



## The Reflection of God in the Sensible World

St. Bonaventure

1. ...since with respect to the mirror of sensible things it happens that God is contemplated not only through them, as by His traces, but also in them, in so far as He is in them by essence, potency, and presence; and to consider this is higher than the preceding; therefore a consideration of this sort holds next place as a second step in contemplation, by which we should be led to the contemplation of God in all creatures which enter into our minds through the bodily senses.

2. Let it be noted then that this world, which is called the “macrocosm,” enters our souls, which are called the “microcosm,” through the doors of the five senses, according to the apprehension, delectation, and judgment of sensible things themselves. This is apparent as follows: In the world some things are generating, some generated, some governing the former and the latter. The generating are simple bodies, celestial bodies, and the four elements. For from the elements, by virtue of the light which reconciles the contrariety of elements in mixtures, there can be generated and produced whatsoever things are generated and produced through the operation of a natural power. But the generated are bodies composed of the elements, like minerals, vegetables, sensible things, and human bodies. The rulers of the former and the latter are spiritual substances, either conjoined entirely, as are the animal souls; or conjoined though separable, as are the rational spirits; or entirely separated, as are the celestial spirits, which philosophers call “intelligences,” but we “angels.” These, according to the philosophers, move the celestial bodies; and thus there is attributed to them the administration of the universe by taking over from the First Cause, that is God, their active influence, which they pour out in accordance with the work of governing, which looks to the natural harmony of things. According to the theologians, however, there is attributed to them the rule of the universe in accordance with the power of the supreme God with respect to the work of reparation, wherefore they are called “ministering spirits,” sent to minister to them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation.

3. Therefore, man, who is called a “microcosm,” has five senses like five doors, through which enters into his soul the cognition of all that is in the sensible world. For through sight enter the transparent, luminous, and other colored bodies; through touch the solid and terrestrial bodies; by the three intermediate senses the intermediates, as by taste the aqueous, by hearing the aerial, by odor the vaporous—all of which have something of a humid nature, something aerial, something fiery or warm, as appears in the smoke which is freed from incense.

There enter then through these doors, not only simple bodies, but also composite, mixed from these. But since by sense we perceive not only these particular sensibles, which are light, sound, odor, savor, and the four primary qualities which touch apprehends, but also the common sensibles, which are number, magnitude, figure, rest, and motion, and since

everything which is moved is moved by something, and some are self-moved and remain at rest, as the animals, it follows that when through these five senses we apprehend the motion of bodies, we are led to the cognition of spiritual movers, as through an effect we are led to a knowledge of its causes.

4. As far as the three kinds of things are concerned, this whole sensible world enters into the human soul through “apprehension.” The external sensibles, however, are what first enter the soul through the five doors of the senses. They enter, I say, not through their substance, but through their similitudes. These are first generated in the medium, and from the medium are generated in the organ and pass from the external organ into the internal, and from there into the apprehensive power. And thus the generation of the [sensible] species in the medium and from the medium into the organ and the reaction of the apprehensive power to it [the species] produce the apprehension of all those things which the soul apprehends from without.

5. Upon this apprehension, if it be of the appropriate thing, there follows delight. Sense, however, takes delight in an object perceived through an abstracted similitude either by reason of its beauty, as in sight; or by reason of its agreeableness, as in odor and hearing; or by reason of wholesomeness, as in taste and touch, speaking with appropriation. All delight, however, is by reason of proportion. But since a species is form, power, and operation, according to whether it is thought of as related to the principle from which it comes, to the medium through which it passes, or to the end for which it acts, therefore proportion may be considered in similitude, inasmuch as it is a species or form and thus is called “speciositas” [beauty], because beauty is nothing other than numerical equality or a certain relation of parts with agreeable color. Or else proportion may be considered as potency or power, and thus it is called “suavity,” for active power does not exceed immoderately the powers of the recipient, since the senses are pained by extremes and delight in the mean. Or it may be considered, by thinking of species, as efficacy and impression, which is proportional when the agent by impression supplies what the recipient lacks; and this is to save and nourish it, which appears especially in taste and touch. And thus through delight the external pleasures enter into the soul by similitudes in a triple mode of delighting.

6. After the delight of apprehension comes judgment. By this we not only judge whether something is white or black, for this pertains to a special sense, not only whether it is healthful or harmful, for this pertains to the inner sense, but also why something is delightful. And in this act the question is raised about the reasons for our delight which sense derives from the object. This happens when we ask why something is beautiful, pleasant, and wholesome. And it is discovered that the answer is equality of proportion. equality, however, is the same in the great and the small, and is not spread out through a thing’s dimensions; nor does it change and pass away when there is alteration through change or motion. Therefore it abstracts from place, time, and motion, and thus is unchangeable, inimitable, without ends, and in all ways spiritual. Judgment is, therefore, an action which causes the sensible species, received sensibly through sense, to enter the intellective faculty by purification and abstraction. And thus the whole world can enter into the human soul through the doors of the senses by the three aforesaid operations.

7. These all, however, are traces in which we can see the reflection of our God. For since the apprehended species is a likeness produced in the medium and then impressed upon the organ itself, and by means of that impression leads to its principle and source—that is to say, to the object of knowledge—manifestly it follows that the eternal light generates out of

itself a likeness or coequal radiance which is consubstantial and coeternal. And He Who is the image and likeness of the invisible God and “the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance” [Hebr., 1, 3], He Who is everywhere through His primal generation, as an object generates its likeness in the whole medium, is united by the grace of union to an individual of rational nature--as a species to a corporeal organ—so that by that union He may lead us back to the Father as to the primordial source and object. If then all knowable things can generate their likeness (species), obviously they proclaim that in them as in a mirror can be seen the eternal generation of the Word, the Image, and the Son, eternally emanating from God the Father.

8. In this way the species, delighting us as beautiful, pleasant, and wholesome, implies that in that first species is the primal beauty, pleasure, and wholesomeness in which is the highest proportionality and equality to the generator. In this is power, not through imagination, but entering our minds through the truth of apprehension. Here is impression, salubrious and satisfying, and expelling all lack in the apprehending mind. If, then, delight is the conjunction of the harmonious, and the likeness of God alone is the most highly beautiful, pleasant, and wholesome, and if it is united in truth and in inwardness and in plenitude which employs our entire capacity, obviously it can be seen that in God alone is the original and true delight, and that we are led back to seeking it from all other delights.

9. By a more excellent and immediate way are we led by judgment into seeing eternal truths more surely. For if judgment comes about through the reason’s abstracting from place, time, and change, and therefore from dimension, succession, and transmutation, by the immutable, illimitable, and endless reason, and if there is nothing immutable, inimitable, and endless except the eternal, then all which is eternal is God or is in God. If, then, all things of which we have more certain judgments are judged by this mode of reasoning, it is clear that this is the reason of all things and the infallible rule and light of truth, in which all things shine forth infallibly, indestructibly, indubitably, irrefragably, unquestionably, unchangeably, boundlessly, endlessly, indivisibly, and intellectually. And therefore those laws by which we make certain judgments concerning all sensible things which come into our consideration--since they [the laws] are infallible and indubitable rules of the apprehending intellect--are indelibly stored up in the memory as if always present, are irrefragable and unquestionable rules of the judging intellect. And this is so because, as Augustine says, no one judges these things except by these rules. It must thus be true that they are incommutable and incorruptible since they are necessary, and boundless since they are inimitable, endless since eternal. Therefore they must be indivisible since intellectual and incorporeal, not made but uncreated, eternally existing in eternal art, by which, through which, and in accordance with which all things possessing form are formed. Neither, therefore, can we judge with certainty except through that which was not only the form producing all things but also the preserver of all and the distinguisher of all, as the being who preserves the form in all things, the directing rule by which our mind judges all things which enter into it through the senses.

10. This observation is extended by a consideration of the seven different kinds of number by which, as if by seven steps, we ascend to God. Augustine shows this in his book “On the True Religion” and in the sixth book “On Music,” wherein he assigns the differences of the numbers as they mount step by step from sensible things to the Maker of all things, so that God may be seen in all.

For he says that numbers are in bodies and especially in sounds and words, and he calls

these “sonorous.” Some are abstracted from these and received into our senses, and these he calls “heard.” Some proceed from the soul into the body, as appears in gestures and bodily movements, and these he calls “uttered.” Some are in the pleasures of the senses which arise from attending to the species which have been received, and these he calls “sensual.” Some are retained in the memory, and these he calls remembered. Some are the bases of our judgments about all these, and these he calls “judicial,” which, as has been said above, necessarily transcend our minds because they are infallible and incontrovertible. By these there are imprinted on our minds the “artificial” numbers which Augustine does not include in this classification because they are connected with the judicial number from which flow the uttered numbers out of which are created the numerical forms of those things made by art. Hence, from the highest through the middles to the lowest, there is an ordered descent. Thence do we ascend step by step from the sonorous numbers by means of the uttered, the sensual, and the remembered.

Since, therefore, all things are beautiful and in some way delightful, and beauty and delight do not exit apart from proportion, and proportion is primarily in number, it needs must be that all things are rhythmical. And for this reason number is the outstanding exemplar in the mind of the Maker, and in things it is the outstanding trace leading to wisdom. Since this is most evident to all and closest to God, it leads most directly to God as if by the seven differentiae. It causes Him to be known in all corporeal and sensible thing while we apprehend the rhythmical, delight in rhythmical proportions, and though the laws of rhythmical proportions judge irrefragably.

11. From these two initial steps by which we are led to seeing God in His traces, as if we had two wings falling to our feet, we can determine that all creatures of this sensible world lead the mind of the one contemplating and attaining wisdom to the eternal God; for they are shadows, echoes, and pictures, the traces, simulacra, and reflections of that First Principle most powerful, wisest, and best; of that light and plenitude; of that art productive, exemplifying, and ordering, given to us for looking upon God. They are signs divinely bestowed which, I say, are exemplars or rather exemplifications set before our yet untrained minds, limited to sensible things, so that through the sensibles which they see they may be carried forward to the intelligibles, which they do not see, as if by signs to the signified.

12. The creatures of this sensible world signify the invisible things of God, partly because God is of all creation the origin, exemplar, and end, and because every effect is the sign of its cause, the exemplification of the exemplar, and the way to the end to which it leads; partly from its proper representation; partly from prophetic prefiguration; partly from angelic operation; partly from further ordination. For every creature is by nature a sort of picture and likeness of that eternal wisdom, but especially that which in the book of Scripture is elevated by the spirit of prophecy to the prefiguration of spiritual things. But more does the eternal wisdom appear in those creatures in whose likeness God wished to appear in angelic ministry. And most especially does it appear in those which He wished to institute for the purpose of signifying which are not only signs according to their common name but also Sacraments.

13. From all this it follows that the invisible things of God are clearly seen, from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made; so that those who are unwilling to give heed to them and to know God in them all, to bless Him and to love Him, are inexcusable, while they are unwilling to be carried forth from the shadows into the wonderful light of God. But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has

transported us out of darkness into His wonderful light, when through these lights given from without we are disposed to re-enter into the mirror of our mind, in which the divine lights shine.

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