

QUESTION 69

The Work of the Third Day

The next thing to consider is the work of the third day. On this topic there are two questions, (1) one about the gathering together of the waters and (2) the other about the production of plants.

Article 1

Was the gathering together of the waters fittingly said to have been done on the third day?

It seems that the gathering together of the waters was not fittingly said to have been done on the third day:

Objection 1: The things that were made on the first and second days are expressed by the verb ‘to make’; for it says, “God said ‘Let light be made’ ... and ‘Let a firmament be made’.” But the third day is grouped with the first two days. Therefore, the work of the third day should have been expressed by the verb ‘to make’ and not just by the verb ‘to gather together’.

Objection 2: Prior to the third day the earth was everywhere covered with the waters; this is why it was said to be “invisible.” Therefore, there was no place on the earth (*super terram*) where the waters could be gathered together.

Objection 3: Things that are not continuous with one another do not have a single location. But it is not the case that all waters have continuity with one another. Therefore, it is not the case that all the waters are gathered together into one place.

Objection 4: To gather together involves local motion. But it seems natural for waters to flow and to run to the sea. Therefore, no divine command had to be given for this.

Objection 5: The earth is already named at the beginning of its creation, when it says, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth.” Therefore, it is inappropriate to say that the name ‘earth’ was imposed on it on the third day.

But contrary to this: The authority of Scripture suffices for the contrary.

I respond: On this topic one has to reply in different ways, depending on whether he follows Augustine’s interpretation or that of the other saints.

In all these works Augustine posits only an ordering of origin and nature and not a temporal ordering. For he says that the first things created are (a) unformed spiritual nature and (b) corporeal nature without any form (which, he says, is first signified by the names ‘earth’ and ‘water’)—first only in origin and not because the lack of form preceded formation in time. And again, according to him, the one formation preceded the other only in the order of nature and not in duration. According to this ordering, the formation of the highest nature, viz., the spiritual, has to be posited first, because light is said to have been made on the first day. But just as spiritual nature has preeminence over corporeal nature, so the higher bodies have preeminence over the lower ones. Hence, the formation of the higher bodies is mentioned in the second place, when it says, “Let there be a firmament”—which means the impressing of a celestial form on unformed matter that exists antecedently only in origin and not in time. In the third place he posits the impressing of elemental forms on unformed matter that exists antecedently in origin and not in time. Hence, the verse, “Let the waters be gathered together and let the dry land appear,” has to do with the impressing on corporeal matter of (a) the substantial form of water, through which the relevant sort of motion belongs to it, and (b) the substantial form of earth, through which it belongs to it to be seen in the relevant way.

However, according to the other saints, there is a temporal ordering in these works. For they claim that matter’s being unformed temporally precedes its being formed, and the one formation temporally

precedes the next. But according to them, matter's being unformed is not to be understood as the absence of all form, since there was already heaven and water and earth (the three of them having been named because they are manifestly perceptible by the senses); instead, matter's being unformed is understood as the absence of due division and of any finished beauty. And corresponding to the three names in question, Scripture posited three sorts of formlessness. For heaven, which is the highest, has the formlessness of darkness, since the source of light comes from it, whereas the formlessness of water, which is in the middle, is signified by the name 'deep' (*abyssum*), since, as Augustine explains in *Contra Faustum*, this name signifies an immensity of turbulent water. On the other hand, the formlessness of earth is touched on when it says, "The earth was invisible (or: void)," because it was covered with water. On this view, then, the formation of the highest body was done on the first day. And since time follows upon the motion of the heavens and is the number of the motion of the highest body, this formation effected the division of time, viz., into night and day. On the other hand, the middle body, viz., water, was formed on the second day through the firmament, and it received a certain distinctness and order (so that other things are also included under the name 'water', as was explained above (q. 68, a. 3)). And on the third day the last body, viz., earth, was formed as a result of its being uncovered by the waters. And a division was made in the lowest body, viz., between the earth and the sea. Hence, fittingly enough, just as he had expressed the formlessness of the earth by saying "The earth was invisible (or: void)," so he expressed its being formed by saying, "And dry land appeared."

Reply to objection 1: According to Augustine, the reason that Scripture does not use the verb 'to make' for the work of the third day, as it had for the preceding works, is in order to show that the higher forms, viz., the spiritual forms of the angels and the forms of the celestial bodies, are perfect and stable in *esse*, whereas the forms of the lower bodies are imperfect and changeable. And so the gathering together of the waters and the appearance of dry land signify that it is forms of this latter sort that are being impressed. For as he himself says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 2, "Water flows in a transient manner, and earth is fixed in a stable manner."

By contrast, according to the others, one must reply that the work of the third day is perfect only with respect to local motion. And so it was unnecessary for Scripture to use the verb 'to make'.

Reply to objection 2: The reply is clear, given Augustine's view. For it is unnecessary to say that the earth was first covered with the waters and that the waters were afterwards gathered together; instead, the waters were produced already gathered together in this way.

Given the view of the others, however, there are three possible replies, as Augustine himself points out in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 1.

The first possible reply is that the waters are elevated to a greater height in the place where they are gathered together. For as Basil explains, it is known from experience that in the case of the Red Sea, the sea is higher than the land.

The second possible reply is that the water covered the earth while more rarified as a cloud and was then condensed and gathered together.

The third possible reply is that the earth could have had certain hollowed out parts in which to receive the flowing waters.

Of these replies, the first seems the most probable.

Reply to objection 3: All waters have a single terminus, viz., the sea, into which they flow together by either apparent or hidden channels. It is for this reason that the waters are said to be gathered together into one place.

An alternative reply is that it says 'one place' not in an absolute sense, but by contrast with the place of dry land, so that the meaning is, "The waters are gathered together in one place," i.e. separately from dry land. For in order to signify the plurality of the places of the water, it adds, "The gathering together of the waters He called 'seas'."

Reply to objection 4: It is God’s command that gives natural motion to bodies. Hence, [Psalm 148:8] says that by their natural motions “they fulfill His word.”

An alternative reply is that it would be natural for water to be everywhere around the earth, just as the air is everywhere around the water and the earth, but that because of the necessity of the end, viz., that animals and plants should live upon the earth, some part of the earth needed not to be covered by the waters. Some philosophers attribute this to the action of the sun, which dries the earth by the elevation of vapors. But Sacred Scripture attributes it to God’s power, not only in Genesis, but also in Job 38:10, where it says in the personage of the Lord, “I set my bounds around the sea,” and in Jeremiah 5:22, ““Will you not then fear me’, says the Lord, ‘who has placed the sand as a boundary for the sea?’”

Reply to objection 5: According to Augustine, what is meant by the earth which is first mentioned is primary matter, whereas in the present context what is meant is the element earth.

An alternative reply, taken from Basil, is that the earth was first named with respect to its nature, whereas in the present context it is named with respect to its principal property, which is dryness. This is why it says, “The dry land He called earth.”

Another reply, taken from Rabbi Moses, is that whenever it says, “He called ...,” this signals an equivocation in the relevant name. Hence, it had previously said, “He called the light ‘day’,” because a period of twenty-four hours is also called ‘day’, in accord with which it says in the same place, “There was evening and morning, one day.” Similarly, it says, “He called the firmament (read: the air) heaven,” because what was first created is also called ‘heaven’. Again, it says, “The dry land (read: the part that was not covered by the waters) He called ‘earth’,” as opposed to ‘sea’, even though the earth is called by the common name ‘earth’, regardless of whether or not it is covered with waters.

Moreover, the phrase “He called” is understood throughout to mean that He gave the relevant nature or property so that the thing could be so called.

Article 2

Is it inappropriate that the production of plants is said to have been effected on the third day?

It seems inappropriate that the production of plants is said to have been effected on the third day:

Objection 1: Plants have life, just as animals do. But the production of animals is placed among the works of adornment and not among the works of division. Therefore, the production of plants should not have been recorded under the third day, which has to do with the work of dividing.

Objection 2: What pertains to the cursing of the earth should not be recorded along with the formation of the earth. But the production of certain plants pertains to the cursing of the earth—this according to Genesis 3:17-18 (“Cursed is the earth in your work; it will bring forth thorns and thistles for you”). Therefore, the production of plants in general should not have been recorded under the third day, which has to do with the formation of the earth.

Objection 3: Just as plants stay close to the earth, so do rocks and metals, and yet no mention is made of the latter in the formation of the earth. Therefore, plants should not have been made on the third day, either.

But contrary to this: Genesis 1:12 says, “The earth brought forth the green herb,” and afterwards, “The evening and the morning were the third day.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), on the third day the earth’s formlessness is removed. Now two kinds of formlessness were set forth concerning the earth: (a) that it was “invisible” (*invisibilis*) or “void” (*inanis*), because it was covered with the waters; and (b) that it was nondescript

(*incomposita*) or empty (*vacua*), i.e., it did not have the due attractiveness that the earth derives from the plants that, as it were, clothe it. And so both types of formlessness are removed on the third day: (a) the first by virtue of the fact that the waters were gathered together into one place and that the dry land appeared, and (b) the second by virtue of the fact that earth brought forth the green herb.

However, as far as the production of plants is concerned, Augustine's opinion differs from that of the others. For the other commentators, following what the text says on its face (*secundum quod superficies litterae sonat*), claim that plants were produced in actuality within their own species on the third day. By contrast, in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 5 Augustine says, "The earth is said at that time to have produced the plant and the tree in their causes (*causaliter*), i.e., to have received the power to produce them."

He confirms this claim with the authority of Scripture. For Genesis 2:4-5 says, "These are the generations of heaven and earth, when they were created, on the day when God made heaven and earth and every green thing of the field before it sprang out of the earth, and every plant of the region, before it grew." Therefore, before they sprang out of the earth, they were made in their causes within the earth.

And he also confirms it with the following line of reasoning: In those first days God established creatures in their origins and causes (*originaliter et causaliter*) and later rested from His work; but after that, in order to administer the things created through the work of propagation, He is at work up to the present time. But the production of plants from the earth belongs to the work of propagation. Therefore, plants were produced on the third day only in their causes and not in actuality.

However, according to the others, one could say that the first establishment of the species belongs to the work of the six days, but that what now belongs to the administration of things is that the generation of things similar in species proceeds from the species that were established at the beginning. And this is what Scripture says: "before they sprang out of the earth" or "before they grew"—that is, before similar things were produced from things similar to them in species, just as we now see them to be made naturally through insemination. Hence, Scripture explicitly says, "The earth brings forth the green and seed-bearing plant," because what was produced were perfect species of plants, from which the seeds of the other plants sprang forth. And it does not matter where they have the power of insemination—whether in the root, or in the stalk, or in the fruit.

Reply to objection 1: The life in plants is hidden, since they lack local motion and sensation, by which animate things are especially distinguished from inanimate things. And so since they stay close to the earth without motion, their production is posited as an aspect of the formation of the earth.

Reply to objection 2: Even before the curse in question, thorns and thistles had been produced either virtually or in actuality. But they had not been produced as a punishment for man, viz., in such a way that the earth which he cultivated for food would bring forth certain unfruitful and harmful things. This is why it says, "... it will bring forth ... *for you*."

Reply to objection 3: As has already been explained (q. 67, a. 4 and q. 68, a. 3), Moses set forth only what was manifestly apparent. But mineral bodies have a generation that it is hidden in the bowels of the earth. And, again, they are not obviously distinct from the earth, but seem to be certain species of earth. And this is why he made no mention of them.