



Center for Spiritual Development

Daily Reflections

Image by Christine Sponchia

THE IMAGE OF GOD'S GOODNESS

By Fr. David C. Robinson, SJ

An Excerpt from the Book of Wisdom

All men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan; But either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water, or the luminaries of heaven, the governors of the world, they considered gods. Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought them gods, let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these; for the original source of beauty fashioned them. Or if they were struck by their might and energy, let them from these things realize how much more powerful is he who made them. For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen.

WISDOM 13:1-5

For millennia, human seekers of divinity have labored to differentiate the divine from the order of the world. The overriding question was—What is of God and what is of ‘nature?’ In centuries past, many cultures divided the physical attributes of their environments into separate deities—storm and winds, floods and droughts, seedtime and harvest, celestial events, etc. Unable to grasp a god-of-all-that-is, they sliced phenomena into compartmentalized ‘deities’ who ruled in their limited fiefdoms of power. The God of the Hebrews eclipsed all of these figures, becoming not only the titular ruler of the people, but of all that had been, could be, or would ever be. The enormity of this ‘reign’ required generations of experience in the communities to coalesce into a coherent understanding of who God was and what God desired of his ‘chosen people.’ To a modern reader, many of the interactions narrated in the Old Testament show a God whose behavior is disconcertingly similar to the foibles of the human ‘faithful!’ Wisdom came slowly.

Over the last 500 years, we have turned that divine emergence on its head. As the Hebrews spent generations absorbing the enormity of the God who had called them, the birth of our fascination with the empirical sciences has led us to constantly deconstruct the wholeness that confronts us in creation. Having displaced God from the center of all that is, we have become fascinated with the grand sweep of the universe and its contents, while searching for ever-smaller increments of all that constitutes the ‘reality’ we inhabit. We can be enchanted with the endless grandeur of the ‘infinite’ without stopping to wonder at the profound meaning of that very grandeur in itself. Recent decades have seen a turn to ‘scientific holism,’ which attempts to see the complexity within all that is. But the public imagination is still largely focused on the qualities of inner details rather than the wonder of external profundity. Where does God reside in the tension between the minute and the majestic?

The 21st century presents us with the grand discernment of how we let God be God. If we are immersed in the world of the ever-smaller dimensions of existence so that we can regulate the larger objects in our environment (think microchips!), we begin to lose our reverence for the magnificence of the boundlessness of our universe. Although we recognize the uniqueness of God in the minutest details, our mystical invitation, our foundations for Wisdom, reside in the inner vision of the boundless presence of the One who brought all into being. William Blake, in the early 19th century, recognized the struggle between the endless receptivity of innocence and the harshness of a world that blunts us and blinds us to the greatness we inhabit. In the words of William Blake who invites us in *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Flower

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

When we recognize the infinite in the minute, and the enfolding embrace of the infinite in our finite existence, we abide in the Wisdom of God, in our world and in our souls.



From the Vatican Museum
Photo by Fr. David C. Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- What does it mean to you to reflect on the ‘infinite reality’ of God? Does it promote confusion, or evoke reverence?
 - Have you felt invited to peer into the small details of your daily life, and to find there a spark of the mystery of the God who is infused into every aspect of your experience?
 - Does your sense of the message found in the Book of Wisdom draw from you a broader appreciation for the enormity and intimacy of God in your life?
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