



A “Modern” Medieval Theory of Doctrinal Development: Development of Doctrine in St. Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaemeron*

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Abstract

Already in St. Bonaventure’s *Collationes in Hexaemeron* there is a rudimentary theory of doctrinal development that confronts the historical problematic encountered most forcefully in modernity. This is the result of Bonaventure’s urgent need to respond to the difficulties of Joachimism wherein Francis of Assisi is believed to have ushered in the new age of the Holy Spirit disassociated from the Bible, sacraments, and the institutional Church. In response Bonaventure elucidates an understanding of divine revelation in which new historical epochs allow the Church through the wise and holy mystic-contemplative to read more deeply of the word of God so as to gain a deeper insight into what has already been given in Jesus Christ. In this way the newness of Francis is preserved by grounding his radical way of life in continuity with the once-for-all revelation of God and the Church. In so doing Bonaventure anticipates the particularly modern historical problematic and paves a way forward that preserves the integrity of revelation centuries before the likes of John Henry Newman, Yves M-J Congar, and others.

Keywords

Bonaventure, Doctrinal Development, *Collations in Hexaemeron* Yves Congar, Francisco Marin-Sola, Henri de Lubac

Introduction

In 1257 St. Bonaventure was unexpectedly called from his professorship at the University of Paris to lead the Franciscan Minors as minister general at a time when the fledgling order was being rocked by a number of challenges from both inside and out. From outside the order the Minors were being challenged by some of the secular clergy as well as those members of the School of Arts who were

proponents of the thought of the 12th-century Arabic philosopher, Averroes. From within the Minors were dealing with the theological ramifications of the “Eternal Gospel” of the Cistercian Abbot Joachim of Fiore, whose thought divided the Franciscans as to how to interpret their illustrious founder, St. Francis of Assisi, the nature of the Order itself, and the mendicant way of life.

At the end of his life, Bonaventure delivered a number of university sermons at the University of Paris to his brother friars deemed the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, which were themselves an exposition centered on the six days of creation found in Genesis 1, although he would regrettably die before he could complete his task. In these collations Bonaventure elucidated a theology of history, which in its own way directly confronted some of the central aspects of the thought of Joachim. It is my belief that in responding to Joachim and his followers Bonaventure outlined in rudimentary form a theory of doctrinal development that takes into consideration the uniquely modern historical problematic, which is centered around the question of how to properly understand the relationship between history and Christian belief and practice. In so doing Bonaventure is centuries ahead of his time by anticipating the thought and concerns of such figures as John Henry Newman, Henri de Lubac, Yves Marie-Joseph Congar, and many others. Bonaventure's theory of doctrinal development, as I shall argue in this article, is the result of the convergence of three important aspects of his thought: (1) the spiritual senses of Scripture, which contain ‘multiform theories’ that can only be known in light of new historical contingencies, (2) the nature of theology as both proper and mystical, and (3) the nature of wisdom as both “multiform” and “nulliform”. In short, the growth in wisdom of the contemplative dimension of the Church and her members allows for a deeper reading of the Scriptures in accordance with the progression of the historical ages, which leads to what would today be considered a development of Christian self-understanding and teaching in response to the divinely foreordained events and circumstances of history. Thus, one need not wait until modernity to find a theology that confronts head on the difficulty that history qua history poses to Christian doctrine.

To demonstrate this thesis, I will first outline in brief two prominent theories of doctrinal development in the logical theory of Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., and the theological theories of Henri de Lubac, S.J., and Yves Marie-Joseph Congar, O.P., so as to present a context in which to situate the Bonaventuran theory. Next, I will outline Bonaventure's theory of doctrinal development as it is found in his *Collationes in Hexaemeron* and survey how his theory answers the problems of his day. Lastly, I will compare the merit of Bonaventure's thought relative to the theories of Marin-Sola and de Lubac and

Congar, and then offer some final reflections and takeaways from this cursory analysis.

Two Theories of Doctrinal Development

To date there is no one theory of doctrinal development that has been accorded the status of Catholic dogma, nor is there any one theory that is universally recognized amongst theologians as settled theology. Instead, there are various and at-times competing theories of doctrinal development, each of which tend to serve as rallying points for their proponents due to some other more fundamental principle guiding their thought. Because this disputed question is somewhat novel in the sense that the question of the relationship between history and dogma takes on a fresh significance with the onset of the critical method of historical research, it is necessary to briefly outline the landscape of the theories of doctrinal development so as to set the stage to understand the manner in which Bonaventure's theology of history and its corresponding theory of development are unique for his time and what light it can shed on the contemporary debate.

The Logical Theory of Marin-Sola

The logical theory of doctrinal development in its essence predates the Modern problematic of the relation between history and dogma. It is the understanding of doctrinal development held by the great schoolmen, including Bonaventure at least at one point in his life¹, and focused most centrally on the speculative unfolding of the deposit of faith with history lacking any real significance in and of itself.² In this section I briefly present the logical theory of Francisco Marin-Sola, which is regarded by many to be its finest articulation.

Caught between the heterodox conception of dogma of Modernism and an overly mystical-affective approach to doctrinal development, Marin-Sola sought to outline a logical theory, which could account – at least in theory if not in actual practice – for doctrinal development through focusing on the “immediate-implicit” and the “mediate/virtual-implicit” of the deposit of faith. In his work *The*

¹ Cf. Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Sentences: Philosophy of God / Works of Bonaventure* Volume XVI, trans. by R. E. Houser and Timothy B. Noone (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications 2013), Bk 3 Dist. 25 a. 1 q. 1.

² Cf. Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 21-48.

*Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*³, he writes of how through the virtual-implicit dimension of the deposit, theologians could arrive at new theological conclusions and propositions of the faith which are in fact objectively identical to the original deposit itself, that is, the new theological conclusions do not admit of a change in the object of the revealed deposit per se.⁴ In this way there is a true deepening in the understanding of the deposit on the side of the subject without a corresponding change in the deposit itself. Development, therefore, is the end result of the sacred metaphysics of theology wherein all conclusions are derived from necessary reasoning and are possible objects of Magisterial definition and thus dogmatic development.

Marin-Sola's logical theory is meant to both stimulate the unfolding of the depths of the Christian deposit as well as safeguard its objective integrity from corruption and the addition of "new revelations"⁵ through the oversight of a clear and rigorous speculative theology. However, speculative theology is not the only show in town. In addition to the development of doctrine by way of theological conclusions, Marin-Sola's logical theory makes space for the affective-experiential dimension of Catholic doctrinal development.⁶ When this is the case, speculative theology takes the role of guardian and authenticator by subjecting the religious insight to the substance of Scripture and tradition so as to judge its continuity or discontinuity with the deposit of faith. However, Marin-Sola also mentions that there may be scenarios where theology cannot determine the necessary relationship between the deposit and the new insight of the Christian people and can instead provide only a probability, which

³ Francisco Marin-Sola, O.P., *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, trans. by Antonio T. Piñon (Manilla: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988).

⁴ Cf. Guy Mansini, "The Development of the Development of Doctrine in the Twentieth Century", *Angelicum* 93 (2016), pp. 789-91.

⁵ In this regard, Marin-Sola seeks to rebut the work of Francisco Suárez, S.J., who introduces into the scholastic tradition the term "virtual-confused", which ends up combining theological conclusions with that which pertains to the explicit given of faith. The end result is that theological conclusions, which are the data of Magisterial definition and doctrinal development, ends up being relegated to those truths that are not objectively identical with the deposit and thereby constitute new revelations. Cf. Marin-Sola, *Homogeneous Evolution*, pp. 175-203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 403. "Thus, as the history of dogmas shows, it frequently happens that come saintly person, or someone possessed of a pure and lively faith, feels or anticipates a certain dogmatic conclusion or development even before it has been deduced, or indeed even surmised, by speculative theology. Such a person than proceeds to share his feeling with other faithful who spontaneously receive it as the genuine expression of their own sentiments or faith. The process is repeated until the feeling is so widely spread that it becomes the *common feeling* of all the Christian people." Cf. Mansini, "The Development of the Development of Doctrine in the Twentieth Century", 791. "This is not the recognition of a cognitive but non-propositional possession of the deposit, but of a non-cognitive relation to the deposit, one based, however on affirming the truths of faith."

is *not* the domain of speculative theology, strictly speaking. When this is the case, Marin-Sola writes that “the common sentiment of the faithful is *of itself alone*, even without theological reasoning, a sufficient criterion enabling the pontiff or the council to define, under the Holy Spirit’s assistance, a truth as a dogma of faith”, since the Magisterium is subject to neither the reasoning of the theologians or the sentiments of the people but is the teacher of them both.⁷

For Marin-Sola’s logical theory of development, “new” doctrines, which are new relative to the subject but not the object of revelation, are the result of both theological speculation and affective-experiential intuition. While Magisterial ruling and teaching is necessary to define the existence and ensure the authenticity of new dogmas, theological speculation executes the special function of doctrinal discernment. This is due to the nature of Catholic doctrine and the deposit of faith as propositional articulations of divine mysteries which are adequately though not exhaustively articulated, as well as the ability of reason to adjudicate between the various theological positions by relating them to the more fundamental explicit truth of the deposit of faith.⁸ However, because speculative theology deals with the theologically necessary, it fails to account for those insights that fall into the realm of the probable, which would include the interpretation of Scripture according to its spiritual sense. Furthermore, because speculative theology deals with the universal and necessary, it is unable to grapple with the historicity of Christian faith and the development that is motivated by historical factors. For Marin-Sola’s logical theory, history is merely accidental and somewhat unintelligible since it is incapable of being understood according to the metaphysical science of theology.

The Theological Theories of De Lubac and Congar

Whereas the heart of the logical theory of development entails a necessary relation of reason of later doctrinal developments to the original deposit, theological theories of development posit alongside the use of reason and logic a more fundamental supernatural

⁷ Ibid., p. 404.

⁸ Cf. Mansini, “The Development of the Development of Doctrine in the Twentieth Century”, p. 791. “The great strength of logical theories consists in their taking seriously what the nature of revelation must be if it is a revelation to us, to human beings. The human cognitive possession of reality is propositional. It consists in affirming true propositions about reality. Therefore, if what is developed is led out and developed from the deposit, if what is implicit must be folded up in the deposit, then it must already somehow be there, in the propositions constituting the deposit.”

development that corresponds to the supernatural character of the revelation. Of this de Lubac writes

It always remains a mystery for us. Our natural observation will never embrace it as it does all the others. Our natural logic is not going to be able to display itself in everything in its regard as it does with the objects of our reason. Not having *conceived* it, not having formed it in ourselves, we will never be the masters of it . . . No mystery is a simple truth, and if we become attached with too narrow an attestation to one of its aspects in order to establish the main part of it, we risk ending in many an absurdity or many a heresy. A mystery can never be, in a way, handled in the way a natural truth can; we will never have the right to apply the laws of our human logic to it univocally, without precautions and correctives.⁹

In this way de Lubac repudiates what he understands to be a reductionistic account of Christianity to a series of propositions, as necessary as they may be. Instead, revelation consists of what de Lubac calls “the Whole of Dogma”, which is the unfathomably rich and dynamic mystery of revelation of all things in Jesus Christ addressed to the whole human person, as opposed to the intellect alone.¹⁰ It resides in the higher state of awareness of the Church and her members in a way that is beyond an exhaustive articulation and the necessary reasonings of speculative theology. By re-ordering the relationship between the explicit and the implicit of revelation by attaching the explicitly known deposit of faith to the mysterious and implicitly known Whole of Dogma – as opposed to latching the implicitly known of theological speculation and affectivity onto the more certain explicit deposit – de Lubac turns the discussion on its head by placing the objective deposit “below” the mystery of the Whole of Dogma of which there is an implicit awareness in faith.¹¹ As a result, Mansini writes of de Lubac’s theological theory that “Given this higher awareness of the deposit, it therefore follows, development is not merely logical, and we should not expect, at least in every case, to be able to show how a new definition is logically contained in previously confessed truths of faith. How to think about this higher awareness of the Christological whole is, however, problematic.”¹²

⁹ Henri de Lubac, S.J., “The Problem of the Development of Dogma” in *Theology in History*, trans. by Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1996), p. 265.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 276. “Then we will understand that, contrary to one current affirmation, which is at the source of the difficulties we have shown, the “implicit” is not contained in the “explicit” as such. It is, from the beginning, the “explicit” that is contained in the “implicit”, “in the definable fringe of the mystery”.

¹² Mansini, “The Development of the Development of Doctrine in the Twentieth Century”, p. 796.

Congar, too, propounded various shortcomings of the logical theory of development in its inability to account for certain dogmas such as the Magisterial definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, which is not readily necessarily, logically deduced from the propositions of the deposit of the faith, as well as the logical theory's lack of circumscription with respect to what can and should be defined out of all the possible and valid theological conclusions.¹³ Congar does not dismiss the logical theory *in toto* but instead allocates its reason and logic to the realm of faith as its instrument.

The deeper penetration into and understanding of the faith of the Church and her members is ordered to what Congar deems the "*dessein*" [design] of revelation.¹⁴ This design entails the whole of what God has revealed in the concrete form in which it has been communicated and enacted throughout salvation history, culminating in Jesus Christ and the Church. To reason from the design entails "reading" the design according to the analogy of faith by understanding the whole of revelation according to the central mystery of Christ's Incarnation, Paschal Mystery, and the Mystical Body of Christ.¹⁵ This is done in manifold ways and according to a number of motivating factors. Congar writes

It is the fullness of the faith, including faithful living, religious contemplation, theological elaboration, the rejection of heresies, the study of the secular sequence of testimonies, the perpetual return to the depths of the biblical text in union with the liturgy in its celebration of the Christian mystery: all of this is integrated under the guidance of the magisterium and under the grace of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church, the principle of identity of her supernatural life and consciousness. There is in all this enough elements of reason, either theological or historical, for the Church to give an account to the men who question her or her faith and hope; but there is always a surplus

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 801.

¹⁴ Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *La Foi et la Théologie* (Belgium: Desclée, 1962), p. 100. "Par son contenu propre, la Révélation concerne, non la nature ontique des choses (elle ne nous dit pas *ce que* sont les étoiles, etc . . .), mais les termes et les lois du rapport religieux que Dieu a le dessein de réaliser entre lui et les hommes (inséparables du cosmos). Cela implique des affirmations d'ontologie, mais c'est autre chose qu'une physique, ou même qu'une métaphysique. S'il s'agit de l'implicite *de la Révélation*, c'est-à-dire de ce que Dieu a voulu nous faire savoir par sa Parole, il est relative à cette nature, à ce contenu propre de la Révélation." [By its proper content, revelation concerns not the ontic nature of things (it does not tell us what the stars are, etc . . .), but the terms and laws of the religious relationship that God has planned to realize between him and men (inseparably from the cosmos). This implies ontological affirmations, but it is something other than a physics, or even a metaphysics. If it is the implicit of Revelation, that is to say, of what God wanted to make known by his Word, it is relative to this nature, to this proper content of the Revelation. (my translation)]"

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

in the supernatural consciousness of the Church in relation to what it can rationally account for: theology surpasses apologetics.¹⁶

By appealing to the design of revelation, which includes but is beyond the literal sense of Scripture and the propositions of the deposit, Congar can ground the many varied aspects of Christian existence in a mystery that is capable of enveloping the dynamics of reason, worship, and morals, as well as the contingencies of history and the cultural, political, and ecclesial strife that inevitably affect the Church's sojourn. In this way Congar can solve the tension of de Lubac's theological theory in its reliance upon a higher awareness of the Whole of Dogma, which nonetheless escapes cognitive apprehension. By having received the whole of the design of God in Christian revelation, the Church has received the fullness of revelation in Christ, but this fullness has a depth and dynamism that has yet to be fully understood and worked out but is nonetheless present to the Christian. Thus, the design is not infinitely mysterious in that it is essentially non-propositional and beyond reason, always subject to change in essence and fundamental substance since it in principle cannot communicate lasting truth across every age and historical context¹⁷; rather, apprehension of the design for Congar is in fact propositional, but it is simply not exhausted by propositional

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117 [my translation]. "Elle est celle de la plénitude de la foi, incluant tout ensemble la vie fidèle, la contemplation religieuse, l'élaboration théologique, le rejet des hérésies, l'étude de la suite séculaire des témoignages, le perpétuel retour aux profondeurs du texte biblique en union avec l'usage qu'en fait la liturgie dans sa célébration du mystère chrétien: tout cela s'intégrant sous la conduite du magistère et sous la grâce du Saint-Esprit, ame de l'Église, principe d'identité de sa vie et de sa conscience surnaturelles. Il y a, en tout cela, assez d'éléments de raison, soit théologique, soit historique pour que l'Église puisse rendre compte aux hommes qui l'interrogent, de sa foi et de son espérance; mais il y a toujours un plus dans la conscience surnaturelle de l'Église par rapport à ce dont elle peut rendre compte rationnellement: la théologie déborde l'apologétique." Additionally, Congar outlines four "motors" of doctrinal development. Cf. *Ibid.*, 107-12. These are theological speculation, Christian living and piety, heresy, and the contingencies of history.

¹⁷ Cf. Karl Rahner, "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow", *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 99 (1977), pp. 1-24, under the title 'Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte - gestern und morgen'. In this article Rahner advocates for a continual revisal of dogma due to the ineffability of the mystery of God and the finite, historical circumstances and language in which the Church finds herself in the world and in time. He writes, "On this is need only be said that a religious statement in the last resort points not to what is drained of meaning, but to the ineffable mystery that we call God, and it is this reference alone which makes a statement a religious one. In other words, these processes of elimination are basically continually recurring events pointing to that mystery and must occur over and over again in the history of abiding religious truth, since this liberating and hopeful approach to the mystery of God must take place in the light of continually new historical situations of truth."

formulations and remains open to deeper understanding and development due to its dynamic structure.¹⁸

The theological theories of development as presented by de Lubac and Congar highlight the mysterious nature of revelation and its supernatural inexhaustibility. While de Lubac's formulation does not entail an obvious relationship of dogma to history per se, Congar's theological theory accounts for the historicity of dogma without falling into an historical reductionism wherein history alone exhausts the formation and meaning of the deposit and its developments. This is so because Congar has a robust understanding of tradition as situated within a providentially guided history, which underlies his thinking with respect to Scriptural interpretation and doctrinal formulation. He writes

Tradition implies and even tolerates no alteration in its objective content. It is a communication from one living person to another, but it is the communication of a definitive object that retains the identity of its inner nature. This communication is made, however, in a history to which it does not remain alien. In other words, this history does not act simply as a setting for it, like a backdrop to a film set, which changes behind the actors without affecting them. It affects the conservation, transmission and even the content of what is kept and passed on in a certain way that does not destroy its identity.¹⁹

Thus, for Congar, historicity is not in and of itself an evil to be purged so as to arrive at the pure and eternal truth, nor is it the final word of the meaning of doctrine that is trapped within a suffocating coffin of contextualism. Instead, the same historical unfolding that is guided by the general providence of God has a role to play in the Church's self-understanding of the revelation given once for all by Jesus Christ and his Apostles.

The Development of Doctrine in Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaemeron*

Having outlined in brief two of the primary theories of doctrinal development, we can now turn to Bonaventure and his *Collationes in Hexaemeron*.²⁰ Bonaventure's *Hexaemeron* consists of twenty-three

¹⁸ Cf. Mansini, "The Development of the Development of Doctrine in the Twentieth Century", p. 804.

¹⁹ Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. by A. N. Woodrow (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 114.

²⁰ I am aware of only two works on doctrinal development in Bonaventure's *Hexaemeron*: John R. White, "St. Bonaventure and the Problem of Doctrinal Development", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 85 (2011) No. 1, pp. 177-202, and Angelo Geiger, F.F.I., "*In Medio Ecclesiae*: The Theory of the Development of Doctrine in St.

university sermons given to a group of Franciscan friars at the University of Paris between Easter and Pentecost in 1273. These sermons are scriptural exegeses of the six days of creation found in Genesis 1 wherein Bonaventure seeks to flesh out the spiritual and symbolic meaning of the contents of the various days. It is an unfinished work as Bonaventure died before he could proceed to the fifth and sixth days.

In Collation I Bonaventure reveals the motivating cause for his writing of these lectures as (1) the attack by secular clergy on the life of Christ as related to morals, that is, the mendicant way of living the evangelical virtues as rooted in Christ, and (2) the affront of the followers of Averroes of the School of Arts at the University of Paris against the supremacy and integrity of Christian doctrine. However, lurking behind the scenes of these two openly acknowledged issues lies the problem of the Cistercian Abbott Joachim of Fiore and his followers in the Franciscan Order, whose teachings and self-understanding threatened schism with and condemnation by the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.²¹

Joachim had delineated a theology of history wherein the Church passes through three successive ages corresponding to the Trinitarian Persons: (1) the age of the Father, which is the Old Testament, (2) the age of the Son, which is the New Testament and the hierarchical Catholic Church, and (3) the age of the Spirit, which is the new age still to come in the immanent future. This new age would consist of a *novus ordo* and would be inaugurated by a *novus dux*, who – according to Joachim – will be so filled with the Holy Spirit that he will symbolize this new way of living wholly and radically in the Spirit as contemplatives who no longer needed the juridical or sacramental structure of the Catholic Church. This new order would live according to the new revelations of the Spirit, which – due to the radical holiness of Francis of Assisi – was seen to be embodied in the evangelical counsels by which he lived.²² As a result, the Franciscan

Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaemeron*", (Unpublished *Tesina*: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Urbe, 2016). The latter work has been of great help in introducing me to important themes within Bonaventure's *Hexaemeron* that lend themselves to a theory of doctrinal development.

²¹ Bonaventure never expressly mentions Joachim of Fiore or his followers but many scholars recognize the behind-the-scenes motivation which the Joachimite strand of Franciscans had upon Bonaventure, who was the minister general of the Minors, as well as Bonaventure's genuine desire to rescue what was true from Joachim so as to integrate his insights in a balanced and orthodox manner. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. by Zachary Hayes (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), pp. 95-117. Cf. Bernard McGinn, *The Calabrian Abbot: Joachim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought*, (New York: MacMillan, 1985).

²² Cf. White, "St. Bonaventure and the Problem of Doctrinal Development", pp. 185-7.

order was seen to be coterminous in a way with this new age and new people.²³

In dealing with the problems and insights of the thought of Joachim of Fiore, Bonaventure was required to confront head on the problems surrounding the relation between history and Christian doctrine and practice. How – in other words – could the life of Francis and the mendicants, who live radical lives of poverty and asceticism heretofore nonexistent in the tradition of the Church, be genuinely new, a product of the action of the Holy Spirit, and yet not be an added novelty to the deposit of faith and Christian practice, which itself would necessarily be a corruption? Bonaventure's solution, I propose, in his *Hexaemeron* is the positing of authentic doctrinal development that occurs through an interaction of the growth in wisdom of the mystic-contemplative and the dynamic quality of Scripture in its containing a limitless abundance of meanings that are discerned only through the passage of time and its corresponding historical situations through which the Church is sojourning.²⁴ As a result, my analysis of a theory of doctrinal development in the *Hexaemeron* will focus on highlighting and bringing together three fundamental aspects of the thesis outlined above: (1) the growth in wisdom of the contemplative as the perfection of the believing theologian, (2) the dynamic quality of Scripture as it contains an infinite number of embedded meanings waiting to be uncovered by the holy and wise, and (3) the historicity of the Church as rendering the contemplative capable of unlocking the hidden meanings of Scripture.

²³ Cf. Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, p. 55. "Though this new People of God may rightfully be called Franciscan, and though it must be said that it is only in this new People that the real intention of the Poverello will be realized, nonetheless, this final Order is in no way identical with the present Order of Franciscans. It may be that the present Order was originally destined to inaugurate the new People immediately. But even if this had been the case, the failure of its members has frustrated this immediate determination. For the present, the Dominican and the Franciscan Orders stand together at the inauguration of a new period for which they are preparing, but which they cannot bring to actuality by themselves. When this time arrives, it will be a time of *contemplation*, a time of the full understanding of Scripture, and in this respect, a time of the Holy Spirit who leads us into the fullness of the truth of Jesus Christ."

²⁴ White makes the interesting point that – whereas the problematic that John Henry Newman had to solve was the issue of the development of doctrinal – for Bonaventure the solution to the problem that lay before him was to posit a rudimentary theory of doctrinal development. Cf. White, "St. Bonaventure and the Problem of Doctrinal Development", p. 200. "In contrast, Bonaventure does not *begin* with the fact of doctrinal development but actually *requires* a notion of doctrinal development, in order to justify the admitted difference between the life of the Franciscans (and the mendicant orders more generally) and modes of Christian living up to his time. Doctrinal variation is not the problem to be solved, for Bonaventure, but is itself the *solution* to what he sees as the more basic problem, namely, how to justify the new way of Franciscan life theologically."

Wisdom and Contemplation

In Collation II Bonaventure speaks of the four forms of divine wisdom: uniform, multiform, omniform, and nulliform. He writes, "That beauty (of Wisdom) is wondrous, for at times it is uniform and at others manifold; at times it assumes every form, and at others none . . . For it is seen as uniform in the rules of divine Law, as manifold in the mysteries of the divine Scriptures, as assuming every form in the traces of the divine works, and as without any form in the elevations of divine raptures."²⁵ For our purposes here, it is worth drawing attention to the nature of multiform and nulliform wisdom and their corresponding relationship.

"[W]isdom appears as manifold," writes Bonaventure, "in the mysteries of divine Scriptures."²⁶ His mention of multiform wisdom is taken from Ephesians 3:8-10 wherein Paul writes of being given the grace to enlighten all men concerning the "*οικονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου*" [economy/plan of the mystery] hidden from all eternity by God so that through the Church may be made known the "*πολυπόκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ*" [manifold wisdom of God]. Since this wisdom is manifold, it is fitting that it be revealed under "many figures, many sacraments, many signs" so that the proud may be confounded and the humble be made wise.²⁷ Paul unveils the mystery through, says Bonaventure, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which he then ties to the allegorical, anagogical, and the tropological senses of Scripture. Faith, therefore, correlates to the allegorical sense because it is concerned with that which is to be believed; hope correlates to the anagogical sense in that it consists of that which is to be hoped for; and charity correlates to the tropological sense because it is made up of that which is to be done. When the spiritual senses of Scripture are read in accordance with this multiform wisdom, it is akin to the multiplication and influx of lights and fires that occurs when multiple mirrors are positioned facing one another in an already lighted room. What was one becomes many as there is an infinite multiplication of meanings and insights in light of one another. This multiform wisdom is proportionate to the measure of faith bestowed by God. "For in the measure in which a man seizes the mind, in that measure does he become wiser – and faith is obtained through humility."²⁸

The other form of wisdom most pertinent to our discussion here is nulliform wisdom. Nulliform wisdom is that which lacks form,

²⁵ Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron / Opera Omnia* Volume V, trans. by José de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970), p. 26, 2.8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.19.

that is, intelligibility as it can be understood according to the natural powers of man. It would seem to eliminate the other forms of wisdom and, yet, Bonaventure is insistent that it does not.²⁹ Bonaventure's discussion of nulliform wisdom centers around 1 Corinthians 2:6-10 where Paul writes of a wisdom that is not of the world but is the mysterious wisdom of God which "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man" but consists of the deep things of God that the Spirit searches out and himself reveals. It is the wisdom which, Bonaventure writes, Paul taught to Timothy and Dionysius but hid from others. It is the wisdom of the perfect and is without form because it is not proportionate to the intellect since it transcends it. It is the highest achievement possible for man, but it is that which he himself cannot attain of his own power but must be granted unto him by God. It is the supreme union of love, which transcends the intellect and its science.³⁰ Man can receive it, nonetheless, because – while the intellect must give way to unknowing and darkness – "the affective power keeps vigil and imposes silence upon all the other powers."³¹ As a result, the few mystics who attain this lofty height can hardly communicate or explain these secret mysteries. This is the height of contemplation, which perfects the soul as well as the Church.

Key to understanding the nature of nulliform wisdom and its corresponding contemplative life is an examination of its relation to the understanding of the active life of the theologian and speculative theology, or theology proper. Bonaventure discusses this in the midst of examining the fourth day of creation when God creates the sun, moon, and stars in Collation XX. He relates the sun to the heavenly hierarchy, the moon to the Church militant, and the stars to the hierarchized human mind. The Church is akin to the moon in that it has no light of its own but receives its beauty and wisdom from the one light of the sun, which is God. Because – like the sun – man cannot gaze upon God due to his superabundant splendor, God provides the Church – like the moon – to provide light to the world in the midst of darkness.³² The light takes the form of the sacraments and figures, which will be touched upon in the next section, which themselves necessitate understanding and penetration of their meaning and depth by a growth in wisdom of the members of the Church.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 2.30.

³² *Ibid.*, 20.15. "Hence, we can gaze upon the moon, not upon the sun, because the radiation of the sun is tempered to our sight by the moon. Likewise, the radiation of eternity cannot be faced as such, but if we look upon it as it exists in the Church, veiled under the sacraments and figures, we may perceive the One who shows us what has been done, what should be done, and what exists in eternity..."

Bonaventure then goes on to speak of the Church as it relates to the full, new, waxing, and waning stages of the moon. The full moon is that positioning of the moon wherein it is in fact furthest from the sun and receiving the least amount of light in its journey around the earth, and yet it is precisely then that the moon is most capable of illumination and providing light by which to see. On the other hand, the new moon is that positioning of the moon whereby it receives the most possible light because it is closest to the sun, and yet it is incapable of providing light by which to illuminate the earth. The waxing moon is the growth of the moon as it moves from the new moon to the full, and the waning moon is the diminution of the moon when it transitions from being full to new. Analogously, Bonaventure writes, “The moon that waxes and wanes represents man in the active and the contemplative life, like the morning star which sometimes precedes the sun and then signifies the contemplative life, and at other times follows it and then signifies the active life.”³³ So, the active life of the Church is the waxing moon, growing in light day by day and most capable of granting clear sight and understanding to the world though actually receiving less of the divine light the brighter it is, while the contemplative life of the Church is the waning moon, which loses its ability to effectively instruct and guide but which itself is receiving more and more enlightenment in her sojourn though – for all appearances – it grows dimmer and dimmer. It is in this context that Bonaventure speaks of the threefold nature of theology as symbolic, proper, and mystical.³⁴ The active life corresponds to the theology proper, which Gregory LaNave describes as “the level of theological knowledge best suited to the nature of the human mind . . . to the powers of the soul”³⁵, while the contemplative life pertains to mystical theology, which consists of the nulliform wisdom described above. These two forms of theology and wisdom interpenetrate one another for those who have both the training and the grace for they both pertain to the same enlightenment of wisdom but through different means and in different degrees. Thus, these and symbolic theology are circumincessary with mystical theology pertaining to the height of theological wisdom. In passing over from faith and understanding to wisdom through holiness³⁶, the contemplative is able to penetrate into the mysteries of the Scriptures so as to reveal their fuller and deeper meaning.

³³ Ibid., 20.18.

³⁴ Ibid., 20.21.

³⁵ Gregory LaNave, “Bonaventure’s Theological Method” in *A Companion to Bonaventure / Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition* Volume 48 ed. by Jay M. Hammond, J. A. Hellmann, and Jared Goff (Leiden + Boston: Brill Academic Publishing, 2014), pp. 83-4.

³⁶ Bonaventure, *Hexaemeron*, 19.3.

The Meanings of Scripture

Beyond the various senses of Scripture described in Collation II when discussing multiform wisdom, Bonaventure outlines a more complex theory when discussing the third day of creation in Collation XIII wherein God gathers the waters and brings forth vegetation with its seed bearing plants and fruit trees. The gathering of the waters refers to the spiritual meanings (*spirituales intelligentia*) of the Scriptures in their allegorical, anagogical, and tropological senses; the bringing forth of vegetation on earth refers to the sacramental symbols (*figurae sacramentalis*) of Scripture; and the various mentioning's of seeds refers to the manifold interpretations or "theories" (*multiformes theoria*) of Scripture.

The spiritual meanings of the Scriptures, writes Bonaventure, are compared to the gathering of the waters because of their primitive origination, most profound depth, and because of their abundantly flowing multiformity. The first two refer to the fact that the spiritual meanings flow from Scripture as their source and the Scriptures have such a profound depth that they can only be entered into upon the wood of the Cross. The third point concerning the abundant multiformity refers to the previously impregnable meanings of Scripture that only becomes understandable in light of the New Testament and Christ. The many meanings of Scripture are made evident and known through the contemplative Church who shields the world from heresy through her wisdom.³⁷ The faithfully uncovered meanings of Scripture, therefore, have a salvific dimension in that they come forth from God and return to him, bringing all of creation back with it. Bonaventure writes, "These four meanings are the four rivers of the sea in Scripture: they derive or originate from the sea, and they return to it. Hence Sacred Scripture sheds light on all things and retraces them all back to God, thus restoring the original state of creatures."³⁸

The sacramental symbols within Scripture are symbolized by the growth of vegetation "in the sense that it has a great number of figures that grow and produce a multiplication [of thoughts] in the soul."³⁹ This, however, is not directly pertinent to a theory of doctrinal development. What is more relevant is Bonaventure's discussion of the *multiformes theoria*, or manifold interpretations of the Scriptures, which are like seeds scattered throughout, awaiting the actualization of their buried meaning and enlightenment. Bonaventure writes of this in Collation XV. Unlike the limited

³⁷ Ibid., 13.7.

³⁸ Ibid., 13.13.

³⁹ Ibid., 14.1.

number of *spirituales intelligentia* and the *figurae sacramentalis*, the *multiformes theoria* are nearly infinite.⁴⁰ Bonaventure writes

Who can know the infinity of seeds, when in a single one are contained forests of forests and thence seeds in infinite number? Likewise, out of Scriptures may be drawn an infinite number of interpretations which none but God can comprehend. For as new seeds come forth from plants, so also from Scriptures come forth new interpretations and new meanings, and thereby are Sacred Scriptures distinct [from everything else]. Hence, in relation to the interpretations yet to be drawn, we may compare it to a single drop from the sea all those that have been drawn so far.⁴¹

The multiform theories are rooted in the relation between the two cherubim seated upon the ark of the Covenant, who face one another and represent the two Testaments of the Old and the New. The seeds thus pertain to a certain providential ordering of time and history wherein what was said and done in the Old Testament can only attain its true significance in light of the New Testament. Likewise, the New Testament's inner meaning is hidden and prepared for in the Old Testament. As a result, Bonaventure can go on to say the following two extraordinary statements

But this germination of the seeds procures the understanding of the different theories through adaption to the different times; and the man who overlooks the times cannot know the theories. For one who ignores the past cannot know the future. If, indeed, I do not know from which tree a seed comes, I cannot know what tree is to grow from it. Hence the knowledge of future events depends on the knowledge of those of the past. Moses, indeed, in his prophecies concerning the future, was telling about the past through revelation.⁴²

But it should be noted that as God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, so also the mystical body of Christ has six ages, and seventh that runs concurrently with the sixth, and an eighth. These are the seminal reasons that lead to the understanding of Scriptures.⁴³

From these two passages can be seen the manner in which the seeds of infinite meaning within the Scriptures are historically conditioned in the sense that they do not merely pertain to metaphysical truths abstracted from history, but they actually have a real relation to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.10. He writes, "For the principle intelligences and figures exist in certain determined numbers, while the theories are almost infinite . . . Hence, as in the seeds there is multiplication to infinity, so also are the theories multiplied."

⁴¹ Ibid., 13.2.

⁴² Ibid., 15.11

⁴³ Ibid., 15.12.

Table 1: Corresponding Days and Ages of Creation and History

	Days of Creation	Ages of the MBOC ⁴⁴	Ages of the Catholic Church
1 st	Light	Adam to Noah	Christ & Apostles to Clement
2 nd	Separation of Waters	Noah to Abraham	Clement to Sylvester
3 rd	Dry Land	Abraham to David	Sylvester to Leo
4 th	Sun, Moon, & Stars	David to Babylonian Exile	Leo to Gregory
5 th	Living Creatures	Exile to Christ	Gregory to Hadrian
6 th	Humans	Christ to Apocalypse	Hadrian to ?
7 th	Divine Rest	Repose of Souls	Final Peace
8 th		Resurrection	

history itself. Furthermore, if one lacks this historical awareness then one is incapable of unveiling the hidden meanings of the Scriptures.

The ages of the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, the Church, which Bonaventure understands to be modeled after the days of creation, are illustrated in Table 1.⁴⁵ There are two important points that help to clarify Bonaventure's intention in laying out such an outline of history.

First, the sixth and seventh days run concurrently and do not succeed one another as do the others ages of the Mystical Body of Christ. Second, after the sixth and seventh ages – or, rather, during? – there is a return to the first age.⁴⁶ This does not mean that time is cyclical but that it has a twofold dimension of linear progression and yet a relation to the past in the form of a rising coil rather than a straight line or a two-dimensional circle. Bonaventure speaks of this when he writes

Again, whatever comes forth is compared to that from which it arises, as the tree to the seed from which it is born, and [the seed] to the tree from which the seed is born. In the same manner, the New Testament is compared to the Old, as a tree to a tree, as the letter to the letter. And as the tree is from a tree and the seed from a seed, and the latter from a letter, so is the one Testament from the other.⁴⁷

As a result, it is impossible to understand the present or the future unless one understands the seed or tree from whence it came. This understanding of the past as it relates to the present and future is unlocked only by Christ who is the center of history through whom

⁴⁴ Mystical Body of Christ

⁴⁵ Cf. Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Bonaventure, *Hexameron*, 15.18. "And it is a return to the first, for after the seventh day, there is a return to the first. These, then, are the seeds scattered throughout for the understanding of Scripture, and they are produced from these trees in so far as they accord with common interpretation, and in this way time is divided into seven ages."

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.22-23.

all is created and finds its meaning and purpose. Thus, third, Christ is not only the Alpha and the Omega of history but he is also its divine Center. He is the hinge upon which history turns and the ages fold onto one another. For this reason Bonaventure writes of the relation of the past to the present and future through the analogy of the seed in the following way

In terms of seed, they consist in correlations of times, by which times follow one another; in terms of the fruit of a tree [they consist also in correlations of times], by which time corresponds to one another. In the order of comparison of a tree or a seed to the seed, the times follow one another; in the order of comparison of the germ to the germinating, they correspond to each other, as it will be evident by now.⁴⁸

Finally, because Christ is the center of not only creation but also of history, the New Testament which he inaugurates is eternal, and, therefore, there will be no wholly new revelations above and beyond that which is already contained in some way in the revelation given once and for all as can be found in the Scriptures.⁴⁹

Historicity and Scriptural Interpretation

In the preceding sections two important truths have been established that can now be brought together to flesh out more fully the rudimentary theory of doctrinal development in Bonaventure's *Hexaemeron*: (1) there exists between human understanding and the theology proper to it an ordering to the mystical theology of the contemplative whose growth in wisdom and holiness allows for a deeper understanding of the mysteries of God and (2) Scripture contains within itself not only veiled spiritual interpretations and sacramental figures but also manifold theories wherein seeds of meaning are planted within the Scriptures that can only be uncovered through a knowledge of the past and the transition from one historical age to the next, along with all that it may entail.

To bring these two overarching ideas together would mean that it belongs to the mystic and the contemplative dimension of the Church – in a special way though not to the exclusion of the theologian – to uncover the manifold theories of Scripture by prophetically reading anew the signs of the times through which new meanings

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.1.

⁴⁹ *Cf. Ibid.*, 16.2. "After the New Testament, there will be no other, nor can any sacrament of the new Law be eliminated, for this is an Eternal Testament. These times follow one another, and there are many correspondences between them, and they are like the germination of a seed out of a seed, of a tree out of a seed, and of a seed out of a tree."

of the once-for-all revelation are uncovered in such a way that they do not contradict or add to the original deposit but merely flesh out more fully the meaning already given and known. In this way history itself and the historicity of events within the life of the Church and the world actually have a significance for the growth in the Church's wisdom and understanding of the mysteries of the faith, which is part and parcel of saying that the development of doctrine is in some way affected by the contingencies of history. Furthermore, while the objective content of revelation may be closed at the death of the last apostle, its meaning continues to advance not only through the channels of theology proper but also through the contemplative dimension of wisdom and its reading of historical events in light of manifold theories of Scripture. Along this vein, Joseph Ratzinger makes the observation that "Consequently, we are able to interpret many things which the Fathers could not have known because for them these things lay in the dark future while for us they are accessible as past history."⁵⁰

Through his unique theology of history, Bonaventure is capable of responding to the difficulties posed by Joachim and his followers in two important ways: (1) Francis of Assisi and his radical life in the Spirit can rightly be understood as genuinely novel in history and yet part and parcel of the revelation given once and for all in Jesus Christ and (2) the eschatological age of the Spirit can be integrated into the revelation and order of the New Covenant, thereby preventing schism with the Roman Catholic Church. Each of these resolutions stem from Bonaventure's reconceived theology of history wherein the "new" manner of life introduced by Francis and the mendicants, which was understood by the Joachimites to be a new age of the Spirit, is in reality simply a deeper unfolding of the infinite meanings present within the Christian mystery found in the Scriptures. What Francis and other revolutionary mystics like him have done, in other words, is to have received the gift of wisdom from the Spirit and read so deeply of the Scriptures as to have uncovered their deeper meaning in light of the historical moment. In so doing they have not moved beyond the juridical and sacramental structure of the Church, but they have instead fulfilled it in some way through having entered more deeply into the inexhaustible mystery of Jesus Christ through whom all things are created, restored, and revealed.

Conclusion

For Bonaventure the Church's growth in wisdom typified by the mystic-contemplative who can read more deeply of the manifold

⁵⁰ Ratzinger, *Theology of History*, p. 9.

theories of the Scriptures in light of their historical moment forms the basis of a theory of doctrinal development. This is by no means a fully fleshed out theory, nor is it necessarily incompatible with the logical theory to which Bonaventure nods his head in Book 3 Distinction 25 Article 1 Question 1 of his commentary of Lombard's *Sentences*. Despite its obvious weakness of lacking a more systematic and thorough presentation, Bonaventure's theory of doctrinal development as found in his *Hexaemeron* has a number of strengths, which can be best appreciated when understood in light of the logical and theological theories of development mentioned above.

When placed side by side with Marin-Sola's logical theory of development, Bonaventure's theory as presented in his *Hexaemeron* bears a certain resemblance to Marin-Sola's understanding of the Christian's affective-experiential sense of the faith. Marin-Sola acknowledges that it often happens that doctrinal development proceeds by way of the sense of the faithful and that this alone is enough of a source of inspiration and data for the Magisterium to be motivated to define some aspect of doctrine. Furthermore, it happens sometimes that speculative theology cannot demonstrate with necessary reasoning but only with mere probability that some intuitive insight is in fact true. Nonetheless, speculative theology and the *via affectiva* bear a close relationship upon one another and ought not to be considered, strictly speaking, as two separate modes of attaining doctrinal insight since they are connected to one another in the Christian and bear upon the same deposit. Bonaventure's theory, as I see it, sees eye to eye with Marin-Sola on each and every one of these points. While Marin-Sola's theory is vastly more systematic and spelled out in much finer detail, I believe that Bonaventure's theory can account for the historicity of the sense of the Church in a particular time and place, which is actually a necessary prerequisite for the deeper penetration into the mysteries of the faith, in a way that Marin-Sola's theory cannot. A further difference between the two is that Bonaventure places a much greater emphasis on the wisdom of the few contemplatives versus the sense of the faith of the many for Marin-Sola. While Bonaventure certainly acknowledges that the Church herself has a contemplative nature, it seems as if he concentrates this role on the few who are gifted by the Spirit with ecstatic contemplation. A final difference between Marin-Sola and Bonaventure is that for Marin-Sola theology is a sacred metaphysics more so in the line of Thomistic theology, whereas Bonaventure's theology is both speculative and symbolic. For Bonaventure, theology proper has its own integrity but it is ordered to the higher theology of mysticism, which for Marin-Sola lacks a place and true significance outside of affective intuitions of this or that dogma-to-be.

When comparing Bonaventure's theory of doctrinal development with the theological theory of de Lubac and Congar, there can readily be seen obvious points of contact. De Lubac's "the Whole of Dogma" and Congar's "design of Revelation" bear a close resemblance to the manner in which Bonaventure thinks about the spiritual senses, sacramental figures, and – most especially – the multiform theories of the Scriptures. Each of these concepts seeks in one way or another to point to the infinite mystery of God whose revelation has a dynamic quality that continues to speak to us today while nevertheless remaining in continuity with what has always been believed and practised since the birth of the Church. Congar and Bonaventure's thought are especially akin to one another insofar as each factors in the historicity of the Church's sojourn in the formation and development of doctrine and Scriptural interpretation. Nonetheless, there remain important discontinuities between Congar and de Lubac's thought in that Bonaventure places a much heavier emphasis on the role of the wisdom of the contemplative who can penetrate the hidden meanings of Scripture whereas for both Congar and de Lubac this advancement in understanding is much more the result of both the Magisterium and the faithful in their own unique ways along with the liturgy, Fathers and Doctors of the Church, and the theologians.

Bonaventure's theology of history and doctrinal development has lasting significance because of his understanding of a participatory notion of history that is providentially ordered and guided by God. In this way past, present, and future are intimately related to one another as each revealing and pointing toward Christ who is not only the Alpha and Omega of history but also the Center. History, then, is not merely the setting in which salvation history occurs but it is charged with a divine meaning and purpose, further demonstrating the almighty wisdom and sovereignty of the God who is Lord of all. Finally, in an age when progressive secular mythologies of inevitable prosperity and triumph abound so long as we the people give ourselves over to the "dogmas" of the day, Bonaventure presents the Church who sojourns through this historical moment with an understanding of history that reorients the future to the past where its deeper meaning lies, awaiting to be uncovered so as to prepare a way forward that leads to the Lord of life.

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