

Prospects for a Sapiential Theology: Bonaventure on Theological Wisdom

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IS THEOLOGY A SCIENCE, or a wisdom? Theologians formed in any Scholastic tradition readily recognize the vital importance of understanding that theology is a science. The topic received such attention well into the twentieth century that it provoked something of a reaction, with theologians insisting that there were other things to be said about theology as well.¹ Such a dynamic was anticipated by the thirteenth-century university masters. Alexander of Hales, for example, begins his *Summa* of theology by asking “whether the doctrine of theology is *scientia*.” He concludes that, whatever one may say about the scientific aspects of this *doctrina*, it is far more appropriately called “wisdom,” *sapientia*.

Is theology, then, a science, or a wisdom?² The two need not be

¹ For a helpful outline of the twentieth-century trajectory among Thomists, see Mark F. Johnson, “The Sapiential Character of the First Article of the *Summa theologiae*,” in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham: Essays in Memory of James A. Weisheipl, O.P.*, ed. R. James Long (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991), 85–98. From a different perspective, one may consider Hans Urs von Balthasar’s famous dictum that theology needs to be done “on one’s knees” (“Theology and Sanctity,” in *The Word Made Flesh*, vol. 1 of *Explorations in Theology*, trans. A. V. Littledale and Alexander Dru [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989], 206), or Karl Rahner’s claim that “the devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has ‘experienced’ something, or he will cease to be anything at all” (“Christian Living Formerly and Today,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7, *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life 1*, trans. David Bourke [New York: Herder and Herder, 1971], 15).

² The reader may find it grammatically odd to speak of “a wisdom” rather than “wisdom” (as does my word-processing program; the grammar func-

opposed. But if the desire—whether it originates among the thirteenth-century masters or twenty-first-century theologians—to describe theology in terms of wisdom is to bear fruit, one will have to have a precise understanding of what wisdom is. The purpose of this article is to enter into the subject by laying out the thought of one extraordinary exemplar of sapiential theology, St. Bonaventure. It is notable that he is committed to the scientific character of theology. He is perhaps the first theologian to appeal to the Aristotelian notion of subalternation to validate a true science of theology.³ It is equally obvious, though, that his vision of the theologian's activity does not end in a purely intellectual mastery of the things of faith. To give just one example, at the end of the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, having gone through an extraordinarily dense argument about the variety of ways in which the Christian mind may be raised to God, Bonaventure states that the completion of this journey lies in a *transitus*, a passing over in which the mind is utterly quieted and intellection gives way to the ardor of love.⁴ We will not understand his theology if we try

tion marks “a wisdom” as an error). This is, in fact, something of the point. It is common to regard wisdom as a single thing. A Christian may associate “wisdom” with the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Someone steeped in the Aristotelian tradition may regard wisdom as that highest of intellectual virtues whereby a man orders all things (see *Nicomachean ethics* 6). It is not uncommon to regard wisdom as an eminently practical kind of knowing or an especially graced or spiritual knowledge. By contrast, the Scholastic tradition was accustomed to speak of varieties of wisdom: “It is fitting, and this is a fundamental point, to distinguish three wisdoms properly so called; wisdom being defined as a supreme knowledge, having a universal objet and judging things by first principles” (Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959], 247). The burden of this article is to try to give some specificity to that wisdom that pertains to theology and that, therefore, must be carefully distinguished from other kinds of wisdom.

³ *In I Sent.*, pro., q. 2, ad 4. See: M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie comme science au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957), 56; Henry Donneaud, *Théologie et intelligence de la foi au XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Parole et silence, 2006), 465–79.

⁴ *Itin.* 7.1, 4, 5: “Accordingly, the mind has reached the end of the way of the six contemplations. . . . When the mind has done all this, it must still, in beholding these things, transcend and pass over, not only this visible world, but even itself. . . . In this passing over, if it is to be perfect, all intellectual activities ought to be relinquished and the loftiest affection transported to God, and transformed into Him. . . . And since, therefore, nature avails nothing and human endeavor but little, little should be attributed to inquiry, but much to unction; little to the tongue, but very much to interior joy; little to the spoken or written word, but everything to the Gift of God, that is, to the Holy Spirit. Little or

to deny or minimize its scientific character, but the perfection of theology lies not in a purely scientific project.

An adequate account of Bonaventure's understanding of theology in light of wisdom must contain four elements. First is the simple identification of theology as wisdom, which I will accomplish with reference to seminal texts on the nature of theology. Second is a more refined identification of theological wisdom in light of Bonaventure's whole doctrine of wisdom. This will require appeal to two famous texts in which he speaks of four types of wisdom and the isolation of that type that is most strictly speaking theological. Third is the incorporation of this wisdom into the ordinary working of theology: the relationship between the wisdom of theology and the science of theology. Here, our attention will turn to various forms of theological argument, especially the form that Bonaventure calls the argument *ex pietate*. I will focus on two texts, one that indicates the distinctive quality of this kind of reasoning and a second that gives an example of such reasoning. Fourth is the relationship that theology has to other kinds of knowledge. The question of the "autonomy" of Bonaventure's philosophy was one of the great topics of twentieth-century Bonaventure studies. Yet, without directly engaging that vast literature, it is possible, and helpful, to distinguish between the ways in which theology may be said to have a purely extrinsic relationship to other sciences and the ways in which its relationship is intrinsic.

In sum, the prospects for a sapiential theology in Bonaventurian terms should deal with theological wisdom (1) in itself (a combination of the first two points mentioned above), (2) in relation to theological science, and (3) in relation to nontheological knowledge.⁵

Theology as Wisdom

That Bonaventure regards theology as a matter of both science and wisdom is undoubted:

nothing should be attributed to the creature, but everything to the Creative Essence—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (*The Journey of the Mind to God*, trans. Philotheus Boehner, ed. Stephen F. Brown, with intro. and notes [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993], 37–38).

⁵ For a good introduction to Bonaventure's understanding of wisdom, see Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (New York: Oxford, 2006), esp. ch. 2 ("Christian Wisdom"; pp. 23–35), or Gregory LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom: The Nature of Theology according to St. Bonaventure* (Rome: Istituto storico dei cappuccini, 2005), ch. 5 ("The End of Theology"; pp. 147–92).

Sacred Scripture or theology is a science that imparts to us wayfarers as much knowledge of the First Principle as we need to be saved. Now God is not only the principle and effective exemplar of all things in creation, but also their restorative principle in redemption and their perfecting principle in remuneration. . . . Thus theology is the only perfect science, for it begins at the very beginning, which is the First Principle, and continues to the very end, which is the everlasting reward. . . . Theology is also the only perfect wisdom, for it begins with the supreme cause as the principle of all things that are caused—the very point at which philosophical knowledge ends. But theology goes beyond this, considering that cause as the remedy for sins; and it leads back to it, considering that cause as the reward of meritorious deeds and the goal of [human] desires. In this knowledge one finds perfect taste, life, and the salvation of souls; that is why all Christians should be aflame with longing to acquire it.⁶

This early text, from the *Breviloquium*, does not elaborate on the distinction between science and wisdom. What really is the difference between, for example, considering God as “the principle of all things that are caused” (wisdom) and “the principle and effective exemplar of all things in creation” (science)? It appears that theology as a science concerns the ordered unfolding of the understanding of revelation,⁷ while, as wisdom, it goes on to the greatest mysteries, at which philosophy stops. Moreover, theology as perfect wisdom clearly achieves an affective end, compared to the more intellectual end of philosophy or even of theology considered purely as a science.⁸

A more precise consideration of theology as wisdom comes in an early text, the delineation of the nature of theology in the prologue to book 1 of Bonaventure’s commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. The passage in full reads as follows:

⁶ *Brev.* 1.1.2–3, in *Breviloquium*, trans. Dominic V. Monti, O.F.M., Works of St. Bonaventure 9 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2005), 28.

⁷ This touches on the method of the whole *Breviloquium*. The treatment of each topic begins with a statement of what must be believed and moves on to an explanation of this in terms of the First Principles (whether the first principle of creation or of salvation).

⁸ Here, Bonaventure is evoking the common etymology of wisdom: *sapientia* = *sapida scientia*, “tasted knowledge.”

We should note that our intellect can be perfected by scientific knowledge. Now we can consider the perfection of the intellect in three ways: in itself; as it applies [*se extendit*] to our affections; and as it applies to deeds, an application the intellect achieves through giving orders and ruling. Corresponding to these three modes of perfection, our intellect, because subject to error, has three kinds of directive habits.

If we consider the intellect in itself, it is properly speculative and it is perfected by a habit which exists for the sake of contemplation. This habit is called speculative science.

If we consider the intellect as it applies to deeds, it is perfected by a habit which exists for the sake of our becoming good. This habit is practical or moral science.

If we consider the intellect in a way falling between these two, as it applies to our affections, it is perfected by a habit that lies between the purely speculative and the purely practical, but one that embraces both. This habit is called wisdom and it involves knowledge and affection together: “For the wisdom of doctrine is like her name.” Consequently, this habit is for the sake of contemplation and also for our becoming good, but principally for the sake of our becoming good.

Such is the kind of knowledge contained in this book. For this knowledge aids faith, and faith resides in the intellect in such a way that, in accord with its very nature, it moves our affections. This is clear; for the knowledge that Christ died for us, and other such truths, move us to love, unless we are talking about a hardened sinner. But a truth like ‘the diameter is incommensurate with the side’ does not. Therefore, we should grant that this science is for the sake of our becoming good.⁹

The way this is understood depends on the sense that one gives the final cause, which is the topic of the question.¹⁰ If it is understood as the purpose—the end for the sake of which we undertake theology—then it is possible to say that theology is meant to lead to an end that

⁹ *In I Sent.*, pro., q. 3, in *Commentary on the Sentences: Philosophy of God*, trans. R. E. Houser and Timothy B. Noone, Works of St. Bonaventure 16 (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2013), 11–12.

¹⁰ Bonaventure explicitly says that the four questions of the prologue to book 1 are divided according to the four causes of theology (or, more precisely, of *iste liber*, Lombard’s book of *Sentences*)—in order: the material, formal, final, and efficient causes.

is extrinsic to its scientific mode of proceeding, which Bonaventure just defined in the previous question.¹¹ In that case, “sapiential theology” would mean theology as undertaken for the sake of the end and, thus, would more rightly be called “sapiential” than “scientific” (or “speculative”). If, on the other hand, the final cause is understood as that end that perfects the formal cause—thus not the end of the one who undertakes the activity, but rather the proper end of the activity itself—then theology must be governed in an intrinsic way by this application *ad affectum*. In that case, “sapiential theology” would mean theology understood in a thoroughly scientific way that is also, and for the very same reason, thoroughly sapiential.

One could reasonably argue that the first interpretation reflects the plain meaning of the text: to say that the loving knowledge of Christ is the end of theology suggests a *transitus* from the intellectual activity of theology to its affective end.¹² Also in favor of this interpretation is the aforementioned fact that Bonaventure often describes an ascent in Christian knowledge that leads beyond the purely intellectual or speculative. Christian wisdom,¹³ nulliform wisdom,¹⁴ and ecstatic knowledge¹⁵ are all states that are clearly beyond the scope of theological science, though that science plays a role in each case in preparation for the end.¹⁶

Without denying any of the foregoing, I would suggest that a strong case can be made for the second interpretation. A *prima facie* reason for this can be seen in the context of this text. In the immediately previous question, Bonaventure departed from his Franciscan teachers (notably Alexander of Hales and Odo Rigaud) in asserting forthrightly that the mode of proceeding in theology

¹¹ See J. F. Quinn, *The Historical Constitution of St. Bonaventure's Philosophy* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1973), 683–86. That the mode of proceeding of theology is scientific is established by Bonaventure in the previous question (*In I Sent.*, pro., q. 2).

¹² *In I Sent.*, pro., q. 3. The same ordering of the intellective to the affective can be found in Bonaventure's description of the wisdom that is the gift of the Holy Spirit (*In III Sent.*, d. 35, a. un., q. 1).

¹³ *Itin.* 7.

¹⁴ *Hex.* 2.

¹⁵ *De sc. Chr.*, epilogue.

¹⁶ See E. Randolph Daniel, “St. Bonaventure a Faithful Disciple of St. Francis? A Reexamination of the Question,” in *S. Bonaventura 1274–1974*, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol, 5 vols. (Rome: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1974], 2:171–87, esp. 183ff. Cf. Charles Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999): 175–91.

is “perscrutatorious,” by way of examination, inquiry—a rational mode of proceeding distinct from the *modus authenticus* (narrative, parable, exhortation, etc.) that is appropriate to Scripture. And, as noted previously, he evokes the Aristotelian notion of subalternation to validate this distinction between theology and Scripture. It would be puzzling to find Bonaventure following up his presentation of a thoroughly scientific conception of theology with an outright denial of its speculative character.

The problem that faces Bonaventure is this. In identifying theology as an Aristotelian *scientia*, he has raised the prospect of it being an effort of syllogistic reasoning that is measured only by the philosophical perspicacity of the theologian and his adherence to the knowledge contained in the articles of faith.¹⁷ This Bonaventure certainly does not regard as satisfactory. He knows well the vain musings of those masters and students at the University of Paris who, if not heretical, left much to be desired.¹⁸ One way to address this problem would be

¹⁷ Elsewhere in the *Sentences* commentary (*In III Sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1), Bonaventure states explicitly that theology contains two sets of principles: the common principles are those that are known through philosophy, and the proper principles are the articles of faith. Therefore, theology is absolutely bound to adhere both to the truth of philosophy and to the truth of faith.

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Hex.* 1.9: “For theologians have attacked the life of Christ as related to morals, and the teachers of the School of Art have attacked the doctrine of Christ by their false statements” (in *Collations on the Six Days of Creation*, trans. José de Vinck, Works of Bonaventure 5 [Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970]); the former seems to be a reference to the mendicant controversy, and the latter to the influence of radical Aristotelianism at the university. See also *Hex.* 19.10–14, where, in laying out the proper order of theological study—Scripture, the Fathers, the *summas* of the masters, the philosophers—Bonaventure warns several times of the dangers attendant upon going too readily to the lower levels, closing by saying: “Indeed, not so much of the water of philosophy should be mixed with the wine of Sacred Scripture that it turn from wine into water. This would be the worst of miracles.” Whether Bonaventure might be called “anti-intellectualist” in the *Hexaëmeron* (and if so, what that would mean) is a complicated question, not least because the two existing *reportationes* of these lectures differ rather notably on precisely this point, the Quaracchi edition containing occasional prophecies of an age in which the intellectual activity of the theologians would be superseded, the Delorme edition at times displaying a much greater knowledge and use of Aristotle. The most provocative view is perhaps that expressed by Joseph Ratzinger in *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*. Ratzinger identifies what he calls an “prophetic-eschatological anti-Aristotelianism” in Bonaventure’s later works, most notably the *Hexaëmeron*: “In the *Hexaëmeron* we find the final development of this anti-philosophical attitude which here becomes an anti-Scholas-

to insist on the presence of other qualities (habits) in the theologian—thus one could talk about the importance for theology not only of faith and knowledge but also of docility, studiousness, and piety, not to mention such higher habits as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Here, however, Bonaventure addresses the problem by appealing to the end of the science. The delineation between speculative, practical, and affective perfections of the intellect and between the sciences corresponding to them is suggestive. A practical science, unlike a speculative science, requires knowledge of its final cause in order to accomplish its work. The speculative science of geometry is guided only by its principles and deduces whatever it may from them; the practical science of housebuilding is guided by the requirements of the end—the qualities of the house that is the *telos* of the activity. By comparison, the end of theology is not an artifact, and so it differs from a practical science. But insofar as the end of theology—the love of God in Christ—gives guidance to theology, it differs also from a speculative science. Hence the category of affective science: a science in which the relation of love toward its subject plays a role in determining the principles on which the science is based.

Sapiential theology is therefore not so much theology as it attends to the affective needs of the theologian as it is theology that is governed by the insight gained from a proper loving knowledge of its subject.

Theology among the Wisdoms

The texts we have looked at so far indicate a difference between wisdom and *scientia*. Not all wisdom is the same, however. Twice in his corpus, Bonaventure speaks about four kinds of wisdom:¹⁹ the

ticism in which Franciscan, Joachimite, and Dionysian themes merge. . . . For the present, speculative theology—philosophical and theological—is justified. But in the higher state that is to come, this will be transcended and become superfluous” (Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes [Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971], 160–61).

Whatever position one takes on Ratzinger’s argument, it may at least be said that Bonaventure does not take the same route as Aquinas in addressing the problems of radical Aristotelianism. Aquinas set himself the task of commenting at length on Aristotle’s corpus; Bonaventure never wrote a commentary on Aristotle. It is as if Aquinas saw that the challenge was to get Aristotle right, while Bonaventure saw that this would not do, that the more fundamental problem was the bracketing of the faith by Christian Aristotelian thinkers.

¹⁹ For a detailed exegesis of these passages, see LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom*, 147–92.

first is in distinction 35 of the third part of his *Sentences* commentary, where the topic is wisdom as the gift of the Holy Spirit; the second is in collation 2 of his *Hexaëmeron*, where he speaks about the fourfold beauty of wisdom.

<i>In III Sent., d. 35, a. un., q. 1</i>	<i>Hex. 2.8</i>
<i>“Communiter”: cognitionem rerum generalem</i>	<i>“Uniformis” in regulis divinarum legum</i>
<i>“Minus communiter”: cognitionem rerum aeternarum</i>	<i>“Multiformis” in mysteriis divinarum Scripturarum</i>
<i>“Proprie”: cognitionem Dei secundum pietatem</i>	<i>“Omniiformis” in vestigiis divinarum operum</i>
<i>“Magis proprie”: cognitionem Dei experimentalem</i>	<i>“Nulliformis” in suspensiis divinarum excessum</i>

The question for us here is: what do these distinctions suggest about the wisdom that is theology? It must be admitted that neither text speaks explicitly about theological wisdom. Readers accustomed to a division between philosophical wisdom, theological wisdom, and mystical wisdom do not find it, at least named as such, here.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is fair to expect it. There is no doubt that Bonaventure distinguishes theology from both the natural knowledge of things proper to the rational mind and the infused knowledge of divine and created things that is the gift of the Holy Spirit.²¹ Theology has a distinct light and reaches to a distinct end, and the perfection of that knowledge is what we mean by theological wisdom.²²

²⁰ Such is the common division in the Thomist tradition. See, e.g., Kieran Conley, O.S.B., *A Theology of Wisdom: A Study in St. Thomas* (Dubuque, IA: Priory Press, 1963). For its applicability to Bonaventure, see Leon Veuthey, “Scientia et sapientia in doctrina S. Bonaventurae,” *Miscellanea Franciscana* 43 (1943): 1–13.

²¹ See *De septem donis Spiritus sancti* 4; *De sc. Chr.*, q. 4; *In I Sent.*, pro., q. 1.

²² It can be tempting to try to find a one-to-one correspondence between the fourfold distinction in the *Sentences* commentary and that in the *Hexaëmeron* (see, e.g., George H. Tavard, *Transiency and Permanence: The Nature of Theology according to St. Bonaventure* [St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1954], 189; cf. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 24–26), but I have argued that this is inaccurate and that it ignores a key difference in the purpose of these discussions (see LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom*, 151–55). In brief, in the *Sentences*, Bonaventure is concerned with the effects of the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon

Commentary on the Sentences

In the *Sentences* commentary, Bonaventure distinguishes between wisdom commonly so called, less commonly so called, properly so called, and more properly so called. The first is the general knowledge of things; Bonaventure quotes Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* as saying that “the wise man knows all things, insofar as it is appropriate.” The second is “sublime knowledge,” or “the knowledge of eternal things,” what Aristotle calls the “knowledge of the highest causes.”²³ The fourth is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the “experimental knowledge of God,” and Bonaventure goes on at some length to describe the way it unites knowledge and the affect. None of these pertains specifically to theology, and so none can be equated with that wisdom that is theology. The first two kinds of wisdom do not, strictly speaking, require grace, nor do they have to do with God under the distinct formality of theology. The fourth kind of wisdom emphatically requires grace, but it achieves a cognition that is beyond what theology itself can provide.²⁴

We are left with the third kind of wisdom, wisdom “properly speaking,” and this Bonaventure describes as “the knowledge of God according to piety.”

In the third way wisdom is understood properly, and this names the knowledge of God according to piety. This knowledge is attained in the cult of *latria* that we show to God through faith, hope, and love. Augustine speaks of it in this way in *De Trinitate* 14, expositing Job (28:28): “Behold, this piety is wisdom,” saying here that piety and wisdom are the same as *theosebia*, and *theosebia* is the same as divine worship, which consists in the three virtues, as he says at the beginning of his *Enchiridion*, to Laurentius.

the powers of the soul, and so his fourfold distinction pertains to various ways in which the soul may be engaged in an act of wisdom. In the *Hexaëmeron*, he is interested rather in the way that wisdom shines forth from God, and thus his fourfold distinction pertains to different ways in which God manifests himself as wisdom.

²³ On these first two forms, cf. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 45, a. 1, on the distinction between wisdom “in a genus” and wisdom “simply.”

²⁴ For a distinction between philosophical, theological, and graced knowledge, see Bonaventure, *De septem donis Spiritus sancti* 4. The topic there is knowledge, rather than wisdom, but the lesson may easily be transferred to the realm of wisdom: whatever connections there are between these three, they do not require an identification between them.

The mention of piety, *latria*, *theosebia*, and *cultus divinus* may suggest that this kind of wisdom is devotional rather than theological.²⁵ However, the text certainly highlights the theological virtues. Properly speaking, “the knowledge of God according to piety” has to be understood in terms of the effect of the theological virtues on the soul. For our purposes, we can distinguish two such effects: first, in terms of the image of God in the soul, and second, in terms of the soul’s reception of revelation.

The rational soul, by virtue of its creation as rational, always bears the image of God, the *imago creationis*. The same soul rectified and transformed by grace—including most importantly the infusion of the theological virtues—also bears the image of God as the *imago recreationis* and is formed in the likeness of God, the *similitudo*. By virtue of the first, the soul has God as its object; by virtue of the second it has God as its end; and by virtue of the third, it has an affective union with him.²⁶ These three qualities can coexist in the same

²⁵ Cf. *Hex.* 19.24–27, which presents the exercise of wisdom in a way that does not seem to have anything to do with theology. It should be noted, however, that the mention of *latria* and *theosebia* suggests a more precise theological doctrine. In an earlier discussion of *latria* (*In II Sent.*, d. 16, a. 2, q. 3), Bonaventure distinguishes *latria* properly speaking from a more general use of the term. Properly speaking, it is an exterior act of worship, part of the virtue of religion, directed toward God as honorable; more generally, it is an interior act of worship informed by the theological virtues and directed to God as the object of the soul. The better term for this more general usage of *latria* is *theosebia*. And it is *theosebia* to which Augustine refers in the text cited by Bonaventure and that is the key virtue at stake here.

²⁶ In Bonaventure’s doctrine of creation, it is most customary to distinguish between vestige, image, and likeness of God (similitude): the vestige of God (the creature simply as created), points to him as its cause, according to its possession of unity, truth, and goodness; the image of God lies in the rational soul and consists of the way in which its powers of memory, intelligence, and will have God as their object; and the likeness of God lies in the soul as conformed to God by the infused gifts of faith, hope, and love (see, e.g., *Brev.* 2.12; *In I Sent.*, d. 3, p. 1, a. un., q. 2, ad 4; *De sc. Chr.*, q. 4; *Christus unus omnium magister*, 17; *Hex.* 2.26–27; see also *Brev.* 5.4; *Itin.* 1.10–11; 3.1; 4.3). In this context, to say that the rational soul apart from the infusion of grace has God as its object means that the powers of the soul are naturally and ineluctably oriented toward God and cannot function properly without that orientation. This is different from the relation the soul has to God by way of the elevation of its powers through sanctifying grace. Nor is there just one such graced relation. In an important text (*In II Sent.*, d. 16, a. 2, q. 3), Bonaventure distinguishes the graced soul as *image* (according to which it is configured like God) and *likeness* (according to which it is made like him, sharing in some measure

person at the same time, but the point is that they bespeak different kinds of relation to God. The relation that is the *imago creationis* is what allows the person to have philosophical knowledge; the relation that is the *similitudo* is what allows the person to have an experiential knowledge of God. The relation that is the *imago recreationis*, therefore, lying as it does between the other two, is what allows the person to have knowledge of God beyond the philosophical but short of the mystical. *Prima facie*, this seems to be the realm of the theological.²⁷

As for the soul's reception of revelation, Bonaventure makes it clear repeatedly that the theological virtues are necessary in order to apprehend revelation as such.²⁸ God reveals himself to us through Scripture, but, as Joseph Ratzinger noted, it is not Scripture itself that is *revelatio* for Bonaventure, but the spiritual meaning of Scripture—and the theological virtues are necessary for us to apprehend the spiritual meaning of Scripture.²⁹ Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the most perfect instance of revelation for Bonaventure is not Scripture, but Christ—and the theological virtues allow the person to apprehend Christ as the Word of God.

The “knowledge of God according to piety” may have devotional aspects to it, but insofar as Bonaventure is really talking here about the knowledge of God according to the theological virtues, he is talking about something that belongs to theology, concerning as it does the ability to apprehend God's revelation, rather than philosophy or mysticism. This is theological wisdom.

Hexaëmeron

The treatment of wisdom in the *Hexaëmeron* speaks at length about the fourfold form of wisdom. The introduction to the subject is as follows:

in his quality). There are also texts in which Bonaventure makes it clear that, although there is some cognitive apprehension of God that is suitable to the soul transformed in grace, the ultimate height of this is an affective rather than a cognitive experience (see esp. *Itin.* prol. 3–4; *Itin.* 7.4–5; *Hex.* 2.32–33). What I am presenting in this paragraph is a combination of the doctrines of these various texts.

²⁷ The doctrine of the three *imagines* given here is especially drawn from *In II Sent.*, d. 16, a. 2, q. 3.

²⁸ *Brev.* prol.1.5: faith and love are necessary to know the breadth, length, height, and depth of Scripture; *Brev.* prol.4.5: faith is correlated with the allegorical meaning of Scripture, hope with the tropological, and love with the anagogical; *Hex.* 2.13–17: faith allows us to know the allegorical meaning of Scripture, hope the anagogical, and love the tropological.

²⁹ Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 62–63.

This form [of wisdom] is *marvelous*, because in one mode it is *uniform*, in one mode *multiform*, in one mode *omniform*, and in one mode *nulliform*. Thus it clothes itself with a fourfold light. It appears *uniform* in the rules of the divine law, *multiform* in the mysteries of the divine Scriptures, *omniform* in the vestiges of the divine works, and *nulliform* in the elevations of divine transports.³⁰

On the face of it, all these forms of wisdom appear to be theological, for they all have to do with the divine—divine law, divine Scriptures, divine works, and divine transports. A couple of easy distinctions can be made, however. Nulliform wisdom, having to do with divine transports, is beyond the theological. It is “without form”; it “transcends every science”; it is “attained only through grace.” It has to do with a kind of experience of God that is far more affective than intellective: “For Christ goes away when the mind attempts to behold this wisdom through intellectual eyes; since it is not the intellect that can go in there.” Bonaventure’s favorite authority here is Dionysius, who urges us “to enter into the radiance of darkness.”³¹ We might call this wisdom mystical, without pausing to define the term too closely. Uniform wisdom, despite its reference to the divine law, is really more philosophical than theological. Bonaventure says of it, “These rules filling the rational mind with splendid light are all the ways by which the mind knows and judges that which could not be otherwise.”³² It is a wisdom that is present to all, even those without grace, and that forms the basis of all sure knowledge and judgment.

This leaves us with multiform and omniform wisdom as candidates for theological wisdom. Multiform wisdom has to do with “the mysteries of divine Scripture.” Bonaventure’s explanation of this adverts to the spiritual senses of Scripture, and as noted above, he correlates them with the theological virtues (faith–allegory; hope–anagogy; charity–tropology). In a word, it is through this wisdom that one receives revelation.³³ Omniform wisdom is manifested in “the traces of the divine works.” God has left his impress on everything he has created, and from any divine work, one may rise to the

³⁰ *Hex.* 2.8.

³¹ *Ibid.* 2.32.

³² *Ibid.* 2.9.

³³ Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, 62. For the meaning of *revelatio* in Bonaventure, see Pietro Maranesi, *Verbum inspiratum: Chiave ermeneutica dell’Hexaëmeron di san Bonaventura* (Rome: Istituto storico dei cappuccini, 1996), 141–45.

knowledge of its author—though in different ways, depending on whether one is considering an essence, a substance, or a spiritual creature. Etienne Gilson called this Bonaventure’s doctrine of “universal analogy.”³⁴ This is certainly, in a way, philosophical, for it involves an access to what God really has done in the creation of things. Yet, it is not sharply distinct from the theological, for Bonaventure readily says that some of what the soul sees is a reflection of the Trinity—and properly speaking, not just by way of the Trinitarian appropriations (which are qualities that even the philosopher could, in principle, attribute to God).³⁵ It thus appears that, in the *Hexaëmeron* account, theological wisdom is not confined to one form. It certainly has to do with revelation, but it extends to the consideration of all natural realities as expressive of divine wisdom as well.³⁶ This consideration is enabled by the transformation of the soul by grace—omniform wisdom presupposes multiform wisdom—but it is not limited to the reception of revelation proper to multiform wisdom.

In sum, theological wisdom is the knowledge of God that comes from the apprehension of his revelation—whether in Scripture, in Christ, or in the things he has made—according to the powers of the soul transformed by grace, particularly the theological virtues.

Theological Wisdom and Theological Reasoning

Wisdom is not science. “Science” refers to the mode in which a certain discipline proceeds, whereas “wisdom” refers to the end of that discipline, what it looks like when it has achieved its perfection. It is not

³⁴ “Universal Analogy” is the title of ch. 7 of Etienne Gilson, *Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Dom Illyd Trethowan and F.J. Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938).

³⁵ E.g., *Hex.* 2.23: “Every created substance has matter, form, and composition: the original principle or foundation, the formal complement, and the bond. . . . And in these the mystery of the Trinity is represented: the Father as the origin, the Son as the image, and the Holy Spirit as the bond”; *Hex.* 2.27: “Again, the creature is made in God’s likeness. This may be according to a likeness of nature or a likeness of grace. The former is memory, intelligence, and will in which the Trinity shines forth.”

³⁶ Something of the same dynamic is evidenced later in the *Hexaëmeron*. The text as we have it (Bonaventure never completed these lectures) runs through the first four days of creation, which reveal understanding (1) inscribed through nature, (2) lifted up through faith, (3) taught through Scripture, and (4) exalted through contemplation. Philosophy clearly corresponds to the first kind of understanding, and mystical knowledge to the fourth. If there is an in-between level, it corresponds to the second and third kinds of understanding and should not be reduced to one alone.

difficult to see, however, that, in any area in which one can identify the existence of a particular wisdom, the reality of that wisdom may have an effect on the practice of the science. A philosopher may practice the science of philosophy assiduously, but if he is not cognizant of or is unconcerned with the perfection of philosophy that is philosophical wisdom, we would expect his practice of the science to be limited. In this section, I will say a bit about how Bonaventure sees the impact of theological wisdom on theological science.

A Principle of Theological Reasoning: To Think of God Most Piously

A common Bonaventurian theme is that reason itself demands that one reason about God in the highest and most pious fashion.³⁷ The following is a passage from his disputed questions on the mystery of the Trinity, when he asks whether the doctrine of the Trinity is “credible”:

By reason of that light given naturally to man by God and known as the light of the divine face, human reason dictates to each individual man that we are to think of the first principle in the highest and most reverent way. . . . But to think that God can and does wish to produce one equal to and consubstantial with Himself so that He might have an eternal beloved and cobeloved is indeed to think of God in the highest and most reverent way; for if one thinks that He is not capable of this, one does not think of Him in the highest way; and if one thinks that He is capable of this but does not will to do it, one does not think of God in the most reverent way. That God exists in this way and that He is to be thought of in this way, I say, is not dictated by the innate light by itself, but by the infused light from which—together with the natural light—one concludes that God is to be thought of as one who generates and spirates one co-equal to and consubstantial with Himself, and thus one thinks of God in the highest and most reverent way.³⁸

Bonaventure is not offering here an argument from natural reason that God is a Trinity; as he says, thinking in this way “is not dictated by the innate light by itself.” But neither does he regard the truth of

³⁷ See, e.g., *Hex.* 8–12.

³⁸ *De myst. Trin.*, q. 1, a. 2 (*Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., *Works of St. Bonaventure* 3 [St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1979], 131).

the Trinity as something simply known as a datum of faith. It is an intelligible truth, and indeed a conclusion of reason. The same point is made in the response to the first objection in this article: “Whatever is contrary to all the dictates of reason is incredible for reason. But all reason dictates the contrary of the statement that a being which is one is really a trinity. Therefore, it is incredible for reason.” Bonaventure replies:

Reason can be understood in three ways; as fallen, as upright [*stante*],³⁹ and as elevated. When it is said that whatever is contrary to all the dictates of reason is incredible, if this is understood in particular of fallen reason it is false, because it is possible that something which is repugnant to fallen reason is consonant with innocent or elevated reason. But if it is understood universally of reason in all three senses, then the first proposition should be conceded as true, but the minor is false and should be denied; since—while [fallen] reason dictates the opposite of the fact that God is one and three, upright reason dictates something consonant with this, and elevated reason dictates this very truth itself.⁴⁰

The reason of the man without grace leads to one conclusion, but the reason of the man whose intellect has been healed by grace (or whose intellect was never wounded by sin) leads to a different conclusion, and the reason of the man whose intellect has been transformed or elevated by grace leads to yet a different conclusion. Theology may make use of reason in any one of these forms, but surely the most appropriate use will be that of the third: elevated reason. Bonaventure makes the same point in laying out his theological methodology in the prologue to book 1 of his *Sentences* commentary. In question 2 of that prologue, he asserts that the mode of proceeding in theology is rational. An objection is raised:

³⁹ I have altered Hayes’s translation to make it more literal. Hayes translates *stante* as “innocent.” “Upright” is more literal, though it is no more accurate. “Innocent” suggests reason as it existed in a state of innocence, before the Fall, which is in fact what Bonaventure means here. The idea is that man in the proper natural state is rightly ordered to the knowledge of God but that sin “bent” (*incurvatus*) him over. One of the effects of grace other than its elevating function is the rectification of the soul, making man able to stand upright and direct himself properly to God once again.

⁴⁰ *De myst. Trin.*, q. 1, a. 2, ad 1 (p. 133).

The method of proceeding should be appropriate to the subject-matter at issue. Therefore, it says at the beginning of the *Ethics*: “Methods of inquiry should follow the material.” But the subject matter of this science is the object of belief. Now the object of belief surpasses reason. Therefore, a method of proceeding using rational arguments is not appropriate to this doctrine.⁴¹

Bonaventure concedes the point, but verifies a rational mode of proceeding nonetheless:

When you object that the method of proceeding ought to be appropriate to the material, I reply: It is appropriate. And when you object that the object of belief surpasses reason, I reply: This is true, it surpasses reason as far as acquired knowledge is concerned; but it does not surpass reason that has been elevated through faith and through the gifts of knowledge and understanding. For faith elevates reason so that it can assent, while the gifts of knowledge and understanding elevate reason to understand what it has already believed.⁴²

Exactly how faith and the gifts of knowledge and understanding affect the reason is an enormous topic in its own right. For our purposes, it suffices to see that Bonaventure conceives of theology as a process of rational argument, with the qualification that the most proper form of that reasoning requires the influence of grace, resulting in an “elevated” reason. One might add that this thinking with “elevated reason” is not the same thing as the simple reiteration of what one knows in faith. Faith knows that God is both one and three. Elevated reason sees that this is “dictated” by reason.⁴³

⁴¹ *In I Sent.*, pro., q. 2, obj. 5 (p. 7).

⁴² *In I Sent.*, pro., q. 2, ad 5 (p. 10).

⁴³ Another example of this same approach, though in a very different context, is in the second vision of Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaëmeron* (collations 8–12). This is the vision of understanding “lifted up by faith.” It is beyond the natural light of reason but short of the understanding involved in the interpretation of Scripture or contemplation. Bonaventure says that the vision of understanding lifted up by faith is lofty, stable, and visible. Collations 10–12 speak about its visibility and begin by talking about twelve “thoughts of faith,” corresponding to the twelve pearls that form that gates of the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21. These twelve thoughts of faith are “that God is the First,

An Example of an Argument ex Pietate

The idea that theological reasoning is affected by grace as it transforms the theologian is not unique to Bonaventure among the Scholastic thinkers. Any argument from fittingness lends itself to this possibility: the grounds upon which one asserts the fittingness of a conclusion may be accessible to reason in the light of nature alone, but they may also require the illumination of faith to be seen as truly probable. A distinctive Bonaventuran version of such reasoning is the argument *ex pietate*. “Piety” may evoke a sense of the devotional rather than the theological, but as we have already seen, a more precise definition of terms presents a different picture. One may have piety toward an authority, such as Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. An opinion that is more clearly in keeping with the testimony of Scripture and the Fathers is to be preferred on the basis of piety. There is also the piety we have toward God, which ascribes to him the greatest glory. On the basis of piety, that opinion that is more in keeping with the glory of God is to be preferred.

These distinctions may be elaborated in the question on the primary reason for the Incarnation. The tradition had offered two reasons for the Incarnation: the perfection of creation (Hugh of St. Victor) or redemption from sin (Anselm). The question Bonaventure poses is: which one is the primary reason?

Now it seems that the first way is more in keeping with the judgment of reason, but the second with the piety of faith: first, because it is more in accord with the authority of the saints and the sacred Scripture. . . . The second reason it is more in accord with the piety of faith is that it honors God more than does the first opinion. This first opinion says that it is fitting for God to become incarnate for the perfection of the universe; and therefore it claims in some way that God is within the perfection of

that He is triune, that He is the Exemplar of things, the Creator of the world, the One who gave form to the soul, and the Giver of life; that God, united to the flesh was crucified, that He is the Remedy of the minds, [living food,] the Retribution of crimes and the eternal Reward” (*Hex.* 10.3 [p. 148; de Vinck simply leaves out “living food” (*vitale pabulum*)]). These three collations go on to speak at length about the first three of these thoughts: God as Being, God as Trinity, and God as Exemplar. It is important to note that these twelve thoughts of faith *do not* correspond precisely to the articles of faith. They are presented here not as things believed, but as things that reason sees when it is elevated by the virtue of faith—they are theological thoughts.

the universe and that there is some necessity of the incarnation if the perfection of the divine works is not to be lost. But the second opinion, holding as it does that the mystery of the incarnation is above all perfection, establishes that Christ is above all perfection of the universe, whether as to nature, grace, or glory.⁴⁴ . . . Fourth, because it more inflames the affect of the faithful. For it more excites the devotion of faithful souls that God became incarnate for the destruction of our wickedness than for the completion of incomplete works.⁴⁵

Reason within the light of nature alone does not make a decisive judgment between these opinions, though it may lean in the direction of Hugh's view. Considering the matter in the light of piety, on the other hand, gives us several reasons to prefer Anselm's view. Piety in the devotional sense leads one to say that it is better to think that redemption is the primary reason for the Incarnation, for this will move the heart to gratitude for God's gift. Piety as adherence to the authority of Scripture and the Fathers regards their clear preference for the primacy of redemption as reason enough to support that view. Piety toward God—thinking of him in the highest and most pious way, ascribing to him the greatest glory—leads likewise to the conclusion that redemption is the primary reason. There is much debate among Bonaventure scholars regarding this point, especially in light of the later position of Duns Scotus that the Incarnation would have happened even if man had not sinned. There are significant reasons to ascribe this same position to Bonaventure.⁴⁶ However, in the text here from the *Sentences* commentary, he turns our attention solely to what either position implies about the relationship

⁴⁴ The third reason, which is not particularly germane to our purposes, is that so great a mystery would not have occurred without the greatest cause; the placating of the divine anger and the restoration of all things in heaven and on earth required an offense to the divine majesty and the fall of the most noble of creatures.

⁴⁵ *In III Sent.*, d. 1, a. 2, q. 2.

⁴⁶ Ilia Delio, O.S.F., "Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 3–23; Zachary Hayes, "The Meaning of *convenientia* in the Metaphysics of St. Bonaventure," *Franciscan Studies* 34 (1974): 92–96; J. A. Wayne Hellmann, *Divine and Created Order in Bonaventure's Theology* (Saint Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2001), 74–77; cf. Joshua Benson, "The Christology of the *Breviloquium*," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, ed. Jay M. Hammond, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and Jared Goff (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 261–65.

between God and creation. One might argue that Hugh's position gives greater honor to God because the Incarnation is not viewed as a reaction to sin, but as a sovereignly free decision on God's part. Here, by contrast, Bonaventure insists that Hugh's position ends up regarding God as "within the perfection of the universe," rather than as transcending it.⁴⁷ It is more in keeping with the "piety of faith" to see Christ as utterly transcending the perfection of the universe and, therefore, not to give priority to the perfection of the universe as the reason for the Incarnation.

The argument *ex pietate* adjudicates between varying opinions not in terms of devotional import, nor by simply appealing to a datum of faith, but by recognizing the harmony (or disharmony) between what is asserted in an opinion and what is known to one who is accustomed to thinking of God in the highest way—one might say, what is known to one who has the feel of the faith. It accords with the affective end of theology—not by warming the affections of the theologian but by reflecting the intimate knowledge of God that is had in the theologian's real relationship with him.⁴⁸

The proper regard for theology as wisdom, therefore, allows one to engage all the more in theological reasoning, perfecting one's ability to make sound theological determinations. It is not anti-argumentative; rather, it promotes a certain kind of theological argument.

Theological Wisdom and Other Forms of Knowledge

Theology is not an isolated discipline for Bonaventure. All human cognition may be divided into three kinds of knowing, depending on whether one is looking outside oneself in the sensible world, inside oneself, or above oneself.⁴⁹ These three form an ascending continuum such that, while it is possible to consider only the outside world, the natural dynamism of the knowledge thus gained is to ascend to consider the soul in itself and ultimately to consider the angels and God; indeed, to stop short with only the sensible world is to have a stunted knowledge even of that world. Now, it is not the case that to consider God and the angels as above the soul is necessarily to engage

⁴⁷ As George Tavad notes, "Christ is not in creation like a perfecting element, since, as a Person, he towers high above all creaturely perfection" (Tavad, *Transiency and Permanence*, 204).

⁴⁸ For a slightly different interpretation of the argument *ex pietate*, see Jacques-Guy Bougerol, *Introduction a saint Bonaventure*, 2d ed. (Paris: Librairie philosophique J.Vrin, 1988), 153–58.

⁴⁹ *Itin.* 1.4; *Brev.* 2.12.

in theology; philosophy is at home here as well. But this pattern of Bonaventure's thought, as well as the fact that he regards theology as one of the possible states of human cognition, raises the possibility that theology has a role to play in drawing up the lower sciences to their perfection. Classic texts in this regard are collations 1 and 4–7 of the *Hexaëmeron*⁵⁰ and the short treatise *De reductione artium ad theologiam*.⁵¹

It must be added that the higher knowledge is not confined to theology. It includes all infused forms of divine revelation as well, such that one could legitimately speak about how, for example, the knowledge of one of the mechanical arts leads to and is perfected in an ecstatic state of contemplation. Here, however, our interest is confined to the way in which theology plays that role and, thus, may rightly be called “Christian wisdom” with respect to the lower forms of knowledge. The difference between theology and the other higher states is that, while it is certainly based on the infusion of faith, it is an acquired rather than an infused knowledge.

The first thing to be said about the lower disciplines—perhaps surprisingly, given what has just been said—is that they are autonomous. Nowhere does Bonaventure say that only a theologian can be a metaphysician, or *a fortiori* a mathematician, physicist, logician, ethicist, and so on. Yet, at the same time, he excoriates those who try to rely on their natural abilities and on the natural realities themselves in order to understand these disciplines. Most striking in this way is a passage from collation 5 of the *Hexaëmeron*. For the entirety of collation 4 and the bulk of collation 5, Bonaventure lays out in

⁵⁰ Collation 1 of the *Hexaëmeron* is largely devoted to a consideration of Christ as “the central point of all understanding” (*Hex.* 1.11), the center of metaphysics, physics, mathematics, logic, ethics, politics, and theology. Collations 4–7 deal with “understanding as given by nature” (*Hex.* 1.24) and begin (*Hex.* 4.1—5.20) with a description of the way truth shines out in the truth of things (considered in metaphysics, mathematics, and physics), the truth of words (considered in grammar, logic, and rhetoric), and the truth of morals (*morum*) (considered in the doctrine of moral habits, the doctrine of intellectual habits, and politics). Taken together, these collations tell us much about how Bonaventure regards different philosophical disciplines and their relation to the divine truth and especially Christ.

⁵¹ In *De reductione*, Bonaventure divides all knowledge according to illumination by “the Father of lights” (Jas 1:17), thus distinguishing an exterior light (the mechanical arts), an inferior light (sense knowledge), an interior light (philosophy, whether natural, rational, or moral), and a superior light (the light of grace and Scripture), and “reducing” the exterior, inferior, and interior to the superior.

varying degrees of detail⁵² the natural knowledge that one can have of the truth of things (metaphysics, mathematics, physics), the truth of words (grammar, logic, rhetoric), and the truth of morals (moral virtues, intellectual virtues, political virtues), and he brings the whole to a crashing end when he says, “But in all of these reason went on a rampage, metaphysics ran riot.”⁵³ Later on in the *Hexaëmeron* (collations 6–7), we see the same dynamic: the radical Aristotelians of Bonaventure’s day are blamed for losing sight of the truth of philosophical knowledge, while Aristotle himself is held blameless, though not able fully to understand this natural knowledge.

Perhaps the simplest way to account for these judgments on Bonaventure’s part is to say that they indicate an extrinsic role that divine illumination has on natural knowledge. The intellect of the natural knower is darkened by sin, and thus, needs the light of grace to know some things that, in principle, it can know in the light of nature. Or, natural reason may not be able to decide between two equally plausible conclusions while, if the truth of one is known through revelation, faith can give the answer to the natural question. Or again, some natural disciplines, such as ethics and metaphysics, deal with matters of ultimate concern (the human good, God), and theology can, because of its insight into precisely those matters, judge the claims of the natural knowledge. All of these are ways to describe possible relationships between divine illumination and natural disciplines, and Bonaventure acknowledges them.⁵⁴ They are, however, all extrinsic, and to leave the matter there would not do justice to his claims about the intrinsic relationship between that illumination and natural knowledge.

The two great texts that display this relationship are the short treatise *De reductione artium ad theologiam* and collation 1 of the *Hexaëmeron*. As the title indicates, *De reductione* shows how the various arts and sciences are related to theology:

Just as all those creations [i.e., the illuminations corresponding to the six days of creation] had their origin in one light, so too are all these branches of knowledge [viz., sense perception, mechanical art, rational philosophy, natural philosophy, and

⁵² How much detail depends in part on which *reportatio* is being consulted. There are topics where the Delorme edition contains a great deal more detail than the Quaracchi.

⁵³ *Hex.* 5.21.

⁵⁴ See esp. *Hex.* 7.

moral philosophy] ordained for the knowledge of Sacred Scripture; they are contained in it; they are perfected by it; and by means of it they are ordained for eternal illumination.⁵⁵

Collation 1 of the *Hexaëmeron*, for its part, is largely devoted to the theme of “Christ the center”:

Our intent, then, is to show that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and that He Himself is the central point of all understanding. He is the central point in a sevenfold sense, in terms of essence, nature, distance, doctrine, moderation, justice and concord. The first is in the metaphysical order, the second in the physical, the third in the mathematical, the fourth in the logical, the fifth in the ethical, the sixth in the political or juridical, and the seventh in the theological. The first Center is first by eternal origin, the second is most strong through the diffusion of power, the third is most deep because of the centrality of position, the fourth is most clear by rational proofs, the fifth is most important because of the choice of moral good, the sixth is outstanding because of the retribution of justice, the seventh is at peace through universal conciliation. Christ was the first center by His eternal generation, the second by His incarnation, the third by His passion, the fourth by His resurrection, the fifth by His ascension, the sixth by the judgment to come, the seventh by the eternal retribution or beatification.⁵⁶

There is a considerable literature on the technique of *reductio* in Bonaventure, and the theme of “Christ the center” has received increased attention in recent decades.⁵⁷ For here, we may confine ourselves to some general comments. *Reductio* involves seeing the

⁵⁵ *De red. 7 (De reductione artium ad theologiam*, trans. Sr. Emma Thérèse Healy, in *Works of St. Bonaventure 1* [Saint Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1955], 29).

⁵⁶ *Hex. 1.11* (p. 6–7).

⁵⁷ For recent commentary on collation 1 or the theme of “Christ the center” generally, see Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 192–204; Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 131–59; Hellmann, *Divine and Created Order*, 62–73; Kevin L. Hughes, “St. Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*: Fractured Sermons and Protreptic Discourse,” *Franciscan Studies* 63 (2005): 107–30.

dependence of one thing upon another for its intelligibility. For example, the intelligibility of a sensible object lies not entirely in itself, but within its exemplary cause—ultimately, in God’s idea of that object. Again, privations are not intelligible in themselves; they must be seen in light of the dispositions of which they are privations. When it comes to the sciences and theology, one may say very simply that the truth of things lies in three places: in the thing itself, in the rational mind that knows it, and in the divine mind according to which it is created, and the fullest truth of the thing lies in the divine mind; therefore, although we can talk about the truth of a natural science in itself, the fullness of its truth lies in its relationship to the divine mind.

The theme of “Christ the center” can be understood in much the same way. Much of the attention of commentators has been drawn to Christ as the center of metaphysics—understandably, since Bonaventure says more about this than about any other science in *Hexaëmeron* 1 and because one of the great debates in twentieth-century Bonaventure scholarship concerned “the Bonaventurian question” of whether philosophy is a properly autonomous discipline. As Zachary Hayes argued, there is for Bonaventure such a thing as philosophical metaphysics, which deals with the efficient, exemplary, and final causes of things, but there is also a theological metaphysics that understands these causes as appropriated to the Trinity and especially understands that in Christ is the exemplary cause of all things. Both are properly metaphysical, but the theological is more perfect than the philosophical.⁵⁸ One could draw the same lesson for any of the other sciences Bonaventure speaks of in *Hexaëmeron* 1, for example, mathematics. The mathematician measures things: “Although his first concern is the measuring of the earth, he further considers the motion of the higher bodies in so far as they act by their influence upon the lower earthly bodies.” Christ in his crucifixion and his descent into hell went to the center of things and, thus, provides the point from which they can be measured—not physically measured, but morally measured through Christ’s humility.⁵⁹ It is not the case that the mathematician can be a mathematician only by reflecting on the crucifixion. But neither is it the case that the connection Bonaventure is drawing here is a pure matter of pious sentiment,

⁵⁸ Zachary Hayes, “Christology and Metaphysics in the Thought of Bonaventure,” *Journal of Religion* 58, suppl. (1978): S82–S96.

⁵⁹ *Hex.* 1.21–24.

that it is a holy thing for a mathematician, who investigates quantity, number, and proportion to think about the crucifixion. Rather, one of the greatest truths of mathematics, the truth of proportion, has its prime instance in the proportion between the humble part (Christ's crucifixion and descent to the dead) and the great whole (all of human history). And it is not impossible to think that knowing the prime instance, the exemplary truth, can shape one's knowledge of the realities that stand underneath it.⁶⁰

Piecing together these claims of the connection between the knowledge of revealed truths and the relative autonomy of natural knowledge, we could present Bonaventure's doctrine as follows. In terms of *the light of knowledge*, there is a clear distinction between the light of nature and the light of faith (or yet higher lights). One may know something in the light of nature, in which case one is engaged in philosophy, or in the light of faith, in which case one is engaged in theology. It may be the same thing that is known—for example, the existence of God. In terms of the light in which this is known, philosophy has a proper operation here that is independent of the light in which theology knows the same thing.⁶¹

In terms of *what is known*, the relationship is a little different. Because of Bonaventure's understanding of the nature of exemplary causality, he will not say that the truth of things lies entirely within them. It is rather contained within God as exemplary cause.⁶² Therefore, God's knowledge of things governs the truth of things within themselves. Put in these terms, such a view may seem unexceptional. But, for Bonaventure, it follows that the person who has access to

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Br. Bonaventure Chapman, O.P., for sharing with me his reflections on "Christ the center": "*Christus tenens medium in omnibus, nisi in comprehensione? Hexaëmeron* Collation 1 in Light of the First Day" (unpublished paper). Chapman's paper is an exploration of an underdeveloped aspect of studies of the *Hexaëmeron*—namely, the connection between Christ the center of the seven named sciences in collation 1 and Bonaventure's explanation of those sciences in collations 4 and 5. The comments about mathematics in the above paragraph owe much to Chapman's paper.

⁶¹ Thus Bonaventure "consistently distinguishes between arguments based on the authority of faith (*de fide*) and those based on reason (*de ratione*)" (Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 29).

⁶² See esp. *De sc. Chr.*, q. 4: See also *Itin.* 2.9: no one can judge with certainty about sensible things except by certain rules, and these rules are "not made but uncreated, eternally existing in Eternal Art" (p. 15). One could go further and say that the exemplary truth of things lies within the divine Word and, therefore, because of the Incarnation, in Christ (see *Hex.* 1.13–17).

God's knowledge of things via revelation also knows the truth that governs the truth of things within themselves. In this sense, no natural knowledge is exempt from the governance of supernatural knowledge and the truth of things can be seen in a more perfect degree by the person of faith than the person without faith. The philosopher has a real knowledge of his subject, but the theologian knows the truth of it more perfectly. The great fault of the philosopher in this situation is to reject deliberately the more perfect knowledge in the name of the autonomy of his discipline. Theology as wisdom thus stands above every other discipline because what it knows is determinative for them. This applies not only to subordinate disciplines like ethics and metaphysics; all disciplines are judged by theology, for they are all intrinsically related to what theology knows.

Finally, in terms of the *end of the sciences*, the relationship is different yet again. In *De reductione*, Bonaventure says that the lower branches of knowledge are "ordained for the knowledge of sacred Scripture." One may have the impression that the "higher" status of theology means that one should engage in the study of only the lower disciplines in order to understand revelation. It is true that Bonaventure occasionally derides those who claim to find joy in the knowledge of the lower disciplines,⁶³ but his view is more complex than that. Some sciences (e.g., geometry) have a purely and properly speculative end. It may be a very good thing for the theologian that his knowledge of geometry helps him to understand something in Scripture, but that in no way affects his knowledge of geometry per se. On the other hand, God created things the way they are with a view toward the revealed order. Therefore, those things that are specially pertinent to the revealed order should command the attention of those who are investigating aspects of natural knowledge.

There is another aspect of Bonaventure's thought that is relevant here: the order of forms to one another. His account of creation does not postulate the simple creation of a set of fixed forms; rather, he sees the emergence of higher forms out of lower because of the dispositions inherent in the lower forms—the seminal reasons.⁶⁴ The *telos* of a lower form is therefore not itself, but the flowering of the

⁶³ See, e.g., *Hex.* 17.7: "In this knowledge [i.e., of Scripture] alone there is delight, and in no other. The Philosopher says that it is a pleasure to know that the diameter is asymmetrical to the circumference. Let this pleasure be his: provided he savors it" (p. 255).

⁶⁴ See Kent Emery, Jr., "Reading the World Rightly and Squarely: Bonaventure's Doctrine of the Cardinal Virtues," *Traditio* 39 (1983): 183–218.

disposition whereby it is raised and perfected in a higher form. The same is true of forms of knowledge: the lower will, if pursued well and brought to their fulfillment, find themselves raised up and transformed into higher forms. This may happen in a very limited way for some—what can one really say about a geometry that is raised up to become “Christian geometry”?—but it may be the life-blood of others (e.g., Christian ethics, Christian politics). Theology therefore plays a governing role: not by importing its special knowledge into an otherwise autonomous discipline, but by enabling the lower discipline to reach its perfection by being sublated into a higher. No one is faulted for pursuing the knowledge appropriate to his illumination, and a philosopher may be excused for his mistakes if he was lacking the knowledge of revelation.⁶⁵ However, one is not excused for refusing to allow for the upward dynamic of natural knowledge. This is to falsify natural knowledge itself.

Summary

One should be in no doubt that Bonaventure conceives of theology as a science in the Aristotelian sense. It is indeed a process of syllogistic reasoning based on indubitable principles known in faith with the assistance of the certain knowledge that comes from reason. The consideration of theology as sapiential is not meant to replace the science of theology, but to complete it by giving an account of things that are not readily apparent to one who considers only the scientific aspect. The first of these is the role of the theological virtues in theology. From the standpoint of the science of theology, it is easy to see that the virtue of faith is necessary because it is the means by which we know those principles that come to us through revelation. From a sapiential standpoint, we can also say that theology involves a whole knowledge of God—“whole” not in the sense of “comprehensive,” but in the sense of an entire body of knowledge that has a distinctive formality and light, much as metaphysical or mystical knowledge of God has.⁶⁶ We learn further that theology can attend to—because it involves an openness to being formed by—the divine self-expression wherever that occurs, be it in the documents of revelation or in the depths of creation itself.

⁶⁵ See Bonaventure’s conciliatory remarks about Aristotle’s errors in *Hex.* 7.2.

⁶⁶ “Theology is quite a different thing from a simple application of philosophy to matters of revelation: that would truly be a monstrous conception” (Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite, or the Degrees of Knowledge*, 250).

A second distinctive contribution of sapiential theology is that it broadens our notion of what constitutes legitimate theological reasoning. The real elevation of the Christian's intellect by grace gives him a capacity to make theological judgments that the natural man can at best see as possible, and that the sinful man is most likely to regard as absurd. Readers familiar with pieces of Bonaventure's writing from different parts of his career will no doubt note that late texts such as the various *collationes*, and even middle-period texts such as the *Itinerarium*, do not display the kind of argumentative structure one finds in the early commentary on the *Sentences* or in the various disputed questions. I suggest that this is due not to the abandonment of the science of theology but, rather, to its completion by sapiential theology, reasoning in (an implicitly) syllogistic fashion about the faith in light of a sense for divine things.

Finally, evoking the sapiential aspect of theology points us to the relationship between theology and the lower sciences. The science of theology makes use of those lower sciences and implicitly—because it is committed to the unity of truth—judges in favor of the conclusions of theology over anything that seems contrary to them in the conclusions of the lower sciences. It is in considering theology as wisdom, however, that we are forced to give a more comprehensive judgment of the relationship between the higher and the lower. On this point, Bonaventure gives us a way to maintain the autonomy of the lower sciences while allowing for a deeper theological insight into their truth and seeing them as ordained to theology. It is not the *use* of the lower sciences that is at issue in sapiential theology so much as it is their *perfection*.

Bonaventure's doctrine of theological wisdom is the reflection of a medieval mind committed to the supremacy of wisdom over science, but also to the strict requirements of Aristotelian *scientia*. It is the vision of a Christian who sees the relative autonomy of the created order but also the transformed sense one can have of that order. And it is the vision of a mystic who knows that the highest knowledge of God lies in a luminous darkness, but that the same God has revealed himself in and through the world through his self-expression. N&V