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From Metaphysics to Kataphysics: Bonaventure's 'Good' Creation

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Abstract
The question of ecology is fundamentally a question of relatedness. Is the Christian tradition, at once incarnational and other-worldly, responsible for the ecological crisis? This article examines the position of Bonaventure whose unique theological-philosophical synthesis leads to a new understanding of created reality, which I term 'kataphysics'. The foundation of kataphysics begins with Bonaventure's understanding of philosophy as a heteronymous discipline, insofar as philosophy is completed and perfected in theology. From this position he develops an understanding of Being as Goodness based on the Trinity. Bonaventure's integral relationship between Trinity and creation leads to an understanding of created reality as essentially good and intrinsically relational. The integral relation between Trinity and creation through the divine Word gives rise to a theological metaphysics; the metaphysical question becomes the christological question and hence a new understanding of created reality, kataphysics, emerges which involves relatedness. It is suggested that kataphysics undergirds a Christian philosophy of nature which has implications for an ecological stance today.

Is ecology a metaphysical question?
In his controversial article, 'The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis', historian Lynn White struck a nerve when he blamed the Judaeo-Christian tradition for the ecological problem. White argued that the West's ecological fall from grace began with the book of Genesis where he claimed radical anthropocentrism excluded all but humans from the realm of divine grace.[1] 'By destroying pagan animism', he said, 'Christianity has made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.'[2] Because the source of the ecological crisis is essentially religious, White claimed, the solution must be religious as well.

Although White's thesis has been challenged, if not outright rejected, over the years the fundamental issues he raised between Christianity and

[1] David Toolan, *At Home in the Cosmos* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), p. 11.
[2] Ibid.

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ecology have not been resolved. Are Christians to blame for the ecological crisis? One would be hard put to place the blame of crisis on any one group; yet the very claim of incarnation makes Christians a likely suspect. Do we take the natural world seriously because of our fundamental religious claim or do we reject the natural world for a higher plane of saving grace? Paul Santmire, in his book *The Travail of Nature*, identifies two main metaphors in the history of Christian thought: the metaphor of fecundity or the promised land, a biblical metaphor which reflects God's promise of abundance, and the metaphor of ascent, which reflects the strong Neoplatonic influence on Christian thought, whereby true reality is beyond the material world and must ultimately be transcended. In *Nature Reborn*, Santmire pursues the Neoplatonic argument by describing the influence of Neoplatonism on the rise of Gothic architecture which, he claimed, pointed the human person away from the earth and towards the heavenly transcendent life. In Santmire's view, the influence of Neoplatonism on the development of Christian consciousness has been significant. As a result of this Hellenic influence, Christians have lived with one foot on earth and the other foot straddling the heavens in the hope of personal salvation.

The question of Neoplatonism and its influence on Christian thought is a metaphysical one. The origin of metaphysics as a branch of study can be traced back to Aristotle who wrote of the principles underlying nature *after* ('meta') his discussion of physics or nature itself. The prefix 'meta' has since been interpreted as 'beyond' or 'transcending' so that metaphysics refers to those principles transcending nature or underlying nature. As a branch of philosophy, metaphysics attempts to understand the fundamental nature of all reality, whether visible or invisible. Neoplatonic metaphysics basically states that the fundamental nature of all reality is the ultimate, transcendent One (Plotinus) or the Good (Plato) from which emanates the intelligible world of forms followed by the world of created or material reality. Thus Neoplatonism maintains that true reality lies in a world beyond marked by universal intelligible forms. The way to know true reality is through contemplation, since the created world is a finite reflection of the world of intelligible forms. For Plotinus, the way to contemplate true reality is to withdraw from the world and turn inward so as to ascend to union with the One.

Neoplatonism, as a hierarchical way of viewing God and the world, passed into the Middle Ages through the writings of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, among others. The Neoplatonic ladder of ascent presented a movement away from the material world towards the spiritual world, rising above natural, sensible things as if they were inferior and in some sense

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not truly real.[3] The emphasis of spirit over matter meant an intellectualising of mystical experience.[4] In this respect, the Neoplatonic tradition, with its insistence on inner illumination and mental ascent, diminished the natural goodness of the created world. In order to know true reality one had to transcend this earthly world and contemplate the spiritual world above. The Neoplatonists, therefore, turned quickly from the material world and its individual creatures to scale the metaphysical ladder to the spiritual and divine realms by means of universal concepts.[5]

It is hard to believe that a simple man from a small town in central Italy could overturn the dominance of Neoplatonic metaphysics but, indeed, the life of Francis of Assisi gave rise to such a revolution: from the transcendence of God to the immanence of God in creation, from abstract ideas to the concrete experience of the world, from universal forms to the significance of the individual. Unlike the Neoplatonists who withdrew from the sensual world in order to contemplate God, Francis of Assisi attained the heights of contemplation through his penetrating vision of creation. The influence of Francis on the shape of medieval philosophy has yet to be fully explored, but suffice it to say that his radical incarnationalism made a profound difference on the way he looked at nature. His concrete vision of the incarnation raised the significance of the individual to a new level. It contrasted with the intellectual priority of the universal which had ruled earlier Platonic thought. Francis brought to light what Christian doctrine had from the beginning proclaimed, namely, in the incarnation God had assumed human nature in one single individual. Francis' devotion to Jesus of Nazareth, the individual, opened up a new perspective on the unique particularity of the person. He upset an intellectual tradition which he hardly understood and which he certainly had no intention of challenging. If the image of all images is an individual, then the primary significance of the individual form no longer consists in disclosing a universal reality beyond itself. Rather, the universal itself ultimately refers to the singular. What began as a religious

[3] Sean Edward Kinsella, 'How Great a Gladness: Some Thoughts on Francis of Assisi and the Natural World', *Studies in Spirituality* 12 (2002), p. 66. According to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, which was very influential on the structure of Neoplatonism, sensible reality is comprised of ersatz forms while the true forms lie in a transcendent, spiritual world.

[4] Kinsella, 'How Great a Gladness', p. 90; Ewert Cousins, 'Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads', in S. Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: OUP, 1983), pp. 164–5.

[5] Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward The Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 89; Cousins, 'Francis of Assisi', p. 165.

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revolution would ultimately succeed in overthrowing the ontological priority of the universal because Francis believed that the goodness of God was truly incarnated in every living being. To love God was to love the creatures of God since there was no other God than the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. His firm belief in God incarnate gave him a new relationship to the created world. He called all creatures brother and sister because he realised they had the same primordial goodness as himself.[6] His was a descending solidarity into creation as family by which he became truly a brother to all living things.

Of the various theologians influenced by Francis, Bonaventure (1217–74) is highly significant, not only as regent master at the University of Paris, but more so as seventh minister-general of the Franciscan Order entrusted with the responsibility of clarifying the Franciscan vision. As a student of Alexander of Hales, he was a master of the Christian philosophical and theological tradition, and it was precisely his position on theology and philosophy which distinguished him from Thomas Aquinas. It is Bonaventure, I believe, who 'Franciscanises' the Neoplatonic tradition and produces a thoroughly Christian metaphysics which may help us today retrieve an authentic Christian ecological stance. It is to Bonaventure therefore that I now turn.

Bonaventure's philosophy of God

The question of metaphysics is a question of 'what' constitutes existence or created reality. Can the question of 'what' be addressed only on the study of created being alone (philosophy) or must the question be addressed to a transcendent source of created reality, namely, God (theology)? If we look to the two 'great lights' of the thirteenth century, we see a fundamental difference in the positions of Thomas and Bonaventure. Whereas Thomas' use of Aristotle allowed him to maintain a philosophy of Being distinct from theology, Bonaventure held that a philosophy of Being is completed and perfected in theology. To philosophise (for Bonaventure) is to recognise that we are seekers rather than possessors or builders of total truth. He did not deny the necessity or usefulness of human knowledge, especially philosophical knowledge, in reflection on faith. His only criticism was towards a use of reason which claimed self-sufficiency and completeness, as having already reached the goal.

Although one can discern a method of philosophy in Bonaventure's scholastic writings, the maturity of his metaphysical thought is found in his final lectures on the *Hexaëmeron* given at the University in Paris in 1273

[6] Bonaventure, *Legenda maior*, 8.6.

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where he described his metaphysics of Christ the centre. Seeing these lectures as the culmination of his philosophical thinking, I take the position that for Bonaventure philosophy is a heteronymous discipline insofar as it is founded on the intrinsic influence of faith. Any attempt to work out a philosophy independent of faith is necessarily doomed to fall into error. Rather a philosophy of Being for Bonaventure makes sense only in view of God.

In his study of Bonaventure's trinitarian theology, Ewert Cousins found that Bonaventure appropriated two philosophical principles to explore the dynamic Being of God, namely, self-sufficiency and self-communication. Cousins claims that these are not two distinct principles but two aspects of the same principle, which can be stated as follows: God as self-sufficient absolute must necessarily be fecund and self-communicating.[7] That is, because God is absolutely self-sufficient, he is absolutely self-communicating. Drawing from the *Liber de causis* Bonaventure states a basic principle under the aspect of fecund primordiality: 'the more primary a thing is the more fecund it is and the principle of others'.[8] The absolute primacy of God therefore designates God as the universal fountain of all origin, the absolute source and cause of all Being. Since God is absolutely prior to all else, he is the full actuality of Being in all its necessary perfections. Thus God is cause of others to the degree that he is first; for to be first is the same as to be principle. As Bonaventure indicates, 'the productive fecundity of God is in proportion to his primacy'.[9] Primacy demands not only that God be cause of the world, but also that he be perfectly and eternally productive within himself; for if he is eternally first, he is eternally principle prior to creation of the world.[10] This principle becomes the argument for the primacy of the first divine person of the Trinity. 'Just as the divine essence is fecund because it is first', Bonaventure states, 'so the person of the Father,

[7] Ewert H. Cousins, 'God as Dynamic in Bonaventure and Contemporary Thought', in George F. MacLean (ed.), *Thomas and Bonaventure: A Septicentenary Commemoration*, Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 48 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1974), p. 140.

[8] Bonaventure, *I Sentence* (*Sent.*). d. 27, p. 1, a. un. q. 2 (1.468–74). The critical edn of Bonaventure's works is the *Opera omnia*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols. (Quaracchi, 1882–1902). Latin texts are indicated by volume and page number in parentheses.

[9] Ibid., d. 28, a. 1, q. 2, ad 4 (1.502).

[10] Zachary Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, vol. 3, *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, ed. George Marcil (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1979), p. 101; Anthony Murphy, 'Bonaventure's Synthesis of Augustinian and Dionysian Mysticism: A New Look at the Problem of the One and the Many', *Collectanea Franciscana* 63 (1994), p. 397.

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since he is first, because from no one, is the principle and has fecundity in regard to persons.'[11] The Father is first because the Father is without origin. This personal property of *innascibilitas* has a positive aspect, namely, self-communication. Hence, because the Father has no source, the Father is absolutely fecund. We might note here that Bonaventure distinguished himself from Thomas Aquinas who emphasised only the negative pole of the Father's *innascibilitas*. For Bonaventure, it is precisely the unoriginate nature of the Father which renders the Father *fontalis plenitudo* and hence the source of all that exists, including the other two divine persons of the Trinity. We can locate here the starting point for Bonaventure's metaphysics of the good since the primal fecundity of the Father, the *fontalis plenitudo*, is the basis of causality. 'The Good', he writes, 'entails a twofold cause, namely, the efficient cause and the final cause; hence the Good is the reason for which the will acts'.[12] That which we call 'Being' is attributed to the divine Goodness not through a manner of representing it but expressing it in causing. Bonaventure writes in his commentary on book 2 of the *Sentences*: 'Because God is Good, God wills to diffuse himself; and because God wills to produce a creature, he wills that the creature be; and thus (following Augustine), because God is Good, we are (*Quia bonus est Deus, sumus*).'[13] Goodness therefore is not only the perfection of Being but its cause; Being is Goodness whose end is not perfection *per se* but fullness.

Bonaventure's reflection on Being as Goodness is given a succinct but comprehensive treatment in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* where he takes up the question of Being and Goodness in chapters 5 and 6 of the spiritual journey to God. Bonaventure contemplates the properties of absolute Being and writes: 'For what is supremely one is the universal principle of all multiplicity; hence it is the universal efficient, exemplary and final cause of all things, "the cause of Being, the basis of understanding and the order of living"'.[14] Even when one arrives at the principle of Being through contemplation, however, one has not arrived at absolute Being. For contemplation of Being itself points to something beyond itself, as Bonaventure says: 'If God is called primary Being, eternal, utterly simple, most actual and most perfect . . . If you see this in the pure simplicity of your mind . . . you have something here to lift you up in wonder.'[15] Bonaventure indicates that the more primary Being is, the less it is apprehended by reason. Being itself is mystery, incomprehensible.

[11] Bonaventure, *I Sent.*, d. 2, a. un., q. 2 (1.53).
[12] Bonaventure, *II Sent.*, d. 1, p. 2, dub. 1 (2.51).
[13] Ibid., d. 1, p. 2, dub. 1 (2.51).
[14] Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (*Itin.*) 5.7 (5.309).
[15] Ibid. 5.7 (5.309). Engl. trans. Cousins, *Bonaventure*, p. 98.

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Hence one cannot know Being; however, one can contemplate Being, for the highest Being is that than which no greater can be thought and this is God. Bonaventure looks to the names of God in the Old and New Testament and identifies two names of God, Being and Goodness, as he writes: 'Therefore, Damascene, following Moses, says that Being is God's primary name; Dionysius, following Christ, says that the Good is God's primary name.'[16] Since he fully accepts the Dionysian principle that Goodness is self-diffusive (*bonum diffusivum sui*) he takes the New Testament revelation of God, that is, the essence of God, to be dynamic self-diffusive Goodness. Thus he distinguishes himself from Thomas who maintains that, while Good is the name of God, it is not identified with divine essence, only causality. In Bonaventure's view absolute Being *is* Goodness.

Bonaventure goes on to indicate that this highest self-diffusion is found only in the trinitarian processions, without which we would not find in the divinity the highest Good.[17] He indicates that such diffusion cannot be the highest unless it is 'actual and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, free and necessary, lacking nothing and perfect'.[18] As Bonaventure writes: 'God's Being is supreme Good, where it supremely diffuses itself in a threefold outpouring: utterly actual, complete, and directed towards an end, that is, most final.'[19] Bonaventure's argument in the *Itinerarium* reflects his argument in the *Sentences*, namely, final cause and efficient cause are the same cause, namely, absolute Goodness. The Good is the reason for which the will is in act – not only reason but cause itself. Things exist by nature of the Good and, in existing, desire their perfection which is the fullness of Goodness. Since the highest Good is love, we can define Being not simply as pure act but as a pure (eternal) act of love. Being is Goodness and Goodness *is* the fecundity of Being because God is fecund Goodness and Goodness itself is diffusive. Hence Being is fecund and self-communicative. That is, Being itself is a primordial mystery of unity and plurality.

[16] Bonaventure, *Itin.* 5.2 (5.307).

[17] Cousins, 'God as Dynamic', p. 141.

[18] Bonaventure, *Itin.* 6.2 (5.310). See Norman Kretzmann, 'A General Problem of Creation: Why Would God Create Anything at All?', in *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* ed. Scott MacDonald (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 225. Kretzmann claims that the first adjective in each pairing is more readily associated with static self-sufficiency or the *Being* side of the Being–Goodness relationship, whereas the second adjective brings out dynamic self-diffusion, or the *Goodness* side. However, I would argue that there is no relationship *per se* between Being and Goodness; rather, Being *is* Goodness.

[19] Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaêmeron* (*Hex.*), 11.11 (5.382). Engl. trans. José De Vinck, *Six Days of Creation* (Paterson, NJ: St Anthony Guild Press, 1970), p. 163.

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Exemplarity and creation

The key to Bonaventure's doctrine of creation is in the eternal generation of the Word from the Father. The Father, who is innascible and fecund, is totally self-communicative and communicates the entirety of his ideas in one other than himself. It is a necessary self-communication which arises by reason of his very nature as goodness. The Father is principle of the Trinity and hence principle of creation. The self-communicative goodness of the Father is literally God giving himself away – but in such a way that fecundity marks the Trinity's dynamic, eternal life. The necessity of God to give God's self away is realised in the Son, while the freedom of God's love is expressed in the Spirit. It is not a necessity imposed from the outside but an inner necessity of the divine being to be always and completely self-sufficient and totally in conformity with itself.[20] This total expression of the Father's love is the Word, who proceeds from the Father, as Word, by way of exemplarity. God in his own self-knowledge is exemplar of all else. Since God exists only as Trinity, exemplarity refers to the entire Trinity; however, the mystery of the Trinity is reflected in the mystery of the second person. Although the doctrine of exemplarity refers to the relations between God and creation, the basis of this doctrine is the relationship between the Father, Son and Spirit. As the full and total expression of God's primal fruitfulness, the Son is also the expression of all that God can be in relation to the finite.[21] Thus, the relation between the Father and Son expressed in the personal love of the Spirit is the first and primal relation and the basis for all other relations.

It is precisely in the relationship between the Father and Son that one must describe Bonaventure's doctrine of creation, for just as the Word is the inner self-expression of God, the created order is the external expression of the inner Word. As the expression of the necessary immanent fruitfulness of God, the generation of the Son is simultaneously the expression of the possible free communication of being to the non-divine. Hayes writes: 'God's being as self-communicative love gives expression to its entire fruitfulness in the generation of the Son, so that in generating the Son, the Father speaks one Word immanent to himself in which is expressed the possibility of creation.'[22] As the centre of divine life, the Word is the ontological basis for all that is other than the Father. Because there is a Word in God, creation can exist as an external word; because there is an Absolute Otherness, there can

[20] Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions*, p. 46.

[21] Ibid., p. 47.

[22] Zachary Hayes, 'Incarnation and Creation in the Theology of St. Bonaventure', in Romano Stephen Almagno and Conrad Harkins (eds), *Studies Honoring Ignatius Brady, Friar Minor* (New York: Franciscan Institute, 1976), p. 314.

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be a relative otherness.[23] The possibility of God's creative activity, therefore, rests in his being as triune, which is to say that 'God could not communicate being to the finite if he were not supremely communicative in himself.'[24] The communicability of God's nature is rooted in the primal relation between the Father and Word which is the basis of all other relations. The Word who is the centre of the divine life is also the exemplar of creation; and creation itself may be seen as an external word in which the one inner Word is objectified through the indwelling Spirit. In as far as the one Word is the expression of the entire inner-trinitarian structure of God, 'that which is created is an expression of the Word which bears within itself the imprint of the Trinity'.[25]

The congruent relationship between the Trinity and creation means that created reality possesses in its inner constitution a relation to the uncreated Word. The primal relationship between the Father and the Son from which creation originates is consonant with Bonaventure's emphasis on creation *ex nihilo*.[26] The fecund self-diffusiveness of the infinite God cannot be exhausted by creation, since such diffusion would make creation equal to God; however, it is directed towards the divine Word who is the exemplar of creation. As Bonaventure writes in his *Itinerarium*, 'the diffusion in time in creation is no more than a centre or point in relation to the immensity of the divine goodness'; however, the diffusion in time is the diffusion of the *Trinity* in

[23] Bonaventure shows a decided preference for the term *Word*; for this title signifies a complex network of relations which the Son bears to the Father, to creation, to humanity, and to revelation, all of which are grounded in the fact that he who is, first of all and by reason of an act of the divine nature, the Son of the Father's love, is simultaneously the Word of the Father's self-expression as loving, fruitful source of all that is. See Hayes, 'Incarnation and Creation', p. 314; Zachary Hayes, 'The Meaning of *Convenientia* in the Metaphysics of St. Bonaventure', *Franciscan Studies* 34 (1974), p. 90.

[24] Zachary Hayes, 'Christology and Metaphysics in the Thought of Bonaventure', *Journal of Religion* (1978), S91.

[25] Hayes, 'Incarnation and Creation', p. 314; Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions*, p. 48.

[26] In the second chapter of his *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure describes the creation of the world in this manner: 'the entire world machine was brought into existence in time and from nothing by one First Principle . . . by asserting "from nothing" we exclude the error of those who hold the eternity of a material principle'. By emphasising a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* Bonaventure assured his audience that creation is radically contingent on God; thus, under no condition can it be made out of pre-existent matter nor can it be eternal. Rather, creation has a beginning and end; it comes from God and is destined to return to God. Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 2.1.1. Engl. trans. Dominic V. Monti, *Breviloquium*, vol. 9, *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, ed. Robert J. Karris (New York: Franciscan Institute, 2005), p. 59. Bonaventure repeats the theme of *ex nihilo* in the same chapter of the *Breviloquium*: 2.1.1 (5.291), 2.2.2 (5.220) and 2.6.3 (5.224).

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time.[27] Bonaventure indicates that what characterises the inner life of God takes place in creation as well, although the exemplary character of the Word does not make the act of creation necessary. The act of creation is a free act of God but it is the free overflow of his necessary, inner-divine fruitfulness. As Hayes states, 'when God creates, he can do so only "in and through the Word" of his own otherness, so that whatever created reality exists appears as the external otherness that is placed through the immanent otherness'.[28] Only a dynamic, self-communicative God can be a creator God, and the weight of that self-communicating falls upon the Word as the necessary condition for any created being. Hayes writes, 'God speaks but one Word in which the world and its history are co-spoken.'[29] Therefore, the created order reflects at some level the relation of the Son to the Father, for this relation is the ontological condition both of creation and of incarnation.[30]

In this respect, exemplarity, the doctrine of relations between God and creation, is key to Bonaventure's position, since there is no created Being apart from the creating principle who is God. Bonaventure's philosophy is so inextricably bound to his theology that one cannot conceive of created Being as created Goodness unless one also conceives Being itself as Trinity in which the Word is centre. Because the divine Word is the absolute communication of the Father's Goodness, the Word is the absolute fullness of Being and the pattern of all that exists. As the exemplar of creation, the divine Word is the absolute expression of the Father's Goodness, the form of created reality by which creation is a finite expression of the divine self-diffusive Good. The Word is not only the Form of created Being but its (participated) pattern and goal as well.[31]

The centrality of the Word in Bonaventure's thought means that God is an outward-moving dynamic Trinity whose essential life is marked by personal gift: the Father who is innascible and fecund, the *fontalis plenitudo*, gives himself totally by producing another, the Son, and Father and Son complete the cycle of total self-diffusion in producing the Spirit. While the nature of the good connotes a necessity of diffusion, such diffusion is not in creation but within

[27] Bonaventure, Itin., 6.2 (5.310). Engl. trans. Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Major Life of Saint Francis* (New York: Paulist, 1978), p. 103.

[28] Hayes, 'Incarnation and Creation', p. 315.

[29] Hayes, 'Christology and Metaphysics', S92.

[30] Hayes, 'Incarnation and Creation', pp. 315–16.

[31] This position differs from Thomas who rejects exemplarity as a separate form from created Being, that is, Platonic 'extrinsicism'. Rather, essential forms are inherent in things. See Jan A. Aersten, 'Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good', in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, p. 69.

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the life of the Trinity. Transcendence is fecundity, and the fecundity of divine life expresses itself in the necessary generation of the Son and the freedom of love in the Spirit.[32] Creation shares in the fecundity of the divine life insofar as it is a finite expression of the divine self-diffusive Good. As Bonaventure writes, 'for the diffusion in time in creation is no more than a center or point in relation to the immensity of the divine Goodness'.[33] Kevin Keane highlights the primacy of the good for Bonaventure by saying:

> Self-diffusive Goodness is the basic and normative reality of the universe, the root and reality of Being itself, just as the intellectual self-understanding of the Unmoved Mover is the ultimate ground and norm of the Aristotelian universe. . . . Given that reality at its deepest (or highest) levels is such a dynamic diffusion of the Good/Being, Bonaventure sees creation – and finite Being as such – as a limited actualisation (finite Being) of the infinite and dynamic life that marks the divine order.[34] Although creation is a free act of the divine will for Bonaventure (and not a necessary emanation), Bonaventure sees the divine will as acting upon and expressing, the tendency of the Good towards self-diffusion – an efficient causality of the Good.[35]

Thus by its very nature of goodness, creation is generative, transcendent and relational. Keane writes: 'the dynamic generosity of Goodness which calls the universe into Being is no accident to Being but essential to Being in its very depths. The emphasis on Being as Goodness means that Goodness is not only the motive and impetus of creation but also its pattern.'[36] Bonaventure maintained with Thomas that created Being ought to achieve its own proper sufficiency and telic perfection but he goes beyond the angelic doctor by indicating that created Beings must be diffusive as their Creator is diffusive for this is what it is to be and no real telos is achieved in its absence. Keane compares the role of the Good in Thomas and Bonaventure and sums up the difference in this way:

[32] Hayes, introduction to *Disputed Questions*, p. 45.
[33] Bonaventure, *Itin.*, 6.2 (5.310).
[34] Kevin P. Keane, 'Why Creation? Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas on God as Creative Good', *Downside Review* 93 (1975), pp. 112–13.
[35] Ibid., p. 114 n. 39. Keane writes: 'The will is the act according to which Goodness [as efficient] is turned toward Goodness [finality]. Hence it is that the will is the effecter in the act of creation, and thus it is that we attribute causality to God as a product of his will and not of his other characteristics.'
[36] Ibid., p. 116.

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> Whereas the Good for Thomas is simply and purely static perfection or achieved telos, Bonaventure sees it as perfection that tends to diffuse itself. . . . Although Bonaventure does not join Plato, Pseudo-Dionysius and Plotinus in placing the Good beyond Being, he does perceive the Good as they did: not secondary to Being but radically co-extensive, that which grounds all limitation by Being limit itself, beyond limit, infinite in its fecundity, the source of all life and intelligibility, so perfect that it must relate to other realities. To be is to be diffusive; Goodness *is* Being itself.[37]

Bonaventure's Christian metaphysics

Bonaventure's view of created reality as essentially good plays out in the development of his metaphysics. In the first collation on the *Hexaëmeron* Bonaventure worked through the mystery of the Trinity in Christ and concluded that Christ is the metaphysical centre because Christ is the divine Word and exemplar, the total expression of the Father, the fullness of divine love, and the eternal art. He writes: 'This is the sum total of our metaphysics: concerned with emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, that is, illumination through spiritual radiations and return to the Most High.'[38] Metaphysics is not concerned with knowledge alone but with knowledge which leads to truth. To be illumined (by grace) and return to God is the foundation of true knowledge. Hence if metaphysics attains its goal by returning to God through the light of grace, then metaphysics is essentially religious since the meaning of religion (*re-ligare*) is to bind back or return to the source. It is in this respect that Bonaventure identifies Christ as the centre of philosophy for in Christ the principle of Being is the principle of knowing.[39] As Word of the Father, Christ is the absolute communication of divine Goodness; hence Christ is the absolute fullness of Being. As centre of the divine life, the Word is the exemplar of creation. In the free divine act of creation, the trinitarian fullness of divine Goodness 'explodes' into creatures which are not God but are God's self-expression, that is, Word incarnate.[40] Every creature reflects the Word and wisdom of God, the divine exemplar. Every creature proclaims the eternal generation of the Word.[41]

[37] Ibid., p. 115.

[38] Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* (*Hex.*), 1.17 (5.332).

[39] Ibid. 1.13 (5.331).

[40] Denis Edwards, 'The Discovery of Chaos and the Retrieval of the Trinity', in *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Rome: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1995), pp. 161–2; Leonard Bowman, 'The Cosmic Exemplarism of Bonaventure', *Journal of Religion* 55 (1975), pp. 182–3.

[41] Bonaventure, *Hex.*, 11.13 (5.382).

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God is profoundly present to all things, and God is expressed in all things, so that each creature is a symbol and a sacrament of God's presence and trinitarian life.[42]

Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the centre, according to Hayes, intended to correct that which had been inherited from the Greek philosophers. The classical Greek doctrine of Being established the one divine essence as the exemplary cause of created Being, a transcendent cause that, at best, could be principle but not related to created Being.[43] Bonaventure's deep reflection on the prologue of John's Gospel allowed him to see the metaphysical and epistemological implications of the Word, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. As Zachary Hayes writes, 'that which the philosopher sought as the exemplary cause and found in the one divine essence, the theologian comes to know as the person of the Word, the center of divine life and the exemplar in whom the whole trinitarian structure of divine nature expresses itself as the exemplar of all finite reality'.[44] Since all things are constituted in Being through the Word, and if it is impossible to understand a creature except through that by which it is made, then in some way the Word is involved in all genuine knowledge at whatever level.[45]

Bonaventure did not reject the classical doctrine of Being; however, he reframed it in light of revelation. His metaphysical starting point of Christ the centre was not 'an isolated, individual existent but a Being who, while individual, is thoroughly relational'.[46] Bonaventure grounded the mystery of Christ in the metaphysics of divine self-relatedness which is the Trinity. The Father begets the Son through the self-communication of love and with the Son breathes forth love in the Spirit. It is out of this creative love that all other created reality flows. Created Being, therefore, is the creative love of the Trinity expressed in history. Hayes writes, 'The metaphysical question coincides with the Christological question in as far as the problem of exemplarity which is focused in metaphysics at the philosophical level is related to the exemplarity of the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ. . . . God speaks but one Word in which the world and its history are co-spoken . . . There is, however, a point in history at which the content of that Word is historicized with such explicitness that from that point light is shed on all of reality,'[47] and that point is Christ the centre.

[42] Edwards, 'Discovery of Chaos', p. 163.
[43] Hayes, 'Christology and Metaphysics', S98–S99.
[44] Ibid., S91.
[45] Ibid., S92.
[46] Hayes, 'Meaning of *Convenientia*', p. 99.
[47] Hayes, 'Christology and Metaphysics', S88–S92.

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In light of Christ, Bonaventure views the exemplary nature of created reality not as Being but as love. This insight enabled Bonaventure to recast classical metaphysics in the following manner: 'God is Being but Being is Love; God is substance but substance is relational; God is One but the highest unity is the unity of plurality in love.'[48] Only when the doctrine of Being is held open to the mystery of Christ is the true nature of created reality revealed as love. Goodness, therefore, is not only the source of created reality, the reason for and impulse towards creation, but also the substance, participated, of that creation – the order, beauty, substantiality of created Being – and the goal of creation. Goodness is communicative, imitative and desirable. Everything that exists comes from the Good, is patterned on the highest Good and can find rest only in the ultimate Good. Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the centre means that the primary significance of individual form no longer consists in disclosing a universal reality beyond itself. Indeed, the universal itself ultimately refers to the singular. Louis Dupré writes, 'if the essence of all ideas resides in an individual, the weight of knowledge shifts from the abstract universal to the singular'.[49] Thus Bonaventure paved the way for Duns Scotus who developed the primacy of the individual into a wholly new philosophy by which 'individuality constitutes the supreme form and perfect knowledge consists in knowing this individual form'.[50] Scotus' doctrine of individuation or *haecceitas* highlights individuality at the core of each thing – its very being.[51] *Haecceitas* refers to that positive dimension of every concrete and contingent being which identifies it and makes it worthy of attention. It can only be known by direct acquaintance, not from any consideration of common nature. Scotus developed this insight in a concrete way as the experience of God. His notion of individuation points to the idea that each particular being has its own intrinsic, unique and proper being. He therefore placed a great emphasis on the inherent dignity of each and every thing that exists.

Scotus' notion of *haecceitas* complements Bonaventure's theological metaphysics since true knowledge lies in knowing the individual which can only take place through personal relationship. As Emmanual Falque notes, 'love becomes a conceptual determination at the junction of theory and

[48] Hayes, 'Meaning of *Convenientia*', p. 99.

[49] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 38.

[50] Ibid., p. 39. This is the basis of Scotus' doctrine of individuation (*Haecceitas*).

[51] Allan Wolter, *Duns Scotus' Early Oxford Lecture on Individuation* (Santa Barbara, CA: Old Mission, 1992), p. 25. On the use of the term *haecceitas* see Allan Wolter, 'Scotus's Individuation Theory', in Marilyn McCord Adams (ed.), *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), n. 26, p. 76.

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practice'.[52] That is, love becomes the form of true knowledge; rationality is primordially the freedom of love.

Kataphysics: the end of metaphysics?

Bonaventure's metaphysics of Christ the centre coupled with Scotus' doctrine of individuation lead me to suggest that metaphysics is supplanted or rather overturned by a new understanding of created reality which involves relatedness. I would describe this new understanding of reality as *kataphysics* since it means understanding the fundamental nature of reality *according to* that which exists, that is, the level of individual or personal being. Kataphysics is knowledge of the singular, individual existent in its createdness. By definition kataphysics means that there is no underlying principle of existence, as if there is an ontological *source* of being distinct from that which exists or is participated in by that which exists (analogy of Being). Rather the source itself is expressed in the created thing without being identical to the created thing (univocity of Being), since every created being is a finite expression of the infinite love of God. In this respect Bonaventure stands closer to Scotus than to Thomas. Whereas Thomas maintains a distinction between essence and existence so that creatures are only imperfect representations of the divine (analogy of Being), Scotus maintains a commonality (or univocity) of Being whereby God and creation share in the community of all that exists, although there is an objective ordering of everything, each according to its nature. As Mary Beth Ingham states, 'the essential order joins all beings to one another and ultimately to God, as First Principle'.[53] Scotus does not deny analogy of Being; however, analogy presupposes univocity.[54]

Bonaventure's kataphysics evokes a univocity of Being without denying analogy insofar as Christ, the Word incarnate, is the principle of Being and the principle of knowing. For Bonaventure an ontology of relatedness based on the exemplarity of goodness is the meaning of Christ; that is, 'the metaphysical question coincides with the Christological question in

[52] Emmanuel Falque, 'The Phenomenological Act of *Perscrutatio* in the Proemium of St Bonaventure's Commentary on the Sentences', trans. Elisa Mangina *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001), p. 18.

[53] Mary Beth Ingham, *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor* (New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), p. 56.

[54] Peter Leithard, 'A Word for Scotus', http://www.leithard.com/archives. Leithart writes: 'If of two things one is the measure of the other, then they must have something in common that permits the first to be measure of the second, and the second to be measured of the first. If of two things one exceeds the other by some quantity or degree, however great, then they must have something in common with respect of which the first exceeds the second.'

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as far as the problem of exemplarity which is focused in metaphysics at the philosophical level is related to the exemplarity of the Word incarnate in Jesus Christ'.[55] The principle of created reality, therefore, is thoroughly relational, grounded in self-communicative, orderly love.[56] Hayes writes: 'it is clear that the incarnate Word stands at the center of reality as that point of unity in relation to which the multiplicity of reality holds together'.[57] The intrinsic connection between the mystery of creation and the mystery of incarnation means that 'we discover . . . in Jesus the divine clue as to the structure and meaning not only of humanity but of the entire universe'.[58] Bonaventure's incarnational kataphysics is faithful to the experience of Francis who realised a primordial source of goodness at the heart of creation which bound together all living beings in a unity of love. Kataphysics is ecological because it connotes a fundamental principle of relatedness; that is, relatedness is intrinsic to being itself. If we ask, what holds the household (*oikonomia*) together, therefore, we have to answer a principle of essential relatedness or, in more poetic terms, a luminous web of goodness. According to Bonaventure's kataphysics, this is the meaning of Christ.

Kataphatic knowledge

The meaning of created reality as essentially relational based on the centrality of Christ points to a type of knowledge which is not abstract or speculative but is itself relational. Because the principle of being is expressed in created being, one must know created being to know the truth of being itself, and this knowledge can only come about through union. For Bonaventure true knowledge is contemplative insofar as it is horizontally ecstatic.[59] Kataphatic

[55] Hayes, 'Christology and Metaphysics', S88. See a related argument by Adrian Pabst who shows through Platonic metaphysics that every being is individuated because it is a particular reflection of the universal Good and thus a unique and singular expression of God's self-communicative actualisation in the world. Bonaventure's kataphysics christianises Platonic metaphysics and thus provides a more theological basis for the primacy of relationship and individuation. Adrian Pabst, 'The Primacy of Relation over Substance and the Recovery of a Theological Metaphysics', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81/4 (2007), pp. 553–76.

[56] Hayes, 'Meaning of *Convenientia*', p. 100.

[57] Hayes, 'Christology and Metaphysics', S95.

[58] Zachary Hayes, 'Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity' *The cord* 46.1 (1996), p. 7.

[59] Bonaventure, *Hex.*, 2.30 (5.341). Bonaventure does not deny the role of the intellect in knowledge but intellect alone cannot attain true knowledge. Since truth is grounded in the generation of the divine Word, one must know the Word to know truth. Thus contemplation, or the integration of mind and heart, is the means of knowing truth. Bonaventure writes that contemplation which comes about through grace is the

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knowledge takes one out of oneself and into the other by way of insight, so that knower and known are differentiated by a union in love. This type of knowledge is described by the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, in his book *I and Thou*. According to Buber, dialogue is the basis of true knowledge by which the 'I' encounters the 'Thou' in openness, acceptance and spontaneity without imposing on the other the inner subjective world of the 'I'. It is distinguished from dialectics which pursues truth by trusting the order of things, the value of reason and weighty arguments. Dialectics is the optimism of reason and maintains that truth can be found by relying on the objective consistency of ideas. Authentic dialogue, however, does not seek primarily to be duo-logue, a duet or two sets of ideas, which would still be dialectical; but a *dia-logos*, a piercing of the logos to attain a truth that transcends it – precisely in relation to the other.[60] In this respect, true dialogue comes from within the encounter between subjects. This dialogue is the optimism of the heart and believes it can advance along the way to truth by relying on the subjective consistency of the dialogical partners. Without genuine dialogue, there remains dialectic 'in which the "I" consciously or unconsciously seeks to use, impress, inspect, or artfully manipulate the other as if it has no subjective nature, but is an object. Thus in dealing with this "object" only a highly filtered rigorously censored self is presented to the other.'[61]

One could argue that the natural world is a dialogical world of 'I–Thou' relationships insofar as each existent is a subject in openness to another subject. However, the human person has the capacity to reject otherness and annihilate the Thou, reducing otherness to the level of object or 'it'. Although Bonaventure did not describe knowledge as an I–Thou relationship, his development of kataphysics gave way to contemplative knowledge based on union where the highest knowledge is wisdom. For Bonaventure wisdom is knowledge deepened by love so that one who attains wisdom arrives at knowledge through union in love which imposes silence on the intellect and appeases all its powers.[62]

supreme union of love. 'Such love transcends every intellect and every science'. Engl. trans. Jose DeVinck, *Collations on the Six Days*, vol. 5, *The Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, NJ: St Anthony Guild, 1970), p. 36.

[60] Raimon Panikkar, *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics: Cross Cultural Studies* (New York: Paulist, 1980), p. 243.

[61] Lawrence W. Fagg, 'Martin Buber: My Man of the Twentieth Century', *The Torch* 81/2 (Winter 2007–8), p. 17.

[62] Bonaventure, *Hex.*, 2.31 (5.341). Bonaventure writes: 'Now such love . . . puts to sleep and appeases all the powers and imposes silence; it lifts up since it leads to God. And so man is dead, wherefore it is said: Love is as strong as death, because it cuts away from all things.' Engl. trans. De Vinck, *Collations on the Six Days*, p. 37.

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Bonaventure discusses wisdom in several different writings, including his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* and his lectures on the six days of creation. In the *Itinerarium* Bonaventure describes Francis as one who attained ecstatic wisdom by passing over into the silence and darkness of God through union with the crucified Christ. Francis's dying into love was a stripping away of everything that prevented him from being grasped by the dominance of grace which opened his eyes to truth through a union in love. True knowledge (indeed, theology itself) entails a death to the self-grasping intellect. One must become as dead in order to see into the heart of things, as Francis did in his lifetime. In reflecting on Francis' life Bonaventure indicated that one can know this truth only by accepting one's poverty or creatureliness, by acknowledging one's contingency and humility, and through kenotic love as the path into the heart of the mystery of God. Only one who can let go of possessing knowledge can really know this world as a Trinity of love unfolding in its fullness, which Christ reveals in the depth of the cross. True knowledge therefore is bound up with death, and unless one is willing to 'die to the ego' so to attain union with the other, truth remains elusive. For Bonaventure, truth is not a given but must be arrived at; it is not a 'thing' but a disclosure. True knowledge is attained through union in love and without love there is no truth and hence no real grasp of true reality.

Kataphysics is not intellectual in nature but contemplative and mystical. It is not a knowledge derived *from* nature but a knowledge *in* and *through* nature by which one comes to know God as the fullness of love or overflowing goodness in created reality. Kataphysics describes a unity of life which flows from the goodness of God *as* Word incarnate, that is, the body of Christ, which we come to know fully through Jesus the Christ. It does not pre-empt the essential role of the intellect but it unifies the relationship between intellect and will in such a way that truth is known when the mind apprehends the Word through the movement of the heart.

Christianity: an ecological religion

By examining Bonaventure's kataphysics we may wonder why Christians have allowed the ecological problem to slide into an environmental crisis if, indeed, the incarnation is at the heart of understanding the world. Is incarnation at the heart of knowing the world or are we anti-incarnational? I would agree with White that Christians play a significant role in the environmental problem; however, I would put the blame not on a deficient reading of Genesis but on a failure to grasp the meaning of Christ. Joseph Chinnici has argued that Christians have a bias against the incarnation and, if so, it may be because we are still more attracted by a hellenised God who

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lures us away from this valley of tears than a God who gets radically involved in a messy world. It is precisely the Christian God, thoroughly relational and incarnational, who imparts to this created world its meaning and purpose.

Bonaventure's contribution to understanding our world lies in his revolution of thought, his 'dehellenisation' of metaphysics, whereby he places Christ squarely in the centre of philosophy. To know Christ is to know reality in its true relatedness. From this point the Christian vocation emerges as one of helping to sacramentalise the universe. Since all of reality is good and beautiful, moral loving does not so much involve finding those objects worthy of love (since all reality is good) but rather working out the manner by which we can love reality as it deserves.[63] Like Bonaventure, Scotus maintains that relationship is the key to the beauty of the universe. Ingham writes: 'Since all reality is good, then one's relationships with others, human and non-human, ought to promote goodness.'[64] Justice is a stance towards reality. It involves treating everything in creation as it deserves. It calls us to attend to the 'thisness', the inherent dignity of each and every thing that exists.

Bonaventure's kataphysics together with Scotus' harmony of goodness mean that true knowledge can never be autonomous or centred in the self-thinking subject for it is grounded in goodness – in Christ – and thus in relatedness. Dialogue is the basis of kataphysics by which every subject lives in openness and receptivity to another subject. Just as the Trinity is a communion of persons-in-love, which we come to know through Christ, so too relatedness is the basis of creation in which Christ is centre. As a Christian understanding of created reality, kataphysics is grounded in love so that one cannot know reality apart from love. We truly live in a participatory universe in which the 'I' is brought into being by the 'Thou' and the 'Thou' by the 'I'. It is in kataphysical relatedness that rationality finds its meaning. To live rationally is not to wield power over another but to love rightly, promoting a harmony of goodness. Only in this way, the Franciscans claim, can the whole of creation give glory and praise to God.

[63] Mary Beth Ingham, 'A Certain Affection for Justice', *The Cord* 45–3 (1995), p. 17.
[64] Ibid.

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