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MAPPING THE HUMAN BEING IN BONAVENTURE: A HISTORICAL AND SYSTEMATIC OVERVIEW

The goal of this work – which gathers the proceedings of a conference held in 2017 at the University of Trento – is that of presenting a multifaceted exploration of Bonaventure's analysis of the human condition. In this sense, this book aims at making a contribution towards our understanding of a topic of both significant depth and width. The question concerning the essence of the human condition is central to Bonaventure's thought, and there is hardly any part of his work that does not include considerations of anthropological relevance.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, to unfold the *Doctor Seraficus's* understanding of human nature is to dive deep into the architecture of his *opus*. This means that it is impossible to map 'the figure of humankind' in Bonaventure without having to touch on the whole net of his philosophical system.

Significantly, the book's editor Irene Zavattero acknowledges this challenge since the very first paragraph of the introduction, underlining how the notion of *homo imago dei* – that is, the Biblical formula along whose lines Bonaventure frames his anthropological investigations – has been lengthily meditated upon by the Franciscan thinker, as well as by generations of students of his work (p. 9). Nonetheless, Zavattero's assumption seems to be that it is crucial to re-invigorate the scholarly interest in this subject. In this respect, she claims that the goal of this book is to shed further light on what *homo imago dei* means to Bonaventure, in order to promote a wave of renewed interest in philosophical and theological anthropology (p. 9). It follows that this book sets quite high stakes by attempting to transcend the field of limited specialist interest, appealing to all those whose research concerns the nature of the human condition. At the same time, the

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<sup>1</sup> For a classic introduction to the topic of Bonaventure's anthropology, which can be fruitfully read as an introduction to the present text, see ALEXANDER SCHAEFER, « The Position and Function of Man in the Created World According to Saint Bonaventure », *Franciscan Studies*, 21 (1961), p. 233–382.

contributors' proficiency assures that also Bonaventure's experts will find much food for thought here.

Further articulating the book's *ratio essendi*, Zavattero quotes an excerpt from Bonaventure's *In II Sententiarum* to the effect of underlining the dominant theme of his anthropology: humanity is located by God as the metaphysical nexus between the Creator and creation. Within this framework, human beings submit to their Creator while at the same time ruling over all other creatures (p. 10–11). Insofar as they are created endowed with rationality and freedom, humans are the only creatures capable of fully understanding and responding to the deity's design and intentions. This is the basic view that the different voices animating this text seek to expound.

The essays themselves are divided into four sections according to their areas of interest. Section 1 consists of an overview of the whole of Bonaventure's anthropology. The two essays included in this section closely revolve around the basic themes presented in the introduction. Accordingly, their goal is to locate the position and features of the human being within the edifice of Bonaventurian thought. Section 2 focuses on the topic of the soul. This is arguably the most historically-tinged part of the book, where Bonaventure's account of the nature of the soul is approached from the point of view of its philosophical and theological sources. While the first half of the book focuses more on the human being as individually considered, the second half switches the attention to human relationships, and to the realm of action and language. In section 3, entitled « Ethics and Law », we find a multifaceted discussion of the faculties of the human soul. Topics such as freedom of will, natural law, and desire get their due attention in their intersections with the notion of *imago dei*. Finally, section 4 contains an exposition of some of the aspects of Bonaventure's philosophy of language and epistemology. Specifically, the essays look at his theory of witness and exegesis of Biblical images. I shall now give an overview of the main contents of each essay.

As already mentioned, section 1 includes two broad sketches of Bonaventure's understanding of the human condition. The opening essay is authored by Letterio Mauro (« L'antropocentrismo di Bonaventura »), who styles the *Doctor Seraphicus's* thought as pervaded by a strong 'anthropocentrism'. In Mauro's intentions, this qualification is wholly positive: Bonaventure is an anthropocentric thinker inasmuch as he understands humanity as the living crossroad of created reality: horizontally, we stand as the convergence, recapitulation and synthesis of creation (p. 25–26). This happens insofar as the human constitution expresses the characteristic traits of inanimate, vegetative, and animal creation – plus of course its own specific human elements. Vertically, humanity is the priest of creation, allowing the latter to maintain a link with God (p. 29). In other words, Mauro shows how Bonaventure appropriates the ancient tradition of humanity as a microcosm,

and as the designed mediator between spiritual and material reality.<sup>2</sup> The essay is further enriched by a short but dense discussion of the relevant secondary literature (p. 22ff).

In her contribution (« L'anthropologie cruciforme de Bonaventure »), Laure Solignac also takes up the task of exploring the same Bonaventurian themes. There are two elements within her extensive piece of writing which stand above the other and which deserve to be mentioned here. First, in order to synthesise Bonaventure's twofold vision of creation's horizontal tension towards humanity (*appetitus totius naturae*, see p. 56), and of humanity's vertical tension towards God, she moulds the term 'cruciform anthropology' (p. 39). Second, Solignac provides a discussion of Bonaventure's Franciscan stress on the familial ties holding between humanity and the rest of creation (see p. 44ff). Her essay also holds the commendable aim of relocating Bonaventure with respect to the categories of philosophical historiography: the Bonaventurian picture of the human being is not – as some commentators hold –<sup>3</sup> foremostly Neo-Platonic (p. 40–41); in turn, Solignac argues that we should understand Bonaventure's view of humanity as being cross-shaped – that is, set along two axes, one stretching horizontally and the other vertically.

The second section opens with a fine historico-philological investigation by Andrea Di Maio (« *Animalitas, spiritu, mens. Antropologia tripartita e struttura dell'itinerario bonaventuriano* »). In his piece, Di Maio discusses the three-fold ascension of the mind to God within the context of the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. Di Maio contextualises the *Itinerarium* in its original context (p. 95), and locates it within the rest of the Bonaventurian *opus* (p. 102ff). After having done so, he discusses the theological anthropology deployed by Bonaventure in the *Itinerarium* (p. 108ff), tracing it back to its Biblical and Patristic roots (p. 94–95). In particular, Di Maio stresses the influence of the Dionysian concept of negative theology (p. 102), which Bonaventure unfolds in the *Itinerarium* and later picks up again in the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* (p. 106).

The following essay by Alessandro Ghisalberti (« L'anima gerarchizzata. Dionigi e l'ultimo Bonaventura ») also revolves around the connection between Bonaventure and Pseudo-Dionysius. Specifically, Ghisalberti focuses on the notion of 'hierarchy' and 'hierarchical soul'.<sup>4</sup> The presence of this concept is traced

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<sup>2</sup> See JAMES McEVROY, *Microcosm and Macrocosm in the Writings of St. Bonaventure*, in JACQUES-GUY BOUGEROL (ed.), *S. Bonaventura 1274–1974*, vol. II, Collegio S. Bonaventura, Grottaferrata 1973, p. 309–343.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, see DOMINIQUE POIREL, « Thomas d'Aquin lecteur d'Hugues de Saint-Victor: à propos de la nature humaine », *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 78 (2011), p. 195–228.

<sup>4</sup> It is worthy of mention that the concept of 'hierarchy' has been crucial to the developments of the contemporary current of philosophy and theology known as 'radical orthodoxy'. See JONH MILBANK, CATHERINE PICKSTOCK, GRAHAM WARD (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, Routledge, London 1999.

throughout the *Itinerarium* (p. 131ff), in the *De triplici via* (p. 138), as well as in the above-mentioned *Collationes* (p. 146ff). Altogether, Ghisalberti is able to show how Bonaventure was able to turn the ecclesiological speculation of Dionysius into a key for describing the soul's path to God. By doing so, he achieved a synthesis between Victorine and Cistercensian theologies and the Greek Patristic tradition flowing from Dionysius (p. 144).

In his essay (« Bonaventura, Tommaso e la considerazione dell'anima come *forma et hoc aliquid* nell'aristotelismo del XIII secolo »), Massimiliano Lenzi discusses Bonaventure's views on the nature of the soul alongside those expressed by Thomas Aquinas. Lenzi starts his discussion by summarising the development of the concept of the soul within the Aristotelian tradition and its reception in the medieval university (p. 155). Subsequently, he discusses how Aquinas and Bonaventure attempted to conceive of the subsistence of the soul when separated from the body in the light of Aristotle's *De Anima* (p. 161). His conclusion is that Thomas and Bonaventure ended up developing similar solutions to this problem. Accordingly, Lenzi aims to rebuke the historiographical thesis that sees Thomas as a 'coherent' Aristotelian, and Bonaventure as the exponent of an eclectic and invariably neo-Platonic thought (p. 175).

Davide Riserbato («*Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine* [Sal. 4,7]. Il concorso tra il *verum mentibus impressum/naturaliter insertum* e le *rationes aeternae* in Bonaventura ») closes the second section investigating the relationship between the notions innately impressed into the human minds and the ideal forms (*rationes aeternae*). Riserbato notes how Bonaventure links both natural knowledge and the eternal forms to the existence of truth. However, he claims that their relationship has never been sufficiently clarified by the secondary literature (p. 177–179). Focusing on the two series of *Quaestiones* concerning Christ's knowledge and the Holy Trinity, Riserbato sheds light on Bonaventure's notion of *veritas*, and his exemplaristic epistemology.

The third section opens with a text by Andrea Colli (« *In anima stat appetitus totius naturae*. A Note on Desire in Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences* »). Colli employs the figure of the prophet Daniel – evoked by Bonaventure in the prologue of his *Itinerarium* and described as a *vir desiriorum* – to explore Bonaventure's account of desire. In this respect, Colli argues that the mention of the prophet Daniel at the beginning of the *Itinerarium* is more than a rhetorical ploy, but rather a witness to the centrality of the desiring subject in Bonaventure's thought (p. 197). Subsequently, Colli launches himself into an elaborate analysis of the notion of *appetitus* throughout the *Commentary to the Sentences*. By doing so, he registers the influence of the Peripatetic tradition, upsetting not few prejudices concerning Bonaventure's relationship to Aristotle (p. 197ff).

The following essay, by Elisa Cuttini (« La facoltà di scelta in rapporto alla legge naturale in Bonaventura da Bagnoregio e nella *Laudato si'* »), presents an

'actualizing' reading of Bonaventure. The Franciscan *Doctor* is read by Cuttini alongside Pope Francis's encyclical letter *Laudato si'*.<sup>5</sup> Cuttini's attempts to explain the lines of thought underlying *Laudato si'* by using Bonaventure's ideas as a hermeneutic framework (p. 221). In spite of the fact that the *Doctor Seraphicus* lacks any sort of visible ecological awareness (p. 222) – that is, at least according to modern sensibility – Cuttini convincingly shows how *Laudato si'* quotes from the *Legenda Maior* (p. 226) – as well as the many and diverse resonances between Pope Francis's discourse and Bonaventure's notions of law, *pietas* (p. 223–224), and sin (p. 228–229) – give enough ground for finding Bonaventurian echoes in the encyclical letter.

Also exploring Bonaventure's political thought, Gianfranco Maglio presents us with an analysis of the relationship between positive and natural law in Bonaventure (« Il diritto e la legge naturale in Bonaventura da Bagnoregio »). Proclaiming the necessity of identifying Bonaventure's place within the broader culture of his own time, Maglio produces an overview of Bonaventure's relationship to pagan philosophy and to the earlier Latin sources of Christian theology (p. 233ff). Then, he goes on to sketch the outlines of the thirteenth-century debate on natural law (p. 238ff). In particular, Maglio focuses on such predecessors of Bonaventure as William of Auxerre and Alexander of Hales (p. 240–241). Having done all this background work, Maglio dives into an extended discussion of Bonaventure's philosophy of natural law. The exposition is rich, presenting and commenting many examples from Bonaventure's works.

Moving onto a different ground, Stefano Perfetti takes into consideration the exegetical work of Bonaventure – a part of his authorship which is often neglected by scholars. In this respect, this essay serves as an introduction to Bonaventure's exegetical method. Perfetti's summary of the essential features of the *Ecclesiastes* and of its reception history in Patristic and early medieval thought is of great value and clarity (p. 271–278). Specifically, Perfetti looks at Bonaventure's *Commentary to the Ecclesiastes* (« *Similiter spirant omnia*. La condizione umana tra degradazione carnale e ascesa spirituale nel commento di Bonaventura a *Ecclesiaste* 3,18–22 »). In Bonaventure's understanding, the *Ecclesiastes* trains one's insight into the nature of reality, teaching to look beyond appearances, thereby turning our eyes to the eternal truth. Perfetti presents the way in which Bonaventure develops his approach to the text by going through his discussion – via the *Ecclesiastes* – of the relationships between human beings and the other animals (p. 280ff).

In her own essay (« Il libero arbitrio *imago* della libertà divina secondo Bonaventura »), the book's editor Irene Zavattero offers a synthesis of

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<sup>5</sup> For some other attempts at an 'ecologically inspired' reading of Bonaventure and of Franciscan thought in general, see KEITH WARNER, « Franciscan Environmental Ethics: Imagining Creation as a Community of Care », *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 31 (2011), p. 143–160; LLIA DELIO, « Evangelical Life Today: Living in the Ecological Christ », *Franciscan Studies*, 64 (2006), p. 475–506.

Bonaventure's doctrine of freedom. Free will is understood by the *Seraphicus* as an expression of humanity's own essence. Accordingly, true human freedom consists in the capacity of giving full expression to our own nature and of truly becoming the *imago Dei* (p. 16). Zavattero's discourse takes off locating Bonaventure's work on the freedom of the will within its historical and cultural *milieu*. Depending mainly on Peter Lombard's sources, Bonaventure also roots his reading of free will within the then young tradition of Franciscan thought. In Bonaventure's day Franciscan intellectuals tended to give priority to the will over the intellect in their accounts of the formation of our deliberative processes (p. 290–292). After this historical preamble, Zavattero unfolds the content of the 25th *Distinctio* from *II in Sententiarum*. There, Bonaventure discussed the different modes (*stati*) of the freedom of will. Accordingly, the rest of the essay is devoted to the discussion of the analogy between human and divine freedom. This is articulated with respect both to the Bonaventurian letter, as well as to his sources – with an emphasis on Anselm of Canterbury and Bernard of Clairvaux (p. 297ff). Through her essay, Zavattero manages to accomplish the difficult task of making a fruitful contribution to an already well-covered topic.<sup>6</sup> This is a short, but balanced and exhaustive synthesis of Bonaventure's doctrine of freedom, and a useful addition to our understanding of his theological anthropology.

In part taking up the argumentative lines laid down by Perfetti, the last section opens with an essay by Barbara Faes (« Predicatori e pescatori. Alcune metafore marine nell'esegesi biblica e nei sermoni di Bonaventura ») concerning Bonaventure's exegetical praxis. Specifically, Faes focuses on the relationship between Bonaventure's exegetical works and his activity as a preacher. In parallel, she seeks to unfold his reading of Biblical maritime metaphors. This choice is motivated by the centrality of the sea and of sea-related images within the Christian spiritual and theological tradition. Indeed, maritime metaphors abound in authors such as Clement Alexandrinus, Origen, Ambrose and Augustine (p. 311–312). Faes picks two case studies, each one connected to one of the topics she aims to cover. First, she looks to the *proemium* to Bonaventure's commentary to Luke's Gospel. Since the same text is employed by the *Doctor Seraphicus* in the opening section of a sermon, this presents a perfect exemplar for Faes's analysis (p. 313ff). Second, she unpacks Bonaventure's exegesis of the Lukan episode of the miraculous catch (p. 319ff). Both texts illuminate Bonaventure's picture of the good clergyman – where the latter is understood as the evangelical 'fisher of people' – discussing the skills he needs to possess. Faes's essay offers a clear presentation of some crucial aspects of Bonaventure's oft-neglected exegetical

<sup>6</sup> See for instance GIANFRANCO MAGLIO, *Libero arbitrio e libertà in San Bonaventura*, Wolters Kluwer–Cedam, Assago–Padova 2016.

works. In particular, she shows his dependency on the Latin theological tradition for his exegetical techniques and his understanding of the ecclesial office.

The following essay, by Paola Müller (« Per un'ermeneutica della testimonianza in Bonaventura da Bagnoregio »), seeks to read Bonaventure through the lenses of the current debate concerning the epistemology of testimony. The issues concerned by this debate are the following ones: (1) the sort of information conveyed by one's testimony; (2) what kind of epistemological warrant is enjoyed by the act of witnessing to something (p. 229). While this topic has not been explicitly thematised by medieval thinkers, Müller seeks to connect the debate on testimony with the medieval use of *auctoritates* (p. 331–332). The essay presents an exhaustive picture of the topic. Bonaventure's views of *auctoritas* are unfolded through a close reading of relevant passages from the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* (p. 336ff). Here, Bonaventure outlines the four relevant criteria that should be followed when considering whether to accept a testimony. The sections where Müller discusses Bonaventure's understanding of the testimonies given by Francis (p. 332), Creation (p. 333), and Jesus Himself (p. 344) are also of particular interest. They are noteworthy insofar as they look to classic topics of Bonaventurian scholarship through some unusual and yet valid interpretative lenses.

The book's final essay (« Tra sapere, visione e Speranza »), penned by Massimo Parodi, starts considering some conceptual and lexical difficulties expressed by the *Itinerarium* (p. 347). From there, the text branches out in many different directions, considering the Bonaventurian image of humankind, the difficulty of getting to know something about 'the man Bonaventure', and the connection between the methodology of the historian of philosophy and the choice of his topic. Standing as this text's fitful culmination, Parodi's essay is an inspired presentation of Bonaventure and his conception of humankind as *mediator*, reflecting at the same time on the connection between life and science, with particular reference to the work of the historian.

In the light of the intention of underlining the relevance of Bonaventure's thought for our present context – with an emphasis on his anthropology – I believe that this volume indeed delivers its promises. All the contributions present solid historical foundations; in this sense, each essay presents a small and yet dense view not just of the work of Bonaventure, but of the whole of his historical context and cultural background. All of this does not detract anything from the book's legibility, which is perfectly approachable by a non-specialist public, as well as by the occasional student of medieval philosophy seeking to deepen his knowledge of the *Doctor Seraphicus*.