

## **Bonaventure's *Reductio* of the Nine Choirs of Angels: How Bonaventure Compressed Two Monumental Traditions into Nine Words and Nine Short Phrases**

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“There is probably no better illustration in medieval thought of how the genius of the symbolic imagination also involves deep speculative insight.” So wrote Bernard McGinn of Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in deum* in *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Woman in the New Mysticism, 1200–1350*.<sup>1</sup> There is no question that the *Itinerarium* is a book suffused with symbolic imagery; so much so, in fact, that it can sometimes seem to lapse into a confusing jumble.

Certainly there are many sections of the *Itinerarium* that have baffled readers over the years, often because Bonaventure’s use of imagery is so unique and creative and the truths he is attempting to enunciate are so far beyond our normal ways of thinking about God. But there is a short passage in chapter 4 of the *Itinerarium* that seems to defy interpretation precisely because of what one might describe as an almost austere terseness and brevity. The point Bonaventure wishes to make is one he communicates in little more than a list of nine words and nine short, parallel phrases.

The passage I have in mind is this one in *Itinerarium* 4.4.

When these things have been accomplished, and our spirit has been brought into conformity with the heavenly Jerusalem, it is ordered

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Woman in the New Mysticism, 1200–1350*, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism* 3 (New York: Herder, 1998), 105.

hierarchically so that it can ascend upward. For no one enters into that city unless that city has first descended into the person's heart by means of grace, as John sees in his Apocalypse. It descends into the heart when our spirit has been made hierarchical by the reformation of the image, by means of the theological virtues, the enjoyment of the spiritual senses, and the ecstasy of rapture; for it has been purged, illumined and brought to perfection.

In this way our spirit is adorned with nine orderly levels when within it the following are found in an appropriate order: announcing, dictating, leading, ordering, strengthening, commanding, receiving, revealing, and anointing. These correspond to the nine choirs of angels. The first three of the foregoing levels in the human mind relate to nature; the next three relate to work; and the final three relate to grace. When it has attained these, the soul, by entering into itself, enters into the heavenly Jerusalem where, as it considers the choirs of angels, it sees in them the God who dwells in them and who works in all their operations.

Therefore, Bernard says to Pope Eugene that "God loves in the Seraphim as charity; knows in the Cherubim as truth; sits in the Thrones as justice; reigns in the Dominations as majesty; rules in the Principalities as a guiding principle; protects in the Powers as salvation; is at work in the Virtues as strength; reveals in the Archangels as light; assists in the Angels as kindness." From all this, God is seen as all in all when we contemplate God in our minds where God dwells through the gifts of the most generous charity.<sup>2</sup>

Notice in the passage I have quoted above that Bonaventure says our spirit must be "brought into conformity with the heavenly Jerusalem," and that this requires it be "ordered hierarchically so that it can ascend upward." This serves as a transition into a rather odd pair of lists—one with nine words and the other with nine short, parallel phrases—that Bonaventure associates with the nine angelic choirs. These two lists of the nine choirs of angels do not, however, correspond exactly with one

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<sup>2</sup> I have added paragraph breaks into what would otherwise have been a single block of text to allow greater emphasis on the two lists of the nine angels: the first, which is expressed in nine words, and a second, which is expressed in nine short phrases. I have quoted throughout from the English translation by Zachary Hayes in *Saint Bonaventure: Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, Works of Saint Bonaventure (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002). The Latin text of the *Itinerarium* has also been quoted from that source.

another, for reasons I will explain below. And although these two lists of the nine ranks of angels in the angelic hierarchy take up just a few lines in Bonaventure's text, there is a lot of background information we will need to fill in to provide the necessary context to appreciate them. Indeed, as we will see, in this short passage, Bonaventure was able using the methods of the thirteenth-century *sermo modernus* style to reduce two monumental commentary traditions regarding the nine choirs of angels—one that can be traced back to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and the other to Gregory the Great—to nine words in the first case and then nine short phrases in the second. It will take some work, however, to appreciate how these amazing bits of summation were constructed.<sup>3</sup> Tracing our way back to Bonaventure's sources will reveal a series of profound theological insights that we might otherwise miss.<sup>4</sup>

### Bonaventure's First Ninefold List and the Angelic Hierarchy of Pseudo-Dionysius

Bonaventure's first ninefold list—announcing, dictating, leading, ordering, strengthening, commanding, receiving, revealing, and anointing—appears to be derived from a *Commentary on the Song of Songs* by the Frenchman

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the role the *sermo modernus* style of preaching played in the development of Bonaventure's style of composition, see Randall Smith, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris: Preaching, Prologues, and Biblical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), and "Finding the Roots of Bonaventure's Literary Style in Medieval Preaching," *Nova et Vetera* 17, no. 4 (2019): 1243–86.

<sup>4</sup> Interested readers will also want to consult Bonaventure's *In II sent.*, dist. 4. Much of the preliminary information I recount below about the two lists of angels, one from Pseudo-Dionysius and the other from Gregory the Great, can be found there. What is interesting for our purposes is that, although Bonaventure knows all this material from the Lombard's *Sentences*, here in the *Itinerarium*, he does not refer to the Lombard or to the *Sentences*. Instead, he makes use of other sources—sources he does not mention in his *Sentences* commentary. There is also a brief discussion of the celestial hierarchy in an odd section at the very end of Bonaventure's *De triplici via* 3.7.14; see Bonaventure, *The Triple Way*, trans. Damian Fehlner, FI (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 2012), esp. 190n162, where Fr. Fehlner notes that some scholars believe this section of the text, seemingly inserted without any connection to what immediately preceded it, was not part of the original text of *The Triple Way*, but was added later. The Quaracchi editors, however, considered it authentic, "despite the stylistic defect." It is interesting, but the hierarchy detailed there does not correspond in any way with the two we find in the *Itinerarium*. Since we cannot be certain that little section of *The Triple Way* is really by Bonaventure, and its contents would not to my mind really illuminate our current discussion, I will not be considering it any further in this article.

Thomas Gallus (ca. 1200–1246), who began his career at the School of St. Victor in Paris, but who eventually (in 1219) left Paris to found the monastery of St. Andrew at Vercelli in the Piedmont province of northern Italy.<sup>5</sup> The part of his commentary in which he deals with the nine ranks of angels is early in the prologue to the work and was probably finished in or around 1238—in other words, during his more mature years.<sup>6</sup> This particular list of the nine ranks of angels corresponds, as we will see, with the order found in Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*, written centuries earlier, sometime between 485 and 528.

Bonaventure's second ninefold list (copied below) is taken, he tells his reader, from "a letter written by Bernard of Clairvaux to Pope Eugene."

1. In the Seraphim, God loves as charity ("amat ut caritas").
2. In the Cherubim, God knows as truth ("novit ut veritas").
3. In the Thrones, God sits as justice ("sedet ut aequitas").
4. In the Dominations, God reigns as majesty ("dominatur ut maiestas").
5. In the Principalities, God rules as a guiding principle ("regit ut principium").
6. In the Powers, God protects as salvation ("tuetur ut salus").
7. In the Virtues, God is at work as strength ("operatur ut virtus").
8. In the Archangels, God reveals as light ("revelat ut lux").
9. In the Angles, God assists as kindness ("assistit ut pietas").

This "letter" from Bernard to Pope Eugene III to which Bonaventure is referring is actually the five-book-long treatise we now know as Bernard's *On Consideration* (written 1148–1152). In the fifth book of *On Consideration*, section 4 (7–10), there is a beautiful passage that Bonaventure summarized by means of the nine parallel phrases characteristic of the *sermo modernus* style listed above. This second ninefold list does not follow the order found in Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*, but follows

<sup>5</sup> For more background on why Thomas of St. Victor's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* has been identified as the source for this passage, see McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 84–85, and Regis Armstrong's annotated translation, *Into God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 287–89.

<sup>6</sup> See the Introduction to the section on Thomas Gallus (Thomas of Wales, Canon of St. Victor, Abbot of Vercelli) in *Angelic Spirituality: Medieval Perspectives on the Ways of Angels*, trans. Steven Chase, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 217–20. This volume contains a wonderful selection of materials on the angels in the work of various thinkers in the Middle Ages.

instead the hierarchical order found in Gregory the Great's Homily 34, delivered in 591.<sup>7</sup>

Before we move into a discussion of how Bonaventure summarized these traditions, we must clear up some potential confusions. The first question some readers may be asking is this: What are these lists of angels, and why are they different? In *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius had identified nine ranks of angels, ordered in three groupings of three. From the highest to the lowest, they were (in English translation with Greek original):

- A. First Group (closest to God)
  - 1. Seraphim (*seraphim*: σεραφίμ)
  - 2. Cherubim (*cheroubim*: χερουβίμ)
  - 3. Thrones (*thronoi*: θρόνοι)
- B. Second or Middle Group
  - 4. Dominions/"Dominations" (*kyriotētes*: κυριότητες)
  - 5. Powers [sometimes translated "Virtues"] (*dynamēōs*: δυνάμεις)
  - 6. Authorities [sometimes translated "Powers"] (*exousiai*: ἐξουσίαι)
- C. Third Group (closest to humans)
  - 7. Principalities (*archai*: ἀρχαί)
  - 8. Archangels (*archangeloi*: ἀρχάγγελοι)
  - 9. Angels (*angeloi*: ἄγγελοι)

One potential source of confusion about this list comes from the fact that, although the admirable English translation by Colm Luibheid of *The Celestial Hierarchy* in the Classics of Western Spirituality series has "Powers" and "Authorities" (nos. 5 and 6 in the list above), elsewhere—and more commonly in the Middle Ages—these two are translated "Virtues" (instead of "Powers") and "Powers" (instead of "Authorities").<sup>8</sup>

What is the source of the confusion? If we look at the original Greek

<sup>7</sup> One of Bernard's early bits of advice to Pope Eugene III, his former pupil, in *On Consideration* 1.9.12, was that he should imitate Pope Gregory the Great (the source of the second angelic hierarchy), who, even when Rome was being besieged, went on quietly working on his *Homilies on the Prophet Ezekiel*. The message, we might say, was that Eugene should keep his ecclesiastical priorities in the proper hierarchical order.

<sup>8</sup> See the English translation of *The Celestial Hierarchy* [CH] 8.1, in Pseudo-Dionysius: *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

text of *The Celestial Hierarchy*, in the English where we find reference to “the divine authorities and powers,” the Greek has *exousiōn* and *dynameōn*. The first of the two Greek terms here, *exousiōn*, can be translated either “power” or “authority.” The second, *dynameōn*, can be translated as “to be able, strong enough to do” or “powerful, mighty,” or “potency.” So it is perfectly understandable that our English translator rendered the first as “authorities” and the second as “powers.” But it also would have made sense to render the first of the two as “powers.” If he had, though, what would he have done with the second of the two? If we understand a *dynamis* as an *ability to do* or a *strength*, then it might make sense to translate it as “virtue.” It is worth noting, in this regard, that a nineteenth-century French translator of the Greek text renders these two ranks of angels as “des puissances et des vertus.”<sup>9</sup>

And yet, it might reasonably be objected, all this is beside the point because Bonaventure and his contemporaries would not have been reading the original Greek; they would have been reading the Latin translation made by John Scottus Eriugena in the mid-ninth century (ca. 862). In Eriugena’s Latin translation, he rendered these two terms *potestatum* and *virtutum*.<sup>10</sup> And as the nineteenth-century French translation we examined above suggests, Eriugena’s decision here to translate *dynamis* as *virtus* was not entirely unwarranted. *Virtutum* is also what Bonaventure would have found if he had consulted the Latin text of the *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy* by one of his favorite authors, Hugh of St. Victor.<sup>11</sup> It had clearly become a commonplace by Bonaventure’s time.

It is for this reason that I have inserted in brackets in the outline above the alternative translation “Virtues” for what in the modern English is “Powers,” and I have given the alternative translation of “Powers” for what in the modern English is “Authorities.” The most confusing part of this switch is that there are two Greek words that can both be translated “Powers.” Having cleared up that potential confusion, we must move on to another.

<sup>9</sup> See the translation of L’Abbeé Darboy, *La Hiérarchie céleste, texte complet*, in *Saint Denis L’Aréopagite* (Paris: Sagnier et Bray, 1845).

<sup>10</sup> The Latin translation by Eriugena can be found at [binetti.ru/collectio/theologia/areopag/caelest.shtml](http://binetti.ru/collectio/theologia/areopag/caelest.shtml).

<sup>11</sup> Hugh’s commentary can be found in *PL*, 175:923–1154C. A more recent edition of Eriugena’s Latin translation and Hugh’s commentary can be found in *Super Ierarchiam Dionisii*, ed. D. Poirel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015). Sadly, I did not have access to this version.

### Bonaventure's Second Ninefold List and the Angelic Hierarchy of Gregory the Great

Pope St. Gregory the Great bequeathed to the Middle Ages a different list of the angels in which the names were the same but the order was different.<sup>12</sup> Here is Gregory's hierarchy, from section of his Homily 34 on the Gospels, with the angels that are in a different order in *italics*.<sup>13</sup>

1. Seraphim
2. Cherubim
3. Thrones
4. Dominions
5. *Principalities*
6. Powers
7. *Virtues*
8. Archangels
9. Angels

The names on both lists—the one found in Pseudo-Dionysius and the one found in Gregory the Great—can be traced to the Scriptures. The name “Seraphim” is found in Isaiah 6:2. The name “Cherubim” appears ninety-nine times in the Old Testament; for example, in Gen 3:24, Exod 25:18–22, and various places in Ezekiel (e.g., 1:5–11, 10:14–15, 41:18–20). The “Thrones” are mentioned in Col 1:16. “Dominions” (a.k.a, “Dominations”), “Virtues,” “Powers,” and “Principalities” are mentioned in Eph 1:21, and with the “Thrones” in Col 1:16. The name “Archangels” appears in Jude 1:9 (“the archangel Michael”). And the word “angel” appears in many places throughout the Scriptures.

Why, then, the different order between the two lists? The confusion stems from the fact that, in Eph 1:21, St. Paul says that Christ sits at the

<sup>12</sup> Everyone in the Middle Ages was aware of both lists and seem to have been comfortable with this fact. See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 108, aa. 1–6, esp. a. 5. Thomas, of course, has an ingenious reason why both Pseudo-Dionysius's and Gregory's lists are appropriate from different perspectives. On this, see a. 6 of the same question.

<sup>13</sup> The passage on which Gregory was preaching in Homily 34 was Luke 15:1–10. An English translation of the homily can found in Chase, *Angelic Spirituality*, 95–106, although I have used the English translation at [sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/luke-commentary/gregory-the-great-homily-34-on-the-gospels](https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/luke-commentary/gregory-the-great-homily-34-on-the-gospels), which does not, however, indicate the source. I have quoted the text using the section numbers from this translation. The Latin can be found in *PL*, 76:1246b; 1249C–1256A.

right hand of the Father, “far above the Principalities, Powers, Virtues, and Dominions.” The four Latin words Bonaventure would have read here were *principatum*, *potestatem*, *virtutem*, and *dominationem*. The Greek original has *archēs*, *exousias*, *dynameōs*, and *kyriotētos*.<sup>14</sup>

This is the order we find in Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy*. In Colossians 1:16, however, Paul writes: “whether Thrones, or Dominions, or Principalities, or Powers, all things were created by Him and in Him.” This is the order one finds in the Pope St. Gregory the Great’s Homily 34.<sup>15</sup> The four Latin words Bonaventure would have found here in Col 1:16 would have been *throni*, *dominationes*, *principatus*, and *potestates*. The Greek original has *thronoi*, *kyriotētes*, *archai*, and *exousiai*. The English of the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, lists these four as thrones, dominions, principalities, and authorities, translating *exousiai* here as “authorities,” as did Colm Luibheid in his translation of our English translation of *The Celestial Hierarchy*.

Since this may still be something of a mess in reader’s minds, here is a summary of the differences in two tables. The list found in Pseudo-Dionysius (with the middle four terms derived from Ephesians 1:21):

|                            |                     |                   |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Seraphim                   |                     |                   |
| Cherubim                   |                     |                   |
| Thrones                    |                     |                   |
| Dominions                  | <i>dominationem</i> | <i>kyriotētos</i> |
| Powers [or Virtues]        | <i>virtutem</i>     | <i>dynameōs</i>   |
| Authorities<br>[or Powers] | <i>potestatem</i>   | <i>exousias</i>   |
| Principalities             | <i>principatum</i>  | <i>archēs</i>     |
| Archangels                 |                     |                   |
| Angels                     |                     |                   |

<sup>14</sup> Sadly, the Revised Standard Version deletes any reference to the ranks of angels and translates the passage: “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.”

<sup>15</sup> Gregory is fully aware of both texts of St. Paul, however. He mentions the order of the angels listed in Ephesians himself early in the same homily, but simply chooses to use the order in Colossians instead (see Homily 34, no. 7). Gregory is also aware of at some of what “Dionysius the Areopagite, an ancient and venerated father,” had to say about the angels (see Homily 34, no. 12).



The List found in Gregory the Great (with middle four terms derived from Colossians 1:16):

|                |                     |                   |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Seraphim       |                     |                   |
| Cherubim       |                     |                   |
| Thrones        | <i>throni</i>       | <i>thronoi</i>    |
| Dominions      | <i>dominationes</i> | <i>kyriotētes</i> |
| Principalities | <i>principatus</i>  | <i>archai</i>     |
| Powers         | <i>potestates</i>   | <i>exousiai</i>   |
| Virtues        |                     |                   |
| Archangels     |                     |                   |
| Angels         |                     |                   |

The reason for going into all this detail is that Bonaventure's two lists are based on these two hierarchies: the one from Pseudo-Dionysius and the other from Gregory the Great. But one will not find in Bonaventure any reference to "Authorities"—he speaks of the "Virtues"—and Bonaventure's two lists do not correspond exactly, first because they are based on different sources, and second because the second list is in reverse order from the first. Now that we have cleared up those potential confusions, we can move on and see how Bonaventure reduced a complex tradition to just a few words and phrases.

### **Essence and Mission: The Significance of the Names of the Angels**

To appreciate the significance of these lists, however, we need to return again to Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*, a work that begins, significantly, with one of Bonaventure's favorite *thema* verses, from James 1:17, a verse he used as the *thema* when he revised his second inception address (his *resumptio*) into the text we now know as *The Reduction of the Arts to Theology*: "Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17).<sup>16</sup> And just as in the *Reduction*

<sup>16</sup> CH 1.1.

Bonaventure envisioned the various arts as different “lights” refracted from a single light source, so too in *The Celestial Hierarchy*, Pseudo-Dionysius had envisioned the ranks of angels in the angelic hierarchy as different “lights” sent forth from “the Father of lights,” meant to guide us back to the Father. “Let us, then,” writes Pseudo-Dionysius, “call upon Jesus, the Light of the Father, the ‘true light enlightening every man coming into the world,’ . . . through whom we have obtained access to the Father, the light which is the source of all light.”<sup>17</sup> We need to “raise our eyes to the paternally transmitted enlightenment coming from the sacred scripture,” where we “behold the intelligent hierarchies of heaven,” so that we may “rise from this outpouring of illumination so as to come to the simple ray of Light itself.”<sup>18</sup>

A hierarchy, says Pseudo-Dionysius, “is a sacred order, a state of understanding and an activity approximating as closely as possible to the divine” that “bestows on each of those being perfected its own form. The goal of a hierarchy, then, is to enable beings to be as like as possible to God and to be at one with him.”<sup>19</sup> Since we cannot know the mysterious fullness of God’s being, “the designations given to these heavenly intelligences signify the mode in which they take on the imprint of God.”<sup>20</sup> God imparts and imprints his perfection upon the ranks of angels, and they in turn impart and imprint those perfections on the ranks of angels below them, and through them, ultimately to us. The hierarchical order leading from God to man is meant to lead man back to God, when our minds are ordered in accord with this divine hierarchy. “The aim of every hierarchy,” writes Pseudo-Dionysius, “is always to imitate God so as to take on his form; . . . the task of every hierarchy is to receive and to pass on undiluted purification, the divine light, and the understanding which brings perfection.”<sup>21</sup> So it is for our benefit and instruction that “the word of God has provided nine explanatory designations for the heavenly beings” that “indicate ways in which God [should be] imitated and conformed to.”<sup>22</sup> “For the transcendent harmony of all the world,” writes Pseudo-Dionysius, “has providentially looked after every being endowed with reason and intelligence and has ensured that they are rightly ordered and sacredly uplifted. In a fashion appropriate to its own sacred character this harmony has arranged the hierarchical groups, making due allowance for what is particular to each group, arranging them

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<sup>17</sup> CH 1.2.

<sup>18</sup> CH 1.2.

<sup>19</sup> CH 3.1.

<sup>20</sup> CH 7.1.

<sup>21</sup> CH 7.2.

<sup>22</sup> CH 8.1.

as we have seen as first, middle, lower powers, and, finally, harmoniously managing them in a way suitable to the degree of participation in the divine which each of them has.”<sup>23</sup> Dionysius’s medieval commentators followed him in making this claim that, by reflecting on the names of the nine ranks of angels, we come to understand how they are like God—how they *reveal* God to us—and also what graces they impart to us in accord with their essential characteristics.<sup>24</sup>

It is in this context that we can better understand Bonaventure’s comments in *Itinerarium* 4.4, first, that when “our spirit has been brought into conformity it is ordered hierarchically so that it can ascend upward”; and again, that the soul, “as it considers the choirs of angels, it sees in them the God who dwells in them and who works in all their operations.”

### The Bonaventure, Thomas Gallus, and Pseudo-Dionysius Connection

With this in mind, let us examine how Bonaventure has summarized Pseudo-Dionysius’s expansive discussion of the nine choirs of angels to nine words, as it was mediated through a key section of the prologue of Gallus’s *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.<sup>25</sup> In each of the following nine paragraphs, one for each class of angel, I use bold for the angel type that corresponds to key terms and tenets (the latter italicized).

So, for example, Bonaventure’s first term (moving again from the lowest rank to the highest) is “announcing” (*nuntiatio*). Gallus in his commentary had called the **Angels** “the announcers” and written that their role is to

<sup>23</sup> CH 10.2

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the comments by John Scotus Eriugena in the section of his *Commentary on the Celestial Hierarchy of Saint Dionysius* translated in *Angelic Spirituality*, 166. See also Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 108, a. 5, who makes a distinction: “Dionysius (Coel. Hier. vii) explains the names of the orders accordingly as they befit the spiritual perfections they signify. Gregory, on the other hand, in expounding these names (Hom. xxxiv in Evang.) seems to regard more the exterior ministrations.” According to Thomas, although these two approaches are different (Dionysius’s and Gregory’s), the point is the same: We come to understand the spiritual perfections of God as they are represented to us in and through the nine ranks of angels and in this way, we also come to understand their “exterior ministrations” to us.

<sup>25</sup> I have used the English translation by Denys Turner found in the appendix of Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 319–39. The Latin text may be found in Thomas Gallus, *Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques*, ed. Jeanne Barnet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), 62–104. Turner provided his own section numbering because there is no generally agreed upon numbering system. I have included both the section number and the page number in Turner’s text (in parenthesis) in the citations below.

“bring news to the soul.”<sup>26</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius had written that the angels “complete the entire ranking of the heavenly intelligences.” For “being closer to us, they, more appropriately than the previous ones, are named ‘angels’ insofar as their hierarchy is *more concerned with revelation* and is closer to the world.”<sup>27</sup>

Bonaventure’s second term is “dictating” (*dictatio*). Gallus had written that the role of the **Archangels** is to help us make “natural judgments about things apprehended, *judging them to be fitting or not*, and to it therefore belongs a power of communication.”<sup>28</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius had written that it is the role of the archangel commune with the “principalities” above them in order to communicate to the angels below them: to “receive upon itself as far as possible the mark” of the transcendent “principle” from “the principalities” above it, and then, having interpreted this divine enlightenment, it “generously announces these to the angels and through them to us insofar as we are capable of being sacredly enlightened.”<sup>29</sup>

Bonaventure’s third term is “leading” (*ductio*). Gallus had written that the role of the **Principalities** is to guide our judgments and desires, “and so this rank gives *leadership* to lower things, *leading them* to the divine,” from lower things to higher things.<sup>30</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius had written that the rank of angels known as the “principalities” refers to “those who possess a godlike and princely hegemony, with a sacred order most suited to princely powers, the ability to be returned completely toward that principle which is above all principles and *to lead others to him* like a prince, the power to receive to the full the mark of the Principle of principles, and by their harmonious exercise of princely powers, to make manifest this transcendent principle of all order.”<sup>31</sup>

Bonaventure’s fourth term is “ordering” (*ordinatio*). Thomas Gallus had written that the role of the **Powers** is to “search out by rational scrutiny an appropriate relation with good and evil, and set the mind *in order* insofar as they can, through a definite commitment to desire and seek the highest good with all the powers of love and knowledge and to the rejection of all obstacles to it.”<sup>32</sup> What we find in Pseudo-Dionysius’s description of the rank of angels our English translation calls “the **authorities**,” but which were

<sup>26</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 5 (p. 321).

<sup>27</sup> CH 9.2.

<sup>28</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 5 (p. 321).

<sup>29</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 5 (p. 321).

<sup>30</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 5 (p. 321).

<sup>31</sup> CH 9.1.

<sup>32</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 6 (pp. 321–22).

in Latin translated *potestates* or “**Powers**,” is that their name signifies “the ordered nature of the celestial and intellectual authority.” They are likened, he says, “to that authority which is the source of all authority and creates all authority; and they make that authority evident . . . in their *harmonious orders* of authoritative power.”<sup>33</sup>

Bonaventure's fifth term is “strengthening” (*roboratio*). Gallus had written that the (angelic) **Virtues**, “contain the powerful energies of the mind, those of the natural and supernatural virtues, which *enable the effective achievement* of what has been properly ordained [or “ordered,” see above] by the Powers.”<sup>34</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius had written about the group our English translation calls “the holy powers,” but which in Latin was translated “the **Virtues**,” that this name signifies “a kind of masculine and unshakable courage.” It is a courage “which abandons all laziness and softness during the reception of the divine enlightenment granted to it, and is powerfully uplifted to imitate God.” Indeed, says Pseudo-Dionysius, “this courage becomes, so far as possible, the very image of that power to which it shapes itself, being powerfully returned to it because is the source of all power. And at the same time, it transmits to its own inferiors its dynamic and divinizing power.”<sup>35</sup> Given Pseudo-Dionysius's description, it is easier to understand why John Scottus Eriugena chose to translate the Greek *dynamis* into the Latin *virtus*.

Bonaventure's sixth term is “commanding” (*imperatio*). Gallus has written that the **Dominions** contain “the authentic *commands* of free will by which the desire and understanding at their highest points are raised in all their power to receive the divine inpourings, insofar as this is possible for free will aided by grace.”<sup>36</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius had written that the name “dominions” signifies “a lifting up which is free, unfettered by earthly tendencies and uninclined toward any of those tyrannical dissimilarities which characterize a harsh dominion. Because it does not give way to any defect, it is above any abject creation of slaves, and, innocent of any dissimilarity, it is forever striving mightily toward the true dominion and the true source of all dominion. It rejects empty appearances, returns completely to the true Lord, and shares as far as it can in that everlasting and divine source of all dominion.”<sup>37</sup>

Bonaventure's seventh term is “receiving” (*susceptio*). Gallus had written that the role of the **Thrones**, “through an ecstasy of mind,” is to allow us

<sup>33</sup> CH 8.1.

<sup>34</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 6 (p. 322).

<sup>35</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 6 (p. 322).

<sup>36</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 7 (p. 322).

<sup>37</sup> CH 8.1.

“to be *receptive* to the overflowing inpouring of the divine.”<sup>38</sup> The title of “thrones” was given to the third rank of angels, writes Pseudo-Dionysius, because “this conveys that in them there is a transcendence over every earthly defect, as shown by their upward-bearing toward the ultimate heights, that they are forever separated from what is inferior, that they are completely intent upon remaining always and forever in the presence of him who is truly the most high, that, free of all passion and material concern, they are utterly available to *receive* the divine visitation, that they bear God and are ever open, like servants, to welcome God.”<sup>39</sup>

Bonaventure’s eighth term is “revealing” (*revelatio*). Gallus had written that the **Cherubim** contain “every kind of knowledge of the intellect which is drawn toward the divine heights.”<sup>40</sup> The name “cherubim,” Pseudo-Dionysius claimed, means “fullness of knowledge” or “outpouring of wisdom.”<sup>41</sup> It signifies “the power to know and to see God, to receive the greatest gifts of his light, to contemplate the divine splendor in primordial power, to be filled with the gifts that bring wisdom and to share these generously with subordinates as a part of the beneficent outpouring of wisdom.”<sup>42</sup>

And finally, Bonaventure’s ninth term is “anointing” (*unctio*). Gallus had written that it is from the **Seraphim** that we receive “the *highest aspirations* for God, the excesses and in-flowings which go beyond understanding, burning brilliance and brilliant burnings,” which cannot be received except in “the supreme love which can unite” as the Bridegroom is united to the bride.<sup>43</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius had written that those beings at the top of the hierarchy, closest to God, are called the “seraphim,” a name that means “fire-makers” or “carriers of warmth.” Because they are perpetually “circling around the divine things,” they possess a “penetrating warmth” and an “overflowing heat of a movement that never falters and never fails” that provides them with “a capacity to stamp their own image on subordinates by arousing and uplifting in them too a like flame, the same warmth.” It means also, says Pseudo-Dionysius, “the power to purify by means of the lightning flash and the flame.”<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Gallus, *Commentaires* 8 (p. 322).

<sup>39</sup> CH 7.2.

<sup>40</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 9 (p. 322).

<sup>41</sup> CH 7.1.

<sup>42</sup> CH 7.2.

<sup>43</sup> Gallus, *Commentaires* 10 (p. 323).

<sup>44</sup> CH 7.1. If we imagine a sacramental material that involves the work of the Spirit, warmth, enlightenment, purification, and the uniting power of love, the anointing of oil (in marriage, holy orders, extreme unction, and confirmation) would likely be a better candidate than the wetness of the water of baptism.

This last comment about the *purifying* role of the flame is noteworthy because it points us to another important relationship between Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* and this section of book 4 of Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*. As the reader may recall from the discussion above (and validate by looking at the outline in the appendix or the text itself), the threefold division of *purified*, *illuminated*, and *perfected* runs throughout book 4 of the *Itinerarium*. This division is not unusual, following as it does the pattern "good, better, best." And it certainly would not have been uncommon in Bonaventure's time. But it is worth noting that these three—purification, illumination, and perfection—also run throughout Pseudo-Dionysius's comments on the nine hierarchies of angels.<sup>45</sup> So, for example, in *Celestial Hierarchy* 8.1, we find Pseudo-Dionysius saying that the middle rank of the angelic hierarchy "manifests its conformity to God," and "this, as has been said, is how it achieves purification, illumination, and perfection."<sup>46</sup> And again, in the next section, Pseudo-Dionysius expands and emphasizes the point, saying: "Hence—to use the terminology handed down to us—the first intelligences perfect, illuminate, and purify those of inferior status in such a fashion that the latter, having been lifted up through them to the universal and transcendent source, thereby acquire their due share of the purification, illumination, and perfection of the One who is the

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<sup>45</sup> The trio *purgari*, *illuminari*, and *perfici* are especially apparent in the Latin translation of John Scotus Eriugena. See, for example (with terms in bold), ch. 3: "quosdam quidem **purgari**, quosdam vero purgare; et quosdam quidem **illuminari**, quosdam vero illuminare; et quosdam quidem **perfici**, quosdam." And again in ch. 3: "et non indigens simul omnis perfectionis, **purgans** et **illuminans** et **perficiens**. Magis autem **purgatio** sancta et **illuminatio** et **perfectio** super purgationem, super lumen, ante perfecta, per seipsam perfecta, per seipsam perfectionis principium." And yet again later in ch. 3: "Oportet itaque, ut aestimo, **purgandos** quidem puros perfici omnino, et omni liberari dissimilitudinis confusione: **illuminandos** vero repleri divini luminis, ad contemplativam habitudinem et virtutem in castissimis mentis oculis renovandos: ex imperfecto restaurandos participes fieri exploratorum sacrorum **perfectivae** scientiae: **purgatores** vero, magnitudine purgationis aliis tradere propria castitate: **illuminatores** autem, ut luculentiores animos, et ad participationem luminis et distributionem proprie habentes, et ditissime sanctae repleti claritatis, omnino suum superexcellens lumen in eos, qui digni sunt lumine, supervehere: **perfectores** vero, tanquam praeceptores perfectivae traditionis, perficere perficiendos sacratissima doctrina per inspectorum sacrorum scientiam." And finally these two in ch. 8: "Has habens deiformes proprietates media caelestium animorum dispositio **purgatur** quidem et **illuminatur** et **perficitur**," and later: "**purgationum** et **illuminationum** et **perfectionum**." Eriugena's Latin translation of *The Celestial Hierarchy* can be found in *PL*, 122:1035–70.

<sup>46</sup> *CH* 8.1.

source of all perfection.”<sup>47</sup> In medieval *sermo modernus*-style preaching, most divisions are suggested by the words of Scripture, but some are suggested by key authorities such as the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. In this instance, the threefold division *purified, illumined, and perfected* appears to have been suggested to Bonaventure by the frequent use of the threefold *divisio* in *The Celestial Hierarchy*.

### **The Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Gregory the Great Connection**

After this first ninefold list of single words, each of which represents, as we have seen, a different rank of the ninefold angelic hierarchy, Bonaventure offers another ninefold list—this time a list of nine short phrases. But this second list of nine follows the order of the angels found in Gregory the Great’s Homily 34 rather than the more common one found in Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy*. To be more precise, it follows the order according to which, after the Dominions, we find in order the Principalities, the Powers, and then the Virtues before the Archangels and Angels. But, Gregory’s discussion of the nine ranks of the angels in Homily 34 actually begins in section 10 with a discussion of the Virtues, then proceeds on to the Principalities, Powers, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim, before he backtracks and takes up his discussion of the Archangels and Angels in section 11. I am not suggesting that Bonaventure adopts this odd order. In fact, Bonaventure starts with the Seraphim and works his way down systematically to the Archangels and Angels.

And just as Bonaventure’s first ninefold list can be traced back to Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy* but shows evidence that this tradition has been mediated through the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* of Gallus, so too Bonaventure’s second ninefold list, although it can be traced back to Gregory the Great’s Homily 34, has been mediated through Bernard’s “letter” to Pope Eugene III, the treatise we call *On Consideration*.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, in what follows, I will repeat the pattern I used above: starting first with the phrase found in Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium*, followed by the passage in Bernard’s *On Consideration* to which he is likely referring, followed again by the passage in Gregory the Great’s Homily 34 on which both are based

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<sup>47</sup> CH 8.2.

<sup>48</sup> By claiming that these sources have been “mediated” through medieval authorities, I do not mean to say that Bonaventure did not read the originals, only that his summaries show (and in the case of Bernard’s “letter,” he explicitly admits) that he has made use of these more contemporary medieval authorities.



(using the same text formatting for angelic types, key terms, and tenets). Before we begin, the reader should remember that Bonaventure recounts this second ninefold hierarchy in reverse order. Above, he began with the lowest rank (the “angels,” associated with the word “announcing”) and ascended to the highest (the Seraphim, associated with the word “anointing”). In this second list of phrases, he begins with the highest, the Seraphim, and descends to the lowest.

As we have seen, Bonaventure says in *Itinerarium* 4.4, that, in the **Seraphim**, “God loves as charity [*amat ut caritas*].” To clarify, we might also say something like this: “In and through the Seraphim, God loves as charity.” Or to put this still another way, we could say that the Seraphim, because they burn so fully with the love of God, have as their special mission imparting that love and charity to us. Bernard had written in *On Consideration* that “in those who are called Seraphim we can perceive how he *loves* who has nothing to elicit his love but who does not hate anything which he had made; we can perceive how he supports those whom he has made to be saved, how he carries them forward, how he embraces them, how that fire consumes the youthful sins of the elect and the chaff of their ignorance, *purging* it and rendering it worthy of his *love*.”<sup>49</sup> In his homily, Gregory the Great had written that the Seraphim “burn with incomparable love.” He agrees with the common view that “Seraphim” means “burning,” but then adds that, since they “are so united to God that no other spirit stands between them and him,” therefore, the “flame with which they burn is assuredly that of love, for their love is all the more ardent as they contemplate the glory of divinity with a more penetrating look.”<sup>50</sup>

Next, Bonaventure states that, in the **Cherubim**, God “knows as truth [*novit ut veritas*].” To put this another way, we could say that, because the Cherubim are themselves full of the knowledge of truth, it is their special mission to impart truth to us. Bernard had written in *On Consideration* that, “We see in the Cherubim, who are called to the fullness of knowledge, that the Lord is God of knowledge who alone is ignorant of ignorance alone, who is totally light and in whom there is no darkness.”<sup>51</sup> In his homily, Gregory had stated that “Cherub means ‘fullness of science.’” Thus, these angels are called Cherubim because they are “so much the more perfectly filled with the knowledge of God, that they contemplate his glory more closely,” and “to their measure of creatures, they have a knowledge of all things all the

<sup>49</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10, in *Five Books on Consideration*, trans. John D. Anderson and Elizabeth T. Kennan (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976).

<sup>50</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10.

more complete as they come closer to the vision of their Creator, by virtue of their dignity.”<sup>52</sup>

Next, says Bonaventure, “in the **Thrones**,” God “sits as justice [*sedet ut aequitas*].” Bernard had written in *On Consideration* that, “We can see how he sits upon the Thrones as a judge who causes no fear among the innocent and who cannot be circumvented and does not wish to circumvent, for he loves and he sees as we have described above [in his comments about the Seraphim and Cherubim].” And the fact that God is sitting “does not lack meaning,” says Bernard; “it is a sign of tranquility.” And so, he prays: “Let my judgment, I pray, come forth from such a countenance in which there is love and from which error and disturbance are absent.”<sup>53</sup> In his homily, Gregory had noted that the Greek word “throne” means “seat” in Latin, and so the “Thrones of God” are so-called because they are “filled with divine grace with such abundance that the Lord sits in them and uses them to pronounce his judgments,” which is why the Psalmist says: “You are seated on a throne, O you who judge with equity” (Ps 9:5).<sup>54</sup>

In the **Dominions**, says Bonaventure, God “reigns as majesty [*dominatur ut maiestas*].” The Latin *dominatur* here expresses more clearly the relationship with the “dominions” or *dominationes*, as they are called in Latin. But the English connotations currently associated with the word “dominate” would not have expressed Bonaventure’s meaning as clearly. What Bonaventure would have found in Bernard’s *On Consideration* would have been this short statement: “In the Dominions, we can see the greatness of the *majesty* of the Lord at whose nod an empire is established with boundaries that are universal and eternal.”<sup>55</sup> Now we can understand why Bonaventure added that, in the Dominions, God reigns *as majesty*. In his homily, Gregory had said that the Dominions “designate spirits that far exceed the power of the Principalities,” which is the rank directly below the “Dominions” in Gregory’s hierarchy.<sup>56</sup> As I pointed out above, in his homily, Gregory began his comments on each of the ranks of angels with the Virtues, so his comments there on the Dominions came *after* his comments on the Principalities. Hence, he felt called upon to explain how “dominion” differed from “principality” and why the Dominions were superior, since it might seem that being a “prince” (in a “principality”) would be superior to merely having “dominion.” Gregory’s explanation was that “to have the

<sup>52</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10.

<sup>54</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

principality consists in holding the first rank in a group," while to dominate is to have others under one's authority. The Dominions, therefore, because of their "admirable power," have precedence over others—namely, the angels in the ranks below them—"because they are bound to submit to them by obedience."<sup>57</sup>

Next, then, we have the **Principalities**, about whom Bonaventure says (in our English translation) that, in them, God "rules as a guiding principle [*regit ut principium*]." We see now that, although the word "principality" is derived ultimately from the word *princeps* or "prince," and even though the word "principality," from the late-Latin *principalitatem*, could be used to refer to the position of a prince or the region ruled by a prince, our translator, Zachary Hayes, has decided that *principium* here should be translated as "guiding principle" in this context. There is good evidence to support this judgment. Not only would that have been the more common usage for a Scholastic author in the thirteenth century, but the word *principalitas*, which was uncommon, could also mean "principal" as in "first in importance, excellence, or pre-eminence." But here is what Bernard wrote about the Principalities in *On Consideration*: "In the Principalities we can see the principle [*principium*] from which all things derive, and thus just as a door hangs from a hinge, so the universe depends on him as a ruler." In the next sentence, Bernard commends the Powers because in the Powers, "it is seen how mightily this same Prince (*princeps*) protects those whom he rules [*quos regit*], repelling and driving off hostile powers."<sup>58</sup> What did Gregory say? Gregory had said, "By the Principalities, we designate those who command the other good angelic spirits themselves, who distribute to those who are subject to them the orders of all that they must do, and who direct them in the accomplishment of the divine missions."<sup>59</sup> So, as much as I suspect Hayes may be right when he translated *principium* in *regit ut principium* as "guiding principle," there is evidence that Bonaventure may have meant something more like that, in the Principalities, God rules as a prince rules. But of course, these "princely" beings, unlike many human princes, must rule, in obedience to "the Dominions" above them, which are in their turn informed by the justice of the Thrones, the knowledge of the Cherubim, and the love of the Seraphim.

What, then, is the role of the **Powers**? In the Powers, says Bonaventure, God "protects as salvation [*tuetur ut salus*]." We have already seen above

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<sup>57</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

that Bernard had written in *On Consideration* that, “in the Powers, it is seen how mightily this same Prince protects those whom he rules, repelling and driving off hostile powers.”<sup>60</sup> Gregory the Great had written that, “By the powers, we designate those who have received, in their order, more power than others to submit the adverse forces to their authority, limit their power and thus prevent them from tempting the hearts of men as much as they do.” From both texts, but perhaps especially from Gregory’s, we can understand why Bonaventure says that, in the Powers, God protects *as salvation*—that is, by protecting us from temptation and by driving off “hostile powers.”

Next, we have the **Virtues**, in whom Bonaventure says God is “at work as strength [*operator ut virtus*].” Why not translate *virtus* here simply as “virtue”? First—and this is not unimportant—it sounds odd and repetitive to say that the Virtues operate as virtue; this is more of a solipsism than a description. We saw above how Bonaventure associated the (angelic) Virtues with “strengthening” (*roboratio*). And we saw that this association had its roots in Gallus’s comment that the Virtues “enable the effective achievement of what has been properly ordained,” and in Pseudo-Dionysius’s statement that an angelic Virtue “transmits to its own inferiors its dynamic and divinizing power.” But there is also this. In Bernard’s *On Consideration*, he says that, in the Virtues, “we can see that there is everywhere equally present one noble force through which all things have their being, which is vivifying, efficacious, invisible and immobile yet beneficially moving all things and firmly sustaining them.” After this, he adds another, somewhat unexpected comment: “When [this efficacious force] appears among mortals with somewhat unusual effects, men call these miracles or prodigies.”<sup>61</sup> This is a tradition he inherited from Gregory’s homily, who says that “by Virtues, we designate the spirits by which signs and miracles are most often performed.”<sup>62</sup>

We are left, finally, with the two lowest ranks of angels, the **Archangels** and the **Angels**. Concerning the Archangels, Bonaventure says that, in them, God “reveals as light” “[*revelat ut lux*],” and in the Angels, he “assists as kindness [*assistit ut pietas*].” I have grouped these together here because Bernard grouped them together in *On Consideration*. There he writes, “Finally we can see and admire in the Angels and Archangels the truth and the proof of that saying, ‘For he cares about us’ [1 Pet 5:7]. He does not cease to delight us with visits from such great beings, to *instruct us by their revelations*, to admonish us by their suggestions and to *comfort us by their zeal*.” From this

<sup>60</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10.

<sup>61</sup> Bernard, *On Consideration* 5.4.10.

<sup>62</sup> Gregory the Great, Homily 34, no. 10.

we can see where Bonaventure likely got the phrase “reveals as light” for the Archangels. But how about “assists as kindness” for the Angels? It is possible that this was suggested by Bernard’s comment that the Angels “comfort us by their zeal [*sedulitate solatiari*].” But there may be something else, something we find buried further back in our source material. For, in Gregory’s homily, he writes that “there are many men who understand only humble truths, but continue to announce them to their brothers with kindness: such men run to join the troop of Angels.” In Gregory’s Latin, we see “kindness” (*pie*, from *pius*), which may be the source for Bonaventure’s statement in the *Itinerarium* that the Angels “assist as kindness” (*ut pietas*).

### Bonaventure’s *Reductio* of the Nine Choirs of Angels

I have described this section as a “reduction” not only because Bonaventure has taken an immense amount of material and compressed it into nine words and nine short phrases—this would be a “reduction” in our modern sense—but also because it is a *reductio* in Bonaventure’s understanding of the term: something that “leads us back” to the sources, and ultimately to *the* Source. Consider, for a moment, Bonaventure’s *Reduction of the Arts to Theology*. In that work, Bonaventure does not “collapse” the other arts into theology; rather, he sets up an ordered pedagogy of the arts designed to lead the mind back to the Source of all knowledge and wisdom, God the Father, Son, and Spirit. In a related way, here in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure has used evocative words and phrases to lead the reader’s mind back to the sources of the two traditions about the nine choirs of angels with which many of his readers would have been acquainted, but also, from these sources, back to God. As in his *Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, so too in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure sets up an ordered pedagogy—moving from things outside to things inside the mind to things above—meant to lead the mind back into God. Within the ordered *reductio* of the whole of the *Itinerarium*, here in *Itinerarium* 4.4 we have a mini-*reductio* related to the structuring principle provided by the nine choirs of angels.

The nine choirs of angels serve here the role of the *divisio* from which Bonaventure would have made an extensive *dilatatio* if this had been a sermon. Instead, Bonaventure has given the reader just enough information to make his or her own “dilation” of these two ninefold hierarchies. Granted, the kind of reflection Bonaventure likely has in mind here would require more knowledge of the traditions surrounding the nine choirs of angels than many of us in the modern world have. But with a little study, we can at least begin to understand the kind of ordered ascent Bonaventure envisions here.

With this in mind, let us return to Bonaventure's text to remind ourselves of the context of this discussion. Bonaventure begins chapter 4 attempting to explain why, if, as he has been arguing, "God is so close to our souls," there are so few who are able to see God in the ways he has been describing in chapters 1–3. "But an explanation for this is near at hand," he says.

The human mind is distracted by many concerns, and hence does not enter into itself through memory. It is obscured by images of sense objects, and therefore does not enter into itself through intelligence. And it is drawn away by disordered desires, and therefore it does not return to itself with a desire for internal sweetness and spiritual joy. Totally immersed in matters of the senses, the soul is unable to reenter into itself as the image of God. (*Itinerarium* 4.1)

What now? We need help. We need the grace of Christ who provides us a "hand up" after we have fallen. Hence our soul needs to be "purged, illumined, and perfected" by grace and by our response in faith, hope, and love.

How does this work? What help does this provide more specifically? Bonaventure's answer: "When these things have been accomplished"—that is, when our souls have been purged, illumined, and perfected by grace and by faith, hope, and love—"and our spirit has been brought into conformity with the heavenly Jerusalem, it is ordered hierarchically so that it can ascend upward." "For no one enters into that city," he continues, "unless that city has first descended into the person's heart by means of grace, as John sees in his Apocalypse."<sup>63</sup> It descends into the heart when our spirit has been made hierarchical by the reformation of the image, by means of the theological virtues, the enjoyment of the spiritual senses, and the ecstasy of rapture; for it has been purged, illumined and brought to perfection" (*Itinerarium* 4.4).

So the order of the heavenly city descends to impart its order on the one who opens his heart and mind in faith, hope, and love to God's purging, illuminating, and perfecting grace. What can we know about the order of this heavenly city? Bonaventure's answer involves the hierarchy of the nine choirs of angels that reside with God in heaven. When this heavenly grace of "the heavenly city" descends to impart its order upon the faithful, then, "in this way, our spirit is adorned with nine orderly levels" corresponding to the nine choirs of angels: "announcing, dictating, leading, ordering, strengthening, commanding, receiving, revealing, and anointing." We have

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<sup>63</sup> See Rev 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

seen above what these nine words represent and the nine phrases that follow. "When it has attained these," writes Bonaventure—that is, when the soul has attained the order provided by these graces, of love, knowledge, obedience, courage, and all the rest—then when the soul enters into itself, it enters, as it were, into the order of the heavenly Jerusalem it finds there. And, "as it considers the choirs of angels, it sees in them the God who dwells in them and who works in all their operations" (*Itinerarium* 4.4).

Now, it is impossible to know for certain whether Bonaventure had Gregory's Homily 34 and the fifth book of Bernard's *On Consideration* in front of him as he composed the *Itinerarium*, just as we cannot know for certain that he had both Gallus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* and Pseudo-Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy* in front of him. Some of this material—perhaps much or all of it—Bonaventure would have been able to quote from memory. But whether he was quoting largely from memory (which may in fact be possible, given that he tells us he was on retreat on Mt. Alverna when he composed the *Itinerarium*), or whether he had some or all of the source texts in front of him, Bonaventure's "reduction" of these two monumental traditions dealing with the nine choirs of angels to nine words and nine short parallel phrases is nothing less than an incredible intellectual *tour de force* within a spiritual masterpiece.