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Perceiving God: The Spiritual Senses in Bonaventure's Mystical Theology

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Abstract: This essay examines the distinctive features; unchanging basic elements and changing emphases of Bonaventure's interpretation of the spiritual senses based on four works selected from different periods of his life and considered significant for the subject. In the first chapter, I analyse the relevant passages of Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Book of Sentences*; in the second the *De reductione artium ad theologiam*; in the third the *Breviloquium*; and in the fourth the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. The objects of investigation are as follows: the correlation between the acts of spiritual senses and their object; the basis of the hierarchical order of spiritual senses; the relationship between spiritual senses; mental excesses and mystical transit; and the relation to Dionysian mystical theology.

Keywords: Bonaventure; Dionysius Areopagite; spiritual senses; affect; mystical theology; mental excess; transitus; contemplation

1. Introduction

In Bonaventure's theological oeuvre, the theme of experiential knowledge of God is most closely related to the reflection on spiritual perceptions,¹ which has attracted the interest of many theologians in the 20th century. In his study on the medieval understanding of the spiritual senses, Karl Rahner devotes the greatest space to Bonaventure, because, in his assessment, the doctrine of the spiritual senses, which goes back as far as the time of Origen, "found its richest development in the mystical theology of Bonaventure" (Rahner 1975, p. 137).² Rahner sees the spiritual senses as stages of the mystical experience of God that can be acquired on the path from contemplation to union in ecstasy, giving an independent status and a prominent significance to the ecstatic experience of pure love that transcends intellectual activity, which he understands as a completely direct experience of spiritual touch (tactus). Rahner's reading of Bonaventure has provoked ongoing debates, pro and con, to this day.³ When Hans Urs von Balthasar, in the first volume of his *Theological Aesthetics*, devotes a special chapter to the spiritual senses, he notes in his historical overview that the theological tradition of the five spiritual senses, which began with Origen and was initially full of speculative force but soon became stale, is given new strength in the synthesis of the Seraphic Doctor: "with Bonaventure this straitened water-course suddenly swells up again to become a mighty river" (Balthasar 1982, p. 349). In keeping with his theological aesthetic, which focuses on a believing, understanding, perceptive contemplation of the figure of Christ, Balthasar emphasises the orientation of the spiritual senses towards Christ in Bonaventure's teaching, especially on the basis of the *Breviloquium* and the *Itinerarium*: "the object of these spiritual acts of sensory experience is the Word of God in his economy as Verbum increatum (hearing and seeing), inspiratum (smelling), incarnatum (tasting and touching)" (Balthasar 1982, p. 353). In addition to these studies, there is no lack of works which discuss the Bonaventurian concept of spiritual perceptions in the full horizon of the theology of the Seraphic Doctor. Among these, Marianne Schlosser's *Cognitio et amor* stands out (Schlosser 1990), and even more so Fabio Massimo Tedoldi's monograph, in which the author explores the theme of



Citation: Puskás, Attila. 2024.

Perceiving God: The Spiritual Senses in Bonaventure's Mystical Theology. *Religions* 15: 902. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15080902>

Academic Editor: Balázs M. Mezei

Received: 9 July 2024

Revised: 23 July 2024

Accepted: 24 July 2024

Published: 26 July 2024



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the spiritual senses with a claim to completeness in the whole of Bonaventure's oeuvre (Tedoldi 1999). In particular, the Italian author stresses the importance of the person of Saint Francis of Assisi, who Bonaventure glimpsed and, especially in his work *Legenda maior*, presented as the figure of a spiritual man endowed with spiritual senses and using them in an exemplary manner (Tedoldi 1999, pp. 287–324). Gregory F. LaNave's interpretation is close to the emphasis of Balthasar's and Tedoldi's concepts, but his focus of attention is the theological basis of the distinction between spiritual perceptions, which he finds in the difference of aspects of the perceived object, the figure of Christ, when he gives a close reading of the Bonaventure texts (LaNave 2012).

Throughout Bonaventure's oeuvre, as an integral part of it, there is a reflection on spiritual perceptions. It appears in more or less elaborate forms, but again and again in his works written at different periods of his life and in a wide variety of genres, from his early Commentary on the book of Petrus Lombardus on the Sentences, through his systematic work *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, his biblical *Commentary on the Gospel of John* and his solemn discourses, to the theological compendium *Breviloquium*, written in his middle creative period, or to late robust theological works on spirituality such as the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* or the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, to mention only the most important.⁴ In these writings, the Seraphic Doctor joins the tradition begun by Origen and revived by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, when he reinterprets the heritage of the tradition, giving it an increasingly specific emphasis as he progresses along his thought path. The aim of our study is to identify the specific features, the unchanging basic elements and the changing emphases of Bonaventure's interpretation by analyzing the relevant passages from four works considered significant for the subject and selected from different creative periods. The steps of our reflection will therefore follow the chronological genesis of the works analysed. We cannot, however, aim for completeness. We are unable to deal with his exegetical works, his discourses, his minor spiritual writings, his work on the life of St. Francis, or with questions of the history of mystical tradition (Coolman 2009). In the course of our examination, we shall join LaNave's approach in two respects. On the one hand, following a close reading, we will consider only those passages where the Seraphic Doctor speaks of all five spiritual perceptions. On the other hand, one of our basic questions will be what theological account Bonaventure gives of the differentiation between each of the spiritual perceptions. The result of our analysis confirms in part LaNave's basic thesis that the cause of the difference on the side of the acts is grounded in the difference on the side of the perceived object, that is, in the difference of the aspects of the mystery of Christ. However, we also seek to answer the question of what underlies the hierarchical order of mental perceptions. In our answer, we will emphasise the correlation between the subject and the object: the order that can be established between the aspects of the mystery of Christ is matched by a hierarchical order on the part of the subject's acts. Furthermore, attention will be paid to the differences in the definitions of mental perceptions and in the precise designation of their objects, as well as to the interpretation of the relationship between mental perceptions and mental excesses. A special reflection will be given to the question of the connection with Dionysian mystical theology, and an effort will be made to show the scriptural background of the key Bonaventurian terms.

2. *Commentary on the Sentences: Delightful Inner Perception of God's Presence*

It is in a passage in Book III of his *Commentary on the Sentences* (1252/53) that Bonaventure first addresses the question of spiritual perceptions. Here he gives the following definition:

“sensus spiritualis dicitur usus gratiae interior respectu ipsius Dei secundum proportionem ad quinque sensus” (Bonaventura 1887, III Sent d. 13 dub I. resp.).⁵

In his definition, the Seraphic Doctor first indicates that spiritual perceptions are not faculties or skills but acts; they are the use, the exercise, the living of inner grace. The term “use of inner grace” corresponds to the term “inner senses” (*sensus interiores*). The object of spiritual, interior perceptions is God himself, who by his grace enables man to

perceive him. The term ‘according to proportion’ refers to the analogy of proportion, which means the similarity of relations; just as man perceives bodily things by means of the five bodily senses, so man perceives God by means of the five spiritual senses, by means of the grace of God’s inner grace. In the following, referring to St. Bernard, Bonaventure records that spiritual senses are rooted in man’s two fundamental spiritual faculties: intellect (*intellectus*) and affect (*affectus*).⁶ The spiritual perception of God made possible by inner grace is a mobilization, a new use of these spiritual faculties. To this, he adds, in agreement, that, because of its connection with affect, spiritual sense is called “experiential cognition” (*cognitio experimentalis*). He then assigns to the two mental faculties the five mental senses, with the following non-rigorous division: to the intellect belong rather (*magis*)⁷ sight (*visus*) and hearing (*auditus*), and to the affect (*affectus*) belong smell (*odoratus*), taste (*gustus*) and touch (*tactus*). In so doing, he also tries to explain why we should have only five spiritual senses. There are two basic ways of cognition on the part of the intellect: either by own insight (*proprio intuitu*), which corresponds to the spiritual sense of sight; or by stimulation or instruction from outside (*aliena excitatione sive instructione*), which corresponds to the spiritual sense of hearing. The latter is noteworthy because a superficial approach might at first sight seem to contradict the notions of “inner grace” and “inner senses” mentioned earlier, with the notion of “alien stimulation and instruction”. For the Seraphic Doctor, however, there is no contradiction between the two, i.e., the inner spiritual sense that arises under the influence of inner grace does not exclude the inspiration from that without, but can be synergistic with it. In this case, spiritual sense means the internal assimilation and hearing of the content of faith from the outside to the extent that man perceives God himself. Bonaventure goes on to explain that, just as in the case of spiritual senses connected with the intellect, it is sufficient to assume only two, since there are only the two fundamental modes of cognition mentioned above, so it is sufficient to posit three kinds of spiritual senses connected with the affect, according to the three fundamental states in which the affect can relate to its object:

“aut *in remotione*, et sic odoratus; aut *in approximatione*, et sic gustus; aut *in unione*, et sic tactus, qui est perfectior inter omnes sensus et spiritualior propter hoc, quod maxime unit ei qui est *summus spiritus*; propter quod dicitur primae ad Corinthios sexto: Qui adhaeret Deo unus spiritus est.” (Bonaventura 1887, III Sent d. 13 dub I. resp.)

In the passage quoted, Bonaventure establishes the distinction between the kinds of spiritual senses, which are more related to affect, as depending on the degree of presence, using the spatial metaphor of distance–approach, positing a kind of qualitative gradation, a hierarchical order (cf. *perfectior, spiritualior*) between the perceptions. The question remains, however, whether presence is understood in terms of the subject or the object of perception? Do the differences between senses arise from the extent to which the subject is close to God, present to God, through his love; or do they arise rather from the extent to which God himself is close to, present to, the perceiver? In the first case, one might think that the greater or lesser intensity of the subject’s love, the gradation of intensity, is reflected in the three qualitatively different and hierarchically ordered kinds of God’s sensation. Then, the senses are differentiated according to the intensity of the subject’s love of God and thus his closeness to God. In the second case, one might suppose that the subject, in perceiving God, also perceives the degree of God’s proximity–distance, i.e., the different forms and degrees of intensity of God’s presence. Then, the senses are differentiated by the fact that God’s presence is realised in different intensities and forms; the spiritual senses perceive precisely in accordance with these differences. Finally, it is also conceivable that the senses of the affect are differentiated according to the reciprocal but asymmetrical relationship between the subject and the object poles. In this case, the spiritual senses are differentiated according to and with dependence on the form and intensity with which God is present to the perceiving subject, whether this is sufficiently perceived by the subject and, accordingly, with what intensity of love is present to God. At the end of our analysis, it is worth summarizing the plural context of the adjective “spiritualis” in the term “sensus

spiritualis". On the one hand, the term refers directly to the nature of the "sensus" as an act and indirectly to the nature of the subject who perceives; it is a spiritual act of the subject which mobilises the spiritual faculties of his intellect and his affect. On the other hand, it refers to the object of the "sensus", God, who is a perfect spirit, "summus spiritus", and with whom, in union, at the summit of spiritual perception, one spirit (*spiritus*) becomes the perceiver. Lastly, the term also refers intimately to the Holy Spirit himself (*Spiritus Sanctus*), whose inner grace makes spiritual sense and union possible.

In a further text in Book III of the *Commentary on the Sentences* the Seraphic Doctor discusses the subject of spiritual senses on a broader horizon, in the wider context of his doctrine of grace. Although he does not here elaborate on the nature and interrelationship of the different senses, it is an important place, because, on the one hand, it completes the definition given earlier; on the other hand, he does not merely speak of the use of "internal grace" in general, as he did earlier, but explains the ways in which grace works, drawing a map of the context of grace and marking out the place of spiritual senses on it. Accordingly, sanctifying grace produces in the human soul three different types of habitus, each with its own acts. To the first type of habitus belong the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love, which, by exercising their own acts—believing, hoping, loving—the soul (with its faculties) becomes righteous, that is, ready to do right. Linked to the first type of habitus of grace is the second type of habitus, the gifts of the Holy Spirit as gifts of overflowing divine goodness, which by the exercise of its own acts—understanding, knowing, honoring God, being strong, being wise, etc.—the soul becomes light, i.e., ready to act with ease. To the second type of habits of grace, that is, to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, is connected the third type of habits, to which belong the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus. By practicing these acts of his own—to have mercy, to seek justice, to make peace, to be pure in heart, etc.—the soul becomes perfected in his faculties, that is, with the habitus of the beatitudes, he is ready to act or suffer perfectly. In the soul endowed with these habits, a state of tranquility and pleasure of some kind is established. Now, Bonaventure connects to this the notion of spiritual fruits as perfect states and spiritual senses as the perfect use of the habitus of grace.⁸ He says:

"Postquam autem illi habitus sunt in anima, est consequenter in ea status quidam quietationis et delectationis. In hac autem delectatione duo concurrunt, videlicet quaedam spiritualis refectio et ipsius refectio *spiritualis perceptio*. Ideo ad ista tria genera habituum adduntur fructus et *spirituales sensus*, qui non dicunt novos habitus, sed habituum praecedentium expriment perfectum statum et usum." (Bonaventura 1887, III Sent d. 34, p. I, a. I, q 1.)⁹

Then, in justifying the use of the term "sensus", Bonaventure adds:

"Usus vero, secundum quem *illa perceptio* suscipitur, recte dicitur *sensus spiritualis*; quoniam sensus est cognoscere rem ut praesentem." (Bonaventura 1887, III Sent d. 34, p. I, a. I, q 1.)

The passage just quoted adds two elements to the earlier definition of spiritual perception. On the one hand, it is clear that the object of spiritual perception is not only God himself, but also the state of repose and refreshment that results from the habitus of grace which God infuses into the soul. The adjective "spiritualis" thus takes on a new meaning: it now includes the inner perception of the soul's own state as a spiritual state. On the other hand, the object of perception is something present: firstly, God, who is graciously present to the soul; secondly, the rest and refreshment that the presence of God brings to the soul.

3. *De Reductione Artium Ad Theologiam: The Heart Perceiving the Beauty of Divine Wisdom through the Mediation of the Word*

From the point of view of spiritual perceptions, sections 8–10 of Bonaventure's *De reductione artium ad theologiam* (1254/55) are interesting because it is in this work that he explains in the most detail the content of the analogy of proportionality between bodily perceptions and spiritual perceptions to which he referred in his *Commentary on the Sentences*.

Moreover, the text is noteworthy for the new elements it introduces: on the one hand, the role of the Word in mental perception and, on the other, the description of the affective spiritual state in spiritual perception, further nuancing the Sentences' Commentary's consideration of pleasure as a spiritual perception of spiritual refreshment. This further substantiates the distinction between mental perceptions in terms of the experience of correspondence of the perceiving soul and of the perceived object. In the text in question, Bonaventure distinguishes and equates the following three moments of bodily external perception with the three moments of spiritual perception: the mediation, exercise and enjoyment. Following the Aristotelian schema, according to the Seraphic Doctor, in bodily perception there is mediation and fusion: the similitude (*similitudo*) from the object to be perceived is fused with the subject's sense organ and perceptive power, thus giving rise to perception, during which the subject perceiving is related to the perceived object itself by the mediation of the similitude, and is led to it. The medium of perception is the object's similitude, which mediates between the object and the subject. Now, in spiritual perception, the mediating medium is the Word, who, as the image of the Father, is "eternally begotten and temporally incarnate"; he leads to the knowledge of the Father.

"Per hunc etiam modum intellige, quod a *summa mente*, quae cognoscibilis est *interioribus sensibus mentis nostrae*, aeternaliter emanavit *similitudo, imago et proles*; et ille postmodum, cum venit plenitudo temporis, unitus est menti et carni et hominis formam accepit, quod nunquam fuerat prius; et per illum *omnes mentes nostrae* reducuntur ad Deum, quae illam similitudinem Patris per fidem in corde suscipiunt." (Bonaventura 1891c, De reductione, 8)

Concerning the analogical moment of the exercise of perception, Bonaventure emphasises elements in the act of bodily perception which are necessary for perception to take place at all and to be carried out in order: perception must be directed towards its own object, it must escape from harm, it must not usurp what belongs to another. When applied to the plane of spiritual perception, these elements acquire a moral meaning, insofar as they are assumed to be necessary preconditions for the perception of the heart (*sensus cordis*) to take place. They are the virtues of prudence, moderation and obedience. The third element of analogy is the search for and experience of pleasure.

"Si autem consideremus oblectamentum, intuebimur Dei et animae unionem. Omnis enim sensus suum sensibile conveniens quaerit cum desiderio, invenit cum gaudio, repetit sine fastidio, quia non satiatur oculus visu, nec auris auditu impletur."

On the plane of spiritual perception, this means:

"Per hunc etiam modum *sensus cordis* nostri sive pulchrum, sive consonum, sive odoriferum, sive dulce, sive mulcebre debet desideranter quaerere, gaudenter invenire, incessanter repetere." (Bonaventura 1891c, De reductione, 10)

It is noteworthy that, although the list of the five spiritual senses here also follows the traditional order observed in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure does not emphasise or even refer to a hierarchical order among them. On the contrary, he seems to underline their equality. He stresses that all five modes of sensation can lead to correspondence, even unity, between God and the soul; all five modes of perception have the same attitudes: desire, pleasure and incessant insatiability. Since in every spiritual perception there is a correspondence between God and the soul, and since in every spiritual perception this correspondence itself is co-perceived, and co-perceived as a correspondence, i.e., as a pleasure-inducer, the possible hierarchy between spiritual perceptions is eclipsed. It is also noteworthy that Bonaventure does not even distinguish here between the mental faculties of the intellect and the affect, thus avoiding the re-establishment of the hierarchical order between the two established in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, but simply speaks of the sensation of the heart (*sensus cordis*). The heart is the unity point comprising the whole of the subject of perception and all its faculties—intellect, affect and emotion. This emphasis on unity is also expressed in the fact that Bonaventure does not refer to the truth

(*verum*), which is connected with the intellect, or to the good (*bonum*), which is connected with the loving will, but to the beauty (*pulchrum*), which somehow includes, connects and transcends these two, as the object of spiritual perception.¹⁰ The reasons for the new emphases noted above are not mentioned in the text. But we may interpret the theological justification of unity and equality as the summary and concluding remark of the Seraphic Doctor at the end of the passage:

“Ecce, quomodo in cognitione sensitiva continetur occulte *divina sapientia*, et quam mira est contemplatio *quinque sensuum spiritualium* secundum conformitatem ad sensus corporales.” (Bonaventura 1891c, De reductione, 10)

Equivalence, then, arises from the fact that all five spiritual senses contemplate the same object, divine wisdom, in wonder, though perceiving it from different aspects. Hence, re-reading the above, the beautiful, the congruent, the fragrant, the sweet and the refreshing touch (*pulchrum, consonum, odoriferum, dulce, mulcebre*) are found to be attributes of one and the same divine wisdom. In this passage, although Bonaventure does not explicitly identify this divine wisdom with Christ, the text is open to Christological interpretation, all the more so because he has named the Word as the medium of spiritual sense, which mediates as the image of the Father.

4. *Breviloquium*: The Perception of the Bridegroom’s Beauty and the Rapture of the Soul

When Bonaventure, in his *Breviloquium* (ca. 1257), again speaks of spiritual perceptions in the context of the theology of grace, although he essentially follows the definition given in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, there is a somewhat new emphasis on the cognitive dimension with reference to contemplative cognition:

“Sensus vero spirituales dicunt perceptiones mentales circa veritatem contemplandam.” (Bonaventura 1891a, Brev V, 6)

But the main novelty of the interpretation put forward here is the explicit Christological perspective on mental perceptions, which also sheds light on the differences between them. In each case, the object of mental perceptions is Christ himself, but seen in a different form. These differences in themselves are well illustrated by the use of the various New Testament Christological titles of majesty—Bridegroom, wisdom, Word—which are further differentiated by the distinction between the ways in which the Word is manifested (*Verbum, Verbum inspiratum, Verbum incarnatum*). Bonaventure puts it this way:

“et tunc est homo ad contemplationem idoneus et ad aspectus et amplexus sponsi et sponsae, qui fieri habent secundum sensus spirituales, quibus videtur Christi sponsi summa pulchritudo sub ratione Splendoris; auditur summa harmonia sub ratione Verbi; gustatur summa dulcedo sub ratione Sapientiae comprehendentis utrumque, Verbum scilicet et Splendorem; odoratur summa fragrantia sub ratione Verbi inspirati in corde; astringitur summa suavitas sub ratione Verbi incarnati, inter nos habitantis corporaliter et reddentis se nobis palpabile, osculabile, amplexabile per ardentissimam caritatem, quae mentem nostram per ecstasim et raptum transire facit ex hoc mundo ad Patrem.” (Bonaventura 1891a, Brev V, 6)

Beauty, harmony, sweetness, fragrance and delight, which are here indicated as objects of spiritual senses, are, with a few minor differences, in agreement with the set of terms used in *De reductione artium*: beautiful, harmonious, fragrant, sweet, relieving to the touch. The differences are as follows. The *Breviloquium* clarifies that it speaks of the beauty of the Bridegroom-Christ; it reverses the order of fragrant and sweet; it substitutes sweetness for the relieving touch. The greatest difference, however, is that it consistently assigns to the objects of each spiritual sense the aspect on the basis of which the perception in question is given, as follows: beauty of the Bridegroom—splendour; harmony—Word; sweetness—wisdom; fragrance—inspired Word; delight—incarnate Word. The second set of terms are all Christological, denoting not only the Word (Jn 1:1–3; 1:14: incarnate, inspired), but also splendour and wisdom. For according to Hebrews (Heb 1:3), the Son

is the splendour of the glory of God the Father (*splendor gloriae eius*), and St Paul calls Christ the wisdom of God (*Dei sapientia*; 1Cor 1:24.30). The terms thus denote different aspects of the person and mystery of Christ. Bonaventure does not clearly identify the content of each aspect, so that several readings of the text are possible. According to one interpretation, the key Christological terms “Splendour/Glory—Word—Wisdom—Inspired Word—Incarnate Word”, as they are used in the prologue to the Gospel of John (John 1:1–14), reflect the chronological order of the realisation of the divine plan of salvation. In this case, “splendour” could be understood as the divinity and divine nature of the Word, which existed eternally before creation. The “Word” could refer to the Creator’s Word by whom all things came into being (John 1:3), and therefore there is an intelligible order and harmony in the created world which can be heard and recognised by intelligent man. The “wisdom”, which includes both the Word and the splendour, could refer to the divine Word, which is incessantly at work throughout the history of salvation, guiding history and wisely ordering all things. The Word “inspired in the heart” could mean the Word breathed into the human heart by the Holy Spirit, who enlightened the Old Testament’s prophets. And finally, the “Word incarnate” could mean the Word made man in the fullness of time, in whom the fullness of divine kindness/grace (John 1:16) is most directly and fully discerned.

However, in addition to the “chronological” interpretation, another reading is possible. The latter understands the members of the phraseology “Splendour—Word—Wisdom—Inspired Word” not as successive stages in time of the Word’s existence and salvific activity prior to the event of the Incarnation, but as co-existent and perceptible aspects of the mystery of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. In favour of this latter “integrative” reading is the fact that Bonaventure, before the detailed exposition, right at the very beginning of the passage quoted, comprehensively names the “Bridegroom” (and the bride) as the object of spiritual perception, and then also associates the splendour with the vision of the beauty of the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom in New Testament parlance is always the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ. Thus, the beauty of the Bridegroom-Christ and the splendour named as the basis of the vision of this beauty are the vocabulary of Hebrews (Heb 1:3) and the “glory theology” of the Gospel of John (cf. Jn 1:4. 6); it is the divinity of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, the radiance of the divine nature of the Son, eternally begotten of the Father, sent into the world by him and made man, shining through his human nature, reflecting the divine majesty of the Father. In the same way, from this perspective, harmony means the coherence, the harmony of the words of the Word preserved in the Gospel of Christ, which man hears by his spiritual hearing. Wisdom embraces the splendour of the incarnate Word, the divine glory of Jesus Christ, and the coherence of its words in a delightful unity, perceived by the spiritual palate. The Word inspired in the heart is nothing other than the Holy Spirit’s quickening in the human heart of the words and life of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, as perceived by the spiritual sense of smell. And finally, the expression “Word incarnate” emphasises the corporeal nature of the Word made man in the fullness of time, in whose human physical nature the fullness of divine kindness/grace/delight (Jn 1:16) is most directly and fully perceived, a fullness and immediacy sensed by the accumulation of expressions of touch (1 Jn 1:1–2), kiss and embrace. By choosing the partitive structure, Bonaventure once again linguistically underlines the real possibility of experiencing the incarnate Word in the present. This formulation also reflects the confession of the truth of sacramental realism, and in particular of the eucharistic real presence (*praesentia realis*): “the incarnate Word, dwelling among us bodily, making himself tangible, kissable and embraceable”. The sacraments, and the Eucharist in particular, are based on the mystery of the Incarnation, they convey the real presence of the incarnate Word, and in the case of the Eucharist, the bodily presence of the incarnate Word. The expression “by the most ardent love” can be interpreted in two ways: first, as the fervent love of Christ, by which he makes himself palpable, kissable and embraceable for us; or as our love for him, by which Christ, who is physically present among us, becomes palpable, kissable and embraceable for us. The two interpretations are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary.

Christ dwelling bodily among us makes himself tangible to us by his most fervent love, which awakens our fervent love for him, by which he becomes tangible, kissable and embraceable to us. It is certain that we have arrived at the culmination, the fullness of spiritual perception. It is through the perception of the most ardent love of the incarnate Word and our love awakened by it that “our minds pass from this world (*per ecstasim et raptum transire*) to the Father through ecstasy and rapture”. The terms “most ardent love” and “transitus” evoke the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the Eucharist, which represents the sacrifice on Calvary. Jesus, in his infinite love, gave himself for us as an immaculate sacrifice on the cross, and in preparation for this he instituted the Sacrament of the Altar at the Last Supper as the sacrament of his infinite flaming love.¹¹ Thus, the mystery of the cross, as the fullness of the mystery of Christ, is also hidden in the text as the mystery of the most fervent love of the Bridegroom-Christ, as the object of the highest spiritual perception, which captivates and makes participant the contemplator in the Passover of Christ (*transitus*).

From our analysis above, we can draw the following conclusions. (1) In the text analysed of the *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure identifies Christ the Bridegroom (and his relationship with his bride, the Church) as the object of spiritual perception.¹² (2) He assigns to the spiritual senses an essential aspect of the mystery of Christ, thus establishing the distinction between the spiritual senses from the point of view of the object of cognition. (3) The order of the essential aspects of the mystery of Christ, whether we choose the chronological or the integrative reading, moves towards an increasingly comprehensive and higher form. The incarnate Word as the fullness of the salvific self-revelation includes all aspects (splendour, Word, wisdom, inspired Word). (4) In accordance with this ordering at the material pole, there is also a progressive ordering towards the higher among the spiritual perceptions: sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch. (5) The correlation between the spiritual senses is established by the fact that all are directed towards Christ. The perception of different essential aspects of the Christ-mystery entails a widening of the range of perceptions, new ones being added to the former. The later ones do not cancel out or make redundant the earlier ones. The newer and newer aspects of Christology and the broadening perception of the love of Christ in them, the love for Christ is also increased. The contemplation of the incarnate Word as the fullness of the mystery of Christ leads to the fullness of love for Christ. The unity of this contemplation and love that attains to fullness is the spiritual perception of touch (kiss, embrace), which is realised in ecstasy and rapture (*raptus*) as a transition (*transitus*) from this world to the Father.

In the light of the passage analysed above, it is now clear that the concept of “truth to be contemplated” in the following definition of spiritual perceptions refers to Christ; spiritual senses are the mental perceptions of the person contemplating the mystery of Christ, in its various aspects. Mental perceptions include both the perception of Christ’s presence manifested in various forms and the affective emotions that accompany the perception of this presence. They are in fact a synthesis of the two. Spiritual perceptions operate during contemplation, but are not identical with it. Bonaventure interprets the process of contemplation in terms of the cognitive and affective dimensions, or the interplay of the two. As contemplation progresses, the cognitive faculties are drawn into contemplation in a hierarchical order: for prophets, in the mode of bodily, imaginative and intellectual vision given as revelation; for other righteous men, contemplation as speculation proceeds by stages of perception, imagination, reason, intellect and understanding, to wisdom, which is the ecstatic knowledge (*notitia excessiva*) beginning in earthly life and fulfilled in eternal glory.¹³ Bonaventure uses the biblical image of Jacob’s ladder and Solomon’s throne to express the stages of ascent. It is important to note that the hierarchical order of cognitive faculties and their involvement in contemplation is not identical with the hierarchical order of mental perceptions. And since the two hierarchical orders are not identical, gradualism does not mean the same thing in one case and the other. In the case of the cognitive subject’s faculties, going to a higher level may imply a transcendence which may render the functioning of the lower level of cognition superfluous, and may

even require its abandonment. In contrast, in the case of mental perceptions, a higher degree means rather that the spectrum of the mental perception of the presence of Christ is broadened in hierarchical order without any form becoming superfluous. The Seraphic Doctor does not identify at what stage of ascending contemplation the mental perceptions come into operation. On the basis of the correspondence with the text examined above, we can best assume that the sixth of the steps of Solomon's throne is assigned to the uppermost step, the sixth, where wisdom containing ecstatic cognition is found. But the biblical image, if interpreted statically, can mislead understanding. For, on the basis of the statements and the vocabulary of the passage analysed above, we must conclude that the object of the spiritual perceptions is the wisest, truly peaceful and loving King, the most beautiful and desirable Bridegroom, sitting on Solomon's throne.¹⁴ If this is so, then the spiritual perceptions belong to the sixth step of the highest throne staircase in such a way that they point beyond and elevate us to the presence of the enthroned Christ himself. The term "notitia excessiva" applied to wisdom certainly refers to this mode of cognition which provides transcendence. In the continuation of this line of thought, elements of Dionysian mystical theology then appear, which raises another question. We read:

"Ouo quidem desiderio ferventissimo ad modum ignis spiritus noster non solum efficitur agilis ad ascensum, verum etiam *quadam ignorantia docta supra se ipsum rapitur in caliginem et excessum*, ut non solum cum sponsa dicat: In odorem unguentorum tuorum curremus (Cant 1,3), verum etiam cum propheta psallat: Et nox illuminatio mea, in deliciis meis (Ps 139,11). Quam *nocturnam et deliciosam illuminationem* nemo novit nisi qui probat, nemo autem probat nisi per gratiam divinitus datam, nemini datur, nisi ei qui se exercet ad illam; ideo deinceps consideranda sunt exercitia meritorum." (Bonaventura 1891a, Brev V, 6)

In the quoted text, the vocabulary of Dionysian apophatic and mystical theology is well reflected in the terms ignorance of the knower (*docta ignorantia*), cloud, obscurity (*caligo*), excess (*excessus*) and nocturnal illumination.¹⁵ However, the relation of the ecstatic experience described here to spiritual perceptions is not clear. If the passage is read on its own, there are several indications that it is an experience distinct from spiritual perception and its highest form, the ecstatic transcendence in spiritual touch. One such is the appearance of a new vocabulary, previously unused, whose source is the mysticism of the Areopagite. Furthermore, the two consecutive biblical quotations suggest a difference and an intensification. If the statement from the Song of Songs is interpreted as a description of a summary experience of spiritual perceptions, the paradoxical content of the psalm quotation—night light—may suggest a new experience in comparison. Furthermore, unlike the passage on spiritual perceptions, the passage on the paradoxical experience of God in Dionysius does not contain a clear Christological reference when read alone. The text's distinction between ascension (*ascensio*) and self-transcendent rapture (*supra se ipsum rapitur*), which involves gradualism, points in the same direction of interpretation. If the spiritual senses belong to the last stage of ascension, the sixth step of Solomon's throne, then something more is implied by the idea of being carried away above oneself. If we follow this reading, we must conclude that there is a continuity and, at the same time, a qualitative leap between spiritual perceptions and the experience characterised by the Dionysian paradox; the rapture in spiritual touch is surpassed by the rapture of the spirit rising above itself and knowing God in the not-knowing.

But another reading is also possible. This is the case if we compare the passage we have just examined with the one we have just read and interpret it in its context. It will then be noticed that the terms previously used (*per ecstasim et raptum transire*)¹⁶ to describe the experience linked to the spiritual perception of the touch of the incarnate Word (embrace, kiss) are at least partially identical to the vocabulary of the passage under examination (*rapitur in excessum*), although the latter also contains new terms (*supra se, quadam docta ignorantia, caligo*), which could be understood as additions used to describe more precisely the experience of the same content. Furthermore, as we have seen earlier, the static attribution of mental perceptions to the sixth, uppermost degree of ascent seems

somewhat problematic. It may also be questionable whether the quotation from the Song of Songs is intended to describe the experience of the totality and highest form of the spiritual sensations, or whether it is intended to describe the experience of the spiritual sensation of smell alone in the literal sense. If we choose the latter reading, we will find that the experience of touch (embrace, kiss), which is considered to be the highest form of the spiritual senses, is identical in content to the experience described by the Dionysian paradox. Then, the ecstasy and rapture of the mind through the most ardent love, by which it passes from this world to the Father, will be identical with the spirit's transcendence of itself, which, through a kind of knowing ignorance, brings us to the paradoxical experience of enlightenment gained in the dark. In this case, we find ourselves confronted with the paradoxical culmination of spiritual perception at the very moment when the spirit is caught up in the darkness and transcends itself. This would also mean that Bonaventure would interpret as the supreme spiritual perception the Dionysian "cognition that takes place in a supra-intellectual way", in which Moses, who ascends the mountain of divine knowledge and attains union with God, "by knowing nothing, acquires knowledge in a supra-intellectual way".¹⁷ In any case, Bonaventure indicates by the word "quadam" that it is a particular kind of ignorance that excludes and surpasses the ordinary knowledge of the spirit/mind by a higher knowledge, enlightenment. Finally, to the above, we may add that if the identification reading is correct, it also implies that the paradoxical experience of nocturnal enlightenment has Christological content, and that accordingly the key terms "docta ignorantia", "caligo", "excessus" must also have a Christological meaning. And since it is the object of the highest spiritual perception, it must be directed towards the Word incarnate, and even perceive the most fervent love of Christ, and thus perceive the special presence of God in a supra-intellectual way. As we have seen above, this is the essential aspect of the mystery of Christ, but only hinted at by Bonaventure via the mystery of the cross (and of the Eucharist), which is even more concealed by the author in this passage. Interpreted from this point of view, the expressions "ignorance of knowledge", "presence perceived in obscurity" and "enlightenment in the night" refer to the seemingly unwise wisdom of God revealed in the crucified Christ, who is a stumbling block and a fool to outsiders, but the power and wisdom of God to the elect, that is, to those who have spiritual perception (1 Cor 1:20–25, 30).

5. *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*: The Spiritual Senses in the Pilgrimage of the Soul's Contemplation Ascending to God

Denys Turner aptly observes of Bonaventure's theology that the Seraphic Doctor masterfully, with the care of an architect, integrates the mystical theological heritage of Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite and the Saint-Victorians, here especially Hugo, Richard and Thomas Gallus (Turner 1995, p. 103). Bonaventure is linked to the Dionysian tradition in several ways. On the one hand, he embraces its hierarchical view of the cosmos, including the doctrine of the hierarchy of the orders of angels. On the other hand, he is the heir of the Dionysian division of theology into affirmative (symbolic and eidetic), negative and mystical theology (Turner 1995, pp. 114–16). He consciously incorporates into his mystical theology the apophatic theology of Dionysius Areopagite, together with the idea of mystical union and mental *excess*, ecstasy. This link to the Dionysian tradition is, however, mediated by Thomas Gallus, the last great canon of St. Victor, who plays a decisive role in it (McGinn 1998, pp. 78–87; Coolman 2012, pp. 140–58). Bonaventure essentially follows him in projecting the Dionysian conception of an objective ontological and epistemological hierarchy of angelic orders onto the human soul, which is progressing in the knowledge of God, and which thus appears as a hierarchical, that is, angelic-angelicised being. He also continues the legacy of Thomas Gallus in his understanding of the realisation of mystical union with God and its apophatic character. This is an affective reading of the Dionysian concept of mystical union, according to which *unio mystica* is achieved by transcending the activity of the intellectus, through the *affectus*. The *excessus* or ecstasy necessary for union is the transcendence of the activity of the intellect, which is the characteristic of the highest,

of the seraphic knowledge of God. The originality of the mystical theological synthesis of the Seraphic Doctor, who weaves together the various strands of tradition, can be marked in the Christological centre which, in the *Itinerarium*, becomes the interpretative key to all theologies, to affirmative theology, to apophatic theology, to mystical union and to the spiritual senses.

5.1. Spiritual Senses and Stage Four of Contemplation

Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (1259/60) is the classic description of the soul's pilgrimage to God. The first chapter clearly sketches the inner logic and the roadmap, along which the Seraphic Doctor will later lead the reader to the mystical, ecstatic experience of God, to the arrival at God's peace and tranquillity. In the concluding chapter, he then looks back and sums up the spiritual journey he has made.¹⁸ The stages of the ascending pilgrimage correspond to the six stages of contemplation (*contemplatio, speculatio*),¹⁹ of which Bonaventure expresses his reflections on the spiritual senses in the fourth stage, the contemplation of God's presence in the image (*in imagine*) renewed by grace. In this connection, the following reflections are found in the most important passage of the text:

“Anima igitur credens, sperans et amans Iesum Christum, qui est *Verbum incarnatum, increatum et inspiratum*, scilicet via, veritas et vita; dum per fidem credit in Christum tanquam in *Verbum increatum*, quod est *Verbum et splendor Patris*, recuperat spiritualem auditum et visum, auditum ad suscipiendum Christi sermones, visum ad considerandum illius lucis splendores. Dum autem spe suspirat ad suscipiendum *Verbum inspiratum*, per desiderium et affectum recuperat spiritualem olfactum. Dum caritate complectitur *Verbum incarnatum*, ut suscipiens ab ipso delectationem et *ut transiens in illud per exstaticum amorem*, recuperat gustum et tactum. Quibus sensibus recuperatis, dum *sponsam suam* videt et audit odoratur, gustat et amplexatur, decantare potest *tanquam sponsa* Canticum canticorum, quod factum fuit ad exercitium contemplationis secundum hunc quartum gradum, quem nemo capit, nisi qui accipit, quia *magis est in experientia affectuali* quam in consideratione rationali. In hoc namque gradu, *reparatis sensibus interioribus* ad sentiendum summe pulcrum, audiendum summe harmonicum, odorandum summe odoriferum, degustandum summe suave, apprehendendum summe delectabile, *disponitur anima ad mentales excessus*, scilicet per devotionem, admirationem et exultationem, secundum illas tres exclamationes, quae fiunt in Canticis canticorum.” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 3)

In the passage quoted, new emphases appear in Bonaventure's interpretation of spiritual senses in comparison with earlier writings.

(1) The first new aspect is the strong emphasis on the fact that Jesus Christ is not only the object of spiritual perceptions, but also the restorer of spiritual perceptions. Spiritual senses lost as a result of sin are restored and renewed by virtue of the fact that, through the grace of Christ, man believes in Christ, hopes in Christ, loves Christ and perceives precisely the presence of Christ in certain aspects of his mystery. The renewal of spiritual senses, that is, the restoration of the sense of God's presence in our own souls, is an integral part of the overall restoration of man's dignity as a God's image, shattered by sin, according to the threefold rhythm of purification, illumination and perfection.²⁰

(2) The second new aspect identified in the text is the triple schema of the five spiritual senses and the explanation of the difference between them on the subject and object sides. From the subject's point of view, this means that the five senses are assigned to the triple divine virtues of faith, hope and love: sight and hearing for faith, smell for hope, taste and touch for love.²¹ From the point of view of the mystery of the object, that is, of Jesus Christ, there appears the distinction of the three ways of being of the Word: the incarnate Word (*Verbum incarnatum*), the uncreated Word (*Verbum increatum*), and the inspired Word (*Verbum inspiratum*), which the Seraphic Doctor corresponds to the three ways of being of the Way, of the Truth, and of the Life. The triple structures on both the subject and the object sides draw the following relationships:

1. faith—uncreated Word—hearing, sight;
2. hope—inspired Word—smell;
3. love—incarnate Word—taste, touch.

From a closer definition of the objects of faith, hope, love and their corresponding spiritual perceptions, it is clear that the distinction of the threefold mode of being of the Word is not made according to a salvific-chronological order, but according to the threefold aspect of the mystery of one and the same incarnate Word: it is a question of spiritually hearing the words of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, of seeing the radiance of his divine glory, of perceiving his life breathed into us and of perceiving his love manifested in the medium of his humanity body. For it is the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, who says of himself, in the passage under analysis, that he is the Way (*Verbum incarnatum*), the Truth (*Verbum increatum*) and the Life (*Verbum inspiratum*). The use of the term ‘the Bridegroom’ (*sponsus*) confirms this once again. It is a perception of the supreme beauty, perfect harmony, alluring fragrance, sweetness of grace and supreme delightfulness of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who comes as the Bridegroom.

(3) The third aspect worthy of attention concerns the hierarchical order of the spiritual senses. Undoubtedly, the interrelationship of the five spiritual senses maps the interrelationship of the divine virtues. This means, in part, that just as the theological virtues stand in a relationship of presupposition and inclusion—faith is presupposed by hope and love, and faith and hope are presupposed by love; hope includes faith, and love includes faith and hope—so too do the spiritual senses. The lower spiritual sense is open to the higher, and the higher spiritual sense does not make the lower one superfluous, and does not cancel it out. As perceptions of aspects of the mystery of Christ, the spiritual senses complement each other. On the other hand, however, like the divine virtues, there is still a hierarchical order between them, at least from the point of view of the subject.²² Bonaventure, placing the spiritual senses in the fourth degree of contemplation, gives this general description of them: “it consists rather (*magis*) in experience conceived in love (*in experientia affectuali*) than in intellectual consideration (*in consideratione rationali*)”. It seems that the hierarchical order among the spiritual senses is established by the proportion and weight of affective experience and intellectual consideration in each spiritual sense. Both elements are present at all levels, but the stronger the affective element, the higher the intellectual perception.

(4) Another important difference with respect to the *Breviloquium* is that, whereas in the *Breviloquium* the spiritual senses are associated with the sixth and final stage of contemplation (cf. the sixth step of Solomon’s throne, the divine wisdom, *notitia excessiva*), in the *Itinerarium* Bonaventure assigns them to the fourth stage of contemplation. The reason is that in the *Itinerarium* the Seraphic Doctor maximises the Augustinian principle of the triple rhythm of the knowledge of God (Augustinus 1834, p. 39); the knowledge of God proceeds from the outside inwards and then from the inside upwards, according to the triple rhythm of *extra nos*, *intra nos* and *super nos*. The created external world contains the traces of God (*vestigia*) and is the starting point for the (*extra nos*) knowledge of God by traces (*per vestigia*) and in traces (*in vestigio*). This is the first and second stage of contemplation. The human soul bears the image of God (*imago*) and is the starting point of the (*intra nos*) knowledge of God that can be acquired through the mediation of the image (*per imaginem*) and that can be acquired in the image (*in imagine*) that is, in the soul that has been made like God again (*similitudo*), renewed by grace. This is the third and fourth degree of contemplation. The eternal Truth radiates the light of divine knowledge into the soul from above, so that man can contemplate God *super nos*, that is, through the mediation of the image of the divine light projected onto him (*per similitudinem lucis*) and in the divine light itself (*in ipsa luce*). This is the fifth and sixth degree of contemplation. It goes without saying that in this schema Bonaventure assigns the spiritual perceptions to the knowledge of God *intra nos*, and within it to the fourth degree of contemplation, that is, to the moment of contemplation in the image renewed by grace (*in imagine*), since spiritual senses are by definition internal perceptions, perceptions of the heart, mental perceptions of the truth to be contemplated and the use of inner grace.

5.2. *Spiritual Senses, Mental Excesses and the Mystical “Transitus” as the Goal of the Contemplation: The Interpretation of the Paradoxical Dionysian Experience*

This new schema, mentioned above, has implications for the interpretation of the relation between mental perceptions and excesses. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the mental perceptions placed in the *Breviloquium* in the sixth degree of contemplation are immediately followed by the description of the paradoxical Dionysian experience of God. In the *Itinerarium*, the paradoxical Dionysian experience of God appears only three chapters later, in the concluding chapter, chapter seven, after the fourth chapter on spiritual senses. We have also found that the passages of the *Breviloquium* under examination allow for two readings: the identifying and the discriminating. According to the former, the highest realisation of spiritual perception in spiritual touch (embrace) is identical with the paradoxical Dionysian experience of God, and consequently the latter also has a distinctly Christological content. According to the distinctive reading, the ecstatic experience, which is also realised in the spiritual touch, differs from the paradoxical experience of the spirit rising above itself and knowing God in the *docta ignorantia*, which exceeds the former and has no clear Christological content. Now, in our view, Bonaventure in the *Itinerarium* clearly subscribes to the distinctive reading, but with the important modification that he also attributes a clear Christological content to the paradoxical experience of God described in the vocabulary of Dionysian mysticism. The distinctive interpretation also implies the recognition that there are different degrees not only of contemplation and mental perceptions, but also of mental excesses. On the one hand, the Seraphic Doctor affirms emphatically that certain mental excesses (*excessus mentales*) are already realised in the fourth degree of contemplation;²³ indeed, he seems to identify them in the triad of the fullness of devotion, great wonder and overflowing joy.²⁴ Mental perceptions directly prepare the soul for these excesses (*disponitur anima ad mentales excessus*). On the other hand, however, he clearly distinguishes from them the unique excess described by Dionysian mysticism, and he makes this distinction in several ways. Already the structure of the *Itinerarium* emphasises the distinction, in that it discusses the excesses linked to mental perceptions in chapter four, which explains the fourth stage of contemplation, while the unique excess described by the Dionysian paradox is discussed as the ultimate goal of contemplation in the final chapter seven of the work. The characteristic expressions of Dionysian mysticism—clear obscurity, clear darkness, the blinding light of divine obscurity—appear only here, in chapter seven, and not in chapter four on the spiritual senses. It is also worth noting that while in chapter four he consistently uses the term mental excesses (*excessus mentales*) in the plural in connection with the spiritual perceptions, in the final chapter he uses the same term in the singular. The distinction is best expressed in the title of chapter seven: “De excessu mentali et mystico, in quo requies datur intellectui, affectu totaliter in Deum per excessum transeunte”. The singularity of the excess described later in the chapter is also expressed in three ways: by the adjective “mystical” (*mysticus*), which occurs only here and in this chapter; by the adverb “total” (*totaliter*), thus indicating the perfection of the transcendence; and by the term “transeunte”, which evokes the key term of the chapter, “transitus”.²⁵ What is left open by the *Breviloquium* is clearly defined here by the *Itinerarium*: not only spiritual senses and the excesses associated with them (chapter four), but also perfect and mystical excesses have a Christological and, in this context, a Trinitarian content. The terms “mystical” and “transeunte” in the title of Chapter seven already refer to this. The adjective “mystical” has a precise meaning, in the sense of “hidden, concealed”, indicating the divine wisdom (*mystica sapientia*) hidden in the cross of Christ but revealed by the Holy Spirit, as can be identified from the Pauline quotation in the fourth section.²⁶ The spiritual man is the one who receives this Christian and hidden (*mystical*) wisdom revealed by the Holy Spirit.²⁷ The terms “transeunte, transitus, transire”, used both in the title and in the chapter, refer primarily to the Passover of Christ, to his great “passage” from the world to the Father, which took place through his death on the cross. The spiritual man is the one who is caught up in the love of Christ crucified, in the wisdom of God revealed in the cross of Christ, and thus transcends himself and experiences the “transitus”, sharing in the “passage” of Christ

to the Father. Thus, the perfect and mystical excess understood as “transitus” is ultimately trinitarian in its definition: to pass to the Father under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, together with and formed by Christ. The “transition” is a transformation, a renewal, a transcendence of self, accomplished in us by the fervent love of Christ the crucified poured into us by the Holy Spirit. In this process, all intellectual activity must cease, and the apex of the mind must be completely immersed in God (*apex mentis totus transferatur et transformatur in Deum*). (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin VII, 4). Thus the pilgrimage of the soul to God is completed and the soul is immersed in God and in his peace. The paradoxical experience of God, signified by the Dionysian expression “the blinding light of the divine obscurity”, becomes the cipher of the paradoxical knowledge of God of the cross; it refers to the knowledge of God hidden and revealed in the cross of Christ, which transcends all understanding and to which the soul can only rise if it rises above everything and beyond itself, enraptured by the love of Christ. In this way, Bonaventure gives a Trinitarian and Christological interpretation to the Dionysian Mystical Theology, to the dynamic of ceaseless transcendence outlined in it, to the apophatic–mystical moment of entering into the “radiant haze” of the unity which transcends understanding and is silenced.

5.3. Spiritual Senses and Spiritual Interpretation of Scripture

A peculiarly new emphasis on the interpretation of spiritual senses is found in another passage of chapter four of the *Itinerarium* examined so far, namely in section six. Already at the beginning of section five, Bonaventure indicates that while contemplation in the earlier stages (chapters one to three) had recourse to philosophy, in this fourth stage of contemplation in the light of the renewed image, it is especially the reflection on Scripture that is the support for contemplation. Then, in section six, he explains in detail the role of the teaching of Scripture in the hierarchical transformation of the Church and its members, that is, in the process of purification, illumination and perfection.²⁸ He first of all corresponds to the triad of *purgatio–illuminatio–perfectio*, the triad of the natural, written and grace law, then, secondly, the triad of the purifying Mosaic law, the illuminating prophetic revelation and the perfecting evangelical education. Thus he arrives at the correspondence considered to be the most appropriate (*potissimum*) when he relates the triad of hierarchicalization to the triple spiritual interpretation of Scripture: the tropological to purification, the allegorical to illumination and the anagogical to perfection. It is in this context that the theme of spiritual senses emerges in the following formulation:

“vel *potissimum* secundum triplicem eius intelligentiam spiritualem: *tropologicam* quae purgat ad honestatem vitae; *allegoricam*, quae illuminat ad claritatem intelligentiae; *anagogicam*, quae perficit *per excessus mentales et sapientiae perceptiones suavissimas*, secundum virtutes praedictas tres theologicas et *sensus spirituales reformatos et excessus tres supradictos* et actus mentis hierarchicos, quibus ad interiora regreditur mens nostra, ut ibidem speculetur Deum in splendoribus Sanctorum et in eisdem tanquam in cubilibus dormiat in pace et requiescat, sponso adiurante, quod non excitetur, donec de eius voluntate procedat.” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 6)

Bonaventure does not deem it necessary to go into detail as to which divine virtues, which spiritual perceptions and excesses and which aspects of the mystery of Christ correspond to each spiritual interpretation of Scripture, but this can easily be assumed by considering section three in the following order: hierarchical act—plane of spiritual interpretation of Scripture—divine virtue—object of spiritual perception—kind of spiritual perception—mental excess.

1. purification—tropologic—hope—verbum inspiratum—spiritual sense of smell—devotion
2. illumination—allegoric—faith—verbum increatum—spiritual sight, hearing—wonder
3. perfection—anagogic—love—verbum incarnatum—spiritual taste, touch—exultation, overflowing joy

In the passage under consideration, Bonaventure sees the relationship between the spiritual interpretation of Scripture and spiritual perceptions from one direction when he claims that the triple spiritual reading of the Bible promotes the realization of hierarchical acts, divine virtues, spiritual perceptions and mental excesses, and thus the full grace restoration and renewal of the *imago Dei* in the soul of man. However, the relationship between the spiritual interpretation of Scripture and the spiritual perception can also be interpreted from the other direction. Is not the triple spiritual reading of the Bible due to and a sign of the fact that the reader already has spiritual perceptions? Is it not only on the basis of spiritual perceptions of the presence of Christ and his relationship to the Church in the whole Bible that Bonaventure can say that “*de hoc igitur hierarchia et ecclesiastica hierarchia est tota sacra Scriptura*” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 6)? We may reasonably assume that the relationship between the reading of Scripture and spiritual perceptions is reciprocal. The reading of the Word of God awakens the acts of faith, hope and love, stimulating the inner spiritual perceptions which are linked to them and which perceive the presence of Christ; at the same time, the renewed spiritual perceptions allow a fuller perception of the presence and mystery of Christ in the whole of Scripture. In the final analysis, it is Christ who is both the author and the object of all Scripture and of all spiritual perceptions; and it is Christ who is both the supreme interpreter of Scripture and the renewer of spiritual perceptions. Bonaventure does not discuss these connections in the *Itinerarium*, but touches on them in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. In this latter work, he speaks of the fullness of the gift of understanding, which leads to wisdom as the key to contemplation, and of the understanding made possible by the uncreated, incarnate and inspired Word (*Verbum increatum, incarnatum, inspiratum*), including the understanding of Scripture. No understanding can be gained except by understanding the uncreated Word, by whom all things were made; except by understanding the incarnate Word, by whom all things are restored; and except by understanding the inspired Word, by whom all things are revealed.²⁹ The incarnate Word, which performs the work of restoration, opens man’s understanding to the understanding of the Scriptures. The inspired Word reveals the meaning of revelations, visions, speeches and dreams (Bonaventura 1891b, Coll in Hex III, 10–11, 22).

5.4. *Spiritual Senses, Excesses and Stages Five and Six of Contemplation*

The triple rhythmic scheme of knowledge—*extra nos–intra nos–supra nos*—borrowed from Augustinus (Augustinus 1834, p. 39), and the presumed need to integrate Dionysius Areopagite’s conception of theology, makes it clear not only why spiritual perceptions are assigned to the fourth degree of contemplation, but also why the *Itinerarium* continues the upward journey of contemplation in chapters five on the divine name of “being” and six on the divine name of “goodness”, which contemplate the mystery of the unity of God and the Trinity. Yet, it is easy for the reader to get the impression that the train of thought in chapter four is interrupted by chapters five and six, and only in chapter seven does the train of thought return to the main theme. Indeed, chapters four and seven are closely linked thematically, with the discussion of spiritual excesses arising from spiritual perceptions and of the total mystical excess, with the Christ-centredness and the emphasis on the affective moment. The theme and style of chapters five and six also seem to be sharply different from this. In these, there is no mention of spiritual excesses; strong intellectual considerations predominate, in which the affective aspect of contemplation is not explicitly present; the object of contemplation gradually expands from the mystery of Christ to contemplation of the attributes of the divine essence and the mystery of the Trinity. At the same time, deeper connections are discernible. Among these, we would like to highlight the following three: the intensification of wonder, the emphasis on transcendence and the link with the mystery of Christ. These are what make the bridging role of chapters five and six in the work’s train of thought understandable. The intellect contemplating the revealed (cf. Ex 3:14) content of the divine name “taken from being” recognises the intrinsic and necessary interconnection of the attributes of the divine essence on the basis of “being”. They provoke

wonder, because they reveal the transcendence of the divine essence over all created reality. Understanding does not extinguish wonder, but enhances it. This is all the more so when the intellect contemplates the revealed content of the divine name “taken from goodness” (cf. Ex 33:19; Lk 18:19), which sheds light on the mystery of origins, personal differences and essential unity in the inner life of the Trinity. Bonaventure stresses that contemplation is not an exhaustive understanding of the incomprehensible, but rather a wondering recognition of the transcendence of the Trinity, of the incomparable and all-surpassing, astonishing being of a God. The description of this astonishment of the mind in chapters five and six is a continuation and deepening of the astonishment presented in chapter four, when it speaks of the soul, in possession of restored spiritual senses, experiencing, on contemplating the mysteries of Christ, an astonishment (awe and exultation) which prepares it for mental excesses.³⁰ And although mental excesses are not explicitly mentioned in chapters five and six, the contemplation of the divine mysteries which essentially transcend creaturely existence—the diversity and unity of the attributes of the divine essence, the diversity and unity of the divine persons in the Trinity, the diversity and unity of the two natures in Christ—in wonder and amazement, nevertheless, performs a function similar to that of the mental perceptions in that it prepares for excesses. Indeed, this contemplation opens the intellect to “transcend itself” and thus prepares the soul for the total and mysterious excess in love, in which the intellect is at rest, as the title of chapter seven states. Finally, the Christological aspect is gradually developed and unfolded throughout the chapters under consideration. In chapter four, the subject of intellectual perceptions is the various aspects of the mystery of the Christ-Bridegroom (*verbum incarnatum, increatum, inspiratum*). In chapters five and six, the gaze of contemplation is directed, as it were, following the gaze of the two cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant, towards the Table of Atonement, which represents Jesus Christ. In Christ, the intrinsic relationship between the essential attributes of God and the persons of the Trinity is realised and revealed.³¹ The depth of the mystery of the Bridegroom-Christ admired in chapter four is revealed in its fullness here in chapter six as the interpretive key to the divine essence and the mystery of the Trinity. Closely connected to this is chapter seven, which contemplates the most brilliant aspect of the mystery of the Christ the Son: the Paschal mystery of the cross as a transition (*transitus*) to the Father. Whoever looks at Christ on the cross and contemplates him, celebrates the transitus with Christ, experiences the transitus with him and, as far as this is possible in this life, passes with Christ from this world to the Father.

6. Conclusions

In our study, we have sought to identify the basic aspects of the Bonaventurian interpretation of spiritual perceptions, with the aim of illustrating the changes of emphasis observed in the development of his approach. In order to achieve our aim, we have analysed relevant passages from four works from different periods of his creative career, with a view to a close reading. The main results of our analysis can be summarized as follows.

First of all, we can conclude that there is a significant shift in emphasis in the definition of the object of spiritual perception as the Bonaventure oeuvre unfolds, with an increasingly strong Christological perspective. Whereas in the *Commentary on the Sentences* there is almost no Christological element, and the clear and exclusive object of spiritual perceptions is God, in the *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, the claim is already made that spiritual perceptions of God are mediated by the Word. The *Breviloquium* and the *Itinerarium* then elaborate the Christological perspective in more detail: the direct object of the spiritual perceptions is Christ the Bridegroom, according to the fundamental aspects of the mystery of Christ. The earlier definitions of spiritual perceptions are not here invalidated, but are given a more precise contour by the addition of the Christological aspect. Spiritual perceptions perceive the presence of God primarily in Christ and prepare the soul for a unitive excess towards Christ, through the realization in which, by a transit with Christ, the perfect excess in God can take place. Thus, the ultimate focus of spiritual perceptions

remains God. Closely associated with the Christological perspective is the Trinitarian perspective, the most elaborated in the *Itinerarium*: with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit according to the trinitarian principle. Thus the adjective “spiritualis” in the term “sensus spiritualis”, which previously referred in general terms to the perfect spiritual nature of the object of perception, God, and to the spiritual nature of the subject’s acts, now takes on a distinct pneumatological meaning.

The theological justification of the distinction and hierarchy of spiritual perceptions is the other dimension in which we can observe the unfolding of Bonaventuran reflection. In seeking to answer the question of why we can speak of only five and not more intellectual perceptions, the *Commentary on the Sentences* only considers the duality of intellect and affect, the nature of the subject’s source of knowledge and the ways in which the subject is present, and while the *De reductione artium ad theologiam* retains the analogy with bodily perceptions, the *Breviloquium* and the *Itinerarium* clearly base their distinction on the Christological object of the spiritual perceptions. The spiritual perceptions are directed towards the main aspects of the mystery of Christ and are differentiated accordingly—*Verbum increatum* (sight, hearing), *inspiratum* (smell), *incarnatum* (taste, touch); or *Splendor*, *Verbum*, *Sapientia*, *Verbum inspiratum*, *Verbum incarnatum*. Bonaventure’s reflections, with the exception of *De reductione*, also establish a hierarchical order among the mental perceptions, but this hierarchy is not identifiable with the hierarchy of cognitive faculties and acts. The hierarchical order of the spiritual perceptions is based on the ecstatic power of love on the subject side, or the order of the divine virtues of faith, hope and love; on the object side, on the mode and degree of the revelation of the divine love manifested in the mystery of Christ which provokes it. The supreme spiritual perception is that of touch (embrace), which perceives the fullness of the filial love of Christ suffering and dying on the cross and, in response, transcends itself to Christ in ecstatic love.

The third main area of our investigation was the definition of the relationship between spiritual perceptions and Dionysian mysticism. Here too we observe an unfolding. While in the passages of the *Commentary on the Sentences* we have examined there is no reference at all to the mystical theology of Dionysius,³² or in *De reductione*, there is more so in the *Breviloquium* and the *Itinerarium*. Both works assume that the excesses prepared by spiritual perceptions can be of different degrees. However, while the *Breviloquium* allows both a discriminative and an identificative reading of the relation between the excesses in spiritual touch and the paradoxical experience of God in Dionysian mysticism, the *Itinerarium* takes a strong position in favour of a discriminative interpretation. At the same time, both works relate to the contemplation of the mystery of the cross of Christ, to the perception of Christ’s most fervent love and to the ecstatic love given to him, the total excess of “almost knowing ignorance”. Bonaventure interprets the Dionysian paradox of the experience of God in terms of the paradox of the cross. Thus, the event of entering “into the clear darkness” and “into the blinding light of the divine gloom”, and thus the spirit’s transcendence of itself and the cessation of intellectual activity, does not bring us to a state of absolute non-knowledge, but gives us an intimate and lived knowledge of the paradoxical wisdom of the cross. This is the goal of the Bonaventuran contemplation and the culmination of spiritual senses and excesses.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ The term “sensus spiritualis” is translated alternately as “spiritual sense” or “spiritual perception”. The terms “perceptio spiritualis”, “perceptio mentalis” and “sensus interior” also occur in Bonaventure’s works, but the “sensus spiritualis” is dominant. Bonaventure uses the terms primarily to denote acts, not faculties and skills.

- 2 The text was first published in French in 1933 and in German in 1934 (ZAM 9, 1–19) under the title “*Der Begriff der ecstasis bei Bonaventura*”.
- 3 Critical authors such as St. Grünewald, J. Beumer, E. Longpré and M. Schlosser question mainly two points in the Rahnerian conception: the total immediacy of the experience in ecstasy without created grace and the total freedom of experience from cognitive content.
- 4 Tedoldi considers the following passages as relevant to the topic: *III Sent d. 13 dub I; III Sent d. 34, p. I, a. I, q 1; Brev 6; Itin IV, 3–7; De red 8–10; Hex III, 22; Sol I, 12–17; De plantatione paradisi 9; De quinque festivitibus pueri Iesu IV, 1; Sermo 9 in Epich; Sermo 14 in Epich*. Other texts that may be included here are, for example, *Hex XV, 20; Comm in Ioan I, 43, etc.* (Tedoldi 1999, pp. 137–82).
- 5 The full text is as follows: “*Alio modo sensus potest dici stricte; et sic sensus spiritualis dicitur usus gratiae interior respectu ipsius Dei secundum proportionem ad quinque sensus. Et sic accipit Origenes et Bernardus, qui distinguunt quinque sensus interiores, quorum numerum facile est assignare. Quilibet enim illorum sensuum, sicut vult Bernardus, radicem habet in intellectu et affectu, pro eo quod cognitionem experimentalem dicant. Sed quidam se magis tenent ex parte intellectus, ut visus et auditus; quidam ex parte affectus, ut odoratus, gustus et tactus. Et sufficientia patet sic: quia ex parte intellectus contingit dupliciter circa cognitionem alicuius exerceri: aut proprio intuitu, et sic est visus; aut aliena excitatione sive instructione, et sic auditus.—Circa affectionem vero triplicem contingit reperire statum: aut in remotione, et sic odoratus; aut in approximatione, et sic gustus; aut in unione, et sic tactus, qui est perfectior inter omnes sensus et spiritualior propter hoc, quod maxime unit ei qui est summus spiritus; propter quod dicitur primae ad Corinthios sexto: Qui adhaeret Deo unus spiritus est.*” (Bonaventura 1887, d. 13 dub I. resp.) The emphasis is mine here and in other quotations in the study.
- 6 For a detailed analysis of the Bonaventurean concept of affect, see (Davis 2017).
- 7 By the term “magis”, Bonaventure perhaps means to suggest that there is an affective element in sight and hearing, just as there is a cognitive element in smell, taste and touch, though not the dominant element.
- 8 An example of the relation between virtues, spiritual gifts, happiness, fruits and spiritual senses is the following series of interconnected members: 1. faith (virtue, habitus)—2. reason (spiritual gift, habitus)—3. pure heart (happiness, habitus)—4. not specifying (spiritual fruit, condition)—5. sight, hearing (spiritual senses). Note that in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure does not yet specify which spiritual perceptions belong to which divine virtues, gifts and happiness.
- 9 Bonaventure even connects here the sacraments as the supports (*adminicula*) given to man by God. For the grace which reaches the various effects communicated in the sacraments is directed to the creation, unfoldment and perfection of the above habitus.
- 10 *Verum* is the correspondence of intellect and thing, *bonum* is the correspondence of will and thing. The *pulchrum* embraces and transcends both. In the third, higher type of correspondence, when in contemplation, the will-aspiration is relaxed and cognition delights.
- 11 The wording also recalls two Gospel passages that speak of the Last Supper. Jn 13:1: “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart (*metabé, transeat*) from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” The passage of Jesus to the Father is his Passover, his transition, which is accomplished through his crucifixion and resurrection. His love that goes on to the end is the most ardent love that cannot be increased (*eis telos, in finem*), by which he makes the ultimate self-sacrifice and, taking it up, offers himself to the Father at the Last Supper, and as a sacrament of this he institutes the Eucharist. The other Gospel passage is Luke 22:14–15: “When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’”. This is the fervent love of Jesus, this “longing” for our salvation, with which he establishes the Eucharist and undertakes the Passion.
- 12 The term “Bridegroom” (*sponsus*) implies a relation, so it is not necessary for Bonaventure to mention the Church every time; it is enough for him to do so once. In any case, the subject of spiritual senses is in fact the member of the Church-bride, the believing soul who is united to her Bridegroom.
- 13 “*Sensus vero spirituales dicunt perceptiones mentales circa veritatem contemplandam. Quae quidem contemplatio in Prophetis fuit per revelationem quantum ad triplicem visionem, scilicet corporalem, imaginativam et intellectualem; in aliis vero iustis reperitur per speculationem, quae incipit a sensu et pervenit ad imaginationem et de imaginatione ad rationem, de ratione ad intellectum, de intellectu ad intelligentiam; de intelligentia vero ad sapientiam sive notitiam excessivam, quae hic in via incipit, sed consummatur in gloria sempiterna.*” (Bonaventura 1891a, Brev V, 6).
- 14 “*Et his gradibus consistit scala Iacob, cuius cacumen attingit caelum; et thronus Salomonis, in quo residet Rex sapientissimus et vere pacificus et amarus ut sponsus speciosissimus et desiderabilis totus.*” (Bonaventura 1891a, Brev V, 6).
- 15 Some typical Dionysian expressions from his work on Mystical Theology: “The Super-Essential Ray of Divine Darkness” (*ad supernaturalem illum caliginis divinae radium*), “he has made Darkness His secret place” (Ps 17,12: *posuit tenebras latibulum suum*), “the Darkness of Unknowing” (*in caliginem vere mysticam incognoscibilitatis ingreditur*). (Areopagita 1857, De Mystica Theologia, I, 1–3; Areopagite 1920, pp. 192–94; Rorem 1993, pp. 184–93, 220).
- 16 Note that the terms “raptus” or “raptur” are generally used to denote the fullest, highest realization of excesses, as is the verb “transire”. This may further strengthen the second reading.
- 17 “eo ipso quod nihil cognoscit, supra mentem cognoscens”. (Areopagita 1857, De Mystica Theologia, I, 3).

- 18 “postquam mens nostra contuita est Deum *extra se per vestigia et in vestigiis, intra se per imaginem et in imagine, supra se per divinae lucis similitudinem super nos relucentem et in ipsa luce, secundum quod possibile est secundum statum viae et exercitium mentis nostrae; cum tantum in sexto gradu ad hoc pervenerit, ut speculetur in principio primo et summo et mediatore Dei et hominum, Iesu Christo, ea quorum similia in creaturis nullatenus reperiri possunt, et quae omnem perspicacitatem humani intellectus excedunt: restat, ut haec speculando transcendat et transeat non solum mundum istum sensibilem, verum etiam semetipsam.*” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin VII, 1).
- 19 The biblical images of the number six in the *Itinerarium* (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin) are as follows: the seraphim with six wings (Preface, 2–3), the six days of creation (VII,1) and the six steps of Solomon’s throne (Preface, 1; I,5; VII,1). The symbol of the ascension is Jacob’s ladder (I,2; I,3; 1,9; IV,2) and the high mountain itself refers to it (Preface, 2; VII, 3).
- 20 The very title of chapter four foreshadows the aspect of renewal: “De speculatione Dei in sua imagine donis gratuitis reformata”—contemplation of God in his image renewed by the gifts of grace. The whole chapter is dominated by the expressions concerning the renewal (*reformare*), restoration (*reparare*) and recovery (*recuperare*) of the divine image of fallen man by Christ, the incarnate Truth and Mediator. In the first passages of this chapter, Bonaventure says: “Ideo totaliter in his sensibilibus iacens, non potest ad se tanquam ad Dei imaginem reintrare. (. . .) non potuit anima nostra perfecte ab his sensibilibus relevari ad contuitum sui et aeternae Veritatis in se ipsa, nisi Veritas, assumpta forma humana in Christo, fieret sibi scala *reparans* priorem scalam, quae fracta fuerat in Adam. (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 1–2). “qui etiam summus hierarcha est, purgans et illuminans et perficiens sponsam, scilicet totam Ecclesiam et quamlibet animam sanctam.” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 5).
- 21 In his earlier works, the *Commentary on the Sentences* and the *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure indicated only in general terms the relationship between the three divine virtues and the spiritual senses, without precisely assigning the five spiritual senses to each virtue. In the *Itinerarium*, he not only accomplishes this, but directly carries out the attribution without the interposition of the seven spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, the eight beatitudes and the twelve fruits of the Spirit. Presumably one reason for this could be precisely the pure triadic correspondence scheme.
- 22 We note this, at least from the subject’s point of view, because Bonaventure seems to relativise the importance of the objective aspect in the hierarchical ordering of the analysed passage. This can be seen in his use of two orders in his enumeration of the triple being of the Verbum. While the order at the beginning of the text is *Verbum incarnatum, increatum, inspiratum*, it is reversed in the course of the exposition and changes to the following sequence: *Verbum increatum, inspiratum, incarnatum*.
- 23 According to Bonaventure, through purification, enlightenment and perfection, the soul becomes hierarchical in the fourth degree of contemplation, which is achieved through the renewal of the image, the divine virtues, the spiritual senses and excesses. See: (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 4). He confirms this once more with his summary statement about the fourth degree of contemplation: “Manudicimur etiam per ipsius animae potentias reformatas, et hoc gratuitis virtutibus, sensibus spiritualibus et mentalibus excessibus; sicut patet ex quarto.” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 7).
- 24 “disponitur anima ad mentales excessus, scilicet per devotionem, admirationem et exultationem, secundum illas tres exclamationes, quae fiunt in Canticis canticorum. Quarum prima fit per abundantiam devotionis (...); secunda per excellentiam admirationis (...); tertia per superabundantiam exultationis (...).” (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 4). Bonaventure refers back to this triad in section 6 of the chapter as the triple excessus, which he links to the anagogic interpretation of Scripture in the following way: “anagogicam, quae perficit per excessus mentales et sapientiae perceptiones suavissimas, secundum virtutes praedictas tres theologicas et sensus spirituales reformatos et excessus tres supradictos”. (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin IV, 6).
- 25 The dominant key terms in chapter seven are the noun “transitus” and the verb “transire” with its derivatives. Including the title, they appear seven times in the text. In chapter four, they are used only once in the wording “ut transiens in illud per ecstaticum amorem”, which leads us to chapter seven. In the Preface to the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure states the aim of the *Itinerarium* as being to pass through the stages of contemplation and to bring the soul to peace through ecstatic excesses of Christian wisdom (ut transeat ad pacem per ecstaticos excessus sapientiae christianae). (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin Praef, 3). We note that, in addition to the transit of Christ and the spiritual transit of the spiritual man, Bonaventure also speaks of the transit of St. Francis in two different senses. On the one hand, the spiritual rapture of Francis (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin Praef, 2–3; VII, 3), and on the other hand, his bodily death as a transition, a transmigration (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin Praef, 2).
- 26 1 Cor 2:10: “this hidden wisdom was revealed by the Holy Spirit”. (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin VII, 4). Hidden wisdom (*mystica sapientia*) is identical with the concept of Christian wisdom (*sapientia christiana*) in the Preface. St Paul, in 1 Cor 2:7, speaks of the mysterious hidden wisdom of God, which he associates with the crucified Christ, whom he calls the wisdom of God. Ultimately, therefore, *mystica sapientia* and *sapientia christiana* are identical with the wisdom of the cross.
- 27 The Apostle Paul speaks of the “spiritual man” in this way in the same passage (1 Cor 2:13–16). The roots of Bonaventure’s use of the word go back to this passage when he claims that God calls every true spiritual man to the pilgrimage and rapture that accompanies the contemplation of the Crucified.
- 28 According to Bonaventure’s Christological and ecclesiological reading, the whole of Scripture is about Christ and the Church and their relationship: Christ as hierarch who renews and sanctifies his Church, who thus becomes hierarchical.
- 29 “Clavis ergo contemplationis est intellectus est triplex, scilicet intellectus Verbi increati, per quod omnia producuntur; intellectus Verbi incarnati, per quod omnia reparantur; intellectus Verbi inspirati, per quod omnia revelantur. Nisi enim quis possit

considerare de rebus, qualiter originantur, qualiter in finem reducuntur, et qualiter in eis refulget Deus; intelligentiam habere non potest.” (Bonaventura 1891b, Coll. in Hex III, 2).

- 30 Note that while spiritual perceptions prepare the soul (*anima*) for mental excesses, contemplation during the supra nos knowledge of God prepares the intellect, the mind (*intellectus*, *mens*), for transcending itself and, as a consequence, for complete mental excesses in love. “restat, ut haec speculando transcendat et transeat non solum mundum istum sensibilem, verum etiam semetipsam”. (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin VII, 1).
- 31 The last four passages of Chapter VI (Bonaventura 1891d, Itin VI, 4–7) actually explain the mystery of Christ as the mystery of the personal unity of the divine and human natures, which unites the mystery of the incomprehensible divine essence, the Trinity and creation.
- 32 Of course, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bonaventure makes several correct references to the works of Dionysius Areopagite, including his *Mystical Theology*. See, for example, (Bonaventura 1887, III Sent d. 35. a. 1., q. 1. resp; d. 24, a. 3, q. 2. dub. 4).

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