

# Bonaventure and the Theology of History by Joseph Ratzinger

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## Abstract

The paper explores the development of the theology of history, highlighting significant figures and controversies throughout the ages. It begins by examining the Patristic and early Scholastic periods, focusing on how the Church Fathers interpreted the Creation narrative as prophetic of humanity's journey. Joachim of Fiore introduced a three-part conception of history linked to the Holy Trinity, which led to doctrinal disputes, particularly impacting the Franciscan Order. In response to these controversies, Bonaventure emphasized the centrality of Christ in history, drawing connections to the Old Testament and the eschaton in his work, the *Hexaemeron*. The paper also notes a theological dispute that arose in the 1950s in Germany between Catholic and Lutheran theologians concerning salvation history and metaphysics, particularly questioning the influence of Hellenization on Christianity. Joseph Ratzinger endeavoured to address these theological dilemmas by focusing on the direction of history toward the eschaton, grounding his arguments in the insights of Bonaventure. The central theme presented is the relationship between history, metaphysics, and salvation, ultimately offering a reconciliatory perspective on the theology of history that is centered on Christ.

## Keywords

Three-Part History, Parallel Structure History, Achievement of History in Christ—History, Metaphysics, Salvation

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## 1. Introduction

This is my second paper on the theology of history. To fully understand this paper, it is essential to have a prior understanding of the historical survey of the theology of history, which spans from the Patristic Period to the early Scholastic Period, which was the focus of my first paper. The Fathers of the Church interpreted the Creation narrative as a prophetic reflection on humanity's history. Joachim pro-

posed a three-part history aligned with the Holy Trinity, envisioning a new form of monasticism that transcended the New Testament. In this second article, Bonaventure emphasized Christ's central role in history, framing it as a progression toward God's Sabbath-Rest and linking events from the Old Testament to the eschaton. The specific objective of this article is to expand on Bonaventure's understanding of the theology of history, drawing on the insights of Joseph Ratzinger. It highlights the connection between salvation history and metaphysics, asserting that history is unified in Christ, with the *parousia* symbolizing its relationship to eternity.

The theology of history reached its climax in the High Middle Ages, more precisely in the thirteenth century. The objection of Joachim of Fiore to the ideas of the Fathers of the Church led to a doctrinal dispute, which affected the Church's theology and tore the Franciscan Order apart. This controversy pitted the Friars who accepted Joachim's speculation against those who rejected it. In this situation, Bonaventure intervened to save the unity of the Order. He wrote the *Hexaemeron* to answer the Joachimite question and the misunderstanding of the figure of Saint Francis. It is an allegorical explanation of the six days of the Creation. Hence, he gave his interpretation of the course of history. In the 1950s, another controversy arose in Germany's theological world, pitting Catholic and Lutheran theologians against each other regarding salvation history and metaphysics. For the second, God acts in time and history, not just to the Eternal *tout court*. Therefore, the metaphysical approach is a deviation from the rationality of Christian faith.

In this way, the *parousia* is related to the history of salvation. The first insists on the account of the divine being based on general experience. *Parousia* is then related to metaphysics. The Lutherans asked Catholics: "Has not the Hellenization of Christianity, which attempted to overcome the scandal of particularity by blending faith and metaphysics, led to a development in a false direction?" Catholics on their side were asking Lutherans: "How can the unique and unrepeatable have a universal significance?" (Nichols, 2007) Joseph Ratzinger, committed to solving this theological problem, shifted his focus from ecclesiology to the theology of history. He surveyed the long controversy about the centrality and end of history in Christ. The central point concerns the *aeon*. History is naturally heading toward the *eschaton*. The exegesis, ecclesiology, revelation, and liturgy are consequently eschatological. Relying upon Saint Bonaventure's theology of history, he came up with a reconciling note.

## 2. The Exegesis and History

Israel approaches history as a journey, filled with meaning and direction, characterised by a distinct beginning and an ultimate resolution (Benedict XVI, 2023). This perspective enables a deeper understanding of past events and their significance in shaping the future.

### 2.1. Historico-Theological Consideration of the Word of God

Israel's traditional history is above the covenantal history. All the history of the

world is conceived as the pre-history of the covenant, which is its ultimate destination. Rahner will consider Christ as the destination of this history. The post-exilic prophets will announce an eschatological restoration at their time, opening the door to universal salvation. They enlarged the relationship between Israel and other nations. Israel has a particular notion of history. It is not a perpetual restart or eternal return, but it has a sense, meaning, and direction. It has a *terminus a quo* (beginning) and a *terminus ad quem* (end). All the reality of history constitutes the phases of a dialectical process: sin, punishment, forgiveness, fidelity and fulfilment (Darlap & Splett, 2010). These are the main categories in which the Messiah understands and fulfils history (Nichols, 2007). This fulfilment confirmed a new dialogical interpretation of history. The incarnation was then considered the telos of history and the total fulfilment of man (Danielou, 1958).

However, with the delay of the imminent *parousia*, a new and comprehensive notion of history was born. It is met in the New Testament, especially in the Acts of the Apostles. The notion of the end of time came with the eschatological confidence of the New Testament (Ratzinger, 1971). Referring to the Christ-event, all the history of the world from the first parents to the hope for the second coming of the Lord was seen by Christians as the history of salvation, centred on death, resurrection and ascension, including the missionary mandate (Darlap & Splett, 2010). On this line, Rahner understands the world's history as the history of salvation. They coexist totally (Ratzinger, 1982). Analysing pertinently this conclusion of Rahner, Ratzinger urges that it dissolves theology in the philosophy of history. It possesses in itself the particular and universal, history and essence, human condition and Christian condition. The Christian liberation becomes meaningless and breaks the spirituality of *ek-stase* in which man finds salvation (Ratzinger, 1982). Ratzinger describes his critique of Rahner's theology of history perception in these words:

The inadequacy of the spiritual formula in which Rahner's theology of history is concretized illuminates for me the unexpected reversal of this transcendental deduction into Marxist-inspired theologies in the theology that followed Rahner. A cruder understanding of his positions leads to the conclusion that Christian content must be interchangeable with general human knowledge, and that it is therefore susceptible to an explanation that identifies it with common conceptions of rationality (Ratzinger, 1982). He goes on to say that "Rahner's amalgamation of history and essence in the concept of the 'absolute Saviour' led to a spirituality of self-acceptance, and of the identification of human reality in general with Christian reality" (Ratzinger, 1982).

The prophets interpreted the Old Testament history in their preaching, according to the Deuteronomistic source. In this activity, the application of the unhistorical way of thinking in Christianity was limited. The prophets' oracles and speeches are classified into three. They are to be understood partly in a purely spiritual sense; partly in a purely earthly sense; but also partly *ad utramque pertinere intelliguntur* (referring to both). These threefold levels can refer to the

earthly Jerusalem, Heavenly City, or both at once (cf. Gal 6:21-31) (Augustine, 1976). This interpretation clarifies the inner intelligibility, unity, and significance of the *factum historicum*. Thus, history and intelligibility are interpenetrated. The Scripture is dynamic and static. It is static because of its unchangeable character, and it is objectively closed. It is dynamic because its understanding is historical and progressive throughout the ages. In this way, it is not yet closed. Scripture is inseparable from history. When they are dissociated, the first loses its meaning (Ratzinger, 1971). The Scripture does not contain imaginations or suprahistorical truths, but it is based on real history and discusses events that took place (Ratzinger, 2012). The following excerpt is rich in it:

Scripture has grown in a historical way. Only those who know its history know its meaning. History is a structural element of Scripture's intelligible form. *Scripturae intelligi non possunt nec mysteria, nisi sciatur decursus mundi et dispositio hierarchica*. Scripture, however, is not simply a product of a past history, but is simultaneously a statement about and a prediction of the future. Since the Scriptures were written, part of this future has already become past, while part of it still remains future (Ratzinger, 1971).

This historical character distinguishes the revelation in the Old Testament and the New Testament from the epiphanies of other religions. They understand revelation as a hieratic manifestation of the eternal ground of being and conceive history as an eternal return to the same point (Kasper, 2010). For Christians, history is unrepeatable; what has happened is done once and for all. It is a progressive line. For the pagans, time is a circular movement, a repetition of the same. It does not state the limit regarding the beginning and the necessity of the end. It is about an unordered infinity. Scripture contains truly historical truths (Pius XII, 1967).

## 2.2. History as Ground of Scripture

Beyond the Fathers of the Church and the scholastics who relied on an allegorical and typological exegesis directed to the unchangeable and enduring, Bonaventure develops an exegesis based on the historical-typological and prophetic character of the Scripture. It is an exegesis based on history. This understanding, influenced by Joachim's exegesis, is the ground of Bonaventure's theology of history. The central concept of this thought is *rationes seminales*, which will be applied to Scripture to develop the notion of the theories (De Gaal, 2010).

In this exegesis, the Scripture has three levels of meaning. To the traditional *spiritualis intelligentia*, the *figurae sacramentales* and the *multiformes theoriae* are added, which have an infinite potential. In Saint Bonaventure's theology, the terms *figurae sacramentales* and *multiformes theoriae* describe different approaches to understanding Scripture, particularly through its spiritual senses. *Figurae sacramentales* emphasizes the symbolic or sacramental figures that point to Christ. At the same time, *multiformes theoriae* refers to the various theories and interpretations that emerge from Scripture, which only God can fully understand. With the *figurae*, it suggests that all the books of the Scripture are about Christ and the

Anti-Christ. It is seen in the command: “Let the earth bring forth vegetation” (Gen 1:11) while the Spiritual sense is seen in the gathering of the waters on the third day (Gen 1:9) (Nichols, 2007). The *theoriae* has a non-exhaustive potential while the other two are limited. All the theories constitute a whole and are understood from the past history of salvation. It is on this basis that the future to which Scripture is directed can be grasped. History is, in fact, an unbroken line of meaning. As a drop of water is related to the whole sea, every single scriptural theory is related to others. Scripture contains seeds of meaning that grow in time. It is a reflection of an insight into God’s interventions into history (Flipper, 2015). Within the framework of this question, Ratzinger points out: “Consequently, we are able to interpret many things which the Fathers could not have known because for them these things still lay in the dark future, while for us they are accessible as past history. Still other things remain dark for us. And so new knowledge arises constantly from Scripture” (Ratzinger, 1971).

The understanding of Scripture can be compared to the two trees in the Garden of Eden: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Paul considers the latter to be *spiritus*, and the first is considered to be *littera*. The early Church presented Christ as the tree of life. This tree is the object of the spiritual sense. The tree of knowledge is the object of the literal sense used by the Judaizers (Rom 7:7) and those who give definitive validity to philosophy. The tree of knowledge is, in fact, a means to strengthen the faith and to make proper exegesis. Otherwise, it becomes a cause of the fall from the faith (Ratzinger, 1971). The texts of Exodus 3:22 and 12:36, the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:1-11), Revelation 19:19, and Saint Francis’ encounter with the sultan have been used to predict the end of all rational theology. We read (Ratzinger, 1971):

The Sultan told him that he should dispute with his priests. But Francis responded that it was not possible to dispute about the faith by means of reason because faith was above reason. Nor was it possible to dispute with them by means of Scripture, because they did not recognize Scripture... one should not, therefore, pour too much philosophical water into the wine of Sacred Scripture lest the wine be changed into water...we read that Christ changed the water into wine and not the reverse.

Thus, faith and reason appeared in light of an age of separation and opposition between science and life. It is about a theology based on *auctoritas* (authority) as a means to defend the faith. In accordance with Bonaventure, Ratzinger points out that “He who loves Scripture, loves philosophy as well...” (Ratzinger, 1971). Avoiding the temptation of fideism and rationalism, he estimates that faith needs knowledge to acknowledge the fullness of Jesus Christ (De Gaal, 2010).

### 2.3. Revelation Unfolding in History: Infinity of Meaning of the Scripture

The Scripture is the objectified Verb and the norm for all history. It originates from God, who is the *norma normans* (De Gaal, 2010). With this consideration,

it is an aspect of Incarnation. According to Origen, it is the body of the Verb and is formed by the Holy Spirit, who is the first auditor of the Verb (Von Balthasar, 1955). It contains truths that have been developed particularly in the course of history and give new meaning and orientations. These truths are constantly actual in different ways and generations. What was unknown in the past can be revealed in the present or in the future. “We are able to interpret many things which the Fathers could not have known because for them these things still lay in the dark future, while for us they are accessible as past history. Still other things remain dark for us” (Ratzinger, 1971). This always happens at a proper time and in a historical situation. It is expressed in the form of theories. It is always oriented towards the *eschaton*. In fact, Revelation refers to the understanding of Scripture that can be increased (Ratzinger, 1971). Scripture can provide an unlimited number of theories, whose total knowledge belongs to God alone (Ratzinger, 1971). Until the Middle Ages, it was held that Man can understand it only through the writings of the Fathers to whom it has been revealed once and for all. Consequently, the Fathers are the end of theology. The event of Francis will challenge this canonical idea. Later on, even Benedict XVI did the same and spoke of popular magisterium:

In this regard, I would like to highlight a fact that I consider relevant. Concerning the teaching on the Immaculate Conception, important theologians like Duns Scotus enriched what the People of God already spontaneously believed about the Blessed Virgin, as expressed in acts of devotion, in the arts, and Christian life in general, with the specific contribution of their thought. Thus, faith both in the Immaculate Conception and in the bodily Assumption of the Virgin was already present in the People of God, while theology had not yet found the key to interpreting it in the totality of the doctrine of the faith. The People of God, therefore, precede theologians, and this is all thanks to that supernatural *sensus fidei*, namely, that capacity infused by the Holy Spirit that qualifies us to embrace the reality of the faith with humility of heart and mind. In this sense, the People of God is the “teacher that goes first” and must then be more deeply examined and intellectually accepted by theology. May theologians always be ready to listen to this source of faith and retain the humility and simplicity of children! I mentioned this a few months ago, saying: “There have been great scholars, great experts, great theologians, teachers of faith who have taught us many things. They have gone into the details of Sacred Scripture... but have been unable to see the mystery itself, its central nucleus.... The essential has remained hidden. On the other hand, in our time, there have also been “little ones” who have understood this mystery. Let us think of St Bernadette Soubirous; of St Thérèse of Lisieux, with her new interpretation of the Bible that is non-scientific but goes to the heart of Sacred Scripture (Homily, Mass for the Members of the International Theological Commission, Pauline Chapel, Vatican City, 1 December 2009; Benedict XVI, 2010b).

The Pontifical Biblical Commission also made a note on this consideration:

From earliest times, it has been understood that the same Holy Spirit, who moved the authors of the New Testament to put in writing the message of salvation (*Dei Verbum*, 7; 18), likewise provided the Church with continual assistance for the interpretation of its inspired writings. The fathers of the Church, who had a particular role in the process of the formation of the canon, likewise have a foundational role in relation to the living tradition which unceasingly accompanies and guides the church's reading and interpretation of Scripture" (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1998).

The tradition serves as the interpreter of the content of the revelation, encompassing what was partially enclosed in the material scripture and what could have been explained only partially (cf. John 20:30; 21:25) (Von Balthasar, 1955). Thus, Scripture and the writings of the Fathers constitute one great *Scriptura Sacra*. However, its total meaning will be fully clear with the final revelation. Scripture should always be read with new eyes. Bonaventure states it emphatically:

Filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11: 9) ... and this especially refers to the period of the New Testament, when the writing was revealed, and especially at the end, when scripture, understood and which cannot be understood. Then comes the mount; the Church contemplative, and then does not hurt contemplative, when using flee to show wisdom of heresy. But today, Mount Zion, the fox is destroyed (Ratzinger, 1971).

That means "Filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11: 9)... and this especially refers to the period of the New Testament, when the writing was revealed, and especially at the end, when scripture, understood and which cannot be understood. Then comes the mount; the Church contemplative, and then does not hurt contemplative, when using flight to show the wisdom of heresy. However, today, Mount Zion, the fox is destroyed.

From a seed, a forest can come; from a plant, innumerable seeds; innumerable theories and meanings can also arise from the Scripture. It is drawn upon a philosophical image common since the time of Zeno and the Stoics, who described the *logoi spermatikoi* (seeds of the word) that make creation intelligible, or on the theory of many *semina* but one *Logos*. Thus, True understanding of any present context can only be obtained in light of the earlier *semina* that had sprung forth from the One *Logos* in the past (Latourelle, 1996). They are infinite, just like a picture mirrored between two mirrors multiplies itself infinitely (Grosse, 2018). Scriptural theories are intimations about future times found in Scripture. They are also hidden indications of the future in the Scripture. These theories are substantially connected and drawn from the fullness of the incarnated Verb. The knowledge which comes from the Scripture is ever new. Because the scriptural line looks forward to the forthcoming time, these theories deal with the future. In history, the future is grasped in the present in the light of the past. Therefore, the interpreta-

tion of the future in the Scripture requires essentially the awareness and understanding of the past (Ratzinger, 1971). In Christ all the treasures of wisdom and science rest (Von Balthasar, 1955). The true meaning of the Scripture is spiritual. The one who does not approach it spiritually cannot grasp it. Ratzinger calls him a *Judaeus* (Benedict XVI, 2023).

Traditionally, Scripture has four senses considered as wheels of Scripture, which constitute the spiritual intelligence: Peshat, Remez, Drash, and Sod (PaRDeS) in the Jewish tradition, or Historia, Allegoria, Tropologia, and Anagogia in the Christian tradition (De Lubac, 1998). They make an ontology of history (Flipper, 2015). They were summarized in a marvellous couplet by Augustin of Denmark quoted by Nicholas of Lyra around 1330: “*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*”; “The letter teaches events, allegory what you should believe, Morality teaches what you should do, anagogy what mark you should be aiming for.” (De Lubac, 1998; Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1998). Besides the first, the three others are compared to the virtues of faith, hope, and love. Any relation between this understanding and the modern discussion about the spiritual meaning of the scripture must be excluded. The latter is so extensive, according to Ratzinger (Ratzinger, 1971). The Pontifical Biblical Commission retains three senses: the literal sense, the spiritual sense, and the *sensus plenior*, which is the deeper meaning intended by God but not clearly expressed by the human author. The literal sense should not be confused with literalism proper to fundamentalists. It is not a word-for-word translation, but it is what the inspired writer has expressed directly (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1998). The spiritual sense is “the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it” (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1998).

#### 2.4. The Logos as Source of Creation and History

Rooted in the biblical revelation, history is not a moment of cosmos, while the cosmos is part of history (Ratzinger, 1971). Plato is the first to teach the creation of the world in time. Physis is not understood in terms of metaphysics and cosmology, but in terms of history. Hence, the notion of “universal history” was developed with a future orientation (Kasper, 2010). Consequently, history consists of positive beginnings that last forever. This concerns all the great creative decisions of God, which have determined the course of history. Saint Gregory of Nyssa remarkably notes that history “proceeds from beginnings to beginnings, by successive beginnings that have no end (Danielou, 1958). Creation is maintained in this way, but it continues to grow and mature. It has a purpose and, by this very fact, a meaning, which means both direction and significance (De Lubac, 1958). Augustine holds that the history of salvation begins, not with the choosing of Abraham, but with the creation of the world. The *narratio plena* starts with “in the beginning” (Danielou, 1958). Creation and the Scripture are united. This is the significance of the second word or group of words of God in the book of Revelation: “And the one who was seated on the throne said: ‘See, I am making all

things new.” Also, he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true” (Rev 21:5) (Theunis, 2004).

The relation between any form of knowledge and its historical context is established in six levels, which are known as the levels of knowledge. These levels and the periods of salvation history are related to the six days of the creation account. The history of the world is thus compared to a long week (Ratzinger, 2001). The concept of sacred history as a unified process of growth was developed, particularly by Eastern writers, in patristic times, and received its definitive formulation in the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa. God’s plan, and the sum of history in its widest acceptance, is therefore seen as a ἀκολουθία (akolouthia), an orderly progression towards the fulfilment of history when God shall resume everything in Christ. Natural laws are not the expression of blind fate, but of Providence, guiding all things towards their last end, which is union with God (Danielou, 1958). The fundamental truth concerning creation has been revealed in a new and more wonderful way in Jesus Christ (John Paul II, 1979).

## 2.5. Inner Unity of the Scripture

Within the Old and New Testaments, there is a juxtaposition of different perspectives that are sometimes in tension. Because by essence a tree is from a tree and a seed from a seed, one Testament should be from the other. The Gnostics held to a radical discontinuity between the Old and the New Testaments. Saint Irenaeus, reacting, was the first to demonstrate that both alike are the work of one and the same God, and that both belong to a single dispensation (Danielou, 1958). Augustine made it very clear: “*Novum testamentum in Vetere latebat: Vetus nunc in Novo patet.*” (The New Testament is hidden in the Old: The Old is now revealed/clarified in the New) (De Lubac, 1958).

The knowledge of history emerges when the Old and New Testaments are placed in relation. This relation is dynamic and static. In the static relation, one Testament stands against the other. In the dynamic relation, one Testament is the source of the other (Ratzinger, 1990). There is an intrinsic unity in the Scripture: “All divine Scripture is one book, and this one book is Christ, speaks of Christ and finds its fulfilment in Christ” (Benedict XVI, 2010c). The Old Testament should be read in light of the New. Jesus is the centre of Scripture, so everything in it ultimately points to him, even if it is not explicitly about him (Benedict XVI, 2010c). The works of God in the Old Testament were a prelude to the work of Christ, wherein God is perfectly glorified and men sanctified (SC 5). Benedict XVI, commenting on the event of Stephen, the proto-martyr, notes this relation:

Indeed, Luke insists on the fact that Stephen, “full of grace and power” (Acts 6: 8), presented in Jesus’ Name a new interpretation of Moses and of God’s Law itself. He reread the Old Testament in the light of the proclamation of Christ’s death and Resurrection. He gave the Old Testament a Christological reinterpretation and provoked reactions from the Jews, who took his words to be blasphemous (cf. Acts 6: 11-14). For this reason he was condemned to

stoning. And St Luke passes on to us the saint's last discourse, a synthesis of his preaching. Just as Jesus had shown the disciples of Emmaus that the entire Old Testament speaks of Him, of His Cross, and His Resurrection, so St. Stephen, following Jesus' teaching, interpreted the entire Old Testament in a Christological key, he shows that the mystery of the Cross stands at the centre of the history of salvation as recounted in the Old Testament; it shows that Jesus, Crucified and Risen, is truly the goal of all this history. St Stephen also shows that the cult of the temple was over and that Jesus, the Risen One, was the new, true "templ" (Benedict XVI, 2007)

However, the inverse is also true: we should read the New Testament in light of the Old. The Scripture is essentially one continuous narrative stretching all the way from creation in Genesis to the new creation in Revelation. The ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the climax of that story (Pontifical Biblical Commission, 1998). Romano Guardini spells it out in more detail:

Christ's effect upon the world can be compared to nothing in its history, save its own creation: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." What takes place in Christ is of the same order as the original act of creation, though on a still higher level. For the beginning of the new creation is as far superior to the old as the love revealed in the incarnation and the cross is to the love which created the stars, plants, animals and men. That is what the words mean: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (Luke 12:49). It is the fire of new becoming; not only "truth" or "love," but the incandescence of new creation (Guardini, 2002).

The two Testaments constitute the two Cherubim over the mercy seat and divide history into two equal parts (Ratzinger, 1971). Ratzinger remains almost on the same line:

The New Testament corresponds to the inner drama of the Old. It is the inner mediation of two elements that, at first, are in conflict with one another and find their unity in the form of Jesus Christ, through His Cross and Resurrection. What at first seems to be a break turns out, on closer inspection, to be a real fulfillment, in which all the paths formerly followed converge (Ratzinger, 2008b).

And *Deus Caritas Est* to add:

Nevertheless, the profound compenetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity (Benedict XVI, 2005).

Bonaventure, like Joachim, does not oppose the two Testaments. He develops a

relationship with them. In his view, the New Testament is the eternal testament, embracing all that remains in the course of history. There will not be another covenant. He develops two types of historical schemata: the division of history in the school-theology and the relation between the two Testaments. Concerning the theological school, he categorises three approaches. The seven ages of Augustine, the division of world history into five ages, and the division of history into three ages. The second is based on the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16). The five epochs are designated by Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ. The third is divided into the time of the law of nature, the law of Scripture, and the law of Grace. Combining these schemata with Joachim's thought, Bonaventure discovered that the knowledge of history emerges from the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments (Ratzinger, 1971).

Other historical schemata emerge when this relation is developed based on the numbers 1 to 7. The number one gives a bipartite. It is defined by the Pauline relationship: *servus-libertas, timor-amor, littera-spiritus, figura-veritas, nox-dies* (slave-freedom, fear-love, letter-spirit, form-truth, night-day). The number two gives a tetra partite. This means that each testament has two periods. The Old Testament is divided into *Ante legem* (before the law) and *sub lege* (under the law). In contrast, the New Testament is divided into *vocatio gentium* (vocation of the Gentiles) and *vocatio Iudaeorum* (vocation of the Jews). The number three also gives rise to a bipartite structure: *synagogae* and *ecclesiae*. They are compared to Lea, who represents the *vita activa*, and Rachel, who represents the *vita contemplativa* (Ratzinger, 1971). After Lea had given birth, Jacob's family was still incomplete. Thus, the *ecclesia contemplativa*, the completed church, has not yet come. He approached the double-seven schemata, similar to Joachim, using the numbers six and seven (Ratzinger, 1971). To throw more light on this unity, Ratzinger concluded that "the New Testament is nothing other than the interpretation of the Law, the prophets and the Writings found in or contained in the story of Jesus" (Ratzinger, 1998).

### 3. The Mystery of Christ in History

History, as we have examined, operates as a dialectical process marked by themes of transgression, retribution, redemption, loyalty, and ultimate fulfillment, all of which find their embodiment in the figure of the Messiah (Benedict XVI, 2023). This perspective on fulfillment offers a nuanced framework for interpreting historical progress, positing the incarnation as the culmination of this trajectory and the actualization of human potential. The incarnation of the *Logos* in human history is the central point of all history and opens towards eternity. In Christ is realized the fulfilment of history: the deification of humanity and the glorification of God.

#### 3.1. Jesus of the Gospels' Historicity

The words *Et incarnatus Est* refer to God's entry into real history. This history distinguishes Christianity from other religions (Ratzinger, 2008a). In the eyes of

Ratzinger, the Jesus of the Gospels is, in fact, the real and historical Jesus in *stricto sensu*, the essence of who He is (De Gaal, 2010). His words and deeds went beyond the hopes and expectations of the time. He thus clearly exceeds the scope of the historical method (Ratzinger, 2008a). The hope of salvation within history is made real because the *logos* is expressed in history as *sarx* (Greek noun meaning flesh) in Jesus Christ (Collins, 2013). Obviously, *sarx* and *logos* are tied in Christ, Jesus, and Christ, Jesus' human being and Christ, the second person in the Holy Trinity, are inseparable (De Gaal, 2010).

The genealogy of Matthew is steeped in the promise made to David: "your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam 7:16). The history from Abraham to Jesus bears the hints of David, his name and his promise. This genealogy has three sets of fourteen generations. The allusion is made here to the Hebrew letters of the name David, which gives fourteen. Christ is therefore the King, and the whole history looks towards him. His throne endures forever, and his mission is universal. That is why in Matthew's genealogy, four non-Jewish sinner women are included. Jesus, through Joseph, belongs by law to the house of David. And yet he comes from above. In this sense, the origin of Christ is both known and a mystery. The provenance of Jesus then has a dual significance (Ratzinger, 2012).

It goes without saying that Luke, in his genealogy, shows that the fullness of time has come with Jesus and the decisive hour of history has started. He is the new beginning of history. That is why Luke traces the line back to Adam (Nichols, 2007) and mentions 76 names. For Irenaeus, Luke used 72 (or 70) names, not 76. He gives precedence to the Lucan tradition, derived from Exodus 1:5, to indicate the number of people in the entire human population. It is worth mentioning:

To prove this, Luke shows that the genealogy of our Lord, which extends to Adam, contains seventy-two generations, and so he joins the end to the beginning and points out that it is he [Christ] who recapitulates in himself all the nations that had been dispersed from Adam onward, and all the tongues, and the human race, including Adam himself. Hence, Paul, too, styled Adam a type of the one who was to come (Ratzinger, 2012).

In Luke's theology, the incarnation is the fulfilment of Daniel 9:24 (Karris, 1996). John identifies Jesus of Nazareth with the divine *Logos* (cf. John 1) (Nichols, 2007). His prologue presents the activity of the *Logos*. It is, in fact, a brief presentation of God's manifestations through His Word (Latourelle, 1996). Ratzinger accurately underlines that "Jesus takes upon himself the whole of humanity, the whole history of man, and he gives it a decisive re-orientation toward a new manner of human existence" (Ratzinger, 2012). Jesus is the primordial source of all things and the light that makes the world into the cosmos. The Christ of faith and the historical Jesus circumscribe one person. Christology, therefore, is not a Platonic discipline (De Gaal, 2010).

### 3.2. The Center of All the Ages

Bonaventure's theology excludes Augustine from the proper theology of history.

His approach matches more with the *figurae* rather than the *theoriae* (Ratzinger, 1971). This theology hopes in an inner-historical transformation of the Church and believes without a doubt in a new salvation in history, within our time. This understanding is brand new in the theological field. This fact does not agree with those who support Christ as the apex of inner-historical fulfilment. Nothing is left out of the eschatological hope that lies beyond all history. The time of the New Testament is in the process of coming to its true fullness. The understanding of Scripture will be progressive until the end of time, when it will be fully grasped (Ratzinger, 1971). The New Testament and patristic notion of “fullness of time” is therefore interpreted as “center of time” (Ratzinger, 1971; Benedict XVI, 2010a):

That is why the coming of the Son of God marks the fullness of time: not because time ends with His coming, but because the hidden prophecies of all ages have been fulfilled. Had Christ come at the beginning of time, He would have come too soon; and had His coming been delayed until the very end, He would have come too late. It belonged to Him as the true Savior to provide a time of healing right between the time of sickness and the time of judgment; as the true Mediator, to come midway, some of His elect preceding and others following Him (Ratzinger, 1971).

Joachim’s age of the Holy Spirit is consequently rejected. He harmonized the notion of the role and position of the Mediator in the Economic Trinity and the economy of salvation. The division of history into Before and After Christ (*Ante Christum Natum* and *Post Christum Natum*) is possibly the work of John Nauklerus (d.1510). The reckoning of time as *before the birth of Christ* became common only in the 18th century, whereas the determination of years after the birth of Christ is much older (Ratzinger, 1971). He related the Trinitarian middle-position of the *Logos* to the mediation of the Lord in history. Christ is the center of history precisely as the Word, as the *Logos* (Flipper, 2015). There is communication from God at the center of history. And how and in what way history “progresses” relates to the nature and quality of the human response to that Word. Christ is therefore the source and summit of all human history. This center marks the beginning of the redemption of history from within, due to what enters it from outside. The incarnation of the *Logos* in human history is the central point of all history and opens towards eternity (cf. Mic 5:2) (De Gaal, 2010).

In Christ, the fulfilment of history is realised: the deification of humanity and the glorification of God. The Resurrection bursts open history and inaugurates the *eschaton*. History is therefore transcended and the definitive ushered. It is at this level that it differs from other historical events, such as the birth and the crucifixion. This type of event is brand new. “It must be understood that the Resurrection does not simply stand outside or above history. As something that breaks out of history and transcends it, the Resurrection nevertheless has its origin within history and up to a certain point still belongs there. Perhaps we could put it this way: Jesus’ Resurrection points beyond history but has left a footprint within history” (Ratzinger, 2011). The ascension of Christ sealed the unity of humanity and

divinity once and for all. Humanity will never again be separated from God, and there will be no turning back (Collins, 2013). Danielou, agreeing with Cullmann, gives a brilliant note:

First, history is not conceived as an indefinite progress, but as finite in scope; it is a determinate, circumscribed design, called by the Fathers of the Church the cosmic week, which is to be followed by the eighth day, representing the life of the world to come. Secondly, Christianity is itself the term of development: Christ professedly comes late in time, and inaugurates the stage that will not pass away. So, there is nothing beyond Christianity. It is indeed ἔσχατος, novissimus, the last thing. And it is the everlasting juvenescence of the world, which makes everything else obsolete. Thirdly, the end of history has already taken place, because the incarnation and the ascension of Christ fulfil its purpose... Christ's resurrection being the decisive event in all history, nothing that can ever happen will equal it in importance (Danielou, 1958).

#### 4. The Finalis Ecclesia

The *Finalis Ecclesia*, as described by Saint Bonaventura, signifies the Church's ultimate purpose in divine salvation. He portrays the Church as a community of believers and a crucial means for humanity's connection to God. It serves as a bridge between heaven and earth, nurturing believers in love, truth, and sacramental life. The *Finalis Ecclesia* represents not just an endpoint but a transformative journey that embodies God's Love, as revealed in Jesus Christ and lived out by the faithful in the world.

##### 4.1. The Final Order of the Sixth Age

The sixth age precedes the seventh age, partly present and partly future (Ratzinger, 1971). It reaches its climax during the New Testament era (Nichols, 2007). To tackle this matter, the seven series of seven in the book of Revelation, along with the historical context of the Passion of Christ, are helpful. The sixth figure of each schema relates to the future, and these series point to the seven-staged course of Church history, but in a different way. The following images are to be considered: the sixth seal which is the Seal of the living God (Rev 6:12-17), the angel of Philadelphia to whom the sixth letter is addressed (Rev 3:7-13), the seven angels who had the seven bowls (Rev 21:9), and the sixth trumpet (Rev 10; 11:1-2; 21:9-22). This angel is the sixth of the seven angels of the series.

This consideration lies in *Haymo*, the etymology of Philadelphia, which means *Conservans hereditatem* (conserving the heritage (Guardini, 2002)). It is held that it is the sixth angel who speaks in the verse: "Come, I will show you the bride, the spouse of the Lamb." Regarding the Passion of Christ, its course started with light, then darkness, and light again. The Church as Mystical Body of Christ should walk in the same way that the sixth day darkness and light will alternate before the *ordo futurus* of the seventh age. It is summarised in the following schema: Ezechias or Ozias—Charlemagne, Manasses—Henry IV and Frederick I, Josias—Zelator

Secundus, Babylon Exile—Tribulatio, Zorobabel—Restauratio Pax (Ratzinger, 1971).

The sixth age will be characterized by the rise of the final Order. This question sparked controversy among the Franciscans and Dominicans. The point is the final order between the two. During this time, a stream of thought known as the pseudo-Joachim rose (Andrews, 2018). With the aim of maintaining unity and reconciling the two views, they employed a double-schema approach, rejecting the Joachimite conclusion and proposing the notion of two final orders that would preach against the apocalyptic beast (Andrews, 2018). On his behalf, Bonaventure separates the two Orders without making a basic rupture. He also understands these two Orders to be the Franciscans and the Dominicans.

They constitute the *ordo cherubicus*. That means they embody a specific angelic quality associated with the cherubim. Although “ordo cherubicus” is not a formal designation in the Church, it implies a high spiritual standing for these mendicant orders. Their main characteristics are *speculatio* and *unctio*. This implies a parallel between the *prophetae* and the *cherubici*. The Dominicans give first place to speculation and *intellectus*, then second to unction and *affectus*, while the Franciscans do the contrary. They rely on this wonderful exhortation of Saint Francis: “*Et illi religiosi sunt mortui a littera: qui spiritum divine littere nolunt sequi, sed sola verba magis cupiunt scire et aliis interpretari. Et illi sunt vivificati a spiritu divine littere, qui omnem litteram, quam sciunt... verbo et exemplo reddunt... altissimo Domino Deo...*” (For what use is it to know much and to save nothing (Ratzinger, 1971).

During the age of this order, the Anti-Christ will be completely defeated (Brooke, 2006). The Order of Francis will be the community of the final age and the beginning of a new era. The ideal poverty envisioned by Francis characterizes it. The life of Francis will be the general model for all (Ratzinger, 1971). This idea depicts a Francis of faith and a Francis of history, the Franciscan Order and the Order of Francis, the empirical Order and the eschatological Order. This answer to the Spirituals is a newness (Ratzinger, 1971). On this assumption, Ratzinger says:

...Bonaventure believed that the Franciscan Order was originally determined to be the final, eschatological Order immediately, and was to bring about the beginning of a new era. In this case, it would have been the failure of its members that impeded the realization of this. Now the Order would have to be purged by another final tribulation before it would be able to find its true and final form (Ratzinger, 1971).

At this point, it is important to explain why the debate over the “Final Order” between Franciscans and Dominicans is significant for contemporary theology, connecting historical details to relevant current questions. The debate is important because it explores the relationship between faith and reason, highlighting different approaches to understanding divine knowledge and human experience. This discussion touches upon the interpretation of scripture, the nature of God’s

will, and the role of human agency in salvation, all of which continue to influence theological conversations today.

Franciscans, following the teachings of Saint Francis, emphasize the intrinsic goodness of creation and advocate for an intuitive and experiential approach to understanding divine truths. They argue that creation itself reflects the glory of God and that humanity is called to live in harmony with it. This perspective encourages an inclusive theology that prioritizes environmental and social dimensions of faith, resonating with contemporary concerns about ecological ethics and social justice. In contrast, Dominicans, inspired by Saint Dominic, focus on the role of reason and the importance of systematic theology grounded in intellectual rigour. They stress the necessity of an ordered approach to moral issues and the pursuit of truth through study, dialogue, and preaching. This intellectual tradition prompts vital discussions in contemporary theology regarding the relationship between faith and reason, as well as the importance of addressing complex moral dilemmas through a theological lens.

The tensions and dialogues between these two perspectives underscore a fundamental dynamic in contemporary theological discourse: the need to balance experiential spirituality with intellectual rigour. This ongoing conversation reflects broader societal shifts and the challenges of addressing modern issues—such as ecological sustainability, consumerism, climate change, and social inequity—within a theological framework. Engaging with the “Final Order” debate not only enriches our understanding of historical theological positions but also has the potential to inform and guide current and future theological reflections, ultimately shaping how faith interacts with the pressing realities of our world today. Saint John Paul II declared: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth (John Paul II, 1998). Benedict XVI contextualized the benefits of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the Church during the General Audience at Saint Peter’s Square on Wednesday, 13 January 2010, while discussing the Mendicant Orders. He said (Benedict XVI, 2010d):

Today, too, a “charity of and in the truth” exists, an “intellectual charity” that must be exercised to enlighten minds and to combine faith with culture. The dedication of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the medieval universities is an invitation to make ourselves present in the places where knowledge is tempered so as to focus the light of the Gospel, with respect and conviction, on the fundamental questions that concern Man, his dignity and his eternal destiny. Thinking of the role of the Franciscans and the Dominicans in the Middle Ages, of the spiritual renewal they inspired and of the breath of new life they communicated in the world, a monk said: “At that time the world was ageing. Two Orders were born in the Church whose youth they renewed like that of an eagle” (Burchard of Ursperg, *Chronicon*).

In summary, this message resonates deeply with current movements that aim

to address issues such as environmental degradation and inequality (Benoît XVI, 2012). It aligns with the principles outlined in Pope Francis's encyclical "Laudato Si." In this document, the Pope emphasises the need for a renewed relationship with nature, encouraging individuals and communities to recognise their interconnectedness with all of creation. This reflects the commitment of both Franciscans and Dominicans to live responsibly, compassionately, intelligently, and reasonably in the world (Francis, 2015).

#### 4.2. The Church of the Seventh Age

The Church of the seventh age is the heavenly Church. It starts with those who enter into heavenly glory between the resurrection of Christ and the general resurrection. It belongs to the future time. It is located within history and the time of the New Testament. The souls of those who have died and have been purified are in this church of the full heavenly glory. This heavenly condition is still part of the framework of world history. In the age of the *Ecclesia militans*, the vision of the Church is under moonlight, not directly under the light of the sun (Grosse, 2018). It is between the destruction of the Anti-Christ and the Last Judgment. This consideration leaves space for the hope of the final state of full *visio*, which is to come. This church is, therefore, a pre-eschatological church and makes the *ordo seraphicus*. Its activity is *sursumactio* (an act of elevation/uplifting). It will precede the *parousia* of the Lord (Brooke, 2006). The Church is, in fact, on a journey towards the eternal Church through the Seventh age. It is not stationary but in progress: "This does not mean that the Church is stationary, fixed in the past, or that there can be no newness within her. *Opera Christi non deficiunt, sed proficiunt*": Christ's works do not go backwards, they do not fail but progress, the Saint said in his letter *De Tribus Quaestionibus*" (Benedict XVI, 2010a).

The seventh age is the time of the Sabbath Rest and God's peace upon the earth. It is an authentic vision of freedom (Ratzinger, 2008a). It will comprise the fulfilment of the great prophecies of Ezekiel and Isaiah (2:4). It will be a church of *virii spiritualis* (The Spirituals) (Andrews, 2018). The notion of the seventh age is summarised in the text: "The prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezek 40) will be fulfilled: The Holy City will come down from heaven; not, however, that city 'which is above' (Gal. 4:26), but that one which is below, that is, the church militant. But she will be formed in the likeness of the Church triumphant as far as possible in her pilgrim-state...And then there will be peace..." (Ratzinger, 1971).

For Ratzinger, Ezekiel's vision of *ostensio civitas* corresponds to the vision of Revelation 21. Bonaventure transformed the cosmic hierarchy of Dionysius into a historical-hierarchical one. He maintains the notion of the hierarchy in heaven and in the eternity of God. This *populus* will be divided according to the nine heavenly angelic choirs. The elected will replace the fallen spirits. Those who will not be elected due to their few merits will make up the tenth choir and occupy the tenth cosmic sphere (Ratzinger, 1971). Ratzinger found himself unable to agree with this consideration, which seems to be a liberationist eschatology. This think-

ing is far from the model of eschatology found in the New Testament (Nichols, 2007). Christ is, in his opinion, the last Temple of God: “The paschal sacrifice abides in him as an enduring presence. For this reason, Heaven, as our becoming one with Christ, takes on the nature of adoration. All cult prefigures it, and in it comes to completion. Christ is the temple of the final age; he is heaven, the new Jerusalem; he is the cultic space for God” (Nichols, 2007).

### 4.3. The Apocalyptic Interpretation of Francis

The Franciscan Order considers Francis a sign of the final age. By the fact of bearing the wounds of Christ’s passion, he is the *angelus cum signo Dei vivi*; the angel having the seal of the living God (Rev 7:2). He belongs to the *ordo seraphicus* for Christ appeared to him in the Seraphic form, though his order was merely cherubicus (Nichols, 2007). In him was seen the fulfillment of Malachi 3: 23: “In Francis, Elias has appeared” (Ratzinger, 1971). This new Elias will restore the state of the *ecclesia primitiva*. The prophecy of Revelation 7:2 in connection with Ezekiel 9:4 was also applied to Saint Francis by virtue of the stigmata (Grosse, 2018). He is the *angelus ascendens ab ortu solis* (the angel ascending from the rising of the sun) who has the work to sign the 144,000 elect and to establish the community of the final age, which is the *ecclesia contemplative* (Nichols, 2007). In this Church, the sixth day will be transformed into the Sabbath Rest of the seventh day. This day, man and all creation participate in God’s rest (Ratzinger, 2001). Therefore, to sign with this seal means to impress a seal of love on someone and oblige him by vowing to the contemplative form of life. Departing from the doctrine of the eternal circle, he interprets the number of the Apocalyptic Beast (Rev 13:11-18) in opposition to the sign of Francis. Six is taken as the symbol of a perfectly closed circle. The number 666 expresses the three basic heresies of that time: the eternity of the world, the necessity of fate, and the unity of the intellect. Some thought that even Francis would occupy in heaven the place of the Proud Lucifer (Ratzinger, 1971).

The *Poverello* (Poor) designated himself as the Herald of a great King. His followers saw in him the eschatological *praeco Dei* or the resurrected John the Baptist. In the Scripture, the names of Elias and John the Baptist are used interchangeably to express the same idea (Matt 11:14; Mark 9:12; Luke 1:17). The Poor Man of Assisi is also compared to Job. Anticipatively, he got the grace to live an eschatological form of life. In him, the natural relationship between *humilitas* and *revelatio* is justified. That is what the Lord says: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the clever, but have revealed them to the humble” (Matt 11:25). The arguments about Saint Francis are drawn from two facts: the tau-sign “T” used by himself as signature and the stigmatization. This sign was interpreted on the basis of Ezek. 9:4 (Ratzinger, 1971). However, Ratzinger underscored an exaggeration in the interpretation of Francis and a wild overestimate of the place of religious life in the Church’s destiny (Nichols, 2007).

## 5. The Novus and *Finalis Revelatio*

According to St. Bonaventure, *Finalis Revelatio* refers to the peak of God's self-communication. This communication occurs not only through Scripture and the Church but also through the cosmos, creation, and various mediations. He emphasizes that the created world reflects its divine source. Revelation is best understood as a dialogue between the Eternal "I" and the historical "Thou" of humanity, rather than as a one-sided communication from God.

### 5.1. The Cosmic-Hierarchical Mediation of Revelation

The approach of the mediation of revelation is epistemological. The revelation is not a matter of an exclusive I-You human relation. The historical covenant surpasses the primitive covenant revelation and involves its fulfilment (Danielou, 1958). God is the only Author of revelation through His word. Creation, theophanies, the Law, prophets, the Incarnation, are all stages in this continuous manifestation of God throughout the course of human history (Latourelle, 1996). According to *Dei Verbum 2*: "This plan of Revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" (DV 2).

It comes through the intervention of the divine Spirit and the entire cosmos of Intelligences. Illumination is like a share of the Intelligences or cosmic sphere. This idea is based on the so-called *augustinisme avenissant* theory. We are to consider the Augustinian and Aristotelian theory of knowledge and the cosmic-hierarchical schema of Dionysius, which comprises God, angels, and man. This schema is based on the law stating that any higher order can exercise an influence only on that order which follows it immediately. Therefore, only the lowest choirs can influence man. The Seraphim and Cherubim are higher than man. The ray of the sun is taken as an example. The first hierarchy (the angels and blessed) received its origin and illumination from God; the middle hierarchy receives it from God and the hierarchy; the lower hierarchy receives it from God and from the higher and the middle hierarchy; the ecclesiastical hierarchy receives it from all the above. This schema introduces a lot of intermediary beings or mediations between God and man (Ratzinger, 1971).

In view of synthesizing Augustin and Aristotle, John of Rupella, with keen perception, writes: "*Intellectus agens* is God Himself for those objects of knowledge that lie *supra intellectum*, that is, for the knowledge of God; for those truths which the soul knows *juxta se* and which are related to the angel-world, the *intellectus agens* is an angel. Finally, the *intellectus agens* is a power of the soul itself in relation to all those insights which the soul achieves *intra* or *infra se*" (Ratzinger, 1971).

The intervention of the angels in the process of revelation is not rejected. However, Christ alone is the source, cause, and revelation. He is the *Logos* in which God declares himself (Rawland, 2008) and the eternal personal word who became

flesh to tell us about the Father (Latourelle, 1996). The divine ray illumines man immediately. Based on this thought, the notion of mediation in revelation is extended to every creature, including sinners. Ratzinger then understands Revelation as a holy work that is from God and leads to God (Ratzinger, 1971). Alfred Läpple notes it with brilliant words: “Ratzinger was influenced by a view of Revelation according to which Revelation is first and foremost the historical action of God, in the progress of the history of salvation, rather than the communication of some truths to reason through concepts, as claimed in the Neo-Scholastic view” (Rawland, 2008).

## 5.2. Revealed Wisdom

The notion of wisdom cannot be separated from the theology of history. It always occurs within a historical context and is achieved through learning and sanctity. Wisdom in its four stages emerges from the revelation: *sapientia uniformis*, *sapientia multiformis*, *sapientia omniformis*, *sapientia nulliformis* (*sapientia*: wisdom). Uniform wisdom is *sola ratione* and is proper to philosophy. Arising from certain rational truths, it helps man to understand the eternal rules and fundamental principles of all knowledge. They are rooted in God but cannot grasp Him. It is found in Moses. The *sapientia multiformis* comes from the divine revelation. It is based on the text of Ephesians 3:8-10 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. Paul imparted this wisdom to the ordinary faithful. Scripture is veiled for the proud and revealed for the humble. The *sapientia omniformis* sees in everything the hand of the Creator and follows His traces through all of creation, which expresses the glory of God (cf. Ps 91:5; 103:24) (Nichols, 2007). It is based on Romans 1:19 and represented by Solomon. The created world is thus the manifestation of God’s eternal wisdom (Flipper, 2015). This form of wisdom makes the letter of the creation understandable:

He who does not allow himself to be illumined by the glory of created things is blind; he who does not awaken to their call is deaf; he who does not praise God for all His works is mute; he who does not discover the First Principle from all these signs is a fool. Therefore, open your eyes, call upon your spiritual ears; loosen your lips and apply your heart so that you may see, hear, praise, love, serve, glorify, and honour your God in all creatures, lest the entire universe raise itself up against you. Therefore, the earth will rise up to struggle with those who do not understand (Ratzinger, 1971).

The *sapientia nulliformis* comes about when reason is silenced and darkened by the mystical power of the divine mystery. It is formless to the degree that it lies beyond all forms. This is the wisdom that Paul taught to Timothy and Dionysius but hid from the other believers. It is based on the tenth plague of Exodus 11:29-36 and 1 Corinthians 2:6-10. (Nichols, 2007).

## 5.3. The Revelation of the Eighth Day

In contrast with Augustine, Bonaventure does not approach history in terms of

opposition: “all the mysteries of Scripture treat of Christ with his Body and of the Anti-Christ and the Devil with his cohorts” (Ratzinger, 1971). However, he understands it in terms of revelation. It is a course of tension between the general revelation and the particular one which is granted to the *perfecti*. This tension will last until the final age when there will be only the *perfecti*. There will be a greater fullness of revelation at the end of time. It concerns both Scripture and mysticism. *Revelatio* is understood not as a written document but generally as the inner understanding or the unveiling of the hidden. The letter is in the sight of Bonaventure, the Old Testament and the Spirit, the New Testament. It is like water, which has to be transformed into wine. It is a stone to be changed into bread; a skin around the true fruit (Ratzinger, 1971). This spiritual meaning constitutes the content of faith. This hidden can be the future, the mystical meaning of Scripture, or the imageless unveiling of the divine reality that takes place in the mystical ascent (Von Balthasar, 1955). Ratzinger points out that “Scripture in the full sense is theology, i.e. it is the book and the understanding of the book in the faith of the church...theology can be called Scripture, for it is nothing other than the understanding of Scripture, this understanding, which is theology, brings Scripture to that full fruitfulness which corresponds to its nature as revelation” (Ratzinger, 1971).

The Order of the final age will be an Order of contemplation and of the pure and final revelation (Nichols, 2007). This revelation will be non-discursive but simple. It is about the full understanding of revelation. It is conceived in terms of the *sapientia nulliformis*. The Scripture will be fully and truly opened, as it was to the disciples of Emmaus (Luke 24:18-25). The wisdom which was reserved for the perfect will become public; the knowledge possessed by the apostles will be accessible. This revelation will neither abolish the revelation of Christ nor transcend the New Testament. It is the fulfilment of the New Testament revelation understood imperfectly. The beginning will be equal to the end, and the final age to the first age. As poverty arose in the early church, it will also blossom at the end of the Church, and the apostolic life will be restored. There is, thus, a parallel between the *seraphici* and the *apostoli* (Ratzinger, 1971).

Regarding the revelation of the final age, the Fathers are now seen as those who received a new spiritual revelation, but not the last. This revelation is the soul of the scriptures. It stands on the dynamic understanding of revelation. It will be fully grasped in the eighth age. Jesus is the *Deus revelatus, Deus absconditus* (God revealed, God hidden). He is the definitive revelation of the Father (*Dei Verbum* 2); however, this revelation cannot be given a definitive and temporal fixation. This thought can destroy the idea that the revelation ends with the death of the last apostle. The Revelation is like an ongoing event that requires a believing subject, which is the Church (De Gaal, 2010). The theologian becomes the *revelator absconditorum* and the theology as the corresponding *revelatio absconditorium* (Ratzinger, 1971).

In Judaism, the time was compared to a world-week of six thousand years, fol-

lowed by the kingdom of God as the seventh day. It was also connected to the feasts, which refer to Creation and celebrate God's historical intervention (Ratzinger, 2001). The Christian transgression of the Judaic Sabbath led to the notion of the eighth day. There was a controversy opposing the seventh day and the eighth day. It has been harmonized in the axiom *Septima aetas currit cum sexta* (the seventh age runs together with the sixth), used already by John Scotus Eriugena. The sixth and seventh days are interconnected. The eternal eighth day will start with the resurrection and judgment (Ratzinger, 1971). It is the age of *Christus oriens* (Rising Christ) and the resurrection, for it is stated that in *octavo, resurrectionis est plenitudo* (De Lubac, 1998). It is the age of the sun. The time will end up. All the creation will be new: *caelum novum, nova terra* (New heaven, new earth) (De Lubac, 1998).

#### 5.4. The Centrum and Medium of Revelation

The notion of *regressus in infinitum* sheds light on the realisation that a double movement of *egressus* and *regressus* characterises history. They are united and divided by Christ at the centre (De Gaal, 2010). Reconciling the Christian and pagan concepts of time, he asserts that this duality causes history to follow a circular movement. As the circle closes on its beginning, it proceeds from God through Christ and returns to God. Thus, Jerome might be right when he says: "*Omega revolvit ad alpha*" (Ratzinger, 1971). Christ is the center of all things and sciences, as long as the hidden meaning is concerned. The center of the circle, which is found with two lines, refers to the centrality of the Cross. Christ has, therefore, definitively solved the geometry problem of the lost center of history (Ratzinger, 1971). Thus, the idea of a spiral arose. Christ is the center and middle of God's revelation, considered a circle or a line. This revelation follows the spiral movement and is perpetually new. The decisive moment in human history for Christian theology is neither at the beginning, as it was for the Greeks, nor at the end, as it is in revolutionary theories, but in the middle (Danielou, 1958). Nichols' estimation is worthy of note:

In reality, however, time is always saving time. History is a movement of *egressus* from God; and *regressus* to him through Jesus Christ who is the centre that both divides and unites. Through Bonaventure's work, Ratzinger here encountered, and appropriated, the Christocentricity which was being discovered anew by Catholic dogmaticians in the 1950s. Indeed, Bonaventure pressed Christocentrism to the point of making the Christ who is the centre of all the centre, even, of all the sciences. In each case, he urges us to press beyond the literal sense of any given discipline to its ultimate meaning: thus the *De reductione artium ad theologiam*. More particularly, Christ is the *medium distantiae*, the defining centre, in his Crucifixion (Nichols, 2007).

If for Aristotle and Thomas time is the measure of duration, an accident of movement, for Bonaventure, it is the first of the four elements to be created: the

*tempus*, the *caelum empureum*, the *angelica natura*, and the *material* (Ratzinger, 1971). The revelation is essentially a dialogue. Ratzinger's theology of Revelation is then logo-centric and historical. To support this allegation, we can appeal to Collins: "Revelation is not properly understood as a monologue from God containing information God chooses to reveal about himself and the world, but rather a dialogue between two essential parties, the Eternal "I" speaking to the historical "Thou" of humanity and the historical "I" of humanity responding to the Eternal "Thou" (Collins, 2013).

## 6. Conclusion

The Fathers of the Church considered the six or seven days of the Creation narrative as a prophecy of the history of the world and humanity. Joachim questioned the patristic view and understood history as divided into three periods following the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity. It is the third age that has raised problems. It is, in his opinion, the time of a new monasticism and a totally new period of history, going beyond the revelation of the New Testament. Contrary to the Joachimites who opposed Joachim to the Fathers, Bonaventure interpreted him in conformity with the tradition and the ecclesiology. He excluded the threefold structure of history and defended the parallel structure. The events of the Old Testament prefigure the Christ-Event. Christ is thus given a central position and role in history and revelation. History is one as God is one for all history. However, this oneness guarantees newness and renewal in all periods of history. History is a journey of progress. Christ is the last word of God. He is not the *telos*, but the center that progresses towards the *eschaton* and opens to eternity. He is the *plenitudo* and *medium* of revelation. It is this interpretation that resolves the polemic of the center and the end of history in Christ.

This theology culminates in the hope for an age of God-given Sabbath-Rest within history and the last revelation at the end of ages. Thus, it is clear that the clue to understanding Bonaventure's theology of history lies in eschatology, the most all-pervasive theme in the New Testament. Joseph Ratzinger used Bonaventure's conclusion to develop his theology of history and closed the theological polemic of the 1950s. He notes that eschatology is what gives access to the central affirmations of the primitive Gospel and discovers that there is an active relationship between salvation-history and metaphysics. That is why he summed up that history is simultaneously unified and demarcated in Christ. Consequently, *parousia* will be in history, yet open the eternity. There is no clear understanding of eschatological realities without seeing them through the lens of the identity and work accomplished by Christ, whom he sees as the perfection of the dialogue between God and humanity. Liturgy is an exemplary illustration of Ratzinger's approach. There, the *eschaton* becomes present, the end and center meet, and history reaches its ultimate goal. That is what I will focus on throughout the remainder of this article. It will shed considerable light and facilitate the reader's understanding of the theology of the liturgy (Benedict XVI, 2023), as understood by

Ratzinger. The topic of my third paper on this subject will be “The Theology of the Liturgy in the Context of the Theology of History.”

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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