

CHAPTER TWO
ON SEEING GOD THROUGH HIS VESTIGES
IN THIS SENSIBLE WORLD

1. However, as far as the mirror of sensible things is concerned, we contemplate God not only *through* them, but also *in* them, in as far as God is in them through his *essence*, *power*, and *presence*—and this way of reflecting is higher than the previous one. For this reason contemplation of this sort comes second, as the second step of contemplation, by which we ought to be led to the contemplation of God in all those creatures that enter into our mind through the bodily senses.

2. It should be noted that this world, which is called the *macrocosm*, enters our soul, which is called a lesser world (*microcosm*), through the doors of the five senses, by which we *apprehend*, *take pleasure in*, and *judge* the objects of sense experience.

(A further clarification is in order. In the world, some things *generate*, some *are generated*, and some *govern* both of these. Those that *generate* are simple bodies such as the heavenly bodies and the four elements. For anything that is generated or produced through the operation of a natural power must be generated or produced from these elements through the power of light that harmonizes the contrary qualities of the elements in mixed things. Those things that are *generated* are bodies composed of the elements, such as minerals, plants, animals, and human bodies. Those things that *govern* both the former and the latter are spiritual substances, which can be *completely bound* to matter as are the souls of the brute animals, or *separably joined* to matter, as are the rational spirits, or *totally separated*, as are the heavenly spirits, which pagan philosophers call Intelligences, but we Christians call angels. According to pagan philosophers, it is the task of these Intelligences to move the heavenly bodies, and therefore they are charged with the administration of the universe. They receive from the First Cause, namely God, an influx of power, which they then use in the work of

administration, which corresponds to the natural order of things. According to Christian theologians, however, the same entities¹¹ are charged with administering the universe in accordance with the supreme power of most high God in terms of the *work of reparation*, whereby they are called *ministering spirits sent for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.*)

3. The human being, then, who is called a *microcosm*, has five senses, which are like five doors, through which the knowledge of all things that are part of the sensible world enters the human soul. Thus the subtle and luminous bodies and the other type, colored bodies, enter through *sight*; solid and earthly bodies enter through *touch*; and those bodies that are located inbetween [the aforesaid two types] enter through the three *senses that are located inbetween* [sight and touch]. For example, watery bodies enter through *taste*, aerial bodies¹² through *hearing*, and vaporous bodies through *smell*. These latter type contains something of the nature of water, something of the nature of air, and something of the nature of fire or heat, as is clear from the smoke released from [burning] aromatic substances.

Now it is not only simple bodies that enter the soul through these doorways, but also composite or mixed bodies. Indeed, our senses perceive not only *objects of particular senses*, such as light, sound, smell, taste, and the four primary qualities which are grasped by the sense of touch, but also the *common sense objects*, such as number, size, shape, rest, and motion. (Now “whatever is moved is moved by another,” and even though certain things such as animals move and come to rest by themselves, when we take note of their bodily movement through these five senses we are led to the knowledge of spiritual movers, as from an effect to the knowledge of its cause.)

¹¹ I.e., in this case the angels.

¹² I.e., sounds.

4. Thus the whole sensible world, with its three categories of beings,¹³ enters the human soul through *apprehension* or perception. It is, however, these external sensible beings that are the first to enter the soul through the doors of the five senses. They enter, I say, not in their substantial reality but by means of the likenesses of them, which are first generated in the medium,¹⁴ then from the medium pass into the organ [of sensation], and from the external organ they move to the internal organ, and from the latter they move to the faculty of perception. In this way, the generation of the likeness in the medium, its movement from the medium to the organ, and the faculty of perception shifting its focus on to this likeness result in the perception or *apprehension* of all those things, which the soul perceives externally.

5. Now if this perception or apprehension is of an object that harmonizes [with the sense organ], *pleasure* follows. Further, the senses delight in an object, which is perceived by means of the likeness that has been abstracted from it, either by reason of its *beauty*, as in the case of vision, or by reason of its *sweetness*, as in the case of smell and hearing, or by reason of its *healthful quality* as in the case of taste and touch, to use appropriate terminology. Thus the cause of all pleasure is proportionality. Now insofar as shape or form¹⁵ flows from its origin,¹⁶ passes through the medium,¹⁷ and acts on its point of termination,¹⁸ its nature combines the aspects of *form*, *power*, and *activity*. For this reason, there are three ways, in which the senses become aware of the aforesaid proportionality. First, by way of likeness, insofar as shape or form has the nature of *beautiful shape* or *form*, and in this case proportionality is called *beauty of shape*, because “beauty is nothing else but

¹³ Outlined above in paragraph 2.

¹⁴ For example, a sound is generated in the medium of air.

¹⁵ I.e., that which flows from the sense object and is perceived by the sense organ.

¹⁶ I.e., the sense object.

¹⁷ E.g., air.

¹⁸ I.e., the sense organ.

numerical equality,” or a “certain arrangement of parts together with pleasing color.”¹⁹ Second, insofar as shape or form has the nature of *power* or *potential*, and then proportionality is called *sweetness*, when the power that is acting is not out of proportion to the recipient, for the senses are pained by extremes but take delight in moderate²⁰ sensory inputs. Finally, insofar as shape or form has the nature of *impressive efficiency*. In this case, form or shape is proportional when the agent’s impressive action fulfills a need in the recipient and thereby *preserves and nourishes it*. This is most apparent in the case of taste and touch. Thus, as far as the aspect of *pleasure* goes, external objects of delight enter the soul by means of a likeness according to the pleasure of three kinds.

6. Perception and pleasure are followed by *judgment*. And through this judgment one judges not only whether a thing is white or black (for this pertains to a *particular* sense), and not only whether it is healthful or harmful (for this pertains to the *interior* sense)—but one also judges and receives an *explanation* as to why the senses derive pleasure from the sense object. This happens when one looks for the *reason why* an object is called beautiful, sweet, or wholesome, and finds out that this reason lies in the *proportion of equality*. Now the nature of equality is the same in large or in small things; it is not extended by greater dimensions of size; nor does it recede or pass away with things that pass away; nor is it altered by motion. Therefore, it is independent of place, time and motion, and hence it is unchangeable, unlimited, and entirely spiritual. *Judgment*, therefore, is a process which allows the sensible shape, which has been received by the senses in a sensible way, to enter the thinking faculty through purification and abstraction. And it is in this manner that all this visible world

¹⁹ Augustine, *On Music*, Bk. 6, ch. 13, n. 38; *City of God*, Bk. 22, ch. 19, n. 2.

²⁰ I.e., those that are proportionate with the senses themselves; a common opinion in ancient philosophy, e.g., expressed in Aristotle’s *On the Soul*.

has access to the human soul through the gates of the senses through the three aforesaid activities.

7. For all these things are vestiges, in which we can see our God. Indeed, the *apprehended* shape is a likeness, which has been generated in the medium and subsequently impressed upon the sense organ, and through that impression it leads back to its origin, namely the object of cognition. This clearly shows, therefore, that the eternal light [i.e., God the Father] generates out of itself a co-equal, consubstantial, and co-eternal likeness or splendor [i.e., God the Son]. Now just as the object of perception generates its likeness throughout the whole medium, and just as this shape is united to the corporeal organ, in the same way he who is the *image of the invisible God*, and the *splendor of his glory*, and the *form of his substance* (Col. 1:15; Hebr. 1:3), he who is everywhere from the first moment of his generation, is united through the grace of union to the individual of rational nature [i.e., the human soul], in order that through that union he might lead us back to the Father, as to our original source and final object. Therefore, if all knowable things have the ability to generate their own shape, they openly proclaim that the eternal generation of the Word, the Image, and the Son eternally proceeding from God the Father can be observed in them as in mirrors.

8. Now sensual shape, which gives *delight* in this way, i.e., as *beautiful*, *sweet*, and *wholesome*, suggests that in that original shape or form, there is that original *beauty*, *sweetness*, and *wholesomeness*, in which is found (1) the highest *proportionality* and equality in relation to the one who generates it; (2) *power* that is manifested not by means of images in the imagination, but on account of the truth of sensory perception; (3) *impression* that is salutary and sufficient, which does not leave wanting the one who perceives. Therefore, if “delight is the joining of the two things that are in harmony with each other,”²¹ and if it is only the likeness of God

²¹ Augustine, *On True Religion*, ch. 18, n. 35.

that qualifies as the most beautiful, sweet and wholesome; and if that likeness is united to us in a manner that is *true*, *intimate*, and *replenishing* us to our capacity, one can see clearly that it is in God alone that the true fountain of *delight* is to be found, and that all other delights are just stepping stones on our way to this one delight.

9. *Judgment*, however, leads us to see the eternal truth with greater certainty, in a way that is more excellent and more immediate. Now a judgment is made by a movement of reason that *abstracts* from place, time, and mutability, and hence from dimension, succession and change, i.e., by a movement of reason that is *immutable*, *unlimited*, and *unending*. But nothing is entirely *unchangeable*, *unlimited*, and *unending* except that which is eternal. But whatever is eternal is either God or in God. Therefore, if all of our more certain judgments are made by the movement of reason that is of this sort,²² then it is clear that God himself is the *principle of all things, their infallible rule, and light of truth*, in which all things shine forth in a way that is infallible, indelible, beyond doubt and beyond questioning or argumentation, unchangeable, having no limits in space and no ending in time, in a way that is indivisible and intellectual. Now those laws, by which we judge with certitude concerning all sense objects that come to our attention, are infallible and beyond doubt *to the intellect of the one who perceives*; they cannot be removed *from the memory of one who recalls*, for they are always present; and they are beyond question and beyond the judgment *of the intellect of the one who judges*, because, as Augustine says, “no one judges about them, but by means of them.”²³ Therefore, these laws must be changeless and incorruptible because they are necessary. They must be without limits in space since they are not circumscribed. They must be endless in time since they are eternal. They must be indivisible because they are intellectual and incorporeal. They are not made but are uncreated, existing

²² I.e., unchangeable, etc.

²³ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, Bk. 2, ch. 14, n. 38.

eternally in the eternal Art,²⁴ from which, through which, and in accordance with which all beautiful things are formed. Therefore no one can judge with certainty about these laws, except that [eternal Art itself,] which not only acted as the forming principle that *produced* all things, but also keeps *conserving* them and making them *distinct*—in the manner of Being, which sustains the form in all things, or of the rule that directs all things. And it is with the help of this [Art] that our mind comes to judge about all those things, which enter it through the senses.

10. This observation can be *broadened* further by considering the seven kinds of *numbers*, by which, as by seven steps, we ascend to God, as Augustine shows in his works *On True Religion* and *On Music*, Book 6. In these texts he discusses different categories of numbers that lead us gradually from all these sensible things to the Maker of all, so that God may be seen in all things.

He says that all bodies, and especially musical sounds and articulated words, are endowed with numbers.²⁵ He calls these numbers “sounding.” The numbers that are abstracted from these and received in our sense organs he calls “occurring.” The numbers that proceed from the soul into the body, as is clear in gesticulating and in dancing, he calls “progressing.” The numbers that are involved in the pleasures of the senses, when the attention is turned to the sensible shape that is being perceived, he calls “sensory.” The numbers that are retained in the memory he calls “mnemonic.” The numbers by means of which we make judgments about all these others he calls “judging.” As has been said above, these latter are necessarily above the mind and are infallible and beyond any judgment of ours. It is also from this last category of numbers that “artistic” numbers are impressed in our minds. Augustine does not mention these in his

²⁴ I.e., the art of God.

²⁵ For example, musical intervals can be presented as proportions, e.g., 2:1; the same can be said about organized speech, e.g., poetic meters.

classification since they are tightly linked to the “judging” numbers. It is also from these “judging” numbers that “progressing” numbers flow, which are responsible for the creation of the numerous forms of *artifacts*. Thus there is an orderly descent from the highest numbers to the lowest through the intermediate. [In an opposite movement,] we ascend to the highest numbers step by step, moving from the “sounding” numbers through the intermediate “occurring,” “sensory” and “mnemonic” numbers.

Therefore, since all things are *beautiful* and in some way *delightful*; and since there is no *beauty* or *delight* without *proportion*; and since *proportion* resides first of all in numbers—all things must involve number. From this we conclude that “number is the principal prototypical form in the mind of the Creator,”²⁶ and in creatures it is the principal vestige leading to Wisdom.²⁷ And since number is most evident to all and is the closest thing to God, its seven varieties lead us very close to God and make God known in all bodily and sensible things: when we *perceive* numerical realities, when we *take delight* in numerical proportions, and when we come to make irrefutable *judgments* by means of the laws of numerical proportions.

11. From these first two steps (which are like the two wings [of the Seraph] hanging down over its feet), by which we are led to behold God in his vestiges, we can conclude that all creatures in this world of sensible realities lead the spirit of the contemplative and wise person to the eternal God. Indeed, creatures are *shadows*, *echoes*, and *pictures* of that first, most powerful, most wise and best Principle, of that eternal source, light, and fullness; of that efficient, prototypical and ordering Art. They are *vestiges*, *images*, and *spectacles* offered to us so that we could contemplate God. They are divinely given *signs*. These creatures are *prototypes*, or rather *copies*, offered to the minds that are still uncultured and immersed in sensible

²⁶ Boethius, *On Arithmetic*, Bk. 1, ch. 1.

²⁷ I.e., to God as Wisdom.

things, so that through sensible things, which they do see, they may be lifted to the intelligible things, which they see not, moving, as it were, from signs to that which they signify.

12. Indeed, the created things of this sensible world signify the *invisible things of God*: partly because God is the *origin, exemplar, and final destination* of all creation, and every effect is a sign of its cause or origin, every copy is a sign of its exemplar, and the road is a sign of the final destination to which it leads; partly in virtue of *their own ability to represent*; partly by means of *prophetic prediction*; partly by means of *angelic forces*; and partly by means of establishing an *institution*. Indeed, by *nature* every creature is a kind of copy and likeness of that eternal Wisdom. However, *specifically* this applies to those creatures that, according to the book of Scripture, have been chosen by the *spirit of prophecy* to prefigure spiritual realities. Even *more specifically*, however, this applies to those creatures, in whose image God wished to appear by means of *angelic ministry*. But *most specifically* this applies to that creature, which God wished to *institute* as a sign: however, not as a *sign* as it is commonly understood, but as a *Sacrament*.

13. From all these observations we may conclude that *from the creation of the world the invisible things of God are seen, being understood through those things that are made*, so that *they are without excuse* who refuse to notice these things, or to recognize, bless, and love God in all these [sensible] things, since such people refuse to be lifted *from darkness to the marvelous light of God*. But *thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, who has lifted us out of the darkness into his marvelous light*, as through those lights that come to us from outside, we are being prepared to re-enter the mirror of our mind, in which divine realities shine forth.