

CHAPTER FOUR
ON SEEING GOD IN HIS IMAGE
REFORMED BY THE GIFTS OF GRACE

1. Since, however, it is possible to contemplate the First Principle not only by way of passing *through ourselves*,⁴⁶ but also *in ourselves*, and since the latter is more excellent than the former, this type of consideration occupies the fourth step on the ladder of contemplation. Now after it has been shown that God is extremely close to our minds, it seems surprising that there are so few who actually contemplate the First Principle within themselves. However, the reason for this is clear. The human mind is distracted by many concerns, and hence does not enter into itself through *memory*. It is beclouded by images of sense objects in the imagination, and therefore does not return to itself through *intelligence*. And it is drawn away by base desires, and therefore a *desire* for internal sweetness and spiritual joy is unable to turn the mind back to itself. Thus totally immersed in matters of the senses, the mind is unable to re-enter into itself as the image of God.

2. Consider the situation when a person falls: this person will certainly remain lying there until someone comes near *to reach out and raise the fallen one up*. It is the same way with our soul: it was unable to be lifted up perfectly from these sensible realities to see itself and the eternal truth within itself—until the truth, after Christ had assumed a human form, became its ladder that repaired the previous ladder that had been broken in Adam.

Therefore, no matter how much someone may be illumined by the light of nature and acquired knowledge, she is still unable to enter into herself, in order *to take delight in the Lord* [Ps. 36:4] while being within herself, without the mediation of Christ, who says: *I am the door. Those who enter through me*

⁴⁶ I.e., when our mind is merely used as a conduit to God: e.g., when the “trinity” of powers in our mind reminds us of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

shall be saved; they shall go in and out and find pasture. [John 10:9] However, we do not come near this “door” unless we *believe* in it, *hope* in it, and *love* it. If we wish, therefore, to re-enter into the enjoyment of truth as into a paradise, we must enter through *faith* in, *hope* in, and *love* for *the mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ*, who is like *the tree of life in the middle of paradise.*

3. Therefore the “image” that is our mind must be clothed over with the three theological virtues, by which the soul is *purified, illumined, and perfected.* In this way the image is reformed, is brought into conformity with the heavenly Jerusalem and becomes a member of the church militant, which is the offspring of the heavenly Jerusalem, according to the Apostle. For he says: *That Jerusalem which is above is free, and she is our mother.* The soul, then, must *believe* in, *hope* in, and *love* Jesus Christ who is the Word *incarnate, uncreated, and inspired* (that is, *the way, the truth, and the life*). Now when that soul in *faith* believes in Christ as in the *uncreated* Word, who is the Word and splendor of the Father, it recovers its spiritual senses of *hearing* and of *sight*: its *hearing* so that it might receive the words of Christ, and its *sight* that it might perceive the splendors of that light. When, however, that soul in *hope* yearns to receive the *inspired* Word, through this desire and affection it recovers its spiritual *sense of smell.* And when that soul in *love* embraces the *incarnate* Word, receiving delight from him and passing over to him in ecstatic love, it recovers its *senses of taste and touch.*

Ultimately, when the soul, through its restored spiritual senses, sees, hears, smells, tastes, and embraces its bridegroom, it can sing like the bride in the *Canticle of Canticles*: the poem that was written for the exercise of contemplation at Step Four. And this step *no one knows except one who receives it*, for it consists rather in emotional experience than in rationalization. At this step, then, after its interior senses have been restored to the point of perceiving the highest beauty, of hearing the highest harmony, of smelling the sweetest fragrance, of tasting the utmost sweetness, and of

embracing what is most delightful, the soul is prepared for spiritual ecstasies: through *devotion*, *admiration*, and *exultation*, in accordance with the three exclamations found in the *Canticle of Canticles*. The first of these comes from the abundance of devotion, through which the soul becomes like a *column of smoke filled with the aroma of myrrh and frankincense*. The second comes from the overflowing sense of wonder, by which the soul becomes like the *dawn*, *the moon*, and the *sun*, following the order of illuminations that lift it up in wonder at the Bridegroom. And the third comes through the superabundance of *joy*, through which the soul is brought to *the fullness of delights* of most sweet pleasure and *rests totally upon her Beloved*.

4. After attaining those things, our spirit becomes sufficiently *orderly* to be able to ascend up the hierarchy, as it is now in conformity with the heavenly Jerusalem: for no one enters into that city unless that city has first descended into that person's heart through grace, as John saw in his *Revelations*. However, it does not descend into our heart until our spirit becomes *orderly*—i.e., cleansed, illumined, and perfect—through the reformation of the [divine] image, by means of the theological virtues, through the joys of the spiritual senses, and through the ecstasy of rapture.

As it advances in this way, our spirit is also stamped with the marks of the nine orders. Correspondingly, the following are found within it, in an appropriate order: *announcing*, *dictating*, *leading*, *ordering*, *strengthening*, *commanding*, *receiving*, *revealing*, and *anointing*. These correspond to the nine hierarchies of angels. Now as far as the human mind is concerned, the first three of these hierarchical steps correspond to *nature*; the next three correspond to our own *effort*; and the final three correspond to *grace*. When it has attained these, the soul, when it enters into itself, enters into the heavenly Jerusalem where, as it considers the hierarchies of angels, it sees in them the God who dwells in them and who performs all their activities. Hence, Bernard says to Pope Eugene that “God loves in the Seraphim as charity; knows in

the Cherubim as truth; sits in the Thrones as justice; reigns in the Dominations as majesty; rules in the Principalities as a guiding principle; protects in the Powers as salvation; is at work in the Virtues as strength; reveals in the Archangels as light; assists in the Angels as kindness.”⁴⁷ From all this, God is seen as *all in all* when we contemplate God in our minds, where God dwells through the gifts of the most generous love.

5. At this level of speculation it is particularly helpful to consider the divinely given sacred Scriptures, just as philosophy was helpful at the previous level. For sacred Scripture is concerned above all with the work of reparation. Therefore, it deals mainly with faith, hope and love: that is, with the virtues by which the soul is reformed. However, its specific focus is love, of which the Apostle says that it is the whole point of the Law, and that it arises from *a heart that is pure and from a good conscience, and from genuine faith*. As the same Apostle says, it is *the fulfillment of the Law*. And our Savior affirms that the whole of the Law and the Prophets depend on two commandments regarding love: namely, to love God and to love our neighbor. These two are symbolized by the one bridegroom of the church, Jesus Christ, who is both our God and our neighbor, both our lord and our brother, both king and friend, both the uncreated Word and the incarnate Word, both our creator and our re-creator, both the *alpha* and the *omega*. As the supreme hierarch, it is he who cleanses, illumines and perfects his bride, namely the entire church and each holy soul.

6. Therefore, this hierarch together with the ecclesiastical hierarchy constitute the subject of all of sacred Scripture, through which we are taught how to be cleansed, illumined and perfected. Now all this happens according to the threefold *law*, which has been handed down in the Scriptures: namely, the law of nature, the law of Scripture, and the law of grace. Or, rather, this happens in accord with the *three main parts* of

⁴⁷ Cf. *On Consideration*, Bk. 5, ch. 5, n. 12.

Scripture: the Mosaic law which cleanses, the prophetic revelation which illumines, and the teaching of the Gospel which perfects. Or, most likely, this happens according to the threefold *spiritual meaning* of Scripture: the *tropological*,⁴⁸ which cleanses one for an upright life; the *allegorical*, which enlightens one for clarity of understanding; and the *anagogical*, which leads one to perfection through spiritual ecstasies and through the most sweet infusions of wisdom.

All this happens with the aid of the aforementioned three theological *virtues*, of the reformed spiritual senses, of the three spiritual *ecstasies* mentioned above, and of the three *orderly acts of the mind*, by which it returns inside itself, in order to see God there in the *splendor of the Saints*, and to *sleep in peace* in these splendors as in her bed, while the Bridegroom pleads that she should not be awakened until it is her will to come forth.

7. Thus from these two intermediate steps—by which we enter in order to contemplate God *within us* as in the mirror of the created image [of God], and which are like the two middle wings [of the Seraph] extended for flight—we can come to understand that we are led to divine things through the powers of the *rational soul* itself. Now some of these powers are *naturally present* in the soul and work through their *operations, dispositions, and predispositions for knowledge*, as becomes clear at Step Three. Some of these powers are *reformed* and work by way of *virtues* given by grace, by way of the spiritual *senses*, and by way of the mental *ecstasies*, as becomes clear at Step Four. We are also led by downward *movements down celestial hierarchies* that, e.g., cleanse, illumine and perfect human minds; or by revelations of the sacred Scriptures handed down to us from above by the angels, according to that statement of the Apostle, to the effect that the Law has been given *by the angels at the hand of a mediator*. Finally, we are led by the *hierarchies and the hierarchic orders*, which are formed in our mind in the image of the heavenly Jerusalem.

⁴⁸ I.e., using moral metaphors.

8. Flooded with all these intellectual lights, our mind turns into a house of God that is inhabited by the divine Wisdom. Our mind, then, becomes a daughter, a bride, and a friend of God. It becomes a sister and a coheir of Christ, and is like a limb of a body, of which Christ is the head. It also becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit, which is founded on faith, raised through hope, and dedicated to God through holiness of mind and body. It is the most sincere love of Christ that brings this about, a love which *is poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us*. And without this Spirit we cannot know the hidden things of God. Just as *no one can know a human person's innermost self except the spirit of that person which dwells within, so no one knows the things of God but the Spirit of God*. Therefore, *let us be rooted and grounded in love, so that we might comprehend with all the saints what is the length of eternity, the breadth of generosity, the height of majesty, and the depth of that discerning wisdom*.