it is not measured, for, what might be measured will not then exist.

But, whence, by what way, and whither does it pass, when it is measured? Whence, but from the future? By what means, but through the present? Whither, if not into the past? From that, then, which does not yet exist, through that which is without length, into that which is already out of existence.

But, what do we measure, if not time in some length? For, we cannot talk about single, double, triple, and equal periods—and whatever else we say about time in this

way—except in terms of lengths of time. In what length, then, do we measure time as it is passing away? Is it in the future, from which it is passing? But, we do not measure what does not yet exist. Is it in the present, by which it is passing? But, we do not measure a thing of no length. Is it in the past, to which it is passing? But, we do not measure what is already out of existence

Chapter 22

(28) My mind burns with eagerness to gain knowledge of this complicated problem. Do not hide—O Lord my God, O good Father, I beseech Thee through Christ—do not hide these familiar, yet mysterious, things from my desire, so that it cannot enter deeply into them; rather, may they be illumined by Thy enlightening mercy, O Lord. Whom shall I ask about these things? To whom shall I more fruitfully confess my lack of skill than to Thee, before whom my strongly burning interest in Thy Scriptures is not offensive? Grant what I love: for I do love it. And this love also Thou hast given. Grant it, O Father, who truly knoweth how to give good gifts to Thy children; grant it, for I have taken on the task of knowing it, and it is labor in my sight,⁸⁴ until Thou dost reveal it. I beseech Thee through Christ, in the Name of Him who is most holy, let no one interrupt me. ‘I have believed, therefore do I speak.’ This is my hope, for this do I live, ‘that I may see the delight of the Lord.’⁸⁶ Behold, Thou hast made my days grow old, and they pass away—how, I know not.

We speak of this time and that time, of these times and those times: ‘How long ago did he say this? How long is it since he did this?’ and: ‘What a long time since I have seen it,’ and: ‘This syllable takes twice as long a time as that short one.’ We both say and hear these things, and we understand and make ourselves understood by others. They are very obvious and most familiar, but, on the other hand, they are deeply hidden and their discovery is a present problem.

Chapter 23

(29) I have heard from a certain learned man that the movements of the sun, moon, and stars are times, yet I did not agree. For, why are not times rather the movements of all bodies? As a matter of fact, if the heavenly bodies stopped moving and a potter’s wheel were moving, would there be no time by which we might measure these turnings and say that they go on in equal intervals; or if it were moved sometimes more slowly and sometimes more quickly, that some intervals are longer and some shorter? Or, when we should say this, would we not be speaking in time, and would there be in our words some

long syllables and others short, except that some sounded for a longer time and others for a shorter?

O God, vouchsafe unto men the ability to see, in a small thing, the common conceptions of things both small and great. There are stars and shining bodies in the heavens, 'for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.'⁸⁹ There are, indeed. But, while I should not say that the revolution of that little wooden wheel is a day, on the other hand, that scholar of ours would not say, then, that time does not exist.

(30) I desire to know the meaning and nature of time, by which we measure the movements of bodies and say, for example, that this movement is twice as long as that one. My question is: since a day is spoken of, not only as the period when the sun is above the earth, in the sense that day is distinguished from night, but also in terms of its complete circuit from the east back to the east—as when we say: 'so many days went by' (for, we speak of a certain number of days as including the nights, not as excluding the length of the nights)—and since a day is made up of the movement of the sun in a circuit from the east back to the east, my question is: whether this movement is itself the day, or is the duration in which it goes on, or both.

For, if the first [the movement of the sun] were the day, then it would be a day, even if the sun completed its course in just an hour. If the second [the duration], then it would not be a day if the duration from the rising of the sun to its next rising were so brief as to take but one hour—rather, the sun would have to go around twenty-four times to make a day. If both, then it could not be called a day either if the sun went through its complete circuit in the space of an hour or if, the sun having stopped its movement, just enough time were to go by for the sun to have completed its customary circuit from morning to morning.

So, I shall not ask what this thing is which is called a day, but what is time, by means of which we, measuring the course of the sun, might say that it took only half its customary time to go through it, if the amount of time it took were equivalent to the passage of twelve hours, and, comparing both, we should say that the one was to the other as one to two—even though sometimes the sun might complete its circuit from east to east in the single period and sometimes in the double of this period.

Therefore, let no one tell me that periods of time are equivalent to the movements of the heavenly bodies. For, when the sun stood still at the wish of a certain person, in order that he might complete a victorious battle, the sun was standing still, but time was going on. Indeed, the fight was waged and finished in its own space of time which was enough for it.

I see, then, that time is some sort of extension. But, do I see it? Do I just seem to myself to see it? Thou wilt point it out, O Light, O Truth!

Chapter 24

(31) Dost Thou command me to assent, when someone says that time is the movement of a body? Thou dost not. I hear that no body can be moved unless in time: Thou sayest it. But, I do not hear that the very motion of a body is time: Thou dost not say it. For, when a body is moved, in time, I can measure it as long as it is moved, from the instant that it began to be moved until it ceases. And, if I did not see the point at which it began, and it continued to move so that I cannot see when it stops, I cannot measure it, except, perhaps, from the point when I begin to see it until I stop. And, if I see it for a long time, I can express the fact that it is a long time, but not exactly how long; for, when we say how much, we say it by means of a comparison—for instance: ‘This is just as much as that,’ or ‘This is twice that,’ or anything else in the same way. But, if we could note the places in space whence and whither the body comes as it is moving, or its parts if it is turning, as though on a lathe, we could say how great the time is in which the movement of a body or its part, from one place to another, is accomplished.

So, since the movement of a body is one thing, and that whereby we measure its duration is another, who could not judge which of these should preferably be called time? Indeed, if a body moves sometimes at different speeds, and sometimes stands still, we measure not only its movement, but also its condition of rest, by means of time. We say: ‘It stood still, just as long as it moved,’ or: ‘it stood still twice or thrice as long as it moved,’ and whatever else our act of measuring grasped accurately or, as the common saying is, roughly estimated.

Therefore, time is not the motion of a body.

Chapter 25

(32) And I confess to Thee, O Lord, that I still do not know what time is; again, I confess to Thee, O Lord, that I know that I am saying these things in time, and that I have spoken at length now about time, and that this length cannot be long without the extent of time. How, then, do I know this, when I do not know what time is? Perhaps I do not know how to say what I do know? Alas, I do not even know what I do not know! Behold, O my God, it is evident to Thee that I do not lie; I speak just as I feel in my heart. Thou wilt light up my lamp, O Lord my God, Thou wilt enlighten my darknesses.

Chapter 26

(33) Surely, my soul is confessing truthfully to Thee that I do measure periods of time? Yes, O Lord my God, I do measure, but I do not know what I am measuring. I measure the movement of a body in time. But time itself, do I not measure it? Could I really

measure the movement of a body, how long it is, and how long it takes to go from here to there, unless I also measure the time in which it is moved?

On what basis, then, do I measure time itself? Do we measure a longer time by means of a shorter time, as the length of a beam is measured by the length of a cubit? Thus we see that the length of a long syllable is measured by the length of a short syllable, and say that it is twice the other. In this way, we measure the length of poems by the lengths of the verses, and the lengths of the verses by the lengths of the feet, and the lengths of the feet by the lengths of the syllables, and the lengths of the longs by the lengths of the shorts—not as written on tablets (for in that way we measure space, not time), but while the spoken words are going on. Thus, we say: ‘this poem is long, for it is made up of so many verses; the verses are long, for they consist of so many feet; the feet are long, for they stretch over so many syllables; the syllable is long, for it is double a short one.’

But, a definite measure of time is not grasped in that way, since it is possible for a short verse to sound over a greater length of time, if it be pronounced slowly, than a longer verse spoken hurriedly. The same is true of a poem, of a foot, of a syllable.

From this it appeared to me that time is nothing but extension, but I do not know of what. It is amazing if it is not of the mind itself. I beseech Thee, O my God, what do I measure when I either say, indefinitely: ‘this time is longer than that,’ or, definitely: ‘this is twice that?’ I measure time, I know. But, I do not measure the future, because it does not exist yet; I do not measure the present, for it does not extend over any length; I do not measure the past, for it does not now exist. What, then, do I measure? Is it periods of time as they go by, but not in the past? So, in fact, have I said.

Chapter 27

(34) Keep on, O mind of mine, and firmly direct thy attention. ‘God is our Helper’; ‘He made us, and not we ourselves.’⁹⁸ Mark where truth brightens to the dawn.

See, for instance, how a bodily voice begins to sound, and it sounds, and still sounds, and then stops; now there is silence: that voice is past, and voice there is no more. It was in the future before it sounded and could not be measured, for it was not yet existing—and now it cannot be, because it is already out of existence. The time, then, when it could be measured was when it was sounding, for then there existed something that could be measured. But, even then, it did not stand still; it went on and passed by. Was it, for this reason, more capable of measurement? For, while passing by, it extended itself into some space of time by which it could be measured, since the present possesses no extent.

And so, if it was capable of it then, consider another example of a second voice beginning to sound and still sounding in continuous duration without any interruption. Let us measure it while it is sounding, for, when it will have ceased its sounding, it will

then be past and will not be anything that can be measured. Let us measure it then, and say how long it is. But, it is still sounding, and it cannot be measured, except from its start, when it began to sound, until its end, when it ceases. For, what we measure is the very interval from some starting point up to some ending. For this reason, the voice which has not yet ended cannot be measured, so that a statement may be made as to how long or short it is; nor can it be called equal to another, or single or double in relation to some unit, or anything else. But, when it will have ended, then it will not exist. How, then, can it be measured? Yet, we do measure periods of time, and not those which do not yet exist, or those which are no longer in existence, or those which extend over no duration, or those which have no endings. So, then, we do not measure future ones, or present, or past, or those which are going into the past, yet we do measure periods of time.

(35) 'O God, who hast created all,'—this verse is of eight syllables, alternately short and long. Thus, the four short ones, first, third, fifth, seventh, are simple in relation to the four longs, the second, fourth, sixth, eighth. Each of these latter, in relation to each of the former, has twice as much time. This I proclaim and report, and it is so, in so far as it is perceived by evident perception. To the extent that sense perception is evident, I measure a long syllable by a short one and I perceive that it is just twice as much. But, when one sounds after another, the first being short, the following one long, how can I hold on to the short one, and how can I apply it to the long as I am making the measurement, so as to find out that the latter is just twice—since the long one does not begin to sound unless the short one stops sounding? And, can I even measure the long one while it is present, since, unless it has ended, I cannot measure it? But, its ending is its passing out of existence.

What, then, is it that I measure? Where is the short one by which I do the measuring? Where is the long one which I measure? Both have sounded, flown away, passed by; they exist no longer. Yet, I do measure, and I answer with confidence, in so far as confidence can be placed in any exercise of sense perception, that this one is single, that double—in the extent of time, that is. Nor can I do this, except because they have passed away and are ended. Therefore, I do not measure these syllables which no longer exist, but something in my memory which remains as a fixed impression.

(36) In thee, O mind of mine, do I measure periods of time. Do not interrupt me by clamoring: 'But it does exist'; do not interrupt thyself with the noisy disturbances of thy previous mental habits.¹⁰³ In thee, I say, do I measure periods of time. I measure the present mental disposition which things passing by produce in thee and which remains after they have passed away, not the things which have passed away in order to produce it. This I measure, when I measure periods of time. Therefore, either these [mental dispositions] are periods of time, or what I measure is not time.

But, how is it when we measure periods of silence and say that this silence took as much time as that spoken sound did—do we not direct the attention of our cogitation to the measure of the voice, as if it were sounding, so that we can report something about the intervals of silence in the whole space of time? For, even when the voice and lips of the speaker have stopped, we continue to go over, in the act of cogitation, poems, verses, any form of speech, and any means whatever of measuring out motions, and this is the way we report on temporal intervals, how one stands in relation to another, for it is as if we spoke and they were actually sounding. If a person wanted to utter a rather long spoken tone, and decided, by thinking it over in advance, how long it would be, he has obviously gone through this space of time in silence, and then, committing it to his memory, he begins to utter the note which sounds until it reaches the terminus that has been previously determined. Nay, rather, it has sounded and it will sound. For, that part of it which is already over certainly has sounded, but the part which remains will sound; and that is how it is completed, while present mental awareness [*intentio*] pushes the future over into the past by decreasing the future and increasing the past, until through the eating up of the future it all becomes past.

Chapter 28

(37) But, how is the future, which does not yet exist, decreased or eaten up, or how does the past, which is no longer existing, increase, unless because of the fact that three functions occur in the mind which is doing this? It looks ahead, it attends, and it remembers—in such a way that what it looks forward to passes through what it is attending to into what it is remembering. Who denies that future things are not yet existing? Yet, there is now in the mind an expectation of future things. Who denies that past things are already non-existent? Yet, there is still in mind the memory of things past. Who denies that present time lacks extent, for it passes away in an instant, like a point? Yet, attention lasts on, and, through it, what will be continues to go on into that which is no longer here. So, the non-existent future is not a long time, but a long future period is a long expectation of the future; nor is past time long, for it is non-existent, but a long past is a long memory of that which is past.

(38) I am about to sing a song that I know. Before I begin, my expectation is directed to the whole thing, but, when I have begun, in regard to that part which I have plucked off and committed to the past, my memory also directs its attention to it, and the life of this action of mine is spread out both in memory, by virtue of what I have sung, and in expectation, by virtue of what I am yet to sing. Yet, my attention remains in the present, for, through it, that which is to come is passed over so that it becomes past. And, the more this is done, on and on, the more is memory lengthened out by a shortening of the

function of expectation—until the whole of expectation is used up, when the completely finished act has passed over into memory. What goes on for the whole song occurs also for each of its parts and for each of its individual syllables; the same, again, for a longer action, of which this song is perhaps but a part; the same for the whole life of a man, the parts of which are all the actions of men; and the same for the whole era of the ‘sons of men,’ the parts of which are all the lives of men.

Chapter 29

(39) But, since ‘Thy mercy is better than lives,’ behold my life is but a distraction;¹⁰⁸ and Thy right hand has held me up,’ in my Lord the Son of man, the Mediator between Thee as One and us as many, in many ways and by many means, so that through Him I may lay hold of that for which He has laid hold of me, and that I may be gathered in from the days of old and follow the One.¹¹⁰ Forgetting what is behind, not straining outward to things which will come and pass away, but straining forward to what is before, not according to distraction, but with mental concentration, I press on toward the prize of my heavenly calling, where I shall hear the voice of praise¹¹² and I shall see Thy delight, which neither comes nor passes away.

Now, indeed, ‘my years [are spent] in sighs,’ and Thou my Consolation, O Lord, Thou art my Eternal Father. But, I have disintegrated into periods of time, of whose order I am ignorant, and my thoughts, which are the innermost vital parts of my soul, are rent asunder by tumultuous diversities—until such time as I shall flow together into Thee, purged and melted into clear liquid form, by the fire of Thy love.

Chapter 30

(40) And I shall become firm and solidify in Thee, in the form made for me in Thy Truth; nor shall I suffer the questions of men who, as a result of their penal sickness, are thirsty for more than they can take in. They say: ‘What did God do, before He made heaven and earth?’ or ‘How did the thought occur to Him to make something, when He never made anything before?’

Grant to them, O Lord, the ability to think well on what they say and to discover that one should not say ‘never’ in reference to a situation where time does not exist. Thus, when a man says that one ‘never’ made anything, what else is said but that one made it at no time? May they see, then, that time cannot be at all without creation, and may they stop talking this foolishness.¹¹⁷ May they be inclined forward, also, to those things which are before, and understand that Thou art before all periods of time, the Eternal Creator

of all times, and that no periods of time and no creature, even one which may be above time, are co-eternal with Thee.

Chapter 31

(41) O Lord my God, what a chasm this is, in Thy deep secret, and how far away from it have the results of my shortcomings cast me? Heal my eyes and let me share in the joy of Thy light. Indeed, if there be a mind reinforced by such great knowledge and foreknowledge, to whom all past and future things are known in the way that one very familiar song is known to me, then this mind is exceeding wondrous and so amazing as to inspire fear. For, thus, nothing whatever that has gone on, and nothing that remains in future centuries, lies hidden to it; even as to me, singing this song, there is nothing hidden of what and how much of it has gone away from the beginning, of what and how much remains until the end.

But, away with the notion that Thou, Creator of the universe, Creator of souls and bodies—away with the notion that Thou shouldst know all future and past things in that way. Far, far more wonderful art Thou, and far more mysterious. For, it is not as the feelings are changed and the sense perceptions extended in the case of a singer of something well known, or of one who hears a familiar song in expectation of the coming words and in memory of the past ones—not in this way does something occur to the immutably Eternal, that is, to the truly Eternal Creator of minds. Therefore, just as Thou didst know ‘heaven and earth in their Source,’ without any change of Thy knowledge, so didst Thou make ‘heaven and earth in their beginning’ without any difference in Thy action. Let him who understands confess to Thee, and let him who does not understand confess to Thee. Oh, how exalted Thou art, yet the humble in heart are Thy dwelling place!¹²¹ For Thou dost lift up those who are cast down, and they, whose exaltation Thou art, do not fall.