

## THEOLOGY, METAPHYSICS, AND THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

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*The article explores the relationship between theology and metaphysics in the light of Bonaventure's theology. His trinitarian theology grounded in self-communicative love and ontology of personhood renders new insight into his metaphysics of Christ the center. The emergence of creation ex amore through the centrality of the divine Word enables Bonaventure to recast metaphysics in terms of love. The import of his metaphysics of love grounded in the centrality of Christ is discussed in view of contemporary Christian life.*

**K**ARL RAHNER, ACUTELY AWARE of the modern philosophical impact on metaphysics, claimed that metaphysical reflection is so fundamental to theology that, "should all philosophers declare the death of metaphysics, he would simply create the necessary philosophical tools within his own theology."<sup>1</sup> Rahner was not alone in his conviction. His contemporary Hans Urs von Balthasar said that, if Christian proclamation and theology made claims of absoluteness on everything that is, then its roots must be in both the historical and metaphysical spheres.<sup>2</sup> "Metaphysics," Walter Kasper writes, "is the name given to the science which enquires not about individual beings or realms of being but about being as such and as a whole. Talk about God presupposes the metaphysical question about being and at the same time keeps this question alive."<sup>3</sup> Balthasar viewed philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, ed. Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 47; Elizabeth T. Groppe, "Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Contribution to Trinitarian Theology," *Theological Studies* 63 (2002) 754.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 4 of 7, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Brian McNeil et al., ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989) 12.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 15.

inquiry as not only pertinent to the task of theology but as integral to Christian life: "The Christian is the person who by virtue of his faith is compelled to philosophize,"<sup>4</sup> that is, who retains an openness to the meaning of the whole in a way that serves the humanness of humanity and nonhuman creation. What these theologians agree on is that theology cannot be divorced from metaphysics, even though the postmodern turn has tried to bury metaphysics in the crypt of modernity.

In light of the modern separation between theology and metaphysics, Rahner's publication of *The Trinity* in 1967 sparked a new interest in the renewal of trinitarian theology. It is here that Rahner put forth his famous axiom: "The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity,"<sup>5</sup> to try to restore a Christian understanding of God to the practice of Christian life. Although this axiom has been subject to criticism for, among others things, failing properly to distinguish God and world,<sup>6</sup> Rahner's axiom provided a theological-metaphysical ground to salvation history by highlighting the mystery of God in creation.

Catherine LaCugna, deeply influenced by Rahner's trinitarian theology, sought to establish an integral relationship between ontology and soteriology through a renewed understanding of the Trinity. Like Rahner, LaCugna aimed to retrieve a credible trinitarian God for Christian life, not only by grounding salvation history in its source but by identifying the relationship between the being of God (ontology) and the action of God (soteriology) leading to a shared life between God and creature. Both Rahner and LaCugna were keenly interested in the authenticity of Christian life and viewed history as the revelation of trinitarian life. Salvation history, they claimed, is metaphysical by nature.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ* 15.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, rev. ed., trans. Joseph Donceel, intro. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: Crossroad, 1997; orig. ed. 1970) 22.

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Groppe succinctly describes some of the problems attributed to Rahner's axiom, especially the tendency to view it as a strict ontological identity (the immanent Trinity *is* the economic Trinity) which would lead to pantheism. She indicates, however, that Rahner's intent was not to collapse God into history but to indicate that "in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit we encounter not something distinct from God, nor something separate from God . . . but *God* in God's own self-communication" ("Catherine Mowry LaCugna's Contribution to Trinitarian Theology" 735–41, esp. 738). Elsewhere LaCugna points out that the terms "immanent Trinity" and "economic Trinity" are theological constructs that refer to a set of relations, one internal, the other external, to God. There are not two sets of relations, she indicates, but "only one type of divine relationality with two distinct forms, one eternal, the other historical" ("Re-Conceiving the Trinity as the Mystery of Salvation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 [1985] 10–11).

In her description of Rahner's trinitarian theology, LaCugna wrote that "his theology as a whole is a profound meditation on the essential unity of 'theology' and economy, premised on the idea that God is by nature self-communicating."<sup>7</sup> LaCugna claimed that "Rahner's theology of self-communication appears to have roots in Bonaventure's vision of the self-diffusive God."<sup>8</sup> While a critical study has yet to be made of Bonaventure's influence on Rahner, there is indeed a compatibility of thought. Bonaventure's trinitarian theology not only anticipated Rahner's *grundaxiom*, but Bonaventure developed a theological metaphysics of Christ the center that integrates the immanent and economic Trinity in such a way that Incarnation discloses the essential nature of God as love. Bonaventure's metaphysics is based on a theology of the divine Word by which the two mysteries of Trinity and Christ are intrinsically connected. Christology is a function of theology, and theology has its meaning in Christology. The self-revelation of the Trinity in history is the expression of the divine Word in whom God "speaks" Godself in all things. Creation bears a congruent relationship to the Word of God so that Christ is truly the center and goal of creation and hence its metaphysical center.

This article's purpose is to examine Bonaventure's contribution to the development of a theological metaphysics, especially in view of a renewed emphasis on Trinity and history. I will first examine Bonaventure's trinitarian theology with its affinity to Cappadocian theology<sup>9</sup> and then explore the integral relationship between Trinity and creation that Bonaventure described, as this relationship is centered in the Word of God. I will then examine how Bonaventure arrived at a metaphysics of Christ the center through his theology of the Word. Finally, I will discuss the import of Bonaventure's metaphysics in light of Rahner's *grundaxiom* and draw out the implications of a Christ-centered metaphysics for Christian life today.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) 210.

<sup>8</sup> While LaCugna notes that "Rahner's theology of self-communication appears to have roots in Bonaventure's vision of the self-diffusive God" (LaCugna, *God For Us* 233 n. 4), there is little evidence to support this claim. Although Rahner published two articles on Bonaventure, one on the spiritual senses, the other on mystical ecstasy, neither article examined divine self-communication.

<sup>9</sup> In his exposition of Bonaventure's theological metaphysics, Hayes points out that "Bonaventure's trinitarian theology bears stronger affinities with that of the Greek Fathers than does that of Aquinas," a position affirmed by Ewert Cousins. See Zachary Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics in the Thought of Bonaventure," in *Celebrating the Medieval Heritage: A Colloquy on the Thought of Aquinas and Bonaventure*, *Journal of Religion* 58 Supplement (1978), ed. David Tracy (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978) S82-S96, at S88; Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1978) 44.

### A TRINITY OF LOVE

One of the most striking features of Bonaventure's theology is that he never gave an extended treatment of the nature of God independent of the doctrine of Trinity. In his commentary on Peter Lombard's sentences, he offered one brief question on the oneness of God, before proceeding directly to the question of plurality of persons.<sup>10</sup> He began his consideration of the Trinity not by examining the individual persons as such but by exploring how we move from the unified nature of God to the existence of three persons. His point of departure is rooted in the religious experience of Francis of Assisi, who, because of his experience of Christ, emphasized the nature of God as a good and loving Father.<sup>11</sup>

Bonaventure's dynamic Trinity takes as its two principal guides Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of Saint Victor. Following Dionysius, Bonaventure considered the name of God in the Old Testament as Being: "I am who am" (Exod 3:14). In the New Testament, however, God reveals Godself as Good: "No one is good but God alone" (Lk 18:19).<sup>12</sup> According to Dionysius, the highest good is self-diffusive (*bonum est diffusivum sui*) and gives rise to being.<sup>13</sup> Richard claimed that the highest good is love, and love is personal and communicative.<sup>14</sup> For him, charity is the supreme form of the good and the basis for showing the necessity of a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Since charity necessarily involves a relation to another, there can be no charity where there is no plurality. The perfect communication of love, according to Richard, must involve no less than three persons, since a perfect self-communication would not be possible if God were only one person, and two persons could only share love for one another. Hence, "if love by nature involves a relation to another, the highest perfection of love

<sup>10</sup> According to Hayes, Bonaventure presents "the development of the attributes of the divine nature . . . within the framework of the trinitarian question" (Zachary Hayes, introduction to *Saint Bonaventure's Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Works of Saint Bonaventure 3, ed. George Marcil (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1979) 32 n. 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>12</sup> In his classic *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (hereafter cited as *Itin.*), Bonaventure compared John Damascene and Pseudo-Dionysius on the names of God as "being" and "good": see *Itin.* 5.2 (5:307) (throughout, I use the critical edition of Bonaventure's *Opera omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. [Quaracchi: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902]; numbers cited refer to chapter and paragraph in Bonaventure's text; numbers in parentheses refer to volume and page numbers in the Quaracchi edition).

<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 4.1 (PG 3.694). For an excellent discussion of the tradition see Ewert H. Cousins, "The Notion of the Person in the *De trinitate* of Richard of St. Victor" (Ph. D. diss., Fordham University, 1966).

<sup>14</sup> Richard of St. Victor, *De trinitate* 3.14–19 (PL 196.924–27).

demands that each of the two persons in love share that love with yet another.”<sup>15</sup> As Zachary Hayes notes, “there must be in God not only a *dilectum* but a *condilectum* as well. *Condilectio* is found where a third is loved by two in harmony.”<sup>16</sup>

Bonaventure drew from Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of St. Victor to describe the Trinity as self-diffusive goodness marked by a community of persons in love. The life of the Trinity originates eternally from the first divine person, the Father, who, as first, is infinitely fecund and thus “fountain fullness” of goodness. This fountain fullness expresses itself perfectly in the one who is Son and Word. This process reaches its consummation in the love between them, which is the Spirit. Love, therefore, is the energizing principle of the dynamic life of the Trinity. Janet Kvamme writes: “It is love that brings the persons together in unity; through the generosity of love the divinity emanates and the divine persons proceed. Love flows out from the fountain fullness of fecundity.”<sup>17</sup> She indicates that the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity flow from a generosity of love and of willing, “originating in the One who is boundless and inexhaustible love.”<sup>18</sup>

Bonaventure’s trinitarian theology is an “ontology of personhood,” a term described by John Zizioulas and championed by Catherine LaCugna.<sup>19</sup> Zizioulas views personhood as ontological; it is not “a quality added onto being,” but is “constitutive” of being. Thus, as Michael Meerson states: “God’s ultimate reality cannot be located in substance (what it is in itself) but only in personhood: what God is toward another. God exists as the mystery of persons in communion. God exists hypostatically in freedom and ecstasies. Only in communion can God be what God is, and only in communion can God be at all. . . . Since love produces communion among persons, love causes God to be who God is.”<sup>20</sup> Bonaventure himself never used the term “ontology of personhood,” but his emphasis on the

<sup>15</sup> See Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 15–17.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

<sup>17</sup> Janet C. Kwamme, “The *Fontalis Plenitudo* in Bonaventure as a Symbol for His Metaphysics” (Ph.D. diss., Fordham University, 1999) 170.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 175.

<sup>19</sup> See LaCugna, *God For Us* 260–66. Although Zizioulas’s interpretation of Cappodocian theology has been criticized (see, e.g., Lucian Turcescu, “‘Person’ versus ‘Individual,’ and Other Modern Misreadings of Gregory of Nyssa,” *Modern Theology* 18 [2002] 527–39), it is highly insightful and offers a basis to interpret Bonaventure’s trinitarian theology. See John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1985); Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Divine Energies or Divine Personhood: Vladimir Lossky and John Zizioulas on Conceiving the Transcendent and Immanent God,” *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 363–71.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Aksionov Meerson, *The Trinity of Love in Modern Russian Theology* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan, 1998) 4.

primacy of the Father led to this understanding.<sup>21</sup> The totality of who God is, for Bonaventure, is grounded in the nature of the Father as unbegotten self-communicative goodness. The Father, who is primal and self-diffusive, diffuses himself to one other who is equal to but other than the Father. The unoriginate (*non ab alio*) and ecstatic nature of the Father is the eternal generation of the Son. The Son is that person eternally generated by the Father's self-diffusive goodness (*bonum diffusivum sui*) who is generated *per modum naturae* and, as such, is both the total personal expression of the Father as Word and the ultimate likeness to the Father as Image.<sup>22</sup> The eternal generation of the Son by nature of the Father's self-diffusive goodness is a necessary generation. To say that the Son is generated *per modum naturae* is to say that the Father's self-diffusive goodness is not a "free choice"; rather, goodness constitutes the person of the Father who is unoriginate and fecund. As ultimate, self-diffusive goodness, the Father *must* do what is intrinsic to his nature, namely, communicate his goodness to another, the Son. Indeed, the Father is *Father* precisely in the eternal generation of the Son through personal love. While this love is necessarily communicative, it is nevertheless free, because there is nothing other than the Father's own nature as good that impels the Father to diffuse goodness to another. In this respect the freedom of the Father's self-diffusive goodness is necessary to the nature of the Father's unoriginate, fecund goodness. For the Father to be Father, everything of the Father must be communicated to another, hence, to the Son. Bonaventure says, therefore, the Son is generated *per modum naturae*, by the mode of nature, which implies a certain type of necessity. God is conceived in terms of a necessary self-communication that arises by reason of God's very nature as good.<sup>23</sup> The dialectical nature of the Father's goodness as both necessary and free means that the very freedom of love is necessarily expressed in union with another. The Father communicates himself as love to the Son who is the Beloved; freedom and necessity are held together in the person of the Father. For the Father to be truly free (as Father) it is necessary that he

<sup>21</sup> Bonaventure follows Richard of St. Victor's definition of divine person as "an incommunicable existence of the divine nature" whereby the divine persons are distinguished by origin and not relations. Although his position on the meaning of divine person is unclear, Bonaventure "seems to favor the origins or processions over the relations as constitutive of the persons" (Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 38).

<sup>22</sup> Bonaventure, *In I. Sent.* d. 5, a. 1, q. 2, resp. (1:115); *In I. Sent.* d. 2, a. u., q. 4, fund. 2 (1:56). See Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 34 n. 10. Bonaventure uses the terms *per modum naturae* and *per modum voluntatis* to designate the two trinitarian emanations. The terms are inspired by Aristotle's principle that there exist only two perfect modes of production, natural and free.

<sup>23</sup> Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 45.

share himself totally with another, the Son, in the act of love; however, it is precisely in the generation of the Son *per modum naturae* that the Father's love is free. Since the person of the Father is the source of trinitarian persons (through the dialectical nature of innascibility and fecundity), we may say that God's freedom is the sharing of God's life with another.

The Son/Word is both generated by the Father and, together with the Father as one principle, breathes forth the Spirit, who is that eternal bond of love between the Father and Son. The Spirit proceeds from Father and Son in an act of full freedom (*per modum voluntatis*), the procession of the Spirit being the act of a clear and determinate loving volition on the part of Father and Son.<sup>24</sup> Hayes writes: "Here we see the divine will can be viewed in two principal ways: either as the principal productive power or as a will that accompanies and approves that which proceeds from the nature. The will as a productive power is reserved by Bonaventure for the procession of the Holy Spirit. As regards the generation of the Son, since this proceeds from the nature as from its primary principle, the will accompanies the act of generation as *approbans*."<sup>25</sup> Thus, Bonaventure maintains, the Son is produced "ut omnino similes et per modum naturae nihilominus ut dilectus" (though he proceeds by necessity of nature, yet he proceeds as beloved of the Father).<sup>26</sup> In light of the nature of the generation of the Son, the Trinity is marked by both necessity and freedom because, to be itself, love must communicate itself to another; it is precisely in the communication of love that it is itself and therefore free. Although divine freedom is expressed in the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit, it is anticipated by the self-communicative love of the Father to the Son. It is in the person of the Father, by which the Father communicates everything to the Son, that the freedom of God is expressed in love.

### EXEMPLARITY AND CREATION

The key to Bonaventure's theology of creation is in the eternal generation of the Word from the Father. The Father, who is innascible and

<sup>24</sup> Bonaventure, *In I. Sent.* d. 6, a. ul., q. 2, resp. (1:128). "Processus per modum voluntatis concomitante natura." Kevin P. Keane observes: "It is noteworthy that Bonaventure's reason for attributing creation to the divine will is quite different from Thomas's. Where Thomas is in the main concerned to protect the divine perfection and radically free will, Bonaventure is at pains to elucidate how only through will can an act be truly personal—both free and expressive of the outward dynamism of goodness, an act spontaneous yet substantial" ("Why Creation? Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas on God as Creative Good," *Downside Review* 93 [1975] 100–21, at 115).

<sup>25</sup> Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 46.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

fecund, is totally self-communicative and communicates the entirety of his ideas in one other than himself. It is a necessary self-communication that arises by reason of his very nature as goodness. The Father is the principle of the Trinity and hence the principle of creation. The self-communicative goodness of the Father is literally God giving Godself away, but in such a way that fecundity marks the Trinity's dynamic, eternal life. The necessity of God to give Godself away is realized in the Son. It is not a necessity imposed from the outside but an inner necessity of the divine being to be always and completely self-sufficient and totally in conformity with itself.<sup>27</sup> This total expression of the Father's love is the Word who, as Word, proceeds from the Father by way of exemplarity. God in his own self-knowledge is exemplar of all else. Since God exists only as Trinity, exemplarity refers to the entire Trinity; however, the mystery of the Trinity is reflected in the mystery of the Second Person. Although the doctrine of exemplarity refers to the relations between God and creation, the basis of this doctrine is the relationship among the Father, Son, and Spirit. As the full and total expression of God's primal fruitfulness, the Son is also the expression of all that God can be in relation to the finite.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the relation between the Father and the Son is the first and primal relation and the basis for all other relations.

It is precisely in the relationship between the Father and the Son that one must describe Bonaventure's doctrine of creation, for just as the Word is the inner self-expression of God, the created order is the external expression of the inner Word. As the expression of the necessary immanent fruitfulness of God, the generation of the Son is simultaneously the expression of the possible free communication of being to the nondivine. Hayes observed: "As the Father's self-expression, the Word is the openness of the Father to the other in all its forms. The second person is God precisely as expressive being. . . . God's being as self-communicative love gives expression to its entire fruitfulness in the generation of the Son, so that in generating the Son, the Father speaks one Word immanent to himself in which is expressed the possibility of creation."<sup>29</sup> As the center of divine life, the Word is the ontological basis for all that is other than the Father. Because there is a Word in God, creation can exist as an external word; because there is an Absolute Otherness, there can be a relative otherness.<sup>30</sup> The possibility of God's creative activity, therefore, rests in

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Zachary Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation in the Theology of St. Bonaventure," in *Studies Honoring Ignatius Brady, Friar Minor*, ed. Romano Stephen Almagno and Conrad Harkins (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1976) 309–29, at 314.

<sup>30</sup> Bonaventure shows a decided preference for the term *Word*, for this title signifies a complex network of relations that the Son bears to the Father, to cre-



God's being as triune, which is to say that "God could not communicate being to the finite if he were not supremely communicative in himself."<sup>31</sup> The communicability of God's nature is rooted in the primal relation between the Father and the Word, which is the basis of all other relations. The Word who is the center of the divine life is also the exemplar of creation; and creation itself may be seen as an external word in which the one inner Word is objectified. In so far as the one Word is the expression of the entire inner-trinitarian structure of God, "that which is created is an expression of the Word which bears within itself the imprint of the Trinity."<sup>32</sup>

The congruent relationship between the Trinity and creation means that created reality possesses in its inner constitution a relation to the uncreated Word. The primal relationship between the Father and the Son from which creation originates is consonant with Bonaventure's emphasis on creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>33</sup> The fecund self-diffusiveness of the infinite God cannot be exhausted by creation, since such diffusion would make creation equal to God; however, it is directed toward the divine Word who is the exemplar of creation. As Bonaventure writes in his *Itinerarium*, "the diffusion in time in creation is no more than a center or point in relation to the immensity of the divine goodness";<sup>34</sup> however, the diffusion in time is the diffusion of the *Trinity* in time. Bonaventure indicates that what characterizes the inner life of God takes place in creation as well, although the exemplary character of the Word does not make the act of creation necessary. Creation is

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ation, to humanity, and to revelation, all of which are grounded in the fact that he who is, first of all and by reason of an act of the divine nature, the Son of the Father's love, is simultaneously the Word of the Father's self-expression as loving, fruitful source of all that is. See Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation" 314; Zachary Hayes, "The Meaning of *Convenientia* in the Metaphysics of St. Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies* n.s. 34 (1974) 74–100, at 90.

<sup>31</sup> Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" S91.

<sup>32</sup> Hayes, "Incarnation and Creation" 314; Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 48.

<sup>33</sup> In the opening of chapter 2 of his *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure describes the creation of the world: "the entire world machine was brought into existence in time and from nothing by one First Principle . . . by asserting 'from nothing' we exclude the error of those who hold the eternity of a material principle" (*Breviloquium*, 2.1.1.; Engl. trans. Dominic V. Monti, *Breviloquium*, Works of Saint Bonaventure 9, ed. Robert J. Karris [New York: Franciscan Institute, 2005] 59). Bonaventure repeats the theme of *ex nihilo* in the same chapter of the *Breviloquium* (2.1.1 [5:291], 2.2.2 [5:220], and 2.6.3 [5:224]). By emphasizing a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, Bonaventure assured his audience that creation is radically contingent on God; thus, under no condition can it be made out of preexistent matter nor can it be eternal. Rather, creation has a beginning and end; it comes from God and is destined to return to God.

<sup>34</sup> Bonaventure, *Itin.* 6.2 (5:310); Engl. trans. Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist, 1978) 103.

a free act of God, but it is the free overflow of his necessary, inner-divine fruitfulness—as Hayes put it: “when God creates, he can do so only ‘in and through the Word’ of his own otherness, so that whatever created reality exists appears as the external otherness that is placed through the immanent otherness.”<sup>35</sup>

Bonaventure’s preference of “Word” as the title of the Second Divine Person is rooted in the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word, through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be” (Jn 1:1–3). The centrality of the Word with regard to God and creation signifies that creation possesses, in its inner constitution, a relation to the uncreated Word. In this respect we can say that creation is more than an act of the divine will; rather, it expresses the self-communicative love of God and is an outward expression of that love insofar as it is an external embodiment of the divine Word. God, “who is the purest of love within, creates not out of any need but out of desire to manifest something of the mystery of the divine truth, goodness and beauty outwardly and to bring forth creatures capable of participating in the splendor of the divine life.”<sup>36</sup> Only a dynamic, self-communicative God can be a creator God, and the weight of that self-communication falls upon the Word as the necessary condition for any created being. Hayes writes, “God speaks but one Word in which the world and its history are co-spoken.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the created order reflects at some level the relation of the Son to the Father, for this relation is the ontological condition of both creation and incarnation.<sup>38</sup>

### CREATION, A SINGLE ACT OF LOVE

In his description of Bonaventure’s trinitarian theology, Hayes claims that we find in Bonaventure a consistent, logical expression of economic trinitarianism. He states: “God communicates himself in history as he is in himself. . . . The economy of a trinitarian history is grounded ontologically in the immanent trinitarian mystery of God himself.”<sup>39</sup> Bonaventure posited an integral relationship between *theologia* and *oikonomia* in such a way that there is only one ecstatic movement or self-communication of God, one history of love, one path of glory, one ecstatic movement of God outward, and that is the ecstatic begetting of the Son and spirating of the Spirit. The fecundity and dynamic life of God involves the eternal procession of love from love which exists in time and history as the missions of

<sup>35</sup> Hayes, “Incarnation and Creation” 315.

<sup>36</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1999) 112.

<sup>37</sup> Hayes, “Christology and Metaphysics” S92.

<sup>38</sup> Hayes, “Incarnation and Creation” 315–16.

<sup>39</sup> Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions* 65.

incarnation and deification. The images of “begetting” and “spirating” express the fruitfulness or fecundity of God who is, from all eternity, a dynamic interchange of persons united in love. Following LaCugna’s insight, “the eternal begetting of the Son and the breathing forth of the Spirit take place in God’s economy [that is, in creation]. The centrifugal movement of divine love does not terminate ‘within’ God but explodes outwards.”<sup>40</sup> God creates the world as the Father begets the Son; indeed, Hayes writes, “creation is co-spoken in the Word that is the Father’s self-utterance and co-loved in the Spirit breathed mutually by the Father and the Son.”<sup>41</sup> The core of Bonaventure’s trinitarianism is expressed by LaCugna who writes: “God goes forth from God. God creates the world, suffuses its history and dwells within us, redeeming the world from within. God makes an eternal gift to the world of God’s very self so that we become by grace what God is already by nature, namely, self-donating love for the other.”<sup>42</sup>

Bonaventure’s notion that “creation is no more than a point in relation to the immensity of divine goodness” means that the economy of trinitarian love in no way exhausts the infinite fecundity of that love. The drama of creation, as Balthasar claimed, is already contained in and surpassed in the eternal act of inner trinitarian love whereby the Father begets the Word.<sup>43</sup> Creation as a limited actualization of the infinite self-diffusive good is caught up in the mystery of the generation of the Word from the Father. It is a limited expression of the infinite and dynamic love between the Father and Son united in the Spirit. In this respect, creation is not a mere external act of God, an object on the fringe of divine power; rather, it is rooted in the self-diffusive goodness of God’s inner life and emerges out of the innermost depths of trinitarian life. To say that creation shares in the mystery of the Trinity means that it is caught up in the dynamic process of self-transcendence and self-communication of interpenetrating relationships and creative love. The reason for creation, therefore, lies entirely in the unfathomable mystery of God, who is self-originating and self-communicating love. While the world is the gracious result of divine freedom, God’s freedom means necessarily being who and what God is. God’s creative activity expresses God’s own inner life. God is not creative because God has decided to be so; God is creative because God is self-communicative love, a communion of persons in love. Creation, therefore,

<sup>40</sup> LaCugna, *God For Us* 354.

<sup>41</sup> Hayes, “Meaning of *Convenientia*” 89.

<sup>42</sup> LaCugna, *God For Us* 353–54.

<sup>43</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4 of 5, *The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1994) 327; Denis Edwards, *The God of Evolution* (New York: Paulist, 1999) 30–31.

expresses who God is as love. Since God's love can only be fully expressed in the divine Word, creation is a finite expression of the eternal Word of God. Such expression does not diminish the one self-communication of God, the love of the Father for the Son in the Spirit. Rather, God loves the world with the very same love with which God eternally is. Thus, the world is created *ex nihilo* insofar as God does not need any preexistent materials, but as the exterior expression of the inner Word of God, the world is created *ex amore* or *ex condilectione*, that is, out of divine love.<sup>44</sup>

### METAPHYSICS OF LOVE

The inner positive relation between the world and Word, by which the world is the external expression of the immanent Word of God, is the basis of Bonaventure's metaphysics. "Metaphysics," Bonaventure wrote, "begins with consideration of the principles that govern particular, created substances, moving from that level to the consideration of the universal and uncreated. Thus, it considers reality under the aspect of principle, means and end."<sup>45</sup> As Hayes writes: "a metaphysical vision emerges from the tendency to see a limited experience as paradigmatic of reality as a whole; a particular human experience in the world is taken as the basic clue as to how things are in general."<sup>46</sup>

Bonaventure's position with regard to philosophy and knowledge is an interesting, if not unique, one. Throughout his writings he clearly emphasized not intellectual knowledge but Christian wisdom, which can be defined as knowledge deepened by love.<sup>47</sup> Wisdom, he claimed, is to be found only in the eternal Word of God, since the Word alone is the foundation of being and knowledge. Bonaventure belied some of the philosophers of his own age who claimed that human knowledge is stable and sufficient and based solely on human faculties. He warned against the self-sufficiency of philosophy and maintained that its purpose is to support theology. He condemned any human attitude that purported to have achieved complete understanding. Although Bonaventure did not entirely dismiss the sufficiency of reason or claim that philosophy is impossible without faith, he held that all (pagan) philosophy stands open to correction in light of the

<sup>44</sup> LaCugna, *God For Us* 354–55.

<sup>45</sup> Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* 1.13 (5:331); Engl. trans. José de Vinck, "Collations on the Six Days," in *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, 5 vols., trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild, 1970) 5:7.

<sup>46</sup> Hayes, "Meaning of *Convenientia*" 98.

<sup>47</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of Bonaventure's doctrine of wisdom, see Gregory LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom: The Nature of Theology according to St. Bonaventure* (Roma: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 2005) 147–92.

New Testament.<sup>48</sup> For Bonaventure, to philosophize is to recognize that humans are seekers rather than possessors or builders of total truth. He did not deny the necessity or usefulness of human knowledge, especially philosophical knowledge, in reflection on faith. He criticized only the advocacy of reason's self-sufficiency and completeness. Kevin Hughes sees Bonaventure's theological metaphysics as a balm to the modern wounding of metaphysics and its critique in ontotheology.<sup>49</sup> He writes: "Bonaventure's concerns are not against Aristotelian categories or against scholastic method or philosophy per se, but rather against a love of categories of rationality and method that exceeds their grasp and becomes disordered."<sup>50</sup> For Bonaventure, the metaphysical question is integral to the problem of exemplarity "so that the entire work of philosophy moves to one goal, namely, to know the one divine essence as the exemplary cause of finite reality."<sup>51</sup>

Bonaventure described a theological metaphysics in the first *collatio* of his *Hexaëmeron*, although one can see the foundation laid in earlier works such as his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.<sup>52</sup> In his first lecture "On the Six Days of Creation," he began his metaphysical discourse by describing the trinitarian relationships. As the Father expresses all that he is in the Word, so too, the procession of the Spirit is expressed in the Word in such a way that the Word appears as the point at which the entire triune structure of the divine life is focused in an exemplary way.<sup>53</sup> Thus if metaphysics is integral to exemplarity, the exemplar is not an unknowable One but the Word of God. The Word is the center of divine self-expression so that in the Word is contained all the divine mystery of self-communicative love. Creation reflects the Word of God's self-expression that becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ; thus, creation returns to the depths of the divine love in and through increasing conformity to the incarnate Word. This is the heart of reduction by which all reality is led back to its fontal source. In formulating a Christian metaphysics based on the self-diffusive good (or love), Bonaventure worked through the mystery of the Trinity in Christ and concluded that Christ is the metaphysical center, the ground of all created

<sup>48</sup> Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" S93.

<sup>49</sup> Kevin L. Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure? (Onto)Theology and Ecstasy," *Modern Theology* 19 (2003) 539. Hughes defines ontotheology as "that ultimate knowledge which is a form of mastery or control. . . . It is curiosity and, ultimately, idolatrous, since it takes comprehension to be the measure of all knowledge and takes "God" to be the object of its comprehension."

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 541.

<sup>51</sup> Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" S87.

<sup>52</sup> See Ilija Delio, "Bonaventure's Metaphysics of the Good," *Theological Studies* 60 (1999) 230–31.

<sup>53</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 1.14 (5:331); Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" S90.

reality, because Christ is the total expression of the Father, the fullness of divine love, and the eternal art:

For from eternity, the Father begets a Son similar to himself and expresses himself and a likeness similar to himself, and in so doing he expresses the sum total of his potency. He expresses what he can do, and most of all, what he wills to do, and he expresses everything in him, that is, in the Son or in that very center, which, so to speak, is his art. Hence this center is truth. . . . The Word expresses the Father and the things he made, and principally leads us to union with the Father who brings all things together. . . . Such is the metaphysical center that leads us back and this is the sum total of our metaphysics: concerned with emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, that is, illumination through spiritual radiations and return to the Supreme Being.<sup>54</sup>

Although Bonaventure reveals his affinity to Neoplatonism by identifying the eternal Word as the *ars patris*, it is the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who is the metaphysical ground of reality—not the Father. True knowledge, therefore, is no longer associated with objective universals; rather, it is now identified on the level of the singular, the person of Jesus Christ. If the Image of all images is an individual, then the primary significance of individual form no longer consists in disclosing a universal reality beyond itself. Indeed, the universal itself ultimately refers to the singular.<sup>55</sup> The revolution of Bonaventure's metaphysics is the triumph of the ontological singular and personal over the universal. True knowledge lies in the uniqueness of the individual, which can be known only through personal relationship. In Christ, the principle of being is the principle of knowing.<sup>56</sup>

Bonaventure's metaphysics plays out on the level of creation. The Word, who is the center of divine life, is the exemplar of creation so that creation becomes the external word that gives expression to the one inner Word. As Ewert Cousins observed, "exemplarity through the Word is the center of Bonaventure's system and the basis for the intimate interpenetration of God and the world."<sup>57</sup> God is in the world, and the world is in God, but God transcends the world by the nature of God's infinite fecund goodness. In the free divine action of creation, the trinitarian fullness of divine goodness "explodes" into creatures that are not God but are God's self-expression.<sup>58</sup> Thus in Bonaventure's view, every creature is understood as an aspect of God's self-expression in the world. Every creature reflects the

<sup>54</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 1.13, 17 (5:331–32).

<sup>55</sup> Louis K. Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993) 38.

<sup>56</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 1.13 (5:331).

<sup>57</sup> Ewert H. Cousins, "Response to Zachary Hayes," in *Celebrating the Medieval Heritage* S97–S104, at S101.

<sup>58</sup> Denis Edwards, "The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity," in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russell, Nancey Murphy, and Arthur R. Peacocke (Rome: Vatican Observatory,

Word and wisdom of God, the divine Exemplar. God is profoundly present to all things, and God is expressed in all things, so that each creature is a symbol and a sacrament of God's presence and trinitarian life.<sup>59</sup> How do we come to know this world as trinitarian love? For Bonaventure, the truth of created reality is revealed in Jesus Christ. Christ, the Word of God, is the center of reality, and it is from this center that one should begin the inquiry concerning the nature of reality. Bonaventure wrote: "Such is the metaphysical center that leads us back, and this is the whole of our metaphysics; namely it is concerned with emanation, exemplarity and consummation, that is, to be illumined by means of spiritual light and be led back to the Highest Being."<sup>60</sup>

Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the center, according to Hayes, intended to correct what had been inherited from the Greek philosophers. The classical Greek doctrine of being established the one divine essence as the exemplary cause of created being, a transcendent cause that, at best, could be a principle but not related to created being.<sup>61</sup> Bonaventure's deep reflection on the Prologue of John's Gospel allowed him to see the metaphysical and epistemological implications of the Word, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. The Word is not only the Father's self-expressiveness but also the relation of God to creation, humanity, and the Scriptures. As Hayes writes:

That which the philosopher sought as the exemplary cause and found in the one divine essence, the theologian comes to know as the person of the Word, the center of divine life and the exemplar in whom the whole trinitarian structure of divine nature expresses itself as the exemplar of all finite reality. . . . If all things are constituted in being through the Word, and if it is that same Word who has become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, then it follows that Jesus Christ lays claim to the human quest for the word of universal intelligibility. Since all things are constituted in being through the Word, and if it is impossible to understand a creature except through that by which it is made, then in some way the Word is involved in all genuine knowledge at whatever level.<sup>62</sup>

Bonaventure did not reject the classical doctrine of being; he reframed it in the light of revelation. His metaphysical starting point of Christ the center was not "an isolated, individual existent but a being who, while individual, is thoroughly relational."<sup>63</sup> Bonaventure expounded the rela-

1995) 161–62; Leonard Bowman, "The Cosmic Exemplarism of Bonaventure," *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975) 182–83.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, "Discovery of Chaos" 163.

<sup>60</sup> Bonaventure, Hex. 1.1.17 (5:329, 332); Engl. trans. De Vinck, "Collations on the Six Days" 1.10.

<sup>61</sup> Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" S98–S99.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* S91–S92.

<sup>63</sup> Hayes, "Meaning of *Convenientia*" 99.

tionality of Christ by grounding the mystery of Christ in the metaphysics of divine self-relatedness which is the Trinity. The Father begets the Son through the self-communication of love and with the Son breathes forth love in the Spirit. It is out of this creative love that all other created reality flows. Created being, therefore, is the creative love of the Trinity expressed in history. Hayes writes: "The metaphysical question coincides with the Christological question in as far as the problem of exemplarity which is focused in metaphysics at the philosophical level is related to the exemplarity of the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. . . . God speaks but one Word in which the world and its history are co-spoken. . . . There is, however, a point in history at which the content of that Word is historicized with such explicitness that from that point light is shed on all of reality."<sup>64</sup> That point is Christ the center. Since this Word is the Word of eternal love spoken in history, it is reasonable to suggest that Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the center is a metaphysics of love. In the light of Christ, Bonaventure views the exemplary nature of created reality not as being, but as love. This insight enables Bonaventure to recast classical metaphysics in the following manner: "God is Being but Being is Love; God is substance but substance is relational; God is one but the highest unity is the unity of plurality in love."<sup>65</sup> Only when the doctrine of being is held open to the mystery of Christ is the true nature of created reality revealed as love. To say that God creates *ex amore* is to say that the metaphysical basis of created being is love, since creation is patterned on the exemplary Word of love. True knowledge of created reality, therefore, is not rooted in the intellect but in love and hence is personal and relational. Thus, Emmanuel Falque writes: "Any strictly *theo*-logical truth [for Bonaventure], one that has its roots in God, will no longer be content with its unique objective determination. On the contrary, such a truth will take on a performative sense, one that is transforming for the subject that states it, or it will not exist."<sup>66</sup> Since love is of the Spirit, the search for knowledge cannot be limited to intellectual study alone but belongs to the life of the Spirit and grace. "Love therefore becomes a conceptual determination at the junction of theory and practice."<sup>67</sup>

### METAPHYSICS AND THE CROSS

If Bonaventure sought to dispel a type of ultimate knowledge that boasted of mastery or control, as Hughes suggests, he also argued that true

<sup>64</sup> Hayes, "Christology and Metaphysics" S88–S92.

<sup>65</sup> Hayes, "Meaning of *Convenientia*" 99.

<sup>66</sup> Emmanuel Falque, "The Phenomenological Act of *Perscrutatio* in the Proemium of St. Bonaventure's Commentary on the Sentences," trans. Elisa Mangina, *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001) 18.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



knowledge is contemplative, insofar as it is horizontally ecstatic.<sup>68</sup> True knowledge takes one out of oneself and into the other by way of insight, so that knower and known are differentiated by a union in love. Bonaventure's metaphysics was not simply a corrective to the prevailing philosophies of his time. Rather it assumed a distinct characteristic through reflection on the life of Francis of Assisi, in whom the height of knowledge was attained through union with Christ crucified.<sup>69</sup> In light of Francis, Bonaventure combined piety and knowledge, faith and reason, and indicated that even if one comes to know God and arrives at the height of intellectual knowledge of God (as that which no greater can be thought), there is more to knowledge than what enters the mind. As Hughes put it, to know beyond knowing or to attain that knowledge beyond knowledge is to "shut up and pray."<sup>70</sup> Love goes further than knowledge, and the type of love that is the highest knowledge for Bonaventure is wisdom, which imposes silence on the intellect and appeases all its powers.<sup>71</sup> True knowledge (indeed, theology itself) entails a death to the self-grasping intellect. As with Francis, to see into the heart of things, one must become as dead. In his *Itinerarium* Bonaventure described Francis as one who passed over into the silence and darkness of the incomprehensible love of God through union with the crucified Christ. Francis's dying into love was a stripping away of everything that prevented him from being grasped by grace, which opened his eyes to truth through a union of love. Francis discovered truth through the logic of self-emptying, following the path of the crucified Christ. Bonaventure viewed the ontological death of the crucified incarnate Word as the revelation of the Trinity and hence as mystery of the world. In reflecting on Francis's life, he indicated that one can know this truth only by accepting one's poverty or creatureliness, acknowledging one's contingency and thus humility, and accepting death as the path into the heart of the mystery of God. Only one who can let go of possessing knowledge can really know this world as a Trinity of love unfolding in its fullness, which Christ reveals in the depth of the cross.

<sup>68</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 2.30 (5:341). Bonaventure writes that contemplation, which comes about through grace, is the supreme union of love. "Such love transcends every intellect and every science"; Engl. trans. DeVinck, "On the Six Days of Creation" 36.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the influence of Francis on Bonaventure's theology see LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom* 123–45.

<sup>70</sup> Hughes, "Remember Bonaventure?" 541.

<sup>71</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 2.31 (5:341). Bonaventure writes: "Now such love . . . puts to sleep and appeases all the powers and imposes silence; it lifts up since it leads to God. And so man is dead, wherefore it is said: Love is as strong as death, because it cuts away from all things"; Engl. trans. De Vinck, "Collations on the Six Days" 37.

Bonaventure's focus on Christ crucified as the metaphysical center underscores the power of God's unconditional love revealed in the cross.<sup>72</sup> If God is a Trinity of love, then the Trinity expresses itself in history in the utter self-emptying of the Crucified. God is most "God-like" on the cross where the metaphysical center shows itself in love unto death. True knowledge, therefore, is bound up with death, and unless one is willing to "die to the ego" and so to attain union with the other, truth remains elusive. For Bonaventure, truth is not a given but must be arrived at; it is not a "thing" but a disclosure. True knowledge is attained through union of love, and without love there is no truth and hence no grasp of true reality. Metaphysics, therefore, is not intellectual in nature but contemplative and mystical. "Christ goes away," Bonaventure wrote, "when the mind tries to behold him with intellectual eyes."<sup>73</sup> One must be on the journey into love to know the God of love.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

While Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the center falls within the logic of his trinitarian theology, one may view his metaphysics as an ideological "Christian view of the world."<sup>74</sup> Bonaventure's intention in developing his metaphysics, however, was to correct certain ideas perpetrated by erroneous philosophies that rendered the search for truth fragmentary and dislocated. After all, if the totality of the triune God is revealed in Christ, the Word of God, then should not true knowledge be found in Christ who is the incarnate Word, crucified, risen, and glorified? For the divine influence of this Word of God extends to the entire universe and all peoples; no one is excluded from the divine Word or the influence of divine grace.

<sup>72</sup> Walter Kasper aptly describes the cross as the full disclosure of God in history: "On the cross the incarnation of God reaches its true meaning and purpose. . . . The cross is the utmost that is possible to God in his self-surrendering love; it is 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'; it is the unsurpassable self-definition of God. . . . The cross is . . . not a de-divinization of God but the revelation of the divine God. . . . God need not strip himself of his omnipotence in order to reveal his love. On the contrary, it requires omnipotence to be able to surrender oneself and give oneself away; and it requires omnipotence to be able to take oneself back in the giving and to preserve the independence and freedom of the recipient. Only an almighty love can give itself wholly to the other and be a helpless love" (*God of Jesus Christ* 194-95).

<sup>73</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 2.32 (5:342); Engl. trans. De Vinck, "Collations on the Six Days" 39.

<sup>74</sup> Heidegger, Louis-Marie Chauvet notes, claimed that "just as any thinking which would attempt to make itself a 'Christian philosophy' would be doomed, so any theology which would base itself on a philosophy would corrupt itself into an ideology of "the Christian view of the world" (*Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1995] 64).

Christ the center is a center that is everywhere; it is not simply the individual existent, Jesus of Nazareth, but Jesus the incarnate one who is now the Christ and hence the center of creation, the center by which immanent and economic Trinity coincide as the single extension of God in love to all others in history. Knowledge of *this* God means knowledge of the other which can take place only through an experience of love.

Bonaventure's metaphysics is an integration of prayer and contemplation, death and transcendent union, knowledge and love. Because his metaphysics is centered in the incarnate Word who is a coincidence of opposites (eternal-temporal, God-human),<sup>75</sup> it involves a knowledge that both unifies and differentiates: knowledge through the Word can never be self-enclosed or self-contained since it is dialectical, held in tension between opposites or extremes. The height of knowledge, for Bonaventure, never leads to power and control but to self-surrender and sacrifice. His metaphysics, therefore, stands against any form of self-glorification or arrogance; truth is not a matter of personal preference. His thought corresponds to the postmodern idea of knowledge as participation but rebels against a type of relativism that collapses knowledge into isolated individualism. For Bonaventure there is one truth grounded in the eternal Word of God; he feared any search for truth apart from the Word. A shattering of the Word of God, in his view, would lead to the separation of faith and world, theology and philosophy, eternity and time. What Bonaventure feared, modern philosophy succumbed to, as the pursuit of rationalism and freedom led to the collapse of God and the worldly immanentism of modernity.

Bonaventure's Christocentric thought may seem stifling, but there is irony within: modernity's search for freedom and plurality has led to fragmentation, individualism, and irreverence for the human person and things of creation. While postmodern Christians may favor retrieving the Trinity of history, they shudder at the idea of Christocentrism, as if the centrality of Christ may quench plurality and freedom. Ironically, the postmodern obsession with freedom and respect for difference has led to rampant individualism, isolation, fragmentation, and the longing for community and relatedness. Bonaventure's "wisdom" of Christ the center is a union in love that differentiates. The more one is in union with the Word of love, the more one finds oneself bearing the Word of love in one's life and thus related to others in community. Christ the center does not unite by absolutizing differences but differentiates the various ways God expresses God-self in history. Self-transcendence in love is the basis of true knowledge

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of Christ as the coincidence of opposites see Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* 147–59; and Cousins, "The Coincidence of Opposites in the Christology of Saint Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies* 28 (1968) 27–45.

because it is where one is truly free to be oneself in relation to another. Bonaventure's "center" is not an abstract center of the whole but a personal center, that is, every person bears the center because every person is created through the Word of God. As Bonaventure himself perceived, "every creature proclaims the eternal generation of the Word;"<sup>76</sup> hence every creature discloses truth through union in love. Bonaventure's theology of the Word leads to the reclamation of Rahner's "supernatural existential" as a "*verbum* existential," a reaching out for the Word that draws one into unity by differentiating through bonds of love.

In an age that longs for unity and peace in the face of rapid scientific progress, imperialism, and global economic inequity, Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the center holds value. What will unite humans as they seek to transcend the absolutizing of the finite and the relativism of life? What will prevent the total collapse of the earth from self-destruction in the face of secularization, materialism, and apathy? Theologians today, such as Rahner and LaCugna, realize the need to reawaken Christians to their professed trinitarian God not simply out of a desire to be authentic but because Christians have a responsibility to *be* Christian.

So too, Bonaventure did not seek to establish himself as an original thinker but as an authentic Christian. As one who held a position of leadership and authority,<sup>77</sup> he felt the responsibility of contributing to the realization of Christian life. His theology impels one to search for truth in the world, not as ideological conviction but as "something greater" that binds persons together despite their differences. His metaphysics of Christ the center is not a medieval fortress of Christian defense but a liberation of the Word of God in our midst, a Word that continues to be spoken in the unfolding beauty, diversity, and magnificence of creation. It is a Word breathed by God's mysterious Spirit hovering around and within human persons, luring them to find truth through love. Christians, as such, are called to participate in the search for truth, beauty, and goodness by sharing in a common search for meaning. Whatever poles individuals find themselves wrapped around, they must let go and let themselves be grasped by this God of overflowing love in the cross. Wisdom, according to Bonaventure, is knowing when to let go and to let love prevail. For it is in the letting go that God is revealed.

<sup>76</sup> Bonaventure, *Hex.* 11.13 (5:382). In *Hex.* 11.21 Bonaventure noted that "all beings point to the generation of the Word," indicating that Christ the center is cosmically differentiated; Engl. trans. De Vinck, "Collations on the Six Days" 168.

<sup>77</sup> Bonaventure was minister general of the Franciscan Order from 1257 to 1273. For a history of his role as minister general see Dominic Monti, introduction to *St. Bonaventure's Writings Concerning the Franciscan Order*, intro. and trans. Dominic Monti, Works of Saint Bonaventure 5, ed. George Marcil (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1994) 1–36.