
Our Relational World Today: Exploring the Wisdom of St. Bonaventure

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OUR RELATIONAL WORLD TODAY: EXPLORING THE WISDOM OF ST. BONAVENTURE

It was a major honor to have been invited by F. Edward Coughlin, the Director of the Franciscan Institute, to deliver the 2013 Ignatius Brady Lecture at St. Bonaventure University. Ignatius Brady was a major Franciscan scholar from the Cincinnati province whose academic focus was on the medieval period at the time of Francis and Clare. Ignatius Brady was highly instrumental in making Franciscan Studies a part of the American scene. The lecture, therefore, honors both Edward Coughlin and Ignatius Brady. Unfortunately, due to a sudden illness, I was unable to deliver the lecture. However, the following pages contain the text, and its publication in Franciscan Studies continues to honor Ignatius Brady.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this essay centers on the ways in which the theology of St. Bonaventure, who lived in the thirteenth century, can truly enhance the theological thinking of the twenty-first century. Bonaventure's theological approach is fundamentally inter-relational, and inter-relational ways of thinking dominate the cultures of today's world. Are these two forms of inter-relational perception compatible with one another? In this lecture, I attempt to show that the Franciscan world-view, especially as formulated by Bonaventure, offers a major format that unites our current world with a current and deeply respected religious way of thinking. The basis for this inter-connection can be stated in a succinct way: in Bonaventure's writings, his relational Trinitarian theology provides a solid basis for a religious understanding of an inter-relational world. An outline of this essay is as follows:

Part One: Today's world is a relational world.

Part Two: The standard teaching on the Trinity in the Roman Catholic Church from the Council of Trent to 1950.

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Part Three: Changes in the philosophy/theology of the Catholic Church which were made in the documents of Vatican II.

Part Four: Bonaventure's Understanding of the Trinity.

Part Five: Conclusion: The relational God of Bonaventure is a major theological position and it is very helpful for today's inter-relational way of thinking.

PART ONE: TODAY'S WORLD IS A RELATIONAL WORLD

Our contemporary world has changed radically from the world-view as found in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In these earlier centuries, there were realities which were considered unchangeable. This does not mean that every century endorsed the same unchangeable realities, but it does mean that in each century, philosophers, theologians, scientists and sociologists analyzed the world from a basis which they considered unchangeable. René Descartes (1596-1650) posited an unchangeable first philosophical reality: I think, therefore I am. Isaac Newton posited the law of gravity, in which the unity of nature presupposed the unity of the divine mind. The physical world was often referred to as a Newtonian world, in which there were precise and non-relational physical attributes.

At the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, there have been serious changes in the scientific world, which have redefined the universe in relational terms. Both quantum physics and the contemporary scientific age of the universe have changed this perception of the microcosm and macrocosm in which we live. The quantum world and the multi-billion-year-universe have been scientifically developed in a profoundly inter-relational way. Today, the globalized universe is perceived through an inter-relational framework rather than through a framework of independent and unchangeable laws and substances.

Secondly, universal globalization in and through population growth, computerization of communications, and multiple forms of quick travel has made the people throughout

the world aware of one another's multiple cultures. In the process of globalization, we have confronted in each of these cultures both problems and possibilities. In an intricate way, human life throughout the world has become multi-cultural in a depth and breadth which human civilization has to date never experienced.

Thirdly, Bonaventure's understanding of an inter-relational God has seriously helped the current science-religion discussion. The recent publication of the volume, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, is a strong witness to today's serious conversations regarding one's belief in an eternal and all-powerful God vis-à-vis a finite and inter-relational scientific world view.¹ The many essays in this volume clearly attest to contemporary interest and at times even disinterest to the confrontation of religion and science today.

F. LeRon Shults in his essay, "Trinitarian Faith Seeking Transformative Understanding," states his purpose as follows:

I will argue that integrative developments in late modern philosophy of science and the broader (re)turn to the hermeneutical significance of the category of relationality have opened up conceptual space for the renewal of a Trinitarian faith that seeks transfor-

¹ See *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, Philip Clayton, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Part one of this volume centers on "Religion and Science across the World's Traditions," and these essays explore the ways in which Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Religions interface with contemporary science (7-123). In this section, the direction of thought is from religion to science. Part two moves in a different direction, namely, from science to religion. The individual essays focus on the following scientific studies: cosmology, physics molecular biology, evolutionary theory, ecology, psychology and sociology. Part three delves more deeply into the major fields of religion and science. Part four focuses on the methodological approaches of science and religion. Part five studies the central theoretical debates vis-à-vis science and religion. The final section turns to the value issues which one finds in science and in religion. In all of these sections the inter-relational aspects of science are presented in the ways in which the two areas tend to unity and also face up to ways the two areas do not coalesce.

mative understanding as it engages in the discourse among the fields of contemporary science.²

In a major way, the current re-understanding of Bonaventure's theology of the Trinitarian God offers the contemporary world a relational God which Shults describes. In the same volume, Susan Power Bratton, in her essay, "Ecology and Religion," specifically mentions Bonaventure and the richness he brings to contemporary science. She writes:

As this dialogue [on the relationship of Christianity and the natural world] continued into the Middle Ages, St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) presented a 'fecund' triune God who diffuses eternal goodness and divine life into the creation."³

Bratton finds in Bonaventure a strongly relational Trinitarian God, and she relates his relational Trinity to today's scientific findings in the area of ecology. It is only in the last one hundred years that the theology of Bonaventure has slowly been stated and clarified. One hundred years ago, scholars presented a mistaken view of Bonaventure's understanding of the Trinitarian God. Since 1950, scholars have reassessed Bonaventure's theology of Trinity in a way that Bratton can speak of a "fecund triune God," a theological explication of God which she sees as acceptable today by relational-minded scientists.

PART TWO: THE STANDARD TEACHING ON THE TRINITY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH FROM THE COUNCIL OF TRENT TO 1950

One of the reasons why Bonaventure's theology of Trinity was not available to Catholic and Christian scholars was the

² F. LeRon Shults, "Trinitarian Faith Seeking Transformative Understanding," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, 488-89.

³ See Susan Power Bratton "Ecology and Religion," *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, 213. For her view, she cites P. H. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1985), 353-428.

determination by the Roman Curia to maintain an undivided format of Catholic belief. From the Council of Trent down to roughly 1950, the only theology of Trinity which was allowed was the thomistic form of Trinitarian thought. There is no need to go into detail on the issue of Catholic teaching from the Council of Trent down to the Second Vatican Council. However, in order to provide a context for the Catholic teaching on the Trinity, we need to consider briefly the period from the end of the sixteenth century – the time of Trent – down to the middle of the twentieth century – the time of Vatican II. During these 350 years, the seminary teaching on Catholic theology and Catholic philosophy slowly became a matter of officially prescribed books. Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879), singled out Aquinas as the approved theologian. Consequently, from 1880 down to 1955, seminary text books for philosophy and theology had to be approved by the Vatican Curia. Only those books, which presented the views of Thomas Aquinas in a foundational manner, were allowed to be used as seminary textbooks. Basically, the Thomistic approach became the dominant theology throughout the western Catholic Church. The theological teachings of the Roman Catholic Church were based on Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.⁴ Franciscan authors, such as Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, and John Duns Scotus, were not accepted by Catholic authority. Rather, Catholic Church leadership was intent in developing a unified theology which clearly negated Anglican, Protestant, and Orthodox teachings.⁵

⁴ The theology from 1550 to 1950 was primarily aimed at a rejection of Anglican and Protestant ways of thinking. A large majority of the Catholic schools during those centuries were staffed by Jesuits. In a Plenary Meeting of all Jesuit Provinces, towards the end of the 1500s, the Jesuits officially established that the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas were to be the centerpiece for every Jesuit school. Prior to this, some Jesuits had presented the positions of the Franciscan scholar, John Duns Scotus. The Franciscan approach was officially set by the Jesuits. If we consider all the schools throughout the world which the Jesuits have established during the past four hundred years, one can see clearly that the dominant theological approach in the Roman Catholic Church became thomistic.

⁵ The transition from a “one-sided” theological Catholic Church to a “multiple-sided” Catholic Church developed slowly from the 1800s down to

During this same period of time – from the Council of Trent to the middle of the twentieth century, the Franciscan approach slowly became a side-line view. George Marcil traces this upward-downward history of the Franciscan school in his essay, “The Franciscan School through the Centuries.”⁶ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Franciscan scholarship had only a whispering voice. However, in 1882 the critical edition of Bonaventure’s writings began to appear. This was followed by critical editions of the writings of John Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Anthony of Padua, Alexander of Hales, and many others. The interest in Franciscan scholarship has developed strongly down to today, and Franciscan philosophy and theology has had a tremendous rebirth in the western world. The world today is a relational world and Franciscan scholarship today offers a relational philosophy and theology.

In 1892, Théodore de Régnon, in his three volumes, *Études de théologie positive sur la sainte Trinité*, maintained that there were only two forms of western medieval Trinitarian theology: that of Augustine-Aquinas and that of Richard of St. Victor-Bonaventure.⁷ From De Régnon onward, his view of western Trinitarian theology was generally accepted by Catholic medieval scholars until the 1960s.

In recent times, the sources of Richard of St. Victor’s Trinitarian Theology have been the focus of scholars such as Gervais Dumiege,⁸ André. M. Ethier,⁹ A Malet,¹⁰ G. Salet,¹¹ and

1950. I have dealt at length with this history in my volume, *A Theology of Church for the Third Millennium* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1-51.

⁶ See George Marcil, “The Franciscan School through the Centuries,” *The History of Franciscan Theology*, Kenan Osborne, ed. (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute Publications, 2007), 311-30.

⁷ See Théodore de Régnon, *Études de Théologie positive sur la Sainte Trinité*, three volumes (Paris: Victor Retauz et Fils, 1892).

⁸ See Gervais Dumeige, *Richard of St. Victor et l'idée chrétienne de l'amour* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952).

⁹ André M. Ethier, *Le “De Trinitate” de Richard de Saint Victor* (Paris: 1939).

¹⁰ A. Malet, *Personne et amour dans la théologie trinitaire de Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1956), 37-42.

¹¹ G. Salet, “Le Mystère de la charité divine,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 28 (1938), 5-30.

Olegario González.¹² Zachary Hayes notes that the position of De Régnon and his followers “tended to present Richard [of St. Victor] as a deserter from the camp of Augustine,” and that Richard “drank deeply from Greek streams and thus developed a style that was competitive to the Augustinian tradition.”¹³

Today, such views are seen as inaccurate. The Trinitarian theology of Richard of St. Victor is classified within the Augustinian framework of Trinity. Anne Hunt in her volume, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*, states this Augustinian relationship of Richard of St. Victor in the following way.

We have noted that Augustine’s exploration of the experience of the human person as analogy for an understanding of the mystery of the Trinity yielded more than twenty variations of what came to be called the psychological analogy. One of the analogies that he presented for consideration in his book *De Trinitate* is the analogy of interpersonal love: the trinity of love that comprises the loving subject (the lover), the object loved (the beloved) and the relation or bond of love (*vinculum caritatis*), the love which unites them.¹⁴

¹² Olegario Gonzalez de Cardenal, *Misterio Trinitario y Existencia Humana: Estudio Histórico-Teológico en Torno a San Buenaventura* (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp: 1965), 258-59.

¹³ Zachary Hayes, *St. Bonaventure’s Disputed Questions of the Trinity: An Introduction and a Translation* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute Publications, 1979), 17-24. In the same volume, Hayes indicates that Bonaventure was strongly influenced by his teacher, Alexander of Hales. On the issue of Trinity, however, Hayes notes: “Despite the obvious historical and literary relations between Bonaventure and the *Summa* [written in part by Alexander of Hales], it is indisputable that the Seraphic Doctor’s Trinitarian theology transcends that of the *Summa* in unity and coherence of thought. It clearly bears the mark of a single, keen mind that has appropriated the tradition in a personal way,” 22-23.

¹⁴ See Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 23. Her reference to Augustine’s *De Trinitate* can be found in 8:14; 9, 2; and 15, 10.

In medieval scholarship today, Bonaventure's theology of the Trinity is presented as a third distinct form of Trinitarian thought in the western Catholic Church, for it was Bonaventure alone who incorporated Dionysian thought into his Trinitarian structure in a primary and distinctive way.¹⁵ Bonaventure is now recognized as a Trinitarian theologian who is basically not Augustinian. His Trinitarian Theology is based on the writings of several early Greek theologians whose works in the thirteenth century had been translated into Latin. In a carefully worded way, Hayes outlines the sources of Bonaventure's thought.¹⁶

PART THREE: CHANGES IN THE PHILOSOPHY/THEOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WHICH WERE MADE IN THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II.

The majority of bishops at Vatican II moved the Catholic Church into a church which takes today's relational form of life seriously. There was, of course, a large constituency of conservative bishops at Vatican II who wanted to maintain the church as it had been from the Council of Trent onward. Nonetheless, the documents of Vatican II offer us a new theology of the church, which is an open church. We can see this openness in the following positions found in the documents of Vatican II.

- A. The Church is a reflection of Jesus, the *Lumen gentium*. This new view of the church began with the naming of the most important conciliar document, namely *Lumen gentium*. In *Lumen gentium*, the theology of chapter one is clear: only when the church people reflect Jesus are

¹⁵ See Kenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), 209-10.

¹⁶ See Hayes, *op. cit.*, 43-79. In this lengthy section, Hayes points out in a clear way Bonaventure's neo-platonic roots, his Dionysian roots, and his dependence on both Alexander of Hales and Odo Rigaldus. The influence of Richard of St. Victor and Dionysius is spelled out on 56-59. See also K. Osborne, "Trinitarian Doctrine (500 to 1500)," *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, J. R. Strayer, ed. (New York, NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1989), 189-98.

they really church. If we do not reflect Jesus, we cannot be called “church.”

- B. The Church is the people of God. Secondly, all the people of God are primarily called to reflect Jesus, the *Lumen gentium*. The theme, people of God, was deliberately chosen as the theme for chapter two. The conservative bishops wanted the second chapter to focus on the church’s hierarchy, since in their view they were appointed by Jesus to be the leaders of the church. The majority of bishops at Vatican II, however, believed that the people of God – every Christian man, woman, and child – were called on to reflect Jesus, and thus the people of God, not just the hierarchy, formed the major reflection of Jesus, the Light of the world.
- C. The Church is an open church. In every document of Vatican II, one sees that the bishops wanted to open the church to the world we live in. With this open understanding of church, the bishops moved on to a stronger and more open acceptance of lay women and men. The bishops moved to an ecumenical understanding of church with openness to Anglican and Protestant churches. They moved on to a more open church by welcoming the Orthodox Churches, even those churches Orthodox Churches which do not accept the pope. They moved to a more open church in their understanding of non-Christian religions. The church was more open to mass media, to a computerized world, and to religious liberty.

These documents simply opened doors. It was left to the post-conciliar leadership of the church to allow these open areas to develop and grow. In the first few years after Vatican II, church leaders – bishops, theologians, pastors – began to move the church in an open direction. However, since some highly positioned conservative bishops remained the leaders in the Vatican Curia, they tried to control any and all developments of the church. Slowly but surely, these conservative bishops have made

headway in the Catholic Church. Today, Catholics live in a church which is being pulled into two directions: into an open direction and into a closed direction.

- D. The Catholic Church today is becoming a closed church. The documents of Vatican II speak of openness, which means that the Catholic Church should be positively open to the world in which we live. We see this in the decree on mass media, *Inter Mirifica*, in which technical mass media, by and large, are endorsed by the bishops. We see this in the declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*, on human freedom (n.2.) This position on freedom is reiterated in *Gaudium et Spes* (n16). In the decree, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, the term, science, is used favorably four times in one paragraph (n. 34). In the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, the bishops focus on contemporary science seven times. In some instances, the theme of science is developed at length (see n. 5; nn. 33 to 36; and nn. 57-59). The bishops at Vatican II composed statements on various topics, and in many of these decrees and constitutions we find a strong openness to contemporary science.

However, in 1994, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published. Unfortunately, the *Catechism* has turned the Catholic Church backwards. The teachings expressed in the *Catechism* more often than not are a return to a pre-Vatican II expression of Catholic faith. We see this in the *Catechism's* citations of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Augustine is cited eighty-seven times, and Thomas Aquinas is cited sixty times. These are the two theologians who are cited most often. There are only two brief references to Bonaventure. St. Francis of Assisi is also cited two times. John Duns Scotus is not cited at all. Moreover, in the *Catechism*, contemporary science is mentioned briefly. Because of this brief mention of science, there is little affirmation of the benefits of modern science. However, in two places in the *Catechism*, contemporary science is mentioned in some detail. In n. 283, both science itself and contemporary scientists are praised,

but in the following paragraph, n. 284, the “glory” of science is set to one side, and another higher order, in which science plays no role, is praised in an abundant way. In this paragraph, the findings of science are belittled. From page 74 in the *Catechism* to page 478, there is no mention of science. On page 478, medical science is discussed. In this discussion, there is no mention of a dialogue between church leaders and medical experts. Rather, in this latter section, the *Catechism* states that all those in contemporary medical work need to abide by Roman Catholic moral norms. Medical science in his section is tolerated, but only if all medical personnel – not just Catholic men and women – follow the moral teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

Today, we find ourselves in a world which faces seven major problematic realities which people in society throughout the world realize, but which the leadership of the Catholic Church at this moment of time seems to be hesitant about making any change. These seven major issues are:

1. Universal Globalization
2. Universal Multi-Culturalism
3. Inter-religious dialogues
4. New approaches to philosophy
5. Quantum physics
6. The contemporary scientific age of the universe
7. The enormous growth in human population today

Let us consider each of these briefly:

Universal Globalization: Throughout East Asia, the world is basically understood as a relational world. We see this in the writings of Confucius, Mo Tzŭ, Mencius, Lao Tzŭ, the *Huai-nan-tzŭ*, and Wang Yang-ming. In the writings of these scholars, relationship not substance or essence is center stage. Deep down Asian people are relational people. The same can be said of the major writings of Indian philosophers and scholars. The same can be said of Islamic

scholars and of Sub-Saharan Africans who are today re-studying their pre-Christian roots. The same can be said of the native populations from Canada to Tierra del Fuego. All of these relational thought patterns are affecting the global world today.

Universal multi-culturalism: We are beginning to know much more about our cultural neighbors. Eventually, human men and women will see the values of cultural diversity. I prefer to and speak of “equi-culturalism” rather than “multi-culturalism,” since each culture has wonderful realities as well as disturbing realities. However, today but some men and women continue to see their culture as superior and all other cultures are secondary or even threatening. When this happens, racism becomes evident.

Inter-religious dialogues: The openness of the Catholic Church to Anglicanism and most forms of Protestantism is something new. The work of the World Council of Churches, which until the Council was reserved for non-Catholic Christian groups, is now open in many ways to Catholic membership. Our relationship – note the word “relationship” – with Orthodox Churches, Anglican and Protestant Churches is becoming more and more a part of our Catholic life. John Paul II called the leaders of all religions to Assisi for a weekend of reflection and prayer. This would have been anathematized prior to Vatican II.

New Approaches to Philosophy: It has become clearer and clearer that the majority of the human race today thinks in terms of relation, not in terms of unchangeable essence. Our Catholic Faith is gradually being expressed by many theologians in a relational way. We see this change in the turn by Catholic theologians to postmodern philosophy. Western philosophers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Lacan, and many others have opened up the western world to postmodern philosophy. One of the first pivotal moments of this reorganiza-

tion of Euro-American thought took place at the University of Göttingen in 1907. Edmund Husserl delivered five lectures in which he introduced his celebrated “phenomenological reduction.” His main issue was to express the decisive overcoming of what Alexandre Lowit’s “la situation phénoménale du clivage,” which means an overcoming of the Euro-American split between subject and object.¹⁷ When we realize that all our views on reality are tinged by our own subjectivity, we begin to see the depths of what relational philosophy means. Maurice Merleau-Ponty once said: “I will never know the way you see [the color] red and you will never know the way I see it.”¹⁸ Martin Heidegger also moves in this relational direction. He writes: “By ‘Others,’ we do not mean everyone else but me – those over against whom the ‘I’ stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself – those among whom one is too.”¹⁹ Add to this change in Euro-American philosophy to the current interest in Asian, Indian, Native, and African philosophies, and one can only say: our way of thinking has changed. The changes have enhanced a relational way of thinking over an essence or substance dominated way of thinking.

Quantum physics: A little over one hundred years ago, some scientists began to speak about Quantum Theory. By 1920, scientists generally referred to Quantum Physics or Quantum Mechanics. The Quantum approach ceased to be a theory and became a reality. (See Kim Al-Khalili, *Quantum: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 30). Quantum physics focuses extensively on the microcosm of our universe. In this microcosmic world, there are a number of inter-relationships between mesons, electrons, neutrinos, photons, muons. Hadrons, anti-particles, etc. Today, scientists speak of elementary particles

¹⁷ See Kenan Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), 55.

¹⁸ Ibid., 78-79. I am citing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Le Primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques,” *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie* 41 (1947), 119-35.

¹⁹ Ibid., 77. I am citing Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 154.

as either quarks or leptons. But in all these various species of elementary matter particles, there is no over-arching plan, by which the microcosm is organized. Quantum physics does not offer any indication of a “divine plan of creation.”

The contemporary scientific age of the universe: Contemporary scientists have determined that the age of our universe is roughly between ten-billion-years-old up to twenty-billion-years-old. In our macrocosmic universe there are scores of inter-relational activities, but again there is no indication at all of a “divine plan of creation.” The macro-universe is deeply inter-related. Our planet earth is dependent on the sun, the moon, other stars and asteroids. Our planet earth is an inter-relational planet. When scientists consider the billions of years in which the universe has developed, it is remarkable that they have not found any over-arching plan for the universe. These scientists do not offer any indication of a “divine plan of creation.” We live in an inter-related universe, but we do not scientifically know of any over-arching structure which gives universal meaning to the movement of the universe.

The enormous growth in human population today Finally, in 1900 there were about 1.6 billion people on planet earth. In 2083 – almost the end of this century – there will be ten billion people on planet earth, a growth of 8.5 billion people. Most of these people will not be Christians. East Asian populations will grow; Indian population will grow; Islamic populations will grow. Christians – according to current statistics – will not grow so that the percentage of Christian on our earth will be small and politically, economically, and socially ineffective.

To date, the hierarchical leadership of the Catholic Church has not done very much vis-à-vis most of these topics. The focus of the church leadership is usually on itself rather than outward-looking towards the major problems we have just mentioned. The documents of Vatican II are outward-looking. The statements of today’s Vatican Curia are more

often than not inward-looking. Even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, mentioned above, presents an inward-looking church, whereas the documents of Vatican II present an outward-looking church.

PART FOUR: THE RELATIONAL TRINITY IN ST. BONAVENTURE

Let us consider the relational theology of Trinity in some detail. One of his major writings on the Trinity is found in his *Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences*, written by Peter Lombard 1157-1158. This four-book writing of Peter Lombard became the standard text book for university teaching of theology at the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the medieval universities, every theological professor had to offer a course, commenting on his four-volume text of Peter Lombard. Bonaventure was no exception.²⁰

In Part One of his commentary, Bonaventure focuses on the unity and trinity of God. Bonaventure takes up the initial question: *Utrum sit unus tantum Deus?* – “Is there only one God?” Bonaventure lists six theological statements from earlier theologians which prove that there can only be one God. He then lists four statements from other writers, such as Aristotle and Averroës, which argue that there can be more than one God. After these pro/con positions, Bonaventure states his own view, namely: “It is impossible that there are several Gods” (*Dicendum est quod impossibile est esse plures deos*).

Bonaventure then offers a very short but well-focused explanation why a plurality of Gods is impossible. He writes, “In actuality, all things come from him, are in him, and return to him, and only in him [the one God] do things exist.” The actual world exists in its many forms and dimensions only because there is one God who has created this world. This is his argument from “actuality.”

²⁰ See Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994). This volume is perhaps one of the most substantial studies of Peter Lombard. Her presentation helps scholars understand in a better way why and how the many scholarly commentaries by medieval philosophers developed the Lombard's views.

Bonaventure then argues for one God but from a different standpoint than actuality, namely in one's human way of thinking. In one's human way of thinking about God, there is nothing one can think about which is equal to God.

Thus, he concludes, in actuality and in our thinking, there can only be one God. All of the above is expressed in one paragraph which has only eleven lines. It is a very brief statement by Bonaventure that there is only one God. Bonaventure sees the question of many Gods as a non-question, and therefore he does not go into a long dissertation to prove there is only "one God."

If we turn to St. Thomas Aquinas and his *Summa Theologiae*, which is similar to Bonaventure's book since it follows Peter Lombard's volume, we see a totally different approach. Thomas Aquinas devotes twenty-five questions to the "One God" issue. In one of the volumes of the *Summa*, edited by Peter Caramello, which I used, the twenty-five questions of Thomas Aquinas take up 136 pages of text. Only after these 136 pages, does Thomas Aquinas move from his teaching on "one God" to his teaching on "the Trinity."

What Bonaventure accomplishes in one page, Thomas Aquinas accomplishes in 136 pages. In the number of pages, we see a major difference between Thomas and Bonaventure. For Thomas, a long discussion of "one God" is needed before a theologian can turn to the Trinity. For Bonaventure, the only way to talk about God is to talk about a triune God. In other words, don't waste time talking about "one God."

But what does Trinity mean in Bonaventure's writing? We find Bonaventure's answer in his Second Question II. How Bonaventure words the title for Question Two is important. In Latin, we read: *Utrum in Deo ponenda est personarum pluralitas?* In English: "Whether, in God, one should establish a plurality of persons." Notice that Bonaventure does not use the term, "trinity." Rather, he uses the open-ended word, "plurality." In the very nature of God, Bonaventure asks, is there some form of interacting plurality?

Bonaventure states that inter-relational activity (plurality) is present in God from the start. God is not first of all a monad, and only then can we talk about a Trinitarian God. God is not an absolutely isolated individuality, and only then can we talk about a Trinitarian God. Rather God, from the very beginning of our thinking is one-and-plurality. One-and-plurality is the essence of God.

Ladies and gentlemen, plurality means inter-relationality. This is the uniqueness of Bonaventure, at least for western theologians.

Bonaventure then describes what he means by plurality. His explanation is found in the terminology he uses. He chooses four terms: *Simplicitas*, *Primitas*, *Perfectio*, and *Beatitudo et Caritas* – Simplicity, Primacy, Perfection, and Blessedness-and-Love.

1. *Simplicitas*: In virtue of simplicity (*simplicitas*), he writes, the divine essence is communicable and can exist in multiplicity (*communicabilis et potens esse in pluribus*). Simplicity means communicability and the ability to be in many others.
2. *Primitas*: In virtue of firstness (*primitas*), a person is first-born which means that there can be second-borns, third-borns, etc. And *primitas* therefore suggests plurality. *Persona nata est ex se aliam producere*.
3. *Perfectio*: In virtue of perfection (*perfectio*), Bonaventure writes, plurality is both apt and at hand (*apta et prompta*). Perfect, one asks, in relation to whom and to way? One is perfect when compared to another and this comparison-quality arises immediately (*prompta*) when we use the word perfect, and if something is actually “perfect” then a comparison to something other which is less-perfect is “fitting” or in Latin *apta*.
4. *Beatitudo et caritas*: In virtue of blessedness and love (*beatitudo et caritas*), plurality is voluntary (*voluntaria*). If a person begins to say, “I am loving! I am loving!”, one might ask: “Who” or “What” are you loving? Love implies plurality: I love X. The same relationship belongs to be-

atitudo. When one is happy, one is happy about someone else or something else. There is once again a reference to plurality.

All four of these realities, *simplicitas*, *primitas*, *perfectio* and *beatitudo et caritas*, are based on the very nature of God. The very being of God means: *simplicitas*, *primitas*, *perfectio* and *beatitudo et caritas*. In this plurality-related approach being can only be relational. Zachary Hayes states this same thing in a very clear way: “The mystery of self-diffusiveness must be articulated in terms of a dialectical relationship.”²¹

Clearly in this opening section of Bonaventure’s theology of God, there is much to say about “one God,” and about “a plurality in God.” This oneness and this plurality is part-and-parcel of his definition of “God.” In these pages, the term Trinity has not yet appeared.

It is only in the next question, Question Three, that the idea of plurality – which includes “Trinity – begins to appear. The title of Question Three does not, however, use the word “three.” The title of Question Three uses the word plurality: *Utrum numerus divinarum personarum sit infinitus?* – “Is the number of divine persons infinite?” In this question, Bonaventure asks whether one can speak about an infinity of persons? Bonaventure replies that an infinite number of persons is unthinkable.

Only in Question Four, does Bonaventure center his argument on three persons in God. The title of Question Four reads: *Utrum tres tantum sint divinae personae?* – “Whether there can only be three persons?” Bonaventure remains focused on one God and in this one and the same God, he asks, can a person acknowledge three persons.

What is important here is this: namely, the one God – therefore the very essence of God – is in itself relational in a threesome way.

²¹ Zachary Hayes, “Bonaventure Mystery of the Triune God,” *The History of Franciscan Theology*, ed. Kenan Osborne, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2007).

For Bonaventure, one does not begin with an essence of God which is fundamentally unified or one, and only then, based on a “unified or one” God, can one begin to construct a Trinity-God. Rather, Bonaventure is saying that the very term God is in itself triune. This is why Question Four is so important.

In the text of Question Four, Bonaventure argues his case as follows.

If we say God is love, then there must be someone who is loved.

If there is a God who is supreme happiness, there must be a supreme happiness over “some thing.”

God is also most perfect, but in perfection there is both nature and freedom.

Nature indicates a “closed unit.”

Freedom indicates an “open unit.”

If perfection includes both nature and freedom, then there is an openness to something else.

If there is a lover then there must be a beloved.

In this we have an “A” who is the lover. We therefore have a “B” who is the beloved. Between the lover and the beloved there must be a mutual union, which we can name “C”.

THE LOVER = A
THE BELOVED = B
THE MUTUAL BOND = C

In this understanding of love, a trinity is formed – a plus b plus c. – I *love you*; *you love me*. That’s two. But, there is also a mutual uniting factor, namely our love for each other, and makes three.

The same holds for nature and freedom. There is a nature – number I – but there is also freedom – number II, but if the one and two are united – in the case of nature united to freedom – then the union factor makes III. Nature is united to freedom and freedom is united to nature. Nature is I, freedom is II, and the mutual interchange is III.

Bonaventure states that lover and beloved have meaning only if the lover loves “this” beloved individual, and the beloved in return loves this individual “lover.” The same argument holds for nature, which is unchangeable, and freedom, which is changeable. You can have one and the other, but if God is both nature and freedom, then there has to be a wedding between nature and freedom, and the wedding of nature to freedom is the third factor.

This is brought out by a metaphor which Christians have used from the early church onward, namely God is the Father, Jesus is God the Son, and the love between Father and Son is God the Holy Spirit. Between father and son there is a physical relationship, but there also needs to be an emotional relationship, namely, that the father loves his son and that the son loves his father.

In reality today, there are some men who do not even know that they are “fathers,” and there are sons who have no idea who their “father” is. In these cases, there is no bonding. Physically, there is a father and there is a son, and there is a genetic connection. In this meager sense of the terms, one can speak about a father-son-genetically correct relationship. Bonaventure does not use this kind of an example. Rather, he asks us to think of a father who truly loves his son and a son who truly loves his father. In this latter situation there are three major factors: first, the father truly loving his son; the son truly loving his father; and the power and depth of their loving each other.

The same kind of argument can be applied to nature and freedom. One can have a human nature but without any freedom; one can have freedom but the freedom is not connected to human nature; and there is the union of freedom and nature in one individual human being that brings about a Trinity. What is important in my view is this: from the very beginning of our understanding of God, relationship is at work. In Bonaventure, God from the very start is relational. There is no way to define God without defining relationality in God and this means “Trinity.” The Franciscan understanding of God is a God who is fundamentally a relational God.

A. Bonaventure uses non-relational and relational words when speaking of God.

In the writings of Bonaventure, we find words and phrases which seemingly are not relational, namely:

One

Only one

One essence

One substance

Immutable

Summe simplex (simple in the highest way)

In each of these words and phrases, there is a focus on oneness rather than openness to plurality. These are also words and phrases about God which were in standard use in the theologies of the thirteenth century. Bonaventure could not have written on God and Trinity without using these words and phrases.

On the other hand, in Bonaventure we find a number of words and phrases which can only be understood as relational:

Ability to produce

Eternal production

Emanation

Communicability

Powerful

Fontal fullness

Infinitely free love

Positive relationship

Primal fountain

Greater than primary/final causality

Non-causal productivity

Highest actuality which includes *summa diffusio et communicatio et caritas*.

Bonaventure argues his case as follows. As regards each of these words and phrases one can ask certain questions.

Let me offer a few examples of his argumentation. In the first phrase above, which Bonaventure uses, we hear: in God there is an “*Ability to produce.*”

One can rightfully ask “Who or what has the ability to produce? and What is produced? The phrase, ability to produce, raises the question: who or what is producing?; and it also asks: what is being produced? Relationship is an essential aspect of the phrase: “Ability to produce.” At all times, therefore eternally, God is producing and what is produced is also infinitely in being. So, too, the inter-connection of producing and being-produced is eternal. God IS eternally inter-relational. We do not have a “one God” first and only then a “Trinity-God.” God, for Bonaventure, is relational always. One cannot understand God if one does not understand a relational God.

Let us take a second example from the list of phrases above. Bonaventure frequently uses the phrase: “*eternal production.*” One can ask two questions:

Number one: “Production by whom or by what?”

Number two: “Production of what?”

Again we can see a similar argument: production is a relational word, since there is someone who produces something, and there is also something which is produced. Eternal Production means that throughout the infinite life of God, the relationship of eternal production means that there is an unending producing in God. There is also an unending production in God. God is always producing, and God is always “in production.”

In each of the above examples, the wording causes us to ask questions such as: of what? or of whom? We are also prompted to ask questions such as: for whom? and for what?

In other words, something relational is taking place.

In the first set of issues used by Bonaventure, there seems to be no issue of relationship. These non-relational terms are the following: one, only one, one essence, one substance, immutable, and *summe simplex* (simple in the highest way).

Can these words and phrases which are basically non-relational be connected to other words and phrases which are relational and which Bonaventure uses to present his theology of God and Trinity?

The words and phrases in the second listing are: Ability to produce, Eternal production, Emanation, Communicability, Powerful, Fontal fullness, Infinitely free love, Positive relationship, Primal fountain, Greater than primary/final causality, Non-causal productivity, and Highest actuality which includes *summa diffusio et communicatio et caritas*. In all of these words and phrase, some sort of question – of what and for whom – arises. All of these words and phrases denote and connote inter-relationship.

These two different sets of terms used for God and Trinity by Bonaventure are not easy to unify. It is my view – and this is only a view – that deep down Bonaventure is trying to say that even the word “being” has a relational meaning. Since such a definition of being would not have been accepted in the thirteenth century, and therefore Bonaventure simply leaves the two aspects – one non-relational and the other highly relational – intact.

However, we today might say that his emphasis on relationship in God’s very nature is what Bonaventure is saying even when he is using the non-relational words and phrases regarding God mentioned above. A relational God is indeed presented by Bonaventure and the issue of relationship seems to reflect his deepest understanding of the nature of God.

B. A key phrase in the theology of Bonaventure is *bonum est sui diffusivum* – *goodness is diffusive of itself*.

There is a key phrase in Bonaventure’s writing which he uses as basic for an understanding of God, namely, *bonum est sui diffusivum* – *goodness is diffusive of itself*. What does this phrase mean?

In his explanation of the theology of Bonaventure, *Homo Viator: Der Mensch im Lichte der Heilsgeschichte*, Johannes

Freyer frequently indicates that God is a relational God.²² The following citation is one example among many.

Since Bonaventure describes God as “The Existing One,” as Personal Being in relationship, as the One who shares his own self and from whose communication creation exists, a relationship and inter-communication of the Highest Being with creation must be presupposed.²³

In his writings, Bonaventure uses a relational phrase again and again, namely, *bonum est sui diffusivum* – goodness is diffusive of itself. Originally, this phrase is found in Dionysius the Great, a Greek-speaking bishop and theologian of Alexandria in Egypt. Jacques Bougerol, a French Franciscan professor, gives us this background:

[Alexander] The Areopagite’s teaching is hard to summarize. We may say, however, that his influence on Bonaventure was three fold: he gave Bonaventure a viewpoint, a method, and a few fundamental themes.²⁴

Goodness, which is diffusive of itself, indicates a “free giving,” not a “necessitated giving.” The creation of the universe is a free gift of God. The creation of humanity is a free gift of God. The incarnation of the Logos in the humanity of Jesus is a free gift of God. The call to the kingdom of God is a free gift of God. No human and no angel can set limits on what God gives and does not give. The grace of God is given in abundance. Not even Church authority can set limits on the forgiving goodness of God. In Freyer’s words, the freely-given goodness of God – *bonum est sui diffusivum* – is the womb of creation. Neither God’s power nor God’s wisdom is the womb of creation; rather, God loved us into existence.

²² Johannes Freyer, *Homo Viator: Der Mensch im Lichte der Heilsgeschichte* (Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 2001).

²³ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁴ Jacques Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure* (Patterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963), 40.

Bonaventure speaks about three books: the Book of Creation, the Book of the Sacred Scriptures, and the Book of One's Inner Life. In each of these books, God speaks to us in a loving way, that is in a way which indicates *bonum est sui diffusivum* – goodness is diffusive of itself.

In the Book of Creation, Bonaventure teaches us that God is present as vestige (*vestigium*) in every created being. God is truly present in everything and God is not playing hide-and-go-seek. We can see God in the sun and the moon, the stars and the wind. In this same book, Bonaventure teaches us that God is present in every woman and man as an image (*imago*). The image of God is present in every human person, and this means that God is there, for the image God in a person is what this book is all about. In saintly people, so the Book of Creation tells us, God is present as a likeness (*similitudo*).

However, Bonaventure indicates in the second book, especially the gospels, that Jesus has become incarnate and that the Spirit of God is at work throughout the world. The incarnation is a moment when divine goodness is diffusive of God's own self – *bonum est sui diffusivum*. The goodness of God is a gift which we experience in our relationship with Jesus.

In the third book, the Book of the Omnipresent Spirit, we also experience the freely-given goodness of God – *bonum est sui diffusivum* – is the womb of the sending of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is deep within each human being, in our will and in our mind, in our heart and in our feelings. The Spirit of God is also present throughout the created world, beyond the boundaries of the church.

In these books on God's presence to us – a divine presence which is freely-given by God – *bonum est sui diffusivum* – we experience relationship: God relating to us and asking that we relate to God. In some ways there is a new Trinity, namely: God, ourselves, and our interpersonal relationship with God. We live in a Trinitarian way.

**PART FIVE: CONCLUSION: THE RELATIONAL GOD
OF BONAVENTURE IS A MAJOR THEOLOGICAL POSITION
AND IT IS VERY HELPFUL FOR TODAY'S INTER-RELATIONAL
WAY OF THINKING**

The conclusion to this lecture is very short and sweet. You are studying, teaching, working in a university named after St. Bonaventure. You even live in a town called "St. Bonaventure." One could simply say that "Bonaventure" is only a name, such as California. There is a state of California and there is a University of California. California is only a name, just as St. Bonaventure is only a name.

However, you could also say that the University is a Franciscan University but also a Franciscan University which from its very beginnings dedicated itself to the study of Bonaventure: his thought, his teaching, his holiness, his leadership.

In today's twenty-first century world, relationship is a way of life. We are surrounded by persons, things, movements, computers, economic factors, social factors, etc. However, we are not just surrounded by these factors; we are intrinsically related to these factors. Our way of life today is relational, or better stated "inter-relational." People and things continually relate to us and we continually relate to them. Relationship is the air in which we today move and live and have our being.

In the religious world, at least in the way Bonaventure understood it, we also live in a relational world and the God we believe in is a God who is relational. God relates not only to you and me, but to all men and women. In Bonaventure's book of creation, God is related to everything, since everything is a vestige of God. God is also related to each and every human being. God is also deeply related to the innermost parts of our thinking and loving. A relational God – it seems to me – is a God in whom people in the twenty-first century can believe in.

Let the relational air of this university enter into you in a deep and overwhelming way. Read the books in the library.

ies, but also read the book of creation, the book of the gospels, and the book of the inner-life. Let Bonaventure not only be a name you honor because you are part of the University of St. Bonaventure. Rather, let Bonaventure and his way of thinking kindle in each of you a deep understanding of inter-relationship. No one wants to be abandoned and left alone. Each person wants to relate deeply to some other women and men. Relating is a major part of our human life. Bonaventure's spiritual and theological insights help us to see our way deeply into our earthly life, our human life, and our life with God. May this kind of insight be a major part of the depth and breadth of your own presence here at St. Bonaventure University. May each of you be filled with inter-relationships and may you allow a relational God to be a major part of your inter-relational life.

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