



The second level of St. Bonaventure's *Transcendent Aesthetics*: Speculating the divine Trinity through the good

El segundo nivel de la *Estética trascendente* de San Buenaventura: Especulando la Trinidad divina a través del Bien

El segon nivell de l'*Estètica transcendent* de Sant Bonaventura: Especulant la Trinitat divina a través d'el Bé

O segundo nível da *estética transcendente* de São Boaventura: especulando a Trindade divina pelo Bem

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Abstract: After pointing out that St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio conceives his Aesthetics as a free way to be able to ascend contemplatively towards God, this article seeks to explain the surprising and ingenious “arguments” (deeply imbued by faith) that this author proposes to base the second level of the “transcendent” stage of his peculiar Aesthetics. In the first four levels of his Aesthetics, Bonaventure establishes this initial ascent to God by considering the external beings of the material world as vestiges of the Creator (first and second levels), and then by examining our mind as an image of God, in which he can be seen reflected in a mirror (third and fourth levels). St. Bonaventure states that in the third stage of his Aesthetics (the "transcendent" stage), the human mind can look over itself to speculate on God in his essential property as the Supreme Being (fifth level) and in his personal properties as highest Good (sixth level). Our article focuses exclusively on the expression of this sixth level of Bonaventurian Aesthetics.

Keywords: Theology – Trinity – Christ – Good – Contemplation – St. Bonaventure.

Resumen: Tras señalar que San Buenaventura de Bagnoregio concibe su estética como un camino expedito para poder ascender contemplativamente hacia Dios, el presente artículo busca explicar los sorprendentes e ingeniosos “argumentos” (profundamente imbuidos por la fe) que dicho autor propone para fundamentar el segundo nivel del estadio “trascendente” de su peculiar Estética. En los cuatro primeros niveles de su Estética, Buenaventura fundamenta ese inicial ascenso a Dios mediante la consideración de los seres externos del mundo material como vestigios del Creador (primero y segundo niveles), y luego mediante la consideración de nuestra propia mente como imagen de Dios, en la que este se puede ver reflejado como en un espejo (tercer y cuarto

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Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

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niveles). San Buenaventura afirma que, en el tercer estadio de su Estética (el estadio “trascendente”), la mente humana puede mirar *por encima* de ella misma, para especular a Dios en su propiedad esencial como el Ser Supremo (quinto nivel) y en sus propiedades personales como Bien Sumo (sexto nivel). Nuestro artículo se concentra exclusivamente en la exposición de este sexto nivel de la Estética bonaventuriana.

Palabras clave: Teología – Trinidad – Cristo – Bien – Contemplación – San Buenaventura.

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Introduction

The work of St. Bonaventure da Bagnoregio as a theologian and as the author of religious, ethical, ascetic, and mystical writings is well known and appreciated by most experts. For this abundant and influential doctrinal production,² our author has deserved the prestigious title of Seraphic Doctor (*Doctor Seraphicus*).³ Moreover, Buenaventura's lavish doctrinal production has motivated many scholars for more than seven centuries, who have produced a vast series of interpretive studies on the various aspects of Bonaventurian thought.

Now, facing unanimous recognition that the Seraphic receives for his theological and religious writings,⁴ his status as a philosopher is not so unanimously recognized nor accepted.⁵ That is due, above all, to the fact that the Seraphic philosophy lacks autonomous validity outside theology. According to him, reason without faith is blind, for the human mind can reach knowledge only if it is illuminated by God Himself's

² As primary sources of the Bonaventurian writings we will use the critical edition *Obras de San Buenaventura*, edición bilingüe dirigida, anotada y con introducciones por León AMORÓS, Bernardo APERRIBAY y Miguel OROMÍ, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1945-ss., 6 vols.

³ For a synthetic panoramic view in Spanish about the life and work of St. Bonaventure, see León AMORÓS, “Introducción general”. In: *Obras de San Buenaventura*, vol. I, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1945: 1-150.

⁴ A valuable explanation of the main concepts used by St. Bonaventure in his writings of diverse nature is the collective book E. CAROLI (a cura di), *Dizionario Bonaventuriano: filosofia, teología, spiritualità*, Padova: Editrici Francescane, 2008, 909 pp.

⁵ As a deep and positive study of the philosophical production of Doctor Seraphic, the classic monograph of Étienne GILSON, *La philosophie de Saint Bonaventure*, Paris: Vrin, 1978 [1943] remains an unavoidable reference.



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

light of eternal truth. For St. Bonaventure, it is indisputable that rational understanding is based and justified in God's illumination/revelation. Therefore, far from being two separate or conflicting areas, theology (guided by revelation and faith) is the essential and unmovable foundation of philosophy, to the point that philosophy without theology fails to get out of the darkness of error or reach the truth.

As if that were not enough, this author's scarce assessment as a genuine philosopher joins the fact that his complex and heterogeneous Aesthetics –unquestionably original— is almost entirely ignored by specialists. And it is precisely on a plot of this Aesthetics where we have focused the current article.

Our research purpose in this article is to explore a small part of the arborescent –and somewhat intricate– Bonaventurian Aesthetics, thus complementing other focused studies that we have done on different aspects of this Seraphic aesthetic system.

Faced with such an epistemological assumption, many experts refuse to admit St. Bonaventure among the genuine philosophers. For this reason, his name does not appear even mentioned in many well-known manuals on the History of Philosophy. However, many historians give the Seraphic a more or less prominent place in their respective Histories of Philosophy, as Étienne Gilson,⁶ Maurice De Wulf,⁷ Émile Bréhier,⁸ Ernst von Aster,⁹ Johannes Hirschsberger,¹⁰ Paolo Lamanna,¹¹ Rafael Ramón Guerrero¹² and Josep-Ignasi Saranyana¹³ do. Other authors go even further in evaluating the philosophical work of St. Bonaventure, dedicating extensive chapters to it, as Sofía Vanni-Rovighi¹⁴ and José Antonio Merino Abad¹⁵ do, and even committing

⁶ Étienne GILSON. *La philosophie au Moyen Âge. Des origines patristiques à la fin du XIVe. Siècle.* Paris: Payot, 1962.

⁷ Maurice DE WULF. *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval. Tomo 2. El siglo XIII.* México, DF: Jus, 1945, pp. 240-246.

⁸ Émile BRÉHIER. *Histoire de la Philosophie. Tome I. L'Antiquité et le Moyen Âge. I. Moyen Âge et Renaissance.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967, pp. 575-582; y 1988, pp. 521-527.

⁹ Ernst VON ASTER. *Historia de la Filosofía.* Barcelona: Labor, 1945, pp. 160-161.

¹⁰ Johannes HIRSCHBERGER. *Historia de la Filosofía.* Barcelona: Herder, 1980, vol. 2, pp. 368-371.

¹¹ Paolo LAMANNA. *Historia de la Filosofía. Vol. II. El pensamiento de la Edad Media.* Buenos Aires: Librería Hachette, 1976, pp. 146-155.

¹² Rafael RAMÓN GUERRERO. *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval. Tres Cantos (Madrid): Akal, 2002,* pp. 177-185.

¹³ Josep-Ignasi SARANYANA. *La filosofía medieval.* Pamplona: EUNSA, 2003, pp. 262-271.

¹⁴ Sofía VANNI-ROVIGHI. *San Bonaventura,* Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1974.

¹⁵ José Antonio MERINO ABAD, *Historia de la filosofía franciscana.* Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1993, pp. 29-105.



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

a voluminous, dense monograph, such as that signed by Étienne Gilson.¹⁶

As if that were not enough, the inadequate evaluation of St. Bonaventure as a true philosopher is compounded by the fact that his complex and heterogeneous Aesthetics –unquestionably original— is almost wholly ignored by specialists, as evidenced by the absence of his name in the conventional manuals on the History of Aesthetics. However, the aesthetic system of the Seraphic has been studied and highlighted to a greater or lesser extent by renowned historians of Philosophy, such as Étienne Gilson,¹⁷ and, above all, by inescapable historians of Aesthetics, such as Edgar De Bruyne¹⁸ and Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz.¹⁹ For the rest, the Aesthetics of San Buenaventura has deserved a monographic treatment of great depth by Emma Jane Marie Spargo²⁰ and, lately, by Isabel María León Sanz.²¹ Now, our research aim in this article is just to explore a small plot of the arborescent –somewhat intricate— Bonaventurian Aesthetics, thus complementing other focused studies that we have done on different fields of that same Seraphic aesthetic system.

St. Bonaventure formulates the essentials of his Aesthetics, especially in *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, and, to a lesser extent, in *Breviloquium*, although the reflections on the aesthetic field that our author left scattered in many theological, ascetic, moral, and hagiographic writings abound. For him, in effect, Aesthetics, far from having a fully self-sufficient validity, as if it were a profane discourse destined to the pure autonomous complacency of material sensibility, manifests itself as an expedited spiritual path to ascend contemplatively towards God. In his view, the Aesthetics does not limit and exhaust in the mere contemplation of earthly beings' beauty. Still, that contemplation of the immanent (the created world) should lead us to consider the transcendent (Creator God).

¹⁶ Étienne GILSON. *La philosophie de Saint Bonaventure* (Étude de Philosophie Médiévale, Tome IV). Paris: Vrin, 1924.

¹⁷ Etienne GILSON, *La filosofía en la Edad Media. Desde los orígenes patrísticos hasta el fin del siglo XIV*. Madrid: Gredos, 1989, pp. 432-443.

¹⁸ Edgar DE BRUYNE. *L'Esthétique du Moyen Âge*, Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1947, pp. 101-109; y 1959, pp. 201-240).

¹⁹ Wladyslaw TATARKIEWICZ. *Historia de la estética. II: La estética medieval*. Tres Cantos (Madrid): Akal. 2007, pp. 244-252).

²⁰ Emma Jane Marie SPARGO. *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*. Allegany, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1853.

²¹ Isabel María LEÓN SANZ. *El arte creador en San Buenaventura. Fundamentos para una teología de la belleza*. Pamplona: EUNSA, 2016.



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

In his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*,²² St. Bonaventure builds his Aesthetics according to a structure of six progressive phases, or steps (plus a seventh step destined to the mystical rest of the soul), which are based one after another, as a sharp pyramid.²³ In the first two phases of his Aesthetics –which constitute what we could call, in the absence of more relevant terms, the "natural" or "immanent" stage of his Aesthetics—, the Seraphic already establishes two primary possibilities of contemplating God *outside* of ourselves: those of considering it through its *vestiges* and in its *vestiges* in the created things.²⁴

The next two phases, with the third and fourth level –the intermediate stage, which we could call the “introspective” stage of Bonaventure’s Aesthetics— offer two more profound possibilities of contemplating God *within* ourselves: those of contemplating it by its *image* printed in the powers of our soul as by a *mirror* and as in a *mirror*.²⁵

The two subsequent steps, the fifth and the sixth –an almost final stage that could be designated as the “transcendent” stage of Seraphic’s Aesthetics— means a third and superior possible way of contemplating God *above* us, by the *light* of eternal truth imprinted in our mind: that supernatural light allows us to speculate the unity of God

²² ST. BONAVENTURE, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe. Vol. I. Dios y las criaturas*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968, pp. 474-534. In the subsequent notes of this article, we will quote this work of the Seraphic Doctor with the abbreviation *Itin*, followed by the chapter in Roman numeral, the heading in Arabic numeral, and the page of the aforementioned book *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe. Vol. I. Dios y las criaturas* (1968) in which the quotation is found.

²³ An excellent synthesis of the ideas systematized by the Seraphic in this exquisite work is the "Introduction [to the *Itinerarium*]" that appears anonymously (probably written by León AMORÓS) in *Obras de San Buenaventura*, op.cit., 1945, vol. I, pp. 541-555.

²⁴ We have studied this first phase of the aesthetics of San Buenaventura in the following texts: J.M. 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 FUENTE BALLESTEROS, Ricardo de la, Jesús PÉREZ-MAGALLÓN y J. R. JOUVE-MANÍN (eds.), *Del Barroco al Neobarroco: realidades y transferencias culturales*, Valladolid Universitas Castellae, 2011: 295-309; J.M. 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. Electronic Journal of Antiquity & Middle Ages* 16, 2013: 79-117; y J.M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, “La Estética inmanente de San Buenaventura desde sus fuentes de inspiración” (article under evaluation in a Spanish academic journal).

²⁵ We have analyzed this “introspective” Aesthetics of San Buenaventura in the text J.M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, “Contemplar a Dios por el espejo del alma: Primer nivel de la Estética introspectiva de San Buenaventura desde sus fuentes inspiradoras” (article under evaluation in a Spanish academic journal)



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

as the *Supreme Being*²⁶ in its essential attributes (fifth step),²⁷ and as the *highest Good*²⁸ in its personal properties (sixth tier).²⁹

I. The transcendent Aesthetics of St. Bonaventure

After exposing in the fifth chapter of his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* the fifth degree of the contemplative ascent towards God, in which the mind considers the essential attributes of God as the highest *Being*, St. Bonaventure argues that man must ascend with his intelligence to co-intuit the Divine Trinity³⁰ in their emanations, considering *Good* as their essential foundation.³¹ In his opinion, man must understand that this good is optimal from every point of view. It is impossible to conceive of anything better, that it must be thought of as necessarily existing since its inexistence is inconceivable existence is better than non-existence.³² Surprisingly, the Seraphic hence

²⁶ On the dimension of Being in God, see, for example, G. SANTINELLO. “La nozione dell’essere in San Bonavenura.” *Doctor Seraphicus* 30 (1983), pp. 69-80; y Orlando Todisco, 2008b. “Esse. Essentia”, en Ernesto CAROLI (a cura di). *Dizionario Bonaventuriano: filosofia, teología, spiritualità*. Padova: Editrici Francescane, 2008, pp. 345-356.

²⁷ We have analyzed this first level of the "transcendent" Aesthetics of St. Bonaventure in the study J. M. SALVADOR-GONZÁLEZ, “The first level of the transcendent Aesthetics of St. Bonaventure: Contemplating God as the most pure and primary being” (article under evaluation in a foreign academic journal).

²⁸ On the essence of God as the highest Good, see, for example, Marco NINCI. “Il bene e il non-essere. Alle radici pseudo-dionisiane dell’esemplarismo di san Bonaventura.” *Doctor Seraphicus* 33 (1986), pp. 71-96; y Orlando TODISCO. “Bonum”. en *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, op. cit., 2008, pp. 221-227.

²⁹ “Quoniam autem contingit contemplari Deum non solum extra nos et intra nos, verum etiam supra nos: extra per vestigium, intra per imaginem et supra per lumen, quod est signatum supra mentem nostram, quod est lumen Veritatis aeternae, cum ipsa mens nostra immediate ab ipsa Veritate formetur; qui exercitati sunt in primo modo intraverunt iam in atrium ante tabernaculum; qui vero in secundo, intraverunt in sancta; qui autem in tertio, intrant cum summo Pontifice in sancta sanctorum; ubi supra arcam sunt Cherubim gloriae obumbrantia propitiatorium; per quae intelligimus duos modos seu gradus contemplandi Dei invisibilia, et aeterna, quorum unus versatur circa essentialia Dei, alius vero circa propria personarum.” (*Itin*, V, 1: 516-517).

³⁰ The nature of the Trinity in the thought of St. Bonaventure has been studied, among others, by L. MATHIEU, “Trinitas”. In *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, op. cit., 2008: 819-826.

³¹ “Post considerationem essentialium elevandus est oculus intelligentiae ad contuitionem 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: 524).

³² “Vide igitur et attende, quoniam optimum quod simpliciter est quo nihil melius cogitari potest; et hoc tale sic est, quod no potest recte cogitari non esse, quia omnino melius est esse quam non esse”. (*Itin*, VI, 2: 524).



deduces that good can be conceived correctly only if it is designed as one and as triune simultaneously.³³

According to him, since the good, in general, is diffusive of itself (*diffusivum sui*), the supreme good must necessarily be extremely diffusive of itself;³⁴ but the diffusion can only be the highest “being at the same time current and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, liberal and necessary, insufficient and perfect”.³⁵ For our author, the existence of the highest good necessarily implies that it is eternal and that it is disseminated from eternity in a double consubstantial and hypostatic diffusion, thus making the diffuser highest good be expressed in a generated and an expired, which are shown as well as the beloved and the co-beloved of the highest good: this means, according to Bonaventure, the affirmation of the divine Trinity, according to which the highest good (God the Father) spreads itself by begetting God the Son and exhaling the Holy Spirit. This is how the theologian formulates it:

As, if there is no eternally a current and consubstantial production in the highest good, and if also 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 coincipient—, so that it is the beloved and the co-beloved, the begotten and the expired, that is, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the highest good would not exist in any way, for then it would not spread to the highest degree.³⁶

Thus, about the immensity of the eternal good, the temporal diffusion of good in creatures can only be as something central or punctual, so it is always possible to conceive another even greater spread, as it would be the one in which the diffusive good communicates to another being all its substance and nature. For this reason, good would not be the highest good if, both in itself and conceptually, it lacked the utmost diffusion.³⁷

³³ “sic est, quod non potest recte cogitari, quin cogitetur trinum et unum.” (*Itin*, VI, 2: 524).

³⁴ “Nam ‘bonum dicitur diffusivum sui’; summum igitur bonum summe diffusivum est sui.” (*Itin*, VI, 2, pp. 524-525).

³⁵ “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).

³⁶ “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: 525).

³⁷ “Nam diffusio ex tempore in creatura non est nisi centralis vel punctualis respectu immensitatis



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

St. Bonaventure starts from the assumption that highest goodness, being a pure act of the principle that loves with free love and with love composed of both, it is an act that is the fullest diffusion in the form of nature and will: and such diffusion is verified in the form of a Verb (in whom all things are said) and in the form of Gift (in which all other gifts are delivered). Hence the author infers that man, if he manages to cointuit the strength of the goodness, can understand that, by the utmost communicability of good, the existence of the divine Trinity, Father (the highest Good), Son (the Verb), and Holy Spirit (the Gift) is necessary.³⁸

Based on this and other quite risky and unclear assumptions, St. Bonaventure then goes on to categorically affirm the indissoluble mutual relationship that he believes is typical of the three divine Persons. In this sense, he argues that the six essential attributes –communication, consubstantiality, similarity, equality, eternity, cointimity– that, according to him, distinguish each of them are interpenetrated to a high degree, thanks to the sum “circumincession,”³⁹ to the extreme to manifest “the omnimode identity of the substance, power, and operation of the same Trinity”. This is stated by the author this way:

Because they are the highest good, the three divine Persons are highly communicable; being highly communicable, they are highly consubstantial; for being consubstantial at the highest level, they are very similar; because they are communicable, consubstantial and identical in the highest degree, they are extraordinarily co-equal and extremely coeternal, from which the utmost cointimity is established between them, by which, each divine Person is not only necessarily in the others, by the highest *circumincession*, but also each works with the others thanks to the omnimode identity of the substance, power, and operation of the same Trinity.⁴⁰

bonitatis aeternae; unde et potest aliqua diffusio cogitari maior illa, ea videlicet, in qua diffundens communicat alteri totam substantiam et naturam. Non igitur summum bonum esset, si re vel intellectu illa carere posset.” (*Itin*, VI, 2: 525).

³⁸ “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: 525-526).

³⁹ For St. Bonaventure, the original concept “circumincession” means the ability of the three divine Persons to interrelate and integrate with each other in all their properties, while preserving their own personality.

⁴⁰ “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 coaeternitatem, atque ex



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

Now, the Seraphic adds that man, even if he can contemplate in some way those six divine properties, must avoid thinking that he understands God, for he cannot be understood (is incomprehensible)⁴¹ in his absolute infinity by finite human intelligence. However, man must still consider with the eye of the mind what in those six attributes produces the stupor of admiration,⁴² as this allows him to glimpse the harmonious mutual relationship between them. This is stated by the author that way:

In which [the six attributes mentioned above of the highest good] it is necessary that because of the highest goodness there is the highest communicability, and of the highest communicability there is the highest consubstantiality, and of highest consubstantiality, the highest configurability is produced, and of these the highest coequality, and for this reason the highest coeternity, and for all the properties mentioned above, the highest cointimity is expressed, with which the one is in the other necessary for the highest *circumincersion*, and the one is acted upon with the other for the omnimode indivision of substance, power and operation of the Holy Trinity itself.⁴³

The Seraphic asserts that, when contemplating so many wonders, one cannot fail to be admired since the mere consideration of the highest goodness leads us with absolute certainty to the truth that all these wonders are found in the Holy Trinity.⁴⁴ In his opinion, indeed, if in the divine Trinity the communication is the highest and the diffusion is true, in it the origin and the distinction are also true; and, as the communication is total, the highest good communicates everything he has, from which it is inferred that both the one who emanates and the one who produces are distinguished by their properties, despite being essentially a single and identical

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: 526).

⁴¹ “Sed cum haec contemplaris, vide, ne te existimes comprehendere incomprehensibilem.” (*Itin*, VI, 3: 526).

⁴² “Habes enim adhuc in his sex conditionibus considerare quod vehementer in stuporem admirationis inducit oculum mentis nostrae.” (*Itin*, VI, 3: 526).

⁴³ “Nam ibi est summa communicabilitas cum personarum proprietate, summa consubstantialitas cum hypostasum pluralitate, summa configurabilitas cum discreta personalitate, summa coaequalitas cum ordine, summa coaeternitas cum emanatione, summa cointimitas cum emissionem.” (*Itin*, VI, 3: 526).

⁴⁴ “Quis ad tantorum mirabilium aspectum non consurgat in admirationem? Sed haec omnia certissime intelligimus esse in beatissima Trinitate, si levamus oculos ad superexcellens bonitatem.” (VI, 3: 526).



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

substance (the divine nature).⁴⁵

For St. Bonaventure, in effect, the three divine Persons are distinguished in their plurality of hypostasis, by their personal properties, namely, emanation, coming from the beginning (God the Father); order of origin, not of posterity (God the Son); emission or outpouring, not of local change, but free inspiration (Holy Spirit), thanks to the authority of the producing person (God the Father), the authority that the sender (God the Father) possesses concerning the envoy (God the Son).⁴⁶ And, 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 in being uncircumscribable.⁴⁷ Our author adds that thus when one considers each of these things independently and separately, one can contemplate the truth; but, when one considers them comparing each other, one is filled with profound admiration. Hence he infers that man, to raise his soul through admiration to an admirable contemplation, must consider all divine properties simultaneously in their mutual relationship.⁴⁸

St. Bonaventure insists on the idea that we must admire the essential and personal properties of God not only in themselves but also by comparing them with the admirable union of God and man that is verified in the unique person of Christ,⁴⁹ Son of God made man. In that sense, the Seraphic states:

So, if you are a Cherubim when contemplating the essential attributes of God, and you admire that divine being was at the same time first and last, eternal and present,

⁴⁵ “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: 526-527).

⁴⁶ “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: 527).

⁴⁷ “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: 527).

⁴⁸ “Dum ergo haec per se singillatim consideras, habes unde veritatem contempleris; dum haec ad invicem confers, habes unde in admirationem altissimam suspendaris: et ideo, ut mens tua per admirationem in admirabilem ascendat contemplationem, haec simul sunt consideranda.” (*Itin*, VI, 3: 527).

⁴⁹ “Nam admirari debemus non solum condiciones Dei essentielles et personales in se, verum etiam per comparisonem ad supermirabilem unionem Dei et hominis in unitate personae Christi.” (*Itin*, VI, 4: 528).



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

very simple and maximum or uncircumscribed, all everywhere, but never included yet immense and infinite without end, extremely one and, nevertheless, omnimode, since it possesses in itself all things, all power, all truth, all good; when one looks at the mercy seat,⁵⁰ one admires that the first principle is united with the last one, God is united with the man formed on the sixth day [of Creation], the eternal is united with a temporary man, born of a Virgin in the fullness of time, the simplicity is united with the extremely composed, the most current with the absolutely suffered and dead, the most perfect and the immense with the small, the extremely one and omnimode with a composite individual, distinct of others, that is, with Jesus Christ.⁵¹

The Seraphic Doctor broadens and deepens his theological presuppositions further by insisting on the idea that, if, when contemplating the properties of the three divine Persons, one admires that the communicability between them is combined with their individual properties, the consubstantiality harmonizes with the 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. The cointimity stands with the issuance, for God the Son is sent by God the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both, despite always coexisting with them (Father and Son), never separating from them.⁵² St. Bonaventure further enhances these ideas by adding:

Look at the mercy seat and admire that in Christ personal union is maintained together with the trinity of substances [Persons] and with the duality of [human and

⁵⁰ With this metaphorical expression "look at the mercy seat" St. Bonaventure refers, undoubtedly, to "consider the nature of divinity according to Catholic doctrine".

⁵¹ "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: 528).

⁵² "Si autem alter Cherub es personarum propria contemplando, et miraris, communicabilitatem esse cum proprietate, consubstantialitatem cum pluralitate, configurabilitatem cum personalitate, coequalitatem cum ordine, coaeternitatem cum productione, cointimitatem cum emissionem, 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: 528-529).



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

divine] natures; that [in Christ] the absolute consensus is maintained together with the plurality of volunteers, the mutual statement of God and man is preserved along with the plurality of properties, the co-worship is combined with the plurality of nobility, the co-exaltation over all things occur together with the plurality of dignities, the joint domination is integrated with the plurality of powers.⁵³

Saint Bonaventure rounds off his disquisitions at this sixth stage of *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, underlining the idea that, when considering man formed in the image of God,⁵⁴ our soul or mind finds the perfect illumination.⁵⁵ In his view, in effect,

The image being a significant resemblance, our soul, contemplating in Christ, Son of God and image of God invisible, our humanity, exalted so admirably and united so ineffably; seeing in Christ 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, *the book written inside and outside*, he already agreed to something perfect, to reach with God the perfection of his illuminations in the sixth degree, as on the sixth day of Creation.⁵⁶

The Seraphic Doctor concludes then that, after this sixth tier of the ascent of the soul towards God, it is only for the man to enjoy the day of rest in a seventh tier, in which, through a mystical mental excess, his mind rests from all works which he undertook

⁵³ “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 condominium cum pluralitate potestatum.” (*Itin*, VI, 6: 529).

⁵⁴ The concept of image (*imago*) as a theological category in St. Bonaventure has been studied by L. Iammarrone, “Imago. Vestigium”, in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, op. cit., 2008: 482-491; and, above all, 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*, Roma: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas a S. Thoma Aq. in Urbe, Roma, 2012.

⁵⁵ “In hac autem consideratione est perfectio illuminationis mentis, dum quasi in sexta die videt hominem factum ad imaginem Dei. (*Itin*, VI, 7: 529).

⁵⁶ “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: 529-530).



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

in his Itinerary to God,⁵⁷ as the Creator rested on the seventh day after creating the entire universe in the previous six days.

With this last reflection, our author announces and introduces the seventh and final step of the contemplative ascent of the soul towards God,⁵⁸ a final step characterized by the mental excess of mystical contemplation.⁵⁹ This is already a stage that, regardless of the intellectual dimension and deeply imbued with spiritual affectivity and a-rational mysticism, is entirely out of this article's restricted limits.

As a conclusion

After this explanation on the fifth grade of St. Bonaventure's Aesthetics –the second level of the “transcendent” stage of the Aesthetics as mentioned earlier–, we could underline the following essential thesis of the Seraphic on this issue:

- 1) For Saint Bonaventure, Aesthetics, far from being a profane discourse conceived to the pure pleasure of material sensibility, manifests itself as a spiritual path to ascend contemplatively towards God. The aesthetic contemplation of the immanent (the created world) allows us to contemplate the transcendent (God).
- 2) Theology stands as an indispensable foundation of philosophy. The speech of the Seraphic Doctor is that of a believer, absolutely convinced of his faith, for which he considers unnecessary to demonstrate or see “the invisible rationally.” However, our author tries to “argue” with the reason (enlightened by faith) to justify his assertions in this field logically.
- 3) In this sense, Bonaventure affirms that, when considering the properties of the highest Good, which is extremely diffusive of itself, the human mind can intuit God, and not as a unique being, but as a Trinity: the highest Good (God the Father) spreads by begetting God the Son and exhaling the Holy Spirit so that the three divine Persons share and intercommunicate the essential qualities of the highest Good.
- 4) Similarly, our author asserts that when contemplating the properties of the three divine Persons –communicability, consubstantiality, similarity, equality, eternity, cointimidity–, one can intuit the existence of the divine Trinity: you can appreciate

⁵⁷ “nec aliquid iam amplius restet nisi dies requiei, in qua per mentis excessum requiescat humanae mentis perspicacitas *ab omni opere, quod patrarat.*” (*Itin*, VI, 7: 530).

⁵⁸ Cf. *Itin*, 7: 530-534.

⁵⁹ On the mystical contemplation according to St. Bonaventure, see Cornelio FABRO, “Contemplazione mística e intuizione artistica del Seraphicus”, *Doctor Seraphicus* 9, 1962: 5-13.



Mirabilia Journal 31 (2020/2)

Jun-Dic 2020/ISSN 1676-5818

that God the Son is sent by God the Father and that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both, despite always coexisting with them (Father and Son).

- 5) On this basis, St. Bonaventure categorically defends the indissoluble mutual relationship between the three divine Persons, to the point that the essential attributes that distinguish each one of them are interpenetrated to a great degree, thanks to the sum “circumincision,” thus manifesting “the omnimode identity of the substance, power, and operation of the same Trinity”.

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