

# Revisiting Bonaventure's Understanding of Spiritual Progress as Reflected in the *Legenda major Sancti Francisci*

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine Bonaventure's understanding of the stages of Francis' spiritual progress as presented in the *Legenda major Sancti Francisci*. Many scholars have claimed that the description of Francis' spiritual growth was deeply influenced by Bonaventure's spiritual theology, which was shaped by the Dionysian tradition. A close reading of the *Legenda major* reveals three significant themes that are not addressed in the other works of Dionysius and Bonaventure: the repeated emphasis on poverty, the achievement of the three central virtues of poverty, humility and obedience, Francis' love and communion with all of nature and the continual ascent of Francis' soul in the perfection stage. This paper will argue that these

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themes reflect the Egyptian monastic spiritual tradition derived from Evagrius, Cassian and Benedict, thereby providing a new interpretive framework for understanding the theory of spiritual progress in the *Legenda major*. Through this lens, it will be shown that Bonaventure's account of Francis' spiritual perfection in the *Legenda major* incorporates not only the Dionysian tradition but also diverse monastic traditions and spiritual theologies. Furthermore, the conclusion will briefly elucidate the profound influence Francis had on early Korean Protestant leaders and the formation of monastic spirituality. It is posited that this study on Francis' spiritual progress can contribute to the revival of socially engaged monastic spirituality, which was a crucial axis of early Korean church spirituality, at a time when a renewal of Korean church spirituality is imperative in the post-COVID-19 era.

#### **Keywords**

the major life of St. Francis, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, the spiritual progress of Francis, medieval spirituality, Pseudo-Dionysius, Evagrius of Pontus, John Cassian, Benedict of Nursia, St. Francis and the early Korean church

## I. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to re-examine the existing research on the spiritual progress in Bonaventure's *Legenda major*. In 1260, the General Chapter of the Lesser Brothers in Narbonne asked Bonaventure to write a new biography that could surpass the earlier lengthy hagiographical writings on the life of Francis.<sup>1</sup> Six years later, in 1266, the General Chapter in Paris recognized Bonaventure's *Legenda major* as a "hagiographical and theological masterpiece," and decided to delete all other earlier biographies.<sup>2</sup> After the decision of the General Chapter, the *Legenda major* became the preeminent text describing the ideal life of Francis and his spiritual growth. It also contributed to the unification of the Franciscan Order by becoming the only liturgical hagiography for the feast of Francis.<sup>3</sup>

In composing his biography, Bonaventure relied extensively on two earlier biographies written by Thomas of Celano and Julian of Speyer. As a result, the literary merits of the *Legenda major* as a source for examining the life of Francis have been questioned, since the *Legenda major* does not differ substantially from the earlier biographical accounts of Francis' personal life.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted, however, that Bonaventure's

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1 Regis J. Armstrong ed, *Francis of Assisi: The Founder* (New York: New City Press, 2000), 495; For Bonaventure's dates, refer to J. G. Bougerol, *Introduction a l'étude de saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1988); Jay M. Hammond and J. A. Wayne Hellmann ed., *A Companion to Bonaventure* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 9-60.

2 Jay M. Hammond, "Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, 456.

3 *Ibid.*, 457-466.

4 Ewert Cousins, trans., *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The*

aim was not to present Francis' actual life as it happened, but rather to clearly present the ideal of Francis' religious life by reflecting his own spiritual theology.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Bonaventure's spiritual theology is deeply embedded in the spiritual progress of Francis, as well as in his monastic rule and his concepts of monastic virtues including poverty, relationship with all of nature, ascent and union of the soul. The *Legenda major* is, therefore, essential reading for an understanding of Franciscan spirituality.

Bonaventure scholars have reached a consensus that the threefold way of spiritual progress in the *Legenda major* and other spiritual works, such as *De triplici via* and the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, was influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a theologian of the late 5th to early 6th century.<sup>6</sup> Robert G. Davis further asserts that the writings of

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*Life of St. Francis*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1978), 41-42.

5 *Ibid.*, 42.

6 Damien Vorreux, *François d'Assise: Documents, écrits, premières biographies* (Paris: 1968), 585; Regis Armstrong, "The Spiritual Theology of the *Legenda major* of Saint Bonaventure," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 1978); Paul Rorem, "Dionysian Uplifting (Anagogy) in Bonaventure's *Reductio*," *Franciscan Studies* 70 (2012), 188; Ray C. Petry, ed., *Late Medieval Mysticism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 126-131; Benard McGinn, "Love Knowledge and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* 56.1 (March 1987), 7-24. Moreover, the influence of Augustine on Bonaventure's spirituality cannot be overlooked. Bonaventure understands that Augustine argues that all theology arises from the intense desire in the deepest recesses of the human mind to find God, because human being is made in the image of God. In the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Bonaventure, influenced by Augustine, systematically explains the progression of faith through the intellect, will and emotions of the human being. However, this paper considers Bonaventure's stages of spiritual growth in the *Legenda major* to be more influenced by the traditions of Dionysius and Evagrius than by Augustine. Refer to Paul Rout, *Francis and Bonaventure* (Missouri: Liguori, 1997); Amador Pedro, "Il tema della luce in alcuni testi di Sant'Agostino e di San Bonaventura," *Alpha Omega* 23.3 (2020), 361-378; Travis E Ables, "The Word in Which All Things are Spoken: Augustine, Anselm

Pseudo-Dionysius, who developed a three-stage theory of spiritual progress including purification, illumination and perfection, were introduced to medieval Europe through the 9th-century translation of John Scotus Eriugena.<sup>7</sup> He also argues that Bonaventure's work shows the influence of this Dionysian tripartite spiritual progress and reflects the burgeoning interest in mysticism that proliferated during the 12th and 13th centuries.<sup>8</sup> It is true that the *Legenda major* describes the stages of Franciscan spiritual growth with a broad application of the three Dionysian stages. However, a closer analysis of the *Legenda major* reveals depictions that differ from the theories of spiritual progress outlined in Bonaventure's other spiritual works, as well as those propounded by Dionysius.<sup>9</sup> These include, for example, an emphasis on the virtues of obedience and humility in the stages of illumination(chapters 5, 6 and 7), the repetition of radical poverty(chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 14), the love of all things in nature and constant communion with them(chapters 8 and 12) and the continuous ascent of the soul, which does not sufficiently exemplify the apophatic theological framework of Dionysius(chapter 14).<sup>10</sup>

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and Bonaventure on Christology and the Metaphysics of Exemplarity," *Theological Studies* 76.2 (Jun 2015), 280-297.

7 Robert G. Davis, *The Weight of Love: Affect, Ecstasy and Union in the Theology of Bonaventure* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 29-44.

8 *Ibid.*, 29-44.

9 Ann W. Astell, "A Discerning Smell: Olfaction among the Senses in St. Bonaventure's Long Life of St. Francis," *Franciscan Studies* 67 (2009), 123 and refer to the footnote 123.

10 For Latin text of the *Legenda major*, see Bonaventura, "Legenda major Sancti Francisci," in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S.

Scholars have not paid much attention to the uniqueness of the spiritual progress of the *Legenda major* mentioned above. In his recent work, Tikhon Alexander Pino has attempted to connect the various spiritual theologies presented by the *Legenda major* beyond the Dionysian tradition to the Evagrian tradition.<sup>11</sup> This paper will take up Pino's work and argue that we need to go further and illuminate the spiritual progress through the lens of John Cassian and Benedict, who inherited the Evagrian tradition. To develop this argument, I will first summarize the spiritual growth theories of Dionysius and Bonaventure, as well as those of Evagrius(345~399), John Cassian(360~435) and Benedict(480~547), as a theoretical background for understanding the spiritual progress of the *Legenda major*. I will then explain how the theories of spiritual progress in the *Legenda major* relate to Dionysius as well as to some aspects of the Evagrian tradition. In doing so, I will show that Bonaventure's spirituality is a synthesis and creative inheritance of a variety of spiritual traditions, not just Dionysian influences.

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Bonaventurae, Tomus 8 (Florence: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898); For English translation of the *Legenda major*, Regis J. Armstrong ed. *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, 525-649.

11 For Latin text of the *Legenda major*, see Bonaventura, "Legenda major Sancti Francisci," in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, Tomus 8 (Florence: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898); For English translation of the *Legenda major*, Regis J. Armstrong ed. *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, 525-649.

## II. Evagrian and Dionysian Backgrounds for Understanding Spiritual Progress in the *Legenda major*

In order to examine Bonaventure's theory of spiritual progress presented in the *Legenda major*, it is necessary to understand the Dionysian concepts of purification, illumination and perfection (or union). However, as mentioned in the introduction, to understand the features manifested in the *Legenda major*, we must explore the understanding of spiritual growth of Evagrius, Cassian and Benedict, which developed before Dionysius and influenced the monastic movements of the late antiquity. Therefore, this chapter will first summarize the theory of Evagrius, who is considered to be the first systematic spiritual theologian and the understanding of spiritual progress of Cassian and Benedict, who were influenced by him. This paper will also examine the key content of the stages of spiritual progress by Dionysius the Areopagite and Bonaventure.

Evagrius asserts that the human soul progresses through the stages of *Praktike*(πρακτική, practical stage), *Physike*(φυσική, natural stage) and *Theologike*(θεολογική, theological stage).<sup>12</sup> The three stages of spiritual progress are related to his tripartite understanding of the human soul.<sup>13</sup> According to the cosmology of Evagrius, the *logikoi* (λογικ

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12 Evagrius, *Praktikos*, trans. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont SC171 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 1. It should be noted that the explanation of Evagrius's stages of spiritual progress is a summary and modification of the following work by the author, Hyun Kee Na, "John Cassian's Understanding of Spiritual Progress and Its Uniqueness," *The Journal of the Church History Society in Korea* Vol.62 (September 2022), 7-9.

οί, naked mind or rational beings), who were separated from the union with God, became the fallen human souls. The fallen human soul is divided into the rational part (τό λογιστικόν), the irascible part where anger arises (τό θυμικόν) and the concupiscible or desiring part (τό επιθυμητικόν).<sup>14</sup> The rational part is not the same as the pre-fallen Logikoi. But it can be understood as the capacity to perceive the essence of the world and the Trinitarian God. The irascible and concupiscible parts are deeply connected to the body and disturb the state of the rational soul. In particular, the irascible part, which is connected to both the concupiscible and rational parts, plays a mediating role. The more the irrational part of the human soul is purified, the more the rational part awakens and gains the ability to contemplate the divine essence.

The first stage of spiritual progress, *praktike*, refers to the purification of the desiring parts of the soul. The parts of the embodied human soul are continually attacked by the eight generic thoughts (οἱ γενικώτατοι λογισμοὶ) instilled by demons: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory and pride.<sup>15</sup> These eight thoughts stimulate the desiring part and disturb the emotions, constantly arousing anger. When the irrational part is disturbed, the human soul becomes enslaved to evil thoughts, unable to cultivate virtue and ultimately unable to offer pure prayer focused on the love of God. The state of regaining the soul's

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13 Evagrius, "Letter to Melania," trans. Martin Parmentier in *Bijdragen: International Journal for Philosophy and Theology* 46:1 (1985), 12-13.

14 Evagrius, *Praktikos*, 89.

15 *Ibid.*, 6, 84, 89; Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* ed. Guillaumont and P. Géhen, SC438 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 2.



health, free from being swayed or enslaved by the eight demonic thoughts or mental representations, is called apatheia (ἀπάθεια, passionlessness).<sup>16</sup> The human soul, having attained apatheia, can then proceed to the next stages of contemplating the essences of the created world (physike) and the Trinity (theologike).

The goal of physike (contemplation of creation) is to uncover the truth hidden in all beings, while in the theologike (divine contemplation) stage, the rational part (intellect or mind) of the human soul turns completely away from all material desires toward the First Cause, the Trinity.<sup>17</sup> The process of growth from praktike to theologike involves overcoming the eight thoughts, purifying the rational part and coming to know the essential reality of the Trinity through true prayer.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, as Bernard McGinn argues, prayer is the process of contemplating the true human essence and original form in God as the essential knowledge of the Trinity.<sup>19</sup> Through such true prayer, which attains apatheia, the human soul recognizes the essences beyond the multiplicity and change that characterize the created world, progressively recovering the image of absolute simplicity, that is, God and advancing toward divine contemplation. Despite the numerous debates surrounding his understanding of the Trinity, Evagrius clearly seems to understand the Word as the expressed Father. The human rational part con-

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16 *Ibid.*, 63-70.

17 Evagrius, *Gnostikos*, 49.

18 Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 150.

19 *Ibid.*, 150.

templates the Father through the Spirit and the Word.<sup>20</sup> Scholars also debate whether this contemplation of the Triune God ultimately means union with God. McGinn argues that although Evagrius never uses the term union, the final perfection of the theologike must tend toward union with the Triune God.<sup>21</sup>

John Cassian was greatly influenced by Evagrius' understanding of spiritual progress. He also sought to interpret this Egyptian monastic spirituality in light of the fifth-century Gallic monastic context. He distinguishes between the practical stage (πρακτική) and the contemplative stage (θεωρητική).<sup>22</sup> The concept of purity of heart (puritas cordis) that Cassian set as the goal of praktike is not different from Evagrius's theory of apatheia. However, Cassian asserts that it is extremely difficult for the fragile human soul to progress to the physike and theologike stages. Rather, he seems to emphasize the praktike stage, focusing on the repetitive and cyclical monastic life of fighting the eight vices (identical to the eight thoughts of Evagrius) and achieving the three important virtues (poverty, obedience, humility) to attain purity of heart.<sup>23</sup> However, the achievement of purity of heart is temporary, so it is important to return to the praktike stage and apply oneself again. We must also bear in mind that Cassian repeatedly emphasizes radical poverty as the starting point of the praktike stage. Radical poverty involves

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>22</sup> Ioannes Cassianus, *Collationes patrum*, ed. E. Pichery 2, SC54 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955), 14, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ioannes Cassianus, *Callationes patrum*, 14,2 (SC54, 184); Hyun Kee Na, "John Cassian's Understanding of Spiritual Progress and Its Uniqueness," 11-17.

the voluntary renunciation of possessions, self-sufficiency, prohibition of personal possessions, refraining from accumulating surplus production and instead sharing it with one's neighbors, coupled with an unceasing process of overcoming inner avarice.<sup>24</sup> This theory of spiritual progress is closely linked to the ecclesiastical and monastic context of southern Gaul, which Cassian sought to reform in the early 5th century.

Cassian's stages of spiritual progress were clearly represented in the *Regula Benedicti* which became the archetype for the monastic movement in medieval Christianity. To be sure, Benedict creatively adapted Cassian's theories to reflect the situation of the church and monasteries amid the political and social changes of 6th century Italy.<sup>25</sup> He also considered humility, achieved through the praktike stage, to be the most important virtue. Although he does not mention the eight thoughts or vices and how to overcome them, Benedict explains in detail the twelve steps for attaining the virtue of humility.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in traversing these steps, he emphasizes the important virtues of poverty, obedience, silence and humility to be attained.<sup>27</sup> However, while Cassian stressed radical pov-

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24 For a study on the meaning of radical poverty as reflected in Cassian's monastic literature, the reader is advised to refer to the author's following research. Hyun Kee Na, "Ioannes Cassianus' Criticism of the Fifth Century Gallic Aristocratic Monks and the Significance of Radical Poverty in His Monastic Literature," *The Journal of the Church History Society in Korea* 46 (April 2017), 7-37.

25 Hyun Kee Na, "Changes in Christian Monastic Poverty of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th and 6th century: Focusing on the Monastic Literature of John Cassian and the Rule of Benedict," *The Journal of the Church History Society in Korea* 66 (December 2023), 141-145.

26 Benedictus, *Regula Benedicti*, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé SC182 (Paris: Cerf, 1972), 7.5-9.

27 *Ibid.*, 5.1-6.7.

erty, the *Regula Benedicti* moderated this somewhat. While prohibiting personal possessions and emphasizing communal ownership as a principle of poverty, it allowed new members to entrust their property to the monastery and stipulated that all monks should be sufficiently provided with sufficient clothing, food and necessities to maintain a basic standard of living.<sup>28</sup> This was a shift from radical poverty to flexible poverty.

Up to this point, we have traced the flow from Evagrius' original systematic stages of spiritual progress to Benedict's early medieval theory. An important feature of the Egyptian theory of spiritual stages transmitted into the early Middle Ages is the increasing emphasis on the praktike stage. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of attaining the virtues of humility, obedience, silence and poverty through unceasing prayer, scripture reading and radical poverty, which enable the human soul to attain apatheia, the goal of the praktike stage.

It is true, however, that Bonaventure's spiritual progress was influenced above all by Pseudo-Dionysius. The three stages of spiritual ascent (purification, illumination, union or perfection) proposed by Dionysius seems to be under the influence of Evagrius.<sup>29</sup> The threefold pattern of praktike, physike and theologike is manifested in Dionysius' works, *De mystica theologia*, *De coelesti hierarchia* and *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*. In *De mystica theologia*, Dionysius presents the spiritual

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28 Hyun Kee Na, "Changes in Christian Monastic Poverty of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th and 6th century: Focusing on the Monastic Literature of John Cassian and the Rule of Benedict," 153-158.

29 Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Origen, Evagrius and Dionysius," in *The Oxford Handbook of Dionysius the Areopagite* ed. Mark Edward, Dimitrios Pallis and Georgios Steiris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 94-108

progress of Moses as an ideal model of the three-stage theory. Moses “first submits to purification,” “sees the many lights, pure and with abundant rays,” “plunges into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing,” and is “supremely united to the utterly unknown.”<sup>30</sup> The purgative stage of Moses shows an abundance of splendid purity, aiming at an immaculate, faultless state. The illuminative stage possesses insightful knowledge, fully receiving and transmitting God's light. The perfected stage, based on the understanding perfected through illumination, sees sacred things and achieves union with God.<sup>31</sup>

Dionysius' three stages differ somewhat from those proposed by Evagrius, Cassian and Benedict. First, we must remember that Dionysius' three stages of purification, illumination and perfection are deeply intertwined with the order and worship of the Church. Dionysius presents his theory of spiritual progress in terms of understanding Scripture through participating in the orderly liturgical rites within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. For instance, in *De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, he explains how initiates grow through the stages of purification, illumination and perfection to understand the mysteries of the Scripture by participating in the sacraments.<sup>32</sup> He also emphasizes that the clergy who perform the liturgy must have the ability to purify the initiates, illuminate the purified and lead them to perfect understanding of the contemplated illuminatio

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30 Pseudo-Dionysius, “De mystica theologia” in *Corpus Dionysiacum* ed. Günter Heil and Adolf Martin Ritter (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 1,3(143-144); Colm Luibheid trans., *Pseudo-Dionysius the Complete Work* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1987), 136-137.

31 Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, 3,3.

32 Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, 5,2-3 (105-106).

n.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, Dionysius makes it clear that the sacraments celebrated by the clergy help the initiated to purify, illuminate and fully comprehend the the mysteries of the church. He further distinguishes the clergy into bishops, priests and deacons: bishops manifest God's perfect power in consecrating, priests illuminate by performing the sacraments and deacons discern and purify the faithful before participating in sacred rites.<sup>34</sup> In this way, Dionysius' three-tiered theory places strong emphasis on ecclesiastical authority, liturgical participation and individual spiritual growth.

Second, the Evagrian tradition explains union with the Triune God through stages of contemplation, which in Dionysian terms might be called the "affirmative way" of describing the highest stage of spiritual development. As transmitted through Cassian to the fifth-century Gallic monasteries and churches of the Western Roman Empire, there was an increasing emphasis on the praktike stage, which focused on the weakness of the human soul, rather than on the higher psychike and theologike stages. This was probably related to the unstable situation of monasteries and churches in the Western empire amid Germanic invasions. In contrast, Dionysius examined the higher contemplative stages more closely and proposed the "negative" or "apophatic" theological method. In other words, he differs from Evagrius' theologike, where contemplation of God begins and union with God is achieved through pure prayer. Dionysius describes the method of negation. His concept of

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5,3 (106).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 5,5-7 (107-110).

“negation” means abstraction by removal or denial.<sup>35</sup> The process of contemplating the transcendent God surpasses human experience and knowledge. In *De mystica theologia*, Dionysius refers to descriptions within the range of human spiritual progress and the created world as “affirmations.”<sup>36</sup> As we ascend from the lower levels, however, we realize our human limitations and ultimately negate all modes of explanation before the experience of transcendent holiness. All the language human beings used to define the Triune God and God’s activities in creation and our purification in the lower stages is denied and recognized as ignorance.<sup>37</sup> Dionysius’ apophatic method claims that the higher we ascend, the more we must confess ignorance about God.

Bonaventure fully embraced the concepts of purification, illumination and perfection in Dionysius’ threefold spiritual progress. In particular, *De triplici via*, one of Bonaventure’s most important spiritual writings, provides a concise and practical guide to spiritual growth in monastic life.<sup>38</sup> Just as there are moral(moralem), allegorical(allegoricum) and anagogical(anagogicum) ways of understanding the spiritual inter-

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35 Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, 174-175; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 159-162.

36 Pseudo-Dionysius, *De mystica theologia*, 2-3 (146-148).

37 *Ibid.*, 4-5 (148-150).

38 In addition to *De triplici via*, in order to understand Bonaventure’s conception of the spiritual stages, it is necessary to refer to *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. In *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Bonaventure presents a much more theoretical and speculative theory of stages compared to *De triplici Via*. However, this paper will explain Bonaventure’s theory of spiritual growth primarily based on *De triplici Via*, premised on the understanding that the theory of spiritual growth in his *Legenda Major* is closer to the theory expounded in *De triplici via*.

pretation of the Scripture, there are three stages (purgatio, illuminatio and perfectio) in the process of spiritual maturity.<sup>39</sup> Purification leads to peace, illumination to truth and perfection to love. In the first chapter, Bonaventure explains the process, goals and importance of achieving each stage, while from the latter part of the first chapter through the third chapter, he discusses how to train by reading Scripture reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation as practical ways to achieve each stage.

Purification refers to the stage of overcoming desires in humans and removing sins. For purification, the conscience (conscientia) of the human soul must function properly.<sup>40</sup> The conscience becomes increasingly sensitive through introspection, remembering past sins and progressing toward goodness. All sins belong to negligence, concupiscence and malice.<sup>41</sup> The evil (evil) that causes sin permeates the human disposition or works at the very core of the human heart.<sup>42</sup> To overcome the devil, the root of the sin, the conscience must actively arise and function in the human mind. Meditation on the Day of Death, the Paschal Lamb's Cross and the eternal judgment to come causes the conscience to function and leads to purification.<sup>43</sup>

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39 Bonaventura, *De triplici via*, Pro. 1 (3). For Latin text of *De triplici via*, see Bonaventura, "De triplici via," in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, Tomus 8 (Florence: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898), 3-27.

40 *Ibid.*, 1.2. (3).

41 *Ibid.*, 1.1.4. (4).

42 *Ibid.*, 1.1.6. (5).

43 *Ibid.*, 1.2.10. (6).



In the illumination stage, after being purified from sin, “the ray of intelligence” (*radium intelligentiae*) or divine light from heaven reveals the sins that God has forgiven us. This allows us to perceive the gift of grace that we have received and to contemplate the rewards that have been promised to us. This light of divine illumination enables a deeper understanding of grace, redemption and the mysteries of the Christian faith during this stage of spiritual growth and maturation. God’s mercy fills us with awe and wonder and we come to know the God who protects us.<sup>44</sup> The human soul completes the life of full imitation of Christ. In perfection (union) stage, the human soul ascends to the Highest God. The spark of wisdom in the human soul constantly guides it toward the very essence of the transcendent God, that cannot be perceived or imagined by the senses.<sup>45</sup> In summary, the purification removes sin, the illumination imitates Christ through the light from heaven and the perfection aims to unite with God.

In *De triplici via*, Bonaventure also suggests specific methods for progressing through the spiritual progress: purification through scripture reading and meditation, illumination through prayer and perfection through contemplation (*Sciendum est igitur, quod triplex est modus exercendi se circa hanc triplicem viam, scilicet legendo et meditando, orando, et contemplando*).<sup>46</sup> The meditation used in the purification stage mainly contemplates the actions and principles of human beings and God revealed through Scripture. Through meditation, the human soul

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 1,2,11-14(6-7).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1,2,11-14(6-7).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Pro.1. (3).

realizes what humans must do, the gifts given by God and the works performed for salvation.<sup>47</sup> Meditation primarily uses the faculties of reason, nature, conscience and will that the human soul possesses.<sup>48</sup> The human soul goes through a process of exploration, judgment and approval using these faculties to make decisions and draw solutions. As a result of meditation, the soul is purified, returns to the joy of the mind and the source of all goodness and obtains the presence of God, who is love itself. In the illumination stage, prayer directs the human mind toward God. Through prayer, the personal inner relationship with Christ is deeply matured by grace. The human soul becomes aware of one's misery, laments, worries about future judgment and develops deep sorrow.<sup>49</sup> Prayer enables the soul to implore God's mercy and to gain the success and hope granted by the Cross of Christ. Finally, the soul comes to worship God. Prayer helps the soul to experience tranquility and lasting peace and to achieve illumination.<sup>50</sup> In the perfection stage, contemplation is the means to possess divine wisdom after meditation and prayer.<sup>51</sup> Through contemplation, one can progress to the final stage of experiencing union with God in the highest dimension, a union in love where human knowledge ceases. In explaining the perfection through contemplation, Bonaventure mentions Dionysius' way of negation. As the human soul ascends toward the Triune God, it comes

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4.18-19. (7).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4.19. (7).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.1. (8).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.5.12. (11).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.1.1. (11).

to know God in two ways: the affirmative way and the negative way. As noted above, the affirmative way describes God through human language and expression, while the way of negation recognizes the ineffability of the transcendent God.<sup>52</sup> Bonaventure follows Dionysius in claiming that after the affirmative way, the transcendent God is passively encountered through the way of negation.

So far, we have examined Bonaventure's three-stage theory of spiritual progress. In addition to the influential theory of Dionysius, we have also looked at the tradition of Evagrius, who systematically proposed a three-stage theory in the early Church and the transmission of this tradition to the West by Cassian and Benedict. As mentioned in the introduction, scholars generally agree that Bonaventure's theory of spiritual growth is primarily influenced by Dionysius. However, Bonaventure was the first to systematize Francis' thought and hoped to popularize his spiritual stages through the *Legenda Major*, showing differences from Pseudo-Dionysius in specific details. In *De triplici via* and *Legenda major*, Bonaventure attempts to link meditation, prayer and contemplation to each stage and presents a detailed methodology, emphasizing the attainment of virtues by struggling against desires in the purification stage. As a monk, Bonaventure showed great interest in personal practice, the attainment of virtues and detailed spiritual progress, bringing his three-stage theory closer to the traditions of Evagrius, Cassian and

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52 *Ibid.*, 3, 7, 11, (16). The Latin texts read "Nota, quod aspectus veritatis debet esse erectus ad incomprehensibilia, et haec sunt mysteria summae Trinitatis, ad quae erigimur contemplando, et hoc dupliciter; ver per positionem, ver per ablationem. Primum ponit Augustinus, secundum Dionysius."

Benedict. Of course, the influence of Dionysius is also very strong, especially in the explanation of the perfection stage, where Bonaventure explicitly mentions the name of Pseudo-Dionysius and extensively describes the way of negation. Therefore, in order to understand Bonaventure's theory of spiritual progress stages as reflected in the *Legenda Major*, it is essential not only to emphasize the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, but also to consider the Egyptian tradition that emphasized personal practice.

### III. Revisiting the Spiritual Progress in the *Legenda major*

Bonaventure reflects the three-stage theory of Dionysius in the overall structure of his the *Legenda major*. However, compared to the spiritual stages presented in *De triplici via*, the explanations of the spiritual progress in the *Legenda major* are much closer to the spiritual growth theories of Evagrius, Cassian and Benedict. When the spiritual progress is viewed through the lens of Dionysius' influence, it is very difficult to understand the intent and meaning of the descriptions of monastic virtues in the purgative and illuminative stages, the repeated emphasis on poverty and the reasons for the soul's continual ascent in the perfect stage. In this chapter, I will summarize the characteristics of the stages of the spiritual growth presented in the *Legenda Major*. Then, I will present the unique features of the theory of the *Legenda Major*, which are not mentioned in the writings of Dionysius and even in Bonaventure's *De triplici via* and show its similarities to the Evagrian tradition.

## 1. The Threefold Way of Spiritual Progress of St. Francis in the *Legenda major*

Bonaventure directly applies Dionysius' three stages in the *Legenda major*. The first chapters 1-4 can be seen as the purgative stage, chapters 5-13 as the illuminative stage in which Francis pursues virtues and grows spiritually and chapters 14-15, which describe Francis' death as the perfection stage.<sup>53</sup> The characteristic of the purgative stage of the *Legenda major* is characterized by Francis purifying his desires and embracing the Passion of Christ with his whole body. In Assisi, when he met a leper on horseback, Francis approached the leper, kissed him and gave him money, marking the beginning of his conversion.<sup>54</sup> While repairing the church of San Damiano, a conflict arose with his father. Francis ended up renouncing his inheritance and even taking off his clothes. The period of purification through voluntary poverty of wealth was at hand.<sup>55</sup> After his retreat from the world, Francis' early life focused on voluntary poverty, service to the poor, basic tasks such as repairing churches, while retreating to quiet woods for walks, fasting and peaceful prayer.

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53 Scholars acknowledge that the *Legenda Major* is structured around the three stages. However, there are differences in the way the content of the Journey is mapped onto these three stages. The following works should be consulted: Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, 42-44; F. Uribe, *Introduzione alle fonti agiografiche di san Francesco e santa Chiara d'Assisi* (Assisi: 2002), 253-254; Jay M. Hammond, "Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*," 483-503. This paper follows the macro-structure of three stages proposed in a relatively recent study of Jay M. Hammond.

54 Bonaventura, *Legenda major*, 1,5 (507).

55 *Ibid.*, 2,2-4 (508).

Particularly, his monastic life of poverty became increasingly austere. In chapter 3, he literally accepted and practiced the apostolic poverty of Matthew 10:9-10.<sup>56</sup> He began to take as his monastic rule everything about apostolic poverty preached in the Gospels. The purifying phase is completed when, beginning with his first follower Bernard, others join Francis to form a community of absolute poverty with the approval of Pope Innocent III.<sup>57</sup> During this period, Francis devoted more time to incessant prayer, spoke daily of the cross of Christ, travelled to villages preaching the Gospel and the Order grew to over 5,000 members.<sup>58</sup>

The illuminative stage (chapters 5-13) is the most crucial phase in the *Legenda major*. As noted above, for Bonaventure in *De triplici via*, the purgative stage involves the purification of desires, while the illuminative stage is the process by which the purified soul finally receives the divine light, preparing it for the final union in the perfection. During the illuminative stage, the human soul increasingly concentrates body and soul on imitating Christ. In the illuminative stage of the *Legenda major*, however, the concepts explained by Dionysius or Bonaventure do not appear in detail. Rather, the descriptions of the attainment of the virtue of humility, perpetual prayer, love and desire for God and communication with creatures closely resemble a blend of the praktike and the physike stages outlined by Evagrius. As will be explained later, there are

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3,1 (510). The Latin text reads: "Quod audens et intelligens amicus indicibili mox perfusus lactitia: Hoc est, inquit, quod cupio, hoc quod totis praecordiis concupisco."

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3,9-10 (512).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 4,1-11 (513-516).

clear limitation to interpreting the stages of illumination found in the *Legenda major* solely through the theories of Dionysian spiritual phases or the framework presented by Bonaventure in other works. The interpretive lens of Evagrius and the Cassian's tradition is also needed.

The scholarly delineation of chapters 5-7 as the illuminative phase should be more convincingly seen as a continuation of the purgative phase leading into the illuminative. This is because it demonstrates the process of overcoming desires and perfecting the monastic virtues. Chapter 5 primarily argues that to maintain purity of heart, one must overcome representative evil desires such as lust, internal and external sloth and maintain silence. Chapters 6-7 explain the ultimate virtues of obedience, poverty and humility that can be attained by those who overcome evil desires through the silence of Chapter 5. It begins by explaining that the virtue of humility is "the guardian of all virtues," and "the splendid model of Christian perfection."<sup>59</sup> Humility means recognizing and practicing that "before God, the human is nothing (*quod altum est apud homines abominatio est apud Deum*)."<sup>60</sup> In achieving the virtue of humility, the monks come to serve and obey everyone in the monastic community.

In Chapter 7, poverty is one of the three essential virtues that are emphasized in each of the purifying, illuminative and perfecting stages. Bonaventure deliberately stresses it to facilitate the understanding of the whole life of Francis. Poverty means voluntary renunciation, "marrying

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.1. (519-520).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.1. (520).

poverty” to become a friend of Christ.<sup>61</sup> It is the renunciation of family and possessions to live only by the monastic habit.<sup>62</sup> Poverty is the source of humility, follows the humility of Christ and offers a special way to salvation.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, all novices must strictly renounce wealth, share possessions and bring nothing into the order.<sup>64</sup> Self-sufficiency through work and begging for food is also emphasized.<sup>65</sup> For Bonaventure, poverty was the supreme virtue by which Francis practiced the self-emptying of Christ, imitating the life of the incarnate Jesus. Consequently, the final stage of purification, which leads to the illuminative, begins with such poverty and is perfected in the virtue of humility, fully realizing one’s nothingness before God by imitating Christ. In the *Legenda Major*, the three essential virtues are obedience and humility, with poverty being emphasized as the source of all virtues.

With this state of purity of heart manifested in poverty, obedience and humility, Bonaventure’s Francis enters the stage of illumination. Francis begins to recognize that all creatures around him come from the same source, God and feels great affection for them:

From a reflection in the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he [Francis] would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of “brother” or “sister,” because he knew they shared

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



with him the same beginning. However, he embraced more affectionately and sweetly those which display the pious meekness of Christ in a natural likeness and portray him in the symbols of Scripture.<sup>66</sup>

The *Legenda major* thus shows Francis not only finding the divine essence in natural creatures but also communicating with them. He is also inflamed with a passionate love for Christ and a fervent desire to save souls. He ended up preaching the Gospel to the Muslims and the Sultan, risking his life in the enemy territory.<sup>67</sup> Through unceasing prayer, Francis experienced the presence of God and out-of-body experiences, with his body radiating light and many miracles occurring through him.<sup>68</sup> His biblical understanding deepened. Miracles of healing often accompanied his preaching. Even in the midst of this missionary work, he often communicated with animals, preaching to them and receiving their obedience. Finally, in chapter 13, which represents the culmination of the illuminative phase, Francis is described as experiencing the stigmata, a perfect image of the crucified Christ.

Bonaventure then presents the perfect stage by recounting Francis' death (chapter 14) and canonization (chapter 15). As mentioned earlier, for Dionysius, the human soul in the stage of perfection, experiences ig-

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66 *Ibid.*, 8, 6. (527). The Latin text reads "Consideratione quoque primae originis omnium abundantiore pietate repletus, creaturas quantumlibet parvas fratris vel sororis appellabat nominibus, pro eo quod sciebat eas unum secum habere principium, Illas tamen viscerosius complexabatur et dulcius, quae Christi mansuetudinem piam similitudine naturali praetendunt et Scripturae significatione figurant."

67 *Ibid.*, 9,8-9. (532-533).

68 *Ibid.*, 10,2, 4. (533-534).

norance of the transcendent divine. Similarly, in other works, Bonaventure clearly mentions the worthlessness and transcendence of previously understood knowledge in the soul's union with God in the final stage. However, in chapter 14 of the *Legenda major*, he first depicts Francis full identification with Christ's humanity by experiencing the depths of human suffering on the cross before his perfection through union with Christ's divinity.<sup>69</sup> In other words, Bonaventure's account of the perfection stage includes Francis' complete unity not only with Christ's divinity, but also with his humanity. This dramatic culmination is reached in the description of Francis receiving the five wounds of the crucifixion and becoming fully one with the human Jesus. This happened in the twentieth year of his monastic life. Having perfectly imitated the incarnate Jesus, Francis' soul was "liberated from the flesh," and "ascended to the abyss of divine glory."<sup>70</sup> A monk testified that "his soul, in the likeness of a shining star, passed over the multitude of waters on a white cloud and was carried up to heaven."<sup>71</sup> Thus, his soul's union with God is ultimately represented not by negation, but by a continuous ascent.

## 2. Rethinking Radical Poverty, Obedience and Humility in the *Legenda major*

As noted above, interpreting the stages of illumination found in the

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 14,1 (545).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 14,6 (547).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

*Legenda major* solely through the Dionysian three-stage framework would make it difficult to properly understand the achievement of the virtues of poverty, obedience and humility. The emphasis on these virtues is a concept stressed in the theories of spiritual progress advanced by Evagrius, Cassian and Benedict. Cassian presented a theory of growth that primarily highlighted Evagrius' praktike stage. In this stage, the soul overcomes the eight principal vices (*octo principalia vitia*) and naturally attains the three virtues, reaching "purity of heart" (*puritas cordis*). The three essential virtues are identical to the poverty, obedience and humility mentioned in the *Legenda major*. According to Cassian, humility is the virtue attained by overcoming pride, while obedience is complete submission to the teachings and rules of superior monks. Obedience is also the primary means of imitating the humility of Christ. Cassian repeatedly emphasizes radical poverty, which involves not only the renunciation of possessions, but also self-sufficiency through labor and the perfect sharing of surplus production beyond the necessities of life. Maintaining a life of poverty requires overcoming many internal temptations, such as the bodily pleasures and family desires experienced before becoming a monk. The attainment of such radical poverty leads to the experience of self-emptying, which is the imitation of Christ's humility. Once the virtue of poverty is attained, there is a natural progression to the virtues of obedience and humility. These three virtues are closely interconnected. Indeed, Cassian considers radical poverty to be the most crucial virtue to be constantly remembered and maintained throughout monastic life. In other words, as one progress through the praktike stage and struggles against the eight vices, one

must first attain the virtue of poverty in order to achieve obedience and humility, to obtain “purity of heart,” and to advance to the stage of contemplating the divine essence present in all natural things.

Benedict’s claims regarding radical poverty seem somewhat weakened by his emphasis on shared equality and the accumulation and sharing of possessions for basic subsistence. Of course, the prohibition of personal possessions and the maintenance of poverty were mandatory rules. In addition, the emphasis on the *praktike* stage seems to be more profound than Cassian’s. It is because Benedict considers humility as the supreme virtue to be attained in this stage, with obedience and silence serving as intermediate steps for attaining humility, with silence being considered an important virtue. In this respect, there is a slight difference from Cassian’s theory of the stages of spiritual growth.

The four virtues of poverty, obedience, silence and humility highlighted in the illumination stage of the *Legenda major* are very similar to those emphasized by Cassian and Benedict. The repeated emphasis on absolute poverty is particularly similar to Cassian’s approach. Just as Cassian structurally reiterates the theme of radical poverty at the points where the theme of spiritual progress is addressed in his *De institutis* and *Collationes patrum*. Bonaventure also accentuates poverty in the *Legenda major*, depicting Francis’ conversion and radical embrace of poverty through his encounters with lepers and beggars in chapters 1 and 2, which mark the beginning of the purgation stage. Then, in chapters 5 through 7, which begin the illumination stage, Bonaventure increasingly emphasizes the systematic rules of poverty and the virtue of poverty embodied by Francis as the leader of the order. In chapter 14, which

initiates the stage of perfection, the ideal poverty of Francis, who fully imitated and became one with the poverty exhibited by the incarnate Christ, is once again presented. In this way, at each transitional stage, Bonaventure intentionally emphasizes radical poverty, highlighting it as the most crucial virtue surpassing all others. Bonaventure seems to explain that poverty is the most important virtue for spiritual progress and a fundamental attitude of imitating Christ that can never be abandoned. In addition, for the intended Franciscan monastic readers, it seems to convey the message of unity in carrying on the tradition of poverty as exemplified in the life of Francis.<sup>72</sup>

The relationship between the virtues of poverty, obedience and humility described in the *Legenda major* is also consistent with the explanations of Cassian and Benedict. Like Benedict's emphasis, the *Legenda major* also presents silence as an important virtue, clearly demonstrating the influence of the Cassian-Benedictine tradition. To reach humility, the culminating virtue of the praktike, the *Legenda Major* clearly follows the tradition of beginning with reverence and fear of God, overcoming desires and emphasizing three basic virtues of poverty, obedience and humility. While incorporating the Dionysian framework

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72 Refer to the following studies to understand the radical poverty of Francis. Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *The Poverty of Riches: St. Francis of Assisi Reconsidered* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Assisi: A Model for Human Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982); Jane Kopas, "A Coin and a Kiss: St. Francis and Social Justice," *The Way* 54.3 (July 2015), 7-19; L. K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Bradley R. Franco and Beth A. Mulvaney, ed., *The World of St. Francis of Assisi: Essays in Honor of William R. Cook* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 1-18, 176-192, 193-204.

of spiritual stages, as argued above, Bonaventure seems to have divided Evagrius' praktike stage into two parts —a stage of complete external practice and a stage of internal practice— and included them within the illumination stage.

### 3. Rethinking Francis' Love for All Natural Things and His Communication with Them in the *Legenda Major*

In describing Francis' transition to the illuminative stage, Chapter 8 of the *Legenda Major* asserts that he came to recognize and truly love the divine origin and essence present in all of the natural world. Francis praised God together with sheep, birds, wild animals and the beasts of the forest. The animals obeyed and listened to Francis' preaching. This realization of Francis exemplifies the physike stage explained by Evagrius. In his above-mentioned theory of spiritual progress, Evagrius asserts that after attaining apatheia through unceasing prayer and enduring love for Jesus, human soul proceeds to the physike stage. In this natural contemplative stage, the human soul gains knowledge of the inner natures that make up the material world, contemplating both the corporeal and incorporeal elements to grasp their true essence. Influenced by Dionysius, Bonaventure refers to this physike stage of Evagrius as the illuminative stage and elaborated how memory, intellect and will in the human soul can contemplate the primordial principle through the illumination of light. Dionysius's primary concern is to explain the illuminative stage in the context of ecclesiastical order and liturgy, as opposed to Evagrius' focus on the contemplation of natural things. As noted

above, in his exposition of the illuminative stage, Bonaventure pays careful attention to the process of transformation that takes place in the human being as he contemplates the primordial principle. It would be difficult to directly apply the illuminative theories proposed by Dionysius and Bonaventure in *De triplici via* directly to the descriptions of Francis' attitude toward all things in the *Legenda major*. Rather, Evagrius' description of the physike stage, in which one contemplates God as the origin of all natural things, though not fully elaborated, bears a closer resemblance to the descriptions of Francis' communication with animals.

#### 4. Rethinking the Description of Francis' Attainment of Perfection in the *Legenda major*

The descriptions of Francis attaining the stage of perfection in chapters 14-15 of the *Legenda major* differ from the theories of spiritual progress of Dionysius and Bonaventure in two aspects. First, the influence of Dionysius' apophatic way is clearly seen in Bonaventure's theory of spiritual progress. In the *Legenda major*, however, the soul of Francis experiences a continuous ascent toward the transcendent God after his death. The *Legenda major*, as mentioned above, describes this ascent in the words of a monk who saw Francis' soul after his death:

At last, when all of the mysteries were fulfilled in him and that most holy soul was released from the flesh and absorbed into the abyss of the divine light, the blessed man fell asleep in the Lord. One of his brothers and followers saw that blessed soul under the appearance of a radiant

star carried up on a shining cloud to be borne aloft straight to heaven over many waters...<sup>73</sup>

The *Legenda major* concludes the perfect stage of Francis with symbolic rhetoric describing the continuous ascent of the soul liberated from the body after death and its union with God. Boldly abandoning the apophatic accounts of the soul's ascent that characterize the Dionysian mystical tradition, Bonaventure makes no mention of darkness, ignorance, or passive transcendence. Instead, he describes the continuous ascent and union of the soul in the most imaginative way. As mentioned earlier, the final stage of spiritual progress, according to Evagrius, is the contemplation of the Triune God. In the last stage of Evagrius, the apophatic statements of Dionysius are not found. The soul, having recognized the essence of all worldly things through natural contemplation, approaches the divinity of the trinitarian God through unceasing prayer and love. In the words of Dionysius, Evagrius strives to explain this final stage by means of "affirmative expressions."<sup>74</sup> In this respect, the description of Francis's perfect stage in the *Legenda major* is similar to Evagrius' account.

On the other hand, Bonaventure claims that Francis' perfection re-

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73 *Ibid.*, 14,6 (547); Regis J. Armstrong ed., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents 2* (New York and London: Franciscan Institutes of St. Bonaventure University, 2000), 643-644. The Latin text reads: "Tandem cunctis in eum completis mysteriis, anima illa sanctissima carne soluta et in abyssum divinae claritatis absorpta, beatus vir obdormivit in Domino Unus autem ex fratribus et discipulis eius vidit animam illam beatam, sub specie stellae praeifulgiae a candida subvectam nubecula super aquas multas in caelum recto tramite sursum ferri, ..."

74 Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Mystica Theologia*, 1,2.



sembled not only the divinity of Jesus Christ but also his humanity. In general, many hagiographies prior to the *Legenda major* describe the protagonist monks as having endured long periods of ascetic practice and the temptations by demons, yet their bodies remained healthy and unharmed.<sup>75</sup> It is taken to represent a Christ-like body. The *Legenda major* tells that after 20 years of monastic life, Francis attained perfect virtue by enduring various illnesses to the end. Even in severe illness and excruciating pain until death, he gave thanks to God who sent the illness. Francis gave the last of his monastic clothes to a beggar and was utterly impoverished. He met death in poverty, naked and in great agony, just as Christ died.<sup>76</sup> The perfected Francis portrayed in the *Legenda major* was in complete union with the human Jesus who died on the cross. Such a depiction of the perfect stage is exceedingly rare and diverges from the Dionysian understanding of spiritual progress. Perhaps the *Legenda major* intended to repeatedly emphasize Francis's poverty in the perfect stage and have readers regard it as the supreme means of uniting with Jesus Christ.

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<sup>75</sup> Refer to the following Life of Antony. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Life of Antony: The Coptic Life and The Greek Life* trans. Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2003), 14, 1-7 (90-93).

<sup>76</sup> Bonaventura, *Legenda major*, 14.4 (546).

#### IV. Conclusion

The characteristics of the stages of spiritual progress described in the *Legenda major* have been re-examined. As many scholars have argued, the *Legenda major* largely follows the Dionysian tradition. However, the understanding of spiritual growth that comes from Evagrius, Cassian and Benedict seems to be strongly reflected in the three aspects mentioned above. This may be because the theories of spiritual progress that Dionysius and Bonaventure presented in other works were highly ecclesiological and speculative, focusing on ecclesiastical order, liturgy and scholastic theology, making them difficult to apply directly to a hagiographical account of Francis's monastic life. It is natural that the affinity between the Evagrian tradition, shaped by the pursuit of the monastic life and the *Legenda major* should be a significant reason for their similarities. Consequently, this paper has argued that Bonaventure's *Legenda major* should be viewed through the lens of diverse monastic traditions and spiritual theologies and has presented evidence to support this claim. Such a scholarly endeavor demonstrates that various monastic spiritual traditions converged within Bonaventure's spiritual theology, shaping Franciscan spirituality and significantly influencing late medieval mysticism. Furthermore, it shows the diversity of theological interpretations regarding Francis' spiritual progress, ultimately deepening our understanding of late medieval Franciscan spirituality and its influence.

In fact, a crucial reason for this paper's interest in the study of spiritual growth as depicted in the *Legenda major* is the profound influence that

Bonaventure's understanding of Franciscan spirituality had on church leaders during the formative period of the early Korean church under Japanese occupation. Prominent examples include Chang-geun Song, Jae-jun Kim, who contributed to the founding of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and Yong-do Lee, a pastor who significantly influenced the Korean Protestant monastic movement. After reading Bonaventure's Life of St. Francis during his conversion to Christianity, Rev. Jae-jun Kim sought to live a life of poverty.<sup>77</sup> Rev. Chang-geun Song held such a reverence for Francis that he adopted the English first name "Francis" while studying in America. He also introduced the first Korean translation of Francis' Canticle of Brother Sun.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Rev. Yong-do Lee decided to emulate Francis' life of radical poverty and showed a deep interest in his infinite love and communion with creation, influenced by Francis.<sup>79</sup> Francis' poverty and love for the natural world appear to have shaped Yong-do Lee's spiritual formation and subsequent monastic movement.

Chang-geun Song, Jae-jun Kim and Yong-do Lee strongly criticized the Korean churches during the Japanese colonial period for becoming more and more clericalized under the influence of American fundamental theology. Korean churches also emphasized a transcendent and otherworldly spirituality and gradually lost their interest in participating

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77 Jae-jun Kim, *Kimjaejun Jeonjip* [Kimjaejun Collection] (Osan: Hanshin University Press, 1991), 54-55.

78 Chang-geun Song, *Songchanggeun Jeonjip 1* [Songchanggeun Collection] (Seoul: PROK Press, 1998), 187-189.

79 Su-cheon Kim, *Leeyoungdo moksa ūi Sam kwa youngsung* [Life and Spirituality of Rev. Young-do Lee] (Seoul: KMC, 2015), 155-160.

in the suffering of neighbors and the nation. They argued that the Korean Church of that time should follow the life of Jesus Christ as shown by Francis in Bonaventure's account, that is, a life of radical poverty, giving up everything for human salvation and enduring the extreme hardship of the cross. They longed to emulate the spiritual growth of Francis, to remain in voluntary poverty, to overcome desire, to perceive and recognize the essence of God within the created world and to embrace suffering of one's neighbors as the suffering of Jesus. In fact, this tradition of social participation rooted in monastic spirituality, along with the otherworldly, mystical and individual-centered spirituality propagated by Rev. Sun-Ju Gil and Ik-du Kim, constituted another crucial axis of the early Korean church's spirituality.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19, the Korean church faces significant challenges. One of the major causes of the crisis of the Korean church may be the exclusive and anti-social behavior of the churches during the COVID-19 pandemic period. In particular, the younger generation is increasingly reluctant to attend Korean Protestant churches. Many scholars are striving to propose alternatives for the reformation and growth of the Korean church. This paper, while deeply considering the influence of the life of Francis on the formation of the spirituality of the early Korean church, re-examined the characteristics of the stages of Francis' spiritual progress as portrayed in the *Legenda major*. Ellen F. Davis suggests that although Bonaventure's spiritual theology is rooted in the past, it remains relevant for the contemporary church.<sup>80</sup> Agreeing with

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80 Ellen F. Davis, "A Response to Bonaventure's The Soul's Journey into God," *Theology Today* 63 (2006), 215-219.

this view, I hope that this paper will contribute to the revival of the social participation of Korean churches and promote a renewal movement for a new Korean Church through radical poverty and spiritual progress, drawing inspiration from the influence of Francis.

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