CHAPTER FIVE

A POLARIZATION OF VIEWS

During the decade of the 1250s, thanks largely to the thought of two men, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, a kind of order, or more accurately a polarization of views, was imposed upon the study of the rational soul. While both men were highly original in their solutions, both were deeply indebted to the preceding half-century of thought on the subject. But each made a vastly different selection from that tradition, Bonaventure developing the Semitic sources and Aquinas the Greek, especially Aristotle. Although both men had a common goal—to safeguard the immortality of the soul while still maintaining the unity of the human being—they went about it in quite different ways. And although they used a common technical philosophical vocabulary, they meant radically different things by the terms they used.

Bonaventure. Like all writers of his generation, Bonaventure was much influenced by Avicenna, especially in holding that the soul should be considered from two points of view: in itself, according to its substance, it is the body’s perfection; and with respect to its powers, it is the body’s mover. Like Albert the Great, Bonaventure was uncomfortable with the term ‘form’ for the soul, preferring instead to call it the body’s perfection or mover, but he did, in the final analysis, say that it was the form of man, united to the body substantially and not accidentally.

But unlike Albert, he insisted that the soul was a *hoc aliquid*. Still, in Bonaventure’s thought we find the extreme dualism that was so pronounced a feature of the teaching of Alexander of Hales and William of Auvergne to be much attenuated. For although the soul is a *hoc aliquid*, its nature is to be a part of man and not the whole man. “The completion of nature,” he says,

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1 “Quoniam autem ut beatificabilis est immutabilis; ideo, cum unitur mortali corpori, potest ab eo separari; ac per hoc non tantum *forma* est verum etiam *hoc aliquid*; et ideo non tantum unitur corpori ut *perfectio*, verum etiam ut *motor*; et sic perfcit per essentiam, quod movet pariter per potentiam.” *Breviloquium* 2, 9, 5, *Tria Opuscula* *Seraphici Doctoris S. Bonaventurae: Breviloquium, Itinerarium Mentis in Deum, et De reductione Artium ad Theologiam* (4th ed., Quaracchi, 1925), p. 84; and “[C]orpus unitur animae ut *perficienti et moventi et ad beatitudinem sursum tendenti.” *Ibid.* 2, 10, 4, ed. cit., p. 88.

2 “...totus homo componitur ex carne et anima.” *Comm. in Sent.* 3, d. 21, art 1, q. 3, fund. 3, *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia* (10 vols., Quaracchi, 1882-1902),
“requires that man consist at once of body and soul, just as of matter and form, which have a mutual appetite for and inclination toward each other.”

Neither the soul nor the body enjoys its complete existence apart from the other, and although the soul (the formal principle) has the capacity for existing after the dissolution of the body (the material principle), its full actuality consists of being united to the body. This unility is an essential and permanent aspect of its nature. The separated soul is always a true substance but never a complete nature.

In spite of his granting the soul’s incomplete state when separated from the body, Bonaventure found it necessary to insist that is was a hoc aliquid and therefore composed of form and matter—not corporeal but spiritual matter. In developing his view of spiritual matter, although he was obviously indebted, directly or indirectly, to Avicebron, he cited Augustine’s Confessions 12, 3, 6 as his authority. Matter considered in itself, he says, is the possibility of taking on every kind of form. But in nature it never exists in this condition and is, in fact, never separated from some form or other. Considered in itself it is neither corporeal nor spiritual, and its essence is indifferent to either. It acquires either spiritual or corporeal being by virtue of subsequent forms, which make it one or the other of these. In the soul, it is (spiritual) matter that both stamps it a creature that has received existence (from God) and makes possible its subsistence. In confirmation of this he cites Boethius to the effect that no creature is pure act, because quod est and quo est differ in it, so that in every creature there is both act and possibility.

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3 “Completo vero naturae requirit ut homo constet simul ex corpore et anima tanquam ex materia et forma, quae mutuum habent appetitum et inclinationem mutuum.” Breviloquium 7, 5, 2, ed. cit. 5, p. 269.

4 See the discussion in Edouard Szułt, O.F.M., “Saint Bonaventure et la problème du rapport entre l’âme et le corps,” La France Franciscaine 15 (1932), 283-310, on p. 293.

5 “Ille enim animae appetitus est ratione perfectionis esse naturalis, sed iste solum est quantum ad be-ne esse; et ideo ille non potest terminari, nisi corpus uniatur.” Comm. in Sent. 4, d. 49, pars 2, sect. 1, art. 3, q. 1, ad 2, ed. cit. 4, p. 1019. See also Breviloquium 7, 4, ed. cit. 5, p. 279.

6 E. Szułt, art. cit., p. 294.

7 “Nulla creatura est actus purus, quia in omni creatura, ut dicit Boethius, differt quo est et quod est; ergo in omni creatura est actus cum possibili; sed omnis talis habet in se