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## AT THE TOP OF THE TRANSCENDENT STAGE OF ST. BONAVENTURE'S AESTHETICS: CONTEMPLATING GOD AS THE *SUMMUM BONUM*

EN EL CULMEN DE LA ETAPA TRANSCENDENTE DE LA ESTÉTICA DE SAN  
BUENAVENTURA: CONTEMPLANDO A DIOS COMO EL *SUMMUM BONUM*

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*Abstract:* This article aims to highlight the sixth and penultimate level that Saint Bonaventure establishes in the contemplative ascent of man towards God, since he begins to consider creatures as vestiges and signs of the Creator until he speculates the transcendental attributes of God as the absolute Being in itself and as the highest Good: this is a complex and mixed process – aesthetic in its beginnings, and ultimately almost mystical– that the Franciscan scholastic teacher outlines in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. To achieve our goal, we will analyze in detail the subtle epistemological, aesthetic, anthropological and theological disquisitions by which the Seraphic Doctor tries to induce the human being to speculate on God in his uniqueness of substance and in his Trinity of persons. The research allows us to conclude that our author arrives in this case to some markedly Christological and Trinitarian theological conclusions, which can hardly be acceptable to a purely rational(ist) secular mentality.

*Keywords:* Aesthetics; Bonum; contemplation; Trinity; Verbum Dei.

*Resumen:* Este artículo se propone poner en luz el sexto y penúltimo nivel que San Buenaventura establece en el ascenso contemplativo del hombre hacia Dios, desde que comienza a considerar las creaturas como vestigios y signos del Creador hasta que llega a especular los atributos transcendentales de Dios como el Ser en sí absoluto y como el sumo Bien: es este un proceso complejo y mixto —en su *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. Para lograr nuestro objetivo analizaremos en detalle las sutiles disquisiciones gnoseológicas, estéticas, antropológicas y teológicas mediante las que el Doctor Seráfico trata de inducir al ser humano a especular a Dios en su unicidad de substancia y en su Trinidad de personas. La investigación permite concluir que nuestro autor llega en este caso a conclusiones teológicas marcadamente cristológicas y trinitarias, que difícilmente pueden resultar aceptables para una mentalidad laica puramente racional(ista).

*Palabras clave:* Estética; Bien; contemplación; Trinidad; Verbo de Dios.

## Introduction: Outlining the structure of Bonaventurian Aesthetics

Before explaining the sixth and penultimate level of the Aesthetics that Saint Bonaventure establishes in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, it is necessary first to sketch its structure and its fundamental theses.

The Seraphic Doctor organizes his Aesthetics according to a scale of three progressive stages in pyramidal distribution. In his opinion, man can contemplatively ascend towards God through three complementary stages, each subdivided into two successive levels: a) through material things; b) through the human soul; c) through the First Principle.

According to him, although all creatures are suitable to ascend towards God, each facilitates this ascent in different ways: *material things* are corporeal and temporary *vestiges* of God *outside* of man; *human souls* are spiritual and eternal *images* of God *within* us. Therefore, the ascent to God from the material world must take place in three stages.

a) The first consists of contemplating God *outside* of us by appreciating corporeal beings as *vestiges* of divinity. This constitutes the stage that we call the *immanent* phase of the Bonaventurian Aesthetics.<sup>1</sup>

This immanent stage makes up the first and second levels of the ascent to God, through which man achieves an embryonic contemplation of the Creator, considering his vestiges in things.<sup>2</sup> In this immanent stage, Bonaventure establishes two primary possibilities of contemplating God *outside* of us (*extra nos*): that of contemplating him *by* his *vestiges* and that of contemplating him *in* his *vestiges* in things.<sup>3</sup>

b) The second stage, which we designate as the *introspective* phase of Bonaventurian Aesthetics,<sup>4</sup> a step made up of the third and fourth levels of

<sup>1</sup> On this specific topic see our paper “La Estética inmanente de San Buenaventura desde sus fuentes de inspiración”, *Revista de Filosofía*, 4712 (2022).

<sup>2</sup> See our study José María Salvador-González, “The concept *vestigium* in the immanent Aesthetics of St. Bonaventure” (article under evaluation in an academic journal).

<sup>3</sup> On this subject, see our papers José María Salvador-González, “*Ascensio in Deum per vestigia et in vestigiis*. La Estética inmanente de S. Buenaventura y sus posibles reflejos en la iconografía de la Basílica de San Francisco”, *Mirabilia Journal* 16 (2013), 79-117.

<sup>4</sup> On this stage, see our chapter José María Salvador-González, “*Per imaginem et in imagine*. El estadio introspectivo de la estética de San Buenaventura en su *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, un discurso barroco *avant la lettre*”, in R. de la Fuente Ballesteros, J. Pérez-Magallón & J.R. Jouve-Martin (eds.), *Del Barroco al Neobarroco: Realidades y transferencias culturales*, Valladolid: Universitas Castellae, 2011, 295-309.

contemplation of God,<sup>5</sup> offers two other, more profound possibilities of contemplating God entering *within* us (*intra nos*): to contemplate him *through* his spiritual *image* imprinted in the powers of our soul, as a mirror of the Trinity, to access divine truth;<sup>6</sup> and that of contemplating him as *through a mirror* and as *in a mirror*.

c) The third stage of the ascent towards God, which we designate as the *transcendent* stage of the Aesthetics of the Seraphic, consists of –transcending the vestiges in external objects and the image of divinity in our soul— rising *above* us (*supra us*) until God Himself, contemplating him, knowing him, and reverence him as the spiritual, eternal, and superior *First Principle* of all creation.<sup>7</sup>

According to Bonaventure, at the two levels of this transcendent stage, we can contemplate God directly through the *light* of eternal truth impressed on our mind. This supernatural light allows us to speculate the unity of God as the *Supreme Being* in his essential attributes (fifth level), and as the *highest Good* in his personal properties (sixth level).

The Seraphic imagines a seventh level –which we would call the *ecstatic* phase of his Aesthetics— in which man achieves “mental excesses” through contemplative ecstasy before God.

Thus, outlining the structure of the Bonaventurian Aesthetics, we will now expose that sixth level in which the human soul, rising above itself, can speculate God as the *highest Good* (*summum Bonum*) in his personal properties.

## 1. The second degree of the transcendent stage of Bonaventurian Aesthetics. Speculating the divine Trinity for the highest Good

After explaining in Chapter 5 of his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* the fifth level of the contemplative ascent towards God, in which the mind considers the essential attributes of God as the highest *Being* in itself, the Seraphic asserts that man must, on a sixth level, to ascend with his intelligence to

<sup>5</sup> See our article José María Salvador-González, “La Estética inmanente de San Buenaventura desde sus fuentes de inspiración”, *Revista de Filosofía*, 46-2 (2021) (in press).

<sup>6</sup> On this first level, see our study José María Salvador-González, “Contemplating God from the mirror of the Soul: The first level of St. Bonaventure introspective Aesthetics from ins inopinuing sources”, *Poligrafi* 26, 103/104 (2021), 153-173.

<sup>7</sup> On the ultra-metaphysical dimension of Bonaventure's philosophic, see Manuel Lázaro Pulido, “Más allá de la quiditas: reflexiones sobre el proyecto metafísico bonaventuriano”, *Cauriensia* 14 (2019): 49-80.

“contuit” (*contuire*)<sup>8</sup> the divine Trinity<sup>9</sup> in his personal emanations, considering the *Good* as their essential foundation.<sup>10</sup>

According to our author, man must understand that this good is optimal from every point of view to the extent that it is impossible to conceive of anything better and that it must be thought of as necessarily existing since its non-existence is inconceivable, because of that existence is absolutely better than nonexistence.<sup>11</sup>

Surprisingly, the mystical friar derives from this that good can be correctly conceived only if it is conceived as one and as a trine at the same time.<sup>12</sup> In his opinion, in effect, since the good, in general, is diffusive of itself (*diffusivum sui*), the highest good must necessarily be extremely diffusive of itself,<sup>13</sup> but diffusion can only be supreme “being at the same time actual and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, liberal and necessary, inadequate and perfect.”<sup>14</sup>

For Bonaventure, the existence of the highest good necessarily implies that it is eternal and that it diffuses from eternity in a double consubstantial and hypostatic diffusion, thus causing the highest diffusing good to be expressed in one generated and in another one expired, which are shown as

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<sup>8</sup> On this special concept, see the synthesis by Orlando Todisco, “Contuitio”, en Ernesto Caroli (a cura di), *Dizionario Bonaventuriano. Filosofia, teologia, spiritualità*, Padova, Editrici Francescane, 2008, 272-279. On this subject, Todisco expresses: “Dio è contuito in quanto presente nel mondo e nell’intimità dell’intelletto, è colto ‘aliquo modo’, non come oggetto in sé, ma riflesso nella creatura, in conformità al nostro stato di viatori. Oltre alla via causale o *per creaturas*, Bonaventura raggiunge Dio ‘in creaturis’, modo questo ‘altior quam praecedens’” (Ibid., 275).

<sup>9</sup> The nature of the Trinity in the thought of Saint Bonaventure has been studied, among others, by Luc Mathieu, “Trinitas”, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, 819-826.

<sup>10</sup> “Post considerationem essentialium elevandus est oculus intelligentiae ad contuitio-nem beatissimae Trinitatis [...]. Sicut autem visionis essentialium ipsum esse est principium radicale et nomen, per quod cetera innotescunt; sic contemplationis emanationum ipsum bonum est principalissimum fundamentum.” (*Itin.*, VI, 1: Q V, 310 b).

<sup>11</sup> “Vide igitur et attende, quoniam optimum quod simpliciter est quo nihil melius cogitari potest; et hoc tale sic est, quod non potest recte cogitari non esse, quia omnino melius est esse quam non esse”. (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 310 b).

<sup>12</sup> “sic est, quod non potest recte cogitari, quin cogitetur trinum et unum.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 310 b).

<sup>13</sup> “Nam ‘bonum dicitur diffusivum sui’; summum igitur bonum summe diffusivum est sui.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 310 b).

<sup>14</sup> “Summa autem diffusio non potest esse, nisi sit *actualis et intrinseca, substantialis et hypostatica, naturalis et voluntaria, liberalis et necessaria, indeficiens et perfecta*.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: 524-525).

well as the beloved and the co-beloved of the highest good. According to our author, this necessarily implies who strongly defends it as theological axiom, without feeling the need to demonstrate it rationally—the affirmation of the divine Trinity,<sup>15</sup> according to which the highest good (God the Father) spreads, generating God the Son and exhaling the Holy Spirit.

This is how the mystic thinker puts it, with an unshakable Christian conviction:

Because, if in the highest good there were not eternally a current and consubstantial production, and if in addition a person as equally noble as the one who produces it by way of generation and expiration –so that it is from the eternal principle of the eternally coprincipient—, so that is the beloved and the co-beloved, the begotten and the expired, that is to say, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the highest good would not exist in any way, because then it would not be diffused in the highest degree.<sup>16</sup>

And it is that, for the teacher of Bagnoregio, the temporary diffusion of the good in the creatures can only be central or punctual about the immensity of the eternal good,<sup>17</sup> for which it is always possible to conceive another even greater diffusion, as it would be the one in which the diffusible good communicates all its substance and nature to another being.<sup>18</sup> For this reason –concludes the Franciscan thinker–, the good would not be the highest, if both in

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<sup>15</sup> This Trinitarian dimension of Bonaventurian thought at this point has been highlighted, among others, by Manuel Lázaro Pulido in the epigraph “1.1. Dios Uno y Trino en su doble nombre de Bien y Ser”, en su libro *La creación en Buenaventura. Acercamiento filosófico a la metafísica expresiva del ser finito*, Grottaferrata, Editori di Quaracchi, 2005, 105-116.

<sup>16</sup> “Nisi igitur in summo bono aeternaliter esset productio *actualis* et *consubstantialis*, et *hypostasis* aequae nobilis, sicut est producens per modum generationis et spirationis —ita quod sit aeternalis principii aeternaliter comprincipiantis— ita quod esset dilectus et condilectus, genitus et spiratus, hoc est Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus; nequaquam esset summum bonum, quia non summe se diffunderet.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 310 b).

<sup>17</sup> This third transcendent stage of Bonaventurian Aesthetics has been treated by J.E. Arias Rueda in the extensive article “Conocimiento de lo bello desde una perspectiva estética de la sensibilidad trascendental en los capítulos VI y VII del Itinerarium mentis in Deum de San Buenaventura”, *Franciscanum* 44 (2002), 137-220, which summarizes a bachelor's thesis at the University of San Buenaventura.

<sup>18</sup> “Nam diffusio ex tempore in creatura non est nisi centralis vel punctualis respectu immensitatis bonitatis aeternae; unde et potest aliqua diffusio cogitari maior illa, ea videlicet, in qua diffundens communicat alteri totam substantiam et naturam.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 310 b-311 a).

itself and conceptually, it lacked the highest diffusion since it would then lose its reason for being, which is to love<sup>19</sup> and be able to be loved absolutely.<sup>20</sup>

With a decidedly confessional approach, Saint Bonaventure now relies on the theological-Trinitarian assumption –without justifying it according to strict rules of pure rational logic— that,

if man can contuit with his mind the purity of the highest good, which is a pure act of the principle that loves charitably with gratuitous love and composed of both, which is the fullest diffusion in the form of nature and will, and which is a diffusion in the form of the Word, in whom all things are said, and in the form of a Gift, in which all other gifts are given, you will see that, by the utmost communicability of the good, the existence of the divine Trinity is necessary, Father [the Most Good], Son [the Word] and Holy Spirit [the Gift].<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The essential communicability between the three divine Persons

Based on this and other similar assumptions with a high theocentric-Trinitarian profile, the mystic friar then categorically affirms that the three divine persons, being good in the highest degree, are highly communicable; being highly communicable, they are highly consubstantial; being consubstantial at the highest level, they are highly similar; being communicable, consubstantial and identical in the highest degree, they are highly coequal and highly coeternal. Hence the utmost co-intimacy is established between them.

On such theological foundations, Saint Bonaventure asserts that those six attributes –*communicability, consubstantiality, similarity, equality, eternity, co-intimacy*— essentially distinguish each of the three divine persons. And because of these six attributes, each divine person is necessary for the other

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<sup>19</sup> On the role of love in the philosophical-theological doctrine of Saint Bonaventure, especially for its mystical projection, see Alfonso M. Pompei, “L’amore nella mistica bonaventuriana”, *Doctor Seraphicus* 42 (1995), 31-52; and Ignacio Verdú Braganza, “La imagen y la semejanza. El amor a la sabiduría y la sabiduría del amor”, in Manuel Lázaro Pulido, Francisco León Florido & Francisco Javier Rubio Hípola (eds.), *Pensar la Edad Media cristiana: San Buenaventura de Bagnoregio*, Madrid, UNED/Editorial Sínderesis, 2019, 125-140.

<sup>20</sup> “Non igitur summum bonum esset, si re vel intellectu illa carere posset.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 311 a).

<sup>21</sup> “Si igitur potes mentis oculo contueri puritatem bonitatis, quae est actus purus principii caritative diligentis amore gratuito et debito et ex utroque permixto, quae est diffusio plenissima per modum naturae et voluntatis, quae est diffusio per modum Verbi, in quo omnia dicuntur, et per modum Doni, in quo cetera dona donantur; potes videre, per summam boni communicabilitatem necesse esse Trinitatem Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 311 a).



two, thanks to the supreme “*circumincersion*”;<sup>22</sup> furthermore, each person of the divine Trinity operates with the other two thanks to the all-embracing identity of substance, power, and operation of the Trinity itself.

This is how the effusive Franciscan expresses it:

In which [the six attributes above of the highest good] it is necessary that because of the highest goodness there is the highest communicability, and from the highest communicability there is the highest consubstantiality, and from the highest consubstantiality the highest configurability occurs, and of these the supreme co-equality, and for this reason the supreme coeternity, and by all the aforementioned properties the supreme co-intimacy is expressed, with which one is in the other necessary by the supreme circumincersion, and one is acted upon with the other by the all-embracing indivision of substance, power, and operation of the Holy Trinity itself.<sup>23</sup>

Our author clarifies, however, that, despite their extreme mutual communicability, each divine person retains his individual properties; apart from the extreme consubstantiality, the plurality of persons is preserved; despite their extreme configurability, each divine person maintains his independent personality; beyond their extreme co-equality, there is a generational order in the three divine persons; the supreme coeternity of the three divine persons is combined with the emanation of one person concerning another, and the extreme co-intimacy between all of them fits well with the emission of a divine person for the other two.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, Saint Bonaventure proclaims these apodictic sentences without hesitation, based only on his deep faith in the dogmas of his Catholic

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<sup>22</sup> The original concept “*circumincersion*” for Saint Bonaventure signifies the ability of the three divine Persons to interrelate and mutually integrate in all their properties, while preserving their own personality. On the meaning of this specific Bonaventurian concept, see Mary Melone, “*Circumincessio*”, in *Dizionario bonaventuriano*, 230-231.

<sup>23</sup> “In quibus necesse est propter summam bonitatem esse summam *communicabilitatem*, et ex summa communicabilitate summam *consubstantialitatem*, et ex summa consubstantialitate summam *configurabilitatem*, et ex his summam *coaequalitatem*, ac per hoc summam *coeternitatem*, atque ex omnibus praedictis summam *cointimitatem*, qua unus est in altero necessario per summam circumincersionem et unus operatur cum alio per omnimodam indivisionem *substantiae* et *virtutis* et *operationis* ipsius beatissimae Trinitatis.” (*Itin.*, VI, 2: Q V, 311 a).

<sup>24</sup> “Nam ibi est summa *communicabilitas* cum personarum proprietate, summa *consubstantialitas* cum hypostasum pluralitate, summa *configurabilitas* cum discreta personalitate, summa *coaequalitas* cum ordine, summa *coeternitas* cum emanatione, summa *cointimitas* cum emissionem.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a).

religion, without justifying them with purely objective arguments. This, in turn, represents an impossible difficulty when trying to place them in confrontation/dialogue with rational, secular philosophy.

Now, Saint Bonaventure adds that, even when he can contemplate in some way those six divine properties, man must refrain from thinking that he understands God since God cannot be understood (he is incomprehensible)<sup>25</sup> in his absolute infinity by finite human intelligence. In his opinion, however, the human being must still consider with the mind's eye what in these six attributes produces the stupor of admiration<sup>26</sup> since this allows him to glimpse the harmonious mutual relationship between them.

From his unshakable faith as a sincere Christian theologian, the Seraphic assures that, when contemplating so many wonders, one cannot help but be amazed because the simple consideration of the highest goodness leads us with absolute certainty to the truth that all those wonders are found in the Holy Trinity.<sup>27</sup>

In his understanding, if communication in the divine Trinity is supreme and the diffusion is true, the origin and the distinction are also true in it;<sup>28</sup> and, as communication is total, the highest good communicates everything it has,<sup>29</sup> from which it is inferred that both the one that emanates and the one that produces are distinguished by their properties, despite being essentially a single and identical substance (divine nature).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Sed cum haec contemplanis, vide, ne te existimes comprehendere incomprehensibilem.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a).

<sup>26</sup> “Habes enim adhuc in his sex conditionibus considerare quod vehementer in stuporem admirationis inducit oculus mentis nostrae.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a).

<sup>27</sup> “Quis ad tantorum mirabilium aspectum non consurgat in admirationem? Sed haec omnia certissime intelligimus esse in beatissima Trinitate, si levamus oculos ad superexcellantissimam bonitatem.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: 526).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a.

<sup>29</sup> On this respect, Luigi Iammarrone (“La struttura della vita trinitaria come amore in S. Bonaventura”, *Miscellanea Francescana* 89 (1989), 315-334), when analyzing Chapters 5 and 6 of the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, it highlights the essential attributes that the Seraphic considers proper to God: Being First by essence, absolute, unlimited, eternal and most actual; and Well supreme and infinite. Iammarrone assures that, according to the Seraphic, by both essential attributes, God manifests himself as Love by essence and communion between the three divine Persons, since the Supreme Being, being the Optimal and Supreme Good, must necessarily involve a plurality of Persons necessarily linked by Love.

<sup>30</sup> “Si enim ibi est summa communicatio et vera *diffusio*, vera est ibi origo et vera distinctio; et quia totum communicatur, non pars; ideo ipsum datur, quod habetur, et totum: igitur emanans et producens et distinguuntur proprietatibus, et sunt essentialiter unum.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a).

For our untarnished Master of Theology, each one of the three divine persons—in their unity of essence or substance, and their plurality of hypostases—is distinguished from the other two by his personal properties, namely, emanation, coming from the beginning (God the Father); order of origin, not of posteriority (God the Son); emission or effusion, not of local exchange, but gratuitous inspiration (Holy Spirit). In his opinion, all this is produced thanks to the authority of the producer (God the Father), authority possessed by the sender (God the Father) concerning the one sent (God the Son).<sup>31</sup>

Bagnoregio's polygraph then rounds out his reasoning by pointing out that, since the three divine persons are one and the same divine substance, it is necessary that they also be identical in essence, in form, in dignity, in eternity, in existence, and the uncircumscribable being.<sup>32</sup> Then he adds that, in this way, when you consider each of these things independently and separately, you can contemplate the truth; however, when you consider them by comparing them with each other, you are filled with deep admiration.<sup>33</sup>

Consequently, our author concludes that, for the soul of man to rise, through admiration, to an astonishing contemplation of God, he needs to consider all the divine properties simultaneously in their mutual relationship,<sup>34</sup> avoiding considering them separately as independent categories.

Saint Bonaventure insists on the idea that we must admire the essential and personal properties of God not only in themselves and in their mutual relationship but also by comparing them with the admirable and unrepeatable union of God and man that is verified in the unique person of Christ,<sup>35</sup> the Son of God made man.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “Quia igitur *distinguuntur* proprietatibus, ideo habent personales proprietates et hypostasum pluralitatem et originis emanationem et ordinem non posterioritatis, sed originis, et emissionem non localis mutationis, sed gratuitae inspirationis, per rationem auctoritatis producentis, quam habet mittens respectu missi.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a).

<sup>32</sup> “Quia vero sunt *unum* substantialiter, ideo oportet, quod sit unitas in essentia et forma et dignitate et aeternitate et existentia et incircumscribilitate.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 a-311 b).

<sup>33</sup> “Dum ergo haec per se *singillatim consideras*, habes unde *veritatem* contempleris; dum haec *ad invicem confers*, habes unde in *admirationem* altissimam suspendaris”. (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 b).

<sup>34</sup> “et ideo, ut mens tua per admirationem in admirabilem ascendat contemplationem, haec simul sunt consideranda.” (*Itin.*, VI, 3: Q V, 311 b).

<sup>35</sup> “Nam admirari debemus non solum condiciones Dei essentiales et personales in se, verum etiam *per comparisonem* ad supermirabilem unionem Dei et hominis in unitate personae Christi.” (*Itin.*, VI, 4: Q V, 311 b).

<sup>36</sup> On this deep Christocentric dimension of the Aesthetics of the Seraphic, see, among others, Antonio Blasucci “L’ascesa a Dio secondo S. Bonaventura”, *Doctor Seraphicus* 14 (1967), 21-41; and Manuel Lázaro Pulido, *La creación en Buenaventura*, 181-208.

Further enhancing that unrestricted base of Christian orthodoxy, the intellectual mystic asserts in a long and complex paragraph, full of subtle inter-related theocentric-Christological assumptions:

So, if [...] you wonder that divine being is at the same time first and last, eternal and present, very simple and maximum or uncircumscribed, everything everywhere, but never comprehended, very actual, but never moved, very perfect without any superfluity or loss, and yet immense and infinite without end, extremely one and yet all-embracing, since it possesses in itself all things, all power, all truth, all good; on looking, on the other hand, at the mercy seat one is amazed that in itself the first principle is united with the last, God is united with the man formed on the sixth day [of Creation], the eternal is united with a temporal man, born of a Virgin in the fullness of time, the most simple is united with the highly composed, the most current with the absolutely suffered and dead, the most perfect and the immense with the small, the extremely one and all-embracing with a composite and distinct individual of others, that is, with Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. The role of the divine Word incarnate, the image of God the Father

The determined dogmatic projection with which our fervent friar conceives this sixth degree of man's contemplative ascent towards God now becomes much more explicitly confessional and, therefore, increasingly alien to a purely rational secular philosophy.

Not content with that, after assuming *a priori* those explicit theological and trinitarian implications, by repeatedly insisting on the one and three

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<sup>37</sup> "Si enim Cherub es *essentialia* Dei contemplando, et miraris, quia simul est divinum esse *primum* et novissimum, *aeternum* et praesentissimum, *simplicissimum* et maximum, seu incircumscriptum, *totum ubique* et nusquam comprehensum, *actualissimum* et nunquam motum, *perfectissimum* et nihil habens superfluum nec diminutum, et tamen immensum et sine termino infinitum, *summe unum*, et tamen omnimodum, ut omnia in se habens, ut omnis virtus, omnis veritas, omne bonum; respice ad *propitiatorium* et mirare, quod in ipso principium primum iunctum est cum postremo, Deus cum homine sexto die formato, *aeternum* iunctum est cum homine temporali, in plenitudine temporum de Virgine nato, *simplicissimum* cum summe composito, *actualissimum* cum summe passo et mortuo, *perfectissimum* et immensum cum modico, summe unum et omnimodum cum individuo composito et a ceteris distincto, homine scilicet Iesu Christo." (*Itin.*, VI, 5: Q V, 311 b).

natures of the pure and supreme Being (God),<sup>38</sup> the fervent Franciscan now appeals to the no less problematic (from the mere profane point of view) dogma of the incarnation of God the Son as a man in Jesus Christ.

With such statements, the Seraphic openly manifests his faith as a militant Catholic. That is why he testifies with unshakable conviction—as he has just done in the preceding paragraph—that the eternal Son of God, born of a Virgin in the fullness of time, perfectly maintains his two natures, divine, and human, hypostatically united in the single person of Jesus Christ, simultaneously true God and true man.

That is why our author also maintains that the Son of God is incarnated in Christ as a man to redeem Humanity with his Passion and his death on the cross. Naturally, these new dogmatic ingredients introduced here by the Seraphic Doctor are alien to a non-religious philosophy based on purely rational arguments.

The Franciscan scholastic broadens and deepens, even more, his theological-Trinitarian presuppositions by insisting once again on the idea that, when contemplating the properties of the three divine persons, you will be amazed that the communicability between them is combined with their individual properties, consubstantiality is harmonized with plurality, the similar form (configurability) is maintained with the individuality of each of the three divine persons, the co-equality agrees with the order of mutual origin, the coeternity subsists with the generation in time, and the co-intimacy with the emission, since God the Son is sent by God the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both, despite always coexisting with them (Father and Son), without ever separating from them.<sup>39</sup>

Saint Bonaventure raises these lofty theocentric, Trinitarian, and Christological ideas to the maximum power by adding:

admire that in Christ the personal union is maintained together with the trinity of substances [divine persons] and with the duality of natures [human and divine]; that the absolute consensus is maintained together with the plurality

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<sup>38</sup> Cesare Vasoli, in his article “L’Itinerarium ‘nel pensiero di San Bonaventura en nella philosophy of tempo”, *Studi Francescani* 85 (1988), 249-261, makes a brief approach to the theme of this contemplative ascent towards God, insisting on all in the primacy of Being (*Esse*).

<sup>39</sup> “Si autem alter Cherub es *personarum propria* contemplando, et miraris, *communicabilitatem* esse cum proprietate, *consubstantialitatem* cum pluralitate, *configurabilitatem* cum personalitate, *coaequalitatem* cum ordine, *coeternitatem* cum productione, *cointimitatem* cum emissione, quia Filius missus est a Patre, et Spiritus sanctus ab utroque, qui tamen semper est cum eis et nunquam recedit ab eis”. (*Itin.*, VI, 6: Q V, 311 b).

of wills, the mutual preaching of God and man is preserved together with the plurality of properties, the co-worship is combined with the plurality of nobility, the co-exaltation above all things is given together with the plurality of dignities, the joint domination is integrated with the plurality of powers.<sup>40</sup>

The Seraphic rounds out his theological disquisitions in this sixth level of the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, underlining the idea that, when considering man formed in the image of God,<sup>41</sup> our soul or mind finds perfect illumination<sup>42</sup> when it sees itself as the image of God.<sup>43</sup>

Taking the theological projection of this anthropological thesis to its last consequences, our author states that this condition of man as a temporary

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<sup>40</sup> “respice in propitiatorium et mirare, quia in Christo stat *personalis unio* cum trinitate substantiarum et naturarum dualitate; stat *omnimoda consensio* cum pluralitate voluntatum, stat Dei et hominis *compraedicatio* cum pluralitate proprietatum, stat *coadoratio* cum pluralitate nobilitatum, stat *coexaltatio* super omnia cum pluralitate dignitatum, stat *condominatio* cum pluralitate potestatum.” (*Itin.*, VI, 6: Q V, 311 b-312 a).

<sup>41</sup> The concept *image (imago)* as a theological category in Saint Bonaventure has been studied by Luigi Iammarrone, “Imago. Vestigium”, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, 482-491; and mainly by J.A. Sequeira. *Vestigium and imago in St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure: a dialogue between qq. 44-47 of the prima pars of the Summa theologiae and the Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. in Urbe, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> “In hac autem consideratione est perfectio illuminationis mentis, dum quasi in sexta die videt hominem factum ad imaginem Dei.” (*Itin.*, VI, 7: Q V, 312 a). In this order of ideas, Manuel Lázaro Pulido explains: “Podemos decir que en el proceso de conocimiento sensible de la naturaleza, el método racional-dialéctico y la aproximación de la Filosofía natural le presentan una evidencia que él juzga interesante, pues nos puede llevar a su realidad ontológica limitada. (1) El conocimiento sensitivo presenta la luz exterior (*lumine exteriori*) de la realidad natural que el intelecto entiende a partir de los primeros principios; pero la naturaleza conoce otra realidad, pues ella es un inmenso *vestigio* de Dios, donde el alma es *imagen* capaz de *semejanza*. (2) Siendo así, el hombre puede conocer desde un dictamen interior que capta la realidad natural en su luz interior (*lumine interiori*). Conocemos por los vestigios, en su significación, en un camino de conocimiento de la realidad última (*por*) y penetración del Misterio de su ser (*en*): por/en creaturas; por/en imagen. El alma es «mente» (*mens*), la parte suprema en la que, a partir de lo captado como objetos superiores, surge la conciencia reflexiva que se abre a la iluminación divina de modo que resplandece la imagen de Dios. (3) Es ahí, pues, que sale al encuentro la iluminación de la luz eterna (*lumine superior*). Lo intuido al ver el mundo, conocido en exterior e interiormente, mediante el alma nos lleva a la cointuición: el conocimiento que se obtiene intelectualmente de la presencia del Ser infinito en y por el ser finito.” (Manuel Lázaro Pulido, *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval y Renacentista I*, 414-415).

<sup>43</sup> On this specific Bonaventurian thesis, see, for example, Luigi Iammarrone, “Imago. Vestigium”, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, 482-491.

image of God<sup>44</sup> is realized in its absolute expression in the person of Christ, who, as a man, is also a finite image of God in time, and as God, the Son is the infinite Image of God the Father from eternity.

In this way, Christ manifests himself simultaneously as the eternal and infinite Image of God the Father by his condition of God the Son, and as Father's finite image in time by his condition of true man; that is why Christ is also the perfect model of those other finite and temporal images of God, which we are men.<sup>45</sup>

In the opinion of our thinker, indeed,

The image being an expressive likeness, our soul, when contemplating in Christ, the Son of God and the invisible image of God, our Humanity, exalted so admirably and united in such an ineffable way; seeing in Christ united the first and the last, the highest and the smallest, the circumference and the center, the *alpha* and the *omega*, the cause and the effect, the creator and the creature, to *the book written inside and outside*, He has already agreed to something perfect, to reach the perfection of his illuminations with God in the sixth grade, as in the sixth day of Creation.<sup>46</sup>

With such resounding statements, Saint Bonaventure thus leads us to the apex of his theological assumptions.<sup>47</sup> Based on such dogmatic beliefs, he

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<sup>44</sup> Laure Solignac, in her book *La voie de la ressemblance. Itinéraire dans la pensée de Saint Bonaventure*, Paris, Hermann, 2014, 449 p., brings a very deep philosophical study on the concept of similarity (similitudo) according to the Seraphic Doctor, which is manifested in three projections: in God one and triune as intra-Trinitarian similarity; in the universe created as the likeness of the Trinity; and in man as the likeness of the Son of God (Christ).

<sup>45</sup> Luigi Iammarone explains this thesis of St. Bpnaventure in "Imago. Vestigium", in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, 482-491.

<sup>46</sup> "Si enim *imago* est similitudo expressiva, dum mens nostra contemplatur in Christo Filio Dei, qui est imago Dei invisibilis per naturam, humanitatem nostram tam mirabiliter exaltatam, tam ineffabiliter unitam, videndo simul in unum primum et ultimum, summum et imum, circumferentiam et centrum, *alpha et omega*, causatum et causam, Creatorem et creaturam, *librum scilicet scriptum intus et extra*; iam pervenit ad quandam rem perfectam, ut cum Deo ad perfectionem suarum illuminationum in sexto gradu quasi in sexta die perveniat". (*Itin.*, VI, 7: Q V, 312 a).

<sup>47</sup> Philip Lyndon Reynolds, in his paper "Threefold existence and illumination in Saint Bonaventure", *Franciscan Studies* 42 (1982), 190-215, highlights the Bonaventurian theory of human knowledge and that of angels through the central role of divine vision or illumination. In this sense, the writer insists on the triple divine illumination that, according to the Seraphic, man acquires: a) in matter (*extra nos*); b) in intelligence (*intra nos*); and c) in the "eternal art" of God (*supra nos*).

then concludes that, after that sixth degree or level of the ascent of the soul towards God, it only remains for man to enjoy the day of rest on a seventh level or step, in which, through a mystical mental excess, your mind rests from all the works you undertook on your Itinerary to God,<sup>48</sup> in a way analogous to how the Creator rested on the seventh day after creating the entire universe in the previous six days.

With this last reflection, our fervent friar announces and introduces the seventh and last step of the contemplative ascent of the soul towards God,<sup>49</sup> a conclusive stage characterized by mental excess in the ecstasy of mystical contemplation.<sup>50</sup>

Now this seventh degree, which we could properly call the *ecstatic* stage of the Bonaventurian Aesthetics,<sup>51</sup> is situated on the fringes of the strictly rational dimension<sup>52</sup> and is deeply imbued by the most fervent spiritual affectivity and the most refined mysticism.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

At the end of this research tour, we could synthesize the main results of it like this:

According to the Seraphic Doctor, in his sixth and penultimate level of the contemplative ascent towards God, man considers him according to his

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<sup>48</sup> “nec aliquid iam amplius restet nisi dies requiei, in qua per mentis excessum requiescat humanae mentis perspicacitas *ab omni opere, quod pararat.*” (*Itin.*, VI, 7: Q V, 312 a).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Itin.*, 7: Q V, 311 b-312 a.

<sup>50</sup> On mystical contemplation according to Saint Bonaventure, see Cornelio Fabro, “Contemplazione mística e intuizione artistica del Seraphicus”, *Doctor Seraphicus* 9 (1962), 5-13; Maurizio Malaguti, “Contemplatio”, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano* 2008, 264-271. This Bonaventurian idea of *excessus mentis* has been studied, among others, by Christian Trottmann, “*Lumen veritatis aeternae*, la convergence des métaphysiques (chérubinique?) et leur dépassement dans les trois derniers chapitres de l’*Itinerarium*”, in Lázaro Pulido, León Florido & Rubio Hípola (eds.), *Pensar la Edad Media cristiana: San Buenaventura de Bagnoregio*, 141-165.

<sup>51</sup> This subject has been studied by R. Zas Friz de Col in the paper “Dallo sguardo estetico allo sguardo mistico. Approccio teologico alla luce di San Bonaventura”, *Mysterion. Rivista di Spiritualità e Mistica* 2 (2009), 22-36.

<sup>52</sup> Renato Lazzarini, “Originalità del messaggio bonaventuriano: lo Status transnaturale”, *Doctor Seraphicus* 7 (1960), 5-19, points out in this interpretive direction.

<sup>53</sup> On this deep mysticism that is at the base of the Bonaventurian Aesthetics, see, for example, Gaudenzio Melani “Inspirazione ed aspetti filosofici nell’*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*” di s. Bonaventura”, *Doctor Seraphicus* 15 (1968), 51-69.



essential properties as the highest Good, one of whose fundamental attributes is his absolute communicability.

Our author asserts that man, when contemplating the Good intuits that it can be conceived correctly only if it is conceived as one and as a triune at the same time since the highest diffusing Good (God the Father) is expressed in a generated (God the Son) and a exhaled (Holy Spirit).

For Saint Bonaventure, the human being, when accessing this sixth contemplative level, perceives the Supreme Good in its attributes of mutual communicability, such as the one that emanates, the one that receives, and the one that is exhaled, so that he discovers the existence of trinity of persons in the oneness of divine substance, that is to say, God one (in his nature or substance) and triune (in their different persons).

It is clear that the Seraphic Doctor, as a convinced Catholic and fervent mystic, does not hesitate to contribute in this area as decisive arguments faith and revelation (the theology), which for him are the unshakable bases that substantiate and enable the activity of reason (the philosophy).

But it is precisely these theological presuppositions, of a markedly Christological and Trinitarian nature, that are unacceptable to those who wish to remain on the objective plane of a purely rational and secular philosophy.

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## RESEÑAS

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