Philosophical aesthetics in *Lignum vitae* by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio

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In order to comprehend the meaning of Bonaventure's aesthetics, the first requirement is to outline its structural elements. It has three parts, containing reflections on the origin, the mystery of death and glorification of Jesus Christ. Each part is divided into twelve "fruits", the equivalent of chapters.

In terms of theme, the work refers primarily to the compassion and humility toward Christ, and secondarily to acquiring virtues obtained through contemplation.

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Nonetheless, it is still possible to discover several starting points for elaborating reflections that can be included within the double perspective of a philosophy of beauty and of a theme such as the Tree of Life. It is almost redundant to remind that these conceptual approaches should always be analyzed taking into account the context of their emergence.

Keywords: Bonaventure, Arbor vitae, aesthetics, philosophy, reflections, mystery, contemplation, perspective, beauty

In terms of aesthetics, the text is symbolically structured as a light irradiating from the *Tree of Life*: each branch represents a chapter within the biblical episodes relating events in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Bonaventure invites the reader to picture a tree that represents invocations and evocations related to Christ. The image of the tree is an invitation to share the experience with the God-man. This way, the man understands the meaning of getting closer to divinity.

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The Saviour's pain is represented by the branches growing from the tree, His resurrection is positioned in the upper part, while His passage through death is depicted in the lower part of the trunk. As all sacred works written in the medieval period, the ones studied here also benefits from a complex structure.

From the beginning, I consider it best to mention that, in Bonaventure's philosophical thinking, it is impossible to pinpoint an aesthetic approach in the current meaning of this concept. Nonetheless, it is

still possible to discover several starting points for elaborating reflections that can be included within the double perspective of a philosophy of beauty and of a theme such as the *Tree of Life*. It is almost redundant to remind that these conceptual approaches should always be analyzed taking into account the context of their emergence.

Bonaventure sees beauty and art from a gnoseological and metaphysical perspective; furthermore, from an ethical and religious standpoint, the contemplation of aesthetic values represents – within such an overall view – a significant phase for whoever wishes to contemplate God and whose ultimate purpose is eternal salvation.

The aforementioned aspects logically entail an adequate interpretation of Bonaventure's work in the cultural space of the Christian Middle Ages. Regarding the concept of *art*, it is worth stating that – in the aforementioned historical context – "fine arts" were included within *mechanical arts*, because they failed to make the distinction between the ideation and the execution moment of the artisanal artistic production. The distinction between the two realities became clear only starting with Humanism and Renaissance (two cultural currents that favoured the inclusion of fine arts within the category of liberal arts).

I consider that the first issue has been made clear, reason for which I continue with another reality, by underscoring that the fusion between the ideation and the execution moment within the process of creating a work of art actually entailed the subordination of the first to the second, or to ascribing the ideation moment mainly to the person ordering it, not to the artist. As it results from many scientific studies in the field, Middle Ages failed to distinguish between aesthetic and artistic, reason for which fine arts were still included among the so-called utilitarian arts. The act of creation should have taken into account the conscious and conscientious observance of certain rules, which allow the execution of *artistic objects*. Therefore, art belonged to "making", not to "acting" (concerning mostly the field of morals). Hence, art was seen as an *achievement* rather than as an *expression of something.*

Whereas the work of art belonged to the technical field (thus not claiming specific and aesthetic reflection), in the double space of natural objects and artificial objects, an aesthetic-oriented contemplation was proposed. Therefore, from the second perspective, the medieval culture elaborates and develops a specific aesthetics, understood as a beauty-specific philosophy. Such a philosophy is impregnated, as I have already shown, with obvious and considerable marks of empirics and metaphysics.

The philosophy of beauty, proposed by Bonaventure in his book *Lignum vitae*, could not possibly omit the relation with the transcendent. In this context, I even mention certain intrinsic realities such as *unum*, *verum*, and *bonum*, which manifest themselves primarily as consubstantial properties of the being and secondarily as values. From the same standpoint, the aforementioned perspective can be completed by underscoring that – in Bonaventure's intuition of the given historical context, highlighted by the Aristotelian-inspired reflections – the *unum-verum-bonum* triad is completed by another characteristic of the being (*pulchrum*). Reunited in one book such as *Lignum vitae*, these four properties reveal the harmony of the Creator's presence in the Creation.

Actually, it is easier to understand better the aforementioned aspects if we take into account that the Aristotelian matrix oriented the Franciscan medieval thinking in general and the one of Bonaventure in particular toward a metaphysical development and toward an optimistic realism. In terms of aesthetics, this realism manifested itself in the proposition of beauty as real property of objects in their particularity and of Creation as a whole. This view entails that multiplicity, truthfulness, and beauty are to be found in symmetry and proportions, in perception, and in the object admired. All of them put together can be considered a *vehicle that ensures* intercommunication between microcosm and macrocosm. In his writings, Bonaventure clearly underlines that creatures must always return to their Creator without suffering any regress in their order and functioning, that the work of art is nothing but a preview of immanent beauty. On the other hand, the author highlights the direct contact with the work of art on sensory level (olfactory, tactile, and auditory). In other words, whoever is not enlightened by such splendour of created things is blind; whoever is not awakened by such outcries is deaf; whoever does not praise God because all of these effects is dumb; whoever does not discover the First Principle from such clear signs is a fool. This advice is addressed to whoever stands before an artistic creation: open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, untie your lips, and open your heart.

All creatures of this world are like shadows, echoes, pictures, footprints, faces, reflexes of God, creator of all things visible and invisible; creation is the sign that God gave to humans. From the visible things that we can perceive using our senses, it is necessary to reach the invisible reality. In this matter, Bonaventure has no doubt; he highlights with great tenacity and with firm conviction that God's invisibility may be experienced through contemplation, helped by the intellect when we come in contact with the things made by the Creator. "Whoever does not want to understand Him, whoever does not want to know, to Praise, and to love God in his creation is lost"(Citati, 2012, *Corriere della Sera*, p. 57).

Beyond the issue of the relationship between creatures and the Creator or the reflections upon the

philosophy of beauty, Bonaventure had an ongoing dispute with other schools of the period concerning the experience of beauty. This dispute results from the discrepancies between the aesthetic view that focuses on the quantitative, mathematical, and proportional element of the real (a view that privileges the qualitative, individual element in the variations of light and colour in the worlds of shapes) and Bonaventure's view, which focuses on contemplating the beauty coming from God.

The metaphysical importance of the theme – assumed in the given historical context by Bonaventure's aesthetics – can be successfully highlighted from the perspective of the Middle Ages mindset, which implies the coexistence of two components: one sensitive and the other supernatural. If we accept that the form stimulates experience through its messages, then this is also the *substantial form* of things and the *metaphysical reality*, which determines beauty (in its aesthetic and stylistic sense) to stimulate the sensitivity of the one who watches and contemplates the work of art. By assuming the transcendental aspect of the work, the artistic creation becomes a significant source of knowledge. On the other hand, in the historical and cultural context of the Middle Ages, this approach forces Bonaventure to intensify his preoccupations concerning the elaboration of aesthetic reflections – with Franciscan-specific connotations – on beauty, art, and aesthetic judgment itself.

Not surprisingly for the philosophers of the period or for the Franciscan theologians and philosophers, Bonaventure oriented his aesthetic view toward a gnoseological and metaphysical direction, where knowledge is theologically oriented toward contemplating God. The experience of beauty, obtained in the sphere of knowledge, consolidates the character of sensitivity and of imagination.

In this sense, the author proposes an exercise for imagination using a quote from Origen: if the Cross is presented as the tree of the new life, Christ Himself becomes *The Tree of Life* embodied in Wisdom.

If the tree planted beside the running waters is such that is produces its fruit in due season and its leaf does not fall off, but all that it does prospers, what must we think about our Saviour Jesus other than he, being the tree of life insofar as he is wisdom, and wisdom is a tree of life to all those who lay hold on he, both bears fruit, and has other leaves in addition to the fruit that are such that not even one of them falls off. (Origene, 1982, pp. 315 – 316; Heine, vol. 89, book 13 – 32)

Symbol of life in God, the theme of the *Tree of life* as sign of wisdom, maturity, and of accomplishment often refers to the Bible to refresh the memory: "Wisdom is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed." (*Prov.* 3.18); "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives." (*Prov.* 11.30); "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." (*Prov*. 13.12); "The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit." (*Prov.* 15.4); "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (*Rev.* 2.7) "; (...) down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." (*Rev*. 22.2)

This type of exercise meant to improve imagination should be performed within a setting that comprises the hierarchical structure of human soul powers, among which the philosopher mentions the following: *senses*, *imagination*, *reason*, *understanding*, *intelligence*, and *the spark of conscience*.

After this hierarchisation, I must resume a reflection that I have already approached from a philosophical perspective. This time, I will analyze the aesthetic dimension of the *Tree of life*; I am persuaded that numerous artists belonging to different traditions and cultures found a universal creation motif in this theme. As mentioned above, *The Tree of Life* is reproduced in all the great spiritual traditions of humankind; it is the symbol of physical and spiritual growth, because its branches reach toward the sky, while its roots penetrate deep in the ground. In other words, this is a symbol of verticality in God: the roots (penetrating the ground) and the top reaching toward the sky equally represent the mystery of life and the constant victory upon death. This image is the perfect expression of the mystery of life understood as a sacred reality of the cosmos.

In relation to the reality of the six powers of knowledge (connected to creation) to which this book refers, it is possible to pinpoint the ideas suggested by Bonaventure in his treatise, when he mentions the six steps leading to God, which are later reduced to three. From among them, the author posits that the first is the outer perception (*exterioribus*) of sense and imagination; the second is the inner perception (*interioribus*) of reason and understanding; the third is higher perception (*superioribus*) of intelligence and the desire for knowledge. (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 19). In their turn, they feature three other forms of knowledge: through vestiges of God (*vestigium*), through images of God (*imaginem*), and through similarities (*similitudinem*) of God (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 20). Bonaventure posits, in a more relaxed manner, that proportionality must be taken into account in order to perceive the sensible world in its wholeness, because delectation depends on both the subject perceiving and the object perceived. Or proportionality attends, inasmuch as it accounts for power or virtue, and so is called savour, when acting virtue does not improportionately exceed the recipient; because sense

is saddened in extremes and takes delight in means.... Ultimately, to enjoyment contribute both the objects stirring delight and the one delighted (Bonaventura, 2002/2012, p. 18). Concerning the aesthetic field in particular, it suffices to mention that, in *Lignum vitae*, Bonaventure refers to the first two powers – *sensus* and *imaginatio* – in relation to the objects resulted from the first two levels reducible to the first. As it results from the previous quotes, this is a type of knowledge "per vestigium" (Bonaventura, 2002/2012, p. 30). This form of knowledge is naturally ordered *ad Deum*, it allows us to connect with the supreme entity in a double gnoseological manner: "*per speculum et* ut *in speculo* (*through a mirror* and *in a mirror*)" (Bonaventura, 2002/2012, p. 30), which means in a mediated way, indirectly; the Creator is perceived as an image mirrored in His creations.

In this case, Bonaventure's aesthetics refers to two forms to knowledge of the first level (*sensus* and *imaginatio*). According to the author, art – viewed from the perspective of gneoseology – assumes the specific role of rediscovering and supporting memory. Hence, the realistic horizon (for our philosopher, *pulchritudo*, presented as characteristic of things) is globally acquired through sensibility. For this reason, *pulchritudo* produces *delectatio*, which in its turn, just like the first, involves sensibility itself (Tatarkiewicz, 2005, p. 233). For clarifications concerning the previous statements, it is useful to remind Bonaventure's opinions regarding *illuminatio cognitionis.* Such illumination, the author posits, is also ordered hierarchically in relation with the objects to know; there are four levels of illumination: "Lumen *exterius*, scilicet lumen artis mechanicae; lumen *inferius*, scilicet lumen cognitionis sensitive; lumen *interius*, scilicet lumen cognitionis philosophicae; lumen *superius*, scilicet lumen gratiae et sacrae Scripturae (*The external light, or the light of mechanical art; the lower light, or the light of sense perception; the inner light, or the light of philosophical knowledge; and the higher light, or the light of grace and of Sacred Scripture*) (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 319).

After enumerating the four indicators, it is possible to establish the premises for determining the objective conditions in which the visible form becomes pleasant, and the four levels become interesting (the first two particularly, because they concern the aesthetic dimension). Bonaventure posits that "Primum lumen illuminat respectu *figurae artificialis* și secundum respectu *formae naturalis*" (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 319). Therefore, it is obvious that *lumen exterius* refers to the productive, artistic moment, while *lumen inferius*, which involves sensibility, refers to the pleasant and contemplative moment of beauty as ontological feature of the real.

As an argument in favour of the aforementioned statements, the *Lignum vitae* painted by Taddeo Gaddi features simple, but semantically complex images. In this sense, I mention *the greatness* of the moment represented, *the faces* (through their contour lines and through their shape, they underline the celebrated beauty), *the continuity* of divine charity, *the harshness* or *simplicity* of bodies in the light, *the shadows* that attenuate the light spots (sometimes maybe too bright). Furthermore, resuming Bonaventure's considerations regarding the genesis of knowledge itself, three ways can be pinpointed, as follows: the senses, the memory, and the experience "ex quibus colligitur *universale* in nobis, quod est principium artis et scientiae" (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 572). Taking into account the close connection between art and science in terms of knowledge setting, I posit – beyond any doubt – that all aspects mentioned above are in full agreement with what Bonaventure's aesthetics expresses. Moreover, Bonaventure accentuates the issue of the aesthetics of quantity and the aesthetics of quality, by proposing a metaphysical solution according to which beauty (in terms of both natural and artificial beauty) comprises per se the characters of both aforementioned aesthetics.

A first definition of beauty that the reader finds in *Lignum vitae* is based on the classical medieval view that features beauty as *numerical uniformity* that requires *the agreement of the parts* of beauty. The first aspect can be understood as an identity of multiplicity, while the second must be explained as the balance of parts between each other and in relation with the whole. To get a clearer picture of the aspects in question here, it is useful to discuss a definition of the *beautiful thing* where Bonaventure clearly summarizes what he repeatedly values in his work through this concept. He considers that "Dicitur enim res pulcra, quando est in ea convenientia partium et aequalitas; pulcritudo enim est aequalitas numerosa" (*Beauty is nothing other than measured harmony, among numerous elements)* (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 25). On the other hand, Bonaventure fails to clarify the distinction between *uniformity* and *convention.* In his opinion, there is a numerical, mathematical plan, within individual things or between objects seen as an exaltation of beauty, but the prevailing aspect is the total harmony of the universe, considering that the Creator is the supreme *artifex*.

In *Lignum vitae*, beauty involves the aspect of quality (also present in the global view of Franciscan medieval philosophical thinking), where beauty has an undeniable metaphysical connotation. In the same sense, it is worth reminding that, actually, the light featured throughout the entire work is the *substantial form* of – corporeal and spiritual – *matter*, a concept that Bonaventure expressly takes over from the Aristotelian *hylomorphism*[1]. From the same doctrine, he takes over the *greatness* of the event, treating it from an aesthetic perspective and considering it as principle

of beauty based on two solid grounds: firstly, because it is *the most pleasant one* and secondly, because it allows the differentiation of chromatic, luminous, and formal effects of the objects perceived through sensibility. When analyzing the progressive levels of knowledge, he states that the soul gets to know God rationally, through sensible things. At the same time, he underscores (from a different standpoint, concerning the aesthetic dimension of objects) that greatness "hoc facit in rebus ipsis considerando... *pulcritudinem* luminum, colorum et effigierum" (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 20). The aspect of *greatness* is not separated from the one of proportion, even within the setting of metaphysics of life, of what can be defined as aesthetics *of proportion* inspired from the concept known as the *uniformity of numbers*. Hence, the *quantitative* aspect is in harmony with the *qualitative* aspect. Nonetheless, the laws of similarity do not determine Bonaventure to elaborate a theory of proportion closed in itself, because he extends the discourse by penetrating the inner world of the artist, where the genesis of such laws is to be found. Thus, he clarifies the issue of artistic inspiration and idea, which I will treat in the following lines.

According to Bonaventure's approach, beauty is *pulchritudo*, an image corresponding to his prototype: "pulcritudo imaginis refertur ad prototypum [The beauty of the image refers back to its prototype]" (Bonaventura, 1893, p. 543). On the stylistic level, the image *of beauty* is highlighted; in fact, beauty differs by the presence of two fundamental characteristics: the first, when it is well organized formally and structurally; the second, when it remains loyal to the object represented. Actually, "imago dicitur pulcra, quando bene protracta est, dicitur etiam pulcra, quando bene repraesentat illum, ad quem est" (Bonaventua, 1893, p. 544). In the same sense, it is worth noting that, as a whole, creation relates in a certain way to God; first, *per vestigia*, then *per imagines*; in the second case, *imago* is obtained through expression as likeness (Cullen, 2006, p. 74). Within such a strictly *ontological* approach, which underlines the relationship between creatures and the Creator, the true *imago* is human being only, because reason enables him to benefit from an expression through likeness, in his relationship with God.

Concerning art, Bonaventure states that it is largely dependent on science. In this case, a direct reference can be made to *action* (though autonomous, it is subordinated to knowledge). Hence, though its autonomy may be conditioned by the metaphysical and gnoseological element, it is specifically configured from a practical perspective. This entails the issue of *artificial* objects or images that complete the *natural* objects or images. According to the author, arts acts upon nature by involving a *complete presence*. The artist cannot decide upon the substance of the natural object, because he can



Bonaventure of Bagnoregio
Sursî foto: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0b/Fran%C3%A7ois%2C_Claude_%28dit_Fr%C3%A8re_Luc%29_-_Saint_Bonaventure.jpg

only accelerate the productive rhythm of nature itself, but not compete with it. This becomes highly obvious in the relation between productive agents established by Bonaventure, because God creates *from nothing*, while nature acts *ex ente in potentia*. Consequently, art "supponit operationem naturae et operatur super *ens completum*" [assumes the previous action of nature and transforms existing things] (Bonaventura, 1477, p. 202). Therefore, it can be deduced that nature produces an effect similar to itself through truth, while the agents creating artistic objects produce objects similar to themselves in a specific way, by using an idea or a model.

Naturally, the artistic object is nothing but the model used by the artist-artisan to elaborate his manufacture. One must not omit that the priority aspect of action concerns entirely *the mechanical art* that also included *fine arts* in the medieval social and cultural context. In the *Lignum vitae* treatise, Bonaventure also highlights the realistic dimension of a work of art. It entails the sensitivity and imagination of the potential artist, who creates – during the artistic activity process – artificial images, capable of representing reality, not a mere fantastic invention, a fruit of curiosity, or of simple technical and stylistic compositional skills.

Art has its fundamental goals, and for Bonaventure it is a gnoseological adjuvant. In his opinion, art has, on one hand, an educational role (supporting the memory), and on the other hand, the work of art illustrates the relationship between the artificial image produced by the artist and the natural prototype to which the image refers. Art relates to nature and completes it at the same time. In this setting (oriented toward a gnoseological and metaphysical realism), the

productive process of artistic activity can be synthesized as follows: the production of the artificial effect by the *manufact* occurs in relation to a similar image existing in his mind. Based on this *manufact*, he projects before producing, and then he produces after projecting. Therefore, the work of art is largely similar to the inner object of the *manufact*, which depends very much on the natural prototype. The product (understood in its broader meaning) features three characteristics coming from the artist's original intention, about which Bonaventure posits the following: "Omnis enim artifex intendit producere opus pulcrum et utile et stabile; et tunc est carum et acceptabile opus, cum habet istas tres conditions [*Every maker intends to produce a beautiful, useful, and enduring object... and only when it fulfils these three conditions can it be called good and acceptable*]" (Bomaventura, 1893, p. 323). Therefore, these characteristics render artistic and artisanal productions good and acceptable.

Bonaventure's reflections meant to determine and distinguish among the various forms of intellectual activity identify five domains: "*science*, *art*, *prudence*, *understanding*, *and wisdom*". In this enumeration, it becomes clear that art belongs between science and prudence. Therefore, from the relationship between knowledge and practical-productive activity, it can be deduced that „notitia autem transiens in *effectum* extrinsecum est *ars*, quae est *habitus cum ratione factivus*, et hinc iungitur notitia cum faciente [*But knowledge passing into extrinsic effect is art, which is a disposition containing a principle of making, and here the knowledge and the making are combined, and yet, they are preceded by affective desire*]" (Coccaglio, 1766, p. 24). This perspective leads to the idea that art depends on science, an idea that determined Bonaventure to believe that, before approaching art, one must experience science. Hence, he posits the priority character of gnoseological experience, on which practical activities depend.

The gnoseological and metaphysical considerations concerning aesthetic values and the permanent confirmation of the relationship between nature and art within the contents of artificial images determine us to clarify the issue of the nature of aesthetic opinion. In agreement with Bonaventure, I note a highly necessary argument for relating to the work of art from an aesthetic perspective. Aesthetic judgment *has* beauty *as study field* and as privileged subject of knowledge. This entails the realistic fundament of aesthetic opinion itself. Now it becomes clear what Bonaventure meant by *judgment*, taking into account that he believes there are different ways of perceiving the soul compared to the ways of relating to sensible things (in this context, he mentions *anxiety* and *pleasure*). The first form refers to perceiving a thing through senses, and it regards proportion or the agreement of parts with its substantial wholeness. The second form refers to the activity of intellect, which distinguishes – within the object materiality perceived through senses – the spiritual-ontological aspect of the object itself, in terms of form as species, and the value of beauty as transcendental connotative dimension of the object to be discovered. Whereas everything is naturally transposed in the field of rationality by *pleasure* itself, in Bonaventure's view *beauty* is featured as *uniformity* (seen from the perspective mentioned above).

Toward the end of these reflections, I believe it useful to remind that *uniformity* has a double reference level in Bonaventure. The first is the inner side of the beautiful object, because it comprises the balance of parts in their own position and because beauty is a numerical equality. On the other hand, *uniformity* exists because the balance between parts does not exceed the substantial contiguity of parts.

Naturally, judgment does not manifest itself exclusively through an opinion concerning the properties and characteristics of the object analyzed, but it regards mainly the arguments that transform the work of art into an aesthetically valuable reality. Further, Bonaventure notes that judgment refers to the cause for which a work of art produces pleasure, by stating that critique seeks to prove the reason of delight, and not so much the way in which the work is perceived. Judgment understood from this perspective relates the admirer to the beauty comprised within the work, thus allowing him to appraise its aesthetic qualities. This aesthetic expression produces *delectatio*, a state seen as deriving from the sensible qualities of a work; in their turn, these qualities originate in the proportionality of parts, regarded separately and as a whole.

In Bonaventure's view, the artist sees his activity as subordinated to knowledge. He executes artificial creations starting from the basis provided by natural objects, which means that an artist cannot create objects, but that he can only build things that complete the generating activity of nature. The artist belongs more to the technical field; hence, he is not a creator, but a person who has *good manufacturing skills*, an *artifex*. Such a view explains the inclusion of "fine arts" within *artes mechanicae*.

Upon appraising the just dimension of Bonaventure's considerations on artists, we must take into account that this view is part of a philosophical aesthetics that does not refer explicitly to artists as we understand them in the present. Within his thinking system, the ethical-religious finality of artistic production prevails. Concerning the illumination levels of knowledge, he posits that the general goal of art is to produce images. This view entails the first illuminating level: the level of *outer light*. Therefore, art contributes to the reduction of human nature limits, but it also produces pleasure and delight.

However, the fundamental purpose of a work of

art is not limited to the operative-technical field or to the gnoseological-metaphysical field, but its deepest meaning pertains to the field of ethical and religious values. Consequently, for Bonaventure, the work of art is a way to open the man toward an indirect contemplation of God, as well as toward passing through the various levels derived from the structure of the human soul powers, ordered hierarchically toward the knowledge of God (Magrini, 1969, pp. 73 - 75). In general, the ethical dimension of artistic production identifies two meanings of works of art: a negative one, when it is considered the result of *curiositas*; and a positive one, when *videre pulcra* is oriented toward *aedificatio hominum* and contemplating God, thus making human knowledge ascending and gradual. The significance of a work of art as production of beautiful things (even artificial ones) depends on the type of aesthetic pleasure that it is capable of stirring in its admirer.

The study of significances also highlights a secondary aspect, to which Bonaventure refers by showing that, when *videre pulcra* is the fruit of *curiositas*, it originates from the *concupiscentia curiositatis*. However, the positive aspect emerges when aesthetic contemplation represents a specific means of contributing to salvation. This becomes apparent mostly when beauty leads to the need of contemplating God.

In conclusion, it can be ascertained that Bonaventure's reflections upon the contemplative admiration of beauty (as innate feature of creatures) highlights a distinct characteristic of the aesthetic and spiritual stance specific to Franciscan philosophy. Bonaventure was capable of enjoying all works of the Creator and he knew how to discover absolute beauty in the beauty of all beings. By revealing the Creator's traces everywhere, imprinted in His creatures, Bonaventure found limitless reasons of joy. Through his new approach to *Lignum vitae*, Bonaventure influenced not only the systems of thought during his period, but also the writing style and other artistic forms. From a Franciscan and mostly from Bonaventure's perspective, the entire artistic creation is reconsidered and redefined as an ascending way toward God, who is the quintessence of all values, aesthetic ones included.

A view similar to Bonaventure's is encountered in Ubertino da Casale (*Arbor vitae Crucifixe Jesu*), where *the tree* mirroring the events in the life and death of Christ helps reducing gradually the distances between God and the humankind. The book written by Ubertino da Casale contributed to the beginning of a new process that highlights the areas where the sacred and the human intertwine: charity, poverty, and prophecy.

Note:

1. Metaphysical (Aristotelian-scholastic) doctrine, which conceives natural existence as a compound of matter as potential principle and form as actual principle.

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