
The Cosmic Exemplarism of Bonaventure

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The writings of the medieval Franciscan thinker Bonaventure (d.1274) express the mature development of the Christian Platonic tradition that springs, in the West, from Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. This study is a summary of the cosmic exemplarism of Bonaventure, that is, his mystical understanding of material creatures. This is only a partial view of Bonaventure's vision. In the six stages of spritual ascent described in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, it corresponds only to the first two stages, wherein man learns to recognize God through and in the material world which man sees outside himself. And so, while this cosmic exemplarism provides a coherent and fruitful understanding of the world, it is intended to lead a person on toward discovering God in his own mind, and finally toward contemplating God in himself. This study will consider first the general economy of exemplarism as it appears in Bonaventure's writings and then the specific role of material creatures within that economy.

I. THE COSMIC ECONOMY OF EXEMPLARISM

Bonaventure's thought is structured according to three concepts that are for him the sum total of metaphysics: emanation, exemplarity, and consummation.¹ These three concepts describe a process in which created beings come forth from God, reflect and express him in their being, and then return to him. They provide therefore the three points which determine the circular economy of exemplarism.

A. Emanation or Expression

The first phase of the process begins with Bonaventure's espousing the position of Pseudo-Dionysius and affirming that the first name of God is the Good.² It is the nature of the Good to be self-diffusive, to emanate,

¹*Hexaëmeron*, collation 1, no. 17, in *Opera Omnia*, tome 5 (Quaracchi, 1891), p. 332.

²*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, ed. Philotheus Boehner (Saint Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1956), chap. 5, no. 2, pp. 80-81.

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and so to express itself. Its complete and perfect self-diffusion, emanation, and expression is not the created world but is, rather, the first phase of the inner life of the Trinity.³ Within the Trinity, it is the Father who is the dynamic source of that emanation, and so it is the Father who is called fountain fullness, *fontalis plenitudo*.⁴

This primal self-diffusion of the Father consists of his self-knowledge, a knowledge which is the Son. The Son is then the representation and likeness of the Father,⁵ the self-expression of the Father in whom the Father expresses the totality of his being and the totality of what he can produce.⁶ The Son is therefore quite aptly called Image, Word, or expression of the Father.

The Son is therefore the locus of the divine ideas, the *rationes aeternae* or eternal reasons. Since the Son expresses and represents the infinite creative power of the Father, he also represents all possible things: indeed the infinite variety of things is given unified expression in him.⁷ Now the divine ideas are indeed God's knowledge of the world, but they are not knowledge caused by an external object as our knowledge is.⁸ Rather, the divine ideas are themselves *expressive* and give rise to the created world, and do not arise from the created world.⁹ Hence the eternal reasons are called the Eternal Art, *ars aeterna*.¹⁰ The eternal ideas are therefore clearly not static and abstract for Bonaventure; they are dynamic causes.¹¹

It is absolutely important to note that the Word in his unity expresses and represents the multiplicity of possible things and embraces in himself all the varied characteristics of creation.¹² His embrace includes not only Platonic universals but also individual things *in their distinctness*.¹³ Hence Bonaventure can say that individual things really and actually *are*

³Ibid., chap. 6, no. 2, pp. 88–89.

⁴1 *Sentences* dist. 31, pt. 2, dubium 6, tome 1 (Quaracchi, 1882), p. 551.

⁵*Hexaëmeron*, collation 3, no. 4; tome 5, pp. 343–44.

⁶Theodore DeRegnon, *Études de théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité* (Paris: Victor Retaux & Fils, 1892), p. 513; *Hexaëmeron*, collation 1, no. 13, tome 5, p. 331; 1 *Sent.* dist. 27, p. 2, articulus unicus, quaest. 1–4, tome 1, pp. 481–91.

⁷*Hexaëmeron*, collation 11, no. 11, tome 5, pp. 381–82.

⁸Luc Mathieu, *La Trinité Créatrice d'après Saint Bonaventure* (diss., Institut Catholique de Paris, 1960) (Paris: privately printed, 1960), pp. 145–46.

⁹*De Scientia Christi*, quaest. 2, conclusio, tome 5, p. 9; 1 *Sent.* dist. 35, articulus unicus, questio 1, conclusio, tome 1, pp. 601–2.

¹⁰Philotheus Boehner, *A History of the Franciscan School*, mimeographed (Southfield, Mich.: Duns Scotus College, 1944), 2:78.

¹¹Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Dom Iltyd Trethowan and Frank J. Sheed (1938; reprint ed., Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965), p. 145; *Hexaëmeron*, collation 12, no. 12, tome 5, p. 386.

¹²*Hexaëmeron*, collation 12, no. 13, tome 5, p. 986; Alexander Gerken, *La théologie du verbe: La relation entre l'Incarnation et la Création selon S. Bonaventure*, trans. Jacqueline Greal (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1970), p. 112; Titus Szabo, *De SS. Trinitate in Creaturis Refulgente: Doctrina S. Bonaventurae* (Rome: Herder, 1955), p. 54; Gilson, pp. 140–41.

¹³1 *Sent.* dist. 35, articulus unicus, quaest. 4, conclusio, esp. ad 3, ad 4, tome 1, p. 610; *Breviloquium*, pt. 1, chap. 8, no. 7, tome 5, p. 217.

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in God, not indeed in their concrete existence but because they can be produced.¹⁴ Therefore, since the Word expresses and represents the ideas of all created things, ideas which act as exemplary causes of these things, he is called the eternal Exemplar, the model or pattern of creation.¹⁵

The inner life of the Trinity, originating from the fountain fullness of the Father and perfectly expressed in the Son who is Word, Image, and Exemplar, finds its consummation in the love between Father and Son which *is* the Spirit. Hence there is within the Trinity a complete process of emanation, exemplarity, and consummation.

But the love of the Father for his Word “explodes into a thousand forms” in the universe outside of God.¹⁶ And so the fountain fullness of the Father within the Trinity is recapitulated in regard to the not-God, and the Trinity itself becomes a fountain fullness expressing itself outward and into the world.¹⁷ So the eternal ideas in the Word, which are the expression of the Father, become themselves expressive, causing a world that represents the life of the Trinity in a way analogous to the Word’s representing the Father. Significantly, this second cycle of emanation, exemplarity, and consummation originates not from the nature of God, necessarily, as does the Son; it comes forth freely from the will of God.¹⁸ So the creative Trinity becomes for the created universe the emanating fountain fullness.

B. Exemplarity

The first phase of the cosmic economy of exemplarism concerned God’s act of expressing himself in creation. The second phase, exemplarity, concerns creatures as reflections or expressions of God. The three phases of the economy of exemplarism, however, are not neatly separated. Rather, the entire economy is recapitulated in each phase, so that at every level of being we meet again the same basic pattern of the life of the Trinity: emanation, exemplarity, and consummation.

1. *Exemplary causality.*—As we shift our perspective from God, the fountain fullness expressing himself in creatures, to the creatures themselves as expressions of God, we confront the question, *How* do creatures reflect God? That is, what is the method of reasoning by which the relation of creature to God is discerned and described?

The scholastics who followed Aristotle employed a method based on

¹⁴1 *Sent.* dist. 36, articulus 1, quaest. 1, conclusio, esp. ad 3, tome 1, pp. 620–21; see also Szabo, p. 38.

¹⁵*Hexaëmeron*, collation 12, no. 7, tome 5, p. 385.

¹⁶Gerken, p. 132.

¹⁷Alexander Shaefer, “The Position and Function of Man in the Created World according to Bonaventure,” *Franciscan Studies*, N.S. 20 (1960): 266–67.

¹⁸1 *Sent.* dist. 7, articulus unicus, dubium 2, tome 1, p. 144.

the principle of efficient causality. That principle provides the mechanism for the development of their systems, so that a grasp of that principle is a requisite for understanding their thought. Bonaventure here employs a method based on exemplary causality. It is important to grasp his method in order to understand his vision.

Exemplarism can be defined as the doctrine of the relations of expression between God and creatures.¹⁹ It presupposes that God is the prototype of all that exists and that he expresses himself in creatures, so that as a result creatures express the Creator.

An exemplar, or exemplary cause, can be defined as that in imitation of which something is formed. The exemplar is the pattern or the model for the form of the thing made. Ultimately for Bonaventure, the Word is the exemplar of all things. Within this doctrine of relations of expression, the exemplar is the *active* side of expression: that which expresses itself. Its correlative, the passive expression or that in which the exemplar is expressed, is called an image.²⁰

As an image, therefore, the creature is related to God as an "imitation by way of expression."²¹ This concise phrase is offered by Gilson as a formula for the principle of exemplary causality. Note that the creature is not an image by an *unqualified* resemblance to God. If it were so considered, then any number of arbitrary and farfetched correspondences might be brought forth (and have been) in the name of exemplarism. But the resemblance Bonaventure considers is one which derives from the act of expression, which is in this case the act of God engendering the creature. The image is therefore the "analogy which the generating act imprints upon the being that it has engendered."²²

"Analogy" refers to a likeness between two beings which are essentially diverse, and it describes the only kind of relationship that can exist between realities which are separated by the distance between finitude and infinity, as God and creatures are. For Bonaventure, this analogy is sought in the order of internal arrangements and structure.²³ The first term of analogy for Bonaventure is therefore the internal structure of the Trinity—Emanation, Exemplarity, Consummation—understood precisely as the dynamic and creative Source of all creatures.²⁴ It is that

¹⁹J. M. Bissen, *L'Exemplarisme Divin selon saint Bonaventure* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1929), p. 4.

²⁰*1 Sent.* dist. 31, pt. 2, articulus 1, quaest. 1, conclusio, tome 1, p. 540.

²¹Gilson, p. 199.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 189, 199.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁴The Thomistic context of Gilson's thought calls for some remarks toward clarification of the meaning of the term "analogy" in Bonaventure as distinct from Aquinas. Perhaps the most significant difference here is in their differing concepts of the divine ideas and of God as "pure act." For Bonaventure, the divine ideas are not simply God's essence as imitable, but are expressive and fecund, a real art; likewise, "pure act" implies for Bonaventure activity and fecundity (see *Hexaëmeron*, collation 20, no. 5, tome 5, p. 426; also De Regnon, pp. 452-57).

structure that Bonaventure will see recapitulated in every level of creation.

Two words that are useful for describing the relationships between beings in Bonaventure's thinking are "recapitulate," a word that is not Bonaventure's but Saint Paul's, and "participate," a word Bonaventure uses frequently. "Recapitulate" can mean to summarize, as the orator recapitulates the main points of his speech. But a deeper meaning of the word is to bring together again, to unite into one (see Eph. 1:10). It is primarily the latter meaning that is applicable here: the inner dynamism of the Trinity is recapitulated in all levels of the economy of exemplarism; it is realized again, brought to bear again, uniting all creatures in a cosmic harmony. "Participation" refers to the way creatures can share in or possess the life of God. It is defined as a mode of possession in which what is possessed is received from another who is essentially different.²⁵ In a general sense, participation is the reverse of exemplary causality: the being which is an imitation of God must by that fact participate in God. But in its proper sense, participation can refer only to intellectual creatures, since only they can consciously share, by grace, in the life of God.

2. *The world of signs.*—The fountain fullness of the Trinity freely expresses itself outward, and so the world is created. The world then stands in a role analogous to that of the Word in this larger circle of exemplarism: it is a reflection and expression of the Trinity, though in an incomplete and partial manner. And just as the Son is called the Eternal Word, the world can be called a temporal or created word. Every creature is then a divine word,²⁶ and the universe appears as a book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker.²⁷

In fact, Bonaventure considers the created world in itself an adequate revelation of God to man. After the Fall, however, men are like illiterates with no appreciation for a book that lies before them.²⁸ For that reason, the book of Scripture is given to man not as a new revelation but as a sort of dictionary, a light by which man can find again the real meaning of created things.²⁹ The use of revealed doctrines to interpret the meaning of the empirical world is therefore quite consistent with Bonaventure's understanding of the world, and he insists that such an approach is absolutely necessary for fallen man if he is ever to reach a full understanding of the world in and for itself.

²⁵J. Guy Bougerol, ed., *Lexique Saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Éditiones Franciscaines, 1969), p. 105.

²⁶Mathieu, p. 93.

²⁷*Breviloquium*, pt. 2, chap. 12, tome 5, p. 230.

²⁸*Hexaëmeron*, collation 2, no. 20, tome 5, p. 340.

²⁹Alexander Shaefer, "The Position and Function of Man in the Created World according to Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies*, n.s. 21 (1961): 332; J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Bonaventure* (Tournai: Desclée & C^{ie}, 1961), p. 229.

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If the world is a book, then it can be “read” as a book. Gilson suggests that the medieval method of reading Scripture can be applied to the world: besides a literal (empirical) sense, it is legitimate to see in it an allegorical sense revealing the mysteries of faith (especially the Trinity), a tropological sense guiding the moral life, and an anagogical sense leading to the love of God and desire for union with God.³⁰ In such a perspective, the world becomes a cosmos united in echoing harmony: practically everything is tied together in a series of correspondences, so that the basic pattern of emanation, exemplarity, and consummation is recapitulated in whole or in part on all the levels of creation, and creatures are related to one another by participation in the same exemplary pattern.

There is an ascending hierarchy among creatures determined by the way in which they reflect the Trinity. Most elementary is the shadow (*umbra*), which reflects God as One and so the attributes of God common to the three persons of the Trinity. Next is the vestige, a reflection of the three persons through efficient, exemplary, and final causality (emanation, exemplarity, consummation). Finally comes the image, which not only reflects God as the vestige does but does so consciously and can know God as its object.³¹

The *shadow* receives little direct treatment in the works of Bonaventure except in connection with the vestige. But his references to it reveal a richness of insight into the concrete properties of things, as we will see when we discuss the specific role of material creatures in the economy of exemplarism.

The *vestige* is related to God by way of triple causality: efficient, exemplary, and final. It is grounded not in accidental qualities of things but in their inner structure, their very being and nature.³² The general pattern of the vestige is a triad of essential characteristics corresponding to the three causes. Hence, as each being has an efficient cause, an exemplary or formal cause, and a final cause, it has unity, truth, and goodness; measure, number, and weight; and mode, species, and order. A being is constituted, first, by its being brought into concrete existence. This unity gives to it its *mode*, which is the particular limit of being belonging to a thing, and that in turn is equivalent to its *measure*. Next, the *truth* of a being, its intelligibility, is constituted by its relation to its exemplary cause, and so to the eternal reason corresponding to it in the Eternal Art. Truth therefore gives to a being its principle of intelligibility, its *species* which is at the same time its form and its beauty. And as form, this line of causality provides a being with the proportion of its parts and its dis-

³⁰Gilson, pp. 208–9; see also *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, no. 5, tome 5, p. 321.

³¹1 *Sent.* dist. 3, articulus unicus, quaest. 2, ad 4, tome 1, p. 73.

³²*Lexique*, p. 134; *Itinerarium*, chap. 2, no. 12, pp. 60–61; 2 *Sent.* dist. 16, articulus 1, 2, conclusio, tome 2 (Quaracchi, 1885), p. 397.

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tinctness from other beings, its *number*. Finally, the *goodness* of a being consists in its relation to God as its final cause, and so is the basis for its *order*, its ordination or orientation toward its goal. This is equivalent to its *weight*, which is the inclination or tendency of a thing to seek its own place.³³

There is an important consequence to Bonaventure's linking of creatures directly and by their natures to God through this triple causality. This sets his world-view apart from a Neoplatonic exemplarism which sees the universe as a hierarchical chain of being ordered by degrees of participation in being, so that the farther down the hierarchy one goes, the weaker and dimmer the reflection of being. For Bonaventure, every single creature from the angel to the grain of sand has its direct model and foundation in the Word himself, in the eternal reasons. For that reason each being is equally close to God, though the *mode* of relationship with God differs according to the capacity of the creature.³⁴

The *image* is the soul of man, specifically the interrelated powers of memory, intellect, and will. These powers recapitulate the roles of the three persons of the Trinity. The memory gives rise to knowledge that becomes reflex and explicit in the intellect, and the two are affirmed and united by the will. These three are one for Bonaventure, for he holds that there is no real distinction between the soul and its faculties,³⁵ and so these powers recapitulate the trinity and unity of God.³⁶ When these powers are directed to the things of the created world, however, they remain on the level of the vestige, since their resemblance to God consists only in a correspondence of structure. But when they are turned to God as their object, man becomes truly the image of God: he reflects God consciously and knows God as his object.³⁷

While a discussion of man as the image of God would go beyond the limits of this study, the role of man in relation to material creatures is especially important because man is composed of a material body and a spiritual soul. Because of his composite nature, man can recapitulate in himself all lower forms of creation and can become the mediator for their return to God and consummation.³⁸ The way in which he can do this will be clarified when we discuss Bonaventure's theories of seminal reasons and of plurality of forms.

3. *Christ the center*.—The ascending order of signs in the created uni-

³³*Lexique*: articles on *unitas*, *veritas*, *bonum*; *modus*, *species*, *ordo*; *mensura*, *numerus*, *pondus* (see *Itinerarium*, chap. 1, no. 11, pp. 44-45; 1 *Sent.* dist. 3, quaest. 1, no. 3, tome 1, pp. 78 ff.).

³⁴Gerken, pp. 79-80. By contrast, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (1936; reprint ed., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 52-54, 69-70, 83-84, 329-30.

³⁵Helen Marie Beha, "Matthew of Aquasparta's Theory of Cognition," *Franciscan Studies*, n.s. 20 (1960): 414.

³⁶2 *Sent.* dist. 26, articulus 1, quaest. 1, conclusio, tome 2, p. 395.

³⁷1 *Sent.* dist. 3, pt. 2, articulus unicus, quaest. 2, ad 4, tome 1, p. 73.

³⁸Shaefer, 1961, pp. 374, 379-80.

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verse reaches its pinnacle in Jesus Christ. Christ combined in himself the perfection of the material world, the world of man's intellect, and since he is Incarnate Word, the eternal reasons themselves. He embodies the highest perfection of creation.³⁹ Christ recapitulates in himself the entire reality of the world, and even its history (his perfection is dynamic and not static).⁴⁰ He is at once Image and Exemplar, since he sums up in himself the world as sign of God, and reveals in himself the Trinity to the world—revealing at the same time to the world its own meaning.⁴¹ Further, he reconciles in himself the created world with the Creator, reuniting as mediator and center these two realities estranged by the Fall.⁴²

The position of Christ in the entire exemplaristic vision is that of the center. He recapitulates in himself all realms of being and of human knowledge.⁴³ He holds this central position not only because of what he is as Incarnate World but also—and this tantalizing line of thought is not thoroughly developed in Bonaventure's writings—in the events of his life, particularly his death and resurrection.⁴⁴

C. Consummation and Return

The purpose or final cause of creation is succinctly summed up so: "The first Principle created this perceptible world as a means of self-revelation so that, like a mirror of God or a divine footprint, it might lead man to love and praise his Creator."⁴⁵ The world is a sign, and so its purpose—if it is not to be abused—is to lead man through it to what it signifies.⁴⁶ The world in its ascending levels of reflecting God is like a ladder for man to ascend in the return of God.⁴⁷

It is, of course, possible to misunderstand and abuse nature. The beholder of a created image might stop at a simple admiration of the creature's beauty rather than seeing beyond it to its model. If he remains content with the creature in itself, he is off the track;⁴⁸ and if he fails to be led through knowledge of creatures back to the Creator, he falls like Lucifer.⁴⁹ To Bonaventure, the philosopher who seeks wisdom exclu-

³⁹*De Reductione Artium*, no. 20, tome 5, p. 324.

⁴⁰Gerken, pp. 80–81, 98, 380.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 286–87.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Hexaëmeron*, collation 1, nos. 10–11, tome 5, pp. 330–31.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, collation 1, nos. 22, 26, 32, tome 5, pp. 333–34.

⁴⁵*Breviloquium*, pt. 2, chap. 11, no. 2, trans. Jose de Vinck (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), p. 101.

⁴⁶*Itinerarium*, chap. 2, no. 11, pp. 60–61; 1 *Sent.* dist. 3, pt. 1, articulus unicus, quaest. 2, ad 1, tome 1, p. 72.

⁴⁷*Breviloquium*, pt. 2, chap. 12, tome 5, p. 230.

⁴⁸1 *Sent.* dist. 3, pt. 1, articulus unicus, quaest. 2, ad 1, tome 1, p. 72.

⁴⁹*Hexaëmeron*, collation 1, no. 17, tome 5, p. 332.

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sively in the isolated natures of creatures will never find it.⁵⁰ He therefore criticizes the philosophy of Aristotle precisely because it is not concerned with exemplarity.⁵¹

Bonaventure's goal is to understand the essential structure of a thing, a structure constituted by the thing's concrete relationships to its causes. This process he calls *resolutio*, a term probably best translated as "analysis," but with the connotation of a leading back (*reductio*) to first principles.⁵² The analysis may be partial or it may be full and ultimate, the *plena resolutio*, the goal of wisdom.

The *plena resolutio* is the mirror image of exemplary causality. The key to this full analysis is the recognition that the principle of knowing a thing is the same as its principle of being made,⁵³ and that is the Word as the model through whom all things are made.⁵⁴ A thing is fully and ultimately known, then, only when it is known in its relation to the Word, the Eternal exemplar.⁵⁵

The kind of knowledge that achieves this apprehension of the Word through the creature is called *contuitio*. In its specific sense, contuitio implies an indirect knowledge of God in his effects.⁵⁶ In the context of exemplary causality, it implies the awareness of simultaneity of form in the created thing and in the Eternal Exemplar. And in general it implies a sense of the presence of God together with the consciousness of the created being.⁵⁷ The notion of contuitio will be given more detailed treatment in the context of the role of material creatures in the economy of exemplarism.

So it is through created things as signs that man reaches back to God and at least to the cognitive aspect of his consummation. But in so doing, since he sums up in himself all lower forms of creation and is mediator between material creatures and God, man also brings those creatures to participate indirectly in the glory of God. In this way the consummation of material creatures and their return to God is accomplished.

D. Summary

Bonaventure's economy of exemplarism presents an integrated and dynamic process of a world coming to be from God, existing as God's expression, and returning to God. The beginning of the process is the

⁵⁰Ibid., collation 2, no. 21, tome 5, p. 340.

⁵¹Ibid., collation 6, no. 2, tome 5, p. 361.

⁵²*Itinerarium*, chap. 3, no. 4, pp. 68–69.

⁵³*Hexaëmeron*, collation 1, no. 10, tome 5, p. 331.

⁵⁴Gerken, p. 35; see also pp. 379–80.

⁵⁵*1 Sent.* dist. 28, articulus unicus, dubium 1, tome 1, p. 504.

⁵⁶J. M. Bissen, "De la contuitio," *Études Franciscaines* 46 (1934): 569.

⁵⁷Alvin Black, "The Doctrine of the Image and Similitude in St. Bonaventure," *Cord* 12 (1962): 272.

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inner life of the Trinity itself, wherein from all eternity the Father, the fountain fullness, in expressing himself generates the Son, and Father and Son in their love breathe forth the Spirit. Through this overflowing love, the Trinity becomes a fountain fullness and in expressing itself freely creates the world, which is patterned after the Word in whom the multitude and variety of all possible creatures is a unity in the eternal ideas. The world then exists as the outward expression of God, reflecting him by recapitulating in material beings and in man the inner dynamism of the Trinity, and so presenting an almost unlimited series of correspondences between creatures and God and among creatures. As the expression or sign of God, the created world returns to God through man's discerning and loving God in this created expression. The entire process, both within the Trinity and in the world, is achieved, expressed, and fulfilled in the figure of Christ, the center of the economy of exemplarism.

II. THE ROLE OF MATERIAL CREATURES

The fountain fullness of the Trinity expresses itself outwardly in the multitude of created things, and so every creature has its exemplary idea in the Word, and every creature exists as a sign of the creative Trinity.

Of particular importance in Bonaventure's exemplarism is the highly significant role he gives to material creatures. The Platonist, Dionysian theory of Bonaventure turns here to follow Francis and to see in each creature the good work of God and the witness to the goodness of God and to the life of the Trinity.⁵⁸ The tendency to exclude created things from contemplation that is characteristic of Pseudo-Dionysius is abandoned by Bonaventure in favor of a very positive attitude toward the things of nature.⁵⁹ And Bonaventure directly attacks Plato because, while he taught a doctrine of exemplarism, he failed to give proper appreciation to the world of sense.⁶⁰

A. Patterns of Exemplarity in Material Creation

The general pattern into which the concepts of shadow and vestige fit has been outlined in the first part of this essay. Our concern now is to develop a more detailed and somewhat more concrete grasp of the way a material thing presents in itself a reflection of God.

The shadow reflects God as its cause in an indeterminate sense, referring not to the Trinity through a pattern of efficient, formal, and final

⁵⁸Mathieu, pp. 195-96.

⁵⁹Shaefer, 1961, p. 382.

⁶⁰*Sermo* 4, no. 18, tome 5, p. 572; M. Hurley, "Illumination according to Bonaventure," *Gregorianum* 32 (1951): 394-95.

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⁶⁰*Sermo* 4, no. 18, tome 5, p. 572; M. Hurley, "Illumination according to Bonaventure," *Gregorianum* 32 (1951): 394-95.

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causality, but to the common attributes of God. Hence the shadow is considered a confused reflection of God, whereas the vestige is distinct.⁶¹ The shadow appears in a quality or property of a thing rather than in its internal structure.

A suggestion of this type of significance in creatures is given in the following catalog of the general properties of creatures, some of which fall into the category of shadow:

The *greatness* of things also—looking at their vast extension, latitude, and profundity, at the immense power extending itself in the diffusion of light, and the efficiency of their inner uninterrupted and diffuse operation, as manifest in the action of fire—clearly portrays the *immensity* of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Triune God. Who, uncircumscribed, exists in all things by His power, presence, and essence. Likewise, the *multitude* of things in their generic, specific, and individual diversity of substance, form, or figure, and the efficiency which is beyond human estimation, manifestly suggests and shows the *immensity* of the three above-mentioned attributes in God. The *beauty* of things, too, if we but consider the diversity of lights, forms, and colors in elementary, inorganic, and organic bodies, as in heavenly bodies and minerals, in stones and metals, and in plants and animals, clearly proclaims these three attributes of God. Insofar as matter is full of forms because of the seminal principles, and form is full of power because of its active potentialities, while power is capable of many effects because of its efficiency, the *plenitude* of things clearly proclaims the same three attributes. In like manner, manifold *activity*, whether natural, cultural, or moral, by its infinitely multiple variety, shows forth the immensity of that power, art, and goodness. . . .⁶²

This passage beautifully expresses Bonaventure's delight in the variety of creatures, and his consciousness of that variety as a shadow of the infinity and immensity of God.

This passage can be read from two other points of view as well, and so we will have occasion to refer to it as the discussion proceeds. First, the precise general attribute of God that is described or reflected by the aspects of creatures given here is his infinity or immensity. While infinity is a common attribute of God, it is also a distinct attribute of the Word in whom the infinite power of God is reflected in the infinite multiplicity of the divine ideas. Hence this passage overlaps with the middle term of the vestige, that reflecting exemplary causality. Second, Bonaventure's sensitivity to the way particular kinds of things reflect particular aspects of the Creator is evident here.

The vestige, unlike the shadow, reflects the Trinity as efficient, formal, and final cause of its own inner structure, of its very nature. The patterns characteristic of the vestige are the echoing triads one, true, good; mode, species, order; and measure, number, and weight. It is

⁶¹ *Sent.* dist. 3, articulus unicus, quaest. 2, ad 4, tome 1, p. 73.

⁶² *Itinerarium*, chap. 1, no. 14, p. 47.

important to note, however, that the vestige does not call for three different methods of interpretation in Bonaventure's system. These triads are seen as integral units, specifically as the inner pattern of the concrete being. The method appropriate for patterns or form is that of exemplary causality, and so Bonaventure's interpretation of the vestige centers upon the middle members of those triads, those corresponding to exemplary causality. The other two sets of causes are included as contributing the triadic pattern to the inner structure of the creature and so making it reflect the Trinity. Further, their inclusion adds to what would otherwise be a relatively static view of the form of a thing, the dynamic pattern or process of emanation and return.

To understand the vestige, then, we should focus on the middle members of the triads. These form a line of corresponding concepts: from exemplary causality come truth, form, species, number, and beauty. Bonaventure relates several of these concepts in this passage from the *Itinerarium*:

Therefore, since all things are beautiful and in some way delightful, and since beauty and delight do not exist without proportion, and since proportion exists primarily in numbers, all things are subject to number. Hence number is the principal exemplar in the mind of the Creator, and in things, the principal vestige leading to Wisdom. And since number is most evident to all and very close to God, it leads us, by its sevenfold distinction, very close to Him; it makes him known in all bodily and visible things when we apprehend numerical things, when we delight in numerical proportions, and when we judge irrefutably by the laws of numerical proportions.⁶³

The terms used here need some clarification. First, Bonaventure's concept of beauty, while not clearly defined by him, can be reduced to a notion he derived from Saint Augustine: beauty is *aequalitas numerosa*, equality of number. This phrase can be interpreted to mean a unity in multiplicity⁶⁴ or to mean a proportionality of parts.⁶⁵

The beauty of the individual thing is most effectively interpreted as a proportionality of parts. Its beauty consists in the complementary inter-relationship of its parts and their subordination to the whole.⁶⁶ In this sense, the beauty of a thing would be the same as its structure or form. Beauty implies further an ordering of parts within the whole, a kind of balance or symmetry that makes a thing pleasing to the eye.⁶⁷ To perceive this beauty would be to grasp the arrangement of parts within the whole in a single apprehension. This suggests another nuance in

⁶³Ibid., chap. 2, no. 10, pp. 59-61.

⁶⁴*Lexique*, p. 111, no. 1.

⁶⁵Karl Peter, *Die Lehre von der Schönheit nach Bonaventura* (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1964), p. 46.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Emma J. M. Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1953), p. 55.

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Bonaventure's concept of beauty—that through proportionality or symmetry, beauty effects a coming together of disparate elements, a unity in multiplicity. The two aspects of *aequalitas numerosa* are therefore organically related.

The beauty of the visible world as a whole is most effectively interpreted as a unity in multiplicity. Two problems present themselves, however, when a person attempts to grasp this beauty. First, no one person can grasp the whole of visible creation or the whole of history. Bonaventure suggests that a total perspective is available, nevertheless, through the vision that the Scriptures provide, for their vision extends from end to end of the world and of history.⁶⁸ Second, true unity cannot be found in the multiplicity of the created world. The model for unity in multiplicity is primarily the unity of three persons in the Trinity and then in the coincidence of absolute unity and infinite multiplicity in the Eternal Ideas. The world does offer a partial reflection of this absolute beauty in the multiplicity and variety of creatures.⁶⁹ However, this reflection consists not in the mere fact of the world's variety and multiplicity, but in the relation of that variety and multiplicity to the unity of the Word. Apart from the Word, the world is chaos.

The relationship between beauty and proportion, two members of the line of concepts based on exemplary causality, is direct: beauty consists in proportion. Two other members of that line, form and species, are rooted in proportion as the concrete relation of parts to a whole. However, the concepts of truth and number have a wider significance.

For Bonaventure, *number* refers to a broader concept than our arithmetic notion. It also refers to all ratios, harmonies, proportions, and even rhythms.⁷⁰ Hence number is the foundation of proportion. Bonaventure lists seven types of numbers in the passage just preceding the one quoted above.⁷¹ The first four kinds of number refer to our "apprehending numerical things" and our "delighting in numerical proportions." These are the rhythm or proportion of sounds, the rhythm of movements, the ratios of sense perception, and finally the pleasure these rhythms can give to the senses. The fifth and sixth kinds refer to our "judging irrefutably by the laws of numerical proportions." The fifth, *memoriales* or recorded numbers, makes number the law of the mind and of memory. The sixth kind, *judiciales* or judgmental numbers, is closely related to *contuitio*. It refers to the process of intellectual judgment or abstraction whereby things are known fully, and so in terms of the exemplary ideas in the Word. The act of judgment will be discussed in the context of *contuitio*. Here, it is important to note that

⁶⁸*Breviloquium*, prologue, no. 2, tome 5, p. 204.

⁶⁹Spargo, pp. 70-71.

⁷⁰Boehner, *Itinerarium*, p. 119, n. 11.

⁷¹*Itinerarium*, chap. 2, no. 10, pp. 58-61.

number in this sense refers simply to the relation between things and their exemplary ideas, that is, to their *truth*. So the concept of number includes the concept of truth. It is in this extended sense that number is considered the principal vestige leading to Wisdom.

The seventh and last kind of number in Bonaventure's catalog suggests an interesting direction to his thought. It bears less on the nature of the vestige than on the significance of art. These are the *numeri artificiales*, the artificial or artistic numbers. "They are the conceptions of the artist who, by an impression from the eternal reason or judicial numbers, through appropriate actions of the body . . . is able to express beautiful and well-proportioned things."⁷² This brief reference to art places artistic creativity in a special relation to the Eternal Art, suggesting that a theory of artistic inspiration might find a basis in Bonaventure's exemplarism, and that art and religious mysticism are for him analogous dimensions of man.⁷³

Exemplarism therefore looks upon material creatures as vestiges, as reflections of the dynamic process of emanation, exemplarity, and consummation. But it looks upon them primarily in terms of exemplary causality, and so in terms of their essential structures. The focus of an exemplaristic vision of material creatures would therefore be the visible form or pattern of the thing seen as reflecting the Word, as coming from God and returning to God.

Particular things and their distinctive characteristics, except insofar as those characteristics are instances of exemplarity, do not receive explicit treatment in Bonaventure's theory. However, there are in the passage quoted above a few examples of Bonaventure's use of the distinctive properties of specific things that will reveal the principle of exemplary causality at work. "The immense power extending itself in the diffusion of light . . . clearly portrays the immensity of the power . . . of the Triune God." The image of light radiating from its source is seen as a reflection of the infinite power of God, the fountain fullness, emanating forth his self-expression. ". . . And the efficiency [*efficacia*] of their inner uninterrupted and diffusive operations as manifest in the action of fire clearly portrays [the power of God]." The dynamism at the core of a flame, always burning outward yet renewed at the center, reflects the creative dynamism of the Trinity. In another passage, four kinds of diffusion together reflect the eternal generation of the Son by the Father: the diffusion of light from its source, of heat from fire, of a river from its source, and of rain from a cloud.⁷⁴ The exemplaristic vision applies right down to the level of the concrete behavior of material things.

⁷²Boehner, *Itinerarium*, p. 119; Spargo, pp. 128–29.

⁷³See also *De Reductione Artium*, nos. 12–14, tome 5, pp. 322–23. This aspect of Bonaventure's thought is investigated by Peter and Spargo, q.v.

⁷⁴*Hexaëmeron*, collation 11, no. 14, tome 5, p. 382.

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B. Nature's Return to God

The consummation of material creatures or their return to God is accomplished primarily through man's recognizing the vestiges of God in them and ascending through them as upon a ladder to the contemplation of God. It is accomplished secondarily because man embodies and brings with him all levels of creation, so that the material world participates in his ascent to God.

There are then two aspects of nature's return to God. We will treat first the process by which the material world is itself ordered, "weighted," to rise to God through participation in man. This process involves Bonaventure's notions of seminal reasons and of plurality of forms. We will then discuss man's recognition of the presence of God in the world, which concerns Bonaventure's theory of contuition.

1. *The ascent of material creation.*—"Insofar as matter is full of forms because of the seminal principles, and form is full of power because of its active potentialities . . . the plenitude of things clearly proclaims the same three attributes."⁷⁵ The seminal principles are active and positive potentialities which are inserted by God into matter. They are the essences or forms of all things which can be produced out of matter. While they are forms and so positive potentialities, they are incomplete and awaiting completion, "in potency" and awaiting actuality. The actuation of a seminal principle is analogous to the blooming of a rose from a bud: what is already there implicitly is made explicit; what is there in repose is awakened.⁷⁶ Bonaventure's concept of matter is therefore a dynamic and positive one: matter is not a passive potentiality, but it is pregnant with a multiplicity of positive possibilities⁷⁷ and bears within itself a kind of dim mirror image of the Eternal Art.

Matter is inclined or oriented toward form, and indeed lower forms contain within themselves the seminal principles of higher forms and are inclined toward them.⁷⁸ The material world is inclined toward existing in the highest form, the state of incarnate spirit: man.⁷⁹ There is a remarkable tendency in matter, therefore, to rise to ever higher forms.⁸⁰

The seminal principles endow matter with the potentiality and the inclination toward participation in man's state. But how does man himself allow for this kind of participation by lower forms in his own being? Here we come to Bonaventure's concept of plurality of form. In his view, there are many forms which work together for the perfection of a com-

⁷⁵*Itinerarium*, chap. 1, no. 14, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁶Boehner, *Itinerarium*, p. 115.

⁷⁷Gilson, p. 269.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

⁷⁹Gerken, p. 108.

⁸⁰See Ewert H. Cousins, "Teilhard de Chardin et saint Bonaventure," *Études Franciscaines* 19 (1969): 175-86.

plex being—and these forms are ordered to a unity because lower forms are subordinated to the higher. Hence for him the unity of a being is ensured not by the unicity of its form, as it is for Thomas Aquinas, but by the unity of the superior form which gives order to the inferior. In that way the concrete being of man includes the lower forms of vegetative and animal life, but the form of rational life gives order and unity to the whole being.⁸¹ Hence man not only is the highest form of material creation, but also recapitulates all the lower levels of creation. For that reason, the entire corporeal world participates through man in the return to God, and, to the extent that it is recapitulated in man, it can participate in his destiny to share the glory of God.⁸²

2. *Man's ascent through material creatures.*—The second way in which the material world returns to God is through man's recognition of God in the world, his ascent through creatures as upon a ladder in his return to God. Our primary concern here is Bonaventure's concept of *contuitio*.

Before we can discuss how man knows God in and through material creatures, however, it is important to have some idea of how he knows the material singular. In Bonaventure's theory, the individual is constituted by the concurrence or mutual appropriation of matter and form, and so *in itself* it is intelligible.⁸³ A problem arises, however, because he adopts the Aristotelian theory of abstraction to explain *man's* knowledge of the sensible world. The knowledge of a material thing by an immaterial power, such as an angel, is no problem for him, but he discovers that the process of abstraction inevitably forms from the singular a universal idea, precluding an intellectual grasp of the singular in itself.⁸⁴ Bonaventure does not attempt systematically to resolve this problem, but his interpreters find in his writings principles that would allow for an intellectual grasp of the singular that is not abstractive but intuitive—a theory explicitly developed by Duns Scotus. The most fruitful avenue of approach here is Bonaventure's insistence on the unity of the powers of the soul. If the powers of the soul are not separated but interpenetrate one another, then man's power of sensation—which is for Bonaventure a power of the soul—is penetrated throughout by intelligibility. Sensation then provides a cognitive grasp of the singular, but not an abstract or conceptual knowledge of its essence as singular.⁸⁵ It would be a reasonably accurate summary of Bonaventure's position that, while he excludes an abstractive knowledge of the singular, he presumes and

⁸¹Leo Veuthey, *S. Bonaventurae Philosophia Christiana* (Rome: Officium Libri Catholici, 1943), p. 162.

⁸²Shaefer, 1961, pp. 379–80.

⁸³Veuthey, pp. 152–54; see also Gilson p. 275.

⁸⁴1 *Sent.* dist. 39, articulus 1, quaest. 1, ad 2, tome 1, p. 689.

⁸⁵2 *Sent.* dist. 8, pt. 1, articulus 3, quaest. 2, ad 4, tome 2, p. 222; Gilson, pp. 323–27; Veuthey, p. 63; see also A. Pisvin, "L'Intuition Sensible selon S. Bonaventure," in *Scholastica Ratione Historico-Critica Instauranda, Acta Congressus Scholastici Internationalis* (Rome, 1951), pp. 374–75.

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allows for a kind of intuitive grasp of it not in its abstract nature but as present here and now, and apparently even in its concrete sensible appearance.

The concept of contuition, the act by which man is capable of seeing things in God and God through things, brings us into the context of Bonaventure's theories of knowledge, of philosophic certitude, and of illumination: an area of very wide extension. Since we are concerned with the role of material creatures in Bonaventure's exemplarism, our discussion of contuition will be limited to that context.

Much of Bonaventure's discussion of the knowledge of things in the Eternal Art concerns the foundation for our conviction of certitude regarding first principles, logical rules, and the like. But one aspect of his discussion concerns *judgment*, a concept we have encountered. Judgment is not the forming of a proposition or statement, but simply the act of forming an idea of a sensible thing, an idea which transcends place, time, and change.⁸⁶ The basis for this ideal knowledge of a concrete thing is not only the power of the mind as agent intellect as it was for those scholastics who held a strict abstraction theory of knowledge, but the presence to the mind of the Eternal Art as a kind of light which gives guidance and direction to our knowledge of the material creature.⁸⁷ This ideal knowledge is none other than the complete understanding of the essential structure of a thing, the *plena resolutio* discussed earlier. It is the comprehension of a thing in terms of its relationships to its causes, especially to its exemplary cause, its idea in the Eternal Art. For this reason, Bonaventure's theory of contuition can be understood as describing "a simultaneity of form in the created thing or mirror and in the Eternal Exemplar . . . an awareness of the ontological presence of God attained in the consciousness of being."⁸⁸ The kind of knowledge implied here is by no means a direct vision of the eternal ideas that is occasioned by a sense object which can then be abandoned. It is, rather, a steady look at the thing in itself—but at the thing seen precisely as *sign*, and so in the light of its relation to the exemplar which it reflects and signifies. The direct object of knowledge is the thing. The eternal idea is not clearly and directly known but is that by which and in the light of which the thing can be truly and fully known. The eternal idea is therefore really but indirectly apprehended in contuition. However, in this life—in the fallen state of man—the apprehension of the eternal ideas is not clear, but it is veiled, obscured, so that an absolutely complete knowledge of something is not readily available.⁸⁹

Contuition, therefore, simply presents the possibility of perceiving

⁸⁶*Lexique*, p. 54; *Itinerarium*, chap. 2, no. 9, pp. 56–57.

⁸⁷Boehner, *Itinerarium*, pp. 118–19; *De Scientia Christi*, quaest. 4, conclusion, tome 5, pp. 22–23.

⁸⁸Black, p. 272.

⁸⁹*De Scientia Christi*, quaest. 4, ad 22, tome 5, p. 26.

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things in their ultimate significance, in the Eternal Art which is the expression of the infinite fountain fullness of the Father and which is expressive of that infinite fullness in creatures. To see a thing in these terms, however, would be simply to see it as vestige: coming from God, patterned after the Word, and returning to God, so concretely recapitulating the creative dynamism that grounds each thing in the life of the Trinity. Contuition then would be a concrete vision of the ultimate significance of things in the economy of exemplarism.

C. Summary

The role of material creatures in the economy of exemplarism follows the same pattern of emanation, exemplarity, and consummation that marks every phase of Bonaventure's thought. Things are important and significant (in a very literal sense of that word) because they come forth from God as his expression. The inner structure of things, their three aspects corresponding to the three modes of causality constituting them in being, is a dynamic reflection of the Trinity. In turn, the outer structure of things, their form, proportion, and beauty, reflects the Word as the explicit expression and unity of the infinite creative power of the Father. The return of things to God completes this dynamic circle, following first the route of the dynamic rise of matter, created full of forms, through the various levels of being to the condition of incarnate spirit and consciousness in man, and then the route of the ascent of man through the variety of created signs to the contemplation of God.