

Confessions - Book Xii - Chapter Xxiv

by St. Augustine

Transcript

33. But in the midst of so many truths which occur to the interpreters of these words (understood as they can be in different ways), which one of us can discover that single interpretation which warrants our saying confidently that Moses thought thus and that in this narrative he wishes this to be understood, as confidently as he would say that this is true, whether Moses thought the one or the other. For see, O my God, I am thy servant, and I have vowed in this book an offering of confession to thee,[492] and I beseech thee that by thy mercy I may pay my vow to thee. Now, see, could I assert that Moses meant nothing else than this [i.e., my interpretation] when he wrote, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," as confidently as I can assert that thou in thy immutable Word hast created all things, invisible and visible? No, I cannot do this because it is not as clear to me that this was in his mind when he wrote these things, as I see it to be certain in thy truth. For his thoughts might be set upon the very beginning of the creation when he said, "In the beginning"; and he might have wished it understood that, in this passage, "heaven and earth" refers to no formed and perfect entity, whether spiritual or corporeal, but each of them only newly begun and still formless. Whichever of these possibilities has been mentioned I can see that it might have been said truly. But which of them he did actually intend to express in these words I do not clearly see. However, whether it was one of these or some other meaning which I have not mentioned that this great man saw in his mind when he used these words I have no doubt whatever that he saw it truly and expressed it suitably.

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