

# Ganz Notes for St. Bonaventure, Part II (16 November 2021)

## Ganz Notes, Part II – St. Bonaventure

For The Night School, Series 9, Part III (16 November 2021)

### Life

The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* – **Bonaventure, St** (c. 1217–74). \*Franciscan theologian, 'Doctor seraphicus'. An Italian by birth, Giovanni di Fidanza studied in the Faculty of Arts in the University of \*Paris. Probably in 1243 he entered the Franciscan Order and then studied theology under \*Alexander of Hales. In 1248 he began to teach publicly; in 1253–4 he became doctor in theology; he continued teaching until 1257, with a short interruption due to the quarrel between the secular masters and the mendicant orders. On 2 Feb. 1257 he was elected Minister General of his order, and in this capacity he took a prominent part in settling the internal dissensions by which the order was then rent.

"Around 1235, a young man by the name of Giovanni di Fidanza entered the University of Paris. Barely eighteen years old, Giovanni began his studies for the Master of Arts degree. In time, this young man would assume the leadership of one of the fastest-growing religious movements in medieval Europe—the Franciscans—and would be recognized as one of the leading General Ministers of the Order. He would eventually be known as Bonaventure of Bagnoregio." [Ilia, Delio. *Simply Bonaventure, 2nd Edition: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (p. 16). New City Press. Kindle Edition.]

"Bonaventure began his studies under one of Europe's leading theologians, Alexander of Hales. An Englishman by birth, Alexander held the chair in theology at Paris and soon came in contact with a group of poor mendicants known as Franciscans. Inspired by their simplicity, poverty and gospel way of life, Alexander decided to join the

Franciscans in 1236 at the age of fifty. 10 This marked a turning point for the Franciscans, for upon joining the Order, Alexander not only continued to teach but he brought his chair of theology with him, establishing the school of the Friars Minor as an official part of the University of Paris." [Ilia, Delio. *Simply Bonaventure, 2nd Edition: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings* (p. 16). New City Press. Kindle Edition.]

## Summary of Part I of Bonaventure

1. 1. We explored the idea of "imitation" – what it does **not** mean (not cloning Christ; not making a copy of Christ, a "knock-off" of Jesus; not making a counterfeit of Him); what we **do** mean by it. As to the latter, we mean that the way we imitate Christ is to learn how to become human in exactly the way God intended; which includes a long and challenging experience of self-discovery; of experimentation; of false trails; of coming to clarity about one's particular gifts and then training oneself in them ... and then sharing them as generously as one is able.
2. 2. What did it mean for Bonaventure to be educated? He was formed to think by a philosophically and theologically alert progression through the disciplines, and these disciplines attentive to the "powers of soul".
3. 3. The classical *ratio studiorum*: the **Trivium** (the Art of Language and Communication); the **Quadrivium** (the Art of Nature: finding Pattern and the Clues to finding its Maker). – Completion of these Seven Disciplines – mastery in them – **before** one could/would be admitted into an intensive two-years long study of Scripture. And only then, after mastery in the reading of the Sacred Text, could/would one be admitted into the study of Philosophy and Theology.
4. 4. *The Soul's Journey to God* – A short presentation about how we "climb" through the works of Nature into an awareness of the Maker.

**Brother William Short, OFM on the "Liberal Arts" at the University of Paris**

## The Art of Words, of Communication

**Grammar (*grammatica*):** The study of language itself; how language is structured; moods (inner dispositions, intentions) and tenses (experience in relation to Time); the "connectors" (conjunctions) where the thinking happens, etc. The rules of language are the rules of human thought. Language is first *spoken* (sound, music) and then *written*.

**Logic (*dialectic*):** The rules of reasoning; non-contradiction; how thought properly develops; building arguments; syllogisms; formal and informal fallacies of thought (mistakes people make inadvertently in their thinking, or deliberately for the sake of manipulation), etc.

**Rhetoric:** The way that one can present a case that something ought, or ought not, to be done; how to dispose one's hearers; the art of relationship with others through one's words.

## The Art of Nature: measure and proportion and pattern

**Arithmetic:** About number; counting; a building-block of reality; what numbers mean; why do some numbers keep appearing in the natural world; the symbolism and mysticism of numbers. For example, the number 9.

**Geometry:** The relationship of number to space; recognizing patterns; learning to recognize how the created world is structured; finding the form, the shape of things.

**Music** (harmonics; experience of Beauty): The study of tones, harmonies; the "harmony" in all things (the music of the spheres); about the "musicality" of proportion. Consider the "musicality" (or not) of the human voice when speaking.

**Astronomy:** Perception of a world vastly bigger than just the ground on which we stand looking up; the humility; the pattern of the weather; the moveable stars (planets) and the unmovable ones. The constellations; the signs of the Zodiac.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at "**zodiac**" – "Astronomy. A belt of the celestial sphere extending about 8 or 9 degrees on each side of the ecliptic, within which the apparent motions of the sun, moon, and principal planets take place; it is divided into twelve equal parts called *signs*."

After Bonaventure had concluded the "Liberal Arts" curriculum, he was pronounced Master of Arts. This then led to the beginning of the next stage of his training, towards what we call the disciplines of Theology and Philosophy, but only after two years spent mastering the Scriptures.

Ronald Rolheiser, OMI on A Parable of Grace by Piet Fransen, SJ –

## **A Parable of Grace**

**Piet Fransen, SJ (1913-1983)** wrote many important books, but he will always be most remembered for giving us a wonderful parable that runs something like this:

### **A Girl**

Once upon a time there lived a young girl who had been cheated in love. Born to parents who didn't want her, she grew up tolerated more than accepted, put-down more than encouraged, cursed more than blessed. Not once in her young life had she ever experienced being wanted and admired simply for who she was. Every bit of love and generosity she experienced had a string attached.

Soon enough it began to show. She became rough, hard, calculating, manipulative, mean, given over to crude language, a bitter young person who bit in order not to be bitten. She ceased caring about her appearance. She also ceased caring about the consequences her actions. She gave herself over to loveless affairs, using sex as recreation and as a way of punishing others for the world's lovelessness and for the fact that normal joys would never be hers.

### **A Boy**

In the same city there lived a young man for whom fate had drawn a different straw. Much wanted and loved, he grew up in a happy home, nurtured by his mother, blessed by his father, surrounded by siblings and friends who, appreciative of his person, teased and humoured him. Soon enough this too began to show. He grew into a young man who was grateful, generous, careful of his appearance and speech, witty, and anxious to give back to others the love that had so generously been

given him.

One day, by chance, he met the young woman. He saw through her shabby exterior – her coarse language, her bad manners, her deliberately ill-fitted clothing. **He saw her soul, its dormant beauty.** He fell in love with her.

## What Happened

But she thought him a joke. She laughed at him, saw his approach as condescending, threw his gentleness back in his face as an insult. But he was still smitten. He grieved her bitterness, ignored the insults as best he could, and continued to invite her into his life with an understanding and a humour that caught her off guard. She laughed, but this time, not at him. She laughed like Sarah laughed, at age 90, when God told her that she was still to have a baby: "Am I to have normal joy in my life? Am I to have the love and tenderness that I have so often disdained?"

She flashed him a shy smile. But it was ever-so-brief. Normal joy was not for her; she knew it. But, bolstered by that smile, he continued to reach out to her, offering her a surprising understanding, inviting her into his life. Unexpected bursts of tenderness began to swell in her and she began shyly to clean up her appearance, to tone-down her coarseness. This made him more bold, and he pronounced his love for her. She responded in tears, her heart full of new resolutions to never do anything to not be worthy of this love.

But old habits die hard, especially in times of disappointment. One day, angered by a perceived slight, she set off to be with her former friends, to take up again her habits of lovelessness. He called her, but she didn't answer. She wanted to make him feel some pain. In bitterness, she threw her infidelity into his face, saw his hurt, and was happy for it. A bitter satisfaction seeped through her soul as he walked away, silent, defeated. But her victory soon turned to defeat, and she found herself weeping, regretting that it was too late. But it wasn't.

He called the next day. She was beside herself with relief. She fell in his arms, wept. No words were necessary. He cried too and asked her to

marry him. She said yes and felt a joy that, for all her life, she had bitterly assumed was only for others. She knew too that she would never betray him again. **She was ready for love.**

Their life together was not without its pain; but, as the years went by, their love grew and was deepened by the birth of their children. Her graciousness grew with each passing year as did a joy that began to etch itself into the very lines of her face. As her hair grew grey, her eyes softened. Each day she felt more grateful. Her husband often expressed his pride in her and her children, alternatively, argued with her and humoured her.

One day, looking through some old photographs, she found a picture of herself as she had once been, before love entered her life. She studied for a long time a snapshot of that bitter, young girl, finding it hard to believe that this once was her. She prayed in gratitude that love had found and saved her and asked God to help all those who find themselves excluded from the circle of love and happiness.

We are that young woman. God is that young man.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 CE to c. 215 CE) in his *Stromateis* [i.e., thoughts on this and that] – **“God is love, and God is knowable to those who love Him.”**

## **Close Reading the “Prologue” of the Tree of Life**

What Love Knows – the Seraphic Doctor

**Seraphim.** The supernatural creatures, each with six wings, which \*Isaiah in his inaugural vision saw standing above the throne of Yahweh (Is. 6:2–7). Unless they are to be identified with the ‘fiery serpents’ mentioned in Num. 21:6 ff., Deut. 8:15, Is. 14:29, and Is. 30:6, they are not mentioned elsewhere in the OT. From an early date Christian interpreters held the ‘Seraphim’ to be a category of \*angels, and considered them counterparts of the ‘\*Cherubim’;

hence their occurrence together in the \*Preface of the Roman Mass and also in the \**Te Deum*. **The further view, which was widely accepted among Christian exegetes, that the Heb. word 'seraphim' was connected with a root meaning 'to burn' led to the notion that they were esp. distinguished by the fervour of their love. As such they came to be ranked highest in the nine orders of angels (the Cherubim filling the next place).**

See my ***Ganz Notes*** on this text.