

BONAVENTURE'S METAPHYSICS OF THE GOOD

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[Bonaventure offers new insight on the role of God the Father vis-à-vis the created world and the role of the Incarnate Word as metaphysical center of all reality. The kenosis of the Father through the self-diffusion of the good inverts the notion of patriarchy and underscores the humility of God in the world. By locating universals on the level of the singular and personal, Bonaventure transforms the Neoplatonic philosophical quest into a Christian metaphysics. The author then considers the ramifications of this for the contemporary world.]

THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES were a time of change and transition, marked by the religious discovery of the universe and a new awareness of the position of the human person in the universe. In the 12th century, a Dionysian awakening coupled with the rediscovery of Plato's *Timaeus* gave rise to a new view of the cosmos.¹ Louis Dupré has described the Platonic revival of that century as the turn to a "new self-consciousness."² In view of the new awakening of the 12th century, the question of metaphysical principles that supported created reality, traditionally the quest of the philosophers, began to be challenged by Christian writers. Of course it was not as if any one writer set out to overturn classical metaphysics; however, the significance of the Incarnation posed a major challenge. It may seem odd that a barely educated young man could upset an established philosophical tradition, but Francis of Assisi succeeded in doing so. As Dupré points out, Francis's devotion to Jesus of Nazareth, the individual, opened up a new perspective on the unique particularity of the person. If the Image of all images is an individual, then the primary significance of individual

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¹ M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century*, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968) 1-48.

² Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993) 34.

form no longer consists in disclosing a universal reality beyond itself. Indeed, the universal itself ultimately refers to the singular. With Francis of Assisi a religious revolution began, in which the ontological priority of the universal would eventually be overthrown.³

The person who grasped the metaphysical implications of Francis's christocentric spirituality was the theologian and Minister General, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (ca. 1217–1274). Trained at the University of Paris, Bonaventure knew the writings of Plato and Aristotle quite well. The main source of his Neoplatonism, however, was not the Neoplatonists *per se* but the writings of Augustine and the Pseudo-Dionysius from whom he derived the notion of God as the self-diffusive good.

Bonaventure's most outstanding achievement, which has been virtually overlooked, is his development of a *theological metaphysics*. As Zachary Hayes has shown, Bonaventure's theology of the Word enabled him to concentrate on the Word of God as the principle of universal intelligibility.⁴ Identifying metaphysics as the task of unifying all of finite reality to one first principle who is origin, exemplar, and final end, Bonaventure perceived the quest of the philosopher to be fulfilled when the exemplar of all else is identified with the one divine essence.⁵ For Bonaventure, the exemplar is Jesus Christ, and only in light of exemplarity is the deepest nature of created reality unlocked for the philosopher. Without Christian revelation the philosopher is unable to reduce reality to a first principle.

While exemplarity of the Word is the basis of a Christian metaphysics, according to Bonaventure, the Word does not exist in isolation but is intimately linked to the nature of the Father as the self-diffusive good. Indeed, a Christian metaphysics of the good finds its deepest meaning in the mystery of the Father. Bonaventure describes the self-diffusive good of the Father in such a way that it is possible to speak of a kenosis of the Father. The spirit of humble, self-giving love that characterizes the eternal relationship between the Father and Son gives rise to the idea that all of reality is essentially loved into being. In the metaphysics of the good, the logic of the created order is rooted in the self-diffusive goodness of God, which means that reality is grounded in the poverty and humility of God who is love.

Because the metaphysics of the good as described by Bonaventure represents the transformation of Neoplatonism into a Christian metaphysics, it offers a new framework for a theocentric universe. The purpose of this

³ Ibid. 38.

⁴ Zachary Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics in the Thought of Bonaventure," *Journal of Religion* 58 (Supplement, 1978) 82–95, at 82–83.

⁵ Ibid. 86.

paper is to examine the development of Bonaventure's metaphysics of the good and to consider some of its implications for the contemporary world.

FROM GOD AS BEING TO GOD AS GOOD

Before one begins to explore the metaphysics of the good it is important to examine the significance of metaphysics, which, for the Seraphic Doctor, lies at the heart of the whole philosophical endeavor. Metaphysics, as Bonaventure writes in the *Hexaëmeron*, begins with the consideration of the principles that govern particular, created substances, moving from that level to the consideration of the universal and uncreated and to the very notion of being.⁶ One must proceed from the sensible experience of the world, but the movement of reflective thought does not rest in the multiplicity of regional experience and particular sciences. Rather, it tends to reduce the plurality of experience to a unity. The multiplicity of the world is the expression of what is first of all a radical unity in principle; therefore, that which is one in origin, though diversified in its objectification, should find a unity again in the finite subject.⁷ While the task of philosophy is that of drawing human knowledge into a unity, the task of metaphysics is to reduce all of finite reality to one first principle that is origin, exemplar, and final end of all things. Thus metaphysics considers reality under the aspects of principle, means, and end.⁸ Since the origin and end of all things is also the task of other disciplines such as physics and ethics, Bonaventure sees the main concern of metaphysics to be exemplarity, for there is no other philosophical science that coincides with this.⁹

Bonaventure introduces his theological metaphysics in the context of the spiritual journey, the journey of the soul into God (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*). While it may seem surprising to the modern reader to incorporate metaphysics in the context of the spiritual journey, such an idea was not foreign to the medieval mind since the goal of the spiritual journey is the contemplation of first principles.¹⁰ In the *Itinerarium*, the journey of the soul to God is the journey to God who is pure, simple, absolute, actual, and most perfect being. This being, Bonaventure writes, "is first, eternal, utterly

⁶ Bonaventure *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* 1, 13 (5.331) (hereafter: *Hexaëmeron*). The critical edition of Bonaventure's works used in this study is the *Opera omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. (Quaracchi, 1882–1902). Latin texts are indicated by volume and page number in parentheses.

⁷ Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" 85.

⁸ *Hexaëmeron* 1, 13 (5.331).

⁹ *Ibid.*; see Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" 86–87.

¹⁰ This idea goes back to the early Fathers, for whom contemplation of first principles and the spiritual journey were intertwined. Bonaventure affirms this idea in the first chapter of his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* 1, 2 (5.297).

simple, most actual, most perfect and supremely one." God is called primary being, and "it is impossible that he be thought not to be or to be other than unique."¹¹ Bonaventure states that absolute being "is the universal efficient, exemplary, and final cause of all things . . . it is the cause of all essences, thus it is the origin and consummating end of all things."¹² While Bonaventure affirms that God is absolute being, it is precisely on this point that he crosses the threshold from philosophy to theology or rather bridges these two disciplines by identifying the New Testament revelation of God as good. In the *Itinerarium* he states that being is the name of God in the Old Testament whereas good is the name of God in the New Testament, revealed by Jesus when he states, "No one is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19; Matthew 19:17). The progression from the God of the Old Testament to the God of the New Testament revealed by Jesus Christ raises metaphysics to a new level for Bonaventure, since God is not simply absolute being but moreover absolute goodness. One can no longer talk about being as the ground of reality without talking about God, and one can no longer talk about God who is Trinity without talking about the good. In the *Itinerarium*, therefore, Bonaventure shifts from a metaphysics of being to a metaphysics of the good and thus establishes the basis of a theological metaphysics.

THE TRINITY AS FOUNTAIN FULLNESS

To understand Bonaventure's metaphysics of the good as a *theological* metaphysics, it is necessary to understand the emanations of the three divine persons of the Trinity. For Bonaventure, God is Trinity and nothing other. Perhaps what is startling about his theology of the Trinity is that it does not follow the Western Augustinian model adopted by so many other medieval writers, even though Bonaventure was deeply influenced by many of Augustine's ideas, for example, on epistemology, exemplarity, and the human image. However, with regard to the Trinity, Bonaventure opted for the Greek Cappadocian model. While no one has ever explained why Bonaventure favored the Greek model, I would suggest that he saw this model operative in salvation history and the one most compatible with the life and experience of Francis of Assisi.

Bonaventure's doctrine of the Trinity follows the Greek model based on the self-diffusive good whereby the persons of the Trinity are distinguished from each other by their relation of origin. He develops his doctrine of the

¹¹ *Ibid.* 5, 6 (5.309). Engl. trans. Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Major Life of St. Francis* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 98 (hereafter: *Journey*).

¹² *Itinerarium* 5, 8 (5.310); *Journey* 99–100.

Trinity by relying on the work of the Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of St. Victor. From the Pseudo-Dionysius he indicates that the good is self-diffusive (*bonum diffusivum sui*), and from Richard he identifies the highest good as love which by its very nature seeks to share itself with an other. In the Dionysian view, goodness is the preeminent attribute of God; it is the very definition of the superessential Godhead and the deepest basis for God's creative activity. In the *Divine Names*, the Pseudo-Dionysius writes that goodness gives rise to being: "The first gift of the absolutely transcendent goodness is the gift of being, and that goodness is praised from those that first and principally have a share of being. From it and in it are being itself, the source of beings, all beings and whatever else has a portion of existence."¹³ The good by nature is self-diffusive, that is, it gives of itself freely to another. Since God is good and since the good is by nature self-diffusive, it follows that God is necessarily self-communicative.¹⁴

Bonaventure complements the Dionysian model of the good with the Victorine emphasis on love. For Richard, love is the supreme form of the good. The perfection of love as Richard describes it requires a lover, a beloved and the fruit of the love shared between them expressed in a third person.¹⁵ Charity, therefore, becomes the basis for showing the necessity of a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Since charity necessarily involves a relation to one another, there can be no charity where there is no plurality, which Richard locates at the level of person.¹⁶ In his commentary on the *Sentences* Bonaventure writes that God is love, and love does not simply belong to the Spirit but to all three persons of the Trinity¹⁷; thus, God's essence (*ousia*) is love (love being the highest good).¹⁸ The essence of God is the sharing of the good (love) which gives rise to a distinction of persons,

¹³ *Pseudo-Dionysius: Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist, 1987) 99.

¹⁴ Zachary Hayes, Introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, vol. 3 of *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, ed. George Marcil (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1979) 33.

¹⁵ *De Trinitate* 3.14 (PL 196, 924–25, 927). Richard argues that there must be in God not only a *dilectum* but a *condilectum* as well; *condilectio* is found where a third is loved by two in harmony (see Hayes, Introduction to *Disputed Questions* 16–17).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 16.

¹⁷ *I Sent.* d. 10 (1.192a). Bonaventure states: "Ioannes autem in Epistola canonica ait: *Deus caritas est. Non dixit: Spiritus sanctus caritas est; quod si dixisset, absolutior esset sermo, et non parva pars quaestionis ideo quaerendum, utrum Deus Pater sit caritas, an Filius, an Spiritus sanctus, an Deus ipsa Trinitas, quia et ipsa non tres dii, sed unus est Deus.*"

¹⁸ *III Sent.* d. 32, dub (1.708b). Bonaventure states: "Dilectio Dei non est nisi divina substantia vel usia." See also Hyacinth J. Ennis, "The Place of Love in the Theological System of St. Bonaventure in General," in *S. Bonaventura*, 5 vols., ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Grottaferatta: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1974) 4.129–35.

all of whom are in such intimate relationship that they form a true communion of the good which is expressed in the statement "God is love." The fact that love requires a plurality of persons all of whom are essential to the fullness of love means that a self-sufficient monarchy is impossible. Rather, love goes out of itself to unite with another for the sake of the fullness of life. The essential role of love in the form of the self-diffusive good distinguishes Bonaventure's metaphysics, since the basic principle of all reality is not the unified transcendent unknowable One,¹⁹ but the personal gift of God who is love.

THE PRIMACY OF THE FATHER

If God is essentially love, the ultimate basis of God as love is the primacy of the Father. According to Zachary Hayes, primacy lies at the heart of Bonaventure's doctrine of God.²⁰ In his *Breviloquium* he identifies the Neoplatonic One with the Father or first person of the Trinity: "The Father is properly the One without an originator, the unbegotten One; the Principle who proceeds from no other; the Father as such."²¹ The Father, therefore, is the ultimate, transcendent source of all being. Bonaventure's doctrine lies in his conception of the Father as dynamic, fecund source of the trinitarian processions. The Father as unbegotten (*innascibile*) is the source of the good insofar as his unbegottenness is the abyss of the good. As the fountain fullness of the good, the Father is self-diffusive good or love. The Father is necessarily fecund and self-communicating; the very nature of the good is to share itself with an other. Thus, there is in God one in whom resides the fullness of divine fecundity with respect to the persons. The Father is that person who is *non ab alio*, and therefore is first with respect to the other persons. Bonaventure emphasizes the Father as the fountain fullness (*fontalis plenitudo*) of the self-diffusive good because the Father is unoriginate and unbegotten.²² In his Commentary on the *Sentences* he states, "The more primary a thing is, the more fecund it is and the principle of others."²³ Based on this Neoplatonist principle, Bonaventure

¹⁹ The transcendent unknowable One is the god of the Greek philosophers such as that described by Plato and Plotinus. See A.-J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris, 1967) 191; *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O'Brien (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1964) 72-99.

²⁰ Hayes, Introduction to *Disputed Questions* 35.

²¹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 1, 3 (5.212). Engl. trans. José de Vinck, *The Breviloquium*, vol. 2 of *The Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1963) 39.

²² *I Sent.* d. 27, p. 1, a. u., q. 2, concl. (1.470b); Alejandro De Villalmonete, "El Padre Plenitud Fontal de la Deidad," in *S. Bonaventura* 4.221-42.

²³ *I Sent.* d. 27, p. 1, a. u., q. 2 (1.471a). Bonaventure writes: "Movet etiam verbum

unites as opposites two personal properties of the Father, innascibility and paternity. He describes these as opposites which not only coexist but which mutually require each other. As unbegotten, the Father is without origin or source. Innascibility, Bonaventure indicates, is a privation of birth or origin, not position.²⁴ Since the Father alone is *innascible*, the Father is the source of the other two divine emanations. As *innascible* or unbegotten, the Father begets the Son so that in the Trinity there are polar opposites: unbegotten and begotten. The unbegottenness of the Father is the paternity or generative power of the Father.²⁵

Bonaventure clearly indicates that the persons of the Trinity are distinguished not by essence but by person according to origin. Origin is preeminent to being as is the basis of emanation in the Godhead and the basis of relations of the three divine persons.²⁶ The Father who is unbegotten begets the Son who is generated *per modum naturae* or by the very nature of the self-diffusive goodness of the Father. The Spirit is generated *per modum voluntatis* or by the will of the Father and is the gift or bond of personal love between the Father and Son.²⁷ Thus, Bonaventure's notion of the divine life is one that is highly dynamic, ecstatic, and fecund. The distinction of the divine persons according to origin means that the Father is distinguished by paternity, the Son by generation and the Spirit by spiration of the love between the Father and Son. Bonaventure's emphasis on origin preempts any idea of subordination.

Although innascibility is the preeminent characteristic of the Father, it does not define the person of the Father. Rather, innascibility is the negative complement to generation, that is, precisely because the Father is

Philosophi, qui dicit, quod principia quanto sunt priora, tanto potentiora—et quod causa prima plus influit—et quae simpliciter prima, summe habet influere per omnem modum.” Ewert Cousins notes that when Bonaventure applies this principle, he cites Aristotle as his source (*Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1978] 103). The Quaracchi editors point out that Bonaventure is drawing from propositions 1, 16, 17, and 20 of the *Liber de causis*. Like his contemporaries, Bonaventure thought the *Liber de causis* was by Aristotle. Shortly after 1268, however, Thomas Aquinas read William of Moerbeke's Latin translation of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* and concluded that the author of the *Liber de causis* was an Arab philosopher familiar with Proclus's treatise, an opinion still held today.

²⁴ *I Sent* d 27, p 1, a u, q 2 (1469a) “Non quia Deus, quia tunc etiam inesset Filio, non quia innascibilis, quia innascibilitas dicit nativitatis privationem, non positionem ergo a divisione, quia Deus pater.”

²⁵ *I Sent* p 1, a u, q 2 (1469), see Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* 102–03.

²⁶ *I Sent* p 1, a u, q 2 (1470a) “Tamen secundum rationem intelligendi origo sive emanatio originis est ratio relationis, sicut in his inferioribus est ratio secundum esse.”

²⁷ Hayes, Introduction to *Disputed Questions* 44–45, 55.

unbegotten he is the fountain fullness and therefore the principal source of origin of the other two divine emanations, namely, the Son and the Spirit. The Father is constituted as Father in the full sense of the act of generation.²⁸ The constitution of the Father, therefore, is understood both with regard to innascibility and fecundity. Because the Father is *innascible*, he is absolutely first; and because he is absolutely first, he is the fecund source of others. Because he is *innascible* he is known as Father, but he is Father in the fullest sense in the act of generation. Paternity, then, is the notion that best designates the first person in his personal property, since it designates him in a positive sense and in terms of his relation to the Son, which is proper to the Father alone.²⁹ It is in paternity that the Father finds the fullness of his divine reality of personhood.³⁰

PATRIARCHY AND THE KENOSIS OF THE FATHER

The notion of paternity, which clearly prevails in Bonaventure's doctrine, raises the question of patriarchy, primarily since Bonaventure emphasizes the Father as origin of the divine persons.³¹ While Bonaventure never discusses the word "patriarchy" per se, neither does he maintain that the primacy of the Father corresponds to the absolute hierarchical rule of the Father as first principle. The significant emphasis that Bonaventure ascribes to paternity may lead to a misunderstanding of paternity as a male

²⁸ *I Sent.* d. 27, p. 1, a. u., q. 2 (1.469): "Ideo Pater, quia generat."

²⁹ Hayes, Introduction to *Disputed Questions* 42–43.

³⁰ *I Sent.* d. 27, p. 1, a. u., q. 2 (1.471–72).

³¹ Patriarchy is defined as "a hypothetical social system based on the absolute authority of the father or an elderly male over the family group" (Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* [San Francisco: Sierra Book Club, 1988] 142). It means literally "the rule of the father." In the "patria potestas" of Roman law, the father had absolute rights over his entire family, including the right to impose capital punishment. The father owned everything and decided everything (see Sandra Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* [New York: Paulist, 1991] 22; also Maria Calisi, "Bonaventure's Trinitarian Theology As a Feminist Resource," a paper presented at the conference "Franciscan Studies: The Differences Women Are Making," Washington Theological Union, May 31, 1998, p. 8). Catherine LaCugna stated that a particular point of contention in feminist literature is the extent to which patriarchy, as the cult of fatherhood, has been bolstered by the central image of divine fatherhood within Christianity. God is the supreme Father-individual who exists in a relationship of domination (literally, Lordship) over the world. Hierarchy is reflected throughout the order of creation, a hierarchy said to be created and intended by God: male over female, human over animal, over plant, over inanimate things. The cult of God the Father perpetuates a convenient arrangement by which men rule over women, just as God rules over the world (*God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* [San Francisco: Harper, 1991] 268).

father generating a male son and thus to a type of subordinationism. However, in no way does he imply a type of “biological” paternity or reproduction. Rather, he is saying that there is one person in the Godhead who, without origin, is the fecund source of the self-diffusive good. And it is the total diffusion (sharing) of this good which identifies this person (named “Father”) in relation to an other (named “Son”) that constitutes the other as person by the very sharing of the good. The person of the Son, therefore, is constituted by the inexhaustible dynamic love that is the Father. As Maria Calisi states, “Fatherhood must be always understood in non-literal, non-patriarchal, non-idolatrourous ways; the only authentic interpretation of the term “Father” is an indication of intimacy, mutuality, and relationality based on origin.”³² The terms “Father” and “Son,” therefore, are not names of male persons but terms of relationship that identify the intimate union of love in the Godhead. Feminist theologians note that God the Mother expresses equally well the life of God within Godself and with us. As Catherine LaCugna wrote,

It should be evident by now that “Father” is not a literal term of biology. “Father” as much as “Mother” indicates origin. In many respects Mother expresses much better than Father the utterly deep and . . . substantial . . . bond between God and creature, between source and offspring. Because the child literally comes forth from the Mother, the relationship between child and Mother is primary and more inherent or intrinsic than with the Father whose biological connection with the offspring simply cannot be the same.³³

While feminine metaphors are equally valid to describe the life of the Trinity, Bonaventure holds fast to the names revealed in Scripture as the proper names of the divine persons. At the same time, however, by distinguishing the divine persons according to origin based on the self-diffusion of the good, he clearly renounces any notion of patriarchy based on self-sufficient being and autonomous rule.³⁴ The idea that the rule of the Father is to give totally to the other by the nature of the Father as self-diffusive good turns the traditional notion of patriarchy upside down. Rather than a self-sufficient being exerting power over another, the self-diffusive goodness that identifies the Father means that the Father is totally self-giving and, in a sense, hidden in the object of his love. The self-donation of the Father can be described as kenotic since that which constitutes the Father, the fecundity of the good, is given to an other by the very nature of the

³² Calisi, “Bonaventure’s Trinitarian Theology” 18.

³³ LaCugna, *God For Us* 303.

³⁴ According to LaCugna, a metaphysics based on being gives rise to a substance ontology which, she claims, is never able to overcome the bedrock values of patriarchy, autonomy, nondeterminism by another, or self-possession as prior to self-donation (ibid. 91).

good. The self-emptying of the Father corresponds to the mystery of the Father as a coincidence of opposites of unbegottenness and generativity. That the Father is an infinite abyss of the good means that the Father can be both totally self-emptying and fountain fullness of the good; thus, the coincidence of emptiness and fullness resides in the mystery of the person of the Father. The self-donation of the Father can also be described in terms of divine poverty and humility, in that the Father is turned completely toward the other by the nature of self-diffusive good. In this way, the "power" of God the Father is not power over an other but it is the power of the poverty and humility of God whose power is the total sharing of love with an other. We might call this inverted patriarchy, in which power is diffusive love, as the metaphysical basis of a nonviolent God.

Bonaventure enables us to understand the metaphors of Father and Son as a relationship based on origin, mutual sharing, absolute loving, and dynamic self-emptying. His theology of God the Father does not in any way resemble the *paterfamilias* or any male ruling figure. Rather, the term "Father" is the name of a relation because the Father is simultaneously unoriginate and generative. He describes the Father as self-diffusive goodness and fecund love, not absolute rule or self-sufficient being. Bonaventure begins his trinitarian discourse with the person of the Father, because he understands the Father's primacy as nothing other than the Father's kenotic, unifying, and inexhaustible fecundity.³⁵ The image of the ruling male monarch, therefore, is not consonant with Bonaventure's understanding of God's Fatherhood, primarily because he never gives even the slightest indication that he thinks it is a literal name. The name Father is not a proper name but the relational term which connotes his principle of dynamic and personal origin within the Trinity.

THE FATHER HIDDEN IN THE SON

If we follow Bonaventure's theology of the Trinity based on personhood and relation, we see that the person of the Father who is the ultimate One does not correspond to the transcendent unknowable One of the Philosophers. To understand the mystery of the Father for Bonaventure is to return to the notion of the Father as unoriginate and fecund, the Father as the fountain fullness of the self-diffusive good. The very nature of the Father, that which defines the person of the Father, is the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the coincidence of opposites of unbegottenness and generativity. The mystery of the Father is the mystery of opposites, an apophatic abyss of the good and a kataphatic generation of the good which is the Son.

³⁵ Calisi, "Bonaventure's Trinitarian Theology" 16.

What we can say about the Father, therefore, can be said only from the kataphatic side, that is, from the Son.

For Bonaventure, the relationship between the Father and Son is the archetype for all other relationships because it is a relationship of intimate union and distinct personhood. In the *Hexaëmeron* he writes, "From all eternity the Father begets a Son similar to himself and expresses himself and a likeness similar to himself, and in so doing he expresses the sum total of his potency."³⁶ Further on he states that "[t]he Word expresses the Father and the things he made, and principally leads us to union with the Father who brings all things together; and in this regard he is the Tree of Life for by this means we return to the very fountain of life and are revived by it."³⁷ Thus the rule of the Father is not only self-giving, but the very gift of the Father is given in the Son who, as Son, is both receptive to the Father's goodness and, like the Father, generates or diffuses the good as self-gift to the Father, the union of which is expressed in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Son, therefore, is both receiver and giver of the good. In this respect the Son shares in the Father's rule of self-giving so that the Son, like the Father, is not a self-sufficient monarch but what we might call a "servant," giving all to the other. Because the Spirit is the gift of self-donation between the Father and Son, the Spirit, too, shares in the rule of self-giving and, indeed, is the gift par excellence. Thus we see that patriarchy, or the rule of the Father, is self-gift, which is the basis of the shared rule of the three divine persons based on the nature of the good as relational.³⁸

If the Father gives everything to the Son, it can be said that the Father can be known only from the one to whom the Father gives everything, namely, the Son. The mystery of the hiddenness of the Father in the Son is at the heart of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. Bonaventure is struck by the fact that the principle of the good, the basis of God's self-communication, holds nothing back for itself but gives itself entirely to the other: "Because the whole is communicated and not merely part, whatever is possessed is given, and given completely."³⁹ He sees the divine mystery of the self-diffusive good, the total self-giving of the Father, in the mystery of the Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, to behold the mystery of Christ is to behold

³⁶ *Hexaëmeron* 1, 13 (5.331); Engl. trans. José de Vinck, "Collations on the Six Days," in *The Works of Saint Bonaventure* (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1970) 5.8.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 1, 17 (5.332); "Six Days" 5.9.

³⁸ This is the same conclusion LaCugna arrived at based on the Cappadocian model of the Trinity (*God For Us* 391); see also her "God in Communion with Us," in *Freeing Theology*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993) 87–88.

³⁹ *Itinerarium* 6, 3 (5.311); *Journey* 105.

the mystery of the Father. Bonaventure symbolizes the fullness of the gift of the Father in the Son by the Mercy Seat. "Look at the Mercy Seat and wonder that in him [Christ] there is joined the first principle with the last, . . . [the] most actual with the one who suffered and died, the most perfect with the lowly."⁴⁰ Through this coincidence of opposites which characterizes the person of Jesus Christ, Bonaventure sees that the Father is perfectly expressed in the Son whose passion and death on the cross images the Father as total self-giving love. Jesus Christ is the door by which one enters into the heart of the Trinity.⁴¹

THE TRINITY AND CHRIST

The notion of patriarchy as relational and self-giving enables Bonaventure to probe deeply into the relationship between the Trinity and Christ. In the *Itinerarium* he contemplates the meaning of the good as the basis of the triune God. The highest self-diffusive good, he states, must be "actual and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, free and necessary, lacking nothing and perfect."⁴² This is, indeed, the Trinity of love in which, from an eternal principle eternally coproducing, there is "a beloved and a cobeloved, the one generated and the other spirated, and this is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁴³ Bonaventure describes the mystery of triune love as

the pure act of a principle loving in charity with a love that is both free and due and a mixture of both, which is the fullest diffusion by way of nature and will, which is a diffusion by way of the Word, in which all things are said, and by way of the Gift, in which other gifts are given . . . [Y]ou can see that through the highest communicability of the good, there must be a Trinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. From supreme goodness, it is necessary that there be in the persons supreme communicability, supreme consubstantiality, supreme configurability, supreme coequality, supreme coeternity, and supreme mutual intimacy by which one is necessarily in the other by supreme interpenetration and one acts with the other in absolute lack of division of the substance, power and operation of the most blessed Trinity itself.⁴⁴

Thus, the persons of the Trinity act in a way that they are eternally and intimately united. In this respect, Bonaventure is amazed to discover that the properties of the Trinity are found in Jesus Christ: "For we should wonder not only at the essential and personal properties of God in themselves but also in comparison with the superwonderful union of God and man in the unity of the person of Christ."⁴⁵ In the mystery of his person,

⁴⁰ Ibid. 6, 5 (5.311); *Journey* 107.

⁴² Ibid. 6, 2 (5.310); *Journey* 103.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; *Journey* 104.

⁴¹ Ibid. Prol., 3 (5.295).

⁴³ Ibid. 6, 2 (5.311); *Journey* 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; *Journey* 106.

Christ embodies all the mysterious opposites of the Trinity. Bonaventure states that "in him there is joined the first principle with the last, God with man, the eternal is joined with temporal man, the most simple with the most composite, the most actual with the one who suffered supremely and died, the most perfect and immense with the lowly, the supreme and all-inclusive one with a composite individual distinct from others, that is, the man Jesus Christ."⁴⁶ Further on, he states that "in Christ personal union exists with a trinity of substances and a duality of natures; complete agreement exists with a plurality of wills; mutual predication of God and man exists with a plurality of properties; coadoration exists with a plurality of excellence, coexaltation above all things exists with a plurality of dignity; codomination exists with a plurality of powers."⁴⁷ He concludes: "When our mind contemplates in Christ the Son of God who is the image of the invisible God by nature, our humanity . . . reaches something perfect."⁴⁸

By illuminating the Trinity as a dynamic communion of the good, Bonaventure indicates that the sharing of the good gives rise to a coincidence of opposites which are expressed in the mystery of the person of Christ. What he brings to light is the fact that the whole Trinity is contained in the person of Jesus Christ. Through the model of the self-diffusive good, he locates the Trinity on the level of the personal, that is, on intimate relationship with the person of Jesus Christ in whom the Trinity is expressed. This means that to live in the Trinity is to live in personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Trinity is not a substance with personhood added on, nor is Christ some type of intermediate who leads one to the Father. Rather, the Trinity is personal love expressed most fully in Jesus on the cross. That is why Bonaventure perceived that Francis entered into the heart of the Trinity because Francis grew in union with Christ through the Spirit of compassionate love. In union with Christ, Francis entered into the mystery of the Father hidden in Christ, that is, into the ecstatic fullness of divine love. The goal of the spiritual journey is to enter into the incomprehensible fullness of divine love, the Father, by entering into the mystery of the Son which is made possible by the love of the Spirit. As Bonaventure writes, "Let us, then, die and enter into the darkness; let us impose silence upon our cares, our desires, and our imaginings. With Christ Crucified let us pass out of this world to the Father so that when the Father is shown to us, we may say with Philip: It is enough for us."⁴⁹

The mystery of the Trinity for Bonaventure is the mystery of personal love. God is love, a love that is personal and can only be expressed in relationship with another person. In the created world, the Trinity of love is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ and in the fullest way, in Jesus

⁴⁶ Ibid. 6, 5 (5.311); *Journey* 107.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 6, 7 (5.312); *Journey* 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 6, 6 (5.311); *Journey* 108.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 7, 6 (5.313); *Journey* 116.

Crucified. On the cross, Bonaventure states, the whole Trinity cries out (in love) to be loved.⁵⁰ Thus, the entire Trinity is to be found on the level of personal relationship with Christ. This is the meaning of the final chapter of the *Itinerarium* in which Bonaventure realizes that Francis's deeply personal and compassionate love of Christ is the Spirit of burning love that leads Francis not only into union with Christ but into the self-diffusive love that is the Father hidden in Christ. Francis's life in the Trinity is a life in personal relationship to Jesus Christ. The Father *is* the fullness of compassionate love (divine self-diffusive love) expressed in Christ and none other. It is the Spirit who leads one into this intimate union. While Bonaventure concedes that God is totally expressed in the person of Jesus Christ, he also affirms that "the diffusion in time is no more than a center or point in relation to the immensity of the divine goodness."⁵¹ He perceives, therefore, that while creation is contingent on the goodness of God, it is only a part of the immensity of God's goodness. Thus, although the triune God is nothing other than what is expressed in Jesus Christ, the immensity of divine love that is poured out eternally surpasses the boundaries of human knowledge and love.

CHRIST, THE METAPHYSICAL CENTER

The mystery of the person of Jesus Christ and the integral relationship between Christ and the Trinity that Bonaventure describes provides the basis of a Christian metaphysics based on the self-diffusive good. Bonaventure's metaphysics is *theological* because he sees the mystery of the Father intertwined with the mystery of the Son, the union of which is expressed in the person of the Spirit. The relationship between the Father and Son is so intimate and dynamic that one can say that the Son is everything the Father is in one who is other than the Father. In the generation of the Son is the existence of a total personal similitude expressed in the terms Word and Image.⁵² The Son is called Word and Image because the Son reflects all

⁵⁰ Bonaventure, *Soliloquium* 1, 38 (8.41a). Although Bonaventure does not say explicitly that on the cross the Trinity cries out "in love," the fact that the whole Trinity is contained in Christ Crucified who is the expression of divine love merits the inclusion of the term "in love."

⁵¹ *Itinerarium* 6, 2 (5.310); *Journey* 103.

⁵² The Son as image, according to Bonaventure, means that the Son is an imitation or expressed likeness of the Father, as he explains in his *Breviloquium* 1, 3 (5.212). His likeness approaches the very property of the Father himself, albeit without innascibility, since this property identifies the person of the Father alone. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Bonaventure explains that the term *Word* expresses not only a relation to the Father but to the entire mystery of creation, revelation and Incarnation (*Comm. in Joan.* c. 1, p. 1, q. 1 [6.247]). Zachary Hayes states: "As the Word is the self-expression of the Father within the

that the Father infinitely is and returns the Father's love as only an infinite person can.⁵³ As Word, the Son is the *Ars Patris*, the art of the Father. The infinite and eternal mind of God, the divine ideas, are generated by the Father to the Son by the diffusion of the good. Because the Son is the exemplar, the basis of all the divine ideas, the Son is the Truth.⁵⁴ All things are truly known in relation to the Son who as Word is both the ground of being and the ground of knowing.

In formulating a Christian metaphysics based on the self-diffusive good, Bonaventure works through the mystery of the Trinity in Christ and concludes that Christ is the metaphysical center, the ground of all created reality, because Christ is the total expression of the Father, the fullness of divine love, and the eternal art. Indeed, not only is Christ the expression of the Father, but all universals can be identified in Christ who is the exemplar of all things. Bonaventure describes this metaphysical center in the first *collatio* of his *Hexaemeron*.

Although the metaphysician is able to rise from the consideration of created and particular substance to that of the universal and uncreated and to the notion of being, so that he reaches the ideas of beginning, center, and final end, yet he does not attain the notions of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For the metaphysician rises to the notion of this being by seeing it in the light of the original principle of all things, and in this he meets physical science that studies the origin of things. He also rises to the notion of this being in the light of the final end, and in this he meets moral philosophy, or ethics, which leads all things back to the one Supreme Good as to the final end by considering either practical or speculative happiness. But when he considers this being in the light of that principle which is the exemplary of all things, he meets no other science, but is a true metaphysician. For from eternity the Father begets a Son similar to Himself and expresses Himself and a likeness similar to Himself, and in so doing He expresses the sum total of His potency, He expresses what He can do, and most of all, what He wills to do, and He expresses everything in Him, that is, in the Son or in that very Center, which so to speak is His Art. Hence this Center is Truth. The Word expresses the Father and the things He made, and principally leads us to union with the Father who brings all things together. Such is the metaphysical Center that leads us back and this is the sum total of our metaphysics concerned with emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, that is, illumination through spiritual radiations and return to the Supreme Being. And in this you will be a true metaphysician.⁵⁵

Bonaventure's emphasis on Jesus Christ as center is a radical step in a new direction. Since Christ is the One in whom ultimate truth and goodness

Godhead, the world is the external objectification of that self-utterance in that which is not God. And the humanity of Jesus is the fullest objectification of that self-utterance within the created world" (Introduction to *Disputed Questions* 51).

⁵³ Calisi, "Bonaventure's Trinitarian Theology" 14.

⁵⁴ *Hexaemeron* 1, 13 (5 331).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 1, 13, 17 (5 331-32), "Six Days" 7-8, 9-10.

is found, it is Christ and not the Father who is the metaphysical ground of reality. True knowledge is no longer associated with objective universals; rather, it is now identified on the level of the singular, the person of Jesus Christ. Since, the basis of all knowledge is eternally generated by a personal relationship of love between the Father and Son, true knowledge is contingent on love, that is, there is no knowledge without relationship or participation in the other through sharing of the good. In Bonaventure's view, knowledge for the sake of deepening love is the basis of wisdom.⁵⁶ To arrive at wisdom, he states, one must proceed from the "serenity of reason to the sweetness of contemplation" in union with Christ.⁵⁷ The emphasis on Christ the Word as the metaphysical center belies the philosophical quest for objective knowledge apart from the personal principle that sustains reality, namely, Jesus Christ. Rather, true knowledge is contingent on personal relationship and requires a union between the knower and the known in such a way that the relationship is grounded in a union of love. Knowledge as truth, therefore, finds its deepest meaning in contemplation, of which the highest stage is wisdom or knowledge deepened by the experience of love.

By locating the universals of truth and goodness on the level of the singular and personal, Bonaventure transforms the Neoplatonic philosophical quest into a Christian metaphysics. It is Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, who is the center of reality because, as Word and Image, Christ is the true exemplar. As Zachary Hayes indicates, Bonaventure unites the search for intelligibility of the created order with the christological mystery.⁵⁸ The problem of exemplarity which is focused in metaphysics at the philosophical level is now related to the exemplarity of the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ.⁵⁹ Moreover, it is not simply Christ but the Crucified Christ who is the metaphysical center, since it is by way of the cross that Christ reaches down to the depths of hell and, through the overflowing love of the cross, reconciles all to God.⁶⁰

The foundation of Christ Crucified as metaphysical center gives new meaning to the role of the Father vis-à-vis the created world. Since the Word is the *Ars Patris*, the art of the Father or the divine ideas, eternally generated by the self-diffusive good of the Father, it can properly be said that all of reality is gift, grounded in the eternal gift of the Father to the Son. Since the ground of reality is the poverty and humility of an eternally

⁵⁶ Zachary Hayes, "Franciscan Tradition as Wisdom Tradition," *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism* 7 (1997) 36.

⁵⁷ Bonaventure, "Christ, the One Teacher of All," in *What Manner of Man? Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1989) 34–35.

⁵⁸ Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" 95.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 88.

⁶⁰ *Hexaëmeron* 1, 24 (5.333).

loving God, it is appropriate to say that creation is essentially “loved into being” by the nature of God’s self-diffusive good. In this way, the logic of creation is the logic of love. Since whatever the Father gives is given totally, the Father is not the wholly other transcendent One distant to creation, but rather the Father is kenotic and hidden in the overflowing goodness of the Son who, as Word, is the ground of all reality. Thus, the Father does not rule “over” the world as some type of remote monarch but is intimately united to the world, since the Father is intimately united to the object of his love, the Son, and through the Son, to creation. The hiddenness of the Father in the Son is the hiddenness of God in the world. While this may seem to collapse the transcendence of the Father, it is precisely because the Father is a coincidence of opposites of unbegottenness and generativity that the Father is the incomprehensible fountain fullness of the self-diffusive good and wholly immanent. The divine poverty of the Godhead, signified by the Father’s total self-giving, is the ground of the fecundity of the world, that is, the fullness of divine love in the world, a love that bursts forth in the Incarnation.⁶¹ In this respect, the Father who is the principle of the good is hidden in the world, in the center, Jesus Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega, the one through whom all things are made and through whom all things are brought to their completion.

CONCLUSION

Bonaventure’s metaphysics of the good is a response to the new self-consciousness of the High Middle Ages that addresses the significance of the Incarnation from both a theological and philosophical perspective. His metaphysics of the good as a christocentric metaphysics raises some new ideas about the ground of reality that deviate from traditional Neoplatonic metaphysics. The first is that universals are no longer objective but rather are located on the level of the singular, the person of Jesus Christ, thus the ground of created reality is personal. Jesus Christ, the eternal art and divine exemplar, is the foundation of all reality and thus the goal toward which all reality tends. Bonaventure does not view Christ apart from the Trinity, so that the ultimate end of all things is not merely Christ but Christ the Word who is the heart of the triune God.

The metaphysics of the good, grounded in the person of Jesus Christ, means that compassionate love, equality of relationships, personhood, and communion form the matrix of life. That Bonaventure holds up Christ as the center of the world means that the self-diffusive love of the triune God

⁶¹ On Bonaventure’s contribution to the question of divine fecundity in creation, see Ewert Cousins, “Response to Zachary Hayes,” *Journal of Religion* 58 (Supplement, 1978) 99–100.

is at the center of the world. What rules, therefore, in the world is not power, autonomy, or domination but love, which means that all of creation is sustained by creativity and freedom.⁶² The rule of the Father is not an autonomous rule of power over the created world; rather the Father is kenotic, self-giving love and, as gift, is hidden in the mystery of the Son. Bonaventure sees the mystery of the humble triune God in the Crucified Christ whose outstretched arms on the cross manifest the diffusive love of God in history. The mystery of the incarnate Son as the metaphysical center of the universe underscores the fact that in the Incarnation the highest is joined to the lowest so that all of creation, from the least to the greatest, is joined to God through participation in the good.

Bonaventure's christocentric metaphysics is a truly *theological* metaphysics because in Christ, the center, the Trinity is the heart of the universe. A metaphysics of this import has profound implications for our contemporary age which, like the medieval period, is undergoing a shift in consciousness. Unlike the Middle Ages, however, the contemporary shift in consciousness is toward a global awareness of other cultures and religions, of a dynamic and evolutionary universe, and of the integral relation between humanity and the cosmos.⁶³ While the metaphysics of the good can contribute to a new understanding on these various levels, it can, in particular, provide a meaningful basis to the current dialogue between religion and science, especially with regard to questions in cosmology and evolution. Because it offers a metaphysical ground that takes seriously the created world, signified by the Incarnation, it offers new insight on divine action in the world and the role of God as Creator in an evolutionary universe, areas that merit further attention in light of the metaphysics of the good. This type of metaphysics can also help illuminate the process of evolution as one that is not antithetical to intelligent design but rather a

⁶² According to Jürgen Moltmann, creativity and freedom are proper to the nature of God as love: "When we say that God created the world 'out of freedom,' we must immediately add 'out of love.' God's freedom is not the almighty power for which everything is possible. It is love, which means the self-communication of the good. If God creates the world out of freedom, then he creates it out of love. Creation is not a demonstration of his boundless power; it is the communication of his love, which knows neither premises nor preconditions. . . . God therefore does what for him is axiomatic—what is divine. In doing this he is entirely free, and in this freedom he is entirely himself" (Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985] 75–76). See also Ilia Delio, "The Humility of God in a Scientific World" *New Theology Review* 11 (1998) 36–50.

⁶³ These changes can be described under what Ewert H. Cousins terms the "second axial period," which is a new age of consciousness marked by global awareness of various religions, culture, and a dynamic universe; see his *Christ of the 21st Century* (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1992) 4–7.

process that is shaped and guided by the humility of God's love in the world. Because the notion of the Crucified Christ as metaphysical center suggests that a relationship of suffering and love undergirds the intricate order of reality, this type of relationship has profound implications for understanding evolution as a process in which suffering is part of the evolutionary trend toward more complex unions. The notion that God is self-diffusive love hidden in the Crucified Christ also supports the process of evolution as unidirectional and oriented toward a telos which, for Bonaventure, is the cosmic Christ.

While the metaphysics of the good can provide new meaning to questions in religion and science, it can also contribute significantly to questions of ecumenism, feminism, liberation theology, and to the essential meaning of Christian life in a postmodern world. The value of this doctrine is that it not only supports a theocentric universe but it provides hope, affirming that, despite the uncertainty and complexity of life, God is hidden in the world and the world is grounded in a communion of love.

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