

CHAPTER THREE ON SEEING GOD THROUGH HIS IMAGE IMPRINTED IN OUR NATURAL POWERS

1. The two preceding steps, which have led us to God by means of his vestiges, through which he shines forth in every creature, have brought us to a point where we can re-enter into ourselves, that is, into our mind, in which the divine *image* shines forth. Therefore, at this third stage, as we leave the outer court and enter into ourselves, we should try to see God through a mirror in the *sanctum*—namely, in the anterior part of the tabernacle. There, the light of truth shines like the light of a candelabrum in the face of our mind, in which the image of the most blessed Trinity shines brightly.

Therefore, enter into yourself and recognize that your mind *loves* itself most fervently; but that it could not love itself if it did not *know* itself; and that it could not know itself unless it *remembered* itself, for we do not grasp anything with our understanding unless it is present to us in our memory. From this you see, not with the eye of the flesh but with the eye of reason, that your soul possesses a threefold power.²⁸ Now consider the *operation* of these powers and their *relation* to each other—and you will be able to see God through yourself as through an image, which means to see *through a mirror in an obscure manner*.

2. The operation of the *memory* consists in retaining and representing not only things that are *present*, *corporeal*, and *temporal*, but also things that are *successive*, *simple*, and *eternal*. Thus, memory retains *past* things by recalling them, *present* things by receiving them, and *future* things by means of foresight.

Moreover, it retains the *simple things*, such as the principles of continuous and discrete quantities, e.g., the point, the instant, and the unity, without which it would be

²⁸ Namely, love, knowledge (or understanding), memory.

impossible to recall or to think of those things which are founded on them.

It also retains, *in a lasting way and as eternal, the principles and axioms of the sciences*. Indeed, as long as one uses reason, one can never “forget” them to such a degree as to not be able to assent to them and approve of them when she hears them, as if one were recognizing them as innate and familiar to herself, and not as if one were perceiving them for the first time. This becomes clear when the following principle is proposed to someone: “Concerning any particular matter, one must say either true or false,” or: “Every whole is greater than its part,” or any other axiom which cannot be contradicted “by virtue of its inner reasoning.”²⁹

In its *first* function, the actual retention of all temporal things past, present, and future, the memory is an image of *eternity*, whose undivided presentness extends to all times.

From its *second* function, it is clear that memory is formed not only by images in the imagination derived *from external objects*, but also *from above* by receiving and holding within itself simple forms, which cannot enter through the doorways of the senses or through images of sensible things in the imagination.

From its *third* function, we gather that memory has present within itself a changeless light, in which light it remembers changeless truths. So through the *operations* of memory, it becomes clear that the soul itself is an “image and likeness” of God. Now these image and likeness are present to the soul to such a degree, and they are themselves so filled with God’s presence that the soul both actually grasps God and potentially “has the capacity for God and the ability to participate in God.”³⁰

3. The *operation* of the *intellective* power consists in grasping the meaning of *terms, propositions, and inferences*. As for grasping *what terms signify*, the intellect does that when it

²⁹ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Bk. 1.

³⁰ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Bk. 14, ch. 8, n. 11.

comprehends what each thing is by means of a definition. But a definition is formulated by using terms of a higher degree of generality; and these, in turn, are defined by terms of a still higher degree of generality—until we arrive at the highest and most general terms. If these higher terms are not known, lower terms cannot be understood *by means of a definition*. Therefore, unless we understand the meaning of ‘being’³¹ when it is taken all by itself, we cannot *fully* understand the definition of any specific substance. And in order to understand the meaning of ‘being’ when it is taken all by itself, one must understand it together with its properties *unity, truth, and goodness*.³² Now ‘being’ can be thought of as *diminished or complete, as imperfect or perfect, as being potentially or being in actuality, as being in a qualified sense or as being in an unqualified sense, as partial being or as total being, as transient being or as permanent being, as being through another or as being through itself, as being mixed with non-being or as pure being, as dependent being or as absolute being, as posterior being or prior being, as mutable being or as immutable being, as simple being or as composite being*, for “privations and defects cannot be known except through affirmations.”³³ Therefore,³⁴ our intellect cannot fully grasp the meaning of any created being unless it is *aided* by the intellect of the most pure, most actual, most complete, and absolute being³⁵ (which being is *being in an unqualified sense and eternal*). This [divine] intellect contains the principles of all things in their purity. For how could the intellect know that a certain being is defective or incomplete if it had no knowledge of that being which has no defect? The same line of argument can be made concerning the other properties [of being] mentioned above.

³¹ Which is the highest and most general term of all, which cannot be reduced to any simpler or more general terms.

³² The so-called “transcendental” properties of being, which accompany being in every instance and cannot be separated from it.

³³ Averroes (Ibn Rushd), *On the Soul*, Bk. 3.

³⁴ I.e., because ‘being’ is so complicated a thing.

³⁵ I.e., by the divine intellect.

As for comprehending truly the meaning of *propositions*, the intellect is said to do that when it knows with certainty that they are true. And to know this means to know that it cannot be deceived in this act of comprehension: for the intellect knows that this truth cannot be other than it is; therefore, it knows that this truth is unchangeable. But since our own mind is changeable, it cannot see this truth shining unchangeably in this manner except through some other light, which shines forth in an entirely unchangeable manner. And it is impossible that such a light would be a changeable creature. Therefore, our mind acquires knowledge in that light *which enlightens all who come into this world*, and which is *the true light* and the *Word in the beginning with God*.

As for grasping the meaning of an *inference* in the truest sense, our intellect does that when it sees that the conclusion follows *necessarily* from the premises. Now the intellect sees this³⁶ not only when the terms [of the proposition] are necessary, but also when they are contingent, as in this one: “If a human being is running, a human being is moving.” For it perceives this relation as necessary not only in things that actually exist but also in the case of things that do not exist in reality. For just as the proposition “If a human being is running, a human being is moving” is true if the human being in question actually exists, so it is true if he doesn’t. Therefore, the source of the *necessity* of this sort of *inference* is not the existence of a thing in *physical matter*, for this sort of existence is contingent. Nor is it rooted in the existence of the thing in the *mind*, because that would be a figment if the thing did not also exist in reality. Therefore, its source is the prototypical reality (exemplarity) [of things] in the eternal Art, which is responsible for the propensities that things have for each other, or for the relations that things have to each other, as [the prototypical relations in] this eternal Art are *reflected* [in things]. So, as Augustine says in *On True Religion*, “The light

³⁶ I.e., the necessity of the inference.

of anyone who *reasons truly* is enlightened by that truth and seeks to return to it.”³⁷

From this it is clear that our intellect is conjoined with the eternal truth itself, for our intellect could not grasp any truth with certitude if that [higher truth] were not teaching it. So you are able to see by yourself that truth, which teaches you—as long as unruly desires and images in the imagination do not stand as impediments, becoming like clouds between you and the ray of truth.

4. The *operation* of the power of *choice* is observed in *deliberation*, *judgment*, and *desire*. *Deliberation* consists in inquiring whether this thing is ‘better’ than that thing. But ‘better’ always means ‘closer to the best’; and ‘closer’ means ‘more like it.’ Therefore, no one can know whether one thing is ‘better’ than another without knowing that the former is ‘more like the best.’ And no one can know whether something is ‘more like’ another without knowing that other. (Indeed, I cannot know whether this person is like Peter unless I know or get acquainted with Peter.) Therefore, the notion of the highest good³⁸ must be present in the mind of anyone who is engaged in deliberation.

As for a sure *judgment* concerning matters that are the object of deliberation, it happens according to some law. And no one judges with certitude according to a law without being certain that this law is right, and that this law itself ought not be judged. But our mind does judge about itself.³⁹ At the same time, our mind cannot judge about the law, which it uses to judge. Therefore, that law is superior to our mind. And our mind is able to judge by this law in as far as this law has been impressed in the mind. But nothing is superior to the human mind except He alone who has created it. Therefore, when our *deliberative* power arrives at a *full and complete analysis* in making its judgments, it comes in contact with the divine laws.

³⁷ Augustine, *On True Religion*, ch. 39, n. 72.

³⁸ I.e., the very ‘best’ thing, or God.

³⁹ Therefore it is not the source of that law about which it cannot judge.

Finally, *desire* tends primarily to that which moves it the most. It is, however, that which we love the most which moves it the most. And that which we love the most is to be happy. But happiness is attained only by reaching the best, or the ultimate goal. Therefore, human *desire* is directed at something exclusively because that something is the supreme Good itself, or because it leads to it, or because it has some resemblance with that supreme Good. The power of the supreme Good is so great that nothing can be loved by a creature except insofar as that thing is able to hijack the latter's desire for the supreme Good. 'To be deceived' or 'to fall into error,' then, means to take the image or the copy for the genuine thing itself.⁴⁰

Behold, therefore, how close the soul is to God, and how, in the same way as the memory leads to eternity, and the intelligence leads to truth, the power of choice, through its operations, leads one to the highest Good.⁴¹

5. Furthermore, if one considers the *order*, *origin*, and *relation* of these faculties to one another, one is led to the most blessed Trinity itself. Indeed, intelligence emerges out of memory as its offspring, because we come to understand only when a likeness, which lies in the memory, is foregrounded in our mental focus. And this [process] is nothing other than [generating] a word. Finally, from memory and intelligence, love is breathed forth as the bond that unites them. These three, namely *the mind that generates*, *the word*, and *love*, exist in the soul in connection with memory, intelligence, and will. They are of one essence, coequal, and coeval, and mutually indwelling. Therefore, if God is the perfect spirit, there must be not only *memory*, *intelligence*, and *will* in God, but there must also be the *Word* begotten and the *Love* breathed forth⁴²—who are necessarily

⁴⁰ I.e., for the highest Good.

⁴¹ I.e., to the Father (eternity), the Son (truth), and the Holy Spirit (the highest Good).

⁴² I.e., the Son and the Holy Spirit.

distinguished (since one is produced by the other): not in *essence*, and not through *accidental properties*, but as *persons*.

Therefore, when the soul reflects upon itself, it rises, through itself as through a mirror, to the spectacle of the blessed Trinity of Father, Word, and Love: three persons that are coeternal, coequal, and of one essence—in such a way that every one of them is in every other, and yet one is not the other, and these three are one God.

6. Now on its way to becoming aware of its own triple and unitary nature by looking at the trinity of its own powers (which is what makes it into an image of God) the soul is *aided* by the light of the *sciences*, which perfect and shape it, and which represent the most blessed Trinity in a threefold way. Indeed, all of philosophy consists of *natural*, *rational*, and *moral*. The first type deals with the cause of existence and therefore points to the *power of the Father*. The second type deals with the basis of understanding and therefore leads to the *wisdom of the Word*. And the third type deals with the order of living and therefore leads to the *goodness of the Holy Spirit*.

Again, the *first* type⁴³ is subdivided into metaphysics, mathematics, and physics. The first deals with the essences of things; the second with numbers and figures; and the third with natures, powers, and diffusive operations. Therefore the first points to the *First Principle, namely, the Father*; the second points to the *image of the Father, namely, the Son*; and the third points to the *gift of the Holy Spirit*.

The *second* type⁴⁴ is divided into grammar, which makes people capable of expressing themselves; logic, which makes people sharp in argumentation; and rhetoric, which enables people to persuade and move others. Again, this points to the mystery of the most blessed Trinity.

⁴³ I.e., natural philosophy.

⁴⁴ I.e., rational philosophy.

The *third* type⁴⁵ is divided into the monastic, the familial, and the political. Therefore, the first suggests the *unbegottenness of the First Principle*; the second suggests the *familial relation of the Son*; and the third suggests the *generosity of the Holy Spirit*.

7. All these sciences are governed by certain and infallible laws that are like lights and rays coming down from that eternal law into our mind. Therefore, our mind, enlightened and filled with such splendors, can be guided to reflect on this eternal light through itself—that is, unless it is blind. Now the irradiation of this light and the reflection on it lifts up the wise in admiration. On the contrary, the fools who reject faith as a way to understanding are led to confusion. Thus the prophetic word is fulfilled: *You enlighten wonderfully from the everlasting hills. All the foolish of heart were troubled.*

⁴⁵ I.e., moral philosophy.