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The Weight of Love

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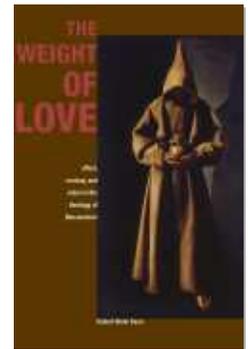
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Hierarchy and Excess in the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*

This chapter and the next examine Bonaventure's development of the theme of love as unifying fire not only as a vision for the consummation of creation, but also as a medium and goal of Christian devotion in contemplation, prayer, and the practice of charity. In this chapter, I analyze the excessive order of creation and of the soul in *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Bonaventure's treatise on the stages of the soul's ascent modeled on the Seraph of Francis's vision at La Verna. In the next chapter, I turn to the relation of the will's self-motion and the movement of affect in Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis*, and the affective movement that the presentation of Francis's life effects in the reader. Together, I suggest, these two works (albeit, in different ways) lead the reader into a practice of devotion whose goal is the transformation of the affect and the ecstatic erasure of the boundary between nature and grace, interior and exterior, action and passion.

On Mount La Verna

In the crucial, curious prologue to the *Itinerarium mentis in deum* (The Soul's Journey Into God), Bonaventure's enchiridion of Franciscan spiri

tual pilgrimage, the author describes the displacement that served as the impetus for the work. He composed the *Itinerarium* in 1259, thirty-three years after Francis of Assisi's death (*transitus*) and just two years after Bonaventure was appointed to "the place of this most blessed father" (*loco ipsius patris beatissimi*) as Minister General of the Friars Minor.¹ Feeling the pressures of his new role as Francis's lieutenant, he was moved by a divine inclination to seek retreat in "a place of rest" (*ad locum quietum*). This was the place in which Francis, too, had sought rest—Mount La Verna, where Francis saw a Seraph, its six wings blazing and affixed to a cross, and received the wounds of Christ's passion. Writing in the first person, Bonaventure reflects on that vision: "In considering this, it appeared to me at once [*statim*] that this vision pointed not only to the uplifting of our father himself in contemplation, but also to the path by which it is reached."² A second vision thus occurs in the very place of the first. The exemplary nature of Francis's vision—that is, the path it describes for the reader—appears to Bonaventure *statim*, "on the spot"; the peak of La Verna serves rhetorically as a single point condensing the time of the two visions and the space of the spiritual journey that follows.

Conveniently for historians, this passage provides plausible evidence for the dating of the work and for Bonaventure's appointment as minister general.³ Yet the passage is just as valuable for the interpretive clues it offers to the theological vision outlined in the work as a whole. By locating the inspiration for the work at Mount La Verna, Bonaventure frames the *Itinerarium* as a spiritual geography and itinerary that describes at once 1) the ecstatic order of the cosmos as the unfolding of God's being in likeness, image, and vestige, and 2) the order of the soul as a hierarchy of powers by which God is revealed and loved. The account of successive illuminations that it traces can be read, in light of this framing, as an account of how the soul is elevated through this order and brought into union with God.

By the year 1259, Francis's Seraphic vision and stigmata were a commonplace legend, one whose theological and scriptural significance Bonaventure would further exploit in his biography of Francis.⁴ The body of the Seraph defines the hierarchized and ecstatic space of the *Itinerarium*. The six wings divide the work into six chapters, describing six successive "illuminations" by which the mind is elevated through the contemplation of created things until it reaches its *transitus*—the soul's final "passing over" or "death" in which the acts of the intellect are abandoned, illumination is replaced by darkness, and the soul is immolated with the ardent love witnessed in and made possible by the life and death of Francis.⁵ For Bonaventure, the figure of the Seraph is significant not only for the enumerative

possibilities of its six wings, but also for its Dionysian position of greatest intimacy to God within the angelic hierarchy and its identification with burning love, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Bonaventure exploits these associations in his description of the soul's *transitus* in a seventh and final chapter of the *Itinerarium*, adumbrated in the Prologue when he identifies the way as "nothing other than through the most ardent love of the Crucified one."⁶

That same love is, not by chance, also the destination of the ascent, a coincidence that renders dynamic—and problematic—the relation between the elevating contemplations of the first six chapters and the consuming affective ecstasy of the seventh. The *Itinerarium* proceeds less as an ordered progression toward a goal than as a series of displacements, culminating not in a fixed destination that can be charted in advance, but in the soul's *excessus* (exceeding) of itself and *ecstasis* (standing outside) of the intelligible in a transformation of its affective power.⁷ The desire that draws the soul toward the summit through contemplation of the interior and cosmic hierarchies ends with the silencing of the mind's contemplations and the transformation of the affective part of the soul into God.

The nature of this journey's goal surely indicates something about the path that leads to it. Yet even scholars who have taken seriously the apophysis of knowledge described in the *Itinerarium*'s seventh chapter have often read it as a kind of coda to the spiritual progression of the first six chapters. Responding to a recent article by Gregory LaNave on the structure of the *Itinerarium*, Jay Hammond suggests the importance of the framing of the work.⁸ Hammond asks, "How can one accurately understand a text if its introduction and conclusion are ignored?" He offers an illuminating reading of the work in light of the structuring devices that Bonaventure introduces in the prologue that suggest a six-part structure. There are good reasons for this reading, both internal and external to the text. First, the figure of the six-winged Seraph suggests, literally, a six-part body to the text. Moreover, the *Itinerarium*'s six body chapters can be seen as a doubling of a three-part structure that Bonaventure repeats throughout the work. And in its historical context, the six-part progression corresponds to the structure of several similar twelfth- and thirteenth-century guides to prayer, including, most proximately, Richard of St. Victor's *Beniamin Maior*, which undoubtedly informed Bonaventure's own work.⁹

Considering each of these factors in turn, I hope here to build on LaNave and Hammond's work, and take Hammond's suggestion further by asking what difference it makes to the whole that Bonaventure posits a state beyond the sixth contemplation. If, as I suggest, the *transitus* described in

the seventh chapter stands as a distinct stage or state beyond the six contemplations, its purpose is not to add one more stage to a six-fold ascent, but rather to recast the movement of the whole in terms of the *ecstasis* to which it leads. Treating this final chapter as the interpretive key to the entire text, I argue, in turn necessitates a re-evaluation of the structure of the work—and not only that, but indeed a re-evaluation of the very concept of structure in Bonaventure’s spiritual cosmology. To this end, I will first examine the order that Bonaventure posits within the soul and the role of desire in its becoming hierarchical. I will then turn to Bonaventure’s elaboration of the hierarchical arrangement of the cosmos as vestige, image, and likeness. Already contained within these discussions of hierarchy, I will ultimately suggest, is the affective *transitus*, which he outlines in the seventh chapter of the *Itinerarium*.

In this way, I contend, Bonaventure’s very understanding of hierarchy—both the hierarchy of the soul’s powers and the cosmic hierarchy of vestige, image, and likeness—depends upon a theology of ontological and spiritual *ecstasis*. The affective *transitus* that Bonaventure describes in the seventh chapter, then, is not a coda to the *Itinerarium* or even the final stage. It is rather, along with the prologue, an indication that the *itinerarium* is not the soul’s movement through a static hierarchy, but its participation in the ecstatic, self-negating time and space of the Christocentric cosmos, which is at the same time participation in the passion of Christ enacted through Francis’s wounding vision. As Michelle Karnes rightly notes, “When it comes to the *Itinerarium*, the line between mysticism and philosophy is hard to draw.”¹⁰ This is true not just because Bonaventure has melded genres, but because a single conception of hierarchy underlies Bonaventure’s philosophical speculation and his devotional program. The instant in which Francis’s vision occurs on Mount La Verna to Bonaventure *statim* is itself *ecstasis*, where the *transitus*—both passage and death—is always already taking place.

Ordering Desire

The relation between desire and excess is established early in the *Itinerarium*. In the prologue, Bonaventure locates the starting point of the journey (*itinerarium*) in the “groans of prayer,” by which desire is enkindled in the soul.¹¹ Then again at the beginning of Chapter 1, he writes that “prayer is the mother and the origin of upward movement [*sursum-actionis*].”¹² Here he explains, with recourse to a citation of Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology*, that ascent must start with prayer because the ascent of the soul is a matter

of the soul exceeding itself, rising above itself, “not by a bodily ascent, but by an ascent of the heart.” Yet the soul cannot exceed itself *by itself*: “We cannot be elevated above ourselves unless a superior power lifts us up. No matter how our interior stages may be ordered, nothing will happen if divine aid does not help us. But divine aid comes to those who pray from their heart humbly and devoutly.”¹³ Ascent begins in affective prayer not as the soul’s first act, but as the initial giving over of oneself to the divine agency that enables the soul’s movement. Moreover, the fact that ascent cannot occur without divine aid (because ascent entails self-surpassing) means that *ecstasis*, the state of the soul as above or outside itself, is not reserved for the final stage of the *itinerarium*. That is, Bonaventure does not present a series of steps that the soul takes to bring itself to order, at the end of which that order is exceeded. Rather, the entire journey into God is an *ecstasis*, or, better, a series of them. If the six wings of the Seraph entail an ordering of the soul’s illuminations from vestige to image, and from image to likeness, Bonaventure is emphatic from the beginning that the entire Seraphic order is set on fire and affixed to the cross.

As Hammond argues, the goal of the *Itinerarium* is peace, understood as “right order,”¹⁴ but it is clear that this is an ecstatic order from beginning to end, an order of movements. The threefold ordering scheme (which Bonaventure then doubles to arrive at six stages) is presented not as a three-step, vertically oriented ladder, but as a movement from without, to within, and finally to above or beyond. The order described and traversed in the *Itinerarium* is oriented around the human soul. And since it is the soul (*mens*)¹⁵ itself that is the wayfarer on this journey, the movement is ecstatic in each of its stages.¹⁶ The soul is never simply “in itself”: even (and perhaps especially) its turn inward is ecstatic, since in the inward movement of the journey one discovers the image of God and is thus taken beyond oneself. Outside itself, the wayfaring soul moves through the *vestigia* of God, within itself as an *imago* of God, and finally beyond itself, to the eternal and *spiritualissimum*.

In the progression through this order, desire (*desiderium*) plays an overarching role—as initiator, vehicle, and consummation of the ascent. In the prologue Bonaventure writes that “no one is disposed at all for divine contemplations which lead to mental ecstasies without being, like Daniel, a man of desires [*vir desideriorum*].”¹⁷ And in the final chapter, he explains that the mystery of the *excessus mentis* can be revealed only to those who desire it, “and no one desires it but one who is inflamed to the marrow with the fire of the Holy Spirit whom Christ has sent into the world.”¹⁸

At the same time as it frames the entire journey, desire also has a precise psychological valence for Bonaventure, and in a sense has a specific place among the soul's powers. Early in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure lists six powers of the soul: *sensus*, *imaginatio*, *ratio*, *intellectus*, *intelligentia*, and *apex mentis* or *synderesis scintilla*.¹⁹ This sixfold list is only one of many ways that he enumerates and distinguishes the soul's powers, and this one works here, clearly, to reinforce the Seraphic structure of the work: The six powers may be understood to correspond to the six illuminations of the journey. In this scheme, *desiderium* takes its place in the third power, *ratio*, which corresponds to the contemplation of the rational image of God.

For Bonaventure, this *imago* follows the familiar Augustinian triad of memory, understanding, and will (*memoria*, *intelligentia*, *voluntas*).²⁰ Because the subject at hand remains the ascent of the soul, Bonaventure explains these powers in terms of their ability to lead the soul back through itself to the eternal Art, the supreme Truth, and the highest Good. Memory holds all things in the soul—past, present, and future; it is not only a depository of things derived from sense, but also a kind of “inner reason” (quoting Augustine) that is able to assent immediately to the first principles of the sciences, “as though it recognizes them as innate and familiar (*tanquam sibi innata et familiaria recognoscat*).”²¹ The intellective power (*virtus intellectiva*)—Bonaventure's precise term here for Augustinian *intelligentia*—is the ability to understand terms, propositions, and inferences. Bonaventure describes this power as the process of reducing specific definitions and propositions to more general ones until the intellect arrives at the exemplars of knowable things in the eternal Art. The third power—what Bonaventure calls the “elective power” (*virtus electiva*)—involves three aspects: *consilium*, *iudicium*, and *desiderium*.²²

The first of these, *consilium* (commonly translated “deliberation”) is the determination of better and worse. This is, Bonaventure explains, in fact a determination about a thing's proximity to what is best, and requires some notion of a highest good (*summum bonum*). *Iudicium* (judgment) makes a determination about the rightness of something with respect to some higher law. When the soul judges itself, it requires some law higher than itself, and thus depends on a divine law for its operation. The first two aspects of the elective power, then, involve both deliberation and a notion of the highest good. The third aspect is desire (*desiderium*): “Desire is principally concerned with that which moves it the most. And that which moves it the most is that which is loved the most. And that which is loved the most is to be happy. But happiness is attained only by reaching the best

and ultimate end. Therefore, human desire wants nothing but the supreme Good, or that which leads to it or in some way reflects that Good."²³ Desire is that which is always moved by and to the *summum bonum*,²⁴ a goal that lies well beyond what the soul can reach with its own powers. Bonaventure's discussion of the soul's powers, then, and especially his account of desire in the third chapter, serves less to highlight the role these powers play in ascent than to chart more precisely how human beings are created with the capacity for a grace that exceeds them.

And it is not only human beings who are so created. The cosmic hierarchy also has an essentially ecstatic structure. The fourth stage of ascent—the transformation of the *imago* of God in the mind's powers to the *similitudo* of God in the hierarchized soul—depends on this structure. In the fourth stage, Bonaventure writes, the soul is like someone fallen who lies waiting for the help of another to get up again. In the soul's case, this help comes from the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and love. Bonaventure details the several effects of the clothing of the virtues on the image of the soul. Most significantly, the virtues purify, illumine, and perfect the soul—that is, they make the soul hierarchical according to Dionysius's triple operation. The remainder of the chapter describes this threefold operation. The soul's becoming hierarchical involves the awakening of the five spiritual senses and three ecstasies. Invoking the *Song of Songs*, Bonaventure argues that this awakening is brought about by the lover's desire for her beloved. Here the interlocking analogies make clear that "becoming hierarchical" is both inward and ecstatic, experiential and affective.

The spiritual senses have everything to do with the soul's love for Christ because, as Bonaventure explains, they are capacities for receiving and experiencing Christ the beloved. By faith, the soul recovers the spiritual senses of sight and hearing by which the soul perceives the light and the words of Christ. Hope enkindles the soul's sense of smell (which, according to the analogy, is linked to the capacity of breath) as it yearns to be filled with the inspired Word. In love the soul embraces the Bridegroom and, "receiving delight from him and passing over [*transiens*] to him in ecstatic love [*ecstaticum amorem*], it recovers its taste and touch."²⁵ In the hierarchy of the corporeal senses common to the thirteenth-century schools, taste and touch are the basest of the senses, the perceptual modes in which bodies (of the perceiver and the perceived) are most implicated. As Bonaventure explains earlier in the *Itinerarium*, what is sublime and luminous enters through sight, while what is solid and earthly enters through touch.²⁶ Yet here, in describing the spiritual senses, taste and touch are the very senses that love awakens.²⁷

Why would something as exalted as the soul's love for the Bridegroom be described through the mode of these most bodily and earthly senses? The embrace of the Bridegroom is above all a matter of taste and touch because these senses involve the closest contact (a contact that can only be conceived, even if analogically, as corporeal) between perceiver and perceived.²⁸ Thomas Gallus makes a similar point in his Commentary on the *Song* when he writes that the external senses are "models of love because love meets its objects by touching, smelling, and tasting."²⁹ Yet the spiritual senses of taste and touch signify more than just intimacy for Bonaventure here.³⁰ Thomas Aquinas explains in the *Summa Theologiae* that touch and taste (the latter being a species of the former) are the most material senses insofar as they are modes in which the body is affected naturally by the object according to its proper quality.³¹ For example, a hand becomes hot by touching a hot object. In this way, then, the bodily senses of touch and taste are modes in which external objects act upon the perceiver naturally and materially; that is, they are modes of natural affect.³² In the embrace of the Lover and the Bridegroom, touch is not only the most intimate apprehension of the soul's object, but the most vulnerable opening of the soul to being affected by and transformed into her Beloved.

With its spiritual senses restored, and the soul able to feel her Beloved, she now assumes the voice of the Solomonic lover. In fact, Bonaventure says, the *Song of Songs* was written for and about this fourth level of ascent, which "no one grasps [*capit*] except one who receives it, for it is more a matter of affective experience [*experientia affectuali*] than of rational considerations."³³ It is at this stage that the soul becomes prepared for three spiritual ecstasies (*mentales excessus*), as performed in the *Song*. The awakening of the spiritual senses leads directly to these ecstasies, in that the fivefold spiritual sensory experience of Christ causes the soul to overflow itself in three ways: through devotion, admiration, and exultation. Bonaventure describes these three ecstasies with the language of the *Song*. In the first ecstasy, the soul is filled with an abundance of devotion, so that it becomes like "a pillar of smoke with the aromas of myrrh and frankincense."³⁴ In the second, the soul is filled to overflowing with admiration, through which the soul becomes like "the dawn, the moon, and the sun." These three lights correspond to the three illuminations that lift the soul in wonder at the Bridegroom. The third ecstasy occurs through an overabundance of joy or exultation. In this ecstasy, the soul is "filled with delight" and "leans [*immixa*] completely on her Beloved."³⁵

The description of these three ecstasies echo Richard of St. Victor's much lengthier discussion of the three alienations of the mind in the

Beniamin Maior—through greatness of devotion, greatness of admiration, and greatness of joy, each of which is described by the same passages of the *Song* that Bonaventure cites here.³⁶ However, here as so often in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure does not borrow without casting his material in a very different light. Richard's text describes three different ways that the mind is lifted above itself and acknowledges that the mind is raised in different ways in different people. "For in order that the author of all goods might commend the gifts of His grace in us, He shows diverse effects from the same thing at diverse times and in diverse persons."³⁷ Even if Richard suggests at times that the third alienation is higher (or at least more dependent on divine grace) than the others, there is still no sense that the three alienations form an ordered progression of a single soul. Bonaventure, by contrast, describes the three ecstasies as a kind of triple operation, analogous to the other threefold transformations that occur at this stage: the infusion of three theological virtues, the opening of the three senses of scriptural meaning, and, the triad discussed most extensively, the three "hierarchizing" operations of the virtues—purification, illumination, and perfection.³⁸ Purification corresponds to the ecstasy of devotion, as indicated by the purifying "pillar of smoke." Illumination occurs in the overflowing of wonder, by which the soul becomes like "the dawn, the moon, and the sun." And the ecstasy of joy perfects the soul's delight in Christ, so that she "leans totally on her beloved." In a real sense, then, the ecstasies of the soul are what make the soul hierarchical: "With these [ecstasies] accomplished, our spirit is made hierarchical in order to ascend on high in accordance with that heavenly Jerusalem. No one enters that city unless, through grace, that city has first descended into the heart, as John sees in his *Apocalypse*."³⁹

This becoming-hierarchical of the soul is at the same time the reformation of the image into a similitude of God. The opening of Chapter 4 makes this connection through an allusion to the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10, by way of Bonaventure's own commentary on this passage. In his Commentary on Luke, Bonaventure interprets the human race as the man who

went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, that is to say, from paradise into the world, and fell among robbers; namely, into the power of demons who robbed him of the gifts of grace and wounded him in his natural powers. They left him half-dead in that after the similitude had been taken away only the image remained. . . . That image, nevertheless, was despoiled because of a turning away and wounded because of a turning around.⁴⁰

This is the soul at the beginning of the fourth stage. Like the wounded man, the soul lies waiting on external help to lift it up. In the fourth contemplation, the soul receives faith, hope, and charity from above. These virtues awaken the spiritual senses, through which the soul receives such delights that it overflows itself, lifting it up to the heavenly place which has already established itself in the soul.

More precisely, the soul is established as a heavenly place through the reformation of the *imago*: “The image of our mind therefore should be clothed with the three theological virtues by which the soul is purified, illumined, and perfected. In this way the image is reformed and made to conform with the heavenly Jerusalem and is made a part of the church militant which is the offspring of the heavenly Jerusalem, according to the apostle.”⁴¹ Note that in Chapter 3, Bonaventure recalled the Augustinian triad of memory, intellect, and will, which is the created image *through which* the soul contemplates the Trinity. Now here, at the fourth stage, the soul, reformed by faith, hope, and charity, is made into an *imago* of the whole heavenly retinue *in which* God dwells and is contemplated. By the lover’s ecstasy the soul is stretched to encompass the heavens, and thus to become “a house of God,” a “temple of the Holy Spirit.”⁴²

Hierarchy and Ascent: Vestige, Image, and Likeness

The “hierarchization” of the soul is thus both a *gradus* of ascent and a radicalization or a reversal of ascent’s logic—for the journey of the soul into God shows itself to be the movement of God (and of the cosmic hierarchy) into the soul.⁴³ This reversal, however, is consistent with the character of incarnational grace. Christ descends in order that the soul might ascend. The movement underscores the passivity of the soul in its own reformation and the role of grace—specifically, the grace of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity—through which the soul becomes a dwelling place for the Spirit. The connection between the dwelling place of God and the theological virtues recalls a triad of distinctions that appears throughout Bonaventure’s earlier writings as *magister*, though not with complete consistency. Vestige (or trace), image, and likeness (or similitude) are three grades or aspects by which creatures represent God. The second book of the *Breviloquium* contains the most extended account of this triad:

The created world is like a book in which its maker, the Trinity, is reflected, represented, and read according to three grades of expression, namely, through the modes of vestige, image, and likeness. The aspect

of vestige is found in all creatures, that of the image is found only in intellectual or rational spirits, and the aspect of the likeness is only found in those which are conformed to God [*deiformibus*]. The human intellect is created to ascend these stages, like the steps of a ladder, to the highest principle which is God. This should be understood to mean that all creatures regard and depend on their Creator, and are likened to him in three ways. They may be likened to him as to a creative principle, as to a motive object, or as to an indwelling gift. In the first way all his creatures [*effectus*] are likened to him, in the second way all intellectual creatures [*intellectus*], and in the third way all righteous spirits accepted by God [*acceptus*]. All effects, insofar as they have *being*, have God as their principle. All intellects, insofar as they have illumination, are naturally created to grasp God through knowledge and love, and all righteous and holy spirits are infused with the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴

Trace, image, and likeness are not only different ways that God is represented in creation; they also constitute the created order and provide a means of ascent or return (*reductio*) to God. According to Bonaventure's summary in Chapter 7, the *Itinerarium* is an elaboration of that order. Just before the final transformation of the *affectus*, Bonaventure writes, "our mind has contemplated [*contuita*] God outside itself through and in the vestiges; within itself through and in the image; and above itself through the similitude of divine light shining down upon us, and in that light insofar as that is possible in our wayfaring state and by the exercise of our mind."⁴⁵ This summary indicates that the contemplations of Chapters 1 and 2 occur, respectively, through and in the vestiges of God in creation, those of Chapters 3 and 4 through and in the image of God in the soul, and those of Chapters 5 and 6 through and in the likeness of divine light.

This structuring principle has been well observed by scholars.⁴⁶ Yet the unfolding of the triad in the *itinerarium* is not as neat as the summaries made by scholars or by Bonaventure himself. At the fourth stage, Bonaventure describes the point at which the soul is made a hierarchical, God-conformed dwelling of the Spirit infused with the theological virtues. Because this description conforms unmistakably to his description of the *similitudo* in the *Breviloquium* (and in several other places), it would seem that the structuring principle laid out in Chapter 7 is inaccurate. Chapter 4 contains a description of the similitude of God when the summary would lead us to expect a discussion of the image. In fact, Chapter 4 does not mention the similitude as distinct from the image. Has the terminology shifted from the *Breviloquium* to the *Itinerarium*? Or does Bonaventure's own summary misrepresent the contents of the work? While both possi-

bilities must be admitted, the problem deserves further exploration for the light it may shed on Bonaventure's understanding of this triad and of the nature of hierarchy in general.

The conception of the created world as a scale of reflections of God's presence appears throughout Bonaventure's writings. In several of the works dated to his period as *baccalarius* at Paris and regent master of the Franciscan school there, he discusses this scale in terms of the difference between the *vestigium* and *imago* of God in creation. Here, *similitudo* sometimes completes the triad.⁴⁷ In all of these writings, it is easy enough to understand how these distinctions structure Bonaventure's descriptions of creation and the soul's ascent to God. What is more difficult to determine is precisely what these distinctions *are*. Or, more to the point, to what do these distinctions *refer*?

Most simply, "shadow," "vestige," and "image" all refer to God and can be understood as different ways of referring to God. In this sense, although they underlie the order of creation, the distinctions of shadow, vestige, image are not degrees of creatures. And although they determine what creatures are, they are not properties of creatures.⁴⁸ Bonaventure explains this in the third distinction of the first book in his *Sentences* commentary, and assumes it in later writings. The distinction between *vestigium* and *imago* arises first in the question of whether God is knowable (*cognoscibilis*) through creatures.⁴⁹ The fourth argument for the affirmative introduces the principle that "like is known through like." If God is known through creatures, then creatures must be like God (*similis Deo*), and there are different ways that a creature can be like God: as vestige and as image.

In his responses to the objections, Bonaventure considers the ways in which others have (inadequately) explained the distinction between vestige and image. Some, he notes, simply refer the distinction between vestige and image to the distinction between sensible and spiritual creatures.⁵⁰ But "vestige" concerns the ways in which the unity, truth, and goodness of God is evident in creatures. And spiritual creatures, certainly no less than sensible ones, evince these perfections; thus spiritual and sensible creatures alike are vestiges of God. Corporeality is therefore not the basis for the degrees of likeness to God. Moreover, every created thing, spiritual and corporeal alike, represents God vestigially in exactly the same degree. Others, Bonaventure continues, understand the distinction between vestige and image as a matter of degree of completeness: A vestige would be a partial representation of God, and an image would represent God as a whole. This is mistaken, he contends, on two counts: Because God is simple, there is no "part" of God to represent. And because God is infinite, no created thing,

not even the universe itself, could represent the “whole” of God. Whatever the distinction between the ways of representing God, it is inadmissible to distinguish them based on greater or lesser degrees of completeness.

If an image, then, is not more spiritual than a vestige, and if it is not more complete than a vestige, in what sense does this distinction structure a hierarchy? Bonaventure offers several ways in which the image exceeds the vestige. A vestige refers the creature to God according to the threefold principle of causality (efficient, final, and formal), whereas the image refers the creature to God not only as cause but also as *object* of knowledge and love through the three powers of memory, intelligence, and will. This distinction, however, is based on a prior, and more obvious (*notior*) one: the mode of representing proper to each of these gradations, or what we might, in light of the pervasive spatial language, call Bonaventure’s geography of God. Both the vestige and image represent God distinctly, but the vestige represents God from a distance or remove (*in elongatio*); the image represents God *in proximity to God* (*in propinquitate*). Bonaventure situates this discussion of *vestigium* and *imago* immediately after a response to the objection that, because the creature is separated from God by an infinite distance, no progression of steps will ever reach God. He therefore affirms that if by reaching God one means attaining equality with God, then it is true that no creature will ever arrive. But ascent can also refer to beholding the presence of God (*ad aspectum praesentiae*), and in this sense ascent is always already accomplished insofar as everything, by its very creation, leads to God (*quaelibet creatura nata est ducere in Deum*).

The spatial language, therefore, that is so integral to Bonaventure’s understanding of the created order helps to clarify the proper referents of the terms “vestige” and “image.” These distinctions are nothing *in* creatures any more than they are *in* the human intellect that cognizes them. Rather, they are different ways in which creatures, the human mind, and God are all related to one another, and at the same time they are degrees of proximity between creatures and God. That is to say, they describe relations and not properties or entities. Etienne Gilson’s elaboration of these distinctions and the role they play in Bonaventure’s thought remains indispensable: The distinctions constitute what Gilson called Bonaventure’s doctrine of universal analogy (a term Bonaventure uses in 1 *Sent.* d. 3 for the likeness between Creator and creature).⁵¹ But it may be better to call it a theory of universal analogogy. For the ontological resemblances that ground analogy are themselves grounded in the *reductio* toward which all creation is ordered.

Subsequent discussions of the triad of *vestigium*, *imago*, and *similitudo* in Bonaventure's writings only make this anagogical dynamic clearer. In the passage from the *Breviloquium* cited previously, Bonaventure compares the distinctions to "rungs of a ladder," upon which "the human mind is designed to ascend step-by-step" to God. The Augustinian distinction between *imago* and *similitudo*, furnished with thirteenth-century distinctions concerning grace, further emphasizes the role of creation in the soul's ascent or *reductio* to God. He explains the rungs of the ladder as degrees of conformity to God, each distinguished by its own triad reflecting the Trinity:

For a creature cannot have God as its Principle unless it is conformed to Him in unity, truth, and goodness. Nor can it have God as its object unless it grasps Him through memory, intelligence, and will. And it cannot have God as an infused Gift unless it is conformed to Him through faith, hope, and love, the threefold gift. And the first conformity is distant, the second close, and the third most proximate. That is why the first is called a vestige of the Trinity, the second an image, and the third a likeness.⁵²

The most intimate conformity—that of the image transformed into a likeness—comes about, as Bonaventure also explains in the *Itinerarium*, through the infused gift of the theological virtues. Yet even in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure does not consistently refer to the triad of vestige, image, and likeness.⁵³ Similarly, in both the *Quaestiones disputatae mysterio trinitatis* and *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, he refers only to vestige and image. Amidst the fluctuations in terms, these passages advance a consistent view that all things have God as their creative principle and reflect God's unity, truth, and goodness; that among creatures, rational beings have God as their object as well as their cause; and as such, they have the capacity to be drawn into God and conformed to God's likeness through infused grace.

Chapter 3 of the *Itinerarium* discusses the image of God in the natural powers of the soul, and Chapter 4 addresses the likeness of God in the reformed powers. Similarly, Bonaventure writes in the *Sentences* commentary that the image concerns the natural and the likeness concerns the gratuitous.⁵⁴ Yet the distinction serves only to draw a closer connection between what belongs to nature and what belongs to grace, for it is just such a dichotomy that the dynamic of vestige, image, and likeness forcefully resists. Nature and grace, image and likeness, belong to a single order and movement.⁵⁵ Creation is so ordered as to lead the mind, through the

operations of its own powers, toward the excess and overcoming of itself. The transformation of the image into the likeness (*similitudo*) through the infusion of the virtues, the *mentales excessus* of the lover, and the hierarchical operations, means that the rational creature is created with a natural desire for intimacy with God that it cannot realize with its own God-given powers. This is what it means to say that the created order is itself an ecstatic order. The triad of vestige, image, and likeness in creation orders the human mind to excess.

The dynamic and ecstatic nature of this created order is reflected in the structure of the *Itinerarium* itself. Bonaventure's summary divides the work into three parts: In the first two stages, the mind contemplates the vestiges of God in creation, in the second two the image of God in itself, and in the final two the likeness of the divine brightness. This threefold structure is evident in the content of the chapters, but the division is not as simple as this summary suggests, and itself reflects the temporal and spatial disordering essential to hierarchy. Just as Chapter 4 (whose heading identifies its subject as the image of God in the soul) describes the infusion of the virtues into the soul, Chapters 2 and 6 also anticipate the stage immediately following. In Chapter 2, contemplation on the vestiges of God in sensible things develops naturally into an exploration of the capacities of the soul to apprehend, take pleasure in, and judge all sensible things. In this way, the inward turn of Chapter 3 is already begun at the previous level. Similarly, in the sixth contemplation, the intellect begins to fail at the consideration of the Trinity: "When in the sixth stage, the mind will have reached the point in which it sees in the first and highest Principle and in the mediator of God and humanity, Jesus Christ. No likeness [*similia*] whatsoever of these things is found among creatures, and they exceed every grasp of the human intellect."⁵⁶ Like the delineation of the powers of the soul in Cistercian treatises such as Isaac of Stella's (d. 1169), the stages of contemplation not only touch each other, but even overlap. For Bonaventure, this contiguity becomes the means by which the *transitus* takes place—the lower stages leading, as if inevitably, to the higher, such that excess is entailed in the created order. The staged reflections of God's light which structure the successive illuminations of the soul, then, contain within them the darkness to which they ultimately lead.

Transitus

Adopting Richard of St. Victor's symbolism for the highest stages of contemplation, Bonaventure illustrates the fifth and sixth stages of the *itineraria-*

rium with the facing Cherubim seated on the Ark of the Covenant. Here, however, the Ark symbolism is placed within the motif of the tabernacle, with the fifth and sixth stages found at the innermost part of the temple, the Holy of Holies.⁵⁷ The two Cherubim are two modes or grades of contemplating the *invisibilia* of God—namely the two names of God, Being and Good. In the first case, the mind contemplates the divine essence; in the second, the persons of the Trinity. Though each may be contemplated individually, only in contemplating together the essence and the persons, the unity and the trinity, the being and the goodness of God, is the mind suspended in the highest wonder (*in admirationem altissimam suspendaris*) and lifted up to the perfection of the mind's illuminations.⁵⁸ Contemplating the unity and trinity together, the mind beholds mysteries surpassing the discerning powers (*perspicacitas*) of the intellect. The consummation of the mind's contemplations, in a sense, already entails its own surpassing, and so brings about the *excessus mentis* in which the intellect rests entirely.

The summary of the six contemplations at the beginning of Chapter 7 recalls, especially, the language used to describe the fourth stage: "We have explained now these six considerations, like the six steps to the true throne of Solomon, by which peace is attained. Here the true person of peace [*verus pacificus*] rests in a peaceful soul [*in mente pacifica*] as in an interior Jerusalem."⁵⁹ The summary also echoes on several notes the opening invocation of the prologue, in which Bonaventure prays for the peace of Francis, who "was like a citizen of that Jerusalem about which that man of peace . . . says: Pray for those things which are for the peace of Jerusalem. For he knew that there was no throne of Solomon except in peace, since it is written: His place was in peace, and his dwelling in Sion."⁶⁰ In the prologue, Bonaventure describes his journey to La Verna, a place of quiet, to find peace. Now nearing the end of the work, Bonaventure's summary reveals how many layers of allegory are condensed into this "place"—the place of Francis's vision, which was at the same time the throne of Solomon in the heavenly Jerusalem. This heavenly Jerusalem, in the course of the soul's ecstatic journey to it, takes place within the soul so that the soul finds this peace within itself and, at the same time, above itself. The celestial hierarchy is imaged in the interior hierarchy, established through the hierarchical operations (purgation, illumination, and perfection) which are ecstasies of the soul in love with Christ. Raised above itself, the soul contemplates God through and in the similitude of divine light.

This is the end of the *itinerarium*, for there is nowhere else for the soul, raised to the height of contemplation, to go. After this point, only death remains, but it is not the journey's destination. For if the consummation

of contemplation brings rest, death sets the soul in motion in a different manner. As Bonaventure explains, “Having contemplated all these things, it remains for the soul to transcend and pass over [*transcendat et transeat*] not only the sensible world, but the soul itself.”⁶¹ This movement, the *excessus mentis*, is not a stage of contemplation, like the *mentales excessus* of the fourth stage. There, the lover’s ecstasies were outside the soul and simultaneously interior to it. Here, by contrast, the phrase *excessus mentis* emphasizes the soul’s going out from itself, especially given that the phrase is used interchangeably with the term *transitus*. There is no indication, however, that the difference holds great significance for Bonaventure; his use of the terms is fluid. The Chapter 7 heading identifies the topic as *de excessu mentali et mystico*.

Moreover, Bonaventure discusses the going out or passing over of the soul, which is the subject of Chapter 7, throughout the *Itinerarium*. In the prologue, his first gloss on the Seraph of Francis’s vision identifies the six wings as six *illuminationum suspensiones*. Bonaventure writes that the cruciform Seraph of Francis’s vision indicated the *suspensio* of the father in contemplation (*ipsius patris suspensionem in contemplanando*).⁶² The father is Francis lifted up in ecstasy, but Francis’s *suspensio* is itself conformed to Christ suspended on the cross—just as Paul, carried off (*raptum*) to the third heaven, could say that he was nailed to the cross with Christ.⁶³ By identifying the six stages as six *suspensiones*, the prologue declares the entire ascent—from the contemplation of corporeal natures to the final passing over—to be the *via crucis*. The lexical connection is completed in the seventh chapter, when the soul in ascent repeats the words of Job: “My soul (*anima*) chooses hanging (*suspendium*), and my bones death.”⁶⁴ *Suspensio* leads to *suspendium*; the groans of prayer that initiate the ascent of the soul anticipate its consummation on the cross.

The layered scriptural and Christological allusions in the seventh chapter perform the *excessus* depicted there. In ecstasy, nothing is simply what it is; every image empties out into another. The soul, like the language used to describe it, is beside itself. The movement of ascent, the *transitus*, is the rapture of Paul, which is the passing through the Red Sea, which is the Passover, which is the *pascha*, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which is—in a word whose shock is undiminished by the density of allusion—simply death.⁶⁵ *Moriamur*, exhorts Bonaventure: “Let us die, then, and enter into this darkness.”⁶⁶ The darkness of death is the end of the illuminations and the consuming heat of desire: “not light, but the fire that inflames totally and carries one [*transferentem*] into God through excessive fervor and the most burning affections.”⁶⁷ In his *Sentences* commentary, Bonaventure dis-

tinguishes the cognitive and affective parts of the soul with reference to the light and heat of fire, respectively.⁶⁸ He recognizes an analytical distinction between the heating and illuminating properties of fire, even if those properties are always naturally concurrent in act. Here those same properties appear again, this time in the uncanny image of a fire that gives heat without light. At the end of the soul's journey into God, the properties of light and heat, of intellectual knowledge and affective desire, are separable—and in fact must be so if the soul's ascent is to be consummated: "In this passing over, if it is to be perfect, all intellectual operations [*intellectuales operationes*] must be abandoned, and our *apex affectus* must be entirely carried into [*transferetur*] and transformed into God."⁶⁹

As I discussed in Chapter 1, "intellectual operations" is a quotation from the opening of Dionysius's *Mystical Theology*, which Bonaventure goes on to cite at length: "Abandon sense and intellectual operations [*intellectuales operationes*], sensible and invisible things, and all nonbeing and being, and, insofar as possible, be restored, unknowing [*inscius*], to unity with the one who is above all essence and knowledge [*scientiam*]."⁷⁰ Bonaventure's statement that intellectual operations must be abandoned and the *apex affectus* transferred into God functions then as a gloss on the Dionysian passage. The Dionysian reference makes clear that the *excessus mentis* is truly a state of unknowing. Affect is introduced not to reinstate the knowledge that Dionysius so emphatically excludes from union, or to locate union in another power of the soul, but to give an account of the dynamics of union beyond knowing—a union that, in Bonaventure's reading of Dionysius, is thoroughly Christological. This union beyond knowing is the soul's participation in Christ's passion. In fact, given the importance and the extent of Bonaventure's citation of Dionysius (the *Itinerarium* is, after all, book-ended with quotations of the *Mystical Theology*), Bonaventure's work may be understood as a kind of extended exegesis of Dionysius as much as it is an exegesis of Francis's vision. Or, better, the *Itinerarium* is Bonaventure's interpretation of the *Mystical Theology* by way of Francis's Seraphic vision—which is, at the same time, a vision and enactment of Christ's passion. The excess that marks each stage of the *Itinerarium* and prefigures the final passing over shows that, for Bonaventure, the Dionysian union beyond knowledge is entailed in and enabled by the ecstatic nature of hierarchy.

Bonaventure has long been counted, largely on the basis of this passage, in the tradition of "affective" readings of Dionysius, facilitated by the traditional association of the Seraphim (whom Dionysius associates only with fire) and ardent love.⁷¹ To the extent that this manner of reading constitutes a tradition, Bonaventure indisputably belongs to it. And yet,

as I have suggested, for Bonaventure the characterization of the *excessus mentis* as affective reflects not merely a priority for love over knowledge, but represents an attempt to work out the dynamics of Dionysian hierarchy in the cosmos and in the soul. For Bonaventure, desire is the agent of both the soul's movement into God and its own transformation. Yet precisely through the image of fire by which this desire is depicted, Bonaventure insists that such desire is no possession or activity of the soul. *Qui quidem ignis Deus est*: "It is God who is this fire." Fire is the most active element, and the one most responsible for motion. Thus to identify God with fire here is to name God as the agency that inhabits and moves the soul, as well as the desire that consumes it.⁷² This divine desire is cruciform: "It is Christ who starts the fire with the intense heat of his burning passion."⁷³ In his final exhortations, Bonaventure invites the pilgrim soul to silence all its wants—using the word *concupiscentiis* rather than *desideriis*. For desire is not a having, like *conscientia*, or an operation of the soul, like contemplation; it is the grace of Christ's passion *taking place* in the soul.⁷⁴ This desire can be enlarged and perfected *in excessus mentis* only because, from the very beginning of ascent, it always already exceeds the soul.

In Bonaventure's account, the same desire that finally overwhelms the soul has been, in fact, innate to the soul all along. When all the powers of the soul are silenced or abandoned in the "pacified soul" (*in mente pacifica*), desire remains because it is not a power of the soul. It is, both at the beginning and end of ascent, the capacity of the soul to be moved above and outside itself, not by its own movement but by the drawing of its beloved. The transfer of the affect into God means the surrender of all the soul's higher operations—a ceasing of activity that is granted to the soul as its long-desired death. The soul's powers are ordered toward their own death, just as the gradations of God's presence in creation are ordered toward their own excess. This desire for death is the ecstatic force of the soul's journey, and the principle that establishes the structure of the *Itinerarium* as an ecstatic order, that is, a hierarchy.