

*St. Bonaventure*  
*750th*  
*anniversary*  
*of*  
*his Easter.*  
**1574-2024**

**CIOFS**



Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
Fraternities of the OFS and Franciscan Youth

Peace and all good,  
It is a great joy for us to be able to share in the celebration of the Centenary of our brother St. Bonaventure, this year we celebrate the 750th anniversary of his Easter. The Secretariat for Formation has prepared formation material to be shared in our local fraternities:

**"Toward an Encounter with Bonaventure of Bagnoregio:  
A Journey Toward Existential Wisdom."**

Our Friars Minor have shared with us a document of reflection for this year in which they tell us: "... The seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Seraphic Doctor, which occurred on July 15, 1274, offers us the opportunity not only to remember and celebrate the service he rendered to the Order and to the whole Church, but also to propose it again as a gift still valid for our time..."

Sister Valeria Pepino Minetti, OFS, of Argentina has prepared this new material for us so that we may get closer to the life of Bonaventure, to his journey and his legacy, we are grateful for her generosity and her fraternal sharing.

We would be grateful if each national fraternity would encourage the use of this proposal, which has been prepared with effort and dedication, for a formation experience that invites us to deepen our Franciscan spirituality,

Your brothers and sisters,



Secretariat for Formation CIOFS  
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# Toward an Encounter with Bonaventure of Bagnoregio: A Journey Toward Existential Wisdom.

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Immersed in the maelstrom of an era dominated by technology and the cult of efficiency, it is increasingly urgent to revive voices that remind us of the depth and richness of human beings, as well as their existential vocation that transcends the merely utilitarian. In this sense, the figure of Bonaventure of Bagnoregio stands as a luminous beacon, inviting us to embark on a journey toward true wisdom, since his philosophical-theological and existential proposal constitutes a valuable counterpoint to the dehumanizing tendencies of our time, offering us a hopeful vision of humanity, in the complex network of relationships in the world and with that which transcends it.

The life and work of Saint Bonaventure springs forth as an inexhaustible source of themes and teachings that can profoundly illuminate our desire to radically incarnate the Franciscan charism in our present time. However, to fully encompass the valuable contributions that emerge from the writings and existence of this distinguished thinker would be an incomprehensible undertaking. For this reason, in these pages we will highlight only some aspects of his very rich thought, with the humble intention that these initial brushstrokes will awaken in us the desire to immerse ourselves in a deep educational, spiritual, human and intellectual journey that unfolds when we walk the paths traced by Bonaventure. What is presented here is no more than a few initial brushstrokes of an immense and resplendent canvas waiting to be contemplated and enjoyed in all its richness.

In order to fully understand Bonaventure's legacy, it is necessary to place it in its historical and cultural context. Therefore, when contextualizing his life, we need to recognize his GAZE, to genuinely approach Bonaventure, transcending the preconceptions of our present and avoiding the biases that Modernity or the Renaissance had on the Middle Ages. We will then be guided by these questions: What does Bonaventure observe? Where does his gaze rest? In fact, for Bonaventure, sight was the sense, the most important sense, since through it, man in an admirable discovery, perceives God expressing himself in the world.[1] Therefore, at the beginning of this journey, it is essential to stop to SEE, to LOOK at what Bonaventure had before him, what he lived, the concerns about his environment, the questioning of the thinkers of his time, the aspirations of the people, the ecclesial research, and so on.

In this regard, we consider of great importance the need to follow a formative itinerary characterized by a detailed LOOK in Bonaventure's direction and toward that which he oriented himself: to God and to the world, to Francis, to every creature, to every brother and to the Bonaventurian desire for a new way, a new path rooted in Francis and Christ that leads to experiential wisdom, that allows us to taste deeply and concretely the flavor of Life (in capital letters).

[1] Cf. Brev., II, 11, 2 (V, 229c); Itin ., chap. II, no. 4 (V, 301); In Eccl. c. I, q. 2 (VI, 16).

To be oriented implies opening ourselves, allowing ourselves to be affected, that is, to open our affection to the existence and legacy of Bonaventure; to be amazed and disposed to encounter this brother and thinker, and to enter into dialogue with him.

## **Giovanni Fidanza: Biographical and Intellectual Context**

Born around 1217 in Bagnoregio, a small town near Orvieto, with the given name Giovanni Fidanza, his life took place in a context of profound social, economic and religious changes: the emergence of cities, the rise of trade, the birth of the mendicant orders and the consolidation of universities were some of the milestones that marked his time. In this context, the Franciscan movement founded by Francis of Assisi represented a radical renewal of ecclesial life, promoting a return to the Gospel and a life marked by fraternity and without possessions.

Residing between 1225 and 1235 as a puer oblati (boy with nothing) in the convent of the brothers of Bagnoregio, Bonaventure was miraculously cured of a fatal illness through the intercession of St. Francis, thanks to the devout intervention of his mother, Maria Ritello, an episode which he would always feel was linked to his vocation of minority. From 1235 he studied in Paris as a layman at the Faculty of Arts, where he was introduced to Aristotelian thought, which implied a profound renewal of the methods and contents of philosophy and theology. In 1243, Bonaventure entered the Order of Friars Minor. The way of life professed and lived by its founder, Francis of Assisi, has its roots in the apostolic *uita uere* of the lay movements that began to form in the mid-eleventh century. With the approval of the Franciscan Rule of Life at the beginning of the thirteenth century, several characteristic notes of that apostolic life were institutionalized, such as *paupertas* (no property) and *fraternitas* (no power). At that time, the poverty of Francis of Assisi flourished, implying that fraternity was the space that made it possible. In deep harmony with the experience of Francis of Assisi, we can appreciate that Bonaventure assumes a specific way of contemplating God and of embracing man and every creature, from which his whole system of thought will spring. It could be said that Francis of Assisi would lay the foundations of a harmony upon which Bonaventure would compose his beautiful melody.

Until 1248, Bonaventure devoted himself to the study of theology under the regency of Alexander of Hales († 1245), having as teachers Jean de la Rochelle († 1245), Eudes Rigaud and William of Middletown. In this context, Bonaventure was compelled to rethink the sources, methods, and aims of theological discipline. Between 1248 and 1250 he worked as a biblical undergraduate, and from 1250 to 1252, having obtained the degree of Bachelor of Sentences, he read and commented on the Sentences of Peter Lombard. In the two semesters between 1252 and 1253, Bonaventure was a trained bachelor, and as such read, disputed and preached. At the beginning of the following year, he received his Bachelor's Degree with *Quaestiones disputate de scientia Christi*. In 1254 he was entrusted with the turbulent regency of Franciscan Studies in the midst of a university crisis, until January 2, 1257, when he took over as Minister General of the Order at the Extraordinary Chapter of Ara Caeli (Rome) as successor to John of Parma, who proposed him personally, in the presence of Pope Alexander IV.

From then on, Bonaventure's activity unfolded in two directions: first, the government of the Order, to which he would seek to give spiritual and institutional consistency; secondly, the vicissitudes of philosophical and theological culture, brought about by Aristotle's second entry into the West, which forced him to redefine the relationship between intelligence and faith. Around the same time (1267), he faced new polemics raised against the Mendicant Orders, responding to Gerard of Abbeville with the Apology of the Poor, composed during a break from his numerous travels as General (he was one of the first ministers to travel almost the entire Order on foot); and with the Quaestiones de perfectione evangelica he confronted the attacks of William of Saint-Amour. These works would become the main sources of Franciscan self-awareness.

Finally, Bonaventure stands out as a man of the Church: appointed by Gregory X in 1273 as Cardinal Bishop of Albano, thanks to which he was able to participate more than actively in the Ecumenical Council of Lyons which met in May of the following year. He died there, during the fourth session, on July 15, having spent his last energies in defending the validity of the mendicant religious life against attempts at suppression by the clergy and in seeking the unity of the Church with the brethren of the East.

This biography shows that Bonaventure was not a peripheral or marginal figure in his time, but actively participated in historical events from the various fields of his competence. We find ourselves in the presence of his life and work, eager to appreciate all his richness and depth, feeling called by his voice to embark on an existential Franciscan and evangelical "journey" in the midst of the challenges of our time.

**Did you know the details of the life of St. Bonaventure?  
Do our personal biographies and community journeys reflect a specific way of  
contemplating God and of embracing man and every creature in deep harmony  
with the experience and spirituality of Francis of Assisi?**

**The search for a science that responds to deep human desire: The Way of  
Bonaventure of Bagnoregio.**

Bonaventure's thought stands as a fruitful point of integration and penetration of the diverse ideas and sentiments that emerged in the second half of the thirteenth century. In his writings, Saint Bonaventure expresses the inseparable unity between inspiration, thought and action, the fruit of his multifaceted work as a student, university teacher, minister general of the Order and a key figure in the ecclesiastical politics of his time. Bonaventure does not limit himself to expounding on current doctrines but reworks them according to his own mental universe and his Christian and Franciscan experience, convinced of the need to rethink the role of theology as a precious and essential service for the men of his time, in constant openness to life. Thus, in each of his writings, he demonstrates his concern to face well and provide solutions to the problems of human existence.

The Bonaventurian way makes explicit his deep desire to seek and indicate, philosophically and theologically, the way in which we are participants in an essentially expressive universe. In fact, this universe is an expression of the work of God's progressive revelation to the maximum exteriorization that took place in the Incarnation. Bonaventure is profoundly convinced that this "new path" that he tries to make explicit in each of his writings is capable of overcoming the distances between man and God, which is why he does not hide his intention to found an existential theology, whose recipient is not only the man of the university, but the man of his society immersed in a deep crisis of conscience and search for human and evangelical authenticity.

In fact, the most complete science for man which Bonaventure seeks and carries out, is identified by him with wisdom, insofar as it reaches full existential efficacy, because it does not dissociate faith, reason and life, since the intelligence of faith awakens love and love impels us to act in coherence with what is believed. The Seraphic Doctor emphasizes that in the human being, wisdom includes both the cognitive aspect, as a starting point, and the affective aspect, which looks to union with God and one's brothers and sisters.[2] Man's search for such wisdom is carried out with all his faculties, since it must lead the mind toward the contemplation of Love. motivating affection to choose a consistent praxis.

Analogous with art, in which the completion of a work involves the intervention of the power, intelligence and will of the artisan[3], theology as a science of wisdom does not consist only of an external abstractive process but involves the subject and his interiority. Through "theological art," the person shows his interiority, his feeling and his thinking, being an expressive creature who communicates what he has existentially believed in and tries to understand. In this way, the work of wisdom sought by Bonaventure is the expressive language by which "what is believed," "what is loved" and "what is known" is expressed: He uses philosophy and theology not only to enlighten the intellect, but also to inflame the heart.[4]

In this sense, the search for this experiential wisdom is art that not only transforms the "object" approached, but also transforms the artist himself and those who receive his work: it is the art of knowledge that gives flavour to life that transforms those who stop to contemplate the One who is Goodness and Beauty and allow themselves to be attracted by Him.

These considerations impel us to make real, from our identity as Secular Franciscans, an integral experience of the wisdom to which Bonaventure refers, *in a continually renewed journey of conversion and formation; attentive to the questions that come from society and from ecclesial reality, passing from Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel; in the personal and communal dimension of this journey* (GC. 8) allowing ourselves to be transformed by God, the divine creative Artist.

[2] Cf. In III Sent., d. 35, au, q. 1 concl. (III, 774)

[3] Cf. ; I Sent., d. 1, a. 1, q. 1, ad op. 4 (I, 31); In Hex., col. V, n. 13 (V, 356).

[4] Cf. Itin., prol. 5.

**In what way can we cultivate, in our personal and communal spaces, the search for an experiential wisdom that directs our minds towards the contemplation of Love, motivating us to choose a consistent praxis?**

### **The Bonaventurian consideration of the world as an expression of God.**

In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, St. Bonaventure describes: *Every creature is a divine word, because it speaks God.*[5] According to this text by our author, each creature is defined as a word that expresses God, so the world is conceived as an open book, in which all beings are the words that compose it. God's creator-language manifests itself as an external speech and consists of producing an effect, in which God speaks/produces the creature in which he manifests himself: *The creature comes from the Creator not by nature, because it is of a different nature; but by artistry, that is, by will. And that free artistry of God is not outside of him because he works for art's sake and willingly.*[6]

The universe is a profoundly significant language, God's doing is revealed to us as a language expressive of himself. In the same way that an artist expresses himself in his work of art, Bonaventure considers God as the Divine Artist and creation as the work of art in which he expresses himself: *God created the world to make himself known.*[7]

Creation is then understood as an immense divine declaration, an invitation to the friendly dialogue that God desires to maintain with man, his interlocutor: The cosmos invites man to read in it the creative Trinity.[8] In the beauty of the world, we are offered the place of encounter with the expressive beauty of the Triune God. Each creature, understood as a word, is a unique expression of the Creator. In and through the creatures of the world, man is able to "read" God, who speaks himself, and *in this way like a mirror of God or a divine footprint, might lead man to love and praise his Creator.*[9]

This Bonaventurian understanding of the world as an expression of God raises profound challenges and impels us toward an authentic experience of fraternity with every creature, since it calls for a profoundly contemplative gaze and wonder at creation, seeing each being as an expressive act, as a "divine word" that manifests the beauty, wisdom and goodness of the Maker; All this urges the Secular Franciscan to actively promote initiatives for the safeguarding of creation, inspired by the person and message of St. Francis of Assisi, with a view to establishing a civilization in which the dignity of the human person, co-responsibility and love are living realities... *By deepening the true foundations of universal brotherhood and by creating everywhere a spirit of acceptance and an atmosphere of brotherhood, firmly rejecting every form of exploitation, discrimination, marginalization and every attitude of indifference towards others. (GC 18)*

[5] In Eccl. c. I, q. 2 (VI, 16), my translation.

[6] In Hex., col. XII, nn . 3-4 (V, 385).

[7] Brev., II, 11 (V, 229a).

[8] Cf. In I Sent., d. 3, p. 1, q. 2 (I, 71-73), Brev . II, 12 (V, 230).

[9] Brev., II, 11, 2 (V, 229<sup>a</sup>)

**Do we recognize the unique and unrepeatable expression of the Divine Artist in every creature, in every brother or sister in fraternity, in every person with whom we share life on a daily basis? Are we attentive to God who speaks himself to us through them?**

**Francis of Assisi, contemplation becomes song: the Cantic of the Creatures from the perspective of Bonaventure.**

At the outset we stated that the category of "having nothing of one's own" makes possible and, at the same time, is the result of the fraternal experience that in Francis extends to every creature. His disciple, Bonaventure, said of him: *"Filled with the greatest tenderness, when he considered the common origin of all things, he gave to all creatures, however contemptible they might seem, the sweet name of sisters, for he knew that they all shared the same origin with him."*[10]

In this context, Bonaventure recognizes *the Cantic of Brother Sun*[11] as the expression that springs from Francis' encounter with every creature as the work and manifestation of the Creative Artist, a vestige in which he discovers and recognizes God, a joyful experience of Beauty expressed in his works. From the time of the "Francis event" and his Cantic, the world is for Bonaventure a significant language that expresses God, and every being is a word by which God is spoken.[12]

Looking at Francis, Bonaventure recognizes the Creative Artist who made the universe as an expression of his infinite beauty and goodness, thus offering man the way by which he can know and love him. Francis' Cantic manifests the way in which he perceives and savors this original beauty and goodness of the Creator in each of his works.[13] That is why Francis does not need to "leave" the world in order to "reach" God, on the contrary, he is immersed in this world where he finds and praises him; the world is his cloister, his dwelling place, his place of encounter with God.[14] It is precisely in this "book" that he finds the words (creatures) with which to praise the Creator: *But that all creatures might impel him to divine love, he rejoiced in every work of the Lord's hands (Ps 91, 5) and by the joyful spectacle of creation he was raised to the reason and life-giving cause of all beings. In beautiful things he beheld the one who is supremely beautiful, and, through the footprints imprinted on creatures, he followed his Beloved everywhere.*[15]

[10] LM, VIII, 6.

[11] For a reading of the Cantic I refer to Francis of Assisi. (2013). Writings, biographies, documents of the time (ed. Prepared by Guerra JA). Madrid, Spain: BAC

[12] Cf. In Eccl. c. I, q. 2 (VI, 16).

[13] LM 9.1.

[14] SC 63, 951

[15] LM 9.1.



Francis manifests an aesthetic attitude through an existence that expresses the certainty of God's presence in the world as Love, Supreme Good and Beauty. He experiences life with gratitude, an expression of that man who is as capable of dwelling in the world as in his beloved and familiar home, and he manifests this contemplation in a song where all nature is clothed in great splendor to highlight the glory and honor of the "Most High, Almighty and Good Lord." From this feeling of fraternity and acceptance, Francis celebrates existence, enkindled in love and praise to the Maker of the universe, *through the footprints imprinted on creatures, he followed his Beloved everywhere.*[16]

In the Canticle, Francis seems to recover the original vision of humanity, to which Bonaventure refers in the *Breviloquium*, in which man was created capable of spontaneously "reading" God who speaks himself in the creatures of the world.[17] In this regard, Pope Francis himself interprets in his encyclical *Laudato Si* the harmony that Francis of Assisi lived with all creatures as a healing of that rupture caused by original sin that prevented man from spontaneously reading God in the world.[18] Bonaventure said in the Major Legend that, through universal reconciliation with all creatures, Francis somehow returned to *the state of primitive innocence.*[19]

Francis of Assisi experienced the "generous Giver of all good." [20] Creatures manifest to him the glory-beauty that the bon Signore has inscribed on them, and it is this contemplation that he expresses in the Canticle, as a work of art that manifests his lived experience of the encounter with the Creator in the encounter with each creature. Francis seems to incarnate what Bonaventure refers to in *his Itinerarium: He is illuminated by so many splendors of creatures, awakens to so many cries, praises God for all his effects, and gives notice of the First Principle in the presence of so many signs. His eyes opened, his ears drawn, his lips unlocked, and his heart excited, he is able to see, hear, praise, love and reverence, extol and honor the Creative Artist in all creatures.*[16]

The contemplative and fraternal experience that Bonaventure recognizes as reflected in Francis' Canticle of the Creatures offers us a profound and necessary teaching for our times. In a world increasingly focused on consumerism and the excessive exploitation of resources, our Franciscan vocation reminds us of the importance of recovering a harmonious and respectful relationship with creation in the spirit of the "*Beatitudes,*" *and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power* (Rule OFS 11). *Following the example of Francis, patron of ecologists, they should actively promote initiatives that care for creation and should work with others in efforts that both put a stop to polluting and degrading nature and also establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person.* (GC 18.4)

[16] LM IX, 1.

[17] Cf. Brev., II, 11, 2 (V, 229<sup>a</sup>);

[18] LS 66.

[19] LM, VIII, 1.

[20] LM, VII, 1.

[21] Cf. Itin ., c. I, no. 15 (V, 299)

**How can we cultivate in our lives a profound contemplative gaze and that aesthetic attitude that Bonaventure well recognizes in Francis who, before every creature and in admirable discovery, perceives God expressing himself in the world?**

I deeply hope that, hand in hand with Bonaventure, we will walk this existential journey of experiential wisdom, with our gaze fixed on God the Creator Artist, on Christ as that image in which God was inspired when he created us, on Francis as the inescapable possibility of the healing of the original harmony in the world, in every creature and in every brother as unique and unrepeatabe words by which God speaks himself to us moment by moment.



Translator : Diane Menditto OFS