

Identity and Freedom: Bonaventure's Position and Method¹

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"Identität und Freiheit:
Ansatz und Methode im Denken des heiligen Bonaventura"

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1. Starting Point: Unity of the Powers of the Soul

The unique position of a thinker of Bonaventure's stature is often best illustrated by considering a contrary position. One way in which we might clarify his position is to re-state it in a different way, short only of contradicting him. Such an approach may serve our purpose in this essay. We shall begin by comparing Bonaventure's position to that of St. Thomas. The comparison will serve as a starting point of our treatment of Bonaventure's thought.

Medieval theology raised the question as to whether or not the powers of the soul, especially intellect and will, are identical with the soul itself and with one another. The question serves our purpose well, because it is a significant part of the background of Augustine's thought. He saw in the soul and its powers an image of the unity and trinity of God. The Middle Ages by and large accepted this Augustinian view. However, the relationship of the soul to its powers, intellect and will, was given varying interpretations by different theologians of the thirteenth century.

Neither Thomas nor Bonaventure answered the question with a categorical yes or no. Thomas was strongly inclined toward the position of an essential difference between the soul and its powers. That is, he leaned more to the distinct properties of the soul's powers than to their unity with the soul. In fact, he placed the distinction between the spiritual soul and its powers on a par with the difference between substance and accident.²

This view of Thomas appeared to Bonaventure to neglect the unity of the soul with its powers. We quote: "The powers of the soul are not so

¹ This article is based on a lecture delivered to the Catholic theological faculty of the University of Regensburg on May 15, 1974. The occasion was a *Dies academicus*. The five lectures of this academic celebration were published in book form in *Aktualität der Scholastik*, Pustet (Regensburg, 1975), pp. 37-52.

² I, q. 77, a. 1-2.

identical with the soul as to constitute the soul's inmost essential principle. But they are not so different from the soul as to belong to another category of being, such as is the case with accidents. They are closer to the category of substance when reduced to their first principle."³

For the same reason he argues for the greatest possible unity of the soul's powers among themselves: "Therefore, one may say that the powers of the soul are one entity, because they are rooted in a single entity and so bound up with that entity that they can belong to no other category of being."⁴

The *status quaestionis* and the contrary opinion in the answers at first blush may strike one as strange, even medieval. But if we take a closer look we are concerned with nothing more and nothing less than the unity of man and person. In answer to the question, Bonaventure responds in a way that reveals the touchstone of his thought: He is a passionate defender of the unity and identity of the person. All reality is to be brought back to its one root. To understand this point is to grasp his basic thought.

From this principle he concludes that the person is to be identified with the widest possible development of its faculties; that all that a person does and thinks and says is to be integrated with the center of his being, and thus integrated, to be understood. With this in mind, we gain access to what has been called the mystical epistemology of Bonaventure. "Mystical" in this connection might be better expressed as identity in thought and understanding. Thus the ultimate goal of knowledge for Bonaventure is an act in which the soul—no longer through its faculties, but immediately through itself—knows itself and truth itself. In this way the soul knows God. In *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure expresses the goal in this way: If this ascent reaches its perfection, it necessarily retains within itself all the movements of the intellect, and the collective unity of the troubled soul will be brought to God and changed in God.⁵

Immediate, intuitive, personal communication between us and the ultimate truth, the origin of our being, is the goal of human knowledge according to Bonaventure. Of course for him as a Christian theologian, the origin of his being is understood as personal and is called God. Thus far every medieval theologian could (and of necessity did) agree. Consequently, distinction and separation are this: The objective in its perfection so exceeds human powers within the space and time dimension

³ Sent., d. 24, p. 1, a. 2, q. 1, concl., *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2, p. 560.

⁴ Ibid., *Opera Omnia*, p. 561.

⁵ *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, chap. 7, no. 4, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 312b.

that it culminates in the definition of human being's whole way of thinking. Indeed, Bonaventure derives the structure of our human knowledge from this very objective; and therefore according to him it makes possible an initial breakthrough to the infinite knowledge of God. In opposition to Thomas, Bonaventure stresses the continuity of our earthly knowledge with our perfect vision of God, as we ask: What must we be, if we are destined to this end? It is from that destiny that we derive the makeup of the human spirit and arrives at the conclusion that we are best presented as conceived and focused on one point.

Against this view one may state that a basic principle of Thomas, which colors all his thought, is that the human being disregards the power of the Creator if it does not place sufficient emphasis on the independence and uniqueness of the creature. As his starting point, Thomas has to show that God and the human person—God and the world—are not concurrent realities; that a thinker honors God much more if he/she stresses the difference and the uniqueness of every single thing in the great order of creation. Bonaventure, on the other hand, as his starting point, has to show that to be a human being—to be a spirit—is a vocation to personal, intuitive communication—a vocation to the discovery of unity and identity in an ascent to the first, personal origin. Bonaventure stresses not the independence of the world but rather the character of the world as an intimation, and that intimation refers to God.

2. Main Objective: *Reductio* of All Reality to the First Principle

In view of what has been said, we have cleared the way so that we may look at the distinguishing basic principle of Bonaventure's thought: the principle of *reductio*, or *resolutio*. It may be formulated in this way:

The whole reality of the world with its many ramifications and its many patterns may be retraced to its last and therefore its first principle; retraced, that is, to its origin. Once that is done, we begin to understand the reality of the world.

All knowledge, which is not gained in view of this retracing, is not indeed to be denied, but is in Bonaventure's opinion equivocal and may lead to error, unless it receives support and balance from the retracing to its origin.

Bonaventure has developed this position, central to all his thought, most clearly in his epistemology, through the so-called doctrine of illumination (*illuminatio*). At the same time he develops his method, the method of *reductio*. He does not stop here until he has found in the act of cognition of the human spirit as a last, implicit condition of possibility, that which he calls the light of God, the first origin Himself:

Everything, however, which is eternal is God, or is in God.... It is clear that He is the basis of perception of all things, the infallible measure and the light of truth. In Him all things are faultlessly clarified.... Therefore, those

laws whereby we make a judgment with certainty, cannot be judged with certainty, except through that reality which not only brought everything into being, but which also contains all things and maintains them as diverse beings, and which remains the same in everything as the measure of everything. Through this reality our spirit judges everything brought before it by the senses.⁶

It would be a mistake were we to regard these reflections as a sort of proof for the existence of God, quite similar to that which Thomas tried to do with his "five ways." This method of proving the existence of God was unknown to Bonaventure. With him it is rather a matter of showing that in the very act of cognition itself we display the light of God, and we think with His help. With him this method also explains what has been implicitly made known. The method of *reductio* is therefore not a proof; it is not concerned with axioms or with cognition already attained as a step forward, so that as a result new cognition might be gained. The method of *reductio* goes back to the basic principle; it proves nothing but it shows something. It shows, namely, what is present in the act of cognition; it shows that the foundation (with whose help the first, primordial thought-steps were taken) demands an immortal being, an eternal origin.

We are dealing here with intuition, and with an intuition which every knower in his act of cognition has perfected as an implicit condition of knowledge itself. We are dealing then with making known, with catching a glimpse, of what is, of what has already been accomplished.

As a consequence, Bonaventure brings together in his synthesis the biblical concepts of seeing, of sight, and of blindness. He notes:

Strange, then, is the blindness of intellect, which does not consider that which it sees first, and without which it can know nothing. The eye, concentrating on various differences of color, does not see the very light by which it sees other things; and if it does see this light, it does not advert to it. In the same way, the mind's eye, concentrating on a particular and universal being, does not advert to being itself, which is beyond every genus, even though it comes to our minds first, and through it we know other things.⁷

It is to be noted: In this cast of thought the impassioned quest for identity is operative. This leading question perdures: In the final analysis, what is it that we are engaged in? Or put another way: What is cognition? Or: What is the human person? Bonaventure does not answer this leading question with a description of the accomplishments of human research, nor does he seek the answer in an extensive and involved presentation of ideas. His answer consists rather in a quest for the ultimate origin, an origin to which we are led by our own makeup,

⁶ Ibid., chap. 2, no. 9, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, pp. 301-2.

⁷ Ibid., chap. 5, no. 4, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 309a.

an origin that is the final, all-comprehending goal of the human person. Therefore, one may rightly call this trend of thought an insistent quest for identity and radical unity—a quest developed with the help of the retracing (*reductio*).

This passionate quest for identity pervades the entirety of Bonaventure's work. While he was still a professor in Paris, it was naturally his task to comment on the *Book of Sentences* of Peter Lombard. It was at this point that the development of his material was already indicated. Also during this period, the *Breviloquium* appeared in 1256. Its literary genre is matched by nothing comparable in the whole of the Middle Ages. It is no *Summa*. It is no *Commentary on the Book of Sentences*. Nor is it a *Quaestio disputata*. In the *Summa* or in the *Commentary on the Book of Sentences* of the Middle Ages, the whole order of theological and philosophical knowledge was developed. By contrast, the *Quaestio disputata* confined itself to a single question and discussed it from a variety of viewpoints. The *Breviloquium* is none of these. It is a presentation of all of theology in brief form. One might call it a compendium, but a compendium of a special sort, of Bonaventurian stamp. It is precisely not an abbreviated *Summa*. It is not a complete presentation of the material in stenographic notes. Its purpose is the bringing together of every branch of theological knowledge at its center. Or better: having each branch of theological knowledge linked to the basic origin.

In my opinion, Bonaventure has been eminently successful in achieving his purpose. The *Breviloquium*, in its contents, may be boldly described as a prophetic fulfillment of the demand of the Second Vatican Council that the hierarchy of truths, the concentration of the truths of faith about one central truth, be made plain to all. Naturally the work makes plain the theological knowledge of the Middle Ages and not that of our age. Hence it is not so much by reason of its contents but undoubtedly by reason of its method that the *Breviloquium* breaks the bonds of scholastic theology.

It is not by chance that every heading in the work begins with the words: "Because the first origin", or also, as in its sacramental teaching, with the words: "Because the author of our salvation..." We have here a clear example of the set purpose to bring back to the point of departure and to orient toward that point of departure every ramification of reality dealt with by theology. It is this that gives the *Breviloquium* its remarkable completeness. To that extent it is Theology in the strict sense of the words.

The same may be said of all the works of Bonaventure written after his departure from the University of Paris in 1257. Whether it be the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* ("The Soul's Journey into God"), or the *Reductio artium ad theologiam* ("On the Reduction of the Arts to Theol-

ogy"), or the *Collationes in Hexaemeron* ("Six Days of Creation"), they all contain the whole Bonaventure, and still no single work may be said simply to repeat what is contained in another one of his works. For instance, his last incomplete work, the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, does not create the impression that something is missing. Why not? Because every *Collatio* keeps the whole picture in its purview, is directed toward the first principle, and therefore contains the whole Bonaventure. Still it is evident that the *reductio* does not produce a sterile monotony. Every *Collatio* has something different, something new, something unique to say.

The passionate quest for identity is especially evident insofar as ontology and epistemology, in their *reductio* to the first principle, are finally viewed by Bonaventure as a unity, as an identity. So his reference to God—not his proof of God—is to be seen not only on the cognitional level, but rather by this very reason on the ontological level. He says:

Let him who wishes to contemplate the invisible things of God in the unity of His essence fix his attention first on being itself.... If, therefore, non-being can be understood only through being, and being [can be understood] only through being in act, and if being signifies the pure act of being, then being is that which first comes into the intellect, and this being is pure act.... It remains that the being in question must be [a] divine being.⁸

3. Creation, History, and Perfection, in Light of the *Reductio*

Let us now look at the thought-pattern of the *reductio*—the leading-back of all reality to its basic principle—in the light of the unity that nevertheless differentiates between existence and knowledge. We come up with this: If reality is understood in its basic principle, then the act of cognition will consciously recognize what is already in existence. That which is already ontically present becomes ontologically present. That is, it is taken up into the *Logos*, and into human cognition and speech. This process in time and in history Bonaventure also calls *reductio*, a leading-back.

It is this principle that enables us to grasp the very basis of his theory of history, in which the understanding of creation attains to a primary function. We can best appreciate it if we listen to what he himself says:

It is certain that man, in his state of innocence at the beginning of human history (*homo stans*), had knowledge of created things, and that he was led to God because of the image-reflectiveness of created things, and as a consequence he praised, honored, and loved God. That is the reason for creation, and in this way all creatures are led back to God.⁹

⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 3, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, pp. 308–9.

In the light of the foregoing, the whole course of history from creation to consummation is to be seen from the perspective of the *reductio*, of leading-back. The creation of things by God gives them their *entontic* existence; it establishes their being. However, this existence of things is not sufficient in itself; rather, by its very nature it points beyond itself. This innate goal is man. Man is the only creature in the material world who is capable of allowing that which already exists ontically to reach ontological existence, which is to bring it to perfection. Things therefore are to be recognized as having come forth from God, their first origin, and thus are to be led back to God. This is the proper meaning of creation. Thus history is generated from time. Human existence becomes an entity destined to manage the world and creation. This management of the world and time is by no means something technical. That is to say it is not to be seen as the extensive unfolding of their potential. Rather it is an "enfolding" in the already-indicated ground of their being, as an understanding proceeding from this ground while being intrinsically rooted in it.

One is tempted to think of a parallel in our own century, that is, to think of some concepts of Heidegger. Heidegger, for example, calls man "the shepherd of being." Heidegger also portrays man in his existence as the "being of beings" so that he can think of being itself. Furthermore, it is to be remembered that for Heidegger, origin and destiny in man are immediately bound together. This idea is recognized as valid in Bonaventure's theory of history, since the task of man, which presents him with a view of the future, is precisely that of the *reductio*, through which he seeks the basic principle of his destiny. Thus for Bonaventure the eschatology of history in its open-endedness and its character as promise stems precisely from its origin, that is, from its very nature as creation. Man's task in history is the ontological *reductio* of being as created reality to the Creator, and the understanding of the world as a created indicator of its personal origin. Therefore, the perfection of history, the objective toward which it strives, is the complete recognition through man of that which by God's design is the essence of creation.

Hence one is to keep in mind how deeply this view of Bonaventure draws its nourishment from Franciscan spirituality. He conceptualizes what Francis and Clare experienced. For instance consider Francis's *Canticle of Brother Sun*. It exemplifies what Bonaventure calls *reductio*: the praising recognition of the creaturely status of the world and its final perfection in gratitude before the Creator. So extensive is Francis's gratitude, his *reductio*, that he embraces what is actually

⁹ *Collationes in Hexaemeron* XIII, 12, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 390a.

man's last, his death. As is well known, shortly before his death Francis added a strophe to his *Canticle of Brother Sun*, in which he thanked God for "our Sister Bodily Death." Finally, it is *reductio* that Bonaventure refers to when he considers the fulfillment of existence—the leading-back of all things to God, their basic principle. In this fulfillment even the greatest darkness turns toward the light and becomes light, because through man's fulfillment it erupts into the wellspring of light—God.

Furthermore we ought to remember that St. Clare died after eighteen years of illness with these words on her lips: "I thank you, God, that you have created me." Thus we see that the thinking and the life of both Francis and Bonaventure had a common basic impetus. This should make us aware that there is more than theory in the method of the *reductio*. Bonaventure always views theology as a unity of theory and life. Theology, in its totality, is to be understood as Christian "life-praxis."

Man, therefore, by reason of his vocation, is to understand the created nature of things by way of God; and with this understanding, man is to bring to perfection a nature that is future-oriented, because precisely in this way is time endowed with the characteristic of a promise. Because of this vocation, the history of man is eschatological. It spans the whole horizon of his existence. That horizon must be viewed as Alpha and Omega, as beginning and end. It is the end because it is also the beginning.

Still, the way God is the beginning is different from the way He is the end. As beginning, He is pure entity, distant from the world. As end, He is both entitive and ontological, known and loved, recognized as origin of all reality and revered as such by man. Later on, Duns Scotus will weave a pattern of thought in the same way and adduce as reason for creation: *Deus vult condiligentes se* ("God wants entities capable of mutual love"). What God, man, and the world are in relationship to one another is grasped according to this view in one glance. As a result of this glance, the capability of man's technical development opens up to the world. This truth Bonaventure does not deny. However, he does not give it a high priority. To his way of thinking, intensity is more important than extension, and identity is superior to prosperity. The road to identity, which is the work of the Spirit and is not the result of working on matter, makes history possible.

In his synopsis, Bonaventure employs paired terms that were in common use among his contemporaries: *egressus—regressus* ("exodus—return").¹⁰ This construct of necessity evoked much criticism.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Breviloquium*, vol. 1, no. 8, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 216b; vol. 2,

Primarily he was accused of cyclic, unbiblical thought. One may attribute to it a form of cyclic, unbiblical thought with its roots in Gnosticism or neo-Platonism. There is a difference between the ideas we have, and the skillful way we adapt our ideas. All too often we fail to take note of that difference, although it is highly significant. In a Bonaventuran use of the paired terms *egressus—regressus*, we must not overlook the fact that the two terms do not operate on the same plane. "Exodus" is used in an entitive sense; it signifies the creative act of God. "Return" is used in an ontological sense; it is a human experience insofar as man recognizes God's creation and understands the created nature of things. The return does not complete a circle in the sense of a mere external repetition, but it reveals the existence of man and his history as one of penetrating understanding and purposeful completion. As a consequence, the world is not abandoned [by God], as the neo-Platonists or Gnostics would maintain. Quite the contrary. The essence of the return consists in this, that the world is understood as proceeding from God and returning to God.¹¹ Hence we are dealing here with the finality of a genuine eschatology of history. This eschatology is by no means rooted in uncertainty but rather leads back to the God of hope. The God of hope (here we have something biblical and Christian concept) is at once the Creator of the world and of man. It is not by chance that Bonaventure in his explanation of the six days of creation develops the work of creation and his eschatological and prophetic theology of history. I do not think you will find a theologian today who has succeeded as well as Bonaventure in understanding God Whom we acknowledge in the Apostles' Creed as creator of all things, in understanding Him at the same time as the God of hope. One gets the impression rather that today's theology, which has rightfully reclaimed an eschatological form for all Christian faiths, has busied itself too little with the fundamental statement of Scripture that God has created the world.¹²

no. 11, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 229a; *I Sent*, d. 37, p. 1, d. 3, q. 2, concl., *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, p. 648b.

For an interpretation, see Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Geschichtstheologie des heiligen Bonaventura* (Munich-Zurich, 1959), pp. 144-48; Heinrich Stoevesandt, *Die letzten Dinge in der Theologie Bonaventuras* (Zurich, 1969), pp. 346-65; Hans Mercker, *Schriftauslegung als Weltauslegung. Untersuchungen zur Stellung der Schrift in der Theologie Bonaventuras* (Munich-Paderborn-Vienna, 1971), pp. 137-60 (Veröffentlichungen des Grabmann-Institutes zur Erforschung der Mittelalterlichen Theologie und Philosophie. Neue Folge. Vol. 15).

¹¹ See the last *Collationes in Hexaemeron XX-XXIII*, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, pp. 424-49. They present contemplation as the highest form of knowledge, because it has an immediate relationship with the whole of reality.

¹² To this question, in addition to the three works mentioned in n. 9 above, cf. Alexander Gerken, *Theologie des Wortes. Das Verhältnis von Schöpfung und Inkarnation bei*

4. Christology and Soteriology in Light of the *Reductio*

The significant distinction in the leading-back (*reductio*) of creation to the creator is this: The freedom of man belongs essentially to the ontological plane. Bonaventure, despite his passionate quest for identity, rejects any Hegelian system in which the end-result of history is reached by reason of a dialectical process. The *reductio* is much more perilous, for the consummation of history consists precisely in this, that man in freedom knows, recognizes and perfects whatever is. To repeat the words of Bonaventure: Man must praise, honor and love the creator. That, however, presupposes man's consent.

In global terms, in terms of universal history, man has refused his consent. As a result, man's way to identity is blocked, and so is the way of the world which is directed by man. Indeed the way is blocked exclusively through human fault. At least Bonaventure names no other cause. As a consequence he apparently recognizes no actual tragedy that is impersonal. Basing his explanation on the grounds of global, universal history, he attributes culpability only to the blindness of the human spirit—the fact that man does indeed live and think from this very Origin.

God, however, intervenes in a way similar to a second act of creation. This second act as reparation corresponds to the first act of creation. God again sets in motion the process of a historical *reductio*. In every way it follows the original creation of man. Human history is blind to the truth. But God again gives it the possibility of knowing Him, the possibility of entering into communion with Him. God does this through the Word.

This Word of God in history has a double dimension for Bonaventure: *Verbum inspiratum*, and *Verbum incarnatum*. What is involved here, then, at one and the same time, is the writings of the Old and New Testament, and then above all else the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

This double dimension itself depends on the historical structure of the *reductio*. In the last analysis, in a guilt-ridden world only God Himself can again open a way to the goal. The Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, becomes at the same time the center. That is, the eternal Word of God, the origin through Whom the world was created, assumes the historical figure of man himself, and He becomes the Way within the realm of history. This way, this center, is Christ. Once again He opens to us the way to the Father through history, through the course of our own fallen existence. The revelatory event

Bonaventura (Düsseldorf, 1963); Margot Wiegels, *Die Logik der Spontaneität. Zum Gedanken der Schöpfung bei Bonaventura* (Freiburg-Munich, 1969), symposium, vol. 28.

also makes clear that in God Himself He is also the center. As such He discloses to us that the plan of salvation history—a plan that is grace-filled and occasioned by the sin of man—is like the trinitarian pattern of God Himself. He is not only the beginning and the end; He is also the center. He follows along the way; indeed, He Himself has become the Way.

The eternal Word of God, the origin of origins, has the function in God Himself of pointing out the destiny of things: "The eternal Word expresses the Father and at the same time the things that are created through Him."¹³ So through Jesus Christ the most profound structure of creation stands revealed: God as the Father creates and sustains the world through His eternal Word. Indeed this structure becomes the principle of the *reductio*, that is, the principle of eschatology. Jesus Christ becomes a revolving wheel, which again reveals to history its way to the Father "Who gathers all things unto Himself." "Therefore," says Bonaventure, "Christ is the tree of life, because through this center we return and become living at the source of life itself."¹⁴

This *reductio* in Christ can happen only in freedom. The fault can indeed be forgiven, but it cannot be glossed over. Therefore, with regard to Christ, one must attend to the paradox of the ability to see and the will not to see; to the interplay of the hidden and the revealed. These things are bound up with human freedom. "Clothed with the flesh," it is said of Christ, "outwardly He showed the flesh in that He hid the divinity within."¹⁵

This means that Christ shows Himself as the Word of the Father only to the believer. From the unbeliever, from him who will not see, He remains hidden. Bonaventure never tires of pointing out the function of humility, which alone makes faith and the ability to see possible. The stance of the proud man, the fact that man is unwilling to be grateful to anyone even to God, has led him into historical error, has blocked the *reductio* for him, and may also render it impossible for him with reference to the Redeemer. Humility, recognition of poverty, and the cross of Christ are the first and basically the only condition for the knowledge of the concrete, salvific truth that again reveals the Way. "See how all things are revealed in the cross.... Therefore, this cross is the key, the gate, the way, and the ray of truth."¹⁶ Because we are

¹³ *Hexaemeron* I, 17, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 332a.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *In Nativitate Domini Sermo*, II, 1, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 9, p. 107.

¹⁶ *De triplici via*, par. 3, no. 5, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 8, p. 14d. See Werner Hülsbusch, *Elemente einer Kreuzestheologie in der Schriften Bonaventuras* (Düsseldorf, 1968); Herman Schalück, "Amut und Heil." Eine Unterschung... (Munich-Paderborn-Vienna, 1971).

dealing here with the historical and free act of faith toward the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, insofar as He has spoken it once and for all into the heart of history, has need of preparation and witness. That Word was proclaimed definitively to the world. It needs the inspired Word of the Old and New Testaments. Therefore its hidden and public center is Christ; and so the inspired Word, the Scriptures, are centered in the incarnate Word. For Bonaventure, theology means nothing else than the understanding, attestation, and actualization of what Scripture says. Hence finally theology is witness to Christ. Scripture shares in the work of Christ in as much as that work is to lead the world back to God through men.

"Since man had fallen into sin, and had lost knowledge, there was no one who led things back to God. Hence that book, namely the world, was as it were dead and unreadable. So another book was necessary, through which that new light began.... This book is Sacred Scripture."¹⁷ A few lines later, in typical Bonaventuran shorthand, he says: "Therefore, Sacred Scripture is the word that casts light on the whole of reality and leads it back to God, and this is especially true of creation."¹⁸

5. Exemplarism of St. Bonaventure

Our consideration of Bonaventure's thought has led us to conclude that the compass of his thinking is circumscribed actually by two poles: identity and freedom. His idea of identity: the unity of man with himself and with his mission to the world in which he finds himself, a world he must face and in which he is immersed.

The discovery of identity, however, presupposes a relationship to the first origin, to God. Without the *reductio* there can be no identity. It is exactly here that freedom must be seen. It is precisely here that we must recognize freedom and therefore the danger in the *reductio*. Man has refused his commission in a concrete, historical way; history has floundered.

Only through a second initiative, as it were, of God—an initiative directed to the same end as the first initiative—the final divine grounding of man in Christ was given historical actuality, is the identity of the world in God possible in faith, that is, in freedom. As a concrete result, history is now not only restoration-history, but also salvation-history.

From this point on, it is evident why Bonaventure ardently embraced the image-thought of antiquity called exemplarism. He was aware of the distinction between God and the world, and that first of all it is God alone who makes genuine history possible—a history of

¹⁷ *Hexaemeron* XIII, 12, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, p. 390a.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13. For this problem area, see Mercker, *Schriftauslegung*, cited in n. 10 above.

freedom, of sin and salvation. Furthermore, he was able to see the mutual compatibility of God and the world, and the dependence of the world on God. For without these relationships between God and the world, *reductio* is impossible. Perfection of the world in God is impossible.

Exemplarism was especially apt to express difference and correspondence at one and the same time. Exemplarism places "original" and "image" in juxtaposition. The image proves through itself that it belongs to the original, that it bears the traits of the original, and still it itself is not the original. In spite of its reference to the original—indeed because of its reference to the original—the image makes it clear that it is only an image, that it duplicates the original only in a deficient manner, and that it thus has its own deficiencies. If the world is seen essentially as an image of God (sometimes weaker, sometimes stronger), then its reference to God, its value as a sign, is enlightening. But at the same time the world is being directed back toward God. The world cries out to God, Who perfects it by leading it back to the original image.

By patterning his thoughts along this line, Bonaventure understands before all else the biblical view of man as the image of God. Bonaventure's teaching on the image of God lies at the center of his anthropology, which is not to be viewed in isolation but rather as something that receives its inner impetus, its dynamic, from the concept of the *reductio*. Because man is the image of God, he is God-oriented; and according to St. Augustine, man comes to rest nowhere but in God. However, because man is only an image of God, his freedom is deficient; it is capable of sin, and hence he can be in need of redemption. Conversely, because man is the image of God, he stands constantly in reference to God. Not only is he in need of redemption, but after Adam's sin he is capable of redemption—we might even say worthy of redemption. And so finally ethics ultimately is grounded in the very being of man. Accordingly, exemplarism allows Bonaventure to take in, in one glance, the greatness and the misery of man, his nearness and his distance from God.¹⁹

6. Present-day Relevance

It seems to me that we have herewith before our eyes the most general and basic principles of Bonaventure's thought. Our concern here, however, is not merely to present a historical overview. Rather, we desire a

¹⁹ For the "image-thought" of Bonaventure, see J.M. Bissen, *L'exemplarisme divin selon saint Bonaventure* (Paris, 1929); Gerken, *Theologie des Wortes*, and Wiegels, *Die Logik*, both cited in n. 12 above.

genuine encounter, a real dialogue, with this medieval theologian. What is he saying to us?

To answer the question we must first take a look at the seven hundred years that separate us from him. His purpose was to look at man and his mission from man's basic orientation and to understand man from that point forward. Bonaventure rejected the study of man from the viewpoint of a mere catalogue of man's capabilities. In a certain sense, his position was already out of step with the currents of thirteenth-century thought. The natural sciences were already slowly making their way. The view of St. Thomas, that human knowledge, independent of revelation, was branching out. It reached out; it gained control of the world, which in its uniqueness and dynamic fascinated man. Bonaventure was the first casualty resulting from this historical development.

He saw this, but in spite of it he held fast to his view. He suspected and feared the collapse of man's world, the loss of its center, the loss of man's base.

If we can see the relevancy of Bonaventure to ourselves, we must admit: What he said is right; he warned us against a real danger. What he predicted has occurred in part, namely, man has come to know more and more about things and less and less about himself about what makes him unique and different. Specialization has carved up the world of man. Man speaks everywhere—and not always with an untroubled undertone—about pluralism. We have parts in our hand, but their spiritual bond has long since been lost. In spite of that, or perhaps precisely because of that, man expresses again his longing for unity. In a word, there is a quest for identity.

This longing then becomes dangerous if it is not recognized, if we (to speak after the manner of Bonaventure) do not lead it back to its basic root. What happens then is that man forces himself into a technological unity, instead of building a unity based on the spirit and on freedom. It degenerates into totalitarianism. In our present century there is no lack of examples of this. No matter how the principle is stated, it is used to establish and defend the various forms of totalitarianism, which always end in a disregard of human freedom, in a debasing of that which Bonaventure understands as the *imago Dei*, the image of God in man.

The deception of a technologically forced totalitarianism can no longer be supported. The cry for unity, for peace, for reconciliation, for the identity of man, cannot go unheard. It is our longing for a world not completely torn apart (as perhaps pluralism defends), but on the other hand not a forced total grouping. Perhaps the experience of our century has made us once again eager to hear what Bonaventure has to say.

It is true that history has treated Bonaventure unjustly. His vision, like that of every thinker, did not see everything, nor did it comprehend the whole of reality. History that is based on the extensive development of human capabilities—the history of modern times—has a right to its place in the sun. However, this right was and is only a relative right. Hence it needs a corrective. Perhaps the word of Jesus needs to be said, the word that Bonaventure indicated in our synopsis: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matt. 16:29).²⁰

The ground that Bonaventure has trod is by no means a mere look backwards, merely a conservative posture. He points to the future. He is aware of the mission and task of man in the history of the world. He is not infected by uncertainty; he is not torn apart by the vast sources of uncontrolled power. More importantly, the goal toward which he sees the world and man journeying is so understood that our origin, of which he never loses sight, continuously gives evidence of itself from within. He calls the end of history *patria*, our "homeland," or more exactly *patria perfectae caritatis*, "the homeland of perfect love." Only when we look at our roots, when we know who it is we are thanking, have we come to Him completely. Only then, with him, are we completely ourselves.

²⁰ See *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, IV, 12, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, pp. 475–76. Here Bonaventure paraphrases the words of Jesus: "Of what value is it that a man knows many things, if the real value of his soul is squandered" *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 476a).