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INTRODUCING BONAVENTURE

1 THE SOUL'S JOURNEY

SLIDE 1 - Title

SLIDE 2

*Bonaventure was the great theologian of the early Franciscans. He was the last flowering of Christian-Platonism before a new intellectual theology, inspired by Aristotle, became dominant in the west. To Bonaventure Love had precedence over Knowledge. I will introduce his two most important mystical texts –*

*The Soul's Journey into God - which affirms the value of Nature and shows how God can be known in Creation in many ways - while leading the soul to Truth beyond the Cloud of Unknowing – and*

*The Tree of Life – a series of carefully structured meditations on the gospel that use Imagination to help us find God in all things.*

*I hope to show that these texts are based on ancient traditions of the nature of the world, have meaning today and affirm the value of Images and Imagination.*

I'm not an academic, or a theologian. I am a retired librarian (most of the time a music librarian) and a sort of composer and historical researcher. This can only be one point of view of a very complex subject – and it will inevitably tend to focus on my personal hobby-horses. To me the key to understanding this world is music – and the idea of Harmony. This is my vocation. It may or may not be valid. But my personal interest in Music is closely bound to the question that has been running through everything I've been doing over the last fifty years – and that's "how does the world have meaning?"

This is what has led me to Bonaventure and the Franciscan tradition. I have come into this from outside, as it were, not from within a Christian world.

I will be looking at Bonaventure from outside. I am not assuming any Christian knowledge or faith. I am not attempting to talk about everything in his work – I am focusing on that question – "how does the world have meaning?" To me this 13<sup>th</sup> century theology is a flowering of what seems to be a combination of Platonic and Christian ways of seeing the Cosmos – though I believe these traditions have common roots – and I will also try to show how this medieval vision is a development of the Platonic tradition – in which the Cosmos –

and, importantly, the material world (whatever that means) is an integrated whole, a theophany, full of meaning, continuously in a state of Formation – a Performance.

### SLIDE 3

It's important to see Francis and Bonaventure in the context of their time.

The 12<sup>th</sup> century was an optimistic period in Western Europe. Nature was rediscovered. It was the time of the first gothic cathedrals – troubadours singing of love – a time of poetry and romance.

At the same time, especially in Southern France, heresy flourished. It's very difficult to define what was actually happening in the Albigensian, or Cathar, heresy. The religious ideas are enmeshed in politics – taken up by southern French nobles against the power of Paris – and enmeshed in the political power of Rome.

### SLIDE 4

The popular appeal of the heresy seems to have come from the ordinary people who saw the church as rich and corrupt. How much were the poor people of Languedoc concerned with theology? It's a very controversial issue.

It seems (and I can't be any more definite) that the Cathar heresy was dualist. There were two Gods – one purely good, the other, the creator of the material world, was evil.

If people are living a life of poverty and pain it's easy to see the appeal of a religion that says only spiritual things are good and this painful world is worthless. But what happens if people believe that this world and their own bodies are valueless - and they want to reject them – that death is an escape?

The Albigensian Crusade was happening at the same time as the building of Chartres Cathedral and other great expressions of the more optimistic outlook and during the lifetime of St Francis.

### SLIDE 5

St Francis was born as Giovanni de Bernardone in late 1181 or 1182. His father was a merchant, who was in France when his son was born – hence his nickname, Francesco. Francis's family was well off and cultured. He sang French troubadour songs and read romances. He became a knight and fought, and was imprisoned, in the gruesome local wars.

He heard a voice in a ruined church say "Rebuild my church" which he did – literally at first, and then by becoming the focus of a new religious movement that grew at enormous speed.

He abandoned his wealth and embraced Lady Poverty. To Francis the poverty of Christ and his disciples was an essential step towards God.

Rather than be a heretic Francis was a thorn in the flesh of the church by being completely orthodox in his attitudes. He wanted to live a simple life and preach simple Christianity. I think he was extremely intelligent. He avoided explaining anything that could be argued about. He just lived the life.

The question of poverty – Jesus and his disciples owned nothing – became a matter of controversy for the following century. The connection between Francis and Creation, or Nature, was a side-issue. He was not concerned with what we think of as ecological issues but with finding unity with God.

## SLIDE 6

His *Canticle of the Creatures* (praising God with Brother Sun, Sister Moon, the stars and the elements) certainly sees the whole world as unity - including Sister Death - it's about living in a new Eden – a return to a state in which everything is in harmony with God.

The Franciscans loved imagery of nature, and imagery of all kinds – teaching through art, music and feeling and emphasising the goodness of Creation.

## SLIDE 7

Bonaventure was born, as Giovanni di Fidanza in Bagnoregio in 1221, three years before the death of St Francis.

Bonaventure became the seventh Minister General of the Franciscan Order at a time when it was torn by opposing factions which he worked to reconcile.

The arguments about poverty – should the friars – and the church - own anything – were at their height – and a new intellectualism was beginning to dominate theology – an analytical approach that would make God more and more remote from Creation – and lead (in the western church) to new ideas that would devalue the material world as much as the supposed Cathar dualism had done.

This question of the relationship of God (whatever that means) and Creation is critically important now. How much has religion affected our attitude to nature? Or has our desire to exploit nature affected our religious attitudes?

Bonaventure stands at a turning point in history. He was the one who would have to justify St Francis's simplicity to increasingly intellectual theologians – to a world that was beginning to be dominated by an increasingly analytical form of Aristotelianism.

## SLIDE 8

At the start of the 12<sup>th</sup> century the whole of Creation was a theophany. We could live in a world where everything had meaning – and God was present in everything. This world was not a “creation”, in the sense of a thing made - long ago and separated from God - but it was something that flowed from God, never detached – and God was also within us.

Everything in Bonaventure flows from Francis.

Bonaventure’s theology is unified.

(See Ewart H Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites*, Franciscan Press, 1978)

It is as if everything he wrote is one great work. Everything is unified by a simple truth – everything is centred on Christ Crucified.

(See Ilia Delio, *Crucified Love. Bonaventure’s mysticism of the crucified Christ*, Franciscan Media, 1998)

All theology is centred in the cross –

## SLIDE 9

The Cross, for Bonaventure, is a point at which Heaven and Earth meet, God is united with Creation – the timeless intersects time. I will look at this, as a symbol, in more detail in my second talk which will focus on Bonaventure’s book of imaginative meditations, *The Tree of Life*.

Bonaventure was a contemporary of the great intellectual theologian Thomas Aquinas, but he had very different ideas. He was influenced by the first Franciscan theologian, Alexander of Hales and by Robert Grosseteste – both of them English – and by the more Platonic theology that was inherited from St Augustine.

## SLIDE 10

Aquinas has so dominated western theology that it can be surprising to discover how different Bonaventure is – while still being as “orthodox”. There are, in effect, two great traditions in the western church. Bonaventure was neglected and Thomas was revered as the great Christian philosopher – especially after 1879 when Pope Leo XIII affirmed his importance.

Aquinas’s theology was intellectual and analytical – Aristotelian. Bonaventure was certainly an intellectual - but his most famous works are about images, symbols, feeling and imagination

## SLIDE 11

Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, makes Aquinas and Bonaventure equals in heaven. Aquinas speaks in praise of St Francis and Bonaventure speaks in praise of St Dominic, founder of Aquinas's order.

(See Dante, *Divine Comedy: Paradise*, Cantos 11 and 12)

For Bonaventure love leads beyond knowledge. Aquinas believed the opposite. This difference has a considerable effect on Bonaventure's work. As a follower of Francis he believes God speaks through love and feeling and not only to intellectuals and philosophers.

But of course - BOTH MIGHT BE EQUALLY TRUE! .

#### SLIDE 12

Contemporary Franciscans have rediscovered Bonaventure – especially his attitude to Creation - as something that is happening rather than happened at the beginning – a flowing, evolving, unfinished Creation. In this theology Evolution becomes an essential feature of the Christian worldview. This was the great theme of the 20thc Jesuit theologian Teilhard de Chardin, who was criticised by the catholic church in his lifetime – but is now being re-evaluated. Today, Teilhard seems to be the successor to Bonaventure.

#### SLIDE 13

Connected to this sense of evolution in Bonaventure is a subtly different attitude to Sin. Much of western theology is tied to the idea of original sin – that people inherit sin in their human natures, from conception. This has never been a fixed doctrine in the eastern church – and Bonaventure, and later Duns Scotus, had a more positive view of humanity.

This even extends to the Incarnation. To the Franciscans God would have been born into this world even if Adam had not sinned.,

#### SLIDE 14

The contemporary Franciscan, Ilia Delio, said

...for Bonaventure, the incarnation is willed for its own sake and not for the sake of a lesser good. The incarnation is a free gift of God (and not something God *had* to do), a mystery of cosmic completion.

Christ is not ordered to us but we are ordained to Christ; creation is made for Christ. That is, Christ does not save us *from* the world; rather, Christ is the reason *for* the world. By reversing the order of sin and incarnation, Bonaventure showed that the purpose of humanity is to shape created reality into the mystery of Christ.

(<https://christogenesis.org/atonement-and-evolution/>)

“Christ is the reason *for* the world” might seem a difficult idea for those “outside” this tradition – but we could reverse it – “The Reason for the world is Christ” – or “the Word” – The Word is the meaning, and Reason, within things.

#### SLIDE 15

Bonaventure writes with a sense of desperation - because the intellectual approach was taking over. This is clearly stated in his last work, *The Hexaemeron, or Collations on the Six days of Creation*. He warns of the philosophers. What he meant was that the rediscovery of the works of Aristotle, or, more accurately, Arab commentaries on Aristotle’s works (this was a time of very close connections between Islamic and Christian thought) was encouraging people to have over-intellectual ideas of God. God becomes detached from the world.

To the new theologians God was unknowably remote – and this is very important to us – remote from Creation – Creation becomes an OBJECT – something detached from God – something “out there” to examine intellectually. God, they would say, cannot be experienced in Nature.

The consequences of this were disastrous - as we can see today.

The separation of God from Nature became wider in the Reformation. To Luther the idea that Nature was God’s Book – part of scripture – was impossible - as he insisted that scripture was the only authority of the church and had only one true meaning. If Nature was also scripture everyone would find their own meanings. Of course Nature could still be Good – but perhaps with the idea that was made *for* us – for our use – but our real world was Heaven.

The medieval attitude to scripture – both written scripture and creation – was very different. There were many layers of meaning. People didn’t think “literally.”

Creation, to Francis and Bonaventure, was not an object. It was part of us – it lived within our souls – and it was not detached from God. God was present in everything. Everything had meaning. Everything was a theophany – a revelation of God.

#### SLIDE 16

One of the most important influences on Bonaventure’s work is the fifth century writer known as Pseudo-Dionysius. Pseudo-Dionysius wrote in the character of a student of St Paul – and so his work was treated as an important and divinely inspired source. In reality the author may have been a follower of the late Platonist Proclus. The relationship of Pseudo-Dionysius and Platonism is complex. Martin Luther dismissed him as a fake - the correct dating of the texts was known by the 16<sup>th</sup> century – and Luther disliked the Platonic influence – but very recent studies have seen the fifth century writer not as a Platonist

writing as a Christian but as Christian writing in Platonic terms for a Neo-Platonist audience. In rejecting Pseudo-Dionysius we might be rejecting authentic Christian tradition.

Pseudo-Dionysius writes of both affirmative (kataphatic) and negative (apophatic) spirituality. God is both known in Creation and also beyond Creation. Bonaventure and the Franciscans rejoiced in Creation as a theophany – a sign and a communication from God – and so *The Soul's Journey into God* combines affirmative spirituality with negative spirituality. It shows how God is in all things – in Creation, in ourselves – yet is *also* beyond all that is knowable, as the absolute simplicity. Our knowledge of God in Creation inspires us to contemplate the simple God beyond Creation – and with that knowledge of the divine Unity we can look again at the world with new eyes.

The well-known English spiritual masterpiece, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, written a hundred years later, is also inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius but, significantly, focuses only on the negative spirituality. The idea of Creation as theophany was already fading away in the west.

Bonaventure's book *The Soul's Journey* is complex and concentrated – and needs to be read with an understanding of how the universe was seen at the time – but it is, I feel, startlingly important as a statement of the value of Creation – the Cosmos, Nature and the Soul – and of the relationship of everything to its Source – which, to Bonaventure, is a very Platonic idea of God, inspired by Pseudo-Dionysius – a God of absolute simplicity – beyond knowing yet known in everything – beyond knowing but known in Love.

## PROLOGUE

### SLIDE 17

*The Soul's Journey into God* begins with the author on retreat at La Verna, the mountain where St Francis received the stigmata. Bonaventure contemplates the seraph which Francis saw in a vision, which embraced within its six wings the figure of Christ on the Cross.

(All quotations from these texts are from: Bonaventure, ed. Ewart Cousins, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, Life of St Francis*, Paulist Press (Classics of Western Spirituality series), 1993)

Bonaventure sees the seraph as the pattern of his book – the six wings are six steps on the ladder to knowledge of God – from God's signs in Creation, through God's signs within us, to God beyond all worldly knowledge.

This is not a purely intellectual exercise.

He tells us that we should not:

... believe that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion ...  
knowledge without love, understanding without humility ...

(Bonaventure: *The Journey of the Mind to God*. Op. cit.)

Bonaventure asks us to look at the world through our senses, through faith and in reason.  
In Created things we can see the imprints, or vestiges of the Creator:

The Creator's supreme power, wisdom and benevolence shine forth in created  
things... (P64)

## SLIDE 18

To Bonaventure, the Source of All Being is source of endlessly outpouring love, which flows  
into an infinitely varied Creation.

Creation ... is like a beautiful song that flows in the most excellent of harmonies but  
it is a song that God freely desires to sing into the vast spaces of the universe.

(Quoted in Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure*, New City Press, 2012)

Though we enjoy the performance real joy is not in the music or the performance but  
something beyond it - that draws us to God.

## SLIDE 19

### CHAPTER ONE

Bonaventure begins the stages of the ascent into God with the contemplation of God  
through his vestiges (footprints or imprints) in the universe

From all this, one can gather that  
From the creation of the world  
The invisible attributes of God are clearly seen  
Being understood through the things that are made.  
And so those who do not wish to heed these things,  
And to know bless and love God in all of them  
Are without excuse  
For they are unwilling to be transported  
Out of darkness  
Into the marvellous light of God.

And these lights in creation – these signs of God in the world - inspire us...

...to re-enter the mirror of our mind in which divine realities shine forth.

The first part Soul's Journey is a catalogue of all the ways in which we can know God in Creation. This is exhaustive – and even more inclusive than it appears. It's important to remember that Bonaventure was writing at a time when it was common wisdom that the whole of Creation was a sign of God and that everything had meaning. We have to read it in the light of the ancient Cosmos – the pattern of Creation that was taken for granted.

#### SLIDE 20

The material world was a point at the centre of a series of heavenly spheres. It's very important to realise that what was called "Earth" was the entire material world. (This is also true in the Lord's Prayer – "In earth as it is in heaven means in the material world as it is in heaven. Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was no concept of other stars and planets being physical objects. The planets, moving on their spheres, were not physical objects but spiritual beings that conveyed life from God, who was beyond the angels, who were beyond the stars.

The many points which Bonaventure makes in his book should be seen in this context.

We can consider things in contemplation (in this case he means intellectually) - and in an Aristotelian way we can

...see in them weight ...number, and measure, mode species and order, substance, power and operation.

From these, as from a vestige, we can rise to knowledge of the immense power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator.

The second way of considering the vestiges is through faith...

...by faith we believe that *the world was fashioned by the Word of life* (Heb. 11:3)

In the third way – that of investigating by reason - one sees that some things merely exist, others exist and live, others exist, live and discern...

Some things are material, others partly material and partly spiritual, others are purely spiritual...

We can see that some things are changeable and corruptible, some things (like the heavenly bodies) are changeable and incorruptible – and that there are things that unchangeable and incorruptible.

The things that are changeable and corruptible are everything in the material world in which we live – a world of constant change, subject to chance and accident, sometimes chaotic, sometimes beautiful – and beautiful because it changes – and always drawn by love to seek Unity – even in death.

The unchanging and incorruptible things are the eternal laws of Creation, the things of the heavens – Truth, Justice, Beauty.

The changeable and incorruptible things are the stars.

And these are not what we think of as stars and planets – these are the mysterious signs that we see in the sky, sun, moon, planets and stars, which move but which are incorruptible beings, passing influences from God to the world.

Bonaventure is very forthright in his language:

Whoever, therefore, is not enlightened

By such splendour of created things

Is blind;

...whoever does not discover the First Principle from such clear signs

Is a fool.

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## CHAPTER TWO

Chapter Two looks at how we might contemplate God in the perceptible world.

It should be noted that this world, which is called the macrocosm, enters our soul, which is called the smaller world through the doors of the five senses as we perceive, enjoy and judge sensible things. (p69)

Our individual souls share their form with the Soul of the World, which is the pattern of the Cosmos as a whole, as described by Plato in his *Timaeus*. This was one of the only works of Plato to be known in western Europe in the Middle Ages but it was of critical importance because it was seen as Greek parallel to the Creation story of Genesis – and had been seen in this way by Jewish philosophers at the time of Christ.

Plato makes it clear that this worldview is older – inherited from Pythagoras – and some would say today that these elements that seem most Platonic or Pythagorean are actually from far more ancient sources – common roots – and that these are the keys to this shared wisdom - which would make their rejection by later theologians a disaster.

(For example, see: Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism, an introduction*, SPCK, 2011)

Because our own soul is the cosmos within us it can be attuned to the whole. It can resonate - but to the Platonists matter gets in the way – or, to the Christians, sin.

The material things of nature, he explains, are made of the traditional four elements – Earth, Air, Fire and Water.

## SLIDE 21

There are also spiritual substances – souls and heavenly spirits -

Which the philosophers call intelligences and we angels

These govern the world –

...by their receiving from the First Cause, God, an influx of power which, in turn, they distribute in their task of governing...According to theologians, the ruling of the universe is attributed to the angels in relation to the work of restoration under the dominion of the most high God. Hence they are called *ministering spirits, sent for the sake of those who inherit salvation* (Heb:14) (p.70)

The angels exist beyond the cosmos itself but in this living, dynamic universe they also communicate their influences through the planets.

The lowest order, the Angels, influence the Moon, archangels influence Mercury and so on...to the Seraphim and the outermost sphere, the primum mobile. We can see this in Dante's *Paradise* – the best guidebook to the medieval Cosmos.

(Dante tr. Mark Musa, *Divine Comedy*, Vol. III *Paradise* Penguin 1986 p.25)

## SLIDE 22

Pseudo-Dionysus in the 5<sup>th</sup> century had united ancient biblical traditions of angelic hierarchies with the hierarchies of Gods which his possible teacher Proclus described as the means through which the One, the Source of All Being was linked to Creation. Proclus had tried to give all the many pagan gods a place in this hierarchy. The angels may have taken the place of many of those gods – but not of the images attached to the stars and planets which still had meaning in the Christian-Platonist view of the cosmos.

(Today we might think of the stars as symbols of archetypal qualities in the Soul and in all of Nature – or of the fundamental harmonies in everything. The Church, by the way, never condemned Astrology as the study of the patterns of Nature – they only condemned the idea that the stars controlled fate – as we, and Creation, has Free Will. Dante, in his *Convivio*, relates the Seven Liberal Arts – the structure of all worldly knowledge – to the qualities of the planets. They are the prime Images from which Images flow – like the colours of the rainbow. Astrology was an important part of Franciscan – as sophisticated scientific observation and as an aspect of the belief in the meaning of the cosmos.)

We apprehend all these things, all these kinds of being, through imagination – and this leads to pleasure and the apprehension of beauty (defined by Bonaventure, following Augustine) as harmonious symmetry – and our judgement derives intellectual ideas from the images given us through our senses...

...and these lead us to the understanding of eternal truths- the unchanging incorruptible things – and these include the key to the law which guides Creation – which is Number.

Thus “number is the foremost exemplar in the mind of the Creator.” (Boethius, *de institutione arithmetica*, I, 2.) (p.75)

It’s easier to grasp this if we read “number” as “harmony.” Here Bonaventure is actually following St Augustine ‘s writings on music. He writes at length about the different kinds of Number that reveal God (pp74-75) – which all stem from the Pythagorean idea of Harmony.

Harmony, the qualities of the stars, Images, all derive from Number.

This was the key realisation in that very ancient time – the source of Pythagorean and Hebrew wisdom - that there was an inherent law which guided Nature – Number or Harmony. Everything shared this law – and – everything came from a common source – Unity.

### SLIDE 23

Everything in Creation flows from Unity and everything leads us back to “the Father as to the fountain-source”

If, therefore, all things that can be known generate a likeness of themselves, they manifestly proclaim that in them as in mirrors we can see the eternal generation of the Word, as Image and Son, eternally emanating from God the Father. (p73)

...For every creature is by its nature a kind of effigy and likeness of the eternal wisdom...

But especially one which in the book of Scripture has been elevated through the spirit of prophecy to prefigure spiritual things...

In other words - things can also have a symbolic meaning – symbols unite the object with the thing signified - a mountain might be also a Holy Mountain - a river a sacred river – Mountain and River are also symbols or images of a truth beyond the objects and images...

### SLIDE 24

## CHAPTER THREE

The third stage of *the Soul's Journey* explains how God is known in our own human faculties, or natural powers.

The two previous stages, by leading us into God through his vestiges through which he shines forth in all creatures, have led us to the point of re-entering into ourselves, that is, into our mind, where the divine image shines forth. (P.79)

God is known in the Soul through the trinity of powers – Intellect, Memory and Reason. These, says Bonaventure, are the like the light of the Menorah, the candle lamp in the Temple which

...glows upon the face of our mind, in which the image of the most blessed Trinity shines in splendor. (p.79)

See, therefore, how close the soul is to God and how, in their operations, the memory leads to eternity, the understanding to truth and the power of choice to the highest good. (p.84)

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SLIDE 25

The fourth stage of *The Soul's Journey* speaks of the gifts of grace – the ways we can bring the soul closer to God. God, the first principle, is within us – but we don't recognise it. We are lured away with the distractions of sin – just as Platonists see the soul is distracted from God by matter. Sin is nothing to do with any arbitrary moral laws – it's the tendency to be self-centred, separate ourselves from God – or to desire to be like God. It's that which prevents us seeking "inner sweetness and spiritual joy" – or that which makes us unhappy.

From Bonaventure's Christian viewpoint it is Christ who leads us from this darkness to light.

Christ says:

I am the door. If anyone enters through me, he will be saved; and he will go out and find pastures. (John 10:9)

When, in St John's Gospel, Christ says "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" this is, logically true, because Christ is speaking as the Incarnate God. From a Christian point of view that God within us who leads us upwards is, by definition, the Word, which is Christ. If we believe that we all have that aspect of the Deity within us it is possible to believe that we all must have this Way within us – and we can know this and recognise this even if we do not use these words and images.

The soul needs to follow the three stages of the mystical way – Purification, Illumination and Perfection.

Of course, this is no easy task. Bonaventure's *The Tree of Life* is a system of mediation which can lead us through this process - and his *Life of St Francis* a carefully structured picture of someone who achieved it.

If we follow these workings of grace

...our spirit is made hierarchical...

Bonaventure is using the mystical language of Pseudo-Dionysius. In a hierarchy of this mystical kind everything, lower or higher, receives the gifts of God – like the glasses of a champagne fountain all filling with the golden wine – but here the spirit is also taking on the form of the Holy City – the pattern of the Cosmos -

The soul

...by entering itself, enters the heavenly Jerusalem.

God draws us closer – until

## SLIDE 26

Filled with all these intellectual illuminations,  
our mind like the house of God  
is inhabited by divine Wisdom;  
it is made a daughter of God, his spouse, and friend,  
it is made  
a member of Christ... (p. 93)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SLIDE 27

The fifth section of the Soul's Journey encourage us to contemplate God, beyond all these images, as "Divine Unity, through its primary name which is Being".

The pure and absolute Being...is totally within all things and totally outside them and thus "is an intelligible sphere and whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."

(p100)

(This famous definition was often attributed to the legendary sage Hermes Trismegistus, but first appears in this form in the 12<sup>th</sup> century writings of Alan of Lille, and as "infinite sphere" rather than "intelligible sphere" in a much older *Book of the 24 Philosophers*.)

## SLIDE 28

### CHAPTER SIX

The sixth stage of the Soul's Journey speaks of God as Trinity "in its name which is Good."

The Trinity is the Source of outpouring Love.

I would say that this sense of outpouring active love is the single most important – and most distinctive - theme in Franciscan theology.

This theology of Love was developed in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century by theologians of the Victorine school, particularly by Thomas Gallus – and adopted by Bonaventure. God was a Trinity because, if God was Good, God must also be Love and Love needs to be in relationship,

(See Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, Independent Publishers Group, 1996 and *The Flowering of Mysticism*, Independent Publishers Group, 1998)

In the sixth chapter of *The Soul's Journey* Bonaventure launches into rapturous and complex language in describing the Trinity, which is both a Unity and also supreme communicability and relationship.

Creation pours from this working of Love in the Trinity. Creation, Bonaventure said, is...

...the fountain-fullness of God's Being.

Of course, this is simply a way of thinking about it – but what it tells us is that Creation is alive, flowing, dancing, communicating meaning. It is inseparable from God, as water flowing from a spring or light from the sun – and that God is known in relationships. The world isn't made of separate objects – whether people or trees or meringues – but things have meaning in relationship.

In philosophical terms Creation is not "made" – it emanates – but Bonaventure uses this Platonic term to mean that Creation flows from Love, as a divine gift, rather than as necessity.

He writes:

## SLIDE 29

This the whole of our metaphysics: it is about emanation, exemplarity, and consummation; that is, to be illumined by spiritual ways and to be led back to the

supreme being...Any person who is unable to consider how things originate, and how they are led back to their end, and how God shines forth in them, is incapable of achieving true understanding.

(Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*. Zachary Hayes O.F.M. (Translation with Introduction and Commentary), New York, Franciscan Institute Publications, 1996.)

### SLIDE 30

Creation is process of emanation and return. Everything flows from God in love - and everything has the desire within it to return to God.

Bonaventure sees...

Divine Love as the power that draws all things to Unity in the Mind of God.

(Joseph Milne, *Metaphysics and the Cosmic Order*. Temenos Academy, 2008.)

Everything seeks Unity. Everything returns to God by finding God's Unity in itself – and finding unity – and peace – with other things.

God is communication. God communicates through the outpouring of Love.

But even these words - are only words.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SLIDE 31

In the end of *The Soul's Journey* Bonaventure takes us beyond words – the seven chapters are like the seven days of Creation – we have reached rest and unity on the seventh day.

In this passing over,  
If it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be left behind  
And the height of our affection must be transformed into God.

*The Soul's Journey into God* shows us how God can be known in Creation, in ourselves and yet the transcendent Source of All Being is beyond all that we know.

...little importance should be given to the tongue, but much to inner joy; little importance should be given to words and to writing, but all to the gift of God, that is, the Holy Spirit.

Little or no importance should be given to creation,  
But all to the creative essence.  
The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... (p.113)

Bonaventure ends with a prayer taken from Pseudo-Dionysius:

...in this state of unknowing be restored, insofar as is possible, to unity with him who is above all essence and knowledge...

For transcending yourself and all things,  
By the immeasurable and absolute ecstasy of a pure mind  
Leaving behind all things  
And freed from all things you will ascend  
To the superessential ray  
Of the divine darkness. (p.115)

Of course, this unity might be touched – if it is touched - for just a moment – but if we achieve this moment of vision we can return to this world and see it as it really is.

### SLIDE 30

This is the world that Bonaventure has shown us – the world that the great gothic cathedrals demonstrate –

And everything in the Cosmos, from the angels, the stars to all things in Nature, emanates from the Source of All Being and communicates Truth, Beauty – and the Source itself because everything is an expression of the Word - and always has been, though we might not see it. This intimate unity of God and Creation is reaffirmed by the idea of the Incarnation.

The whole world is a unity – a performance – and this is how Francis was able to sing with Brother Sun, Sister Moon and the creatures of all the elements – and also Sister Death – and the Performance is UNFOLDING IN TIME – a very important factor, regardless of when we might imagine it all began!

Everything comes from that absolute unity and simplicity – which is also within us.

We are microcosms of the cosmos – we share – we participate in the Performance of Creation.

We know the world through love rather than intellectual exercises – because Love is the nature of that Source of All Being – Everything flows from that source as an excess of Love.

We know this in our memory, reason and understanding – which are the image of God – and we experience it through our senses –

If Creation is a song, a performance, how can we become better performers? How can we escape the distractions that prevent us from seeing God in All and prevent us from following the calling of love that draws us to the transcendent God?

That will be the subject of my second talk.