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Book Review: The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure

Term Paper
Introduction

Father Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) wrote the book *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*. It was originally published in German in 1959, and then later published in English in 1971. The book is a scholarly study of Saint Bonaventure’s “historico-theological” perspective on the past, the present, and the future.

The book is divided into four chapters. Chapter I covers the general structure and format of Bonaventure’s view of history. Chapter II explores Bonaventure’s perspective on revelation. Chapter III describes the historical setting of the theology of history vis-à-vis Bonaventure’s historico-theological perspective. Chapter IV analyzes the relationship and influence of Aristotlianism on Bonaventure’s theology of history.

Book Review of Chapter I

Prior to Bonaventure, the theological perspective of history had divided history into different ages. In Bonaventure’s day, there were three primary ways to divide history into these different ages. They are as follows:

1. St. Augustine of Hippo’s six/seven ages, corresponding to the seven days of creation:
   1. Adam to Noah
   2. Noah to Abraham
   3. Abraham to David
   4. David to the Babylon Captivity (transmigration)
   5. The transmigration to Christ

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2 Ibid., (see title/copyright page, i.e., the page immediately preceding page v, if it had a page number it would be page iv).
3 Ibid., 10.
4 Ibid., 11.
5 Ibid., 11.
6 Ibid., 11–12.
(6) Christ to the end of the world
(7) Eternity.\(^7\)

(II) Five ages based on the parable in the gospel of Matthew of the landowner hiring workers for his vineyard (Mat. 20:1-16).\(^8\) The different groups of workers were hired at (1) about 6:00 a.m., (2) 9:00 a.m., (3) noon, (4) 3:00 p.m., and (5) 5:00 p.m. Based on those five divisions, history was then divided into the following five epochs:
(1) Adam
(2) Noah
(3) Abraham
(4) Moses
(5) Christ.\(^9\)

(III) The division of time into three ages, based on the prevailing law of that particular age:
(1) the age of “the law of nature”
(2) the age of “the law of Scripture”
(3) the age of “the law of Grace.”\(^10\)

Ratzinger identifies these three ways of dividing history with School-theology.\(^11\) Ratzinger also highlights another alternative view of history that had been presented by Joachim of Fiore. One of the most important aspects of Joachim’s view is that the New Testament corresponds to the Old Testament.\(^12\) In fact, there is a “double relation” between the Old Testament and the New Testament. “The first is a dynamic relation whereby one Testament comes from the other and emerges out of the other. The second is a more static relation in which one Testament stands over against the other.”\(^13\) This view of the relationship between the two Testaments sets the stage for Bonaventure’s development of his double-seven-schema.

\(^7\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 17.
\(^8\) All Biblical references in this paper are taken from the *New American Bible Revised Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).
\(^10\) Ibid., 11.
\(^11\) Ibid., 11.
\(^12\) Ibid., 12.
\(^13\) Ibid., 12.
Bonaventure’s Double-Seven-Schema

One of the primary ways Bonaventure conceptualizes history is through the division of history into two sets of seven ages. This double-seven-schema is similar to Augustine’s schema in that it is based on the number seven, corresponding to the seven days of creation. In one sense it is a triple-seven-schema, being comprised of:

Schema #1: the seven days of creation,

Schema #2: the era of the Old Testament, divided into seven ages, and

Schema #3: the era of the New Testament, divided into seven ages.

Ratzinger presents Bonaventure’s double-seven-schema in detail in what looks like a helpful outline. Unfortunately the table is in Latin, which makes it difficult for those unfamiliar with the Latin language to understand exactly Bonaventure’s double-seven-schema. I have attempted to reproduce, to some extent, an outline of Ratzinger’s double-seven-schema table, which I have included in the Appendix.14 It appears that the outline of Bonaventure’s double-seven-schema is as follows:

(I) Seven days of creation
   (1) 1st day: Creation of light;
   (2) 2nd day: Separation of the waters;
   (3) 3rd day: Water moved to reveal dry land, and the beginning of earthly vegetation;
   (4) 4th day: Creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars;
   (5) 5th day: Creation of creatures in the oceans and birds in the sky;
   (6) 6th day: Creation of man;
   (7) 7th day: God rested on the seventh day.

(II) First Schema (Old Testament era)
   (1) 1st age: Adam to Noah (formation of man, trial-trespass-exposure-expulsion);

14 See Table 1; In addition, please note that I am not familiar with the Latin language, and so my understanding and reproduction of the outline of Bonaventure’s double-seven-schema is based in part on Google Translate and other Internet resources, along with the drawing of inferences.
THEOLOGY OF HISTORY IN ST. BONAVENTURE

(2) 2nd age: Noah to Abraham (cleansing and purification for the crimes of mankind, division of languages);
(3) 3rd age: Abraham to Moses (age of the chosen nation, and the patriarchs);
(4) 4th age: Moses to Samuel (rendering of the law);
(5) 5th age: Samuel to Hezekiah (royal honor);
(6) 6th age: Hezekiah to Zorobabel (prophetic voice, rededication of the temple);
(7) 7th age: Zorobabel to Christ (middle peace).

(III) Second Schema (New Testament era)
(1) 1st age: Christ to Pope St. Clement I (time of grace);
(2) 2nd age: Pope St. Clement I to Pope St. Sylvester I (baptism of blood);
(3) 3rd age: Pope St. Sylvester I to Pope St. Leo I (Catholic norms);
(4) 4th age: Pope St. Leo I to Pope St. Gregory I (law, justice);
(5) 5th age: Pope St. Gregory I to Pope Adrian I (the high chair);
(6) 6th age: Pope Adrian I to ? (clarity);
(7) 7th age: the final peace.

Bonaventure has a beautiful analogy that connects the three schema together: The seven days of creation are the seeds, the Old Testament ages are the trees, and the New Testament ages are the fruits. For example, the second day of creation (the separation of water between the sky and the earth) is the “seed,” and then the second age of the Old Testament (Noah to Abraham, the cleansing and purifying of the earth) is the “tree,” and then the second age of the New Testament (Pope St. Clement I to Pope St. Sylvester I, the baptism of blood) is the “fruit.”

One aspect of Bonaventure’s “theology of history” is concerned with dividing up history into different distinct ages, and finding parallels between the era of the Old Testament and the Christian era. Bonaventure’s primary goal is to define and explain his present age and develop an understanding of the future age to come. To that end, Bonaventure focuses on the sixth and seventh ages. Bonaventure’s explanation of the seventh age helps determine and inform his view of the sixth age.
Bonaventure envisions the seventh age as a time of holy peace.\textsuperscript{15} The seventh age is within history and prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{16} In the seventh age, the New Jerusalem will come down from heaven, in the form of the Church militant.\textsuperscript{17} This Church militant will be a transformed Church militant; that is, a Church militant that resembles as closely as earthly possible the Church triumphant.\textsuperscript{18} It will be a new order. This new order will be contemplative, and Franciscan in nature.

\textbf{The Sixth and Seventh Ages}

Bonaventure finds clues about history and the future of the sixth age in the Passion of Jesus Christ. For Bonaventure, the Passion of Jesus entailed two periods of light that alternated with two periods of darkness (it is not clear exactly how Bonaventure deduced two periods of light and two periods of darkness occurring during the Passion of Jesus).\textsuperscript{19} To Bonaventure, the Mystical Body of Jesus (the Church) was therefore also destined to go through a period of light, followed by a period of darkness, followed by a period of light, and then followed by a period of darkness.\textsuperscript{20} This last period of darkness is to be followed by the glorious seventh age.\textsuperscript{21} The framework of periods of alternating light and darkness is also reflected in the Old Testament as well. In the time of time of the Church, Bonaventure sees the first period of light as corresponding with Charlemagne (who himself parallels Ezechias or Ozias of the Old Testament). Bonaventure sees the first period of tribulation as corresponding with Henry IV of

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 28.
England and Frederick I of Prussia (and they parallel Manasses of the Old Testament). In Bonaventure’s framework, the next period of light (which will parallel Josias of the Old Testament), followed by a time of darkness (which will parallel the Babylonian Exile of the Old Testament), is “imminent” but has likely not yet begun.22

In his quest to understand the sixth age, Bonaventure also finds clues in the book of Revelation. Series of seven are prominent in the book of Revelation. For example, there are seven seals (Rev. 5:1), seven angels holding seven trumpets (Rev. 8:2), seven angels holding seven bowels with seven plagues (Rev. 15:1–16:1), and seven letters to seven churches (Rev. 1:11–3:22). For Bonaventure, these series of seven denote a “seven-staged course of church history”23 (i.e., New Testament history). Furthermore, the sixth figure in the series of seven can offer insight into the present sixth age (including shedding light on what is still to come in the sixth age).24 Especially important for Bonaventure are the events surrounding the breaking of the sixth seal, and in particular the angel who holds “the seal of the living God” (Rev. 7:2).

The hero in Bonaventure’s conception of history is St. Francis of Assisi. Bonaventure sees Francis in two ways: (1) as a type of John the Baptist, and (2) as the angel holding “the seal of the living God” depicted in the book of Revelation. The connection with John the Baptist begins with Francis calling himself “the ‘Herald of a great King.’ ” This is similar to John the Baptist, who was identified as the “voice of one crying out in the desert” (Matt. 3:1-3; Mrk. 1:2-4; Lk. 3:2-6; Jhn. 1:19-23), that is, “the Herald of the Kingdom of God.”25 Since John the

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23 Ibid., 26.
24 Ibid., 26.
25 Ibid., 32.
The Baptist was identified with Elijah of the Old Testament (e.g., Matt. 11:7-15; see also Mal. 3:23), the connection between Francis and John the Baptist also leads to the identification of Francis with Elijah. In the book of Revelation, two witnesses appear after the sixth trumpet is blown but before the seventh trumpet is sounded (Rev. 11:3). The two witnesses prophesy wearing sackcloth (Rev. 11:3). Joachim of Fiore’s interpretation of this chapter of Revelation is that these two witnesses will be identified with the two Old Testament figures Elijah and Enoch (see Gen. 5:18-24). Bonaventure apparently adopts this interpretation, and through it recognizes Francis (through the identification of Francis with Elijah) as the fulfillment of this prophecy in Revelation and as playing an important role in ushering in the seventh age. St. Dominic, who also lived during the time of St. Francis, was seen as the second witness.

Bonaventure also saw Francis as the fulfillment of the prophesy about the angel holding “the seal of the living God” (Rev. 7:2). It is written in the book of Ezekiel that “a man dressed in linen” would “mark an X” on those in Jerusalem that were to be spared (Ez. 9:2-6). From antiquity this “man in linen” had been connected with the angel who holds the seal of God in the book of Revelation (Rev. 7:2). Moreover, in Ezekiel the “X” that was used to mark those who would be saved refers to “the Hebrew letter taw”, which is related to the “tau-sign ‘T’ ” that Francis used to sign his letters. In addition, Francis identified himself with the man dressed in

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27 Ibid., 33.
28 Ibid., 33.
29 Ibid., 33.
30 Ibid., 33.
31 Ibid., 35.
32 NABRE, fn. to Ez. 9:4.
Most importantly, Bonaventure saw the Stigmata that Francis received as “the seal of the living God” referred to in the biblical passage.35

**Novus Ordo.** Joachim of Fiore prophesied that “a new religious social order” would be established in the “the final age” before the Second Coming.36 This *novus ordo* was to have a contemplative nature, and would fully live out the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1–7:29).37 Joachim taught that there would first be two orders, and that these two orders would pave the way in the sixth age for the final new religious social order in the seventh age.38 After Joachim’s time, some saw the Franciscans and the Dominicans as the two orders fulfilling Joachim’s prophesy.39 The Spiritualists, which were a group within the Franciscan order, saw the current Franciscan order (i.e., the Order of Friars Minor) itself, and especially their branch of the order, as the final order of the last age.40 Bonaventure rejected this Spiritualist idea, and taught that the final order was still to come.41 However, Bonaventure did teach that this final order of the seventh age will trace its beginning to Francis, and it will be Franciscan in nature, that is, it will be an “Order of Francis.”42 Although the order that Francis founded is separate from this final order, Francis himself is a member of the new final order, and his life exemplifies the “general form of life” that will be lived in the future by those within the *novus ordo*.43

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35 Ibid., 35, 94.
36 Ibid., 39.
37 Ibid., 39–40.
38 Ibid., 40–42.
39 Ibid., 40–41.
40 Ibid., 46.
41 Ibid., 46, 49–50.
42 Ibid., 45, 49–50.
43 Ibid., 49–50, 93.
Ratzinger’s second chapter is devoted to revelation. Ratzinger equates the contemplative nature of the seventh age, the “ecclesia contemplativa,” with “revelatio” (revelation).\textsuperscript{44} For Bonaventure, the term “revelation” not only encompasses the modern theological understanding of the term (e.g., referring to doctrinal teachings revealed by God), but further includes “individual revelations” that could also be described as inspirations.\textsuperscript{45} For Bonaventure, the term “revelation” has several different meanings: (1) “the unveiling of the future”, (2) “the hidden ‘mystical’ meaning of Scripture”, and (3) the “imageless unveiling of the divine reality which takes place in the mystical ascent.”\textsuperscript{46}

Another way of conceptualizing revelatio is through the explanation of the different levels of wisdom. Bonaventure describes four ascending degrees of wisdom: (1) sapientia uniformis (uniform wisdom), (2) sapientia multiformis (manifold wisdom), (3) sapientia omniformis (all-form wisdom), and (4) sapientia nulliformis (formless wisdom).\textsuperscript{47} Uniform wisdom refers to “basic truths” and “basic principles.”\textsuperscript{48} This wisdom is within the province of philosophy, and an example of it is the wisdom of Moses.\textsuperscript{49} Manifold wisdom refers to wisdom from divine revelation.\textsuperscript{50} This type of wisdom might be a type of “revelation,” and it refers to a spiritual, mystical understanding of Scripture.\textsuperscript{51} All-form wisdom is the recognition of the traces

\textsuperscript{44} Ratzinger, \textit{Theology of History in St. Bonaventure}, 56–58.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 57–58, 64.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 58–59.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 59–61, 86.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 60.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 60–61.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 62–63, 65.
of God within and throughout creation.\textsuperscript{52} An example of this type of wisdom is the wisdom of Solomon.\textsuperscript{53} Formless wisdom is where the individual experiences God on a “super-intellectual” level, that is, on a level that goes beyond our intellect and is “free of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{54} Ratzinger observed that “the primitive Franciscan ideal”, which presumably is equivalent with the type of contemplation anticipated in the seventh age, “would seem to involve almost necessarily a certain anti-intellectual element.”\textsuperscript{55} However, it might be better described as meta-intellectual, rather than anti-intellectual. Just as metaphysics goes beyond and above physics, it appears that in a somewhat similar sort of way Bonaventure’s ideal state of contemplation goes beyond and above the normal intellectual state (rather than being directly opposed to intellectualism).

There seems to be a lack of clarity with regard to Bonaventure’s expectation of the type of revelation/wisdom that will characterize the seventh age. As stated above, Bonaventure seems to equate the contemplative nature of the seventh age with his understanding of “revelation.” Ratzinger observed that Bonaventure taught that “[t]he revelatio of the final age leads beyond the sapientia multiformis of the present time. It tends more in the direction of the sapientia nulliformis.”\textsuperscript{56} Ratzinger also noted Bonaventure taught that “the final age clearly must be conceived in terms of this form of wisdom”, with that “form of wisdom” meaning the “formless wisdom.”\textsuperscript{57} But, Ratzinger also notes that at least some type of sapientia multiformis falls within the umbrella of revelatio (and therefore, within the umbrella of the “contemplation” of the

\textsuperscript{52} Ratzinger, \textit{Theology of History in St. Bonaventure}, 61.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 61.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 61, 90.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 157.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 86–87.
seventh age). Furthermore, Ratzinger identifies *sapientia omniformis* as “revelation” as well. On the one hand the seventh age will be characterized by *sapientia nulliformis*, and on the other hand it might be characterized by both *sapientia nulliformis* and *sapientia multiformis* (and perhaps also *sapientia omniformis*). It appears that Bonaventure’s conceptualization of *revelatio*, and therefore his conceptualization of the *ecclesia contemplative*, is not clearly defined and capable of being plainly demarcated.

**Book Review of Chapter III**

In the third chapter Ratzinger recounts and analyzes prior theologians and theories that influenced Bonaventure’s theology of history. He begins with abbot Rupert of Deutz, who was followed by Honorius of Autun and then Anselm of Havelberg. Next came the abbot Joachim of Fiore, whose influence on Bonaventure was substantial. Joachim developed the idea that Christ is the “the center and turning-point of history.” This is in contrast to the widely held view that Christ was the “beginning of the end”, where Christ was ushering in the final age. Although Bonaventure rejects Joachim’s view that the New Testament was to be superseded and that the time of Christ was limited to the second of three ages, Bonaventure did accept Joachim’s idea of Christ as the center of time. Aquinas rejected Joachim’s notion that

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59 Ibid., 84–85
60 Ibid., 97.
61 Ibid., 102.
62 Ibid., 103.
63 Ibid., 104–105.
64 Ibid., 106.
65 Ibid., 106–107.
66 Ibid., 23, 105.
67 Ibid., 110.
the age of the New Testament parallels the age of the Old Testament. \(^{68}\) Aquinas took the stance that Christ completely fulfilled the Old Testament; the Old Testament points only to Christ and not also to future events. \(^{69}\) Bonaventure differs from Aquinas in that he adopts Joachim’s idea that the New Testament events parallel the Old Testament events, but agrees with Aquinas’s Christocentric position. \(^{70}\) This central thesis of Bonaventure is made explicitly clear when Ratzinger flushes out the fundamental difference between Augustine and Bonaventure: For Augustine and his schema, “Christ is the end of the ages”, whereas for Bonaventure and his schema, “Christ is the center of the ages.” \(^{71}\)

Although Ratzinger titles the chapter as “The Historical Setting of Bonaventure’s Theology of History” and identifies a subsection as “The Pre-Bonaventurian Development of the Medieval Theology of History,” the chapter seems to only really describe those theologians and theories that set the stage for Bonaventure; the chapter is primarily limited to those theologians whose influence can be seen in Bonaventure’s work (with the exceptions being Augustine and Aquinas). Aside from some general remarks, the mainstream theology of history at the time of Bonaventure (if there was a mainstream) is not clearly or fully explained in the book – at least, it is not presented in its own section.

However, to some extent the mainstream view is admittedly interspersed throughout the book to provide a brief contrast to Bonaventure’s theology of history. The mainstream view that is presented appears to be essentially limited to: (1) Christ was viewed as ushering in the final

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\(^{68}\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 116, 118.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 116–117.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 117–118.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 17 (Chapter I).
age, and (2) history was not viewed as a topic capable of being understood. For example, in comparing the scriptural exegesis of Bonaventure with that of the Church Fathers and Scholastics, Ratzinger does note that Bonaventure “emphasize[d] the historical character of the” scriptures, whereas the Church Fathers and Scholastics was “more clearly directed to the unchangeable and the enduring.”\(^{72}\) In addition, Ratzinger does helpfully point out that at the time of Bonaventure, “the predominant impression remained that history lay outside the limits of that which is properly intelligible and thus below the proper area of concern for theology,” which is a view can be traced back to Augustine of Hippo.\(^ {73}\) Perhaps this statement alone is a succinct and sufficient enough explanation of the “mainstream” approach to the theology of history during the time of Bonaventure.

**Book Review of Chapter IV**

Scholars have seen Bonaventure as being at odds with Aristotle.\(^ {74}\) Ratzinger conducts an in-depth analysis of the relationship between Bonaventure and Aristotelianism, and shows the confrontation between Bonaventure and Aristotelianism to be nuanced and complicated. Ratzinger finds that the thrust of Bonaventure’s objection was based in Bonaventure’s theology of history.\(^ {75}\) Bonaventure rejects Aristotle’s view that the world is eternal.\(^ {76}\) Bonaventure also takes issue with the idea of philosophy being separate from Christian theology.\(^ {77}\)

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\(^{72}\) Ratzinger, *Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, 7 (Chapter I).

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 75–76 (Chapter II).

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 121–123.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 119.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 134.

\(^{77}\) Ibid., 130, 132.
Aristotle held that the world was eternal. For Aquinas the eternity of the world was possible, and he did not find this belief incompatible with Christian theology. Both Aristotle and Aquinas held that belief in the eternity of the world does not violate the rule that there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. This is because, in their view, there can be an infinite series on the level of “accidental” (e.g., on the temporal level), but there cannot be an infinite series on the level of *ordo causalitatis*. In other words, there could be an infinite number of cars on a train, but there has to be a higher ultimate cause for the cars and train being present/created in the first place. Although at the temporal level there could possibly be an infinite series, there still must be a prime unmoved mover that is the ultimate cause of being (God). Bonaventure disagrees. In Bonaventure’s view the world was created at a definite point; in other words, the world was created in time. Bonaventure holds that there cannot be an infinite series among the temporal order – there must be a specific beginning. This is part of Bonaventure’s overall conception of history and the future. Bonaventure envisions history as beginning with God, with mankind and the world going and coming out from God (egress), which then leads to Christ (the center), and then after Christ, mankind and the world go back to God (regress). This ‘God⇒egress⇒Christ⇒regress⇒God’ formula folds into Bonaventure’s concept of time as

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79 Ibid., 139.  
80 Ibid., 139.  
81 Ibid., 139; Ratzinger provides a helpful diagram of the Aristotle/Aquinas view, which I have reproduced and included in the Appendix (see figure 1).  
82 Ibid., 121.  
83 Ibid., 141.  
84 Ibid., 141; Bonaventure’s view is presented by Ratzinger in a helpful diagram, which I have reproduced and included in the Appendix (see figure 2).
circular but not infinite.\textsuperscript{85} It is circular because time starts with God and ends with God, but it is not infinite because there is a definite beginning and a definite end.\textsuperscript{86} By contrast, Aquinas’s view leads one to see history as being in the “realm of chance”, it is a series of unordered accidental causes and therefore not properly intelligible on a deep level.\textsuperscript{87} Also, it appears that Aquinas’s concept of time could be described as linear.

Bonaventure held that philosophy should not be treated as its own independent field of study, separate and unhinged from theology.\textsuperscript{88} This is markedly different from the approach of Aquinas, for whom the separation of philosophy from theology was possible.\textsuperscript{89} For Bonaventure, philosophy should be informed by and inseparably related to Christian theology.\textsuperscript{90}

Bonaventure’s stance harkens back to his view of wisdom vis-à-vis his view of “revelation.” Bonaventure taught that sapientia omniformis (the wisdom that recognized traces of God within and throughout creation) was subject to becoming a type of “folly” when those who engaged in studying it (e.g., philosophers) failed to see their findings in light of God; that is, failed to recognize the spiritual aspect of their findings and trace those findings back to God.\textsuperscript{91} Even sapientia multiformis (wisdom from divine revelation) can also become a type of folly where the letter of Scripture is studied in the literal sense without grasping the spiritual sense.\textsuperscript{92} For Bonaventure, all knowledge and wisdom should point back to God, and those who fail to make

\textsuperscript{85} Ratzinger, \textit{Theology of History in St. Bonaventure}, 141–144.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 141–144.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 140–141.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 130–132, 151, 153–155.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 130–132.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 130–132.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 61, 84–85.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 61, 63, 77, 152.
that essential connection are missing the point. This is a particularly relevant warning for 21st century society, a society that seems to have completely divorced religion and theology from other forms of knowledge – to the extent of even assuming that science and theology stand in opposition to one another.

I think Bonaventure would have offered the following correction to modern society: Knowledge and wisdom comprise the various truths that are meant to point towards and reveal the ultimate Truth (i.e., God). When knowledge and wisdom have failed to lead one closer to God, they have failed their true purpose and become a trap. The antidote to this pitfall is to approach all knowledge and wisdom through the lens of Christian theology.

Bonaventure’s Historical Setting

The context of Bonaventure’s development of his theology of history helped shape his direction and focus. Bonaventure was the General of the Franciscan Order, and he was confronted with the challenge of how to respond to a branch within the Franciscan Order called the Spiritualists. Furthermore, Bonaventure developed his theology of history in order to determine how best to lead the Franciscans into the future.

The Spiritualists embraced the teachings of Joachim of Fiore.93 In particular, their embrace of Joachim of Fiore “involved the full identification of the actual Franciscan Order (especially its Spiritual branch) with the ordo of the final age.”94 In addition, Bonaventure had to decide how the order would operate and how it would be structured. Should the Order look

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94 Ibid., 46.
exactly as St. Francis had envisioned, adopting a very simple “eschatological form of life”?

Or, should the Order adopt and put into place “institutional structures”, even though St. Francis would have disproved of those structures? Bonaventure needed to develop a coherent understanding of the past (and hence develop a theology of history) in order to understand the present and the future.

Bonaventure rejected the Spiritualists’ position. As discussed above, he took the stance that the final age had not yet come. Although the future ordo would be Franciscan in nature, it was not the actual Franciscan Order of which he was serving as general – his current Franciscan Order was a precursor of what was to come, but not the fulfillment of the Joachmite prophesy. Bonaventure also led the Order with the realization that Francis’s ideal was not realistically attainable in his present world. This enabled him to chart a path “between the visionaries and the laxists”.

Critique

Expert Audience

This book appears to be written for a scholarly audience. In particular, it appears to be written for other experts in theology. A prior familiarity with Bonaventure and Joachim of Fiore would be helpful in understanding this book. This book was originally written as an academic paper, and I think it is standard practice to write such a paper with a doctoral-level audience in

96 Ibid., 50.
97 Ibid., 19–20.
98 Ibid., 46–51.
However, it is my opinion that this practice should be modified within the academic world. I agree that scholarly writings need not (and probably should not) be written at a popular level, and efforts to enhance the readability of an academic paper should not sacrifice the nuance and complexity of a topic, theory, or discussion. Nonetheless, I think that more of an effort should be made by academics to make their scholarly writings more understandable to the public. Specifically, I think an effort should be made by academics to make their scholarly writings understandable to someone at the graduate level, without that person having to be at the graduate level in that particular field; or at least understandable by someone with only a basic or fundamental grasp of the specific field. This would include explaining key terms and providing general background information. In this book, it would have been helpful if Ratzinger had given more of an explanation upfront of the historical setting of Bonaventure and the background of Joachim of Fiore. These are sprinkled throughout the book, but the book clearly makes the assumption that the reader is already very familiar with Bonaventure and Joachim of Fiore. I think scholarly writings, such as Ratzinger’s *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, will have more of a positive impact on our society if they are written in a more accessible manner.

**Use of Latin**

This book included quite a bit of Latin. This is not a drawback in and of itself, but unfortunately the Latin is not translated, and therefore those people not familiar with Latin are unable to read certain portions and passages of the book. This book would have been much improved if footnotes were included at the bottom of the pages providing the English translation.

99 Since the book simply follows this standard practice, this sub-critique (i.e., the section of this paper entitled “Expert Audience”) is aimed more at the scholarly writing community in general, rather than this specific book and author.
of the Latin passages. There appear to be key thoughts presented in Latin, and therefore some of these key thoughts are lost to the person who does not know Latin. For example, Ratzinger wrote:

> And when we see how everything falls together almost naturally for Bonaventure, then we can understand why he can close his schema with one statement which reveals unmistakably the hidden joy of a discoverer who has achieved such success: “Et sic patet, quomodo scriptura describit successionem temporum; et non sunt a casu et fortuna, sed mira lux est in eis et multae intelligentiae spirituales.”

Perhaps more importantly, Bonaventure’s double-seven-schema, which plays such a central role in the book, is presented entirely in Latin (except for the word “Pope”). Likewise, the schema explaining the different hierarchies (which Ratzinger observes is the next-most-important schema after the double-seven-schema) is also presented in Latin. Each of these schemas (the hierarchy schema and the double-seven schema) is presented on a single page, and it would have been very helpful if a second page had followed each schema that depicted an English translation version of the schema.

**Critical Reception (other reviewers)**

Book reviews have been penned critiquing *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*. Breck wrote a favorable review of the book, noting “Ratzinger has [] done all a great service by producing a clearly worked out map of part of the mind of a great medieval thinker.” By way of contrast, Sheets wrote a review that presented a robust critique of the book, and in particular

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101 Ibid., 21.
102 Ibid., 47.
noted that a comprehensive “theology of history” was not presented within the book. Sheets observed that “There is not a developed theology of history in [the primary Bonaventurian work relied upon by Ratzinger called the] Collationes, nor does [Ratzinger] present us with such a theology.” He goes on to state that “Bonaventure’s theology of history has still to be written. Whoever undertakes this task will find valuable source material in [Ratzinger’s] work.”

**General Critique**

Although certainly different, the spirit of both Breck’s and Sheet’s book reviews are arguably accurate. Ratzinger’s presentation of Bonaventure’s “theology of history” certainly does present a distinct way of looking at history through a religious lens. For example, Bonaventure thinks that the Bible, when read in light of past and present events, can provide insight into the future. Importantly, he also sees Christ as the center of history. However, there does seem to be a lack of depth in Bonaventure’s “theology of history” as presented by Ratzinger. I think that lack of depth is due to the fact that Bonaventure was probably not trying to develop a systematic and comprehensive theology of history. Instead, it seems that Bonaventure’s goal was simpler and more practical: to (1) understand his present era, and (2) to see in broad brush-strokes what the future probably looked like. Bonaventure realized that he needed to understand the past in order to understand the present (and the future). Bonaventure was motivated in this regard by his desire to properly direct and position the Franciscan Order.

The book does highlight and analyze the thought of Bonaventure in a way that is interesting, fruitful, and worthwhile. However, at times it is difficult to follow how certain parts

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105 Ibid., 546.
of the book fit together to explain a “theology of history.” After reading the book once, I found that the various pieces fit together much better after going through the book a second time. The dots are there, but the dots are not always clearly or explicitly connected together – which, as touched upon above, is probably partly because the book seems to be written for other experts in the field. Also, the book can, at certain times, be confusing, and the reader is required to continue on towards the end of the book before some of the ideas are clarified.

**Similarity Between Revelatio and Later Mystics.**

There is a similarity between Bonaventure’s conception of the contemplative nature of the seventh age and the description of later mystics’ spiritual experiences. In particular, Bonaventure expects the contemplative nature of the seventh age to include some iteration of *sapientia nulliformis* (formless wisdom). As described above, this formless wisdom is in a sense anti-intellectual (or, meta-intellectual), as it is on a level that goes beyond our intellect and is “free of knowledge.” A similar type of meta-intellectual experience has been described by later mystics. St. Angela of Foligno (ca. 1248-1309), ¹⁰⁶ a Third Order Franciscan, ¹⁰⁷ and St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), a Carmelite nun, ¹⁰⁸ both described revelations of a spiritual state/experience where one is not able to form thoughts in a normal way; where one’s intellect is operating on a higher, yet simpler, level that they could not quite fully explain.

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¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 19.
Angela wrote:

I saw a fullness, a brightness with which I felt myself so filled that *words fail me, nor can I find anything to compare it with*. I cannot tell you that I saw something with a bodily form, but he was as he is in heaven, namely, of such an indescribable beauty that I do not know how to describe it to you except as the Beauty and the All Good. [emphasis added]¹⁰⁹

Later on, Angela wrote:

And immediately upon presenting himself to the soul, God likewise discloses himself and expands the soul and gives it gifts and consolations which the soul has never before experienced, and which are far more profound than earlier ones. In this state, the soul is drawn out of all darkness and granted a greater awareness of God than I would have thought possible. This awareness is of such clarity, certitude, and abysmal profundity that there is no heart in the world that can ever in any way understand it or even conceive it. Even my own heart cannot think about it by itself, or ever return to it to understand or even conceive anything about it. This state occurs only when God, as a gift, elevates the soul to himself, for no heart by itself can in any way expand itself to attain it. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing that can be said about this experience, for no words can be found or invented to express or explain it; no expansion of thought or mind can possibly reach to those things, they are so far beyond everything – for there is nothing which can explain God. I repeat there is absolutely nothing which can explain God. Christ's faithful one affirmed with utmost certitude and wanted it understood that there is absolutely nothing which can explain God. [emphasis added]¹¹⁰

Angela described how:

No matter how far the understanding of the soul is able to stretch itself, that is nothing in comparison to what it experiences when it is lifted beyond itself and placed in the bosom of God. Then the soul understands, finds its delight, and rests in the divine goodness; *it cannot bring back any report of this, because it is completely beyond what the intelligence can conceive, and beyond words; but in this state the soul swims*. [emphasis added]¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 213.
¹¹¹ Ibid., 208.
St. Teresa described her revelation of a spiritual experience that she calls a “dreamy state”:

I say “dreamy state” because it only seems that the soul is asleep; for neither does it really think it is asleep nor does it feel awake. There is no need here to use any technique to suspend the mind since all the faculties are asleep in this state – and truly asleep – to the things of the world and to ourselves. As a matter of fact, during the time that the union [with God] lasts, the soul is left as though without its senses, for it has no power to think even if it wants to. In loving, if it does love, it doesn’t understand how or what it is it loves or what it would want. In sum, it is like one who in every respect has died to the world so as to live more completely in God. Thus the death is a delightful one, an uprooting from the soul of all the operations it can have while being in the body. . . . Nonetheless, its whole intellect would want to be occupied in understanding something of what is felt. And since the soul does not have the energy to attain this, it is so stunned that, even if consciousness is not completely lost, neither a hand nor a foot stirs, as we say here below when a person is in such a swoon as we think he is dead.

O secrets of God! I would never tire of trying to explain them if I thought I could in some way manage to do so; thus I will say a thousand foolish things in order that I might at times succeed and that we might give great praise to the Lord. [emphasis added] ¹¹²

Teresa goes on to observe that during this spiritual experience, “God has made this soul a fool with regard to all so as better to impress upon it true wisdom. For during the time of this union it neither sees, nor hears, nor understands, because the union is always short and seems to the soul even much shorter than it probably is” (emphasis added). ¹¹³

Both Teresa and Angela seem to be describing a spiritual state of being where one’s contemplation of God is taken beyond and above the normal intellectual state, and thus their revelations and experiences are in accord with Bonaventure’s description of formless wisdom and his expectation of what the spiritual life will be like in the seventh age. Teresa of Avila and


¹¹³ Ibid., 164.
Angela of Foligno both seem to affirm Bonaventure’s conception of the contemplative state as a valid and real level of spirituality that can be experienced in this world.
Bibliography


### Table 1. St. Bonaventure’s Double-Seven-Schema (p. 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Times</th>
<th>first schema</th>
<th>second schema</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>the light formed</td>
<td>very nature of time (Adam to Noah)</td>
<td>of grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1st day: “Let there be light...”]</td>
<td>formation of man</td>
<td>(Christ to Pope St. Clement I, ca. 99)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>trial-trespass-exposure-expulsion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>water distribution</td>
<td>cleanse his guilt (Noah to Abraham)</td>
<td>Baptism of blood</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[2nd day: “separated the water below the dome from the water above the dome...”]</td>
<td>to purify for their crime(s)</td>
<td>(Pope St. Clement I to Pope St. Sylvester I, 314-335)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>making of the ark</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>toll paid, arch</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(rainbow?/covenant?)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>the division of languages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>of grain; (fruitful earth?)</td>
<td>the chosen nation</td>
<td>Catholic norms</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>[3rd day: “Let the earth bring forth vegetation...”]</td>
<td>(Abraham to Moses)</td>
<td>(Pope St. Sylvester I to Pope St. Leo I, 440-461)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>generation of the patriarchs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>descendants in Egypt</td>
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The original (seeds) figures (trees) agreeable; enjoying favor; kind (fruit)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>light [light separation]</th>
<th>the rules (Moses to Samuel) rendering the law the prostration of the enemy (the distribution to the children?)</th>
<th>law justice (Pope St. Leo I to Pope St. Gregory I, 590-604)</th>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>[4th day: “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them mark the seasons .... God made two great lights, one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night...”]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>motivating life</td>
<td>royal honor (Samuel to Hezekiah) Goliath widening of the divine the division of ten tribes</td>
<td>the high chair (Pope St. Gregory I to Pope Adrian I, 772-795)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>[5th day: “Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky...”]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>human forms</td>
<td>prophetic voice (Hezekiah to Zorobabel) the rededication of the temple the restoration of the city a time of peace</td>
<td>clarity (of doctrine?) (Pope Adrian I to ?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>[6th day: “God created mankind ... and said to them: Be fertile and multiply...”]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>the first peace</td>
<td>the middle peace (Zorababel to Christ)</td>
<td>the final peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>[7th day: God “rested on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...”]</td>
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Figure 1. *Diagram of Aquinas’ View of Prime and Accidental Causes* (p. 140).

![Diagram of Aquinas’ View of Prime and Accidental Causes](image)

Figure 2. *Diagram of Bonaventure’s View of Time* (p. 141).

![Diagram of Bonaventure’s View of Time](image)