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The Created World as a Creator's Vestigium in St. Bonaventure's Aesthetics

Ustvarjeni svet kot Stvarnikov vestigium v estetiki sv. Bonaventure

Abstract: The conspicuous Franciscan thinker Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio develops his personal Aesthetics in his book *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (1259). This consists essentially in an ascent of man to God through three successive phases, each of them divided into two levels. This article seeks to analyze the first of those three phases in which our author structures his aesthetic system, a phase that we could call Bonaventurian Immanent Aesthetics. In this immanent phase, the human being can reach the knowledge of God, if he considers the material beings of the created world as vestiges that visibly reveal the invisible presence of God who created them. To achieve such a discovery, the human being must consider through apprehension, delectation, and judgment the physical qualities of material creatures, to perceive them as traces or vestiges of the Creator.

Keywords: Aesthetics, created world, senses, material beings, vestige, analogy, Creator God

Povzetek: Prodorni frančiškanski mislec sv. Bonaventura iz Bagnoregia razvija svojo osebno estetiko v delu *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (1259). Gre pravzaprav za dviganje človeka k Bogu skozi tri zaporedne faze, vsaka od njih pa je razdeljena na dve ravni. Članek poskuša analizirati prvo od treh faz, pri čemer naš avtor strukturira svoj estetski sistem: fazo, ki jo lahko imenujemo Bonaventurova imanentna estetika. V tej imanentni fazi človek spoznanje Boga lahko doseže, če materialna bitja ustvarjenega sveta razume kot znamenja, ki vidno razodevajo nevidno navzočnost Boga, ki jih je ustvaril. Da bi to odkril, mora človek na fizične lastnosti materialnih bitij gledati prek spoznanja, uživanja in presoje – tako jih bo dojel kot Stvarnikove sledove ali znamenja.

Ključne besede: estetika, ustvarjeni svet, čuti, materialna bitja, znamenje, analogija, Bog kot Stvarnik

1. Introduction: The Aesthetics of St. Bonaventure, between Philosophy and Theology

The prolific Franciscan thinker St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221–1274) produced a large theoretical *corpus* with predominant theological, exegetic, ascetic, and mystical thoughts. Nevertheless, he also approached philosophical reasoning extensively. His work reached such high prestige and influence in the Christian world that he earned the title of “Seraphic Doctor” (*Doctor Seraphicus*). His intellectual production has been analyzed by numerous specialists in countless specific works on some specific topics of his heterogeneous theoretical system and even in the form of a synthesis of his entire speculative work. (Gilson 1948; Vanni-Rovighi 1974; Bougerol 1984; Todisco 2007, 17–75; Caroli 2008; Pulido, Florido and Hípola 2019)

It is interesting now to point out that, among his philosophical treatises, dedicated to the specific metaphysical, cosmological, anthropological, and ethical themes, the Seraphic was also interested in formulating his Aesthetics, which several experts in extensive monographs have analyzed (von Balthasar 2007; De Rosa 2011; León Sanz 2016, Salvador-González 2022a). Saint Bonaventure did not consider his Aesthetics –to which he integrated with great originality lots of philosophical and theological components— as an autonomous and self-sufficient discipline but as a privileged way of access to God (Zas Friz de Col 2009, 22–36). Bonaventure developed his peculiar Aesthetics in many paragraphs scattered in his various writings, including *Comentarii in quatuor libri Sententiarum Petri Lombardi* (Bonaventura de Balneoregio 1882a; 1882b), *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* (1882c), *Breviloquium* (1882d), and mainly *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (1882e). Our short article will present a panoramic view of the initial part of this Bonaventurian Aesthetics.

The Seraphic starts from the thesis, for him indisputable, that God created the world out of nothing. He considers it evident that not only the Holy Scriptures preach the existence of God, but that the entire universe proclaims that there is a supreme Creator who made him exist, and who gave men the necessary intelligence to prefer living beings over the inert, those who have senses versus those who lack them, the intelligent versus those who cannot understand, the immortals versus mortals.¹

According to our author, God creates the world and its creatures by producing the being from non-being in a free and deliberate way, by his omnipotent will, and as a spontaneous act of his unlimited love. Being God the only necessary and infinite Being, whose essence is Being (Santinello 1983, 69–80; Todisco 2008, 345–356), which exists from eternity by himself, without needing any other that sustains him,

¹ “Neque enim divinatorum librorum tantummodo auctoritas pradicat, esse Deum, sed omnis quae nos circumstat, ad quam nos etiam pertinemus, universa ipsa rerum natura proclamat, se habere praestantissimum Conditorum, qui nobis mentem rationemque naturalem dedit, qua viventia non viventibus, sensu praedita non sentientibus, intelligentia non intelligentibus, immortalia mortalibus /.../ praeferenda iudicamus.” (*Breviloquium*, I, 5: Q V, 211a).

all other beings do not exist by themselves but receive being in time and finite measure by God the Creator, First Principle of all beings. Thus, all beings different from God are his creatures, which exist dependent and necessarily related to their Creator (Lázaro Pulido 2005). For the rest, experience immediately reveals the existence of these creatures in their multiplicity, limitation, and relativity. However, our author emphasizes that the being of creatures, despite its finitude, temporality, and contingency, reveals a certain similarity or analogy with the infinite, eternal and necessary Being of the Creator God because He is the perfect example of all the beings of the created world. (Landry 1922, 137–169; Bowman 1975, 181–198; Todisco 1980, 5–19; Berti 1985, 11–22; Peratoner 2008, 178–184).

Based on such assumptions, the Seraphic asserts that the material, finite world is a path that leads to the spiritual, infinite exemplar, which is the divine Creator. This is how he expresses it when, in a passage from his first book of *Commentaries on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, he points out that the creature, being a vestige of the Creator, is like a ladder to climb up to God and like an expeditious path to get there up to Him.² In his opinion, every created being is a vestige that reveals and reflects its Creator for two reasons: first, because every effect necessarily reveals the existence of a cause that produced it; secondly, because God creates each creature according to the idea or exemplar that He conceives to create it in its specific form and its concrete individuality.

Hence, Bonaventure states that the finite, material world is a path that leads to the spiritual and infinite model, which is God the Creator (Beschin 2000, 43–64; Reynolds 2003, 219–255; Chiarinelli 2007, 5–16; Peratoner 2008, 180; Soullignac 2011, 413–428; Parisi 2016, 140–170). According to him, all this created world is a shadow, a path, and a vestige that, although mixed with darkness, reflects the splendour of the divine exemplar, God, so that each creature is an opacity mixed with light.³ To demonstrate such a thesis, he offers this eloquent metaphor:

“Just as you see that a ray coming through a window is colored in different ways according to the different colors of the various parts [of the window panes], so also the divine ray shines in each creature in different ways and through different properties.”⁴

Furthermore, after reiterating that the created world is a path that leads to the exemplar (God),⁵ our author assures us that the created world is also a vestige of

² “*Vestigium sive creatura est sicut scala ad ascendendum vel sicut via ad perveniendum ad Deum.*” (*Comentarii in quatuor libri Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, I, q. 3, a. un., 2: Q I, 74a).

³ “*Quantum ad primum totus nundus est umbra, via, vestigium et est liber scriptus forinsecus. In qualibet enim creatura est refulgentia divini exemplaris, sed cum tenebra permixta; unde est sicut quaedam opacitas admixta lumini.*” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 12, 14: Q V, 329–454)

⁴ “*Sicut tu vides, quod radius intrans per fenestram diversimode coloratur secundu in colores diversos diversarum partium; sic radius divinus in singulis creaturis diversimode et in diversis proprietatibus refulget.*” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 12, 14: Q V, 386b)

⁵ “*Item, est via ducens in exemplar.*” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 12, 14: Q V, 386b)

God's Wisdom, so that each worldly creature is like a certain simulacrum or imitation of divine Wisdom as if it were a sculpture in the image of the person represented in it.⁶

For this reason, a few lines later, Bonaventure enriches his reasoning by pointing out that when the human soul sees these things that happen in the created world, he sees himself in need to pass from the shadow to the light, from the path to the term of destiny, from the vestige to the truth, from the book to the true science, which is in God.⁷

In Bonaventure's opinion, the creatures of this world are precisely those that allow contemplative access to the Creator, since by considering the nature and the material, finite properties of the creatures, the human being can come to think the spiritual, infinite properties of God, (Woo 1972, 306–330; Osborne 2013, 511–539). Our author develops these ideas in his *Aesthetics*. Thus, in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*—a booklet that collects the essentials of his *Aesthetics*—he assures that the appreciation and contemplation of earthly beings are an excellent way to rise to God. (Assunto 1962, 56–58; Ulivi 1962, 1–32; Ost 1976, 233–247; Offilada Mina 3006, 151–164; LaNave 2009, 267–299; Davis 2015, 433–453). For this, the Seraphic Doctor establishes in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* a scale of six steps or levels that, from the simplest and lowest to the most complex and sublime, elevates man directly towards God. Thus, man can behold God with increasing clairvoyance as he progresses up those six levels.

In the first two levels—which we could call the “immanent” or “material” stage of Bonaventure's *Aesthetics*—the human being achieves an initial contemplation of the Creator when he considers the signs or vestiges that he left in created things (Maccagonolo 1981, 47–63; Iammarrone 2008, 482–491; Giraud 2011, 251–274; Salvador-González 2013, 79–117). In the two intermediate levels—which condense what we could call the “introspective” stage of his *Aesthetics*—, man, entering within himself and considering his soul as a mirror of the Trinity, manages to reach an even more refined speculative contemplation of the Supreme Being. (Salvador-González 2009, 295–309; 2021a, 153–173). In the last two levels—the core of what we designate as the “transcendent” or “ecstatic” stage of Bonaventurian *Aesthetics*—man reaches “mental excesses” through contemplative ecstasy before God by directly considering his essential attributes (fifth level) and their personal property (sixth level) (Salvador-González 2020, 741–755; 2021b, 273–285; 2022c, 411–428).

According to St. Bonaventure, the contemplative ascent of man towards God takes place in three consecutive and complementary stages: through things, through the soul, and through the First Principle. Although all beings of the world

⁶ “Item, est vestigium sapientiae Dei. Unde creatura non est nisi sicut quoddam simulacrum sapientiae Dei et quoddam sculptile.” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 12, 14: Q V, 386b)

⁷ “Quando ergo anima videt haec, videtur sibi, quod deberet transire ab *umbra* ad lucem, a *via* ad terminum, a *vestigio* ad veritatem, a *libro* ad scientiam veram, quae est in Deo.” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 12, 15: Q V, 386b)

constitute a ladder to ascend to God, each facilitates the ascent differently: corporeal things are material, temporal vestiges of God, existing outside of man (Iamarrone 2008, 482–491); the human souls are spiritual, eternal images of God, living within us.⁸ In this sense, the ascent to God from the material universe must be carried out in three steps: the first consists of appreciating the material, temporal and external entities as *vestiges* of the deity;⁹ the second consists of –from the corporeal, temporal, and external vestiges— entering into our soul, a spiritual, eternal and interior *image* of God, to access the divine truth;¹⁰ the third step is to transcend the vestiges in the external objects and the image of the deity in our soul, to rise to God himself (Chavero Blanco 1990, 5–35), contemplating him, knowing him and reverencing him as the most spiritual, eternal and *First Principle* of all creation.¹¹

For Bonaventure, this triple ascent in the first level of gnoseological-aesthetic contact with the created world is necessary twice: first, it translates the triple existence of the creatures in the matter in which they are concretized, in the mind that thinks them, and in the uncreated First Principle (“eternal art”) that creates them; second, it also reflects the three substances present in Christ, scilicet, the bodily substance (the human body), the spiritual substance (human soul) and the substance or divine nature (as God the Son).¹² Furthermore, in this triple ascent from the created world to God the Creator, man has three fundamental cognitive powers: animal *sensitivity* to capture the vestiges of God in external objects, *soul* to appreciate from within his images of God, and *mind* to ascend towards the First and Infinite Being that surpasses and transcends him.¹³

Each of these three cognitive powers of man is duplicated, in turn, depending on whether God is contemplated in each one of them “as if by a mirror or as in a mirror,” or as a function of each being considered autonomously, or, on the con-

⁸ “Cum enim secundum statum conditionis nostrae ipsa rerum universitas sit scala ad ascendendum in Deum; et in rebus quaedam sint *vestigium*, quaedam *imago*, quaedam *corporalia*, quaedam *spiritualia*, quaedam *temporalia*, quaedam *aeviterna*, ac per hoc quaedam *extra nos*, quaedam *intra nos*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 2: Q V, 297a)

⁹ “Ad hoc, quod perveniamus ad primum principium considerandum, quod est *spiritualissimum* et *aeternum* et *supra nos*, oportet, nos *transire* per *vestigium*, quod est *corporale* et *temporale* et *extra nos*, et hoc est *deduci in via Dei*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 2: Q V, 297a)

¹⁰ “Oportet, nos *intrare* ad mentem nostram quae est *imago Dei aeviterna, spiritualis* et *intra nos*, et hoc est *ingredi in veritate Dei*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 2: Q V, 297a)

¹¹ “Oportet, nos *transcendere* ad *aeternum, spiritualissimum*, et *supra nos*, aspiciendo ad primum principium, et hoc est *laetari in Dei notitia et reverentia maiestatis*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 2: Q V, 297a)

¹² “Haec est triplex illuminatio unius diei /.../; haec respicit triplicem rerum existentiam, scilicet in materia, in intelligentia et in arte aeterna, secundum quam dictum est: fiat, fecit et factum est; haec etiam respicit triplicem substantiam in Christo, qui est scala nostra, scilicet corporalem, spiritualem et divinam.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 3: Q V, 297a)

¹³ “Secundum hunc triplicem progressum mens nostra tres habet aspectus principales. Unus est ad corporalia exteriora, secundum quem vocatur animalitas seu sensualitas; alius intra se et in se, secundum quem dicitur spiritus; tertius supra se, secundum quem dicitur mens.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 4: Q V, 297a–b)

trary, about some other factor.¹⁴ Expanding on –and delving into– such ideas, Bonaventure maintains in a passage from *Breviloquium* that God, as the First Principle, made this sensible world to manifest Himself in such a way that, through the world as through a mirror and a vestige, man tended to love and praise God his Creator.¹⁵ That is why he concludes by saying that there are two books in the world, one written from within, which is that of wisdom and the eternal art of God (the idea which God has of each creature), and the other written from without, which is the sensible world itself, vestige and reflection of the Creator.¹⁶

Hence, in his contemplative ascension to God, man must travel through six successive degrees of illumination,¹⁷ by which he ascends from the lowest to the supreme, from the external to the internal, and from the temporal to the eternal. Those six illuminating degrees are *sense* and *imagination* in bodily sensitivity, *reason* and *intelligence* in the immanent spirit, and *mind* and *synderesis* in the transcendent mind.¹⁸

The Seraphic Doctor thus configures the dense plot of his complex Aesthetics, whose we will only address in this brief paper the first two levels or steps, which is to say, what we have called the “immanent” stage of the Bonaventurian Aesthetics (Salvador-González 2022b, 1–18). As we have already specified before, we have studied the other two stages of the St. Bonaventure’s Aesthetics—that we have designated as the “introspective” stage and the “transcendent” stage—in the works above. (Salvador-González 2009, 295–309; 2021a, 153–173).

2. First Level of Bonaventurian Aesthetics: The Corporeal Senses and Their Three Modes of Intervention

According to the Seraphic, the first degree of enlightenment that man can achieve is to contemplate the created world as in a mirror in which God the Creator is reflected.¹⁹ Creatures, being perceived from the outside through our five bodily senses, reflect three qualities of the Creator into the interior of the mind: his su-

¹⁴ “Quoniam autem quilibet praedictorum modorum geminatur, secundum quod contingit /.../ videre Deum in unoquoque praedictorum modorum ut *per speculum* et *in speculo*, seu quia una istarum considerationum habet commiseri alteri sibi coniunctae et habet considerari in sua puritate.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 5: Q V, 297b)

¹⁵ “Primum principium fecit mundum istum sensibilem ad declarandum se ipsum, videlicet ad hoc quod per illum tanquam per speculum et vestigium reduceretur homo in Deum artificem amandum et laudandum.” (*Breviloquium*, II, 11: Q V, 229)

¹⁶ “Et secundum hoc duplex est liber, unus scilicet scriptus intus, qui est aeterna Dei ars et sapientia, et alius scriptus foris, mundus scilicet sensibilis.” (*Breviloquium*, II, 11: Q V, 229)

¹⁷ “Hinc est, quod necesse est, hos tres gradus principales ascendere ad senarium /.../; sic *minor mundus* sex gradibus illuminationum sibi succedentium ad quietem contemplationis ordinatissime perducat.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 5: Q V, 297b)

¹⁸ “Iuxta igitur sex gradus *ascensionis* in Deum sex sunt gradus *potentiarum animae* per quos ascendimus ab imis ad summa, ab exterioribus ad intima, a temporalibus conscendimus ad aeterna, scilicet *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *ratio*, *intellectus*, *intelligentia* et *apex mentis* seu *synderesis scintilla*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 6: Q V, 297b)

¹⁹ “Primum gradum *ascensionis* collocemus in imo, ponendo totum istum mundum sensibilem nobis

preme power, his infinite wisdom, and his boundless goodness.²⁰ This happens through three modalities: serving the mind that reasons about the current existence of things, helping the mind that believes in the evolution of things, or serving the mind that intellectually contemplates the potential excellence of things.²¹ St Bonaventure then explains those three modalities of illuminating support of the corporeal senses in favour of the mind.

a) According to the first modality, the *mind that contemplates* things as such finds in them the *weight* about the place to which they are inclined, the *number* by which they are distinguished from each other, and the *measure* to which they mark their limits.²² In this way, the contemplative mind finds in the creatures their mode of being (*modus*), their specific form (*species*), and their order (*ordo*), as well as their substance, their power, and their operation, that are some objective properties that constitute so many vestiges capable of elevating it to understand the immense power, wisdom, and goodness of God the Creator.²³

The Seraphic formulates some thoughts similar to these, although with slight variations, also in *Breviloquium* and *Hexaëmeron*. Thus, in the first of these books, he points out: “the whole machine of the world was taken out of time and out of nothing by a First and Only Principle, whose power, although immense, disposed all things with a certain *weight, number, and measure*.”²⁴ And in *Hexaëmeron*, he insists, with slight differences:

“God creates any essence with measure, number, and weight; and giving these properties, it also provides mode, species, and order; the mode is with what it consists of; the species is with what it is distinguished [from other creatures]; the order is with what it agrees. There is, then, no creature that lacks measure, number, and inclination, and in these properties, the vestige is appreciated, and the wisdom [of God] is manifested, as the foot in the footprint [that it leaves] is manifested.”²⁵

tanquam speculum, per quod transeamus ad Deum, opificem summum.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 9: Q V, 298a)

²⁰ “Relucet autem Creatoris summa potentia et sapientia et benevolentia in rebus creatis, secundum quod hoc tripliciter nuntiat sensus carnis sensui interiori.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 10: Q V, 298b)

²¹ “Sensus enim carnis aut deservit intellectui *rationabilitet investiganti*, aut *fideliter credenti*, aut *intellectualiter contemplanti*. *Contemplans* considerat rerum existentiam actualem, *credens* rerum decursum habitualem, *ratiocinans* rerum praecellentiam potentialem.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 10: Q V, 298b)

²² “Primo modo aspectus *contemplantis*, res in se ipsis considerans, videt in eis *pondus*, numerum et *mensuram*: *pondus* quoad situm, ubi inclinantur, *numerum*, quo distinguuntur, et *mensuram*, qua limitantur.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 11: Q V, 298b)

²³ “Ac per hoc videt in eis *modum, speciem* et *ordinem*, nec non *substantiam, virtutem* et *operationem*. Ex quibus consurgere potest sicut ex vestigio ad intelligendum potentiam, sapientiam et bonitatem Creatoris immensam.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 10: Q V, 298b)

²⁴ “Universitas machinae mundialis producta est in ese ex tempore et de nihilo ab uno principio primo, solo et summo; cuius potentia, licet sit immensa, disposuit tamen *omnia in certo pondere, numero et mensura*.” (*Breviloquium*, II, I: Q V, 219a)

²⁵ “Deus creat quamcumque essentiam in mensura et numero et pondere; et dando haec, dat modum, speciem et ordinem; modus est, quo constat; species, qua discernitur; ordo, quo congruit. Non est enim

As if that were not enough, in *Breviloquium* the Seraphic takes to an even higher level the analogy he believes in finding between the creatures and the Creator, which can be contemplated even in his Trinitarian existence. This is what our author says when affirming with great conviction:

“in adding [that God disposed of all things] with a certain weight, number, and measure, it is declared that the creatures are the effect of the creative Trinity by a triple genre of causality, namely, the *efficient causality*, from which the unity of the creatures derives the mode and the measure; the *exemplary causality*, from which the creatures receive the truth, the species or form, and the number; and the *final causality*, of which creatures have goodness, order, and weight. These properties are a vestige of the Creator in all creatures, whether corporeal, spiritual, or composed of both substances.”²⁶

In this sense, the limited being of the finite creatures maintains a necessary relation of analogy with the unlimited Being of the Creator: the created beings are, in their finitude and partiality, analogous to the infinite and absolute Being of God, although they depend on full of the Creator (Cilento 1966, 49–81; Beschin 2008, 367–380). Thereupon, it is evident to Bonaventure that “the creature is nothing but a certain figuration of the wisdom of God” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 12, 14: Q V, 386b). And precisely in this analogy between the Creator and the creatures, the Seraphic founded the recognizability of God on the part of man: all creatures are vestiges that preserve a specific image and likeness of the Creator,²⁷ for which they facilitate access to the contemplation of God.

b) According to the second modality, *the mind that believes* appreciates the created universe based on its *origin*, *process*, and *termination*.²⁸ By faith, man believes these three certainties with respect to the created world: regarding its *origin*, God created the world perfectly adapted to the divine Word; regarding the world *process*, the times of the three laws (first, that of nature, then that of Bibli-

aliqua creatura quae non habeat mensuram, numerum et inclinationem, et in his attenditur vestigium et manifestatur sapientia, sicut pes in vestigium.” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, 2,23: Q V, 340a)

²⁶ “Per hoc autem, quod additur [que Dios dispuso todas las cosas] *in certo pondere, numero et mensura*, ostenditur, quod creatura est effectus Trinitatis creantis sub triplici genere causalitatis: *efficientis*, a quo est in creatura *unitas, modus et mensura*; *exemplaris*, a quo est in creatura *veritas, species et numerus*; *finalis*, a quo est in creatura *bonitas, ordo et pondus*. Quae quidem reperiuntur in omnibus creaturis tamquam vetigium Creatoris sive corporalibus, sive spiritualibus, sive ex utriusque compositis.” (*Breviloquium*, 2, 1: Q V, 219a)

²⁷ “Contingit simile cognoscere per similem; sed omnis creatura est similis Deo vel sicut vestigium, vel sicut imago, ergo per omnem creaturam contingit cognosci Deum.” (*Comentarii in quatuor libri Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, I, d. 3, p. 1, a, un., q. 2, f. 4: Q I, 72)

²⁸ “Secundo modo aspectus *fidelis*, considerans hunc mundum, attendit *originem, decursum et terminum*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 12: Q V, 298b)

cal Revelation and, third, that of grace, brought by Christ) follow one another in perfect order; regarding its *termination*, the created world will end in the Final Judgment. The mind that believes also knows that each of these three contributions of faith allows him to discover in nature the immense power of the Creator, to discover in Revelation his unlimited providence, and to discover in the Final Judgment his infinite justice.²⁹

c) According to the third modality, *the mind that rationally analyzes* discovers the enormous differences between beings in their way of existing: there are inferior beings who only have a mere existence; there are intermediate beings who, besides existing, have life; and there are superior beings who, in addition to existing and living, can reason.³⁰ The analyzing mind also discovers that there are some beings that are only corporeal, others partly corporeal and partly spiritual, from which it deduces the existence of purely spiritual beings.³¹ When realizing that corporeal beings are mutable and corruptible and that celestial beings, while being mutable, are incorruptible, the analyzing mind infers that there are immutable and incorruptible beings, such as the super-celestial.³² As a result, the human mind that analyzes rises to intuit the power, wisdom, and goodness of God as a being that exists, lives, and understands, as a purely spiritual, immutable, and incorruptible being.³³

3. The Second Level of Seraphic's Aesthetics "Immanent" Step: In the Mirror of Things, We See God by Vestiges and in Themselves

For Bonaventure, the second level of the contemplation of God in all creatures consists in contemplating God not only by them as mere vestiges but also in themselves, since God is in them by essence, power, and presence.³⁴ Man begins to

²⁹ "Nam *fide* credimus, *aptata esse saecula Verbo vitae*; fide credimus, trium legum tempora, scilicet naturae, Scripturae et gratiae sibi succedere et ordinatissime decurrisse; fide credimus, mundum per finale iudicium terminandum esse; in primo potentiam, in secundo providentiam, in tertio iustitiam summi principii advertentes." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 12: Q V, 298b)

³⁰ "Tertio modo aspectus *ratiocinabiliter investigantis* videt, quaedam tantum esse, quaedam autem esse et vivere, quaedam vero esse, vivere et discernere; et prima quidem esse minora, secunda media, tertia meliora." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 13: Q V, 298b)

³¹ "Videt iterum, quaedam esse tantum *corporalia*, quaedam *partim corporalia, partim spiritualia*; ex quo advertit, aliqua esse *mere spiritualia* tamquam utriusque meliora et digniora." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 13: Q V, 298b)

³² "Videt nihilominus, quaedam esse *mutabilia et corruptibilia*, ut *terrestria*, quaedam *mutabilia et incorruptibilia*, ut *caelestia*; ex quo advertit, quaedam esse *immutabilia et incorruptibilia*, ut *supercaelestia*." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 13: Q V, 298b)

³³ "Ex his ergo visibilibus consurgit ad considerandum Dei potentiam, sapientiam et bonitatem ut entem, viventem et intelligentem, mere spiritualem et incorruptibilem et intransmutabilem." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I, 13: Q V, 298b)

³⁴ "Sed quoniam circa speculum sensibilibum non solum contingit contemplari Deum *per ipsa* tanquam per vestigia, verum etiam *in ipsis*, in quantum est in eis per *essentiam, potentiam et praesentiam* [...]: ideo huiusmodi consideratio secundum tenet locum tanquam secundus contemplationis gradus, quo debe-

know the world through his five corporeal senses, which are the doors through which the corporeal entities enter him (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 2: Q V, 300a). Man possesses a polyvalent ability to understand material beings, from which he can capture both the individual sensitive properties (light, sound, smell, taste, heat, pressure, roughness, pain), as well as the sensible qualities common to all bodies (number, dimensions, shape, rest, and movement).³⁵

According to the Seraphic, the aesthetic appreciation of the material entities is regulated by a triple structure based on three successive and mutually founded cognitive operations, which man exercises over material beings: *apprehension*, *delectation*, and *judgment*.

Through *apprehension*, the perceptible and external things of the world are the first to enter the soul of man through the five senses.³⁶

In turn, the apprehension of something convenient produces the *delectation* of the senses³⁷ when they perceive objects by their abstract similarities, by their beauty through sight, or by their softness through smell and hearing, or their healthiness through taste and touch.³⁸

After apprehension and pleasure, man formulates *judgment* on created things, a polyvalent judgment that is exercised in a triple register: while each sense judges the objective or physical qualities (if this is white or black), and the inner sense judges the subjective incidences (if this is healthy or harmful), reason judges and perceives the motive why the object delights the senses.³⁹

Thus, according to our author, by *apprehension*, *delectation*, and *judgment* of the perceptible creatures, we can contemplate the divine Trinity because they are vestiges through which we can discover God.⁴⁰ In fact, by *apprehension*, the species apprehended by our cognitive organ, being a similarity generated by the object, allows us to know the object from the one it emanates and to which it re-

mus manuduci ad contemplantum Deum in cunctis creaturis, quae ad mentem nostram intrant per corporales sensus." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 1: Q V, 299b–300a)

³⁵ "Intrant igitur per has portas tam corpora simplicia quam etiam composita, ex his mixta. Quia vero sensu percipimus non solum haec *sensibilia particularia*, quae sunt lux, sonus, odor, sapor et quatuor *primariae qualitates*, quas apprehendit tactus; verum etiam *sensibilia communia*, quae sunt numerus, magnitudo, figura, quies et motus." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 3: Q V, 300b)

³⁶ "Intrat igitur quantum ad tria rerum genera in animam humanam per *apprehensionem* totus iste sensibilis mundus." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 4: Q V, 300b)

³⁷ "Ad hanc apprehensionem, si sit rei convenientis, sequitur oblectatio." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 5: Q V, 300b)

³⁸ "Delectatur autem sensus in obiecto per similitudinem abstractam percepto vel ratione *speciositatis*, sicut in visu, vel ratione *suavitatis*, sicut in odoratu et auditu, vel ratione *salubritatis*, sicut in gustu et tactu, appropriate loquendo." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 5: Q V, 300b)

³⁹ "Post hanc apprehensionem et oblectationem fit *diiudicatio*, qua non solum diiudicatur, utrum hoc sit album, vel nigrum, quia hoc pertinet ad sensum *particularem*; non solum, utrum sit salubre, vel nocivum, quia hoc pertinet ad sensum *interiorem*; verum etiam, qua diiudicatur et ratio redditur, *quare* hoc delectat; et in hoc actu inquiritur de *ratione* delectationis, quae in sensu percipitur ab obiecto." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 6: Q V, 301a)

⁴⁰ "Haec autem omnia sunt vestigia, in quibus speculari possumus Deum nostrum." (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 7: Q V, 301a)

sembles.⁴¹

Analogously, *delectation* can also reveal God because the delightful species, being beautiful, gentle, and healthy, reveals the existence of that first beauty, softness, and healthiness consubstantial with the first species (God).⁴²

With greater efficacy, immediacy, and certainty than apprehension and pleasure, *judgment* leads us to the eternal truth.⁴³ The Seraphic Doctor justifies such assertion by a sequence of such subtle arguments, First consider these four conditions; if the trial is based on absolute (regardless of place, time, and changes), immutable, unrestricted, and perennial reasons;⁴⁴ if, on the other hand, the only thing that is completely immutable, unrestricted, and perennial is eternal; if also everything eternal is God or is in God;⁴⁵ and if everything we judge is judged certainly for those reasons. If these four conditions come true, it is evident that

“God is the reason of all things, and the infallible rule and the light of truth, light where everything created shines in an infallible, indelible, indubitable, true, illimitable, unappealable, unchangeable, never-ending, indivisible, and intellectual.”⁴⁶

In this regard, such things can be judged with absolute certainty only through that eternal Being (“eternal art”) because He is the form that produces, preserves, and distinguishes all things, as a being that possesses the primacy of the form between all beings, and for being the rule that directs all things, using which our soul judges everything that enters in it through the senses.⁴⁷

According to Bonaventure, the harmonious mathematical proportion existing in all things constitutes the vestige “very obvious to everybody and very close to

⁴¹ “Cum species *apprehensa* sit similitudo in medio genita et deinde ipsi organo impressa et per illam impressionem in suum principium, scilicet in obiectum cognoscendum, ducat.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 7: Q V, 301a–b)

⁴² “Secundum hunc modum species *delectans* ut *speciosa*, *suavis* et *salubris* insinuat, quod in illa prima specie est prima *speciositas*, *suavitas* et *salubritas*, in qua est summa *proportionalitas* et aequalitas ad generantem; in qua est *virtus*, non per phantasma, sed per veritatem apprehensionis illabens; in qua est *impressio* salvans et sufficiens et omnem apprehendentis indigentiam expellens.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 8: Q V, 301b)

⁴³ “Excellentiori autem modo et immediatori *diiudicatio* ducit nos in aeternam veritatem certius speculandam.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 9: Q V, 301b)

⁴⁴ “Si enim *diiudicatio* habet fieri per rationem *abstrahentem* a loco, tempore et mutabilitate ac per hoc a dimensione, successione et transmutatione, per rationem *immutabilem* et *incircumscriptibilem* et *interminabilem*; nihil autem est omnino *immutabile*, *incircumscriptibile* et *interminabile*, nisi quod est aeternum.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 9: Q V, 301b)

⁴⁵ “Nihil autem est omnino *immutabile*, *incircumscriptibile* et *interminabile*, nisi quod est aeternum; omne autem quod est aeternum, est Deus, vel in Deo.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 9: Q V, 301b–302a)

⁴⁶ “Patet, quod ipse [Dios] est *ratio omnium rerum* et *regula infallibilis* et *lux veritatis*, in qua cuncta relucent infallibiliter, indelebiter, indubitanter, irrefragabiliter, indiudicabiliter, incommutabiliter, incoarctabiliter, interminabiliter, indivisibiliter et intellectualiter.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 9: Q V, 302a)

⁴⁷ “Et ideo nec certitudinaliter iudicari possunt nisi per illam quae non tantum fuit forma cuncta producens, verum etiam cuncta conservans et distinguens, tanquam ens in omnibus formam tenens, et regula dirigens, et per quam diiudicat mens nostra cuncta, quae per sensus intrans in ipsam.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 9: Q V, 302a)

God.” Such vestige makes easier for us to get closer to God and allows us to know Him in perceptible corporeal beings, by *apprehending* their condition as integrated elements, to *delight* us in their harmonious proportions and to *judge* them by the necessary laws of universal harmony.⁴⁸

For our author, all creatures of the perceptible universe are vestiges, signs, and copies of God, which allow to mind that contemplates and reasons to access the eternal God, thanks to three essential characters: a) because they “are shadows, resonances, and paintings of this First Principle omnipotent, the most wise and optimal, of this eternal origin, light, and plenitude, and of this efficient, exemplary, and ordering art”;⁴⁹ b) because such creatures are vestiges, simulacra, and spectacles that have been proposed to us and given by the deity so that we can co-opt God;⁵⁰ c) because they are “specimens” or “copies” proposed to men to ascend from the visible physical things to the invisible intelligible entities, as who transits from the sign to its meaning.⁵¹

Based on such assumptions, the Seraphic asserts that the material, finite world is a path that leads to the spiritual, infinite exemplar, which is God the Creator. This is how he expresses it when, in a passage from his first book of *Commentaries on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, he points out that the creature, being a Creator’s vestige, is like a ladder to climb up to God, and like an expedited path to reach God.⁵²

Or how, when in a paragraph of the book of comments to the *Hexaëmeron*, he states that every creature in the sensible world is “a shadow, a path, a vestige, and is a book written from outside”⁵³. For this reason, a few lines later, Bonaventure enriches his reasoning by pointing out that when the human soul sees these things that happen in the created world, it sees itself in need to pass from the shadow to the light, from the path to the term of destiny, from the vestige to the truth, from the book to the true science, which is in God.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ “Quod [the vestige of divine Wisdom manifested in the numerical proportions exhibited by things] cum sit omnibus evidentissimum et Deo propinquissimum, propinquissime quasi per septem differentias ducit in Deum et facit eum cognosci in cunctis corporalibus et sensibilibus, dum numerosa *apprehendimus*, in numerosis proportionibus *delectamur* et per numerosarum proportionum leges irrefragabiliter *iudicamus*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 10: Q V, 302b)

⁴⁹ “Omnes creaturae istius sensibilis mundi animum contemplantis et sapientis ducunt in Deum aeternum, pro eo quod illius primi principii potentissimi, sapientissimi et optimi, illius aeternae originis, lucis et plenitudinis, illius, inquam, artis efficientis, exemplantis et ordinantis sunt *umbrae*, *resonantiae* et *picturae*.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 11: Q V, 302b)

⁵⁰ “Sunt *vestigia*, *simulacra* et *spectacula* nobis ad contuendum Deum proposita et signa divinitus data.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 11: Q V, 302b)

⁵¹ “Sunt *exemplaria* vel potius *exemplata*, proposita mentibus adhuc rudibus et sensibilibus, ut per sensibilia, quae vident transferantur ad intelligibilia, quae non vident, tanquam per signa ad signata.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 11: Q V, 302b)

⁵² “Vestigium sive creatura est sicut scala ad ascendendum vel sicut via ad perveniendum ad Deum.” (*Comentarii in quatuor libri Sententiarum Petri Lombardi*, I, q. 3, a. un., 2: Q I, 74a)

⁵³ “Totus mundus est *umbra*, *via*, *vestigium* et est *liber scriptus forinsecus*.” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, XII, 14: Q V, 386b)

⁵⁴ “Quando ergo anima videt haec, videtur sibi, quod deberet transire ab *umbra* ad lucem, a *via* ad termi-

St. Bonaventure thus maintains that the creatures of the material world are visible signs that signify the invisible qualities of God according to various measures and repercussions: they are, in part, because God is the *efficient cause*, the *exemplary model*, and the *ultimate goal* of everything created.⁵⁵ From these premises, our author concludes that the invisible perfections of God are made visible to the human mind thanks to the creatures of the world,⁵⁶ to the extreme that the external “lights” present in the visible things facilitate the re-entry into the mirror of our soul, in which the divine perfections shine.⁵⁷ But with this, we are already entering the second stage of Bonaventurian Aesthetics, which we have called its “introspective” stage, which, therefore, exceeds the limits of the current paper.

4. Conclusion

Among the many conclusions that we could draw from the complex aesthetic system of St Bonaventure studied in this article, we can highlight these four, directly related to the core of our research:

1) According to the Seraphic Doctor, every being in this created world is a vestige that reveals and reflects its Creator for two reasons: first, because every effect reveals the existence of the cause that produced it; furthermore because God creates each creature according to the idea that He conceives as a model or example for creating it in its specific form and its concrete individuality.

2) In the philosophical-theological theory of St Bonaventure, the entire created world is a shadow, a path, and a vestige that, although mixed with darkness, reflects the splendor of the divine model, which is God.

3) As a consequence, every creature, being a vestige of its Creator, is like a ladder to contemplatively ascend to God, and an expeditious path to reach Him. Thus, the material, the finite world is a path that leads to the spiritual, infinite exemplar, which is God the Creator.

4) According to Bonaventure, although all the beings of the world constitute a ladder to ascend to God, each one facilitates the ascent in a different way: material things are corporeal, and temporary vestiges of God, existing outside of man; human souls are spiritual, and ethereal images of God, existing within us. In the current article, we have tried to highlight the value which material creatures have as traces that, although opaque and with shadows, are capable of reflecting the

num, a *vestigio* ad veritatem, a *libro* ad scientiam veram, quae est in Deo.” (*Collationes in Hexaëmeron sive illuminationes Ecclesiae*, XII, 15: Q V, 386b)

⁵⁵ “Significant autem huiusmodi creaturae huius mundi sensibilis *invisibilia* Dei, partim quia Deus est omnis creaturae *origo, exemplar et finis*, et omnis effectus est signum causae, et exemplatum exemplaris, et via finis, ad quem ducit.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 12: Q V, 302b–303a)

⁵⁶ “Ex quibus omnibus colligitur, quod *invisibilia Dei a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sum, intellecta conspiciuntur.*” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 13: Q V, 303a)

⁵⁷ “Per haec lumina exterius data ad speculum mentis nostrae, in quo relucent divina, disponimur ad intrandum.” (*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, II, 13: Q V, 303a)

infinite splendor of God who created them. The creatures of the material world, perceived through our five senses, constitute adequate means to reach the first step in our contemplative ascent towards God.

5) This ascent to God from the material universe must be carried out in three steps: a) appreciating the material, temporal, and external entities as God's *vestiges*; b) entering from the material, external vestiges into our spiritual, internal soul God's *image* to access the divine truth; c) transcending the objects' external vestiges and our soul's image of God to rise to God himself, contemplating him as the most spiritual, eternal *First Principle* of all creation. So, the creatures of the material world are visible signs that signify the invisible qualities of God since He is their efficient, exemplar, and final cause.

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