

BONAVENTURE
THE JOURNEY OF THE MIND INTO GOD
(translated by Oleg Bychkov)

PROLOGUE

1. In the beginning I call upon that First Beginning from whom all illuminations flow down as from the *God of lights*, and from whom comes *every good and perfect gift*—namely, I call upon the eternal Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that through the intercession of the most holy virgin Mary, the mother of that same Lord and God, Jesus Christ, and through the intercession of blessed Francis, our leader and father, God might grant clearly seeing eyes to our mind in order to guide our feet to the path of peace: that *peace which surpasses all understanding*. This is the peace, which our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed and granted to us. It was this message of peace, which our father Francis took over, proclaiming it at the beginning and the end of each one of his sermons. In every one of his greetings he wished for peace; and in every experience of contemplation he sighed for an ecstatic peace. He was like a citizen of that Jerusalem about which that man of peace—he *who was peaceable even with those who despised peace*—says: *Pray for those things that are for the peace of Jerusalem*. For he knew that it was only in peace that the throne of Solomon stood, since it is written: *His place is in peace, and his dwelling is in Sion*.

2. Now I, a sinner, who, unworthy as I am, had taken over the responsibilities of the most blessed father after his death to become the seventh minister general of the brothers, was moved by the example of our most blessed father, Francis, and eagerly desired this peace. As I was thus preoccupied, it happened around the time of the thirty-third anniversary of the death of the saint [year 1259] that, by God's will, I withdrew to Mount Alverna, as to a quiet place, seized with desire to seek the peace of mind. While I was there, reflecting on certain ways, in which the mind might ascend to God, I

recalled, among other things, that miracle which the blessed Francis himself had experienced in this very place, namely the vision of the winged Seraph in the form of the Crucified. As I reflected on this, it became immediately clear to me that this vision presented not only the uplifting of our father himself in contemplation but also the road by which one might arrive at this contemplation.

3. For those six wings can rightly be understood to stand for six levels of uplifting illuminations. By means of these illuminations—as by certain steps or pathways, so to say,—the soul is disposed to move on to peace through the ecstatic raptures of Christian wisdom. This road, however, can only go through the most burning love of the Crucified. It was that sort of love, which lifted Paul into the third heaven and transformed him into Christ to such a degree that he could say: *With Christ I am nailed to the cross; it is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.* It was also that sort of love that so absorbed the mind of Francis that his spirit became apparent in his flesh; and for two years prior to his death, he carried the most holy marks of the passion on his body. The figure of the six wings of the Seraph, therefore, stands for the six stages of illumination, which begin with creatures and lead up to God, to whom no one has proper access except through the Crucified. For anyone *who does not enter by that door, but climbs up another way, is a thief and a robber. But anyone who enters by that door will go in and out, and will find pastures.* For this reason, John writes in the Apocalypse: *Blessed are those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, for they are nourished at the tree of life and they may enter the city through the gates.* This is to say that no one can enter into the heavenly Jerusalem by means of contemplation except through the blood of the Lamb as through a door. For no one is disposed in any way for those divine contemplations, which lead to ecstasies of the mind, without being, like Daniel, *a person of desires.* However, desires can be inflamed in us in two ways, namely through the *cry of prayer*, which makes us cry aloud with *groaning of the heart*, and through the *brightness of*

contemplation, by which the mind turns itself most directly and intently towards the rays of light.

4. Therefore, I first of all invite the reader to groans of prayer through Christ crucified, through whose blood we are purged from the filth of our vices—in order that you might not assume that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, examination without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, merely mirroring things without divinely inspired wisdom. To those, then, who are already touched by divine grace—to the humble and pious; to those who are devout and sorrowful for their sins; to those anointed with the *oil of gladness*; to those who are lovers of divine wisdom and are inflamed with desire for it; and to those who wish to give themselves to glorifying, admiring, and even savoring God—I propose the following reflections. At the same time I warn them that to have a mirror placed before them externally¹ is of little or no use unless the mirror of the mind is first cleansed and polished. Therefore, O child of God, train yourself first to be more sensitive to the stinging bite of conscience before you raise your eyes to those rays of wisdom that are reflected in its mirrors—in order to avoid falling into an even deeper pit of darkness as a result of the very act of looking at these rays.

5. It seemed appropriate to me to divide this treatise into seven chapters with a title attached to each chapter for clarity. I ask, therefore, that you give more attention to the intent of the writer than to the work itself, more to the meaning of the things said than to the unsophisticated language, more to the truth than to the gracefulness of style, more to how much affection is being stimulated than to how much more learned the intellect becomes. In order to achieve this, you should not run through these reflections in a perfunctory manner, but should ponder them carefully.

¹ I.e., that would only mirror external things.

CHAPTER ONE
ON THE STEPS OF THE ASCENT INTO GOD AND ON
SEEING GOD THROUGH HIS VESTIGES IN THE WORLD

1. *Blessed are those whose help comes from you. In their hearts they are prepared to ascend by steps in the valley of tears, in the place which they have set.* Since happiness is nothing other than the enjoyment of the highest good, and since the highest good is above us, no one can become happy without rising above herself: not by a bodily ascent, but by an ascent of the heart. But we cannot rise above ourselves except by means of a superior power lifting us up. For no matter how much one works on ordering these internal steps, nothing will happen without the accompaniment of the divine aid. Divine aid, however, comes to those who ask from their heart humbly and devoutly. This means to sigh for it in this *valley of tears*, which only happens through fervent prayer. Therefore prayer is the mother and the origin of the upward movement of the soul. It is for this reason that pseudo-Dionysius in his book *Mystical Theology* [Bk. 1, ch. 1], wishing to teach us about the ecstasy of the mind, first offers a prayer. Let us, therefore, pray and say to the Lord our God: *Lead me, O Lord, in your way so that I might enter into your truth. Let my heart rejoice that it may be in awe of your name.*

2. When we pray in this manner, the [first] step of the ascent to God is illuminated for our understanding. Now in accordance with our [created] condition, the whole universe of things itself could serve as a ladder, by which we can ascend into God. Further, among those things some are *vestiges*, others are *images*; some are *bodily*, others are *spiritual*; some are *temporal*, others are *everlasting*; and in accordance with this, some are *outside* us, others are *inside* us. Now since what we just said is the case, in order for us to be able to consider that First Principle—which is *most spiritual* and *eternal*, and *above us*—we ought to *move on* through the *vestiges*, which are *bodily* and *temporal* and *outside us*: and this means to *be led in the way of God*. Next we must *enter* into our mind, which is the

image of God, an image which is *everlasting, spiritual*, and *inside us*: and this means to *enter into the truth of God*. Finally, we must *pass beyond* to that which is *eternal, most spiritual*, and *above us* by raising our eyes to the First Principle: and this means *to rejoice in the knowledge of God and to stand in awe before God's majesty*.

3. This, therefore, is the three-day journey in the solitude of the desert; this is the triple illumination of a single day: the first is like evening, the second like morning, and the third like noon. This illumination corresponds to the three-fold existence of things, namely in matter, in understanding, and in the eternal Art, in connection with which it is written: *Let it be, God made it*, and *it was made*. This also relates to the triple substance in Christ who is our ladder: namely the corporeal, the spiritual, and the divine.

4. In accordance with this three-fold progression, our soul has three principal ways of relating itself. In one way, the soul is directed towards external corporeal things; under this aspect, the soul is called 'animality' or 'sensation.' In the second way, the soul is directed at itself and within itself; viewed under this aspect, the soul is called 'spirit.' In the third way, the soul looks above itself; under this aspect, it is called 'mind.' Accordingly, one must so dispose oneself towards the ascent to God that he might love God *with the whole mind, the whole heart, and the whole soul*. Those three constitute perfect observance of the Law together with Christian wisdom.

5. Now each of the aforesaid ways may be doubled: insofar as we happen to consider God as the *alpha and the omega*; or insofar as we happen to see God in any of the abovementioned ways as *through* a mirror or as *in* a mirror; or because each of these ways can be considered as mixed, i.e., as conjoined with another, or simply in itself in its purity. For all the aforesaid reasons, it is necessary to increase the number of these principal levels of ascent from three to six, in order that, just as God completed the *entire world* in six days and rested on the

seventh, the “lesser world”² might be led to the quiet of contemplation in a most orderly way through six successive levels of illumination. This can be symbolized by the six steps, with which one ascended to the throne of Solomon; by the Seraphs whom Isaiah saw, each of whom had six wings; by the six days, after which the Lord *called Moses from the midst of the cloud*; and by the *six days*, after which, as Matthew writes, *Christ led the disciples to the mountain and was transfigured before them*.

6. Corresponding to the six steps of the *ascent* to God, there are six levels of the *powers* of the soul, by which we ascend from the lowest to the highest, from the external to the internal, and by which we move from the temporal to the eternal. These six levels are: *sense, imagination, reason, understanding, intelligence*, and the *high point of the mind*, or the spark of conscience. These powers are implanted in us by nature. They are deformed through sin and reformed through grace. They must be cleansed through [the exercise of] justice, developed by learning, and perfected by wisdom.

7. According to its original natural constitution, the human being was created with a capacity to experience the quiet of contemplation. Therefore, *God placed the first human being in a paradise of pleasures*. However, turning away from the true light to the changeable good, the first human strayed through his own fault, and the entire human race went sideways on account of original sin, which infected human nature in two ways. It infects the mind with *ignorance*, and the flesh with *concupiscence*. The result is that humans, *blind and wayward*, sit in darkness and do not see the light of heaven, unless grace together with justice aid them against *concupiscence*, and unless knowledge together with wisdom aid them against *ignorance*. All this comes about through Jesus Christ, who by God *has been made wisdom and justice and sanctification and redemption* for us. For since he is the *power* of God and the

² I.e., the “microcosm” of the human mind.

wisdom of God, and the incarnate Word of God full of grace and truth, he is the source of grace and truth. He pours into us the grace of love, which, since it arises from a pure heart and a good conscience and unfeigned faith, rectifies the entire soul according to the three ways mentioned above. He has taught the knowledge of truth according to three sorts of theology, namely symbolic, proper, and mystical, so that through symbolic theology we might use sensible things correctly, through theology in the proper sense we might deal with intelligible things correctly, and through mystical theology we might be drawn up to ecstatic experiences.

8. Therefore, a person who wishes to ascend to God must do the following things. The first is avoiding sin, which deforms nature. Next comes sharpening the aforesaid natural powers of the soul in order to receive *reforming grace* (and this is done through prayer); in order to obtain *justice that purifies* (and this is achieved by one's way of life); in order to receive *illuminating knowledge* (and this happens through meditation); and in order to achieve the *wisdom that perfects* (and this is done through contemplation). For just as no one arrives at wisdom except through grace, justice, and knowledge, so no one arrives at *contemplation* except by means of insightful meditation, a holy way of life, and devout prayer. Therefore, just as grace is the foundation of the righteousness of the will and the enlightening clarity of reason, so for us it is necessary first of all to pray. Then we must live in a holy way. And third, we must fix our gaze on the manifestations of truth, and gazing on them, rise gradually, until we arrive at the *high mountain, where the God of gods is seen in Sion.*

9. Now since we must ascend before we can descend on Jacob's ladder, let us place the first step of our ascent at the bottom, putting this whole world perceived by the senses before us as a mirror, through which we may pass to God, the highest creative Artist. In this way we may become true Hebrews, passing from Egypt to the land promised to the forbears. And we shall be Christians passing over with Christ *from this world*

to the Father. We shall also be lovers of that wisdom, which calls and says: Pass over to me, all you who desire me, and be filled with my fruits. For in the greatness and beauty of created things their Creator can be seen and known.

10. The supreme power, wisdom, and benevolence of the Creator shines forth in created things; accordingly, the bodily senses make this known to the interior senses in a three-fold way. For the bodily senses aid the intellect when it *investigates rationally*, or *believes faithfully*, or *contemplates intellectually*. When it *contemplates*, the intellect considers the actual existence of things; when it *believes* it considers the habitual flow of events; and when it *investigates by means of reason*, it is concerned with the potential excellence of things.

11. According to the first way, as the intellect *contemplates*, considering things as they are in themselves, it sees them in terms of *weight*, *number*, and *measure*. *Weight* refers to the position toward which they are inclined; *number* refers to that by which things are distinguished; and *measure* is that by which things are limited. Thus we see things in terms of state, form-beauty, and order, and in terms of substance, power, and activity. From observing these aspects, we can rise as from the trace or *vestige* to an understanding of the immense power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator.

12. According to the second way, as the intellect approaches with *faith* while considering this world, it notices the aspects of *origin*, *development*, and *end*. For it is *by faith* that *we believe that the world was fashioned by the Word of life*. By faith we believe that the periods of the three laws followed each other in a most orderly succession: namely, the law of nature, the law of Scripture, and the law of grace. By faith we believe that the world is to come to an end in the final judgment. Considering the first [i.e., origin], we notice the power of the highest Principle; considering the second [i.e., development], we notice its providence; and considering the third [i.e., the end], we notice its justice.

13. According to the third way, as the intellect *investigates by means of reason*, it sees that some things merely *exist*; others *exist and live*; and yet others *exist, live, and are sentient*. Here it recognizes that the first of these are the less perfect ones; the second are the intermediate ones; and the third are the more perfect ones. Again, it sees that some things are merely *corporeal*; some are *partly corporeal and partly spiritual*; and from this it conjectures that some are *wholly spiritual* and hence are better and of greater dignity than the first two types of beings. It sees also that some things are *changeable and corruptible*, such as earthly things; some are *changeable but incorruptible*, such as heavenly bodies; and from this it conjectures that some are *unchangeable and incorruptible*, such as those things that are beyond heavenly bodies.³ Therefore, from these visible realities, the intellect learns to see the power, wisdom and goodness of God as existing, living, intelligent, purely spiritual, incorruptible and unchangeable.

14. These observations can be extended if we take into consideration the seven properties of the created world, which offer a seven-fold witness to the power, wisdom, and goodness of God—namely, if we consider the *origin, greatness, multitude, beauty, fullness, activity, and order* of all things.

For the *origin* of things—taking into consideration their creation, distinction, and adornment, which manifested themselves during the work of the six days—proclaims the power of God that produces all things from nothing, the wisdom of God that clearly distinguishes all things, and the goodness of God that richly adorns all things.

The *greatness* of things, if one considers the immensity of their length, width, and depth; or if one considers their immense power, which extends in length, width, and depth, such as the diffusion of light clearly demonstrates; or if one considers the efficiency of their internal, continuous, and diffuse operations, such as the action of fire shows—all this clearly points to the immensity of the power, wisdom, and

³ I.e., purely intelligible beings such as angels and God.

goodness of the triune God who, though unlimited, exists in all things by virtue of his *power, presence, and essence*.

The *multitude* of things, if one considers their general, particular, and individual diversity of substance, form or figure, and activity—the diversity that is beyond human estimation—manifestly points to and demonstrates the immense scale, to which the three aforesaid attributes⁴ are present in God.

The *beauty* of things, if one considers the diversity of light, shape, and color in bodies that are simple, mixed,⁵ or complex⁶—for example, in the heavenly bodies, in minerals (such as stones and metals), and in plants and animals—clearly proclaims the three aforesaid attributes.⁷

Moreover, if one considers the fact that *matter* is full of forms on account of the seminal principles;⁸ and that form is full of power, i.e., of potential towards actuality; and that this power is full of actual effects, one will see that the *fullness* of things also clearly proclaims the same three attributes.

Likewise, *activity* in its many forms, whether *natural, artistic, or moral*, shows by its extreme variety the immensity of that *power, art, and goodness*,⁹ which is for all things “the cause of being, the basis of understanding, and the rule of life.”¹⁰

As far as *order* is concerned, if one considers it under the aspect of *sequence, position, and status* (i.e., in terms of prior

⁴ I.e., power, wisdom and goodness.

⁵ Consisting of more than one element.

⁶ Composed of the physical body and some type of a soul: vegetable, animal, or rational.

⁷ See note no. 4.

⁸ According to ancient Greek thought (this idea was later taken over by Christian thinkers), the primary matter of the world is filled with essential principles of all things that can be potentially generated from this matter. Since not all things that can potentially exist are present in the world at any particular time, these principles are called “seminal”: the seeds that can grow into all possible forms at a certain time.

⁹ I.e., those of God.

¹⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, Bk. 8, ch. 4.

and posterior, higher and lower, and more or less noble), it clearly shows in the book of creation the *primacy, sublimity, and dignity* of the First Principle, as far as the infinity of its *power* goes. As for the order of the divine *laws, precepts and judgments* in the book of the Scriptures, it shows the immensity of God's *wisdom*. Finally, the order of the divine *sacraments, graces, and rewards* in the body of the church shows the immensity of God's *goodness*. In this way order leads us most manifestly to that which is first and highest, most powerful, most wise, and best.

15. Therefore, any person who is not illumined by such great splendors in created things is blind. Anyone who is not awakened by such great outcries is deaf. Anyone who is not led from all these effects to give praise to God is mute. Anyone who does not notice the First Principle from such conspicuous signs is a fool. Therefore open your eyes, alert your spiritual ears, unlock your lips, and apply your heart so that in all creation you may see, hear, praise, love and adore, extol and honor your God—lest the entire world rise up against you. For it is on this account that *the entire world will fight against the fools*. On the other hand, this will be a cause of glory for the wise who can say in the words of the prophet: *You have given me delight, O Lord, in your deeds, and I shall rejoice in the work of your hands. How wonderful are your works, O Lord. You have made all things in wisdom, the earth is filled with your richness.*

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.

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.

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*.

CHAPTER FIVE
ABOUT MEDITATING ON GOD’S UNITY BY USING
GOD’S PRIMARY NAME, WHICH IS ‘BEING’

1. Now God can be contemplated not only *outside ourselves* and *inside ourselves* but also *above ourselves*: *outside* ourselves through his vestiges; *inside* ourselves through his image; and *above* ourselves by means of the light that is positioned above our mind. This is the light of the eternal truth itself, since “our mind itself is shaped immediately by truth itself.”⁴⁹ Those who have become adept at the first way have already entered into the *court* before the tabernacle. Those who are practiced in the second way have entered into the *sanctum*. And those who are skilled in the third way enter together with the High Priest into the *Holy of Holies*, where the Cherubim of glory stand above the ark and overshadow the Mercy Seat. The two Cherubim symbolize the two modes or levels of contemplating the invisible and eternal qualities of God. The first mode concerns the essential attributes of God; the second concerns the properties of the persons.

2. The first approach fixes our gaze primarily and first of all on Being Itself, thus indicating that God’s primary name is *He Who Is*. [Exodus 3:14] The second approach fixes our gaze on the Good, thus suggesting that God’s primary name is ‘the Good.’ The first looks above all to the *Old Testament*, which above all proclaims the unity of the divine essence. Hence it was said to Moses: *I am who am*. The second approach looks to the *New Testament*, which establishes the plurality of persons by baptizing *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. Therefore Christ, our Master, wishing to raise to evangelical perfection the young man who had observed the Law, attributed to God principally and precisely the name of *Goodness* saying: *No one is good but God alone*. So Damascene, following Moses, says that God’s primary name is *He Who Is*,

⁴⁹ Augustine, 83 *Questions*, qu. 51, ch. 2, n. 4.

while pseudo-Dionysius, following Christ, says that God's primary name is *Good*.⁵⁰

3. Anyone, therefore, who wishes to contemplate the invisible qualities of God that have to do with the *unity of essence* must first of all fix his or her gaze on *Being* Itself. Next, this person must recognize that Being Itself is of itself so *thoroughly certain* that it cannot be thought not to be, for the *purest being* itself only occurs in the total absence of non-being, just as *nothing* is present only in the total absence of *being*. Therefore, just as *total nothingness* possesses nothing of being or of being's attributes, so, on the contrary, Being Itself possesses nothing of *non-being*, neither in actuality nor in a potential state, and neither in reality nor in our mind. Now, since *non-being* is the privation of being, it does not occur to the intellect except by way of [the positive notion of] being. *Being*, on the other hand, does not need anything else in order to occur to the intellect, because everything that is understood is conceptualized either as *non-being*, or as *potential being*, or as *actual being*. But if *non-being* cannot be understood except through *being*, and *potential being* cannot be understood except through *actual being*, and if 'to be' refers precisely to the pure actuality of a being—then it follows that *being* is what first occurs to the intellect, and that this *being* amounts to 'pure actuality.' This, however, cannot be a particular *being*, which is limited because it is mixed with potentiality. Nor is it analogous *being*, which has the least actuality because it has the least of existence. It remains, therefore, that this *being* is the divine Being.

4. How remarkable, then, is the blindness of the intellect, which does not take notice of that which it sees first, and without which it can *know* nothing. It is just like the [physical] eye, which is focused on perceiving different shades of color and fails to see the light, which enables it to see other things; or if it sees it, it pays no attention to it. So it is with the eye of our

⁵⁰ John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*, Bk. 1, ch. 9; pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names*, Bk. 3, ch. 1.

mind: it is focused on perceiving *particular* and *universal* beings and pays no attention to *being* itself, which *transcends every genus*—even though it is *being* that first occurs to the mind, and it is through *being* that all other things are known. Hence it rings true that “as the eye of a bat reacts to light, so the eye of our mind reacts to the most evident things of nature.”⁵¹ That is, when the mind, accustomed to the darkness of individual beings and to the images of sensible objects in the imagination, looks directly upon the light of the highest being, it seems to it that it sees nothing: just as when the eye sees pure light it seems to it that it sees nothing. And our mind does not understand that this darkness itself is its highest illumination.

5. Therefore, gaze at the purest *being* itself, if you can, and you will realize that it cannot be thought of as something *received from another*. For this reason it is necessarily thought of as *first* in every sense; but such a thing cannot result from nothing, nor from something else [than itself]. For what else could exist by itself if even *being* itself does not exist through and of itself? Also you will realize that this pure being is *totally lacking in non-being*, and hence that it has never had a beginning nor will ever have an ending, but is *eternal*. Also you will realize that this being *has no attributes whatsoever* except that it is *being* itself; hence it has no composition in itself, but is *most simple*. Also you will realize that this being *has nothing of potentiality* since whatever is potential in some way possesses something of non-being; hence this being is *actual in the highest degree*. Also you will realize that this being *has no defect*, and therefore it is *most perfect*. Finally, you will realize that there is *no diversity* in this being, and therefore it is supremely *one*.

That *being*, therefore, which is being in an unqualified sense, pure, and absolute, is the *first, the eternal, the most simple, the most actual, the most perfect, and the supremely one being*.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. 2.

6. Now these qualities are so certain that no one who understands the meaning of 'being' itself, can imagine the opposites of these qualities [in their place]. Moreover, each one of these qualities necessarily implies the other. For since it is *being* with no qualification, it is thereby *first* in an unqualified sense. Since it is first in an unqualified sense, it is not made by another, nor could it be made by itself; therefore it is *eternal*. And since it is first and eternal, therefore it is not made out of other things, which makes it *supremely simple*. Also, because it is first, eternal, and most simple, therefore there is no potentiality in it that is mixed with actuality; it is therefore *most actual*. Then, because it is first, eternal, most simple, and most actual, it is also *most perfect*. Such a being lacks absolutely nothing, and nothing can be *added* to it. Because it is first, eternal, most simple, most actual, and most perfect, it is *supremely one*. Indeed, when one uses the language of 'super-excess⁵² of all sorts,' it can only refer to the 'multitude of all things.' "However, when one uses the language of 'super-excess in an unqualified way' (or 'super-excess simply'), it can only be appropriate for one thing alone."⁵³ Hence, if the term 'God' stands for the 'primary, eternal, most simple, most actual, and most perfect being,' then it is impossible to think of God as not existing, or to think of God as existing in any other way than as *exclusively one*. Therefore, *Hear, O Israel. The Lord your God is one*. [Deut. 6:4] And if you see this with the pure simplicity of your mind, you will be filled to some extent with the illumination of the eternal light.

7. Here you have something to lift you up in wonder. Indeed, *being* itself is both first and *last*, eternal and *most present*, most simple and *greatest*, most actual and *least changeable*, most perfect and immense, supremely one and *all-embracing*.

⁵² Bonaventure refers to the superlative degrees used above to describe 'pure being' (most perfect, most actual, etc.). For example, if one says 'primary of all sorts,' this can refer to several things that are primary in various ways. But if one says 'simply primary' or 'primary in an unqualified way,' this can only refer to one thing.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Topics*, Bk. 5.

If you marvel at these things with a pure mind, you will be filled with an even greater light when you see further that it is *last precisely because* it is first. For since it is first, it does everything for its own sake; therefore, it is of necessity the ultimate end, the beginning and the consummation, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.

Also, it is *most present* precisely because it is eternal. Indeed, because it is eternal, it does not flow from another, it is not absent from itself, and it does not move from one state to another: therefore, it has neither past nor future, but it exists only in the present.

Also, it is the *greatest* precisely because it is most simple. Indeed, since it is most simple in essence, it is greatest in power, since the more unified or concentrated a power is, the more unlimited it is.

And it is *least changeable* precisely because it is most actual. Indeed, because it is most actual, it is pure actuality. And whatever is such can neither acquire anything new nor lose anything it already possesses; therefore it cannot be changed.

And it is *immense* or immeasurable precisely because it is most perfect. Indeed, because it is most perfect, nothing can be thought of that would be better, more noble, or of greater dignity than it; hence nothing is greater than it; and anything of this sort is immense.

Finally, it is *all-embracing* precisely because it is supremely one. Indeed, that which is supremely one is the universal origin of all multiplicity. By reason of this, it is the universal efficient, exemplary, and final cause of all things, as it is the “cause of existence, the basis of understanding, and the rule of life.” [see p. 10, note 10] Therefore it is *all-embracing* not in the sense of being the essence of all things, but in the sense of being the most excellent, most universal, and most sufficient cause of all essences. And the power of this universal cause, because it is supremely unified in its essence, is thereby supremely infinite and supremely multiple in its effects.

8. Backtracking, let us say as follows: because the most pure and absolute *being* (which is being in an unqualified sense) is *first and last*, it is both the *origin and consummating end* of all things.

Because it is *eternal and most present*, it both exists in and traverses all durations, simultaneously existing, as it were, as both their center and circumference.

Because it is *most simple* and greatest, all of it is both within all things and outside all things, and hence “it is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.”⁵⁴

Because it is *most actual* and *least changeable*, therefore remaining thus unmoved, you movement give to all.⁵⁵

Because it is *most perfect and immense*, it is within all things but is not contained by them; and it is outside all things but is not excluded; it is above all things but not distant; and it is below all things, but not dominated by them.

Because, however, it is both *supremely one and all-embracing*, it is *all in all*, even though all things are multiple and this being is merely one; what allows it to function that way is all that *power*, all *exemplarity*, and all *communicability* in it on account of its most simple *unity*, most peaceful *truth*, and most sincere *goodness*. Hence, *from him and through him and in him are all things*, for he is *all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good*. And to see that perfectly is to be blessed, as it was said to Moses: *I will show you all good*.

⁵⁴ *The Book of 24 Philosophers*, Part 1, Sentence 2.

⁵⁵ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. 3, meter 9.

CHAPTER SIX
ABOUT MEDITATING ON GOD’S MOST BLESSED TRINITY
BY USING GOD’S NAME ‘THE GOOD’

1. After our consideration of the essential attributes of God, the eye of intelligence must be raised to the contemplation of the most blessed Trinity, so that the second Cherub might be placed across from the first. Now as far as seeing God’s essential properties is concerned, *being* itself is the root principle and the name, through which other essential attributes come to be known. As far as our contemplation of the processions⁵⁶ is concerned, however, the same role belongs to the *good* itself, which is its most basic foundation.

2. Therefore, see and take notice that the ‘best’ (or the ‘highest good’) is simply ‘that, than which nothing better can be conceived.’⁵⁷ Now such a thing exists in such a way that it cannot be rightly imagined as not existing, because it is absolutely *better* to exist than not to exist.⁵⁸ Such a thing also exists in such a way that it cannot be rightly imagined not to be both singular and triple. Indeed, “the good is referred to as self-diffusive.”⁵⁹ The supreme good, therefore, is supremely self-diffusive. But the highest degree of diffusion can only exist as *actual and internal, substantial and personal, natural and voluntary, free and necessary, lacking nothing and perfect*. In the supreme good, then, there must be from eternity a production⁶⁰ that is *actual and of the same essence, and persons*⁶¹ that

⁵⁶ Bonaventure speaks of “processions” within the Trinity, such as ‘generation’ (‘begetting’) and ‘spiration’ (‘breathing forth’), which correspond to the Son and the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁷ Anselm of Canterbury’s definition of God in the *Proslogion*.

⁵⁸ Therefore, something that is ‘best’ will certainly have all those qualities that are ‘better,’ including ‘existence.’

⁵⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchies*, Bk. 4.

⁶⁰ ‘Production’ corresponds both to the ‘generation’ of the Son and to the ‘spiration’ of the Holy Spirit.

⁶¹ I.e., the result of this production.

are as noble as [the person of] the producer,⁶² who produces by way of both generation and spiration—so that these persons might result from the eternal principle that eternally co-produces.⁶³ This production must result in a beloved and a co-beloved, in one generated and one spirated, so as to form [, together with the producer, three persons:] Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And if this were not the case, it would not be the supreme good at all, since it would not be *supremely* self-diffusive. Indeed, that diffusion in time or history, i.e., *in the created world*, is a mere dot or speck in comparison to the immensity of the eternal goodness. In comparison [to creaturely diffusion,] one surely *can* think of another diffusion that is greater than that one: namely, of that sort of diffusion, in which the one diffusing itself communicates the whole of its substance and nature to the other. Therefore, it would not be the highest good if that [diffusion that it produces] were lacking either in reality or in intelligence.

Are you able, then, with the eye of your mind to reflect on the purity of that goodness, which is the pure act of the principle that in charity loves with a love that is *free*, and with a love that is *due*, and with a love that is a *combination of both*? or which is the fullest diffusion by way of *nature* (i.e., the diffusion by way of the *Word*,⁶⁴ in which all things are spoken) and *will* (i.e., the diffusion by way of the *Gift*,⁶⁵ in which all other gifts are given)? If you are able to reflect in this way, you are able to see that the supreme communicability of the good demands necessarily the existence of a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That same supreme goodness also demands that there be supreme *communicability* in those three persons; and on account of supreme communicability, that there be *identity of essence*; and on account of the supreme identity of essence, that there be supreme *conformability*; and on account of all of these, that there be supreme *co-equality*; and because

⁶² I.e., God the Father.

⁶³ I.e., simultaneously produces in two different ways (generates and spirates).

⁶⁴ I.e., the Son.

⁶⁵ I.e., the Holy Spirit.

of this, that there be supreme *co-eternity*; and from all of the above, that there be supreme *mutual intimacy*, which means that each person is necessarily in the others through the greatest degree of mutual indwelling, and that one acts with the others in a total unity of *substance*, *power*, and *activity* within the most blessed Trinity itself.

3. But as you contemplate these matters, beware that you do not think that you have come to comprehend the One who is incomprehensible. For you still have something to consider about these six characteristics that will plunge your mental vision into stupefying awe. For here we find the highest degree of *communicability* together with individual properties of persons, highest *unity of essence* together with the plurality of persons, highest *conformability* together with separate personalities, highest *co-equality* together with hierarchy, and highest *co-eternity* and *intimacy* together with procession. Who would not be rapt in wonder at the thought of such marvels?

And yet we know with utmost certainty that all these are present in the most blessed Trinity if we raise our eyes to that super-excelling *goodness*. Indeed, if there is supreme *communication* and true diffusion there, then there is also true origin and true distinction. And since it is the whole that is communicated and not just a part, it follows that whatever is possessed is given, and given in its entirety. Therefore, the producer and the product are both distinguished by their properties and are one in essence.

Now since they are *distinguished* by their properties, it follows that they have personal properties and a plurality of persons. Further, as there is a procession from the source in them, they are hierarchically ordered: not according to temporal priority,⁶⁶ but according to the priority of origin.⁶⁷ Further, there is procession in them, which consists not in local change but in free breathing forth, by the authority of the

⁶⁶ I.e., one comes after the other in time.

⁶⁷ I.e., one is from another, but simultaneous in time.

producer, which is the authority of the sender with respect to the one who is sent.

However, because they are substantially *one*, it is necessary that there be oneness of essence and form, of dignity and eternity, of existence and limitlessness. And as you consider these matters one at a time, you are certainly contemplating truth.

Therefore, when you consider these things in themselves *one by one*, you will have ample material for contemplating *truth*; when, however, you consider these things *in relation to one another*, you will arrive at the source of greatest *wonder*. Therefore, in order that your mind might ascend through admiration to wondering contemplation, you must consider all these matters together.

4. Even the Cherubim that face each other symbolize this.⁶⁸ Nor is there lack of mystery in the fact that they faced each other, *their faces being turned toward the Mercy Seat*. In this is fulfilled what our Lord said in John's Gospel: *This is eternal life, to know the only true God, and the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ*. For we must come to admire the essential and personal attributes of God not only *in themselves*, but also *in relation* to the most admirable union of God and humanity in the unity of the person of Christ.

5. Now if you are like that first Cherub, when you contemplate the *essential* attributes of God, you are surely amazed, because God's *being* is simultaneously *first* and last; *eternal* and most present; *most simple* and greatest or unlimited; *everywhere in its entirety* and yet never contained by anything; *most actual* and yet never moved; *most perfect* and having nothing superfluous nor deficient—and nonetheless immense and infinite without boundaries; *supremely one* and yet *all-embracing*, as it contains in itself *all* things, and as it represents *all* power, *all* truth, and *all* good. If you are, once again, so amazed, then look toward the *Mercy Seat* and be

⁶⁸ I.e., that these things should be considered together.

[further] astonished that there the First Principle is joined to the last, *God* with the human being created on the sixth day, the *eternal* is joined with a temporal human being, born of the Virgin in the fullness of time; the *most simple* with the most composite, the *most actual* with the supremely passive and dead; the *most perfect* and immense with the modest, the *supremely one* and *all-inclusive* with an individual that is of a composite nature and that is distinct from others—namely, with the human being Jesus Christ.

6. If, however, you are like that other Cherub, when you contemplate the *properties of the persons*, you must be amazed to find *communicability* together with [individual] properties, *being of the same essence* with plurality, *conformability* with [individual] personality, *co-equality* with a hierarchical arrangement, *co-eternity* with production [of one by the other], *mutual intimacy* with procession—since the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, yet the one that proceeds does not depart from the others but remains always with them. If you are so amazed, then, look toward the Mercy Seat and be [further] astonished that in Christ, *personal union* stands together with a trinity of substances⁶⁹ and with a duality of natures;⁷⁰ and that *total agreement* exists there together with plurality of wills; and that there is the *mutual predication* of God and humanity together with a plurality of properties; that there is *co-adoration* together with a plurality of rank; *co-elevation* over all things together with the plurality of eminence; and *co-dominion* together with a plurality of powers.

7. Considering these things, one reaches a perfect illumination of his or her mind: when the mind sees humanity as made in the image of God, as it could on the sixth day of Creation. Now since this ‘image’ functions as a perfectly revelatory likeness,

⁶⁹ I.e., corporeal, spiritual and divine substances: see Ch. 1, n. 3. Bonaventure here refers to the person of Jesus, not to the Trinity.

⁷⁰ I.e., human and divine.

when our mind contemplates our humanity so remarkably exalted in Christ, the Son of God, who is by nature the image of the invisible God—seeing, at the same time, how this humanity is so ineffably united into something one, which is both the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the center, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature, that is, *the book written within and without*—at this point our mind has already reached something perfect, which would allow it, with God, to reach the perfection of its illuminations on the sixth step, as on the sixth day of Creation. Nothing further remains but the day of rest, when, in an ecstatic insight, the discerning power of the human mind *rests from all the work that it has done*.

CHAPTER SEVEN
ABOUT THE MYSTICAL TRANSPORT OF THE MIND, IN WHICH
REST IS GIVEN TO THE INTELLECT AFTER OUR AFFECTION
PASSES OVER TOTALLY INTO GOD THROUGH ECSTASY

1. At last, we have exhausted these six considerations, which are like the *six steps* leading to the *true throne* of Solomon: these steps lead one to peace, where the true person of peace rests in the quiet of the mind as in an interior Jerusalem. They are also like the *six wings of the Cherub*, by which the mind of the truly contemplative person, filled with the light of heavenly wisdom, is able to ascend upwards. They are also like the *first six days* of Creation, during which the mind is trained, in order to arrive, finally, at the Sabbath of rest. Further, our mind has contemplated God *outside itself* through and in the vestiges; *within itself* through and in the image; and *above itself*: through the likeness of the divine light, which shines on us from above, and in the divine light itself, as far as our pilgrim state and the level of training of our mind permit that. Finally, only at Step Six, our mind has come to reflect, using as its object the first and highest Principle and the mediator *between God and humanity*, Jesus Christ, on those things that have no whatsoever parallel in the created world, and that completely surpass the penetrating power of the human intellect. It remains, then, for the mind, while it meditates on these things, to pass over and transcend not only this sensible world but even itself. And in this passage, Christ is the *way and the door*. Christ is the *ladder* and the *vehicle*, like the *Mercy Seat placed above the ark of God* and *the mystery that has been hidden from all eternity*.

2. Anyone who turns fully to face this Mercy Seat with faith, hope, and love, devotion, admiration, joy, appreciation, praise and rejoicing, beholding Christ hanging on the Cross, celebrates the *Pasch*, that is, the Passover, with Christ. This allows this person, using the rod of the Cross, to pass over the Red Sea, moving from Egypt into the desert where he could taste the *hidden manna*. This also allows this person to rest

with Christ in the tomb, as one dead on the outside, yet experiencing, as far as this pilgrim state allows, what was said on the cross to the thief who was hanging there with Christ: *This day you will be with me in Paradise.*

3. All this was shown also to blessed Francis when, in a rapture of contemplation on the top of the mountain⁷¹ where I reflected on the things I have written here, a six-winged Seraph fastened to a cross appeared to him, as I myself and many others have heard from the companion who was with him at that very place. Here he was carried out of himself in contemplation and passed over into God. And he has been set forth as the example of perfect *contemplation*, just as he had earlier been known as the example of *action*, like another Jacob transformed into Israel. His example enables God to invite all truly spiritual persons to this sort of passing over and ecstatic experience, more by example than by words.

4. Now if this passing over is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be given up; all of our affection, intensified to its highest point, must be directed to God and transformed into God. However, this experience is mystical and most hidden, which *no one knows except one who receives it*. And no one receives it except one who desires it. And no one desires it but one who is set on fire internally by the fire of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ has sent into the world. Therefore the Apostle says that this mystical wisdom is revealed through the Holy Spirit.

5. Now since our nature can achieve nothing in this area, and even personal effort cannot achieve much, little importance should be given to investigation and much to unctio; little to speech but exceedingly much to interior joy; little to words or writing and all to the gift of God, namely the Holy Spirit; little or no importance should be given to the creature but all to the creative essence, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit—

⁷¹ I.e., mount Alverna.

so that we could cry out to the Triune God with pseudo-Dionysius: “O Trinity, essence beyond essence and God beyond all deities, and most excellent Protector of the theological wisdom of Christians, guide us to that totally unknown but exceedingly radiant and most high summit of mystical discourse. There, the new, absolute, and changeless mysteries of theology are concealed in the dazzling darkness of a silence that teaches secretly: the darkness that shines exceedingly brightly in a total obscurity that is nevertheless exceedingly manifest; the darkness, in which all things shine forth and which fills to excess invisible intellects with the splendor of invisible goods that are above all good.”⁷² This was said to God. But to the friend, to whom this was written, we can say with Dionysius: “In this matter of mystical visions, my friend, being strengthened for your journey, leave behind the world of the senses and of intellectual activities, all sensible and all invisible things, and everything that exists or does not exist, and, in your ignorance, allow yourself, in as far as that is possible, to be restored to unity with that One who is above all essence and knowledge. Thus, in an ecstasy of a pure mind that is beyond you and other things, and beyond their scale, leaving all things behind and freed from all things, you shall rise up to the radiance of the divine darkness that is beyond all essence.”

6. If, however, you ask how all these things come about, ask grace, not learning; desire, not intellect; the groaning of prayer and not diligent reading; the Bridegroom, not the academic teacher; God, not a human being; darkness, not clarity; not light, but the fire that inflames one totally and carries one into God through spiritual fervor and with the most burning affections. Now this ‘fire’ is God, and God’s *furnace is in Jerusalem*. And it is Christ who starts the fire with the white flame of his most intense passion. Only that person who says *My soul chooses hanging, and my bones death* can truly grasp this passion. Only one who loves this death can see God, for it is absolutely true that *no one can see me and live*.

⁷² Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, Bk. 1, ch. 1.

Let us die, then, and enter into this darkness. Let us silence all our cares, desires, and images in the imagination. Let us pass over with the crucified Christ *from this world to the Father*, so that when the Father has been shown to us, we may say with Philip: *It is enough for us*. Let us hear with Paul: *My grace is sufficient for you*; and let us exult with David, saying: *My flesh and my heart waste away; you are the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever. Blessed be the Lord forever, and let all the people say: let it be, let it be. Amen.*