

## General Introduction

*In the midst of the Church the Lord shall open his mouth, and shall fill him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding and shall clothe him with a robe of glory.*<sup>1</sup>

With these words from the Book of Sirach, Bonaventure begins a series of twenty-three university sermons on the six days of creation, known as *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*. This verse is his *thema* for introductory collations on the six days.<sup>2</sup> The first words, *in medio Ecclesiae*, immediately direct our attention to the ecclesiological character of Bonaventure's project. It is the thesis of this study that this project can be described as a theory of development of doctrine.

As minister general Bonaventure is responding to an urgent situation within the Franciscan Order and the academy at Paris and he will die before his work is finished. The Franciscan Order is teetering between religious laxity and charismatic zealotry. Some friars pride themselves on being *virī spirituales*, but they have failed to show themselves to be *virī ecclesiastici*. These men, the so-called Spirituals, many of whom were infected by Joachimism, have no patience with the rest of the Church. In response, some of the secular masters at the University of Paris have attacked the whole mendicant movement as being a dangerous and heretical innovation, contrary to the received tradition. Thus, at the end of his life, the Seraphic Doctor and Prince of Mystics<sup>3</sup> sets out to show the masters and students of

---

<sup>1</sup> Sirach 15:5, quoted by Saint Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, vol. 5, *Opera Omnia* (Florence: Quarracchi, 1891), col. 1, 1 [329a]. The Latin reads: *In medio Ecclesiae aperiet os eius et adimplebit eum Dominus spiritu sapientiae et intellectus et stola gloriae vestiet illum*. All citations from Bonaventure in any of his works refer to the Quarracchi edition unless otherwise noted: *Opera Omnia ed. Studio et cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura ad plurimos codices mss. Emendate, anecdotis aucta, prolegomenis scholiis notisque illustrata*, 10 vols. (Florence: Quarracchi, 1882-1902). The volume and page number will be given in brackets. The English translation of the *Hexaëmeron* used here, unless otherwise specified, is *Collations on the Six Days*, trans. José de Vinck, vol. 5, 5 vols., *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal Saint and Doctor* (Patterson: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970).

<sup>2</sup> Collations 1-3 form a kind of prologue to the rest of the collations, each developing an aspect of on the *thema*. The Holy Spirit teaches the prudent man how to speak: to whom, viz., the Church (col. 1); where to begin, viz., the center which is Christ (col. 1); where to end, viz. wisdom (col. 2), and understanding (col. 3). The *Verbum Inspiratum*, by which all things are revealed, brings forth visions and dreams. The rest of the collations describe the intellectual understanding of the visions of the six days of creation, which are introduced at the end of collation 3 (24-31).

<sup>3</sup> Cf., Leo XIII, *Allocutio* (Rome: October 11, 1890).

theology within the Order how it is that they can be both spiritual and ecclesial men. He will encourage them to cling to Christ as the stable center of the whole universe and at the same time pass through the vicissitudes of time by growing in wisdom. They can do only this *in medio Ecclesiae*, but the benefit is not only a personal growth in wisdom; it is also an ecclesial one. In other words, the ecclesial character of theology not only serves to preserve the deposit of faith but also functions in such a way as to bring about a development of doctrine in response to the needs of the times. For Bonaventure, this is the best way to assure that individual men grow in wisdom and achieve the sanctity to which they are called.

The notion of development of doctrine is not explicit anywhere in Bonaventure's writings; however, his defense of the mendicant innovation of St. Francis, quite clearly implies the existence of such development. The explicit treatment of this topic was not a scholastic concern; nevertheless, I believe the metaphysics of a theory of the development of doctrine is present in the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*.

According to Bonaventure, with the words of Sirach quoted above, the Holy Spirit teaches the prudent man how to speak, i.e., to whom speech should be addressed, from where it should begin and where it should end. First, the Church, as "the assembly of rational men," is one to whom the prudent man speaks.<sup>4</sup> This means that theology should belong to the unity of the faith preached in the Church as an act of obedience and charity, in one accord with its prayer and praise in the liturgy. Theology should not be addressed to or proceed from *a rebellious house*.<sup>5</sup> The prudent man speaks only *in medio Ecclesiae*. Secondly, the prudent man begins to speak from the center, which is Christ. If this is neglected, nothing is obtained. Christ is the metaphysical center through His eternal generation, and the physical center through the Incarnation. And as this center He leads upwards through mathematics, logic, ethics, politics and theology, radiating outward in the mysteries of the Crucifixion,

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf., *Hexaëmeron*, col. 1, 2 [V, 329b].

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 1, 9 [V, 330d], quoting Ez. 2:5.

Resurrection, Ascension, final judgment and eternal beatitude. Thirdly, the prudent man ends his speech in wisdom and understanding. Here Bonaventure is referring to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which operate in such a way so as to lead man back to God, and through man all creation as well. Wisdom is rooted in one Divine Light, passes through the various manifestations of divine revelation, and is consummated in the darkness of ecstasy. Understanding mediates between the simple assent of faith and the apophatic mode of the gift of wisdom, by lifting rational intelligence to the contemplation of the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchies, which include both stable unchanging concepts and the volatile elements within the flux of history. The Seraphic Doctor discusses the ascent of this understanding in terms of the symbolism of the six days of creation.

St. Bonaventure never got beyond describing the contemplative symbolism of the fourth day of creation when God created the sun, moon and stars. He delivered twenty-three collations during Easter-tide of 1273, during which time Pope Gregory X made him a cardinal. Shortly after he was called to the Council of Lyons and died on July 15, 1274 with his masterwork unfinished. However, what the Seraphic doctor had accomplished is extraordinary and remains highly relevant to contemporary theology. Joseph Ratzinger famously chose Bonaventure as a partner in discussion precisely because *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* afforded him insights as to how to synthesize in the modern context an understanding of revelation, history and metaphysics.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Bonaventure offers the postconciliar Church a synthetic vision of what it means to be traditional, ecclesial and prophetic all at the same time. He does this in the collations by articulating wisdom and understanding in terms of order or hierarchy. He says that the operative structure of theology is symbolic, speculative and mystical. As I will attempt to demonstrate, these are not three separate branches of theology, superseding levels,

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf., Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachery Hayes (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), xii.

or ages in one's theological life, but interpenetrating and simultaneous modes of our reception and assimilation of divine revelation. This theological hierarchy is stable in the unity of the Divine Light, in the objective revelation of the literal sense, in the one deposit of faith, and in the firmness of perennially valid theological concepts. But theological hierarchy is also dynamic, just as the Trinitarian relations are proper to the unity of the divine nature. There is growth in wisdom and this takes place *in medio ecclesiae*, through the circumincessary operation of 1) pious assent under the authority of divine and ecclesiastical magisterium, 2) the approval of reason by means of ecclesial function of academic theology, and 3) the prophetic contribution of the saints that sometimes become normative for the life of the Church. The operation of this theology is also a form of hierarchization because it is providentially ordered by a Hierarch who is the principle, center and consummation of history, viz., Jesus Christ, Lord of history and the one Teacher of all.

To my knowledge *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* has never been mined for a theory of doctrinal development, though John R. White has suggested that Bonaventure's theology of history implies such a theory.<sup>7</sup> I contend that this endeavor promises to be fruitful, not only for the formulation of a theory, but also because the notion of the hierarchization of theology evidenced in the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* sheds a great deal of light on the text itself and may contribute significantly to the ongoing attempt to interpret the *Hexaëmeron* as the author intended it to be understood.

Thus, this project presents us with three tasks. In chapter one we will carefully but briefly define and contextualize the notions of order, hierarchy and hierarchization as Bonaventure understands them. Order for Bonaventure is a global concept, essential not only to the operation of theology but also to his whole metaphysics. The Blessed Trinity, the divine missions, the structure of creation, the human soul, the senses of sacred scripture, the

---

<sup>7</sup> John R. White, "St. Bonaventure and the Problem of Doctrinal Development," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (2011).

ascent of the soul and the function of time: in Bonaventure all of them hinge on the notions of order or hierarchy. If this fact is not appreciated, his theology will be utterly opaque. Hence, essential to our argument is that theology itself functions in a hierarchical manner. This is fundamental to the whole metaphysics of Bonaventure as well as key to understanding the *Hexaëmeron*. In chapter two, then, we will describe the threefold theology of St. Bonaventure: symbolic, speculative and mystical. Our task will be to show why theology is threefold and why its function is hierarchical. Finally, we will undertake our third task in chapter three, viz., to show how and why the hierarchization of theology in *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* constitutes a theory of the development of doctrine, and what this might suggest for the Church today.

Methodologically, we will focus on the metaphysics of Bonaventure and provide historical context and background only where it truly necessary. The scope and length of this study does not permit a thorough historical investigation, but we will not neglect the essentials, which are extremely important to the subject at hand. For the same reasons we will not be focusing on issues related to textual criticism.<sup>8</sup>

As for sources, we will look primarily to Bonaventure's texts, concentrating on the *Hexaëmeron*, with the wider corpus being mined for support. I contend that regardless of Bonaventure's growing concerns with the mendicant crisis, Joachimism within the Order, and Latin Averroism within the University of Paris, his metaphysics of order and hierarchy is an unbroken whole in which the later Bonaventure is in continuity with the earlier. I will also have recourse to many useful and authoritative secondary sources. I am especially in debt to

---

<sup>8</sup> As was the case with many medieval lectures and sermons, for the text of the *Hexaëmeron* we depend on the notes of his listeners. In regard to the *Hexaëmeron* there are two sets of such notes. The Quarracchi editors of the *Opera Omnia*, made use of *Reportatio B*, thinking that *Reportatio A*, was a different and abridged version of the other. But F. Delorme later edited and published *Reportatio A*, arguing that it was independent of *Reportatio B*; cf., Saint Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, ed. F. Delorme (Florence: Quarracchi, 1934); cf., also White, "Doctrinal Development," note 12. I am using here *Opera Omnia* edition of *Reportatio B*. While there are significant differences in the manuscripts, I do not believe they greatly affect the essentials of my arguments. For the textual problems regarding the interpretation of the *Hexaëmeron*, cf., Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 4-5.

Fr. Peter Damian Fehlner, with whom I have consulted on this project continually over many months.

## **1. Hierarchy and Hierarchization**

Our entire argument for the presence of a theory of development of doctrine in *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* depends essentially on the understanding of theology as a hierarchical operation. Hence in the first section of this first chapter we will define order and hierarchy in general, as Bonaventure understands these ideas (section 1.1.1.), and illustrate his meaning through his chosen symbol of order, viz., the circle (1.1.2.) Having done this we will then explicate the notion of hierarchy as it applies to man as image of the triune God (section 1.2). Man has a hierarchical function, and the understanding of the order of knowledge in him, which makes him capable of receiving revelation and of growing in wisdom, is also integral to our argument. In the final section we will discuss the notion of hierarchy in the context of magisterium (section 1.3.). This begins with Christ Himself as the one Teacher of All, and then by means of hierarchical descent, the teaching of Christ radiates downward to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Having done this we will then be prepared to discuss the hierarchization of theology.

### **1.1. The Notions of Order and Hierarchy**

#### **1.1.1. Definition and Description**

Order and hierarchy in Bonaventure are practically synonymous. Etymologically hierarchy means sacred order. The general notion here is Dionysian. In order or hierarchy there is an approximation of the creature to God via illumination that passes from a principle to a term.<sup>9</sup> In his *Sentences* commentary Bonaventure defines order in this way: “For this is order [*ordo*], which executes and maintains the divine law in its operations, as it leads from

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf., Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Coelesti Hierarchia*, ed. Balthasar Corderii, vol. 3, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857), c. 3 [164d, 65bc]. Bracketed numbers in all references to Dionysius refer to the column number in PG 3.