MIRROR OF EXPERIENCE: PALAMAS AND BONAVENTURE ON THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD—A CONTRIBUTION TO ORTHODOX-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

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PRECIS

In this essay, the author places into a “dialogue of love” the mystical theologies of Saints Gregory Palamas and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, as developed in their respective masterpieces, the Defense of the Holy Hesychasts and The Soul’s Journey into God. It is the author’s contention that when this dialogue is engendered, one is able to see how these saints, precisely within the diversity of their respective ecclesial traditions, mirror each other’s understanding of how the human person experiences God and, in the process, mirror how Orthodox and Roman Catholic faithful alike can both perceive anew and visibly witness once again to the faith, hope, and love that even now unites them as one body in Christ.

1 Introduction

In his apostolic letter Orientale Lumen, Pope John Paul II noted, with regard to the enduring schism between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, “We have increasingly learned that it was not so much an historical episode or a mere question of preeminence that tore the fabric of unity, as it was a progressive estrangement, so that the other’s diversity was no longer perceived as a
common treasure, but as incompatibility." In order that this "fabric of unity" may be restored, the Holy Father called upon Orthodox and Roman Catholic faithful to engage in a dialogue of "mutual knowledge in charity," founded upon the conviction that they are, in spite of their visible divisions, fundamentally united in Christ, "born from one Baptism and one Eucharist." "As I had occasion to say," he emphatically stated, "the Church of Christ is one. If divisions exist, that is one thing; they must be overcome, but the Church is one, the Church of Christ between East and West can only be one, one and united."

Twenty-three years later, John Paul II’s call has found a committed echo in the newly reassembled Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. In the introduction to its recently published document, *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority*, the commission declared that "[t]he processes of secularization and globalization, and the challenge posed by new encounters between Christians and believers of other religions, require that the disciples of Christ give witness to their faith, love and hope with a new urgency." In order that we, Orthodox and Roman Catholics together, may give witness to the faith, love, and hope we share in Christ, it is likewise required, as John Paul II recognized, that we enter into a true dialogue of love and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, commit ourselves once again to see in our diversity the common treasure of our discipleship. Only then will we be able to witness to the marvelous unity-in-diversity that God desires all people to have in Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this essay is to bring into such a dialogue of love two theologians of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, St. Gregory Palamas (+1359) and St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (+1274), considering as their subject the human experience of God. When this dialogue is engendered, one is able to see how these great saints, precisely within the diversity of their respective ecclesial traditions, mirror each other’s understanding of how the human person experiences God and, in the process, mirror how Orthodox and Roman Catholic

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2 Ibid., no 17

3 Ibid., no 20, citing *Unitatis redintegratio*, no 14

4 Ibid., no 20, citing "Greeting to the Faculty of the Pontifical Oriental Institute" (December 12, 1993), *L'Osservatore Romano*, December 13-14, 1993, p 4

5 No 1 (Ravenna October 15, 2007), available at [http://www.proumione.urbe.it/dia-int/ore/doc/e_o-rc_ravenna.html](http://www.proumione.urbe.it/dia-int/ore/doc/e_o-rc_ravenna.html)

6 Cf *Orientale Lumen*, no 4. "The cry of men and women today seeking meaning for their lives reaches all the Churches of the East and of the West. In this cry, we perceive the invocation of those who seek the Father whom they have forgotten and lost (cf Lk 15 18-20, Jn 14 8). The women and men of today are asking us to show them Christ, who knows the Father and who has revealed him (cf Jn 8 55, 14 8-11). Letting the world ask us its questions, listening with humility and tenderness, in full solidarity with those who express them, we are called to show in word [and] deed today the immense riches that our Churches preserve in the coffers of their traditions. We learn from the Lord himself, who would stop along the way to be with the people, who listened to them and was moved to pity when he saw them 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Mt 9 36, cf Mk 6 34). From him we must learn the loving gaze with which he reconciled men with the Father and with themselves, communicating to them that power which alone is able to heal the whole person.”
faithful alike can perceive anew, precisely within our diversity, the faith, love, and hope that unite us in Christ. With this before our eyes, the way opens to us not only to grow in mutual knowledge about one another but also to profess again with one another our common faith in the Christ who calls us to renew visibly our identity as the one and united church. To accomplish this, I shall first introduce Sts. Gregory and Bonaventure's respective understandings of the experience of God. I shall then examine how, within their diversity, each theologian's expressed understanding of this experience mirrors that of the other, together becoming that mirror in which Orthodox and Roman Catholics alike may discern the reflection of the faith we share as sisters and brothers, "born from one Baptism and one Eucharist" in Christ.

As the troparion in his honor proclaims, St. Gregory Palamas is revered by Orthodox Christians as the light of Orthodoxy, the teacher of the church, the ideal of monks, and the invincible champion of theologians. Gregory is so honored because of the synthesis he achieved between the monastic spirituality known as "hesychasm" (the pure prayer of the heart in which one may experience the transformative light of the divine presence) and the expressed faith of the great Fathers of the church. This achievement contributed to the acceptance of Gregory's own mystical theology, known to subsequent generations as "Palamism," as an integral component of Orthodoxy itself, thereby placing its namesake among the ranks of Orthodoxy's chief representatives. This is a place of honor that has captured the attention and the respect of Roman Catholic theologians in recent decades.

Like St. Gregory Palamas, St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio has also been the subject of increasing attention from Roman Catholic scholars. He is the leading representative of the "Franciscan School," which has experienced a renaissance since the close of Vatican II, when alternatives to Thomism were being rediscovered. Yet, Bonaventure has also garnered respect in his own right, due in no small part to the noticeably Eastern character of his thought. Bonaventure's pneumatology was considerably more developed and evident than that of his Parisian colleague St. Thomas Aquinas, and his trinitarian theology was more profoundly relational and cohesive. Bonaventure perceived God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—as a dynamic and effective force in the life of every person. For these reasons, Bonaventure is uniquely placed to represent Roman Catholicism in conversation with Gregory and, moreover, to serve Roman Catholicism as a point of encounter with the richness of the Orthodox tradition.

II. Saint Gregory Palamas

A. Gregory in Context

Gregory was born in 1296 to a noble family that was close to the court of Emperor Andronicus II. At the age of twenty, he decided against a career in the imperial civil service in order to embark upon a life of "pure prayer" among the
monks of Mount Athos. Though Gregory’s monastic life would prove a literal as well as a figurative journey, his vocation remained rooted in the spiritual tradition taught him by his elder, Nicodemus: hesychasm. By the time Gregory encountered the Greco-Italian philosopher Barlaam of Calabria in 1334, he was already acknowledged as one of hesychasm’s leading representatives.

The debate between Gregory and Barlaam began as a disagreement over theological methodology. Its occasion was the issue of the filioque. Although both men were united in their opposition to Latin Christianity’s unilateral inclusion of the filioque in its version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, they were divided over the principles underlying their objections and, consequently, over the direction their respective principles would lead them when faced with the question of whether the human person can ever be said to know God.

As a matter of principle, Barlaam held the human intellect to be incapable of attaining to any direct, unmediated knowledge of God. The human intellect was by essence finite, and, as such, any penetration of the infinite mystery of the divine essence (Gk. ousía) was beyond its ability. Therefore, the only certain knowledge that human beings could claim to have of God was that mediated through the scriptures, which were the definitive record of what God had chosen to reveal of Godself. All other claims to knowledge of God, including those made by the Fathers of the church, were the product of dialectical reasoning from divinely established premises; so, they had to allow for a certain degree of doctrinal flexibility. Such was the case regarding the question of the Holy Spirit’s procession.

Whether from the Father alone, as Byzantine Christianity held, or from both Father and Son (filioque), as Latin Christians professed, the scriptures offered no clear statement regarding the origin of the Holy Spirit. This lack of certainty was attested to by the divided opinions of the Fathers themselves. Therefore, though Barlaam himself argued on behalf of the Byzantine position, he was willing to admit the doctrinal appropriateness of the filioque for the Latin West. To assert anything further was nothing more than an act of pride and arrogance.9

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7 Gregory entered the Great Lavra of St Athanasius in 1319. Three years later, he withdrew to the hermitage at Glossia. Turkish raids forced him, together with other monks, to leave Athos. They eventually settled in Thessalonika, where Gregory became associated with Isidore, a disciple of Gregory of Sinai (who is credited with bringing hesychasm to Athos) and a future patriarch of Constantinople. Together with Isidore, Gregory spread hesychasm beyond monastic circles. In 1331, Gregory returned to Athos and eventually settled at the hermitage of St Sabbas. It was from St Sabbas that he composed his three-part Défense des saints hesychastes, or Triads. See Jean (John) Meyendorff, St Grégoire Palamas et la mystique orthodoxe, Maîtres spirituels 20 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959), pp. 75–87.

8 In the introduction to his French translation of the Triads, Meyendorff noted that Gregory and Barlaam had become acquainted in 1334, when Barlaam was debating two Dominicans on the question of whether the human person could attain to any certain knowledge of God. Barlaam and Gregory corresponded privately over the ensuing two years, until Gregory published the first of his Triads against the “humanist” teachings of the, by then, celebrated philosopher See Grégoire Palamas, Défense des saints hesychastes Introduction texte critique, traduction et notes, vol. 1, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense Etudes et Documents 30, tr Jean Meyendorff (Louvain, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense Administration, 1959), p. xi, also see Meyendorff, St Grégoire Palamas, p. 88.

9 See Meyendorff’s introductory comments in John Meyendorff, ed and intro., Gregory Palamas The Triads, tr Nicholas Gendle, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York and Ramsey,
For Gregory, however, such flexibility was not an admitted necessity. In his *Defense of the Holy Hesychasts* Gregory posited that the human person could attain to a knowledge of God beyond what scripture mediates because, through the process of *divinization* (Gk. theôsis), the human person *qua human* is permitted by grace to experience God directly—not with regard to the divine *essence*, which by nature remains beyond the finitude of the human intellect, but with regard to the divine *energies* (Gk. enérgia).

**B. Defending the Holy Hesychasts: Experiencing the Immanence of the Transcendent God**

Although it remains the most comprehensive presentation of Gregory’s thought, his *Defense* did not offer a systematic presentation of his theological/spiritual vision. Rather, he left behind a polemical work developed over three distinct periods, hence the work’s more familiar name: *Triads*. In this three-part work, positions were taken and arguments developed as the occasion demanded. For the purpose of this essay, I will examine Gregory’s understanding of the experience of God through the lens of *Triad III*, which Gregory composed in 1341 to defend hesychasm against the charge of Messalianism. First, however, I shall briefly explain what hesychasm is, and the place it holds within the Tradition of Byzantine Christianity.

Hesychasm (Gk. hesychia: stillness, quiet, rest) has its historical roots in the

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10 See *Triads*, II, iii. 17 (pp 61–62) and 35 (pp 64–65). In these sections, Gregory distinguished between two forms of knowledge of God: the *apophatic*, what we know God is not, and the *apodictic*, what we know God *to be*. As will be noted below, for Gregory apodictic knowledge of God can be had only by surrendering to the ecstatic experience of God in pure prayer. “The mind which applies itself to apophatic theology thinks of what is different from God; thus it proceeds by means of discursive reasoning. But in the other case, there is union. In the one case, the mind negates itself together with other beings, but in the other there is a union of the mind with God.” First, however, I shall briefly explain what hesychasm is, and the place it holds within the Tradition of Byzantine Christianity.

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11 The term “Messalian” derives from a Syriac word meaning “praying people.” It was applied to a Christian sect, condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431), which taught that, as a consequence of Adam’s sin, the soul of every human person was united essentially with a demon. This demon could only be expelled by a life of ceaseless, ascetic prayer, which eliminated all the person’s passions and desires. Those who achieved this state of “perfection” were said to receive a direct, unmediated vision of the Holy Trinity that they beheld with their bodily eyes. Much of what Barlaam learned about hesychasm—even, so he claimed, from hesychasts themselves (see Meyendorff, *St Grégoire Palamas*, p 91)—seemed to him nothing more than rehashed Messalianism. With reference to their meditative practice of praying with bowed head, Barlaam referred to the hesychasts as *omphalopsychoi*, i.e., “those whose soul is in their navel” (see Meyendorff, *St Grégoire Palamas*, p 81).
eremitic spirituality of the Desert Fathers who sought to cultivate in the wastelands of Egypt and Palestine that “purity of heart” extolled in the Gospels: “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.” This vision, described by the early hesychasts in terms of “uncreated light,” was granted by God as the graced fulfillment of the desire implanted in the believer at baptism and freely pursued through a life of “pure prayer.” The hesychasts’ explication of this experience was straightforward: Through baptism, they were united to Christ; through their dedication to prayer, they consented to be conformed more perfectly to Christ’s divinized humanity; through conformity to Christ, they came to an eschatological sharing, body and spirit, in Christ’s union with the Father, and so anticipated their bodily resurrection when they will share fully in that union and so participate by grace in the glory of the divine essence, that is, the eternal communion of life and love of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As the title of his work indicates, in offering his Defense, Gregory did not present himself as a spiritual/theological innovator but, rather, as the faithful defender of a heritage to which he himself was but an heir. Yet, in the course of his representation, Gregory would further develop this heritage by explicitly rooting it in the doctrinal axioms of Orthodoxy, thereby leading Byzantine Christianity eventually to identify “Palamism” as an essential part of its Tradition. With this in mind, I shall now turn to consider how Gregory’s defense of

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12Mt 5 8
13This prayer is rooted in the teachings of Abba Marcanus of Egypt (+ c 390), who advocated the constant repetition of a short formula, the essential element of which was the name of the Lord. Cf Benedicta Ward, tr., *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), p. 131. This brief invocation was later joined to the practice of disciplined breathing and evolved into what we know today as the “Jesus Prayer.” For a brief explication of this latter development, cf. Meyendorff’s citation from the writings of Nicephorus the Hesychast in his *St Grégoire Palamas*, pp. 61–62. This union of the *whole* person in prayer is a consistent characteristic of Eastern Christian spirituality in general and hesychasm in particular (see *Triads*, II, 11, 5 [p 48]).
14For a full summation of this process, see Jean Meyendorff, *Introduction a l’étude de Grégoire Palamas*, Patristica Sorbonensia 3 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1959), pp. 195–222. As will be noted below, the key for Gregory to the hesychast understanding of divinization was the mystery of the Incarnation (see Meyendorff, *Introduction a l’étude*, pp. 213–214, also see Georgios I Mantzardis, *The Deification of Man St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, tr. Liadain Sherrard, Contemporary Greek Theologians 2 [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984], pp. 29–32). As both a divine and a human essence harmoniously coexist in the person (*hypostasis*) of the Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ, without the confusion or diminishment of either essence, so also does the human person, in the process of divinization, come to union with the person of Christ, without any confusion or diminishment of his or her personhood with that of Christ, and so freely experiences within him or herself the “enchypostatic” grace that divinized Christ’s humanity.
15See *Triads*, II, 1, 32 (p 87). Here, Gregory demonstrates the hesychast (and, in general, monastic) tendency to speak about the mysteries of the divine with care, and then only by necessity, drawing upon the experience and insights of the Fathers to guide him in both his explications and his silences. Thus understood, Gregory’s thought was not (consciously) speculative in nature, but decidedly representative. Among the early practitioners and proponents of hesychasm to whom Gregory appealed were Evagrius Ponticus (+ c 399), whose writings were later disseminated under the name of “St Nilus,” Evagrius’s teacher Macarius (+ c 390), the anonymous fourth-century disciple of Macarius’s teaching known simply as the Pseudo-Macarius, and John “Climacus” (+ c 649). To these were added the insights of those who gave theological voice to the experience of the desert Gregory of Nyssa (+ c 395), Maximus the Confessor (+662), and Symeon the New Theologian (+1022).
hesychasm reveals his understanding of the human person’s experience of God.

C. Divinization

Divinization, the experiential heart of the hesychast tradition, is that graced process by which a person is brought into union with God. It is initiated in baptism when a person is united with Christ’s Body and continues throughout the baptized believer’s life, progressively uniting the person more fully to God through Jesus Christ, who, as God’s Incarnate Word, is the source of divinization for all humanity. This union, potentially bestowed in baptism and progressively realized throughout the believer’s life, finds its fulfillment in bodily resurrection when the believer is raised to eternal life with God. In this description, the following characteristics of divinization are discernable: It is (1) christocentric, (2) sacramental, and (3) eschatological, and (4) it involves a mystical encounter with the divine glory shining through Jesus Christ. I address each of these in turn.

1 Christocentric

Gregory presented the hesychast vision of the christocentric character of divinization in terms of the Incarnation, specifically as this was defined by the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381): that the second person (Gk. ἐσορομοσθήσεως)
hypóstasis) of the Trinity, the Word of God, by essence divine, assumed the fullness of our human essence in Jesus Christ, without any confusion or diminishment of either divinity or humanity.20

In the mystery of the Incarnation, the human essence of Christ was enhypostacized, that is, "personalized," by the divine person (hypóstasis) of the Word. By virtue of this enhypostacization, the human essence of Jesus Christ was divinized by the effective energy of the Holy Spirit.21 All that was proper to Christ qua human also participated in all that that was proper to him qua divine. It shared fully in his communion of life and love in the undivided Trinity as "Son of God" while, at the same time, uniting him in essential communion with all men and women as "Son of Man."22 It was this union, understood as "communion," of the human and divine in Jesus Christ that was revealed to the disciples on Mt. Tabor when they beheld the glory of Christ's divinity transfiguring his earthly body.23 Furthermore, it was this very same glory that the hesychasts

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20See the "Profession of Faith" of Nicea and "Canon 1" of Constantinople in Norman P. Tanner, ed., Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, vol 1 (London and Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), pp 3 and 31, respectively. Reiterating this point, the Council of Chalcedon (451) declared "[We] all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, consubstantial/essential with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same con-substantial/essential with us as regards his humanity, one and the same Christ, at no point was the difference between the natures [i.e., essences] taken away through the union. But rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person (hypóstasis) and in a single being" (see Tanner, Decrees, p 86).

21See Triads, III, i, 34-35 (pp 89-90). The effect of this divinizing presence, both with regard to the divinizing of the human essence of Christ, as well as the humanity proper to every baptized person, was the work proper to the energy of the Holy Spirit. On this point, see Mantzaridis, Deification of Man, pp 33-39, wherein the author explains Gregory's understanding of the role played by the Holy Spirit in the process of divinization and, what is more, the significance Gregory placed upon the process of the Holy Spirit ex Patre solo for the proper Orthodox understanding of this process, as well as of the relationship existing between the persons of the Trinity, i.e., if the Spirit were to proceed from both Father and Son rather than from the Father alone "as the sovereign principle of the Trinity," then the Holy Spirit would be set "on the same level as created beings" and so be unable to effect the divinization the believer. Thus, it was for no mean reason that Gregory chose to debate Barlaam. In his judgment, what was at stake was nothing other than the proper understanding of salvation.

22See Lossky, In the Image p 61. "At the moment of the Incarnation the divine light was concentrated, so to speak, in Christ, the God-Man in whom the fullness of the deity dwells (Col 2:9). This means that the humanity of Christ was deified by the hypostatic union with the divine nature [i.e., essence], that Christ, during his terrestrial life, was always resplendent with the divine light, which remained invisible to most men." This light is the divinizing gift of the Holy Spirit which bestows via the divine energies a share in the divine life (cf. Triads III, i, 35). This only emphasizes what was stated by the early Great Councils regarding the hypostatic union that in the Incarnation, a human essence was united to the divine person (hypóstasis) of the Word. By virtue of this union, the councils declared that the human and divine essences of Christ coexisted inseparably and without either confusion or diminishment of that which is proper to them in the one divine person of the Word Incarnate who is confessed to be the "single being" of Jesus Christ. Thus, humanity and divinity are not in conflict but coexist in the "God-Man" Jesus Christ who as Word Incarnate shares in the very life of God. This formed the foundation of the arguments of Maximus the Confessor whose influence upon Gregory is well noted by Gregory's frequent appeal to him (e.g., Triads III, i, 28 [pp 83-84]). For a brief statement of Maximus's position regarding deification, see Meyendorff, St Grégoire Palamas, pp 45-48.

23Triads, III, i, 10, 12, and 19 [pp 72, 73-74, and 78, respectively].
claimed to see in their experiences of pure prayer, that is, the resplendent, uncreated light of the divine drawing them into union with God by progressively conforming their own humanity to the divinized humanity of Jesus Christ. For the hesychast master Gregory, this affirmed the absolute significance of Jesus Christ for all humanity in general and for the Christian in particular.

As the divinization of Christ's human essence was effected through its union with the divine person of the Word in the Incarnation, so, too, is the divinization of the human essence personalized in all men and women effected by their union with the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, through baptism. By such a union, the human person encounters the divinized humanity of Christ's enhypostaticized human essence and, as a consequence, experiences the effective, divinizing presence of the divine energies within him or herself. In this way, the baptized believer participates by grace in the life that Christ, the Word Incarnate, has by nature—communion of life and love in the undivided Trinity. Further, just as in the Incarnation there is neither confusion nor diminishment of either Christ's divinity or his humanity, so there is neither confusion nor dimishment of human personhood in the union that the baptized share with the di-

24Ibid, III, i, 30 (pp 85-86), cf Mantzaridis, Deification of Man, pp 96-104, for an explanation of the significance of the vision of light—specifically uncreated light—for Orthodox theology in general and for Gregory's theology in particular, i.e., it was the effective energy of the Holy Spirit (and, hence, uncreated, as the Holy Spirit is a divine person, not a "created being", see note 21, above), which enabled the baptized believer to have a direct, immediate experience of God, thereby divinizing him or her. As Mantzaridis explained, 'The hesychast monks of Mount Athos, in receiving the radiance of uncreated light, were experiencing direct communion with God, together with all the regenerative [i.e., uniting the baptized believer to Christ and thereby restoring him or her to the dignity of his or her creation as imago Dei] and deifying consequences if this Uncreated light, according to the teaching of Palamas and of the hesychasts in general, is the divinizing gift of the Holy Spirit, 'this glory of the divine nature, whereby God has communion with the saints.' This light is not only visible to man but is participable by him, and participating in it he is divinized" (Mantzaridis, Deification of Man, p 99)

25Triads, i, iii, 38

26Ibid, III, i, 18, 28, and 30-31 (pp 78, 83-84, and 85-87, respectively) In referring to the grace of divinization as "enhypostatic," Gregory sought to emphasize the hesychast belief that this grace is experienced neither as an abstract quality, as though it were an intellectual construct, nor as a temporal reality existing one moment but passing away the next, but a stable, effective, essential energy of God that makes of the human person an adopted son or daughter of God by conforming his or her humanity after the image of the divinized humanity of the Son, the Incarnate Word Jesus Christ

27See Lossky, In the Image, pp 109-110 'The Son has become like us by the incarnation, we become like him by deification, by partaking of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who communicates the divinity to each human person in a particular way. The redeeming work of the Son is related to our nature. The deifying work of the Holy Spirit concerns our persons. But the two are inseparable. One is unthinkable without the other, for each is the condition of the other, and ultimately they are but one dispensation of the Holy Trinity, accomplished by two Divine Persons sent by the Father into the world. This double dispensation of the Word and of the Paraclete has as its goal the union of created being with God'".

28Though not essential to this essay, it is worth noting that, in accord with the Fathers, Gregory held that a person's true likeness to God is manifested when other people are able to see it active in one's life. For a fuller explanation of this, see Meyendorff, Introduction a l'étude, pp 245-246 'This contradicts the often mistaken belief among Western Christians that Orthodox spirituality lacks an evangelical character. Quite the opposite. What is given to one is given for the sake of all, as was Christ
vine personhood of Christ. Rather, by union with Christ, the baptized come to participate in ever fuller degrees in the glory of his divinized humanity and, in the earthen vessels of their own bodies, experience the light of the divine presence that transfigured Christ's earthly body, thereby bringing them into deeper union with the divine life effectively present in Christ. This stands out more clearly when considering divinization's sacramental character.

2. Sacramental

In characterizing divinization as sacramental, I refer principally to the manner by which God's salvific will is affected within the reality of our enfleshed existence. The Incarnation itself attests to this. Salvation in Christ did not occur apart from our flesh. Therefore, it will not be experienced by us apart from that flesh, and this in two ways: in the union of body and spirit in a continuous Amen to the grace of divinization, and in the manner by which Christ unites us more closely to himself by incorporating us more fully into his Body.

The union of body and spirit in our Amen to the grace of divinization formed the heart of the hesychast teaching regarding pure prayer as "prayer of the heart." Such prayer arises from the very core of the human person and involves the whole person, body and spirit, in a rhythmic, effective attentiveness to God's presence. In this way, one focuses one's mind upon oneself, scrutinizes one's passions, gains control over them, and lives according to God's commandments. This opens a person to the grace of the Holy Spirit who, by means of the divine energies, penetrates the whole of the person, divinizing both body and spirit so that the whole person in harmony with oneself may live in harmony with God. Thus understood, "purity of heart" is not a disembodied
virtue. It is the way of living in the light of God who is to be desired above all else.

This leads to the second aspect of divinization’s sacramental character: the manner in which Christ unites the whole person more closely to himself by incorporating that person more fully into his Body. Here, Gregory specifically called attention to the manner in which this unity is affected by the eucharist. By the very act of partaking of the eucharist, the whole person is incorporated into Christ’s Body and so is brought into communion with Christ’s divinized humanity. In the eucharist, Christ unites himself personally (hypostatically) to the communicant. Christ becomes “one single body” with that person, and makes of the person “a temple of the undivided Divinity.” Christ illumines the believer’s soul from within the depth of the heart. There, the believer is able to contemplate the fullness of God’s shining through Christ’s humanity and, by prayerful attentiveness, come to experience the Spirit’s divinizing work, uniting the believer to Christ’s humanity so that the believer may participate in the glory of Christ’s divinity, which is nothing less than Christ’s sharing in the Father’s glory.

3 Eschatological

For Gregory, this transforming experience is a foretaste of the believer’s ultimate union with God in the Resurrection. In that eternal moment, the spirit no longer strains against the temporal limitations of the body for the union that it formerly knew only in anticipation. Likewise, the body experiences the transforming power of divine energy and so is fully united with the spirit in its participation in God’s eternal life. Thus, in the Resurrection, the whole person is perfectly reconstituted and united to God through the vision of God’s overflowing glory in a communion of life and love.

Expressing the experience of God in terms of “sight” was characteristic of hesychasm. Eschatologically, the vision of God on this side of the grave is granted only in anticipation of its fulfillment in the resurrection. Sacramentally, it signifies the transforming power of God’s divine energy at work within the whole of the believer, bringing that person into deeper union with God through union with the divinized humanity of Christ. As this vision is granted only in relation to Christ, Christ stands at the center of all human experience of God, both as the source of our divinization and as the promise of its fulfillment.

4. Vision of the Divine Glory

In his Discourses, Symeon the New Theologian described his experience of

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40 ibid., I, iii, 38
41 ibid., I, ii, 2 (p 42), cf Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, pp 51–56. The importance of the eucharist for the process of divinization underscores what was said above regarding the evangelical character of Orthodoxy. As Mantzaridis noted, citing Gregory, “Having participated in the blood of Christ’s testament, let us not make this testament of no effect by our acts” (Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, p. 56, citing Homily 56, 9; cf pp 61–85)
42 See Mantzaridis, *Deification of Man*, p 55, for a discussion of this point, with reference to the sacrament of the eucharist.
43 *Triads*, II, iii, 66 (pp. 67–68)
God in terms that resonate deeply with the tradition of hesychasm

You drew me from a stinking swamp When I reached firm ground, you entrusted me to your servant and disciple (Symeon the Pious), bidding him to cleanse me from all stain He led me by the hand as one leads a blind man to the fountainhead, i.e., to the Holy Scriptures and to your divine commandments One day when I was hurrying to plunge myself into this daily bath, You met me on the road, You who had already drawn me out of the mire Then, for the first time the pure light of your divine face shown before my weak eyes From that day on, you returned often at the fountain source You would plunge my head into the water, and let me see the splendor of your light Then suddenly you would disappear You would become invisible, and I did not understand who you were Finally you deigned to reveal the noble mystery One day when it seemed as though you were plunging me over and over again in the luminous waters, lightning flashed surrounded me I saw the rays of your face merge with the waters, washed by these resplendent waters, I was carried out from myself and ravaged in ecstasy

On coming back to myself, I wept in sorrowful surprise at my abandoned state But soon you deigned to reveal your face to me, like the sun shining in the open heavens, without form, without appearance, still not revealing who you were How could I have known unless you told me, for you vanished at once from my weak sight

For the first time you allowed me, a wicked sinner, to hear the sweetness of your voice You spoke so tenderly that I trembled and was amazed, wondering how and why I had been granted your gifts You said to me ‘I am the God who became man for love of you You have desired me and sought me with your whole soul, therefore henceforth you shall be my brother, my friend, the coheir of my glory’

Symeon’s description is christocentric, for it was Christ, the Word Incarnate and Risen Son of Man whom he encountered in the light It is sacramental, for it was within the very fabric of Symeon’s humanity that he “heard” Christ’s voice It is eschatological, for each of his encounters begged another in which the One whom he saw became ever more intimate to him, even while remaining wholly other This was the hesychasm Gregory defended the experience of the transcendent God who reveals Godself as more intimate to us than we are to ourselves, through a vision of inexpressible, inconceivable, uncreated light

Apophaticism held a well-established place within the Byzantine tradition It resounded within the Hagia Sophia with the confession of God as “ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible,” transcending the limitations of our creaturely finitude To one as sensitive to this tradition as Barlaam, the hesychasts’ claim to a direct experience of God—to see God—bore the definitive stamp of heresy Gregory’s Defense was to turn this criticism on its head by affirming that, far from contradicting the Church’s faith, hesychasm was Ortho-

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44 See Meyendorff, St Gregory Palamas pp 51-52
44 Liturgy of John Chrysostom, anaphora
doxy's truest affirmation, for it opened the Christian's "eyes" to the mystery of the transcendent God's revealing Godself to all humanity in Christ.  

Gregory declared that the cloud of unknowability surrounding God is not an empty darkness but is filled with the luminous presence of God. This presence is revealed, not to fleshly eyes, but to the eyes of a believer's spiritual faculties. This vision is the graced occasion for divinization. Human beings were created in God's image and likeness. Therefore, they were created to know God beyond the finitude of their intellect and to see God beyond the veil of material sensibility. This was perfectly realized in Christ by virtue of the hypostatic union. By conformity to Christ's divinized humanity, it may be realized by all those who are "in Christ" as well, albeit only in anticipation of the "glory that is to be revealed." Gregory expresses this well with words that compliment those of Symeon, quoted above:

This knowledge, which is beyond conception, is common to all who have believed in Christ. As to the goal of this true faith, which comes about by the fulfilling of the commandments, it does not bestow knowledge of God through beings alone, whether knowable or unknowable, for by 'beings' here we understand 'created things'; but it does so through that uncreated light which is the glory of God, of Christ our God, and of those who attain the supreme goal of being conformed to Christ [i.e., after the pattern of his divinized humanity]. For it is in the glory of the Father that Christ will come again, and it is in the glory of their father—Christ—that 'the just will shine like the sun' [Mt 18:43]; they will be light, and will see the light, a sight delightful and all-holy, belonging only to the purified heart. This light at present shines in part, as a pledge, for those who through impassibility have passed beyond all that is condemned, and through pure and immaterial prayer have passed beyond all that is pure. But on the Last Day, it will deify in a manifest fashion 'the sons of the Resurrection', who will rejoice in eternity and in glory in communion with Him Who has endowed our nature with a glory and splendour that is divine.

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46 See Triads, I, III, 3
47 Ibid, I, III, 18 (pp 35-36)
48 "On the day of the transfiguration, when God's uncreated grace had not yet been given to man, it illuminated the three disciples from without through the medium of their corporeal sight, but it is subsequently bestowed on the faithful through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist and dwells within them, illuminating from within the eyes of the soul. Thus, in accord with the hesychasts' mystical experience, Palamas does not speak of the bodily eyesight being transformed, but of the spiritual perception being strengthened by divine grace. Of course, here too he does not ignore the body's share in the communion of uncreated grace, he simply maintains that during this mystical experience it is man's intellect that first partakes in the radiance, 'and through the intellect the body linked to it is made more divine'" (Mantzaris, Deification of Man, p 101, citing Triads, I, III, 33)
49 Triads, III, i, 22 and 27 (pp 80 ad 83, respectively), also II, III, 37 (pp 66-67)
50 Ibid, II, III, 17 (pp 61-62) For Gregory, this "knowing" was knowledge not in a strict but in a metaphorical sense (see Triads, II, III, 33 [p 64]), i.e., as a way of affirming that the human person does experience someone in his or her experience of God (cf Triads, I, III, 4 [pp 33-34]), Gregory referred to this as "knowing beyond knowing," i.e., as an immediate vision of God had by the grace of the Holy Spirit (see Triads, III, i, 35 [pp 89-90])
51 See Ibid, I, III, 22 (pp 38-39)
52 Ibid, II, III, 66 (p 67)
To answer fully Barlaam's criticisms, however, it was vital for Gregory to reconcile hesychasm's claim to an immanent experience of God with the doctrinal axiom of God's absolute transcendence. He accomplished this by an appeal to the patristic distinction between the essence and the energies of God.

D. The Essence and the Energies of God

Gregory's grounding of hesychasm in the distinction between the essence and the energies of God proved to be his most noteworthy contribution to the development of the hesychast tradition, as well as to the wider tradition of Orthodox theology. While a rehearsal of the theological subtleties of this distinction would be beyond the scope of this essay, an overview of its basic thrust is vital to any study of Palamism. As noted above, in his defense of hesychasm, Gregory sought both to affirm the apophatic tradition of the Church and to reach beyond it. In God's essence, God is ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, and incomprehensible. Yet, for Gregory as for the Fathers, God transcends even mystery. For, as I noted above, the aforementioned dark cloud of unknowability that surrounds God is not filled with fathomless darkness but with the eternal glory of the divine presence of God who communicates Godself to the believer by means of the divine energies.

The term *energia* denotes action and operation. I referred to this term above when describing the effective presence of God in divinization. In this sense, Gregory presented the divine energies as the effective presence of God to creation, particularly to human beings. While distinct from God's essence, which remains inaccessible to the human person *qua human*, the energies are nonetheless so intimately related to the divine essence that they share in its uncreated quality. Thus, the divine energies are essentially divine and, as such, are capable of providing the human person with an intimate, immediate experience of God who, nevertheless, remains essentially wholly Other. According to Greg-

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53 See, above, my discussion of the Christocentric character of divinization, particularly my reference to, and citation of, Mantzaridis in note 24, above.

54 In accord with Christian monotheism, Gregory held there to be one common energy of the three persons of the Trinity. To speak of the divine energy(ies), then, is to speak not of the relationship existing between the divine persons but of the relationship existing between the divine persons and us. As Robert Sinkewicz stated in his commentary on Gregory's later work, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, "When Gregory spoke of the energies observed in the three hypostases, he did not neglect to add that in the Godhead these are numerically one, for there is one common energy of the three persons. The divine energies are spoken of as plural in reference to God's activities *ad extra*, in relation to us" (Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Saint Gregory Palamas: The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters—A Critical Edition, Translation and Study* [Toronto Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988], p. 48, referencing Chapters 138 and 144).

55 See *Triads*, III, ii, 5–6 (pp 93–94).

56 See *Triads*, III, i, 29, III, i, 7 (pp 93–94), see also III, i, 23 (p 81), in which Gregory again cites the Pseudo-Dionysius: "As the great [Dionysius] says, 'When we call the superessential [NB denoting the absolute transcendence of the divine essence] Mystery "God" or "Life" or "essence", we have in mind only the providential powers produced from the imparticipable God' [The Divine Names, V, 2]. These, then, are the essential powers. As to the Superessential which is the Reality which possesses these powers and gathers them into unity in itself. Similarly, the deifying light is also essential, but is not itself the essence of God."

57 See *Triads*, III, ii, 11 (p 98), citing the Pseudo-Dionysius (*The Divine Names*, II, 7) "If we
ory, it is possible for Christians in this sense to speak of God not only in apo-
phatic but also in kataphatic terms, that is, according to their experience of God
who has revealed Godself to them through the divine energies.

III Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio

A. Bonaventure in Context

Little is known of Bonaventure’s life before his arrival at the University of
Paris, c. 1235, when an accurate chronology of his life begins to emerge. He be-
came a bachelor of arts in 1241 and a master of arts in 1243. That same year he
followed his master, Alexander of Hales (+1245), into the Order of Friars Mi-
nor, which had been founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209. Fifteen years
later Bonaventure became the order’s Minister General, an office he would hold
for the next seventeen years.

At the time Bonaventure began his tenure as Minister General, membership
in the far-flung order topped 30,000. Men from every social class were found
within it, and likewise within the numerous factions then debating the order’s
ture identity and mission, in light of the example of its sainted founder. It is little
wonder that, after only two years in office, Bonaventure “withdrew to Mount La

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call the superessential Mystery ‘God’ or ‘Life’ or ‘Essence’ or ‘Light’ or ‘Word’, we are referring to
nothing other than the deifying powers which proceed from God and come down to us, creating sub-
stance, giving life, and granting wisdom.” See also III, 1, 29 (pp. 84-85) that the “deifying gift” of
the divine energies, while conveying the “principle of divinity,” is not the divine essence, which
remains ever transcendent. In the Chapters, Gregory offered a more succinct, focused presentation
of the essence/energy distinction, which Sinkewicz summarized in a way that informs the above pres-
entation. For this reason it deserves to be quoted in full: “The divine energy is uncreated, distinct
from the divine substance [i.e., essence] and from the trinitarian hypostases. The divine energy alone
is accessible to creatures, while the substance of God, his inner life and being, remains forever inac-
sessible and utterly transcendent to all created reality. For both men and angels, union with God
means participation in the energy which is truly God, yet distinct from his substance which is impar-
ticipable. The distinction between God’s substance and energy is necessary to explain the fact that
God in his asynt is totally beyond nature and being but still, at the same time, intimately close to the
realm of creation. There is both a natural participation in the divine energy common to all created
beings and a participation granted solely to rational beings [i.e., humankind and angels] who have
freely chosen the good” (Sinkewicz, Chapters, p. 41). The manner in which Gregory holds this es-
sence/energies distinction in relationship to the philosophical principle of divinity as essentially sim-
ple remains problematic for many students of Gregory’s theology. It is helpful, then, to keep in mind
a principle that he expounded during his debate with Gregory Akindynos, a former student of Pal-
amas’s who criticized his master’s distinction between the divine essence and energy on the ground
that it contradicted the simplicity of God. Drawing upon the Fathers, who posited the impossibility
of knowing the existence of an essence apart from its energies, he stated, “What does not possess
energy is not simple, but nonexistent” (Mantzaridis, Deification of Man, p. 106, citing Answer to
Akindynos VI, xii, 42). Thus, to affirm the existence of the divine energies is to affirm the very exis-
tence of God and with it the graced-ability of humankind to enter into direct, immediate relationship
with God who is that mysterious unity-in-diversity whom we confess as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

58 Due to a longstanding controversy between Paris’s secular and mendicant masters, Bonaven-
ture was not awarded his doctorate until the spring of 1257, six months after Pope Alexander IV
confirmed his election as Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor.
Verna, seeking a place of quiet and desiring to find there peace of spirit.  

Whether he found that peace is unknown. What we do know is that from that retreat Bonaventure produced what would eventually be recognized as a masterpiece of Western spiritual literature: *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, commonly translated today as *The Soul’s Journey into God*.  

Despite both the brevity of his tenure as a university lecturer and the demands on him as Minister General, Bonaventure produced a wide-ranging corpus of forty-five collected works. Yet, for all its topical breadth, his thought was remarkably consistent. It was focused by a coherent theological vision that he expressed early in his university career in a “little work” commissioned by his own students, the *Breviloquium*:

The theme of theology is, indeed, God [as] the first Principle. Rather, being the highest knowledge and the highest teaching, it resolves everything in God as the first and supreme Principle. That is why, in giving the reasons for everything contained in this little work or treatise, I have attempted to derive each reason from the first Principle, in order to demonstrate that the truth of Holy Scripture is from God, of God, according to God, and for God as an end.  

Bonaventure saw all creation as being from God, of God, according to God, and for God as its proper, intended end. This was particularly true regarding creation’s crown, the human person. It was the human person alone who was created in the image and likeness of the triune God and who was eternally intended to share in the divine life of the Trinity, that is, to enter into communion with God the Father by being conformed to the image of the Son by the effective grace of the Holy Spirit. In a word, the human person was created to know God, not by the finite power of the intellect but by the limitless expanse of the

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60 See Bernard McGinn, “Ascension and Introversion in the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*,” in *S Bonaventura, 1274–1974*, vol 3 (Grottaferrata Collegio S Bonaventura, 1973), p 535 “For clarity of expression, mastery of organization, and density of thought, the *Itinerarium* ranks as one of the purest gems of medieval theology”  

61 Prologue, (6), 6, p 22, the translation and pagination for quotes from the *Breviloquium* are from José de Vinck, *The Works of Bonaventure Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, vol 2, *The Breviloquium* (Paterson, NJ St Anthony Guild Press, 1963)  

62 Cf Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (*The Collations on the Six Days*), I, 17 “[T]his is the sum total of our metaphysics concerned with emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, that is, illumination through spiritual radiations and return to the Supreme Being” (José de Vinck, tr, *The Works of Bonaventure Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, vol 5, *Collations on the Six Days* [Paterson, NJ St Anthony Guild Press, 1970])  

63 See Ilia Delio, *Crucified Love Bonaventure’s Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy, IL Franciscan Press, 1998), pp 45–50, wherein Delio discussed Bonaventure’s understanding of the human person as possessing a “built-in” capacity for God. For Bonaventure, this capacity is grounded in the created nature of every human being, i.e., in his or her having been created in the image and likeness of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Regarding how Bonaventure understood the human person *qua human* to be *imago Dei* is a question that I shall consider below. Suffice it to say at this point, for Bonaventure a person’s capacity for God is “written” into his or her very being,
heart wherein the gift of divine love could make its home, find its response, and grow. Bonaventure expressed this clearly in the opening lines of the *Breviloquium*, citing Eph. 3:14-19:

For this reason I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name, that He may grant you from His glorious riches to be strengthened with power through His Spirit unto the progress of the inner man; and to have Christ dwelling through faith in your hearts: so that, being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge, in order that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.  

This process whereby the human person enters into the fullness of the divine life that Bonaventure addressed in the *Itinerarium* will serve as the principle lens through which I shall examine his understanding of the human person’s experience of God.

B. The Journey into God

Composed in 1259, the *Itinerarium* represented a significant turning point in Bonaventure’s theological output. From this point onward, Bonaventure the scholastic master entered into explicit conversation with what we today call “spirituality.” This conversation stretched his theology, as he strove to express theologically the human experience of God. The ground upon which Bonaventure chose to develop this conversation was his own spiritual father, St. Francis of Assisi. He made Francis the hermeneutic not only for his own experience but also for the experience that God wills all people to have of Godself through the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ.

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"we are ordered to God immediately," as Delio stated (Delio, *Crucified Love*, p 50), and so no-thing and no-one is capable of fully satisfying this capacity—this God-given longing—for God but God in Godself.

*Breviloquium*, Prologue, 1st paragraph, p 1. This prayer of Bonaventure finds a later echo in his prologue to the *Itinerarium*, in which Bonaventure invites his readers “to the groans of prayer through Christ crucified so that he not believe that that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy, work without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, endeavor without divine grace, reflection as a mirror without divinely inspired wisdom.” (Itinerarium, Prologue, no. 4, pp 55-56). Thus, for Bonaventure, as Delio notes, the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* is “not a ‘head-trip’ but a matter of the heart” (Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought and Writings* [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2001], p 100).

Nowhere in the *Itinerarium* did Bonaventure explicitly claim to be expressing a mystical experience of his own. Nevertheless, given the deeply personal tone that marks the work as a whole, it would not stretch credulity to assert that what Bonaventure bequeathed to us was not a speculative musing but a theological reflection upon his own mystical encounter with God—a reflection guided not only by his theological acumen but also by the vocation he received as one of St. Francis’s Friars Minor.

On the importance of St. Francis for Bonaventure’s theology, as well as for the theology of the broader Franciscan School, see Zachary Hayes’s comments in his introduction to (and translation of) *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol 3, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* [Quaestiones Disputatae de Mysterio Trinitatis] (St Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1979), pp 32-33.
Bonaventure divided the *Itinerarium* into a prologue and seven chapters. The first six chapters serve as a guided meditation on the soul's ascent from the created order into a direct experience of God. This division was inspired by St. Francis's mystical vision on La Verna, a seraph bearing in his six wings an image of Christ crucified. Franciscan tradition holds that this experience marked Francis with the stigmata, in response to his desire to experience in his own flesh Christ's salvific love for all humanity. The seventh chapter, “On Spiritual and Mystical Ecstasy,” recapitulates this ascent in the experience of a mystical death that parallels Francis's own experience. For this reason, it will serve as the primary lens through which I will examine Bonaventure's understanding of the experience of God, which, at its heart, is (1) trinitarian, (2) christocentric, (3) humanizing, and (4) focused upon the transformative effect of divine love.

1 Trinitarian

In her introduction to the “life, thought, and writings” of Bonaventure, Ilia Delio, O.S.F., described succinctly the trinitarian character of Bonaventure's thought:

The life of God—precisely because God is trune—does not belong to God alone. God who dwells in inaccessible light and eternal glory comes to us in the face of Christ and the activity of the Holy Spirit. Because of God’s outreach to the creature, God is said to be essentially relational, ecstatic, fecund, alive as passionate love. Divine life is therefore also our life. The heart of the Christian life is to be united with the God of Jesus Christ by means of communion with one another. The doctrine of the Trinity is, ultimately, therefore a teaching not about the abstract nature of God, nor about God in isolation from everything other than God, but a teaching about God's life with us and our life with one another.

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67 See *Itinerarium*, Prologue pp 2–3
68 Delio, *Simply Bonaventure*, pp 39–40, citing Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p 1 Bonaventure's theology of the Trinity is essential to his thought, and this is particularly the case with regard to the *Itinerarium*. His reflection on the "soul's journey into God" must be read in the light of his theology of the Trinity, which he explicated earlier in his *Commentary on the Sentences* (Commentarium in I, II, III, IV Librum Sententiarum) (1250–56), *de Mysterio Trinitatis* (1253), and the *Breviloquium* (1256). As Cousins noted in his introduction to the *Itinerarium in Bonaventure*, behind "the entire treatise stands Bonaventure's theological vision, which is based on the doctrine of the Trinity as the mystery of the self-diffusion of the Good" (p 24) For this reason, Bonaventure's trinitarian theology deserves further word It is marked by four elements (1) Bonaventure conceived of the Trinity according to the Greek/Patristic model, not the Latin/Augustinian model Like the Greek Fathers, he focused on the Father as dynamic source, not on the persons as relations, as Augustine had done Bonaventure did integrate aspects of Augustinian's model of the Trinity into his thought, e.g., his acceptance of the *filioque*, but these always remained subordinated to the Greek model Flowing from this, (2) the trinitarian procession were seen as the expression of the Father's fecundity—the Father as the *fontalis plenitude* of the Trinity. From this perspective, Bonaventure developed a highly elaborate doctrine of the generation of the Son as perfect Image of the Word of the Father (3) Bonaventure makes a self-conscious link between the Trinity and creation. The world issues ultimately from the fecundity of the Trinity and reflects the Trinity, according to various categories of representation vestige, image, similitude. Finally, (4) this Trinitarian theology is the basis for Bonaventure's spirituality, in which the human person as *imago Dei*—or, more precisely, the human person as *imago Trinitatis*—returns to its trinitarian source (Ewert H Cousins, "The Two Poles of
For Bonaventure the essentially relational character of God as a Trinity of "persons" is the foundation of all our rightly ordered relationships, with one another and with God. This resonates deeply with Bonaventure's earlier assertion in the *Breviloquium* that everything is "from God, of God, according to God, and for God as an end." It also resonates with the seventh chapter of the *Itinerarium* in which he recapitulated the contemplative journey of the human person into God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

"[I]nflamed in his very marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit whom Christ sent into the world," a person is driven to seek communion with the triune...
God. This expresses itself first in the contemplation of God as God reveals Godself “through His vestiges and in His vestiges” in the created order.  

This continues with the contemplation of God as imaged by a person’s human soul. Finally, that person is led to contemplate with devotion the perfection of the *imago Dei* in Jesus Christ who, as the Word Incarnate, revealed in his crucified flesh both the fullness of God’s love for humanity and humanity’s perfect response to God’s love. This threefold contemplative journey leads a person into a mysti-

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70 *Itinerarium*, 7, 1, p 111, cf 2, 11-12, pp 75-77 Regarding this relationship between the human person and the world as a locus for contemplating God, Delio stated, “The human person, in Bonaventure’s view, is to be immersed in reverent contemplation of the world, not to flee it, but to embrace it, so as to be drawn to its source who is God Bonaventure describes creation as a human person and the world as a locus for contemplating God, or as rephrased above in note 68, as *imago Dei*—

and that he grounded this capacity in the created nature of every human being as rephrased above in note 63, above, regarding the human person’s capacity for God As I stated with reference for contemplating God reveals not only Bonaventure’s theological acumen but also his vocation as a faithful son of St Francis (see Hayes, *Bonaventure Mystical Writings*, pp 59-61)

71 Ibid, 7, 1, p 110-111, cf 3, 1, pp 79-80, and 4, 1, p 87 At this point, it is appropriate to expand upon note 63, above, regarding the human person’s capacity for God As I stated with reference to Delio, Bonaventure held that the human person *qua human* possesses a built-in capacity for God, and that he grounded this capacity in the created nature of every human being as *imago Dei*—

or as rephrased above in note 68, as *imago Trinitatis*, i.e., in the human person’s having been created in the image and likeness of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit In order to explain precisely how he conceived of the human person as bearing this image, Bonaventure borrowed from two Augustinian tris memory-intelligence-will and mind-knowledge-love “[That] creature which is an image—such as the intellectual creature—testifies to the threefold character of God, as it were, from near at hand, because an image is an express similitude The intellectual creature has memory, intelligence, and will, or mind, knowledge, and love, mind, like a parent, knowledge, like an offspring, and love like a bond proceeding from both and joining them together For the mind cannot fail to love the word which it generates Therefore, these not only indicate origin and emanation which leads to distinction among them, but they indicate also quality, consubstantiality, and inseparability, from which an express testimony is given to the fact that God is a trinity” (de Mysterio Trinitatis, 1, 2, conclusion, cf Hayes, *Bonaventure Mystical Writings*, pp 81-92) Note that, as Delio stated, the human person does not thus image God in a generic sense Rather, the human person images God “in the specific sense of being like the Son,” i.e., of being created after the likeness of the perfect, only-begotten Image of the Father “Although Bonaventure holds that the human person is created as an image of God , he qualifies this by saying that the ‘image’ is the inner ordering of human nature to the mystery of the second divine person, the Son or Word of God ” Thus for Bonaventure, the “status of the human person as an image of God is grounded in the Word as image of the Father” (Delio, *Crucified Love*, p 48) This qualification should be kept in mind when reading the sections 2 Christocentric and 3 Humanization, below It is because human beings as *imago Dei* are ordered to Christ as perfect *imago Patris* that they have access to the Father and are able, by means of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, which restores the created Godlike dignity of their human nature, to participate in the divine life of the Trinity that flows from him as *fontalis plenitudo*

72 See *Itinerarium*, 4, 2

73 Ibid, 6, 4, p 106. 7, 2, pp 111-112 This emphasis upon Christ crucified is a fundamental characteristic of the Franciscan tradition, which, it may be said, sees in Christ’s embrace of the cross the full expression of thehypostatic union (see Delio, *The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective* [Cincinnati, OH St Anthony Messenger Press, 2005], pp 58-59, although Delio does not make this argument herself, her comments on the intrinsic link between the Incarnation and the Crucifixion in the life of Jesus as exemplary of the total self-gift of love that a person is called upon to make of him or herself to God and neighbor may be read as supportive of this contention) In his obedient embrace of the poverty of the human condition, the Son redeemed for humanity its innate dignity as the *imago Dei* and, by so doing, restored to it that which, from the beginning, God intended all human beings to enjoy, i.e., participation in the divine life of the Trinity Thus, the Incarnation and the
cal encounter with Christ, who joins that person to himself and, in an embrace that restores that person’s innate dignity as *imago Dei*, graces him or her with a sharing in the very life of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  

2 Christocentric

The christocentric character of Bonaventure’s journey stands out boldly—and this by design. Bonaventure’s trinitarian theology and his Christology are inextricably linked and relate directly to his understanding of a person’s experience of the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For Bonaventure, the Son stands at the relational center of the Trinity and, as that center, is himself the nexus of every person’s experience of God. As Bonaventure stated in the *Itinerarium*, Crucifixion are inseparable Together they serve as the hermeneutic through which the Gospels are not only read but also lived. It is for this reason that Phil 2:5–11 (“for our sake he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross”) and 2 Cor 8:9 (“though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty, you might become rich”) have been so dear to Franciscans. It was also for this reason that Bonaventure exhorted all his readers to cultivate, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, a “burning love” for Christ crucified Only by the free offering of such love, given in thanksgiving to the Father for all he willed his Son to do for humanity and on behalf of humanity can a person come to know God and, ultimately, experience salvation (see *Itinerarium*, Prologue, no 3, pp 54–55).  

*Itinerarium*, 7, 5, pp 113–115, 4, 2, pp 87–88 Cf Hayes, *Bonaventure Mystical Writings*, pp 92–99, especially “To grow in grace is to grow into God-likeness by becoming more like Christ. To grow in Christ-likeness is to enter more deeply into the Word’s relation to the Father and the Spirit” (p 96)  

Hayes noted this in his introduction to *de Mysterio Trinitatis* “In Bonaventure’s thought, the Trinity and Christology are inseparably intertwined. It is the mystery of Christ that leads us to the Trinity, and the Trinitarian concept of God is developed as a function of Christology. At one level, the whole of the Trinity is seen as the exemplar of the world while at another level, the mystery of exemplarity is concentrated in the second person. For the divine Word is the total expression of all that the divine love is in itself and can be in relation to the finite. The entire trune structure of God, including the procession of the Spirit, is focused on the Word in an exemplary way. In as far as the Word is the expression of the entire inner-trinitarian life of God, that which is created as an expression of God bears a relation not only to the Trinity as such, but to the Word in particular” (p 31). In light of what I said above in note 68, I am reticent to agree with Hayes’s statement that Bonaventure’s trinitarian theology is developed as a function of his Christology, at least as this is stated in the citation above. Nevertheless, in concert with Cousins I echo Hayes’s statement that, for Bonaventure, it is the mystery of Christ that leads us to the mystery of the Trinity and, moreover, to the fullness of the mystery of creation itself, in particular the mystery of the human person (cf *Itinerarium*, 6, 7, pp 108–109, and 7, 1–2, pp 111–112, quoted in the text at note 76). As Cousins has noted, in Bonaventure’s vision, “The boundless fecundity of the Father expresses itself in the generation of the Son, as Image and Word. This is the focal point of Bonaventure’s entire theology. It was in treating the generation of the Son that Bonaventure made his famous observation [citing *de Mysterio Trinitatis*, 4, 2, cf note 62 for Bonaventure’s repetition of this in his *Hexaemeron*] It is in the Son that the fecundity of the Father finds its perfect Image, and it is from the Son, as Word, that all creation issues, and it is to him, as exemplar, that it reflects back and returns” (Cousins, “Two Poles,” p 161). It is this final point, that of reflection and return, that I shall consider below in sections 3 Humanization and 4 The Transformative Experience of Divine Love. N.B. In the development of this theology of the Trinity in which Christ stands at the center, Bonaventure’s Western/Latin roots come to the fore. Yet, in placing Christ at the center, Bonaventure neither subordinates nor contradicts what he received from the Greek Fathers, i.e., the primacy of the Father in this he shows himself to be at one and the same time both a markedly traditional theologian, as he held fast to the traditions he received, and a thinker who was able to develop what he received in new and creative ways. Thus, one may be justified to say of Bonaventure what Florovsky said of Gregory Palamas, namely that “[he]
In this passing over, Christ is the way and the door, Christ is the ladder and the vehicle, like the Mercy Seat placed above the ark of God and the mystery hidden from eternity. Whoever turns his face fully to the Mercy Seat and with faith, hope and love, devotion, admiration, exultation, appreciation, praise and joy beholds him hanging upon the cross, such a one makes the Pasch, that is, the passover, with Christ. By the staff of the cross he passes over the Red Sea, going from Egypt into the desert, where he will taste the hidden manna, and with Christ he will rest in the tomb, as if dead to the outer world, but experiencing, as far as is possible in this wayfarer's state, what was said on the cross to the thief who adhered to Christ: Today you shall be with me in paradise.

Thus, for Bonaventure there can be no experience of God and, consequently, no union with God apart from Jesus Christ. It is Christ who sends the Holy Spirit to "inflame" a person with the desire for God, and it is Christ who is himself the means by which this desire is fulfilled, enabling a person to pass over with him into the mystery of the communion of life and love of the Trinity.

3 Humanization

In order to address the humanizing character of a person's "journey into God," some background to Bonaventure's theological anthropology must be reviewed. Like his contemporaries, Bonaventure understood every person to be wounded by the double effect of original sin, moral guilt on the one hand and physical death on the other.

Through the grace of baptism, which joins a person to Christ by the effective grace of the Holy Spirit, a person is freed from the first of these effects, moral guilt, in order that he or she may grow in faith and, by so doing, ultimately be liberated from the second effect, physical death, via bodily resurrection. In effect, this process of progressive liberation frees a person to experience the humanizing presence of Christ in the divine life of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
person to become by grace what every person is intended to be by nature: to be fully human, to be a true imago Dei called to a living communion with both God and, in and through God, all creation.  

Integral to this process of humanization is the restoration of a person’s “spiritual senses.” These senses enable a person not only to perceive the presence of Christ (and in and through him as the Word Incarnate, the presence of the Trinity), but also to respond to Christ with the whole of that person’s heart:

When by faith the soul believes in Christ as the uncreated Word and Splendor of the Father, it recovers its spiritual hearing and sight: its hearing to receive the words of Christ and its sight to view the splendor of that Light. When it longs in hope to receive the inspired Word, it recovers through desire and affection the spiritual sense of smell. When it embraces in love the Word Incarnate, receiving delight from him and passing over into him through ecstatic love, it recovers its sense of taste and touch. Having recovered these senses, when it sees its Spouse and hears, smells, tastes and embraces him, the soul can sing like the bride [in] the Canticle of Canticles.

It is this total response that progressively leads a person into union with Christ who, in turn, leads that person into the glory of the divine life of the Trinity. As Bonaventure stated, borrowing the words of the Pseudo-Dionysius:

[You] my friend, concerning mystical visions, with your journey more firmly determined, leave behind your senses and intellectual activities, sensible and invisible things, all nonbeing and being, and in this state of unknowing be restored, insofar as is possible, to unity with him who is above all essence and knowledge. For transcending yourself and all things, by the immeasurable and absolute ecstasy of a pure mind, leaving behind all things and freed from all things, you will ascend to the superessential ray of the divine darkness.

Thus far, Bonaventure’s understanding of the experience of God has been phrased almost entirely in terms of the soul. It must be kept in mind, however, that this experience that so moves the soul in love also moves a person to a total

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80See my commentary above in note 71 for background regarding what Bonaventure meant when he spoke of the human person as an image of God.

81The notion of the human person’s possessing spiritual, in addition to natural, senses is something already encountered above, in the treatment of Gregory Palamas. That it should be encountered again here in Bonaventure is understandable. The doctrine of the spiritual senses was something favored by the Fathers of the church, both East/Greek and West/Latin. Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine all spoke of an interior experience of God through one’s spiritual senses. Bonaventure renewed this doctrine, but in a way integral to his (typically, though not exclusively, Franciscan) devotion to the humanity of Christ. He held that when the soul recovers these senses—which it does when, through the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit conferred in baptism and continually active in a person’s life through the living of one’s faith in Christ, it is conformed to Christ as the perfect Image of the Father—it can fully embrace the God of compassionate love. Then the soul is prepared to ascend the heights of ecstatic contemplation and come to an immediate experience of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in eschatological anticipation of the resurrection when the believer, body and soul, will share in God’s divine life forever (cf. Delio, Simply Bonaventure, pp. 108–109).

82Itinerarium 4, 3, p. 89.
83Ibid., 7, 5, pp. 114–115.
offering of self in eschatological anticipation of his or her complete passing into the mystery of God’s own trinitarian life. For Bonaventure, this process was exemplified in the person of St. Francis of Assisi. Therefore, in order to complete my examination of Bonaventure’s understanding of the soul’s salvific journey into God, I now turn to his consideration of the saint from Assisi.

4. The Transformative Experience of Divine Love

Of St. Francis’ own passing into God, Bonaventure wrote:

This was shown also to blessed Francis, when in ecstatic contemplation on the height of the mountain—where I thought out these things I have written—there appeared to him a six-winged Seraph fastened to a cross, as I and several others heard in that very place from his companion who was with him then. There he passed over into God in ecstatic contemplation and became an example of perfect contemplation as he had previously been of action, like another Jacob and Israel, so that through him, more by example than by word, God might invite all truly spiritual men to this kind of passing over and spiritual ecstasy.84

For St. Francis, the experience of union with God in and through the person of Jesus Christ literally transformed his own person. As the tradition of the Franciscan Order would later hold, Francis emerged from this experience marked with the sacred stigmata. He was thus seen to have become the very image of the One he loved, Jesus Christ, and by so doing surrendered himself in and with Christ to the One who sent Christ as the incarnate proclamation of divine love, God the Father. Thus viewed, Francis was seen by Bonaventure as the living witness to every person’s truest vocation, to live wholly for God who gives Godself wholly to all people in and through the Incarnate Word, God’s Son, Jesus Christ.85 Once embraced, this vocation utterly transforms a person. It transforms the entire disposition of that person’s soul; it transforms the whole of that person’s life.86 As Bonaventure declared, “In this passing over, if it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities must be left behind and the height of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God.”87

84Ibid., 7.3, pp. 112–113
85See Noel Muscat, The Life of Saint Francis in the Light of Saint Bonaventure’s Theology on the “Verbum Crucifixum,” Studia Antoniana Curæ Pontificii Athenæi Editæ 32 (Rome: Editrice Antonianum, 1989), p. 175, wherein Muscat describes Bonaventure’s approach to St. Francis in his Major Life of the saint (i.e., the Legenda Maior) “The whole life of St. Francis is presented as a journey toward ecstatic vision of God in Christ Crucified, so that Francis’ conformity to Christ through the stigmata becomes a sign, a revelation of God’s grace, incarnated in his poor and humble person, and accessible to all those who, like him, become followers of Christ” Also see Delio, Crucified Love, pp. 79–81, and idem, Simply Bonaventure, pp. 137–138
86As Hayes has stated in his introduction to Bonaventure’s mystical writings, “Bonaventure himself will speak of the transformative power of love. It is a common human experience that a person is gradually changed by the persons or things that are most important in his or her life. If this is true of human relations, may it not also be true of the relation between the human person and God? The life of grace and the imitation of Christ are a process of responding to the divine offer and the example of Christ. And the human person is changed in that process. We become like what we love” (Hayes, Bonaventure Mystical Writings, p. 121)
87Itinerarium, 7.4, p. 113
The human person is "from God, of God, according to God, and for God as an end." Thus, for a person to experience God and, what is more, to know God in love, that person must set aside all presumption to experiencing and knowing God on his or her own terms. In other words, a person must obey Christ’s command to die to self. Only then can a person be filled with the richness of God and permit him or herself to be loved by God precisely as God has spoken this Word of love in the flesh and blood of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Only then can a person experience redemption and, in turn, begin in anticipation to share in the resurrection, in the divine life of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Whoever loves this death can see God because it is true beyond doubt that man will not see me and live. Let us, then, die and enter into the darkness; let us impose silence upon our cares, our desires and our imaginings. With Christ crucified let us pass out of this world to the Father so that when the Father is shown to us, we may say with Phillip: it is enough for us. Let us hear with Paul: My grace is sufficient for you. Let us rejoice with David saying: My flesh and my heart have grown faint; You are the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever Blessed be the Lord forever, and all the people will say Let it be. Let it be Amen.

HERE ENDS THE SOUL’S JOURNEY INTO GOD. 88

This said, I now turn my attention to the manner in which Gregory and Bonaventure mirror each other’s understanding of the human experience of God and, in the process, hold up to faithful Orthodox and Roman Catholics today a mirror in which they may once again discern the fundamental unity they share in Christ and that they are called by Christ to hold before the world as his one and undivided church.

IV. Saints Gregory and Bonaventure: Mirror of Experience

At the outset of this comparison it bears noting that, when I contend that Gregory and Bonaventure mirror each other’s respective understandings of the human experience of God, I am not implying that one may draw a simply “tit for tat” equation between all, or even any, aspects of their respective expositions. Even the cursory introduction offered above flies in the face of any attempt at such a simplistic equation. Rather, what I am asserting is that, from precisely within their diversity of expression, one is able discern in each saint’s writing a reflection of the other’s experience of God, revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ and drawing us, through Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit, into a communion of eternal life and love. In this final section, I shall identify five characteristics of this reflection and conclude by demonstrating how this reflection can transform the dialogue in charity proposed by John Paul II into a dialogue in faith in which we, Orthodox and Roman Catholics alike, can profess our fundamental unity as the one church of Christ before the world.

88Ibid., 7, 6, p. 116, emphasis in original.
A. The Possibility of a Direct Experience of God

The first characteristic is Gregory's and Bonaventure's mutual affirmation of the possibility for the human person to have a direct experience of God. This affirmation does not imply that either saint denied that human beings have mediated experiences of God. Their works, as reviewed in this essay, reveal this quite clearly. Rather, Gregory and Bonaventure affirmed that such an encounter is not the only one we may have. There is another, higher form of encounter available to us, the one spoken of by Jesus in the Gospels, namely, the experience of unity with God through which we come to know God in love. As such an experience cannot not be had apart from a direct, immediate encounter with God, such an experience must be possible for us, in accord with the expressed will of God proclaimed by God's Word Incarnate.

B. The Experience of God as Trinity

This leads to the second characteristic: Gregory's and Bonaventure's radically trinitarian understanding of the human experience of God. For both saints, the human experience of God is the experience of the divine present to us in the person of the Word Incarnate, God's Son, Jesus Christ, who reveals to us the fullness of God. To see the Son is to see the Father who sent him, and the light by which this unity in diversity is seen is nothing less than the divine action of the Holy Spirit. Though each saint speaks of this illumination by the Spirit in different ways—Gregory in terms of the effective presence of the Spirit by means of the divine energies, Bonaventure in terms of the indwelling of the Spirit within the human person—the point of reference for this illumination remains the same: the effective presence of God experienced in the Son, Jesus Christ, apart from whom there is no access to the life of the triune God.

C. The Experience of God as Christocentric

At this point, the third characteristic stands out boldly: its christocentrism. Christ stands squarely at the center of both Gregory's and Bonaventure's understanding of the human experience of God. As noted above, this centrality is approached from very different vantage points. For Gregory, the christocentric nature of this experience was founded upon the Christian belief in the Incarnation as it has been defined by the great Ecumenical Councils. For Bonaventure, the christocentric nature of this experience corresponded to his understanding of the

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89 For Gregory, see Triads II, iii, 11 (pp 58-59) For Bonaventure, see the first four books of the Innerarum
80 See Jn 17 21 For both Gregory and Bonaventure, the scriptures were part and parcel of their daily lives The scriptures formed their private contemplation, gave voice to their liturgical prayer, and played a determinative role in setting the parameters of their respective theologies It is with this in mind that I refer to the scriptures here, not as a proof text, but as reflective of the heart of Gregory's and Bonaventure's religious imagination
81 See Jn 14 9b
82 See Jn 14 16-20
Trinity, specifically to the central place held by the Word within his approach to this mystery of faith. Diverse as they may be, these vantages converge upon one and the same point, namely, that the fullness of God cannot be experienced apart from Christ. In himself, Christ reveals the truth of who God is. Christ leads us along the way by which we offer ourselves in response to God's gift of Godself to us. Christ is God's promise of life eternal vouchsafed for those who entrust their lives to God by placing their faith in the Son whom God sent. Christ is both the paradigm of who human beings are called to be and the medium by which they may realize that call. For both Gregory and Bonaventure, there is no true and authentic life apart from that offered us in the Word made flesh.

D The Experience of God as Sacramental

The fourth characteristic of this reflection is its sacramentality. I am not so much referring here to the sacraments as such but to the ontological ground upon which the church's belief in the efficacy in the sacraments is founded. Our belief that created reality can transcend its own limitations in order to participate in the reality of the divine, without ever ceasing to be itself. For Gregory and Bonaventure, this is supremely true of the human person in his or her relationship with God. It is precisely as human beings that we are graced to share in the life of God, not in a manner that violates our human nature but, rather, in a manner that fulfills it. Gregory spoke of this in terms of "divinization." Bonaventure spoke of this in terms best described as "humanization." However, the reality of which each saint spoke was and remains the same that when a person experiences Christ, he or she experiences the fulfillment of the desire of every human heart for a fulfillment that transcends the limitations of this world—including the apparent limitations of his or her own human nature—and that gives us, *qua human*, a share in the limitless, eternal life of God.

E The Experience of God as Union with God

The fifth and final characteristic flows directly from what was said above. Not only can a person *qua human* participate, by grace, in that which is proper to God *qua divine*, but just such a participation is a person's proper end, it is the experience for which that person and, indeed, every human being is created by God to enjoy. This harkens back to the reflection penned by St. Augustine of Hippo in the opening lines of his *Confessions*:

> Great art thou, O Lord and greatly to be praised; great is thy power and thy wisdom is infinite. And man wants to praise you, man who is only a small portion of what you have created and who goes about carrying with him his own mortality, the evidence of his own sin and evidence that Thou resistest the proud. Yet still man, this small portion of creation, wants to praise you. You stimulate him to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you. ⁹³

We are called in our humanity to participate in the gift of God's own life and love. Christ revealed this in his Incarnation. Christ perfected this upon the Cross and in the Resurrection. By enticing us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Christ draws us ever closer to himself, conforming our humanity to the glory of his own enhypostacized human essence, and giving us to share in that which Christ experiences, the eternal life of the Trinity. This is the mirror that Gregory and Bonaventure hold up to Orthodox and Roman Catholics alike, in order that we together might see the reflection of that which unites us as the church of Jesus Christ that we have visibly divided: the experience of God alive for us in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

V. Conclusion: Dialogue in Love

As the Joint International Commission noted in its agreed statement, Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church, the manifold challenges of our day lend a new sense of urgency to Christ's plea that we, as Christ's disciples, give witness to the world of the faith, hope, and love that we share in Christ. "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." In order for us to offer such a witness, it is essential that we, faithful Orthodox and Roman Catholics alike, renew our understanding of the faith, hope, and love that we share as Christ's disciples and, what is more, that we ground this renewal in love. At this moment in history, in the history of our world and of our discipleship lived for the life of our world, there can be no other way. As John Paul II stated in his apostolic letter Orientale Lumen, in "the dynamic of our meeting . . . knowledge of the treasures of others' faith . . . spontaneously produces the incentive for a new and more intimate meeting between brothers and sisters, which will be a true and sincere mutual exchange. It is an incentive which the Spirit constantly inspires in the Church and which becomes more insistent precisely in the moments of greatest difficulty."

Orthodox and Roman Catholics can thus never be content to settle solely for a mutual, strictly conceptual knowledge of one another. Such contentment stands in stark contrast to the unity Christ wills for his disciples, for to know a great deal about one another is not the same as actually knowing one another—knowing one another as fellow disciples, as sisters and brothers in Christ. For that depth of knowledge, we must allow what we have learned about one another to disclose the faith we share as disciples, which "spontaneously produces [in us] the incentive for a new and more intimate meeting" in love as "brothers and sisters." When this happens, we will no longer be content to see one another

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5No 1 (see note 5, above)
6Jn. 17.20–21.
7Orientale Lumen, no 22.
8Ibid
strictly from the security of our own familiar ground and judge the validity of one other's spiritual traditions and ecclesial life through the lens of our own respective understandings and experiences of God. For love of one's brothers and sisters leads to the desire to see God through their eyes, to experience God as they experience God within the fabric of their lives, and so to be converted once more to the One in whom there is no division. When this happens, our diversity will be seen no longer as a reason for estrangement and a ground for division but as a common treasure and the means by which we may mirror to the world the wondrous unity-in-diversity that God wills all people to have—united in one and the same baptism, nourished by one and the same eucharist, called to one and the same salvation through Jesus Christ, our Sovereign.

"May Christ, the Orientale Lumen, soon, very soon, grant us to discover that in fact, despite so many centuries of distance, we were very close, because together—perhaps without knowing it—we were walking towards the one Lord, and thus towards one another." If we Orthodox and Roman Catholic faithful would look into the mirror that Saints Gregory Palamas and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio hold before us, we would not but make this hope of John Paul II our own and, what is more, proclaim with one heart and voice the petition made by the Joint International Commission on our behalf:

May the Spirit of the risen Lord empower our hearts and minds to bear the fruits of unity in the relationship between our Churches, so that together we may serve the unity and peace of the whole human family. May the same Spirit lead us to the full expression of the mystery of ecclesial communion, that we gratefully acknowledge as a wonderful gift of God to the world, a mystery whose beauty radiates especially in the holiness of the saints, to which all are called.

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98 Ibid., no. 20.
99 Ibid., no. 28.
100 Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences, no. 1