



The *Vir Hierarchicus* and the Goal of Theology According to St. Bonaventure

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For if we consider the intellect *in itself*, thus [theology] is properly called speculative and is perfected by a habit which is the grace of contemplation, and is called *speculative science* (*scientia speculativa*). But if we consider it as having originated to be extended *to work*, thus it is perfected by a habit that exists so that we might become good, and this is *practical* or moral science (*scientia practica sive moralis*). But if we consider it from a middle point of view, as having originated to be extended *to the affect* (*ad affectum*), so it is perfected by a middle habit between the purely speculative and the purely practical, and which is encircled by both. And this habit is called *wisdom* (*sapientia*), which simultaneously designates the cognition and affection (*cognitionem et affectum*) ... Whence, it is for the sake of contemplation, and so that we might become good; but principally, it is so that we might become good.¹

The relationship between the Seraphic Doctor's "wisdom theology,"² first articulated here in the Prologue to his *Sentences* commentary, and his view of sanctity has already been well established by scholars of the Seraphic Doctor. Indeed, just to name a few, Gregory LaNave, Ephrem Longpré, Christopher Carpenter, and Zachary Hayes, while perhaps disagreeing about some of the finer points concerning *how* these two concepts relate in the Bonaventurian corpus,³ have nonetheless all shown

¹ *I Sent*, prooem., q. 3, concl., (1,13). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Portions of this paper were revised from my dissertation; see Katherine Wrisley Shelby, *The Vir Hierarchicus: St. Bonaventure's Theology of Grace*, PhD Diss. (Boston College, 2017). I am grateful to the Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, and my co-organizers for the conference—Joshua Benson, Timothy J. Johnson, Dominic Monti, and Marie-Kolbe Zamora—for including me in this historic event and for giving me the opportunity to present this research.

² I borrow the phrase "wisdom theology" from Timothy J. Johnson, "Wisdom has built her house; she has set up her seven pillars: Roger Bacon, Franciscan Wisdom, and Conversion to the Sciences," in *The English Province of the Franciscans (1224-c.1350)*, ed. Michael Robson (Leiden, 2017), 294-315, where Johnson argues that the diverse views about theology as "wisdom" in the early Franciscan school of theology necessitates that scholars recognize "wisdom theologies" within the Franciscan theological tradition, rather than one "wisdom theology" that characterizes the whole tradition.

³ See especially Gregory LaNave, "Introduction," in *Through Holiness to Wisdom: The Nature of Theology according to St. Bonaventure* (Roma, 2005), 14-26, for a very a helpful introduction to the *status quaes-*

the inseparability of the Franciscan's notions of theological *sapientia* and *sanctitas*. For the Seraphic Doctor, sanctity is required of the theologian: in order to *do* theology well, the theologian must possess the gift of grace which unites her to the "First Principle," the Trinity, and which also thus distinguishes her from those who merely philosophize.

The purpose of this paper is to approach the Seraphic Doctor's above-cited definition of theology as a "wisdom" from the standpoint of his teachings on sanctity and doctrine of grace. More particularly, I claim that a re-examination of his teachings on the *vir hierarchicus*—or the hierarchical person, a key component within his doctrine of grace—can help us better comprehend the relationship between contemplation and praxis with respect to what he claims about the goal of theology in his *Commentary on the Sentences*. Whereas previous scholarship on this subject has, not without warrant, tended to emphasize the contemplative and speculative dimensions within Bonaventure's description of the final cause of theology,⁴ my goal in attending to his concept of the *vir hierarchicus* is to lay a path forward for respecting his claim that we do theology primarily "so that we might become good." My argument will proceed in three parts. First I briefly discuss why my approach might here be illuminative, namely, by underscoring how the Seraphic Doctor's theology of hierarchy informs his doctrine of grace in a broad way. Second, I turn to a more focused discussion of his view of sanctity in order to unpack what he means by the phrase, the *vir hierarchicus*, and third, I comment on his claim concerning the "goal" of theology these themes.

tionis surrounding the relationship between sanctity, theology, and grace in Bonaventure's thought. As LaNave's introduction well highlights, the relationship between Bonaventure's doctrine of grace and his understanding of theology as a "wisdom" has largely been treated in the context of the "Bonaventurian Question." For a select bibliography, see also especially Jacques-Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, 1964); Christopher Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness in St. Bonaventure* (New York, NY, 1999); Zachary Hayes, "Franciscan Tradition as a Wisdom Tradition," *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Franciscanism* 7 (1997): 27-40; and Ephrem Longpré, "Bonaventure," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, col. 1768-1843.

⁴ As LaNave suggests, this is in part because the contemplative vision that crowns Bonaventure's most famous work, the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, seems at odds with his claim in *The Commentary on the Sentences* that the goal of theology is primarily "practical." See LaNave, *From Holiness to Wisdom*, 190-191.





Part I: Hierarchy in Bonaventure's Doctrine of Grace

To begin, therefore, it is necessary to establish *why* it might be helpful to adopt this approach with respect to Bonaventure's "wisdom theology." First and foremost, as aforementioned,⁵ this approach is advantageous because scholarship has already well established an intimate relationship between Bonaventure's view of theological *sapientia* and his notion of *sanctitas*. What deserves further emphasis here is that within these same contexts, many scholars—Zachary Hayes, Christopher Carpenter, and Gregory LaNave included among them—have likewise also underscored the central significance of the Lesser Brother's theology of hierarchy within his portrait of sanctity as such.⁶ Simply put, grace and hierarchy walk hand in hand for the Seraphic Doctor.⁷ Throughout the length of his career as a

⁵ See above, n. 3.

⁶ See Carpenter, *Theology as the Road to Holiness*, 39-56; and LaNave, *Through Holiness to Wisdom*, 71-121. See also Hayes, "Soteriology: Cosmic and Redemptive Dimensions of the Christ-Mystery," in Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY, 2000), 58: "While the element of hierarchy is most fully developed in the later writings, particularly in the *Hexaëmeron*, it is by no means peculiar to the late period of his life. Indeed, it is an explicit factor in the very earliest literary evidence of the Bonaventurian *corpus*. The structure of hierarchical thought may well shed light on the question of Bonaventure's theology of redemption. Evidence is found in virtually all [Bonaventure's] writings, whether they are early or late, and whether they are of an academic-speculative sort or of a spiritual-mystical nature. The broader structures of his thought lend themselves readily to the use of such a model, and the implications of the model for soteriology were perceived with greater clarity with the passing of time."

⁷ For more extensive arguments to this effect, see Shelby, *The Vir Hierarchicus: St. Bonaventure's Theology of Grace*, PhD Diss. (Boston College, 2017); "Grace, Hierarchy, and the Symbol of Jacob's Ladder,"

"Frater, Magister, Minister, et Episcopus" within the Order of the Friars Minor, Bonaventure uses the concept of hierarchy as a way of describing what it is exactly that sanctifying grace achieves within the rational soul. For example, he consistently defines sanctifying grace as an *influentia*, or an inflowing, a created gift within the soul that conforms it into a similitude of the Trinity by purifying, illuminating, and perfecting it from within, even shaping it after the nine orders of angels described by Pseudo-Dionysius in *The Celestial Hierarchy*.⁸ We see these themes at work, for example, in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, the *Breviloquium*, and quite explicitly in the fourth chapter of the *Itinerarium*, the *Legenda Maior*; his *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, and the *Hexaëmeron*.⁹

Most pertinently for our present purposes, Bonaventure's prologue to the *Legenda Maior* explains these themes in light of St. Francis: there, the Seraphic Doctor begins his hagiographical text by claiming that "the grace of God our Savior has appeared in these last days in his servant Francis," whom he then refers to as the *vir hierarchicus*, the "hierarchical man" (*vir hierarchicus*) who has been "overcome with the gifts of heavenly grace," "magnified by the merit of unconquerable virtue," and who was "totally ignited by a Seraphic fire."¹⁰ To fully understand Bonaventure's doctrine of grace and teachings on sanctity, scholars must arrive at a clearer understanding of this claim: what, exactly, does he mean by referring to Francis as the *vir hierarchicus*, and what does he mean by claiming that grace "hierarchizes" the soul, as he writes in the fourth chapter of the *Itinerarium*?¹¹ If

in *Ordo et Sanctitas: The Franciscan Spiritual Journey in Theology and Hagiography*, ed. Michael Cusato, Steven McMichael, and Timothy J. Johnson (Leiden, 2017), 207-228; and "Part V: On the Grace of the Holy Spirit," in *Bonaventure Revisited: Companion to the Breviloquium*, eds. Dominic Monti and Katherine Wisley Shelby (St. Bonaventure, NY, 2017), 215-244.

⁸ Shelby, *The Vir Hierarchicus*, esp. "Part II: Bonaventure's Doctrine of Grace," 151-252.

⁹ See esp. *II Sent*, d. 26, a. 1, q. 2, resp. (2, 636), where Bonaventure first defines sanctifying grace as an "*influentia*" that assimilates the soul to the "First Principle," the Trinity. Bonaventure will construct all his subsequent treatments of sanctifying grace from this definition. See also *Brev*, 5 (5, 252-264), where Bonaventure indeed presents a shortened version of his account of sanctifying grace from his *Sentences* commentary while also claiming that grace causes the soul to become a "similitude" of the Trinity by purifying, illuminating, and perfecting it; see also my discussion of this text in "Part V: The Grace of the Holy Spirit," in *Bonaventure Revisited*, 207-228. In *Itin*, 4.4 (5, 307), the Seraphic Doctor will explicitly claim that grace "hierarchizes" the soul: "... efficitur spiritus noster *hierarchicus*, scilicet purgatus, illuminatus et perfectus." In the *Leg maj*, prol. 1 (8, 504), Bonaventure will then refer to Francis himself as a "hierarchical man" (*vir hierarchicus*). This association between grace and hierarchy is also explicit in Bonaventure's discussion of grace in *De don Spir*, 1.12 (5, 460). For a discussion of how Bonaventure's doctrine of grace enjoys an inner harmony across all these texts with respect to this association between grace and hierarchy, see again Shelby, *The Vir Hierarchicus*, esp. "Part II: Bonaventure's Doctrine of Grace," 151-252.

¹⁰ *Leg maj*, prol. 1 (5, 460).

¹¹ See again *Itin*, 4.4 (5, 307).



theological *sapientia* and *sanctitas* are intimately related in Bonaventure's theology, attention to these questions might here prove illuminative; that is, if holiness is required of the theologian, and the concept of hierarchy characterizes the Seraphic Doctor's doctrine of grace and concomitant view of sanctity, then a re-examination of his teachings regarding the *vir hierarchicus* might tell us something about the task of the theologian who is informed by grace. It is to these questions that I thus now turn.

Part II: The Shape of Sanctity in Bonaventure's Theology of Grace

What, then, does the Seraphic Doctor mean by referring to Francis as the *vir hierarchicus*? Approaching this question requires first briefly stepping back to the figure known as "the last of the great Victorines," Thomas Gallus, who died in 1246 and who wrote in the early half of the thirteenth century. This understudied Victorine is credited for being the architect behind an interpretive tradition that read the Dionysian corpus in an affective key: namely, rather than relegating the soul's mystical union with God to a realm of apophatic darkness, this medieval school of thought read the Areopagite in a way that posited love *above* knowledge in its account of contemplative union.¹² In addition to being recognized as the founder of this tradition, Gallus can also be commended for putting forward an angelic anthropology: for this Victorine, the soul itself can be shaped after the nine orders in Dionysius's *Celestial Hierarchy*, with the "Seraphic Order" in the soul representing the affective union with God that drives his reading of the Dionysian corpus.¹³ As Boyd Taylor Coolman has convincingly argued of Gallusian thought, this affective union is not some sort of *stopping* point in the soul's quest for God, but rather must be regarded as a kind of *fulcrum* around which his angelic anthropology revolves. Indeed, once the soul has "ascended" through the nine orders of angels to this affective union, Gallus holds that the illuminations received by the soul at the level of the Seraph then "descend" throughout the rest of the soul, as well, so that, as Coolman observes of Gallus's angelic anthropology, "the ascending and descending valences in the hierarchized soul ultimately generate a perpetual 'circulation' within it too."¹⁴

These observations are crucial for understanding

¹² For a concise introduction to this concept in Gallus's thought, see especially Boyd Taylor Coolman, "The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition," *Modern Theology* 24, no. 4 (2008): 615-632. For a lengthier introduction to Gallus, including his biography, his affective Dionysianism, his angelic anthropology, and associated bibliography, see especially Coolman, *Love, Knowledge, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus* (Oxford, 2017).

¹³ See Coolman, "The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition," 615-632, and *Love, Knowledge, and Ecstasy in the Theology of Thomas Gallus*.

¹⁴ Coolman, "The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition," 627.

Bonaventure's own notion of the *vir hierarchicus*, since he adopts Gallus's angelic anthropology almost verbatim in both the *Itinerarium* and the *Hexaëmeron* when describing how sanctifying grace "hierarchizes" the soul in order to conform it to God.¹⁵ In the latter text, for example, he writes that "the whole universe" can be described in the soul that has been sanctified through grace, which can be "likened to Jerusalem through the disposition of the hierarchical levels. But these are disposed in the soul in a threefold way: according to an ascent (*ascensum*), according to a descent (*descensum*), and according to a return into the divine (*regressum in divina*). And then the soul sees *angels of God ascending and descending on a ladder*, as Jacob saw in his mind."¹⁶ The Seraphic Doctor in the *Hexaëmeron* proceeds, on one hand, to attribute this claim to Gallus himself, while also, on the other hand, providing his own comprehensive and unique account of what the "ascending," "descending," and "returning" valences within the hierarchized soul look like.¹⁷

While much more could be said with respect to Bonaventure's use of Gallus's angelic anthropology within his teachings on grace, I raise this comparison here because attending to Bonaventure's notion of the *vir hierarchicus* as he re-adapts it from Gallus in the *Hexaëmeron* will serve the purpose of illuminating for us the "shape" of sanctity in the Franciscan theologian's thought. Following Gallus and his "affective" Dionysianism, Bonaventure's subsequent description of the hierarchized soul's "ascent" in the *Hexaëmeron* is not surprising: through grace, Bonaventure narrates in *Hex. 22* how the soul "ascends" to a Seraphic Union through which it will be possible for the soul to say, along with the author of the *Song of Songs*, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!"¹⁸ It is his ensuing description of the *descending* valence in the twenty-second collation of the

¹⁵ Strikingly, in *Itin.* 4.4 (5, 307), Bonaventure expands his claim that grace "hierarchizes" the soul by noting nine distinct "orders" within the soul that correspond with the nine orders of the Angelic hierarchy. He names the function of these orders as "*nuntiatio, dictatio, ductio, ordinatio, roboratio, imperatio, susceptio, revelatio,*" and "*unctio,*" and then claims that these can be further divided into three categories: the first three activities pertain to human nature; the second three activities pertain to "industry;" and the final three activities pertain to grace. Bonaventure's naming of these Angelic orders within the "hierarchical" soul in *Itin.* 4.4 exactly repeats Gallus's own claim to this effect in his prologue to his commentary on the *Song of Songs*; even more strikingly, Bonaventure's naming of the functions of these nine hierarchical orders within the soul—*nuntiatio, dictatio, etc.*—also correspond with Gallus's subsequent description of the same. See Gallus, *Commentaires du Cantique des Cantiques*, ed. J. Barbet, *Textes philosophiques du Moyen Âge*, 14 (Paris, 1967), 66-67; and Coolman, "The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition," 615-632 for an explanation of these subdivisions in Gallusian thought. Bonaventure will, moreover, explicitly cite Gallus in his expanded treatment of this angelic anthropology in *Hex.* 22.24 (5, 441).

¹⁶ *Hex.* 22.24 (5, 441).

¹⁷ For Bonaventure's attribution to Gallus, see again *Hex.* 22.24 (5, 441): *Abbas Vercellensis assignavit tres gradus, scilicet naturae, industriae, gratiae...* Bonaventure's extended discussion of all three valences of the hierarchized soul can be found in *Hex.* 22.34-39 (5, 441-443).

¹⁸ See *Hex.* 22.27 (5, 441).





Hexaëmeron, however, that I would like to highlight here, because it is this that holds consequences for how we regard Bonaventure's claim concerning the goal of theology in the Prologue to his *Sentences Commentary*.

In service of this aim, I have provided in *Table 1* a "map" of Bonaventure's discussion in *Hex 22* of the "descending" valence within the hierarchical soul:

Table 1 **The Descending Pattern of Grace in *Hex 22***¹⁹

The Highest Hierarchy of the Soul: The "Receiving" Powers of the Soul		The Middle Hierarchy of the Soul: The "Maintaining" Powers of the Soul		The Lowest Hierarchy of the Soul: The "Distributing" Powers of the Soul	
<i>Dionysian Order</i>	<i>Function in the Soul</i>	<i>Dionysian Order</i>	<i>Function in the Soul</i>	<i>Dionysian Order</i>	<i>Function in the Soul</i>
Seraphim	Vivacious Desire	Dominions	The Authority of the Commands	Principalities	Gives life to neighbor by illustrious example
Cherubim	Perspicacious Scrutiny	Virtues	Strength in the practice of what has been proposed by the commands	Archangels	Gives life to neighbor through the truth of speech
Thrones	Tranquil Judgments	Powers	The nobility of triumph against impediments	Angels	Gives life to neighbor through the humility of following

As can be seen in *Table 1*, the Seraphic Doctor organizes this "descent" within the soul in *Hex 22* into three categories. There is a highest, middle, and lowest hierarchy in the soul, which are then each divided by the Lesser Brother into subsets of three: the Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones first "receive" divine illuminations in the descending valence; the Dominions, Virtues, and Powers "maintain" these illuminations within the soul; while the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels finally "freely pour out" these illuminations outward to others in the final act of "descent."²⁰ Whereas the *ascending* movement within the hierarchical soul *ends* in an "affective" contemplative union with God at the level of the Seraph, in other words, the *descending* movement rather *begins* with the Seraph in this schema. Of this "beginning,"

¹⁹ See *Hex*, 22.28-33 (5, 441-442).

²⁰ See *Hex*, 22.28 (5, 441): "But this has to happen according to the powers of the soul, which are three according to Dionysius: receiving, maintaining, and distributing, so that we might copiously receive, copiously maintain, and freely pour out, whence, 'freely you have received, so freely give.'"

Bonaventure writes:

But for the soul to receive these lights, it needs vivacious desire, perspicacious scrutiny, and tranquil judgments. For the contemplative soul is not without vivacious desire. *Anyone who does not have this has nothing of contemplation, for the source of lights is from the highest things to the lowest things, and not the other way around* [my emphasis]. This vivacious desire corresponds to the Seraphim, which is ardent like fire; and so fire has the greatest signification in Scripture. Moses ascended to the summit of the mountain to this burning fire, and nevertheless he first saw that fire at the foot of the mountain. For Moses could not have descended for the purposes of teaching the people, unless he had first ascended to that fire. Thus, desire disposes the soul for receiving light.²¹

From this reception of light at the level of the Seraph, the "descending" valence within the hierarchical soul finally concludes, for Bonaventure, in an act of humility, represented for him by the order of the Angels. "Hence," he writes, "in descending, we begin from the vivacity of desiring to the humility of following (*humilitas obsequii*). Whence Christ comes to us in humility. So also the soul has angels ascending (*ascendentes*), just as it also ought to have a descending (*descendentes*). Whence in John: 'For no one ascends into heaven, unless he descended from heaven, like the Son of Man who is in heaven.'"²²

Notably, building upon Gallus's angelic anthropology, this entire discussion of the "descending" valence of the hierarchical soul here in *Hex 22* underscores the idea that for Bonaventure, contemplative union with God is not only an "end" or a "stopping-point" in a merely bottom-up mystical ascent into God; rather, it is also a *beginning*. The soul's desire for God indubitably drives it with respect to its *ascent* to a Seraphic embrace with God, but in the passage from *Hex 22* quoted above, this "lively desire" of the Seraphim is primarily used by Bonaventure as a descriptor of that which then drives the *descent* of the hierarchical soul to one's neighbor. For the Seraphic Doctor, anyone who does not possess this "lively desire" to descend from charity to humility, "has nothing of contemplation, for the source of lights is from the highest things to the lowest things, and not the other way around." Laure Solignac argues that the Seraphic Doctor's theology of hierarchy differs from that of Pseudo-Dionysius on precisely this point: for Bonaventure, the Incarnation of the Word represents hierarchical perfection.²³ The Incarnate Word is called the "Hierarch" by the

²¹ *Hex*, 22.29 (5, 441-442).

²² *Hex*, 22.33 (5, 442).

²³ Laure Solignac, *La voie de la ressemblance: Itinéraire dans la pensée de saint Bonaventure* (Paris, 2014), 301-302.





Seraphic Doctor precisely because, as he says in the *Itinerarium*, Christ joins the first with the last, God with creation, by descending from the heights of divine charity to lowly human flesh in an act of kenotic humility.²⁴ As Solignac notes, this perspective radically distinguishes Bonaventure's theology of hierarchy from that of the Areopagite because, for the former, hierarchical perfection "does not reside only in the superior (Dionysius) but in the union of the superior with the inferior."²⁵ Similarly, here in *Hex* 22, the soul made "hierarchical" through grace so perfectly so as to achieve the affective union of the Seraph has only been thus perfected insofar as it then descends from Mt. Sinai for the purposes of "teaching the people" in humility. The true contemplative, for Bonaventure, hikes up *and* down the contemplative mountain; the hierarchical soul receives light from above so that it may shine light down the mountain, as well, and only in this will the soul truly be likened unto Christ.

Sanctity, for Boanventure, thus has a definite shape, symbolized by the image of Jacob's Ladder with which he opened this account of the hierarchical soul in the *Hex-*

aëmeron.²⁶ The soul that has been brought into conformity with Christ will become "hierarchical" insofar as it ascends, descends, and returns to God, a return which—quite notably—he will simply call a "re-ascent" in *Hex*. 23.²⁷ Or in other words, a soul will only be made "hierarchical" through grace insofar as it must always be continuously "circling" between a contemplative union with God and humble service to creation. Crucially, within this "shape," the contemplative union with God experienced at the level of the Seraph is the fulcrum around which these "ascending" and "descending" valences revolve: it is at once an end *and* a beginning, and it never ceases being both.

This, then, is the context through which scholars ought to read Bonaventure's claims in the *Legenda Maior* that Francis is a *vir hierarchicus*. Quite notably, the Seraphic Doctor opens his account of the stigmata miracle in Chapter 13 of the *Legenda Maior* by asserting that Francis received the miraculous wounds because he had prudently learned to divide the time given to him between contemplation and praxis. In this way, Bonaventure tells us, the Poverello can be compared to a "Jacob's Ladder," in that he was constantly both "ascending" to God and "descending" to his neighbor

²⁴ *Itin*, 4.5 (5, 307).

²⁵ Solignac, *La voie de la ressemblance*, 301-302: "...that is to say that the 'consummation of perfection' lies in the conjunction of the first and the last. Perfection does not reside, therefore, in the higher (Dionysius) but in the union of the higher with the lower (Bonaventure)."

²⁶ See again *Hex*, 22.24 (5, 441). For more on the symbol of Jacob's Ladder in Bonaventure's theology, see especially Shelby, "Grace, Hierarchy, and the Symbol of Jacob's Ladder," in *Ordo et Sanctitas*, 207-228.

²⁷ *Hex*, 23.1 (5, 445): *reascensum*.





in virtue.²⁸ Even more notably, after spending Chapter 13 describing the perfect, Seraphic union between Francis and Christ atop Mt. Alverna, Bonaventure will then open Chapter 14 of the *Legenda Maior* by writing:

Thus now fixed with Christ to the cross in both flesh and with his spirit, Francis not only burned with a seraphic love in God but also was thirsting with Christ crucified for the multitude of those to be saved. Since he could not walk because of the nails coming out of his feet, he had his dying body carried around the cities and towns so that others would be animated to carry the cross of Christ ... He also burned with a great desire to return to his beginning in humility, that he might minister to the lepers as he did at the beginning...²⁹

The Poverello, in other words, does not *cease* being a *vir hierarchicus* or a “Jacob’s Ladder” after his climactic contemplative experience; rather, this experience enflames him to burn even brighter with love for God *and* others. In the *Legenda Maior*, St. Francis is a *vir hierarchicus* precisely because the “ascending” and “descending” valences are always at work with him, even and especially after his Seraphic embrace with Christ through the miracle of the stigmata.

Bonaventure’s sermon for the second Sunday in Lent from his *Sermones Dominicales* further elaborates upon these same themes. There, treating Jesus’s transfiguration before Peter, James, and John in *Matt* 17:1, the Seraphic Doctor allegorically reads the pericope to proffer John as a figure for the “contemplative” order within the Church. Of these contemplatives, those signified by John, he tells his brothers:

[Jesus] *led* contemplatives onto the mountain of open communication or communicable influence for the charitable diffusion of gratuitous preaching. Indeed the mountains are of such communication and diffusion that everything they receive immediately flows out, and as if they are freeing themselves from weight, they send everything to the plains; for the rain, as soon as it runs down, immediately overflows and the rivers share with the valleys all they bring forth, and even the stones and metal and almost everything else they produce, passes on to the plains. Contemplatives should irradiate in this manner, passing on to others the rains or irrigation of their thoughts and even the dewdrops of charisma and gifts like Mount Zion, through the preached word and example of honest conduct ... Whence it says, *Mountains of Israel*, that is contemplatives,

shoot forth your branches, by gathering a wandering people, *leaf* by preaching of the divine word; and *blossom*, by demonstrating fragrant example, *and yield fruit*, by the acquisition of your salvation and the advancement of neighbors; because then you will be the *mountain of God*, a *mountain of abundance*, etc.³⁰

Here again, contemplation is comparable to a fulcrum, the summit of a mountain from which those who have been sanctified are called to irradiate, “yield[ing] fruit” for the purposes of advancing their neighbors. With respect to the purpose of the *Sunday Sermons* collection as a whole, Johnson has argued that “Bonaventure does not intend this unified text to be used primarily to assist his confreres in their preaching to the laity, but rather, to shape the identity of his confreres as they reflect on Scripture, and preach among themselves and to likeminded religious and clerics.”³¹ Certainly the Seraphic Doctor is here indeed “shaping” the identity of his brothers by exhorting them to follow Francis up the mountain of contemplation so that they, too, may become “hierarchical” persons who must ascend Mt. Sinai in order to come back down and irradiate the influence of grace to those below. Bonaventure urges his brothers to be molded thusly not so that they would remain at the summit of contemplation, but, following Francis, so that they would experience the burning love of the Seraph in a way that would *intensify* their longing to serve the lepers in their midst.

Part III: “So that we might become Good”

In conclusion, how, then, does any of this relate to Bonaventure’s claim concerning the goal of theology with which I began this paper? Thus far, I have argued that sanctity has a definite “shape” in the Seraphic Doctor’s doctrine of grace: for Bonaventure, holiness and hierarchy walk hand in hand. Using the stigmatized body of Francis, the “hierarchical man,” as his model, he employs hierarchy within his doctrine of grace as a way of describing how the sanctified person ought to be interiorly ordered so as to “burn” with love for both God *and* others. Within his portrait of the *vir hierarchicus*, contemplative union with God—which, following Gallus, bears an especial relation to the “affect” in his angelic anthropology—is the fulcrum upon which the “ascending” and “descending” valences within his own description of the “hierarchized” soul always hinges. Through contemplation, the sanctified soul tastes the wisdom of God and is likewise emboldened by charity to bend down to its neighbor in humility. For Francis as for Moses, the ascent up

³⁰ I have here used the fine translation of this sermon excerpt provided by Timothy J. Johnson. See “Sermon 16: The Second Sunday in Lent,” in *The Sunday Sermons of St. Bonaventure*, 214-215; *SD Sermo* 16, 248-249.

³¹ Johnson, “Introduction,” in *The Sunday Sermons*, 14.

²⁸ See *Leg maj*, 13.1 (8, 542).

²⁹ *Leg maj*, 14.1 (8, 545).



the contemplative mount is that which fecundates the “interior orders” within his soul and so prepares him to once again descend to those below.

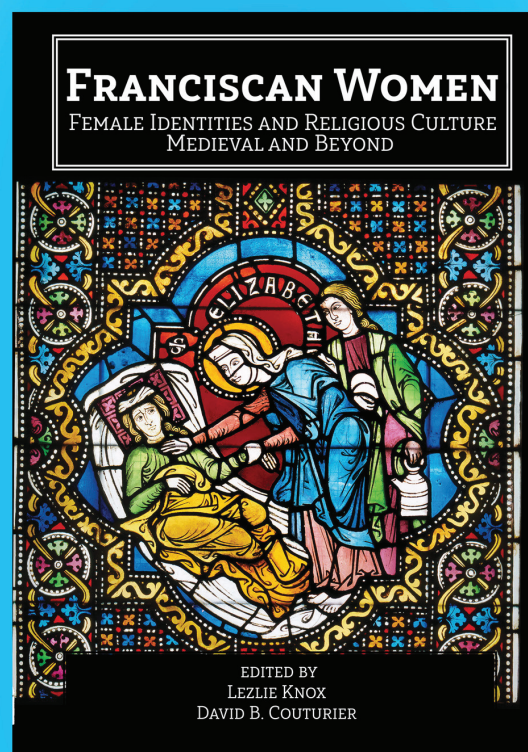
This hierarchical shape of sanctity, as it were, pertains to the Minor Brother’s words concerning the goal of theology in his Prologue to the *Commentary to the Sentences* because it helps us understand how contemplation and praxis relate within his definition of theology as *sapientia*, as an affective habit that we do “primarily so that we might become good.” As the great Bonaventuran scholar Jacques-Guy Bougerol once wrote: “Bonaventure does not seek to develop a theology of of pure speculation ... Our salvation is at stake. Bonaventure intends to be a theologian for no other reason than to form saints.”³² And indeed, by attending to his notion of the *vir hierarchicus*, we can begin to see the shape of these theologian-saints. For Bonaventure, the theologian ought to aim at nothing less than becoming “hierarchical,” than ascending to the contemplative union with God that will nonetheless irrevocably set him or her ablaze with a desire to irradiate the influence of grace to those in the plains below. In the same way that Bonaventure regards St. Francis as a “Jacob’s Ladder,” so too should the theologian ascend through her speculative pursuits to taste the charity of the Seraph and—like Francis—be conformed to Christ. She will only be thus conformed to the Crucified, however, when she also “descends” from contemplation to praxis, to teach her neighbors in humility. The Seraphic Doctor’s claim in his *Commentary on the Sentences* that the end of theology is both “speculative” and “practical” but primarily “practical” is nothing but an early articulation of this same theme. To strive for contemplation through the work of theology is to strive, through grace, to become holy in this way, to learn how to love God in such a way that we might be molded to love the leper, as well.

³² Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 108.



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