

God Is Love: An Investigation of Bonaventure's Theology of the Essential Love of God

THOMAS PIOLATA, O.F.M. CAP.
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

In his commentary on book I of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, Bonaventure argues that love is proper (*proprium*) to the Holy Spirit (d. 10, a. 2, q. 1). To formulate this position, he distinguishes between the way in which love can be said essentially, notionally, and personally.¹ Such a conceptual framework allows him to index love *personally* to the Holy Spirit, but in such a way that does not diminish or jeopardize the divine nature as *essentially* love. The theological refinement of this distinction, as Walter Principe has affirmed, played an important role in medieval Trinitarian theology and pneumatology: in particular, it helped theologians explicate coherently the way in which the Father and the Son can be said to love one another by the Holy Spirit (*Spiritu sancto*).²

¹ Bonaventure, *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1 (1:200–201). Citations from Bonaventure's works taken from vols. 1–10 of the Quaracchi edition of his *Opera Omnia*, and will be cited parenthetically by volume and page. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

² See Walter Principe, "St. Bonaventure's Theology of the Holy Spirit with Reference to the Expression 'Pater et Filius Diligunt Se Spiritu Sancto,'" in *S. Bonaventura 1274–1974*, vol. 4, *Theologica*, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1974), 243–69, at 250–51. According to Principe, "the elaboration [of this distinction] . . . was completed in the years before Bonaventure. . . . Hints of this distinction appear already in Robert of Melun, writing between 1155 and 1160, and appear in a number of other authors such as Peter of Poitiers, Praepositinus of Cremona, and William of Auxerre" (250). He also refers to Alexander of Hales and Albert the Great. In addition to Principe's references, I would add the early Franciscan

It is not, however, straightforwardly clear what Bonaventure means by essential love. Put succinctly, “essential love” refers to the love that is God’s essence, and hence common to the three divine persons. More specifically, Bonaventure says that love can be said essentially of God “because each [divine person] loves oneself [quia quilibet diligit se].”³ But how to unpack this further? This article answers this question, thereby shedding light on Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology. What follows thus constitutes a theological analysis of what it means to say that the divine being is *essentially* love.

This analysis thus seeks to clarify an aspect of Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology that has not yet been adequately explained. Indeed, a panorama of the secondary literature on this topic reveals a tapestry of varied, though not necessarily mutually exclusive, interpretations. In his seminal study on Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology, Albert Stohr writes: “The word ‘love’ comes into consideration for God in a threefold sense: essential, notional, and personal. In the first [sense], because each person loves oneself [sich selber liebt].”⁴ Does “essential love” thereby designate merely the self-love of the divine persons? Hyacinth Ennis, in an article on love in Bonaventure’s theology in general, puts it simply: “God is essentially love, love is the very substance of God.”⁵ That seems unproblematic, but it does not offer much in terms of a thorough explication. Similarly to both Stohr and Ennis, Zachary Hayes describes essential love as “that love which is found in all three persons by reason of their nature as God, by which they love themselves; it is divine love in the absolute sense.”⁶ Johannes Freyer describes essential love as that love “with which each of the three divine persons loves from oneself [aus sich selber liebt].”⁷ Freyer’s phrase “aus

Summa Halensis: see *Summa theologica*, vol. 1, *Liber primus* (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924), no. 307 (1:444b) and no. 460 (1:655–57).

³ See note 16 below.

⁴ Albert Stohr, *Die Trinitätslehre des heiligen Bonaventura* (Münster: Aschendorffschen, 1923), 149. Unless otherwise noted, translations of secondary literature in a language other than English are my own.

⁵ Hyacinth Ennis, “The Place of Love in the Theological System of St. Bonaventure in General,” in Bougerol, *S. Bonaventura 1274–1974*, 4:129–45, at 130.

⁶ Zachary Hayes, introduction to *Works of Saint Bonaventure*, vol. 3, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1979), 11–103, at 55. In a similar vein, Elizabeth Dreyer identifies essential love as that “by which each of the persons in the Trinity loves by himself” (“Affectus” in St. Bonaventure’s Theology,” *Franciscan Studies* 42 [1982]: 5–20, at 7).

⁷ Johannes Freyer, “Der Hl. Geist als Band der Liebe nach Bonaventura,” in *Das fränkische Verständnis des Wirkens des Heiligen Geistes in Kirche und Welt*, ed. Herbert

sich selber liebt" potentially nuances essential love conceived merely as self-love. More recently, Mary Melone importantly identifies essential love with *complacentia*: "[essential] love is understood as *complacentia*, that is, as the act with which each divine person loves himself. . . . The concept of essential love expresses the 'ontological power of loving and giving oneself, which is common to the three persons.'" ⁸ The reference to *complacentia*, as well as the notion of "giving oneself," effectively introduces alterity into the concept of essential love.

This synopsis of the secondary literature evinces that, while authors certainly know of the distinction among essential, notional, and personal love in Bonaventure's Trinitarian theology, it remains unclear precisely what essential love is for the Seraphic Doctor. To be fair, none of the studies cited in the previous paragraph take it as their goal to explicate the sense of "essential love" *secundum mentem Bonaventurae*. This fact, however, only accentuates that there is a gap in the literature. ⁹

Attending to this gap, however, should be of interest not only to the scholar of Bonaventure's thought. On a more general level, this gap is unfortunate for the simple reason that the threefold distinction of love as essential, notional, and personal constitutes a critical achievement of medieval theology. In a word, the refinement of this distinction is relevant to Trinitarian theology and pneumatology. For example, to grasp correctly the Holy Spirit as the love of the Father and Son or to make sense of the teaching, inherited from the Augustinian tradition, that "Pater et Filius diligunt se Spiritu sancto," this distinction is decisive. It provides a framework to think about the divine being *essentially* as love and about the Holy Spirit as *personally* love.

Even more broadly, this theological distinction is important because to reflect on God's essence as love is to reflect on what "[Jesus] revealed to us," namely that "God is love." ¹⁰ Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI, in his *Deus Caritas Est*, affirmed that 1 John 4:16—"God is love" (New American

Schneider (Mönchengladbach: B. Kühlen, 2005), 44–50, at 48.

⁸ Mary Melone, "'Spiritus Sanctus facit nos similes illi summa Trinitati.' La funzione intratrinitaria e l'agire salvifico dello Spirito nel pensiero di Bonaventura," in *Bonaventurianski System Myślenia: Pytanie o Aktualność, 1217–2017*, ed. Romuald Henryk Kośła (Kraków: Calvarianum, 2018), 121–42, at 128. Melone is citing Luigi Iammarone, "La struttura della vita trinitaria come amore in san Bonaventura," *Miscellanea Franciscana* 89 (1989): 315–34, at 324.

⁹ Admittedly, Bonaventure is terse on the topic. Such terseness evinces his own personal preoccupation not with the divine being *per se*, but rather with the divine being as a Trinity of persons, that is, with the tri-personal community of perfect divine unity.

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), §38.

Bible; used throughout)—expresses “the heart of the Christian faith”¹¹ and captures “the newness of biblical faith” itself.¹² Similarly, at an audience in 1985, Pope St. John Paul II foreshadowed Benedict’s synthesis: “These words [God is love] . . . constitute the keystone of truth about God. . . . The faith of the Church culminates in this supreme truth: *God is love*.”¹³ More recently, addressing the tenth anniversary of Benedict’s encyclical, Pope Francis re-emphasized that “God is love” is the “beating heart of our life and our witness,” as well as the “center of the proclamation of faith.”¹⁴ These remarks in effect attest to the importance of this medieval distinction, inasmuch as it can refine talk about God as love. After all, theology’s task is to render intelligible that which we believe (*credibile ut intelligibile*).¹⁵

In order to unpack and nuance Bonaventure’s theology of love as *essential* in God, I begin in the first section with a preliminary consideration of his description of essential love (“quia quilibet diligit se”). Therein, what I call the *heterologic character* of essential love begins to surface. Showing that Bonaventure’s description of essential love is not “selfish” or “ego-centric” is a key component of this study as a whole. Then, in my second section, I turn to the term *complacentia*, which Bonaventure uses to describe essential love. The meaning of this term deepens the sense of essential love’s heterologic character. Accordingly, these two sections show that essential love is not exclusively or merely self-love (“quilibet diligit se”), but involves alterity. In the third section, then, I analyze in more detail the relation between self-love and love of the other. To do so, I touch upon other important themes in Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology, namely, *circumincessio* and the relationality of divine personhood. The fourth section then attends to the relation among essential, notional, and personal love. In the fifth section, which functions as an *excursus*, I reflect on the theological relevance of this study by considering select implications.

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), §1.

¹² *Deus Caritas Est*, §9–10.

¹³ Pope John Paul II, general audience of October 2, 1985, §1 (italics in the original Italian).

¹⁴ Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the International Congress on The Encyclical ‘Deus Caritas Est’ of Benedict XVI on The Tenth Anniversary of Its Publication,” 2016.

¹⁵ See Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* 1.1.4 (5:210b); *In I sent.*, proem., q. 1, resp. (1:7ab).

Defining Essential Love (*In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1)

In d. 10, a. 2, q. 1, of his commentary on *Sentence* I, Bonaventure formulates how love can be said essentially, notionally, and personally:

It should be said that love [dilectio] in God can be taken and is necessarily taken essentially, notionally, and personally: essentially, because each loves oneself [quia quilibet diligit se]; notionally, because the Father and the Son harmonize [concordant] in spirating the Holy Spirit, which concord [concordia] is *amor* or *dilectio*; personally, because he who is produced through the mode of perfect liberality [per modum perfectae liberalitatis] cannot be anything other than *amor* or *dilectio*.¹⁶

This passage seems to convey that essential love is simply each person's love for oneself. Theologically, however, this position begs further questions. Is essential love in God selfish? Does the Father by himself love *only* himself? In a word: it seems that this definition of essential love is insufficient, if not problematic.

The problem lies, in part, in the ambiguous or even potentially misleading phrase "essentialiter, quia quilibet diligit se." Taken by itself, this phrase constitutes only an incomplete description of essential love, and does not quite capture the nuance of Bonaventure's thought. To understand more precisely what Bonaventure's position entails, this phrase—"quia quilibet diligit se"—cannot constitute the exclusive source for an elucidation of love said *essentialiter* of God.

A first hint that nuances Bonaventure's formulation lies in a reference to Augustine found in the critical edition of the text. After "quilibet diligit se," the editors of the *Opera Omnia* include a footnote which specifies that one of the codices here adds "*XV. c. 17. de Trin.*" This reference is helpful. In book 15 of his *De Trinitate*, Augustine wants to avoid any conclusion that would suggest that the divine persons cannot love except through the Holy Spirit. Augustine argues that the Father loves, the Son loves, and the Holy Spirit loves.¹⁷ From an earlier chapter of book 15,

¹⁶ *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1: "Dicendum, quod dilectio in divinis potest accipi et accipitur necessario essentialiter, notionaliter et personaliter: essentialiter, quia quilibet diligit se; notionaliter vero, quia Pater et Filius concordant in spirando Spiritum sanctum, quae concordia amor sive dilectio est; personaliter vero, quia ille qui producit per modum perfectae liberalitatis, non potest esse nisi amor sive dilectio" (1:201a).

¹⁷ St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.17.28: "So *God is charity*. But the question is whether it

Augustine maintains: “[Who would presume to say] that the Son does not remember either himself or the Father except through the Father, and only loves through the Holy Spirit?”¹⁸ This Augustinian background nuances Bonaventure’s formulation: it suggests not only that each person loves, but that the scope of each person’s love exceeds the person itself.

Fortunately, Bonaventure himself sheds helpful light on what he means just a few lines after his initial description. He asserts: “Hence, said essentially, [love] bespeaks delight [*complacentiam*].”¹⁹ The term *complacentiam* further illuminates the significance of essential love. While the essential love of God is not unrelated to the idea that each person loves himself,²⁰ *complacentia* ultimately deepens the significance of essential love. In brief, and this will be made clearer in what follows, it indicates that self-love in God is not so selfish.

The question to ask is: What does Bonaventure mean by *complacentia*? Although Bonaventure does not offer much by way of a definition in his response here, his treatment of one of the contrary arguments is relevant. Therein, Bonaventure avers that essential love “bespeaks the *complacentiam* of the will, by which each person [*quilibet*] loves and is loved.”²¹ This

is the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit or the triad, because this triad is not three Gods but one God. But now I have already argued earlier on in this book that the trinity which is God cannot just be read off from those three things which we have pointed out in the trinity of our minds, in such a way that the Father is taken as the memory of all three, and the Son as the understanding of all three, and the Holy Spirit as the charity of all three; as though the Father did not do his own understanding, or loving, but the Son did his understanding for him and the Holy Spirit his loving, while he only did the remembering for himself and for them; and the Son neither remembered nor loved for himself, but the Father did the remembering and the Holy Spirit the loving for him, while he only understood for himself and for them; and again the Holy Spirit neither remembered nor understood for himself, but the Father did the remembering and the Son the understanding for him, while he himself only did the loving for himself and for them. It is rather that all and each of them has all three things each in his own nature” (trans. Edmund Hill, 2nd ed. [Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2015], 422).

¹⁸ *De Trinitate* 15.7.11 (p. 404).

¹⁹ *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1, resp.: “Unde essentialiter dictum dicit *complacentiam*” (1:201a).

²⁰ See also *In I Sent.*, d. 10, dub. 3: “Furthermore, it should be noted that ‘to love’ is at times taken in a purely essential way, as when it is said: The Father loves himself”—“Propterea notandum, quod diligere aliquando tenetur pure essentialiter, ut cum dicitur: Pater diligit se” (1:206a).

²¹ *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4: “Ipse autem obicit de essentiali, qui non dicit egressum ab amante, sed solum dicit *complacentiam* voluntatis, qua quilibet amat et amatur” (1:201b).

definition—and I will attend in more detail to the meaning of *complacentia* in the successive section of this article—proffers a basic framework of essential love: each person loves and each person is loved. *Complacentia* endows essential love with a certain heterologic character: the essential love of God does not collapse into the personal hypostasis unable to see beyond the confines of its individuality. Rather, the love that is common to each divine person transcends hypostatic singularity: God is essentially loving and loved. Self-love, in other words, blossoms into love for the other.

One more aspect of Bonaventure's treatment here deserves comment. After having provided a brief description of love as essential, notional, and personal, Bonaventure goes on to provide a kind of metaphor (*exemplum*) to clarify further the distinction. He considers, that is, the love between spouses. This example further intimates the heterologic character of essential love. Bonaventure analyzes the phenomenon of human spousal love in order to find a correlate of essential, notional, and personal love in God. What concerns us here is how he perceives essential love in the example: "They love themselves [*diligunt se*] by a social love [*amore sociali*] for living together."²² This love corresponds to essential love. It refers to the love spouses share in order to live together. Implied, then, is a sense of intimacy and belonging to one another. Consequently, this example alone would confute an interpretation of essential love limited to a too-simplistic sense of self-love. Essential love is "social." A certain convergence inevitably surfaces: *diligere se* is simultaneously *amor socialis*.

The Meaning of *Complacentia*

What does Bonaventure mean by *complacentia*? In his *The Psychology of Love According to St. Bonaventure*, Robert Prentice explains that this love is an "alterocentric love." It "describes that aspect . . . wherein the lover accepts a person as he is, approves of him and takes complacency in his goodness."²³ To corroborate his explanation, Prentice footnotes a help-

²² *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 1, resp.: "Nam diligunt se amore sociali ad convivendum" (1:201a). Cf. Albert the Great, *In I sent.*, d. 10, C, a. 4, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 25, *Commentarii in I Sententiarum* (Dist. I–XXV), ed. Augusti Borgnet (Paris: Bibliopolam Editorem, 1893), 316–17.

²³ Robert Prentice, *The Psychology of Love According to St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1957), 97 (see also 132–34). See also Peter Fehlner, *The Role of Charity in the Ecclesiology of St. Bonaventure* (Rome: Miscellanea Franciscana, 1965), 132: "By the love of complacency is meant that love by which one rests and is delighted in something desired when it is present, for its own sake and not precisely because it is good for oneself, or for some other person."

ful passage from Bonaventure: "Someone loves another with the love of complacency [*amore complacentiae*] when he accepts his acts [*facta*] and approves of him [*ipsum approbat*] and delights in his goodness [*in bonitate eius complacet sibi*]." ²⁴ This passage further accentuates what I called above the heterologic character of essential love, which Bonaventure had identified as "delight" (*complacentiam*). Consequently, essential love entails a certain acceptance of and delight in the other: to love oneself (*diligere se*) is to delight in the other. The essential love of God, common to the three persons, thereby seems inseparable from their utter "acceptance" and "approval" of one another, their delighting in the infinite goodness of each other. *Amor complacentiae* is, to echo Prentice's terminology, an *altero-centric love*. Accordingly, to restrict essential love to the person's exclusive self-love seems too precipitous a conclusion that does not do justice to Bonaventure's more nuanced position.

Furthermore, such verbs as *to accept* (*acceper*) and *to approve* (*approbare*) recall Bonaventure's theology of the divine will, the *voluntas complacentiae*. In fact, in his treatment of the phrase "Pater et Filius diligunt se Spiritu sancto," Bonaventure remarks explicitly that "to love" can be taken essentially or notionally, and that taken essentially it refers to "the complacency of the will, which is common to the three."²⁵

The question thus emerges: What does this notion of the will mean? To answer it, I turn to Bonaventure's *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*. Therein, in his treatment of necessity, Bonaventure explicates this notion of the will. Specifically, he identifies three different modes of willing (*modus volendi*). He proffers such a distinction in order to pick out a mode of willing applicable to God's immanent life. The three modes of willing he distinguishes are: *voluntas accedens*, *voluntas antecedens*, and *voluntas concomitans et acceptans*. Only this third mode "is in God with respect to himself and with respect to the creature; for the divine will approves and accepts every good, whether created or uncreated, whether contingent or necessary."²⁶ He explains: "I say *voluntas acceptans* on behalf of the highest charity in the one producing [e.g., the Father] and the highest goodness in the product [e.g., the Son], which both necessarily include in themselves

²⁴ *In III sent.*, d. 29, dub. 4: "Amore complacentiae amat quis aliquem, quando eius facta acceptat et ipsum approbat et in bonitate eius complacet sibi" (3:653b). See also *In I sent.*, d. 17, p. 1, a. un., q. 2, resp. (1:297a), and d. 17, p. 1, dub. 1 (1:304a).

²⁵ *In I sent.*, d. 32, a. 1, q. 1, resp. (1:558a).

²⁶ *Quaestiones disputatae de mysterio Trinitatis* [*Myst. Trin.*], q. 7, a. 2, resp.: "Haec est in Deo respectu sui et respectu creati; approbat enim et acceptat voluntas divina omne bonum, sive creatum sive increatum, sive contingens sive necessarium" (5:110b).

the *voluntas complacentiae*.²⁷ This will is utterly accepting of every good. "The accepting will," writes Jared Goff, "has for its object primarily the infinite goodness of the divine being, and, secondarily, all other potential goods that can be realized by the divine power, *ad extra*."²⁸ Ultimately, then, the *voluntas complacentiae* reaches beyond the confines of the person. It is utterly accepting of the divine goodness, which entails the personal plurality of divine life.

Bonaventure's theology of the essential will of the divine being as *voluntas complacentiae* sheds light on the "social love" of the two spouses, which he had used as a metaphor to illustrate God's essential love. Put simply, the spouses accept and delight in the goodness of one another. Accordingly, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit accept one another and delight in one another's infinite goodness. Herein lies the fundamental meaning of essential love.

In his erudite study of Bonaventure's Trinitarian theology, Klaus Obenauer also makes this important connection between *amor essentialis* and the divine will:

According to d. 10, a. 2, q. 1, ad 4, the *amor essentialis* is the "complacentia voluntatis," "qua quilibet amat et ametur." According to d. 6, q. 2, resp., this will, as the *voluntas approbans*, aims itself at everything good, "whether it be necessary or contingent, created or uncreated, from another or not from another, as is clear."²⁹ This means, among other things, that the essential *voluntas* embraces everything in God, so that its bearer, as bearer of the *voluntas essentialis* can by no means only love himself, but rather must love all in God, including himself of course.³⁰

²⁷ *Myst. Trin.*, q. 7, a. 2, resp.: "Voluntas, inquam, acceptans propter summam caritatem in producente et summam bonitatem in producto, quae duo necessario claudunt in se voluntatem complacentiae" (5:111a). See also *In I sent.*, d. 6, a. un., q. 2 (1:127–28).

²⁸ Jared Goff, *Caritas in Primo: A Study of Bonaventure's Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2015), 270. See also 280: "Bonaventure's conception of the will as accepting posits that the fundamental act of freedom is not with respect to choosing between this or that particular finite good or an act that terminates in producing or effecting a desired entity or state of affairs *outside* of the being acting (*effectus*). Rather, it is the *spontaneous* power of the divine will to *accept* and *love* that goodness objectively present in the *same* divine being (*affectus*)."

²⁹ This quotation is from: *In I Sent.*, d. 6, q. 2, resp. (1:127b–128a). The *voluntas approbans* is the *voluntas acceptans* of *Myst. Trin.*, q. 7, a. 2.

³⁰ Klaus Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas: Zum Verhältnis von Einheit und Verschiedenheit*

In its utter acceptance of the good, the *voluntas complacentiae* betrays an almost ecstatic element by dint of the infinite goodness of Trinitarian life.

Self-Love and Love of the Other

In this section, I now turn to the following question: What is the relationship between self-love and love of the other in God? In other words, given that the persons love themselves—and this love correlates with the essential love of God (“quia quilibet diligit se”)—and given that this essential love of God also betrays in the persons a certain heterologic character, then what is the relationship between, for example, the Father’s love for himself and his love for another divine person?

The notion of the *complacentia voluntatis* helps to provide an answer, in that the essential love of God lovingly embraces everything that is good. The Father, then, accepts himself and the others. Nonetheless, at this point in the present investigation, I dive deeper into the structure of self-love. I inquire into how it unfolds heterologically—how it implicates love of the other.³¹

To begin, I consider a passage from Bonaventure’s commentary on the Gospel of Luke on the baptism of Jesus. In his explication of Luke 3:22, Bonaventure underscores that the Father says, “This is my *beloved* Son,” because the Father loves the Son supremely (*summe*). He continues:

And for a greater expression, it is added: “in you it has pleased me [in te complacuit mihi],” that is, everything [in you] pleases me [omne scilicet, quod placet]; and this on behalf of [propter] the most perfect *nexum* of love, which is between the Father and the

in der Dreieinigkeitslehre des heiligen Bonaventura (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 231. Obenauer takes his reflection further, and draws attention to Bonaventure’s theology of charity in general. Referring to *In III Sent.*, d. 29, q. 3, ad 4 (3:645a), he concludes: “In God, *caritas* is directed neither primarily toward the self nor primarily toward the other person, but rather toward both in unity [in einem]. Each person can love the other only if he loves [mitliebt] the ‘relational network’ [Beziehungsnetz] in which the other stands and which is constitutive for the other, which includes love for his own person. In other words, the other person is loved in God only when this love has as its object what the one essential delight [Wohlgefallen] in God Himself has as its object: namely, everything in God” (232). See also *In III Sent.*, d. 29, q. 3, ad 3 (3:645a).

³¹ In regards to this, I found extremely helpful Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 205–40. In what follows, I draw heavily from Obenauer’s study. In addition to Obenauer, I should also mention Fehlner’s insightful chapter “Perfect Love” in his *Role of Charity*, 111–44.

Son. Proverbs 3 [verse 12]: "As a father in the son pleases himself [in filio complacet sibi]."³²

In this passage, the citation from Proverbs is quite relevant. It suggests that the Father's love for himself is not altogether separable from his love for the Son. Indeed, as Bonaventure develops his exegesis, he states that Christ is the "Word most similar and expressive of the Father *and therefore most pleasing*."³³ The Word's maximal natural likeness to the Father becomes, in effect, another center of gravity of the Father's own self-love.³⁴ In loving himself, he cannot but love the Word who is his own expression and likeness.

In his commentary, Bonaventure explains what the different Gospels convey in their own particular formulation of the Father's words. Pertinent here is his explanation of Matthew's phrasing—"Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi complacui." To decipher the sense of this phrase, Bonaventure accentuates the heterologic character of essential love understood as *complacentia*: "Matthew alludes to the *complacentiam* of the Father with respect to the Word, insofar as he speaks himself in him [*dicit se in se*]; and therefore he says: '*In quo mihi complacui*.'"³⁵ Obenauer offers a stimulating reflection on this passage:

The Father finds himself anew in his Word expressed for himself and is pleased in this his Word. The love for the other appears as self-love: the lover pleases himself in the other [gefällt sich im anderen], in whom he sees himself again in the complete identity of nature ("Verbum simillimum").³⁶

³² *Commentarius in Evangelium S. Lucae* [*In Luc.*] 3, no. 55: "Et ad maiorem expressionem additur: *In te complacuit mihi*, omne scilicet, quod placet; et hoc propter perfectissimum nexum amoris, qui est inter Patrem et Filium; Proverbium tertio: 'Quasi pater in filio complacet sibi'" (7:84b).

³³ *In Luc.* 3, no. 56: "Christus sit Verbum Patris simillimum et expressivum, et ideo placitissimum" (7:84b).

³⁴ See also *Myst. Trin.*, q. 1, a. 2, ad 8: "To the intellect full with piety, however, it is very easy to think this of the supreme Father, that he should have an only-begotten [Son], *whom he loves as himself*"—"Intellectui tamen pietate pleno facillimum est illud sentire de summo Patre, quod Unigenitum habeat, *quem sicut se ipsum diligit* . . ." (5:57b; emphasis mine).

³⁵ *In Luc.* 3, no. 56: "Matthaeus insinuat complacentiam Patris respectu Verbi, in quantum dicit se in se; et ideo dicit: '*In quo mihi complacui*'" (7:84b).

³⁶ Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 210.

What I have called the heterologic character of self-love thus ultimately indicates a kind of ecstatic component.³⁷ The Father, in loving himself, is carried beyond himself, so to speak: the depth of each hypostasis “touches,” as it were, the others.³⁸ Love, said *essentialiter* of God, reveals that divine personhood is *not* locked in its own hypostasis. God’s essential love is manifested, in the persons, in a heterological manner.

Ultimately, understanding essential love in this way highlights the theology of *circumincessio/perichoresis*: the unity of the divine essence is a perichoretic unity.³⁹ The Father—as well as the Son and the Spirit—exists *in se* and *in* the other persons.

The whole essence of the Father is in himself, totally in the Son, totally in the Holy Spirit; and the whole essence of the Son is in himself, totally in the Father, and totally in the Holy Spirit; and the whole essence of the Holy Spirit is in the Father, totally in the Son, and totally in himself.⁴⁰

The Father, in loving himself, cannot but love the other persons: he is in them totally. Hence the heterologic character of essential love proposed in this study is inseparable from the theology of *circumincessio*. Divine persons are perichoretic persons. “He who sees one person, sees another.”⁴¹

Another important passage that illuminates the correlation between self-love and love of the other comes from the twenty-first collation of Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaemeron*. Therein, Bonaventure presents a perichoretic theology of the appropriations. There is no need here to enter

³⁷ See Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 234: “According to this perspective, the person itself is realized [gewinnt sich] only through its love for the other person: its loving self-relation is ecstatically mediated.” Cf. Fehlner, *Role of Charity*, 134.

³⁸ And ultimately, this “carrying beyond” is manifested in the—hypostatic—love (the Holy Spirit) that proceeds “ab alio in alium” (*In I sent.*, d. 13, a. un., q. 1, fund. 4 [1:231a]).

³⁹ On Bonaventure’s use of *circumincessio*, see Luc Mathieu, “Circumincessio,” in *Lexique Saint Bonaventure*, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Paris: Éditions Franciscaines, 1969), 33–34; Mary Melone, “Circumincessio,” in *Dizionario Bonaventuriano*, ed. Ernesto Caroli (Padova: Editrici Franciscane, 2008), 230–31.

⁴⁰ *Collationes in Hexaemeron* [Hex.] 21.19: “Tota essentia Patris in se ipso, tota in Filio, tota in Spiritu sancto; et tota essentia Filii in se ipso, tota in Patre, tota in Spiritu sancto; et tota essentia Spiritus sancti in Patre, tota in Filio, tota in se ipso” (5:434b). See also Hex. 21.2 (5:431b); *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* [Itin.] 6.2 (5:311a).

⁴¹ *Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis* [In Ioann.] 17, no. 11 (6:470a). Similarly, the persons are “inseparable”; see *Myst. Trin.*, q. 1, a. 2, resp. (5:55a).

into the thickets of this complicated yet extremely rich text. I simply want to draw attention to the following set of appropriations: *pious, verus, sanctus*. In his treatment of these three attributes, Bonaventure asserts:

And according to these three, God is the pious worshipper of himself, the true professor of himself, and the holy lover of himself; and each person relates to himself [habet se ad se] and to the other [ad alteram] in a pious, true, and holy manner [pie, vere, sancte]: so that the Father is pious toward himself, pious toward the Son, pious toward the Holy Spirit, and true and holy, and so on with the others.⁴²

God, who is essentially pious, true, and holy, is these things *as* Trinity. Essential attributes are Trinitarian attributes. Hence, if God is a holy lover of himself, then it is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who are holy lovers: *ad se* and *ad alteram*. In effect, the Seraphic Doctor here fastens into a synthesis love of oneself (*ad se*) with love for the other (*ad alteram*).

This passage, however, is also interesting because—given the context and structure of *Hexameron* 21—*sanctus* is ultimately an appropriation of the Holy Spirit. Obenauer thus avers that each person is a *sanctus amator* “in the Holy Spirit”; the mystery of self-love is mediated by the Spirit.⁴³ In fact, this interpretation would seem to shed light on the passage from the commentary on the Gospel of Luke above: “In you it has pleased me [in te complacuit mihi], . . . and *this on behalf of the most perfect nexum of love* [= the Holy Spirit], which is between the Father and the Son.”⁴⁴

The intrinsic coherence and mutual—perichoretic—interpenetration between self-love and love of the other is further corroborated by

⁴² *Hex.* 21.7: “Et secundum haec tria Deus est pius cultor sui, verus professor sui, sanctus amator sui; et quaelibet persona habet se ad se pie, vere, sancte et ad alteram: ut Pater pie ad se, pie ad Filium, pie ad Spiritum sanctum, et vere et sancte, et sic de aliis” (5:432b). See also Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 233–34.

⁴³ See Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 234: “Perhaps Bonaventure arrived at the insight that, in God, self-love (and the self-relation of the person in general) is coordinated [gleichzuordnen ist] to the relationship with the other person. The consequence of such an approach would be to consider the Holy Spirit as the love proceeding toward one and all other persons [zur eigenen und zu allen anderen Personen]. In the context of *Hexameron* 21.7, it would in any case be evident to understand each person as behaving (toward themselves and toward the other persons [zu sich und zu den anderen Personen]) as a *sanctus amator in the Holy Spirit*, whereby self-love would thus be mediated through the Spirit” (emphasis original).

⁴⁴ *In Luc.* 3, no. 55 (7:84b; emphasis mine). See note 32 above.

Bonaventure's theology of the constitution of divine personhood. In an important discussion concerning the relation between generation and paternity, Bonaventure argues that the Father is the Father because he generates.⁴⁵ In the course of his treatment, Bonaventure states that the property of paternity, while not "acquired" through an act, "inheres through the act" ("inest per actum").⁴⁶ Relations are *in act*.⁴⁷ The Father generates and "is that generation."⁴⁸ In light of this account of divine personhood, it follows that the Father cannot love himself ("diligere se") if he does not concurrently love his act of generation and spiration; it would otherwise be fundamentally incoherent. To echo Romano Guardini, "[the Father] is not Father in himself and for himself."⁴⁹ The divine persons, in other words, betray ecstatic relationality: hypostatic singularity realizes itself heterologically. Ultimately, the gravity of act—that is, the stress on generation as primitive in Bonaventure's account of the Father—manifests the heterologic character of Trinitarian personhood, and thus of essential love. To quote J. A. Wayne Hellmann's seminal study on Bonaventure: "A person cannot exist alone."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ See *In I Sent.*, d. 27, p. 1, a. un., q. 2 (1:468–72). On the significance of this discussion, see Russel Friedman, "The Makings of a Trinitarian Controversy: Aquinas and Bonaventure on Relations, Emanations, and Personal Distinction," in his *Intellectual Traditions at the Medieval University: The Use of Philosophical Psychology in Trinitarian Theology among the Franciscans and Dominicans 1250–1350*, vol. 1 (Boston: Brill, 2013), 50–89.

⁴⁶ *In I sent.*, d. 27, p. 1, a. un., q. 2, ad 2: "Unde sicut actus generationis est aeternus, ita et proprietates paternitatis aeterna. Unde quamvis non acquiratur per actum, inest tamen per actum" (1:470a).

⁴⁷ Bonaventure's position would cohere well with Thomas Weinandy, who has argued that the divine persons, though designated by nouns (e.g., "Father"), are better conceived as verbs: "[the divine persons] are relations in act and only relations in act. As designating subsistent relations or relations fully in act, the terms 'Father,' 'Son,' and 'Holy Spirit' are therefore *verbs*, for they refer to, define, and name . . . the *interrelated acts* by which all three persons are who they are" (*Does God Suffer?* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000], 118; emphasis original). See also Weinandy, *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 467–69.

⁴⁸ *Myst. Trin.*, q. 3, a. 2, resp. (5:76a).

⁴⁹ Romano Guardini, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Würzburg: Werkbund, 1953), 45.

⁵⁰ Hellmann continues: "A person must either be an origin for a second person or take its origin from a first. So this means that a person is incommunicable, but this incommunicability can only exist in a communion of persons where there is giving and receiving" (*Divine and Created Order in Bonaventure's Theology*, trans. Jay M. Hammond [St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2001], 49–50).

The Relationship Among Essential, Notional, and Personal Love

The reflection thus far has demonstrated that essential love is ultimately heterologic (perichoretic): self-love (“diligere se”), in terms of the divine persons, includes in its fundamental framework love for the other. In this fourth section, to flesh out in more detail this investigation of Bonaventure’s theology of love said essentially of God, I offer some brief speculative remarks concerning the inner structure and, in a qualified sense, continuity among essential, notional, and personal love.

I begin with a quotation from Bonaventure’s *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*: “Again, more perfect is unity, in which with a unity of nature there remains a unity of charity [unitas caritatis]; but ‘charity reaches forth toward another’: therefore, it includes the distinction of the one loving and the beloved [diligentis et dilecti].”⁵¹ In these words, Bonaventure avers that a unity of charity renders more perfect a unity of nature. For the Seraphic Doctor, the Christian revelation of the personal God who is a communion of three persons perfects the conception of a mere unity of nature without the intrinsic dynamic of love.⁵² Ultimately, the Holy Spirit—the *completio Trinitatis*—reveals the perfection of divine unity: unity of love (*unitas caritatis*).⁵³ Therefore, to contemplate the mystery of God’s essential unity is to enter into the mystery of the God who is love, and thus into the mystery of the divine persons. In the *unitas caritatis*, as Obenauer observes, “the divine unity possesses its form of completion [Vollendungsgestalt].”⁵⁴

⁵¹ *Myst. Trin.*, q. 2, a. 2, fund. 9: “Item, perfectior est unitas, in qua cum unitate naturae manet unitas caritatis; sed ‘caritas ad alium tendit’: ergo includit distinctionem diligentis et dilecti” (5:63a).

⁵² It seems that a point of contact could here be established with the thesis advanced by Karl Rahner when he argues that relations in the Trinity “are as absolutely *real* as other determinations; and an ‘apologetics’ of the ‘immanent’ Trinity should not start from the false assumption that a lifeless self-identity without any mediation is the most perfect way of being of the absolute existent” (*The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel [New York: Herder and Herder, 1970], 103).

⁵³ See Thomas Piolata, “*Unitas caritatis*: Explicating an Implicit Reference to the Spirit in Bonaventure’s *Quaestiones disputatae de mysterio Trinitatis*,” in *Ut bon(a)venturian)i fiamus: Studies in St. Bonaventure on the Occasion of the 800th Anniversary of His Birth*, ed. Miran Špelič, Nena Bobovnik and Jan Dominik Bogata (Ljubljana: University Ljubljana Press; Rome: Edizioni Quarrachi, 2022), 135–51. The explicit identification of *completio Trinitatis* with the Holy Spirit comes from Richard of St. Victor’s *De tribus appropriatis*; see *Opusculum Théologiques*, ed. Jean Ribailier (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1967), 183–84.

⁵⁴ Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 208.

With this in mind, how might we think of the relationship among essential love, notional love, and personal love? To see how these three relate, I consider, albeit briefly, select features of Bonaventure's treatment of the theology of the phrase "Pater et Filius diligunt se Spiritu sancto."

Love [diligere] can be taken essentially or notionally. Insofar as it is taken essentially, then it bespeaks the *voluntatis complacentiam*, which is common to the three. Insofar as it is taken notionally, then it bespeaks the *voluntatis fecunditatem ad productionem personam ex se*. This fecundity is only in two [the Father and the Son who are prior in the order of origins], even though the will is in three.⁵⁵

The *voluntas complacentia* realizes a certain, as it were, concentrated gravity in the Father and the Son, inasmuch as in them the will is fecund. This fecundity manifests itself in the production of *amor personalis*. "The Father and the Son love one another by the Holy Spirit, that is to say: by being in harmony together [invicem concordando] they spirate the Holy Spirit, or by spirating the Holy Spirit they are connected together."⁵⁶

In the course of his treatment, moreover, Bonaventure draws from Richard of St. Victor's *Quomodo Spiritus Sanctus est amor Patris et Filii*. In this text, the Victorine states that, since the human soul is—unlike God—not love, then it can love only from a love that comes forth from it. Richard's point is that the human soul cannot love *se ipso*—by means of itself—because the human soul is not essentially love.⁵⁷ In God, the matter is different. The Father is love, and thus can love *se ipso*. But love is ultimately ecstatic (*egressus*).⁵⁸ In God, the inclination of love that stretches forth (*tendere*) toward the other is thus hypostatic. The Father loves *se ipso*, yes, but this love reaches its fulfillment, so to speak, hypostatically in the *amor personalis* that is the Spirit. The Father's love does not remain in the

⁵⁵ *In I sent.*, d. 32, a. 1, q. 1, resp.: "Nam hoc quod est diligere potest teneri essentialiter, vel notionaliter. Secundum quod tenetur essentialiter, sic dicit voluntatis complacentiam, quae communis est tribus. Secundum quod tenetur notionaliter, sic dicit voluntatis fecunditatem ad producendam personam ex se, quae quidem fecunditas solum est in duobus, quamvis voluntas sit in tribus" (1:558a).

⁵⁶ *In I sent.*, d. 32, a. 1, q. 1, ad 1.2.3: "Pater et Filius diligunt se Spiritu sancto, hoc est, invicem concordando spirant Spiritum sanctum, vel spirando Spiritum sanctum invicem connectuntur" (1:558b).

⁵⁷ See *In I sent.*, d. 32, a. 1, q. 2, ad 1.2 (1:561ab).

⁵⁸ See *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 2, q. 3, resp. (1:204b).

will, as in the case of human love, but is manifested perfectly and infinitely in the Spirit.⁵⁹

The *fecunditas voluntatis*—which corresponds to the notional love of the Father and Son who spirate the Holy Spirit—cannot be, in the final analysis, totally abstracted from essential love. Some recourse to the essence is needed. Indeed, Bonaventure himself asserts that the will in the Father and the Son is one, “because the Father and the Son are one in substance.”⁶⁰ They constitute together *one* principle of spiration. Bonaventure says that they spirate the Spirit insofar as they are *unus Deus improcessibilis*: insofar as they are one (*unus*), there is unity of will (*unitas voluntatis*); insofar as they are *improcessibilis*, there is the *una fecunditas voluntatis*.⁶¹ Bonaventure thereby says that the Father and Son are *principium* of the Holy Spirit—*principium* said in reference “to the nature and spirative power” (“ad naturam et vim spirativam”).⁶² “Therefore, when it is said: the Father and Son are one principle [of spiration], ‘one’ bespeaks the unity of the notion [i.e., of the notional act of spiration] in reference [in comparatione] however to the unity of nature and spirative power.”⁶³

Bonaventure develops this theology further when he explains that the Father and Son, while one principle, do not however constitute one *spirator*. In other words: two *spiratores* but only one *principium*. Briefly put, and without plunging into the details of Bonaventure’s argumentation, he discusses how the term *spiratio* can be said either in reference to the *subjects*

⁵⁹ See *In I sent.*, d. 10, a. 1, q. 2, ad 2 (1:198a).

⁶⁰ *In I sent.*, d. 11, q. 2, resp.: “Una autem est in Patre et Filio voluntas, quia Pater et Filius sunt una substantia” (1:215b). Once again, most helpful in writing this section was Obenauer, *Summa Actualitas*, 236–40.

⁶¹ *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 1, resp. (1:513b).

⁶² *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 1, resp. (1:513b).

⁶³ *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 1, ad 1: “Cum ergo dicitur: Pater et Filius sunt unum principium, unum dicit unitatem notionis, in comparatione tamen ad unitatem naturae et vis spirativae” (1:513b). See also *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 1, fund. 3: “Again, the Father and the Son spirate: either therefore with one power, or with two. It is evident that [they spirate] with one, because since one is the essence in them, there is also one power; therefore, since the three are said to be a principle by reason of power [ratione potentiae], and one is the power in the Father and the Son, it is clear, etc.”—“Item, Pater et Filius spirant: aut ergo una potentia, aut duabus. Constat quod una, quia cum una est in eis essentia, et et una potentia: ergo cum tres dicantur esse principium ratione potentiae, et una sit potentia in Patre et Filio, patet etc.” (1:512a). Obenauer comments: “Even though *voluntas* is expressed only indirectly (*in obliquo*)—*fecunditas voluntatis*—without it in its unity, the unity in the fruitfulness and the notion (= *spiratio activa*) cannot be understood” (*Summa Actualitas*, 237).

of the verb “to spirate” or in reference to the *activity*.⁶⁴ There are two subjects who spirate—the Father and the Son—yet there is one *principium*, which term bespeaks origin, of the spiration.⁶⁵ Bonaventure explains the oneness of *principium* as follows:

And since the subject acts through power [virtutem], and power regards the nature [respicit naturam], since nature and power in the Father and the Son is one and not multiplied, the notion of spiration is signified through this name *principium* as in no way multiplied. Therefore we say: the Father and the Son are one principle [unum principium] of the Holy Spirit, so that *unum* bespeaks the unity of notion and of the spirative power and of the nature in those spirating.⁶⁶

The point to highlight is this: the Father and the Son act—spirate—as one principle. Their oneness, in this regard, bespeaks the unity of nature and power: “and of the nature in those spirating.” This unity of nature

⁶⁴ See *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 2, resp.: “Wherefore it should be noted that the notion can be signified in two ways, namely in the abstract and in the concrete: in the abstract, as when it is said *spiratio*; in the concrete, as when it is said *principium vel spirator*. In the concrete, however, it can be signified either in relation to the subject in the mode of a supposit, or in relation to the subject in an active mode, or in both ways”—“Propter quod notandum, quod notio potest significari dupliciter, scilicet in abstractione et in concretione: in abstractione, ut si dicatur *spiratio*; in concretione, ut si dicatur *principium vel spirator*. In concretione autem potest significari vel in comparatione ad subiectum in ratione supposit, vel in comparatione ad subiectum in ratione activi, vel utroque modo” (1:515b).

⁶⁵ See *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 2, resp.: “Therefore, the notion of spiration is signified in the concrete in relation to the subject in the mode of a supposit through the noun *spirator*, which is a verbal noun. And because the supposit of this notion is a person—and not one person, but two—we therefore say two *spiratores*, not one. . . . For the notion is signified in relation to the subject in an active mode, as through the noun *principium*, which bespeaks origin”—“Significatur igitur notio spirationis in concretione in comparatione ad subiectum in ratione suppositi per hoc nomen *spirator*, quod es nomen verbale. Et quia suppositum huius notionis est persona et non una persona, sed duae, ideo dicimus duos *spiratores*, non unum. . . . Significatur enim notio in comparatione ad subiectum in ratione activi, ut per hoc nomen *principium*, quod dicit originem” (1:515b–16a).

⁶⁶ *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 2, resp.: “Et quoniam subiectum agit per virtutem, et virtus respicit naturam, cum in Patre et Filio sit una natura et una virtus non multiplicata; per hoc nomen *principium* significatur notio spirationis ut nullo modo multiplicata. Ideo dicimus: Pater et Filius sunt unum *principium* Spiritus sancti, ut unum dicat unitatem notionis et vis spirativae et naturae in spirantibus” (1:516a).

cannot but be related to essential love; as Bonaventure says elsewhere: "Love [dilectio] can be taken essentially and bespeak the supreme unity of the Father and Son," and this supreme unity is "unity in essence."⁶⁷ Accordingly, their notional activity is not altogether abstracted from their essential unity. The Father and Son spirate "by a single spiration and a single power and *in unitate naturae*."⁶⁸

Here, I refer once again to the quotation with which this section began: "more perfect is unity, in which with a unity of nature there remains a unity of charity." The Father and Son spirate in the unity of nature and in this spiration, such unity—which originates in the Father (*principium totius divinitatis*)—realizes its complete perfection in the Spirit.

To bring this section to a close, I turn to another passage from the *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*. In his treatment on divine unity, Bonaventure responds to an argument that held that, in God, there are a plurality of truths (e.g., that the Father generates, that the Holy Spirit proceeds). Such a plurality of truths, however, is repugnant to the concept of highest unity. In his response to this argument, Bonaventure grants that, in one way—in terms of what he calls the *veritas complexi*—there are in fact a plurality of truths. For example: it is true that the Father generates; it is also true that the Holy Spirit proceeds, and so on. Yet, in terms of the truth of the thing or reality (*veritas rei*), the argument fails, because the truth in God is one. In his own words: "That the Father generates, and that the Son is generated, and that the Holy Spirit proceeds is not something other than: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are [esse], and one is in them *esse*."⁶⁹ The divine being *is* the Trinity: the divine being *is* the

⁶⁷ *In Ioann.* 5, no. 46: "Dilectio enim accipitur essentialiter et dicit unitatem summam Patris ad Filium; et quia summa est unitas in essentia" (6:311a).

⁶⁸ *In I sent.*, d. 29, a. 2, q. 2, ad 1 (1:516a). If they did not spirate *in unitate naturae*, one could not conceive of the Spirit as being of the same divine essence as the Father and the Son.

⁶⁹ *Myst. Trin.*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 15: "quia Patrem generare, et Filium generari, et Spiritum sanctum procedere non est aliud quam Patrem et Filium et Spiritum sanctum esse, et unum est in eis esse" (5:67b). In a similar vein, Bonaventure's theology of *summa actualitas* at *Myst. Trin.*, q. 6, a. 2, resp. is also significant: "Highest actuality is through [being's] full conversion over itself in knowing and in loving, and understanding includes a word, and love includes a *nexum*; [and] just as it is not only not repugnant to, but rather harmonious with the immutability of the First Principle that it know and love itself, so it is also harmonious that it generate a Word and spirate Love."—"Actualitas summa est per plenam conversionem eiusdem supra se intelligendo et amando, et intellectus includit verbum, et amor includit nexum; sicut immutabilitati primi principii non solum non repugnat se ipsum intelligere et amare, quin potius est consonans, sic non repugnat, immo consonat generare Verbum et spirare Amorem" (5:104b). The actuality

dynamic life of generation and spiration, and hence *is* hypostatically three. Accordingly, divine unity is manifested in the mystery of triune plurality. What is essential in God is *not* something different from the reality of the three divine persons.

Bonaventure hints at this mystery also in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, when he discusses the Holy Trinity. He speaks of the

purity of goodness, *quae est* the pure act of the principle who in charity loves with a love that is gratuitous, with a love that is due, and with a love that is a mixture of both, *quae est* the most full diffusion through the mode of nature and of will, *quae est* the diffusion through the mode of the Word . . . and through the mode of the Gift.⁷⁰

The repetition of *quae est* is striking. The purity of goodness—the divine being—*is* the intrinsic life of love of the Holy Trinity.

When we speak, then, of something like the essential love of God, we cannot limit our gaze to the divine essence apart from its Trinitarian life. At the same time, when we speak of something like notional love (i.e., spiration), we cannot consider it wholly abstracted from God's essential love.

Theological Relevance and Implications

Before concluding this study, I here reflect on the theological relevance of what has hitherto been explored. In particular, I consider select implications of this study and thereby touch upon how it might be developed further in different areas.

Thinking about the Divine Essence Relationally

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, Pope Benedict XVI, in *Deus Caritas Est*, maintained that the revelation of God as love constitutes the “newness of biblical faith.” This newness reveals that the “metaphysical image of God” as “the absolute and ultimate source of all being . . . is at the

of the essence is manifested and realizes itself in the intrinsic generation of the Word and spiration of Love.

⁷⁰ *Itin.*, 6.2: “Si igitur potes mentis oculo contueri puritatem bonitatis, quae est actus purus principii caritative diligentis amore gratuito et debito et ex utroque permixto, quae est diffusio plenissima per modum naturae et voluntatis, quae est diffusio per modum Verbu, in quo omnia dicuntur, et per modum Doni, in quo cetera dona donantur” (5:311a).

same time a lover with all the passion of a true love.”⁷¹ Bonaventure’s theology of “essential love” can provide a certain framework for contemplating anew the “newness of biblical faith.” That “God is love” does not mean only that God loves us, but that the very essence of God is love.

As this study has stressed, God’s essential love—“God is love”—implies alterity, inasmuch as essential love is *amor complacentiae*, and thus heterologic in its orientation. “To love,” to quote Hellmann, “cannot be said of an essence but only of a person. No person can be alone in love, but rather in a community which is a plurality of persons.”⁷² Metaphysically, the point is striking: if God is not triune, God cannot be perfect, infinite love.

The “newness of biblical faith” introduces heterology (i.e., alterity), within the *actus purus* that is the First Principle. To be absolute is to be in relation: “supreme co-intimacy, by which one [person] is in the other necessarily *per summam circumincessionem*.”⁷³ Accordingly, Bonaventure invites us to think about the essential unity of God relationally. To contemplate God as love is to contemplate triune relationality. Christian metaphysics reveals unity as triune. “God is love” because God is Trinity.

The Spousal Imagery of God’s Essential Love and Its “Perfection”

Bonaventure’s example of two spouses to adumbrate the threefold distinction of love merits further reflection. Two spouses love one another by a social love (essential love in God). In addition to this social love, they also love one another with a conjugal love (notional love in God). Such love brings forth a child (personal love, namely, the Holy Spirit). It would be promising here to reflect phenomenologically on how a child impacts spousal love. And I am using “impact” intentionally: the word comes from *impingere*, to impress, or perhaps even more literally, to paint or decorate into. In brief, a child impresses herself into and embroiders her parents’ social love for one another: a child reshapes, alters, strengthens, buttresses, vitalizes, and amplifies spousal love.

In some way, then, might we say that love said *personaliter* (the Holy Spirit)—love breathed forth from the Father into the Son and from the Son into the Father—adds something “more” to essential love? Aware of the difficulty and utter inadequacy of the term “more,” the answer nonetheless seems to be: yes. There is, to be sure, no Father–Son dyadic divinity *apart from* the Spirit: The Son is generated “as beloved” (*ut dilectus*).⁷⁴

⁷¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §10.

⁷² Hellmann, *Divine and Created Order*, 43.

⁷³ *Itin.*, 6.2 (5:311a).

⁷⁴ *In I Sent.*, d. 6, a. un., q. 2, resp. (1:128a).

Indeed, the Holy Spirit, so affirms Bonaventure, as the *ratio terminantis complementis* “terminates the divine persons.”⁷⁵

“More perfect is unity, in which with a unity of nature there remains a unity of charity.” The Spirit, *unitas caritatis*, perfects the *unitas naturae*.⁷⁶ In addition to a possible point of convergence with an intuition of Rahner alluded to above,⁷⁷ this Bonaventuran perspective dovetails nicely with Ratzinger’s contention that, “to him who believes in God as tri-une, the highest unity is not the unity of inflexible monotony. . . . The authentic acme of unity is the unity created by love.”⁷⁸ Indeed, for Bonaventure, that which is most perfect is most communicative.⁷⁹

Anthropological Considerations: Guardini and Marcel

As secularism precipitates the forgetfulness of God, the human person continues to forget who she herself is. As Guardini has eloquently described, when the human person—who *is* image (*Ebenbild*)—loses sight of God—the imaginal origin (*Urbild*)—then she loses sight of her own self. Commenting on the drama of Gen 3, Guardini writes: “Now begins the bitter story of the human being, who no longer knows his name, because he has betrayed that name, in which his own is grounded. He goes around and asks: Who am I? And he receives no answer.”⁸⁰ Forgetfulness of self is concurrent with the self’s forgetfulness of God. Guardini’s analysis effectively reminds us that to reflect on God—on the biblical revelation that God is love—befits the human condition. “When we call [nennen] God correctly, then do we call ourselves correctly.”⁸¹

⁷⁵ *Hex.*, 1.12 (5:331b).

⁷⁶ I think here of a relevant passage from Mary Melone’s important study on the pneumatology of Richard of St. Victor’s *De Trinitate*: “The Holy Spirit is not simply the ‘fruit’ of a desire for communion, but has a character of *fulfillment*, inasmuch as it represents the perfection of charity, which is ontologically the essence of God. Naturally, this fulfillment does not have a chronological or causal value: it is not the condition of God’s perfection. The fulfillment is rather to be understood in a dynamic sense: within the perfect charity that is God, the superabundant fullness of perfection is guaranteed and manifested by the *condilectio*” (*Lo Spirito Santo nel De Trinitate de Riccardo di S. Vittore* [Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 2001], 245–46; emphasis original).

⁷⁷ See note 52 above.

⁷⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 179.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., *Breviloquium* 1.3.2 (5:211a).

⁸⁰ Romano Guardini, *Gebet und Wahrheit: Meditationen über das Vaterunser* (Kevelaer: Verlagsgemeinschaft topos plus, 2019), 51.

⁸¹ Guardini, *Gebet und Wahrheit*, 58.

In light of Guardini's remarks, the present study would invite us to contemplate the *relational* meaning of human personhood itself—made in the image of God—and to refine our own conceptions of what self-realization entails.⁸² The heterologic and perichoretic dynamic of Trinitarian personhood, *Urbild* of the *Ebenbild*, offers a specific “paradigm of what it means to be a person.”⁸³

In this regard, Bonaventure's theology explored above would cohere well with the relational anthropology of Gabriel Marcel. For the twentieth-century Catholic existentialist, the person that remains locked within the enclosure of its own self never fully actualizes the true depth of personhood. Such a self, trapped within the “illusion of moral egocentricity,”⁸⁴ remains “unawakened.”⁸⁵ On the contrary, “the essential characteristic of the person is . . . availability [disponibilité]. This . . . means . . . an aptitude to give oneself to anything which offers, and to bind oneself by the gift.”⁸⁶

Trinitarian personhood is fully “awakened.” In effect, the *Urbild*, manifesting perichoretic intimacy, shatters the mirage that the *Ebenbilds* flourishing could consist either in distancing oneself from the other to protect one's own subsistence or in obsessing over the drama of oneself. “The overstepping of the singular,” writes Ratzinger, “is implicit in the concept of person.”⁸⁷

Hence to “love” oneself by closing oneself is self-belittling and toxic.

⁸² In an incisive passage, Guardini remarks: “We are certain [gewiß] of our nature only when we know [wissen] about God. Let us look at history, how man, as soon as he loses sight of God, answers the question about himself. One says: man is differentiated matter. The other: he is the autonomous lord of his being. A third: he is identical with the Absolute. Another: man is indeed a finitely priced being, but he stands in terrible freedom and must in every moment determine his own being. Lastly: he is nothing other than a function of society, an instrument of the state” (*Gebet und Wahrheit*, 56).

⁸³ See Robert Sokolowski, “Language, The Human Person, and Christian Faith,” in his *Christian Faith & Human Understanding: Studies on the Eucharist, Trinity, and the Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 165–78, at 178: “[The Divine Persons'] personhood consists . . . in donating and receiving [their nature], in being thus related to one another. In Christian faith, the Divine Trinity of Persons in one Nature, one Being, becomes the paradigm of what it means to be a person. Our way of being persons, distributed as it is singularly among individuals, is now seen to be only a derivative form.”

⁸⁴ Gabriel Marcel, “The Ego and Its Relation to Others,” in *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2010), 7–22, at 14.

⁸⁵ Marcel, “Ego,” 17.

⁸⁶ Marcel, “Ego,” 17.

⁸⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 180.

Rather, love of self is enfolded within the commandment to love our neighbor.⁸⁸ Love is an *exire in alium*:⁸⁹ love does not collapse centripetally in the self, but stretches forth to the other. And without love, the self cannot reach its own fruition. The soul lives through love (see 1 John 3:14).⁹⁰ Human personality can never realize itself in the act—or better, *anti-act*—of self-enclosure. “The being who is ready for anything is the opposite of him who is occupied or cluttered up with himself. He reaches out . . . beyond his narrow self, prepared to consecrate his being to a cause which is greater than he is, but which at the same time he makes his own.”⁹¹

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to unpack and nuance Bonaventure’s theology of love said essentially of God. In so doing, it attended to a gap in the secondary literature on the Seraphic Doctor, and thus shed light on an important medieval discussion relevant to Trinitarian theology and pneumatology, and to the ever-significant doctrine that “God is love.”

Specifically, this study inquired into Bonaventure’s description of essential love as each divine person’s love of oneself (“quilibet diligit se”). I showed that this formulation is more nuanced than it may at first appear. It does not, that is, connote a kind of selfishness. Bonaventure compares essential love to “social love” and identifies it with *amor complacentiae*. As such, alterity is built into the framework of essential love. Indeed, in loving himself, the Father also loves the Son. Love said essentially of God thus manifests the theological dynamic of *circumincessio*. The divine persons are in one another totally. After discussing essential love and the way in which self-love implicates love of the other in the first three sections of this study, I then turned to the relationship between essential, notional, and personal love. In that section, I reflected on the perfecting love of the Holy Spirit (*unitas caritatis*) and the Father’s and Son’s spiration—as *unum principium*—of the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁸ See, e.g., *In III sent.*, d. 28, a. un., q. 6, ad 2 (3:632b). Furthermore, Bonaventure specifies that, while seeking one’s private good (*bonum proprium*) can go against Paul’s admonition that love does not seek its own interests (1 Cor 13:5), there is also another sense in which one’s *bonum proprium* involves the divine will such that the common good is not rejected; see *In III sent.*, d. 29, a. un., q. 3, ad 1 (3:644b–645a).

⁸⁹ See *In III sent.*, d. 30, a. un., q. 6, resp. (3:669a).

⁹⁰ See *In Luc.* 6, no. 65 (7:153ab); *In I sent.*, d. 14, dub. 6 (1:255a); d. 17, p. 1, a. un., q. 1, fund. 3 (1:293ab).

⁹¹ Marcel, “Ego,” 19.

To contemplate Christ's revelation that "God is love," that the divine essence is love, should not stop at the divine essence. That is to say, the divine essence is not something other than the Holy Trinity. The essential love of God unfolds, as it were, Trinitarianly. "Self-love" in God is so deep—essentially perichoretic—that it touches what is hypostatically other, as it were. Thus, I argued that the divine persons' self-love exhibits a fundamentally heterologic character. This heterologic character is precisely what the essential perichoretic love of God reveals. N.V.