

~Other Speakers A-F: St. Augustine:

1. Dead now was that evil and shameful youth of mine, and I was passing into full manhood.[176] As I increased in years, the worse was my vanity. For I could not conceive of any substance but the sort I could see with my own eyes. I no longer thought of thee, O God, by the analogy of a human body. Ever since I inclined my ear to philosophy I had avoided this error--and the truth on this point I rejoiced to find in the faith of our spiritual mother, thy Catholic Church. Yet I could not see how else to conceive thee. And I, a man--and such a man!--sought to conceive thee, the sovereign and only true God. In my inmost heart, I believed that thou art incorruptible and inviolable and unchangeable, because--though I knew not how or why--I could still see plainly and without doubt that the corruptible is inferior to the incorruptible, the inviolable obviously superior to its opposite, and the unchangeable better than the changeable.

My heart cried out violently against all phantasms,[177] and with this one clear certainty I endeavored to brush away the swarm of unclean flies that swarmed around the eyes of my mind. But behold they were scarcely scattered before they gathered again, buzzed against my face, and beclouded my vision. I no longer thought of God in the analogy of a human body, yet I was constrained to conceive thee to be some kind of body in space, either infused into the world, or infinitely diffused beyond the world--and this was the incorruptible, inviolable, unchangeable substance, which I thought was better than the corruptible, the violable, and the changeable.[178] For whatever I conceived to be deprived of the dimensions of space appeared to me to be nothing, absolutely nothing; not even a void, for if a body is taken out of space, or if space is emptied of all its contents (of earth, water, air, or heaven), yet it remains an empty space--a spacious nothing, as it were.

2. Being thus gross-hearted and not clear even to myself, I then held that whatever had neither length nor breadth nor density nor solidity, and did not or could not receive such dimensions, was absolutely nothing. For at that time my mind dwelt only with ideas, which resembled the forms with which my eyes are still familiar, nor could I see that the act of thought, by which I formed those ideas, was itself immaterial, and yet it could not have formed them if it were not itself a measurable entity.

So also I thought about thee, O Life of my life, as stretched out through infinite space, interpenetrating the whole mass of the world, reaching out beyond in all directions, to immensity without end; so that the earth should have thee, the heaven have thee, all things have thee, and all of them be limited in thee, while thou art placed nowhere at all. As the body of the air above the earth does not bar the passage of the light of the sun, so that the light penetrates it, not by bursting nor dividing, but filling it entirely, so I imagined that the body of heaven and air and sea, and even of the earth, was all open to thee and, in all its greatest parts as well as the smallest, was ready to receive thy presence by a secret inspiration which, from within or without all, orders all things thou hast created. This was my conjecture, because I was unable to think of anything else; yet it was untrue. For in this way a greater part of the earth would contain a greater part of thee; a smaller part, a smaller fraction of thee. All things would be full of thee in such a sense that there would be more of thee in an elephant than in a sparrow, because one is larger than the other and fills a larger space. And this would make the portions of thyself present in the several portions of the world in fragments, great to the great, small to the small. But thou art not such a one. But as yet thou hadst not enlightened my darkness.