32 To look at (*Aspicere*)

Man ought to look at the present, the past, and the future.[[1]](#endnote-1)

As for the present, man ought first to investigate his own fragile condition, so that he may be humbled. Thus the peacock[[2]](#endnote-2) looking at his feet, puts down his elevated tale, Deut. 3[:27]: “Cast your eyes roundabout to the east,” of your birth, “to the west,” of your death, “to the south,” of grace, “and to the north,” of your guilt, “and behold,” namely, through meditation that nativity is vile, death is terrible, grace can be lost, guilt is punishable.

Second, man ought to look at mutable fortune in the world, so that it may be little valued. For I would not take much care if I have now a hundred pounds, if I were sure that I would lose them tomorrow. But there are many just like the swan[[3]](#endnote-3) who sings more freely against its death, Mark 13[:1-2]: “Master, behold what manner of stones and what buildings are here,” and it follows, “There shall not be left a stone upon a stone.” And if every fortune is to be feared, however, more the prosperous than adverse. The example in the eclogue of the lover [Can. 4:16], concerning the two winds, southern and northern, where the heat of the south wind takes away the toga of the young man, namely, in the summer, which the north wind does not do, then in truth he fastens his vestments together.

¶ Third, we must look at the greatest liberality in God, so that it may be magnified. Thus, one drinking good wine praises the vine. Wherefore it comes out of Tob. 13[:6], look at what he did for us, as if, because more than other creatures, and with trembling you confess to that. Just as a tremor of the body is caused from retraction and dilation of the nerves, thus spiritually, from the retraction of affects from evil and dilation to the good.

¶ And this is a good fear and meritorious.

¶ As far as the past, we must look on Christ at his honest conversation, so that one may be changed. Thus, the disciple looks at the work of the painter, Exod. 25[:40]: “Look and make it according to the pattern, that was shown you in the mount,” that is, on Christ. Heb. 12[:2]: “Looking on the author and finisher of faith, who having joy set before him,” etc.

¶ Second, we must look on Christ’s natural passion so that one may be a sufferer with him. Just as the mother shows to her sons the linen shirt of their slain father, so that they themselves sometime would revenge him; thus, because your sins killed Christ, we must kill the sins, to which follows the healing, Num. 21[:9], seeing who was struck, so that he would be healed. But alas because the wise man bewails, Prov. 1[:24]: “I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded.”

¶ Third, we must look at his glorious ascension, so that we lift ourselves upwards. Just as the eye to the beloved, the heart to the treasure, Act. 1[:10]: “Men of Galilee, why stand you looking up.” But many are just like the pig[[4]](#endnote-4) which always eats the acorns bent down for it, but it never looks upward to the bestower.

¶ As for the future, man ought to look at the severity of divine judgment, so that he may be called back from evil. Thus, the lion[[5]](#endnote-5) seeing the cub beaten, that he may fear for himself; and the boy seeing the rod fears, Daniel 7[:9]: “I beheld till thrones were placed,” etc.

¶ Therefore, if you look for mercy in the freeing of the thief on the cross, look also at the justice of the one hung. See the example in the arms bearer capturing booty.

¶ Second, one ought to look to the reward of the just, so that he may be called to the good, thus the calling out is shown to the bird for flying, Heb. 12[:2]: “Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith.” Thus Moses “looked unto the reward,” [Heb. 11:26]. Freely be enslaved to a Lord who quickly and beyond merit rewards, but many offend in this.

Third, man ought to look at the leaving of his habitation of the earth, that he may seek a better. Thus, the steward being warned provided for himself from another house, Luke 16[:1-8]. And Jer. 4[:23, 26]: “I beheld the earth, and lo it was void, and nothing … and all its cities were destroyed.”

1. Cf. Raimundi de Biterris, *Liber Kalilae et Dimnae* c. 2 in Leopold Hervieux, *Les fabulistes latins: depuis le siecle d’Auguste jusqua’ a la fin du moyen age* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et C, 1899), (5:464): ut in presenti sciat euitare malum, et bonum et utile prosequatur; secundum est aspicere presencia ad magna utilia eligenda; tercium est circumspicere futura ad euitanda pericula et ad com[m]oda persequenda. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* 12.31 (1509 p. 236b): Videns autem pedum suorum deformitatem quasi erubescit et velut non accedens predicta pennarum pulcritudinem eas subito deprimit et submittit.

Cf. *Fasciculus morum: a fourteenth-century preacher's handbook,* 1.1.8.17-18, ed. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ., 1989), p. 64: sicut pavo aspiciens pedes turpissimos caudam suam dimittit lucentem. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 10.32 (LCL 353:332-333): olorum morte narratur flebilis cantus, falso, ut arbitror aliquot experimentis.

Some say swans sing a mournful song before they die, but this is false, judging from experience. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Bartholomeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* 18.75 (1505 p. 469b): Et tamen porcique porce delectantur comedere glandes, quia eorum temperant carnes, tamen si porce comederint multum de eis abortient sicut oues. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. *Pelbartus: Pomerium de sanctis, Pars hiemalis* sermo 75 in *Domus sermonum compilatorium*: Quarta proprietas est docilem alterius exemplo et timidum se prohibere. Nam secundum praescriptos doctores leonis ferocitas arte sedatur, ut se docilem et timidum exhibeat, quia leo timet quattuor haec, scilicet accensum ignem, strepitum rotarum et gallum, maxime album, timet etiam, quando videt verberari catulum, cuius exemplo se debet timere hominem, credit quem in canis coertione videt potentem, et in hoc significatur quarta regula salutis vicem summe timere peccata et hostium spiritualium pericula et dociles nos exhibere ad virtutes contrarias, quia sicut scribitur Apoc. paenul.

<http://sermones.elte.hu/pelbart/index.php?file=ph/ph075> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)