

St. Bonaventure and St. Francis: The Heart of Franciscan Wisdom

Abstract

In this presentation, I will seek to put into perspective the philosophy and theology of the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure. I will argue that to understand the thought of St. Bonaventure, one has to understand his Franciscan vocation and the exemplary role of the Seraphic Father, St. Francis. This pattern becomes evident when one looks closer at St. Bonaventure's (1) exemplary causation, (2) divine illumination theory, (3) and crown of affectivity.

Throughout these three topics, it is also my goal to elaborate upon St. Bonaventure's philosophy by (1) analyzing the respective philosophers who St. Bonaventure responded to (i.e. Aristotle, Plato, St. Augustine, St. Thomas) and (2) contextualizing him among the great Christian thinkers of his time (i.e. St. Thomas and St. Albert).

Introduction

The medieval age saw the rise of some of the greatest thinkers in the Church including the likes of St. Augustine, St. Anselm, St. Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas, Blessed John Duns Scotus, and St. Bonaventure. Known by almost all Christian philosophers is St. Thomas Aquinas and his brilliant works, *Being and Essence*, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, and of course the *Summa Theologiae*. Also known, but perhaps not as well known, is St. Bonaventure. However, it seems that St. Bonaventure is not known for his works but rather, he is more well known for being a Franciscan and sometimes being called the "second founder of the Franciscan order". While those are worthy facts of St. Bonaventure, not knowing his way of thought seems to be an

injustice and it seems necessary to investigate the philosophy and theology of the one to whom Pope Leo XIII placed alongside St. Thomas as a constructor of scholastic theology.¹

In looking at the history of St. Bonaventure's thought it seems that only until recently have his works been interpreted correctly. This is noted by both Étienne Gilson and the late Pope Benedict XVI (at the time Fr. Joseph Ratzinger) in their respective works, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* and *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*. Gilson suggests that a reason we have not come to fully appreciate the work of St. Bonaventure is because we have limited ourselves to only reading bits and pieces of his work and as a consequence, we have misconstrued his thoughts and taken them out of context. Thus, Gilson says, "It is quite otherwise in such a doctrine as that of St. Bonaventure. In it, the totality of the system means so much that the mere notion of fragments has no meaning at all. You can either see the general economy of his doctrine in its totality, or see none of it..."² However, a second reason that Gilson posits, and one that is perhaps more convincing, is that people do not know the heart of St. Bonaventure's system of thought. They miss his Franciscan spirituality and propose he is nothing other than a "modern Augustinianism" or "a potential and incomplete St. Thomas" or a man "having been born too early to profit by the theological reform of Albertus Magnus and the translations of Aristotle..."³ Yet, this seems to be a grave injustice to the missions of St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, and St. Albert and this problem must be rectified.

It seems to me that a solution to this problem only arises when one views the central role St. Francis of Assisi plays in St. Bonaventure's philosophy and theology. After all St. Francis was the one who by the grace of God saved St. Bonaventure from the "jaws of death" in his

¹ Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, §14.

² Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 406.

³ Copleston, *History of Philosophy* (Vol. II: Augustine to Scotus), 245. Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 2-3.

youth and gave him the name “Bona Ventura”.⁴ Undoubtedly, the two from the youth of St. Bonaventure shared a special bond and therefore, it is my intention to show the relation between the humble saint of Assisi and St. Bonaventure’s thought through three key principles in St. Bonaventure’s philosophy and theology: exemplarism, divine illumination, and the crown of affectivity.

Exemplarism

The beginning point in St. Bonaventure’s system of thought is his exemplarism. Exemplarism is the idea that all of creation is created as an emanation from the expressed Word of God and thus, bears a certain reflection of God.⁵ St. Bonaventure firmly believed this was the starting point for the metaphysician because it distinguishes metaphysics from all other disciplines. Consider the four causes that were central in Aristotle’s physics (and metaphysics): formal, material, efficient, and final.⁶ Formal and material are studied rigorously in the natural sciences, physicists can study efficient causation up to the point of an unmoved first principle, and final causation is the central interest of all moral philosophers. Yet, studying the relationship between creatures and their Creator is something distinct to metaphysics alone, and here, we can infer with St. Bonaventure two things: (1) the metaphysician must study philosophy with Christ, who is the exemplar of all beings, at its center and (2) the Incarnation becomes a significant point in philosophy and theology. This second point will be expanded later.

In adopting this exemplarism, St. Bonaventure is enabled to speak of the analogy of being in a far more efficient and personal way. For St. Bonaventure is able to say without error that

⁴ St. Bonaventure expresses a feeling of indebtedness when he writes on the life of the Seraphic Father. See St. Bonaventure’s *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, pg. xi.

⁵ Undoubtedly, we find here a Platonic influence in St. Bonaventure. Plato’s forms came to indicate a certain relationship between God and His creation in the thought of St. Bonaventure. And while the totality of Plato’s theory of forms was rejected, it was innovated to what would become the “Divine Ideas” for the Scholastic philosophers. For St. Bonaventure’s thoughts on creatures as vestiges of the Trinity, see his *Breviloquium*, 2, 1, 2. For more on the Divine Ideas, see St. Bonaventure’s *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, q. 3, arg. aff. 2 and St. Thomas’ *De veritate*, q. 3, a. 1.

⁶ See Aristotle’s *Physics*, Bk. II, Ch. 3.

through Christ there is a resemblance between God and creation while avoiding the errors of the “Third Man Argument”⁷ and speaking of the relation between God and man in univocal terms. He avoids the first when he states, “But that sort of likeness by which one being is said to imitate another is aptly posited in the creature with respect to the Creator, and that sort of likeness by which one being is said to be the exemplar of another is posited in the Creator with respect to creation. Such a likeness does not require that the two beings agree by participation in a common third. It is sufficient that there be harmony of order whereby they are related as cause and effect, or as expressive principle and object expressed.”⁸ This metaphysical innovation, however, does not just prove St. Bonaventure avoids the first error, but it also shows how he avoids speaking of God and man in univocal terms. For as is indicated in the Seraphic Doctor’s words, creation is the expressed object that is caused by God and thus, is something far lower that can only imitate.

And yet, we identify in St. Bonaventure’s analogy of being a relation that seems more intimate than other philosophers have emphasized. For instead of speaking of analogy merely as a “mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation”⁹, St. Bonaventure explains analogy in a way where creation is invited to imitate God who is their exemplar. Thus, we find in St. Bonaventure’s philosophy and theology a mission that emphasizes the conformity of man to Christ rather than emphasizing Boethius’ famous definition of man: “*naturae rationalis individua substantia*”.¹⁰

⁷ An argument Parmenides makes against Plato’s theory of forms in Plato’s *Parmenides*. The argument goes something like this: the theory of forms proposes that two things (A and C for example) are related in likeness in virtue of some other third thing (B). However, this third thing (B) is both like and unlike C and thus, it needs another third thing (D) to form a likeness between B and C. But this necessarily has to go on for infinity and this creates an infinite regress of likenesses which is nonsensical. Therefore, the theory of forms seems flawed.

⁸ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, q. 2, ad. 2.

⁹ Aquinas, *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, co.

¹⁰ Now, St. Thomas and St. Albert were fully aware of exemplarism and accepted it, but they did not emphasize it as much as St. Bonaventure. This it seems to me is because emphasizing the individuality of man as a rational substance is the core mission of St. Albert’s and St. Thomas’ philosophy while St. Bonaventure is more concerned

One might be tempted to conclude that St. Bonaventure has done nothing but take up the Augustinian tradition and refine it. After all, exemplary causation is a notion founded by St. Augustine. But this does not seem to be the case with St. Bonaventure since St. Augustine adopts exemplarism merely for the sake of explaining the doctrine of creation. We find evidence for this when St. Augustine says, “the world itself in all its ordered change and movement and in all the beauty it presents to our sight, a world which bears a kind of silent testimony to the fact of its creation, and proclaims that its maker could have been none other than God...”.¹¹ St. Bonaventure, on the other hand, seems to adopt exemplarism not just to explain creation, but also to call to mind the eschatological character of creation. This becomes evident when St. Bonaventure says, “Lord, I came forth from Thee, I return to Thee, through Thee: that is all our metaphysics.”¹² Exemplarism, then, is not just about creation’s call to imitation, but it is also about creation’s call to transformation in Christ.

It is here that we begin to stumble upon the deep significance of St. Francis. For St. Francis, as Ratzinger notes, was seen “not simply as another Saint, but as a sign of the final age, as one sent by God.”¹³ Thus, in following his religious father, we find in St. Bonaventure’s writings an immanent call to conversion and contemplation. The former is emphasized in St. Bonaventure’s *Collationes de decem praeceptis*, *Collationes de septem donis*, and *Collationes in Hexaemeron* while the latter is emphasized in St. Bonaventure’s *The Journey of the Mind to God*. These works, building off his exemplarism and *Disputed Questions*, reveal the true depth and character of St. Bonaventure’s Franciscan Spirituality as they speak more emphatically on creation’s eschatological character.

with conformity. Seen in this light, one can see them not as opposing one another, but as complementing one another.

¹¹ Augustine, *City of God*, 432. St. Augustine shows a similar attitude regarding creation and exemplarism in his *On Genesis* and *The Confessions*, Bk. XI.

¹² Bougerol, *Works of Bonaventure*, 132.

¹³ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, 31.

But, while the eschatology of St. Bonaventure cannot be explored in full here (though we will treat it more in depth below), a brief word about St. Bonaventure's eschatological vision is necessary to conclude our analysis of exemplarism. Creation, according to the eschatological vision of St. Bonaventure, is split into an *egressus* and *regressus* with the Incarnation of Christ standing at the center.¹⁴ The *egressus* in relation to Christ's Incarnation we can now see with greater clarity through exemplarism. Furthermore, we can see how exemplarism leads to the *regressus*. However, we find that creation cannot begin its *regressus* if it does not have some kind of ascent and it is here that we conclude our analysis of exemplarism and come upon one of the Seraphic Doctor's most important doctrines: divine illumination.

Divine Illumination

The Seraphic Father's theory of illumination demands prudence and careful analysis. For if misunderstood, we shall find ourselves unwilling to follow the rest of the Bonaventuran vision. But if interpreted correctly, we shall find ourselves confirming a mystical epistemology unseen in the history of philosophy and ascending to the mind of God like St. Francis. Indeed, this is the goal that St. Bonaventure sets out with as he proclaims: "Inspired by the example of our blessed father, Francis, I wanted to seek after this peace with yearning soul... I withdrew to Mount Alverno, as to a place of quiet, there to satisfy the yearning of my soul for peace. While I dwelt there... I was struck, among other things, by that miracle which in this very place had happened to the blessed Francis... As I reflected on this marvel, it immediately seemed to me that this vision might suggest the rising of Saint Francis into contemplation and point out the way by which the state of contemplation may be reached."¹⁵

¹⁴ We come to see that St. Bonaventure has a Christocentric eschatology and we now see why the Incarnation is so important for philosophy and theology. For a more in-depth schemata of St. Bonaventure's eschatology, see Ratzinger's *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, pgs. 128-132.

¹⁵ Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, 1.

It should come as no surprise that as St. Bonaventure begins to construct a doctrine of illumination, St. Francis stands as an exemplar. This should strike us as having particular importance because it shall help us to understand the distinction between St. Bonaventure's theory of illumination and the theory of the one whom St. Bonaventure often praises: St. Augustine. We shall see, however, that they treat knowledge and beatitude quite differently. But first, we must properly treat St. Augustine's theory.

(a) An Outline of St. Augustine's Theory of Illumination

St. Augustine, it could be said, is the founder of the theory of divine illumination. But for St. Augustine, the theory of illumination was founded primordially within a platonic background. Copleston notes this when he says, "The fact of the matter is that his 'Platonism', coupled with his spiritual interest and outlook, led him to look on corporeal objects as not being the proper object of knowledge... Augustine assumed with Plato, that the objects of true knowledge of changing objects is not true knowledge."¹⁶ Thus, in following Plato, St. Augustine was led to believe that one must penetrate to unchanging objects (eternal truths) in order to attain any form of certainty in knowledge. But there arises a problem in attaining these truths that St. Augustine recognizes. The problem is precisely this: if the mind is temporal and mutable, how then can it capture immutable eternal truths? St. Augustine's answer to the problem is one akin to Plato: God who is the light of the world must necessarily illuminate the truth of objects to the mind "for no creature, however rational and intellectual, is lighted of itself, but is lighted by participation of eternal Truth."¹⁷

We find here in St. Augustine's doctrine an adaptation of Plato's allegory of the cave¹⁸ fitted within a Christian context. And from this interpretation, we can draw some preliminary

¹⁶ Copleston, *History of Philosophy* (Vol. II: Augustine to Scotus), 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁸ See Plato's *Republic*, Bk. VII.

conclusions from St. Augustine's doctrine of illumination. Firstly, we see that St. Augustine follows Plato in starting from the Eternal Truths (or Ideas) and works down to the temporal world.¹⁹ Secondly, and this flows out of the first conclusion, we see that St. Augustine places the intellect and mind in a "purely passive role".²⁰ Thirdly and finally, one might point out a danger that could be interpreted in St. Augustine's doctrine (although I insist that this was not St. Augustine's intention); namely, that the mind seems to receive ideas from above as if they were impressed upon it.

This shall prove to be a sufficient enough analysis of St. Augustine's theory of illumination as all its content and the whole schemata of St. Augustine's thought cannot be studied here. In making ourselves familiar, however, with the key points of St. Augustine's doctrine of illumination, we are now enabled to throw into full relief the philosophical framework of St. Bonaventure's doctrine of illumination.

(b) The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure's Theory of Illumination

As St. Bonaventure begins to construct a philosophical background for his doctrine of illumination, we find that he both conforms to and deviates from St. Augustine's theory. For though St. Bonaventure agrees with St. Augustine that "if full knowledge requires recourse to a truth that is fully immutable and stable, and to a light that is completely infallible, it is necessary for this sort of knowledge to have recourse to the heavenly art..."²¹, he also affirms that this light only "gives infallibility to the knower"²² and does not give knowledge. St. Bonaventure makes this distinction because he does not agree with Plato (and the implications of St Augustine's

¹⁹ I might mention that it is in this specific stance from St. Augustine that we see a gap between Augustinian epistemology and Thomistic epistemology. In identifying this, I agree with Copleston that it is a stretch to try and find the ambiguities in St. Augustine and positively compare it to St. Thomas. However, in what follows, I shall adamantly disagree with Copleston's account of St. Bonaventure's concept of illumination and knowledge of God. I will not argue that St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas can be likened to the same epistemology, but I shall not set them so far apart as to be opposing one another as many historians have done.

²⁰ See Copleston's *History of Philosophy* (Vol. II: Augustine to Scotus), pg. 64.

²¹ Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, q. 4, concl.

²² *Ibid.*

theory) that illumination grants knowledge. For if this was indeed the case, then there would be no distinction between natural knowledge and heavenly knowledge.²³ Thus, St. Bonaventure only affirms illumination in the sense that it grants certitude to the knowing subject and because of this, St. Bonaventure (1) does not fall prey to the errors of Platonism, (2) preserves the role of the intellect, and (3) rejects any notion of innate ideas.

We find behind this luminous epistemology what has often been missed in the philosophy of St. Bonaventure: an Aristotelian background. Indeed, St. Bonaventure adopts alongside St. Thomas Aquinas the Aristotelian claim that knowledge begins with sense experience and incorporates the agent and possible intellect.²⁴ That being said, however, it would be a grave mistake to believe that St. Bonaventure appeals to Aristotle for the sake of adopting Aristotelianism.

While St. Bonaventure praises Aristotle in numerous places²⁵, one must keep in mind who St. Bonaventure looks to in the beginning of his *The Journey of the Mind to God*. In fact, it is because St. Bonaventure follows the humble saint of Assisi that St. Bonaventure ends up critiquing not only Aristotle, but Plato and anyone who would try to find a self-sufficient philosophy.²⁶ This is not to demean the role of philosophy, but one must remember the true beginning and end of philosophy: God. Thus, St. Bonaventure nobly preaches, “Whence because Plato turned the whole of certain cognition [totam cognitionem certitudinalem] toward the intelligible or ideal world, he was for that reason deservedly reprehended by Aristotle; not because he said badly, that there are ideas and eternal reasons, since in this (St.) Augustine

²³ St. Bonaventure emphasizes this before he affirms an illumination theory. See St. Bonaventure’s *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, q. 4, concl.

²⁴ See St. Bonaventure’s *II Sent.*, d. 24, pars 1, a. 2, q. 4.

²⁵ See *Works of Bonaventure*, pgs. 25-30 for an excellent and prudent account on St. Bonaventure’s attitude toward Aristotle.

²⁶ While we cannot go into further depth on St. Bonaventure’s attack on Aristotelianism and philosophy, the reader will find a marvelous summary of St. Bonaventure’s true reason for attacking Aristotle and philosophy in Ratzinger’s *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, Ch. 4.

praises him: but because, having despised the sensible world, he wanted to reduce the whole certitude of cognition to those ideas; and by posing (the argument) in this manner, though it would seem that he stabilized the way of wisdom, which proceeds according to eternal reasons, he nevertheless destroyed the way of science, which proceeds according to created reasons; which way Aristotle on the contrary stabilized, having neglected that superior one. And for that reason it seems, that among philosophers the sermon of wisdom is given to Plato, but to Aristotle the sermon of science. For the former looked principally to superior things, but the latter principally to inferior ones..”²⁷

We find in this sermon the true perspective St. Bonaventure holds in relation to St. Augustine, Plato, and Aristotle. Indeed, they receive great praise for their contributions to a *philosophia perennis*, but it is undeniable that they each fall short in some way. Thus, St. Bonaventure turns to St. Francis for the solution of finding a harmony between wisdom and knowledge, faith and reason, grace and nature, and revelation and reality. And it is here that we leave the philosophical framework of St. Bonaventure’s doctrine of illumination and turn to see both its theological and Franciscan significance.

(c) *The Theology of St. Bonaventure’s Theory of Illumination*

That St. Francis becomes a solution to completing a doctrine of illumination for St. Bonaventure is evident when one sees how St. Francis did not merely seek knowledge, but also Wisdom.²⁸ Having a certainty of knowledge upon objects is of course a way of exercising the dignity of the intellect, but man cannot just stop at knowledge. Rather, man must ascend from knowledge to Wisdom which is Truth who is Christ Himself. This would be the greatest exercise of the dignity of the intellect and it is here that we see that illumination for St.

²⁷ Bonaventure, “Christ, the One Master of All”.

²⁸ It must be said that St. Augustine also sought Wisdom. What I mean to imply with St. Francis, however, is that he ascended to God through the sensible while St. Augustine came to the sensible through the Eternal.

Bonaventure must necessarily expand past merely bestowing certainty upon the knowing subject and become an invitation to the subject to draw closer to the divine light that illuminates its mind; furthermore, it must draw men to Christ who is “the true light that enlightens every man” (Jn. 1:9).²⁹ This is why we find that St. Francis did not just stop at a knowledge and love for reality and creation, but he allowed himself constantly to be drawn up into an ecstatic knowledge, an intimate union with Wisdom. Creation, then, could not be loved by St. Francis unless the Creator Himself was praised and loved through it. Gilson captures this attitude adequately when he states, “we can say that the more he [St. Francis] despised the world the more he loved it: in a sense he used it as a field of battle against the prince of darkness, but in another he saw in it the clear mirror of the goodness of God... that is why seeking everywhere his Well-Beloved in the traces of Him that remained in things, he used all things whatsoever as steps to mount to Him.”³⁰

We come to see through this marvelous passage by Gilson the proper schemata of St. Bonaventure’s doctrine of illumination. For St. Bonaventure must hold with Aristotle that illumination begins with sense experience for that is where we see traces or vestiges of God (as our philosophical investigation of exemplarism and illumination revealed). However, St. Bonaventure must also follow St. Francis and say that illumination must also ascend to the divine light so that knowledge may be perfected, and the soul might attain the most perfect truths.

What we see here is the wonderful unfolding of the relationship between philosophy and theology in the eyes of St. Bonaventure. For philosophical epistemology lends itself to revealing that there is a supreme light even if we cannot fully comprehend this light. One could think of

²⁹ While I cannot explore St. Bonaventure’s commentary on the Gospel of John nor go into greater depths on his philosophy of light, it is worth mentioning that St. Bonaventure numerous times refers to the Incarnation when he speaks of illumination. Truly, Christ who is the Light of the world becomes the center of divine illumination for St. Bonaventure as He was for St. Francis.

³⁰ Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 53.

this in terms of Gilson's example: "we affirm it [the divine light] as we affirm the existence of the hidden source of whose flowing waters are actually before our eyes."³¹ Yet, in this realization, we find that the intellect does not just stop at the incomprehensible because there is something familiar about the sensible truths since they "are supposed to be discovered in the soul and drawn out from oblivion."³² Thus, the intellect strives to rise to God, but through God's help with grace and faith and hence, theology comes to complete philosophy and its mission. St. Bonaventure emphatically expresses this when he says, "Thus it is that, no matter how enlightened one may be by the light coming from nature and from acquired knowledge, he cannot enter into himself to delight in the Lord except through the mediation of Christ, Who says, *I am the door. If anyone enter by me he shall be safe, and shall go in and out, and shall find pastures* [Jn. 10:9]."³³

We shall conclude our analysis of divine illumination by noting two important things. Firstly, we see that St. Bonaventure does not just hold an epistemology, but he holds a mystical epistemology that does not destroy philosophy, but rather, integrates it into theology. Secondly and more importantly, we see that illumination for St. Bonaventure starts with the sensible world, but through the grace of Christ necessarily turns inward to the soul so that it might ascend to God. Therefore, we find in our analysis that St. Bonaventure's divine illumination theory builds off his exemplarism and contains the beginning of the answer to creation's *regressus*. But the journey is not complete, and St. Bonaventure knows that one must imitate St. Francis of Assisi if creation is to make its ultimate ascent. For creation is called to transformation and this can only come by way of love which as we shall see with St. Bonaventure, was to become the very identity of the saint of Assisi.

³¹ Ibid., 332.

³² Ibid., 312.

³³ Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, 23.

The Crown of Affectivity

As has become evident, if creation is to complete its *regressus*, then it not only requires illumination, but also transformation. But before we dive into St. Bonaventure's notion of transformation in Christ, it must be clarified what St. Bonaventure means by transformation. For what he does not mean is a false interpretation of St. Paul's words, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20); namely, an interpretation that suggests that man must be abolished and completely covered by Christ. Such a notion deceptively seems pious, but it in fact falls far short of St. Paul's true intention. The reason for this is that if we were completely covered by Christ and our personhood was abolished, then there would be no call to action to actualize the person or any call to moral excellence. But did Christ not come to fulfill the law? Does Christ not call us to moral excellence so that we might bear fruit? Indeed, He did fulfill the law and call us to moral excellence and thus, it would seem that a radical interpretation of St. Paul's words is incompatible with Christ's Gospel.

This is why St. Bonaventure believes that man must not be wholly abolished, but on the contrary, fully actualized. Moreover, the person must become fully actualized through love (specifically *caritas*) which perfects the human person because it draws the person closer to their exemplar Who is Love itself. When St. Paul's words are seen in this light, the person does not become eliminated but becomes an *alter Christus* (another Christ).³⁴ This is the goal that St. Bonaventure believes that humanity is called to, and this is what he means by transformation in Christ. In making this examination, we are now enabled to begin to see why the stigmata of St. Francis became such a significant point in history for St. Bonaventure.

St. Francis' Stigmatization as a True Transformation in Christ

³⁴ This is how the Church Fathers interpreted St. Paul's words in Galatians as they were keen on the idea of divinization. Divinization, however, for the Church Fathers did not mean that we become a reduced and mechanical part of God like Hegel and the German Idealists suggested, but it meant that we "become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4) as St. Peter proclaimed.

Before St. Francis, creation's *egressus* and *regressus* were viewed as simply the expression of the Father's love in creation and the returning of the many of creation to God in love. Furthermore, creation returned by means of salvation and purification through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Church Fathers and Robert of Deutz, inspired by St. Augustine, constructed such a worthy Trinitarian view.³⁵ And yet, it was not until the stigmata of St. Francis, a true transformation in Christ, did theology find the beginnings of a new understanding of the end times. An understanding that did not abolish what the Church Fathers had constructed, but rather, threw into full relief what it meant to return to God through love. What St. Francis revealed was this: it is not just through love that we move toward our final end, but it is specifically through Christ Crucified that we attain our final end. Hence, St. Bonaventure says, "The road to this peace is through nothing else than a most ardent love of the Crucified, which so transformed Paul into Christ when he *was rapt to the third heaven* [2 Cor. 12:2] that he declared: *With Christ I am nailed to the Cross; it is now no longer I that live, but Christ in me* [Gal. 2:20]." ³⁶

Now, according to St. Bonaventure, St. Francis did not just reveal the importance of Christ Crucified in creation's *regressus*, but St. Francis himself through his stigmatization became an instrument in creation's *regressus*.³⁷ St. Bonaventure, in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, claims that St. Francis is the angel "with the seal of the living God" (Rev. 7:2) that seals the elect with the image of God. (One could put it like this: the one who has truly been transformed in Christ helps others undergo that transformation). This is a bold interpretation on St. Bonaventure's part, but how could he not make such an interpretation. Ratzinger sympathizes with this as he says, "Even more important, however, is another event –

³⁵ See Ratzinger's *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, pgs. 91-92.

³⁶ Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Mind to God*, 1-2.

³⁷ And as this essay has been trying to show, we are all called to be an instrument in God's great plan through a transformation in Christ.

Stigmatization [of St. Francis] – which stood as something unique and unparalleled; it all but cried out for an interpretation.”³⁸

But while this was indeed groundbreaking for the study of eschatology, it is not my intention to go any further into St. Bonaventure’s and Ratzinger’s speculative eschatology. I only wanted to highlight two things. Firstly, I wanted to highlight what was alluded to at the end of our analysis of exemplarism and what has really been the intention of this project as a whole; namely, the central role of the humble saint of Assisi in St. Bonaventure’s philosophy and theology. Secondly, I wanted to highlight the significance of focusing more on Christ Crucified in creation’s *regressus*. For it complements most well with what we examined at the end of our analysis of exemplarism. We found that the Incarnation gave deep expression to creation’s *egressus*, and now we see that the Crucifixion gives deep expression to creation’s *regressus*. In this, there is nothing but a Franciscan influence that St. Bonaventure received from the Seraphic father who would often ask his friars to contemplate the Incarnation and the Crucifixion and their intimate union. Here, we see that St. Bonaventure has taken that Franciscan charism and integrated it deeply into his thought.

The Soul and Affectivity

Now, before I conclude this section and essay, I want to briefly clarify what is meant by the *crown of affectivity*. For all that has been shown is that ardent charity in Christ Crucified is the key to the eschaton of the world. But it remains yet to speak on what moves the soul to this ardent charity.

St. Bonaventure, as we have seen, was not afraid to incorporate Aristotle into his philosophy and theology and defend knowledge through the senses. But we also saw that St. Bonaventure is more concerned with taking that knowledge and using it for the sake of loving

³⁸ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, 33-34.

Wisdom. Underneath this mission of St. Bonaventure is a certain divergence from the intellectuals of his time.

For many in the time of St. Bonaventure had held that it was the intellect's contemplation of God that was the deepest expression of love and the ultimate goal of man. And while St. Bonaventure would agree with them that the intellect should be given great reverence, he did not think that the intellect was the seat of beatitude. Instead, St. Bonaventure thought that the intellect's purpose was to lead the soul of man to a wisdom that silenced the intellect. What we mean by this silencing is captured most brilliantly by Gilson who says, "the expressions frequently used by St. Bonaventure: *caligo*, *excaectio*, *ignorantia* (darkness, blindness, ignorance); they must be taken literally, for they express above all the nothingness of this state in the matter of knowledge or vision...".³⁹

Now, this language might seem shocking or even scandalous at first, but St. Bonaventure is trying to show reason's utter failure at comprehending God. Sure, it can come to a demonstration of God's existence as St. Thomas brilliantly expressed, but the fact remains that it cannot bring one to a personal encounter with God.⁴⁰ Man is utterly helpless unless through ardent charity and transformation in Christ, he is brought up into the mystery. And it is precisely this what would become the Seraphic Doctor's ecstatic knowledge or *sapientia nulliformis*.⁴¹ But this seems self-contradictory for if this is indeed the case and the intellect is silenced, then what is left?

Once again Gilson clarifies this matter as he says, "The answer lies in this: that when all the powers of knowing are transcended, and the uttermost point of the soul has gone beyond the uttermost point of thought, one faculty of the soul still remains. It is *love* that goes the furthest in

³⁹ Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 386.

⁴⁰ One might also point out that Ratzinger suggests something similar in his *Introduction to Christianity*.

⁴¹ These terms are used by Gilson and Ratzinger. See Gilson's *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, Ch. XIV and Ratzinger's *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, Ch. 2, Part VII.

the soul's exploration of being; for whereas our faculty of knowing cannot pursue Being to the point of seeing it, our love can pursue it – as Good – to the point of contact and of joy in it. The experience of God as the mystic has it is exclusively affective...".⁴² Thus, we come to see that the heart and affectivity (working with the intellect and the will) become the ultimate motivation for the soul's ascent to God.⁴³

Here lies our answer to what motivates the soul to ardent charity in Christ Crucified. Moreover, here lies our complete answer to creation's *regressus*. For truly, it is only when man turns his heart to Christ that he completes a full transformation in Christ⁴⁴; only when he surrenders his heart to Christ can he become a mediator in Christ's salvific plan in returning creation to God. This indeed is how it was for St. Francis as St. Bonaventure notes when he says, "And although, by the great austerity of his past life and his continual bearing of the Cross of Christ, he [St. Francis] had become very feeble in body, yet was he not terrified, but prepared himself with good courage to endure the martyrdom set before him. For there grew in him an invincible fire of the love of his good Jesus, even a flame of burning charity, which many waters could not quench."⁴⁵

Truly, as it was for St. Francis, so shall it be for all men who respond to the sweet invitation of the Lord, who set aside the desires of the flesh and pursue deep union with God. Not all shall be marked with the wounds of Christ externally, but all should seek to have His

⁴² Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 386.

⁴³ I ought to mention that it is here that I think St. Bonaventure complements St. Thomas Aquinas' thought most well. For though they obviously have different methodologies, we have come to see that they are not emphasizing the same thing. St. Thomas emphasizes ontology and Being while St. Bonaventure emphasizes mysticism and Love. One sees in this that while they are emphasizing two different things, they reach the same conclusion. For God is both Being and Love itself. For an excellent analogy for the two complementing each other, see Gilson's comparison of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure to Beatrice and St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, pgs. i-iv.

⁴⁴ Here, I would also like to mention that St. Bonaventure can be seen as a great forerunner to the masterful philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand who perhaps articulated the greatest philosophy on the heart.

⁴⁵ Bonaventure, *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, 108.

most holy, venerable, and humble wounds impressed on their hearts. And it is to these most charitable and meek people that the Lord shall crown with His Love.

Conclusion

Here, we find a fitting place to end this essay. For though we did not touch upon everything in the Seraphic Doctor's philosophy and theology, we have followed three of his most important principles and have allowed them to lead us to the true purpose of his system of thought. Originally, we set out to find the true role of St. Francis in the thought of St. Bonaventure, but we were led to see that St. Bonaventure's thought culminates in his mysticism and the *crown of affectivity*. And yet, with this discovery, we do not see the Seraphic Father fall into the background. For it was through his stigmatization that St. Francis became truly transformed into the very image of his beloved, Christ who is Love. Moreover, Love (God) is the true exemplar in St. Bonaventure's system of thought. Thus, if St. Francis became transformed into Love's very image, then it does not seem wrong to say that St. Francis became, so to speak, a co-exemplar in St. Bonaventure's thought.⁴⁶ Therefore, we can conclude that the life of St. Francis became a guide for St. Bonaventure, and it truly is as Gilson puts it: "What St. Francis had simply felt and lived, St. Bonaventure was to *think*; thanks to the organizing power of his genius, the interior effusions of the Poverello were to be given shape as thought; the personal intuitions of St. Francis were totally detached from science, but they were to work like leaven in the mass of philosophical ideas piled up by Bonaventure in the University of Paris..."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ The reader should not read this as an over glorification of St. Francis of Assisi. That, indeed, is not my intention, nor is it what St. Bonaventure intended, nor is it what St. Francis would ever want. What we mean by St. Francis as a co-exemplar is this: God as the most generous, loving, and caring Father has invited us, His children, to participate in His most holy and loving plan of salvation. Truly, this sounds scandalous to the pious and humble of heart, but it in fact is only scandalous to our pride as no one can know the ways of God as they are so high above ours.

⁴⁷ Gilson, *The Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure*, 49.

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