

## READING SCRIPTURE SPIRITUALLY: BONAVENTURE, THE QUADRIGA, AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION TODAY



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Modern Christians often polarize the otherwise inseparable realities of academic reading and personal reading of Scripture. While generally not declared outright, many Christians consider the two methods discontinuous. This article deems this bifurcation unnecessary and dangerous to the spiritual formation of individuals and the spiritual health of the church. It examines Bonaventure's insightful use of the quadriga in order to contribute to today's discussion of spiritual reading of Scripture.

Known as the Seraphic Doctor and the Prince of Mystics, Bonaventure was the foremost Franciscan theologian of the thirteenth century. While he is still highly regarded today, it is generally for his work in metaphysics and epistemology.<sup>1</sup> His reading of Scripture has been comparatively neglected,

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<sup>1</sup> For a general history of studies of Bonaventure, see Colman J. Majchrzak, "A Brief History of Bonaventurianism" (Ph.D. diss., The Catholic University of America, 1957), esp. 81–88. Ilia Delio, for example, tends to disregard Bonaventure's use of the commentaries and claims that Bonaventure's "essence" is "contained in a simple

that is, until the recent translation of his biblical works into English. This article, in order to retrieve a renewed and fresh perspective on spiritual reading of Scripture, shall focus its attention on Bonaventure's method of interpretation of Scripture. It uses Bonaventure because his method of spiritual reading is one of the most theologically coherent and philosophically comprehensive approaches to the subject to date. The distinguished historian, Henri de Lubac, once said on behalf of Bonaventure: in his "harmonious density, [he] exhibits an overall synthetic power that was perhaps never equaled."<sup>2</sup> The article shall argue that (at least a variation of) Bonaventure's quadrigal method ought to be retrieved today for the spiritual health of scholarship and the church. This thesis will be attained organically. It will first survey his proposed method of interpretation in his *Breviloquium* and *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*; then, it will appeal to scriptural and pastoral support to show that his method is a helpful route for retrieval.

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formula that Bonaventure himself professed," namely, emanation, exemplarity, and consummation (see her *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to his Life, Thought, and Writings* [New York: New City, 2001], 12). While it is true that Bonaventure's basic metaphysic is contained here, as he himself acknowledges, it is not true that these three words introduce the entirety of his thought, which includes all kinds of subjects, categories, and genres besides the philosophical metaphysics. As Zachary Hayes better summarizes, "In the wide diversity of his writings, ranging from the more Scholastic *Sentence Commentary* to the ascetical writings and sermons, the priority of Scripture is everywhere in evidence" (Zachary Hayes, *What Manner of Man?: Sermons on Christ by St. Bonaventure* [Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1974], 6).

For other scholars who tend to over-emphasize the philosopher in Bonaventure, see Vincent Mayer, "The Doctrine of St. Bonaventure: Concerning Our Knowledge of God (*De Cognoscibilitate Dei*)," *Franciscan Studies* 2 (1924): 39–54; John P. Dourley, *Paul Tillich and Bonaventure: An Evaluation of Tillich's Claim to Stand in the Augustinian-Franciscan Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); Matthew M. de Benedictis, "The Social Thought of Saint Bonaventure: A Study in Social Philosophy" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America, 1946), who devotes only one page to his use of Scripture (2–3); Efrem Bettoni, *Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Angelus Gambatese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964); Robert W. Shahan and Francis J. Kovach, eds., *Bonaventure and Aquinas: Enduring Philosophers* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976); Douglas C. Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues: From Bonaventure to MacIntyre* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), 21–37; Emma Thérèse Healy, "Saint Bonaventure's *De Reductione Artium Ad Theologiam*: A Commentary with an Introduction and Translation" (Ph.D. diss., Saint Bonaventure College, 1939); and Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. Dom Illyd Trethowan (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Henri de Lubac directed these words toward Bonaventure's *Breviloquium*. However, since this work is indicative of Bonaventure, they might as well be applied to the writer himself. See Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 2000, 2009), III:317; cf. idem, *Exégèse médiévale*, part 2, 1 (Paris: Aubier, 1961), 425.

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE QUADRIGA

The article begins by briefly defining the meaning and nature of the quadriga with particular attention to Bonaventure's understanding in his *Breviloquium*. Bonaventure suggests that the quadrigal dimension (the "fourfold sense") is, in fact, merely one aspect of his larger understanding of the polyvalence of Scripture,<sup>3</sup> but this contribution will focus only on his quadrigal method for the sake of space.

Bonaventure classically asserts that Scripture contains literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings at various places. He unapologetically states that these four meanings exist and are necessary for interpretation, since they are appropriate to Scripture's polyvalent subject matters, multiple writers, and holistic-salvific purpose.<sup>4</sup> In other words, because of the divine nature of the Bible and the fact that it is God's word to humans for the purposes of spiritual knowledge and growth as well as volitional transformation, Scripture must have spiritual senses (the *triplex*

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<sup>3</sup> He calls the polyvalence of Scripture the "fourfold pattern" of interpretation: "In this way it describes the breadth and length and height and depth of the entire universe, insofar as it is expedient to have knowledge of it for salvation" (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, trans. and ed. Dominic V. Monti, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. 9 [Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2005], prologue 0.3). First, the breadth of Scripture refers to the division of two testaments and the partition of each testament into four categories—legal, historical, sapiential, and prophetic (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 1.2–3; cf. Augustine, *Contra Adimantum*, 17.2). Second, the length of Scripture refers to its chronological span, including seven ages from the time of Adam until the general resurrection (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 2.1–3). Third, the height of Scripture refers to its ecclesiastical, angelic, and divine hierarchies. These hierarchies, incidentally, are each fulfilled through the "one Hierarchy, Jesus Christ," who is head of the church, head of the angels, and the middle person of the Trinity (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 3.2). The depth of scripture, fourth, refers to the quadrigal method, which is the subject of this paper. See also Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 5.1–4. For an excellent scholarly discussion, see Thomas Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator: A Translation and Analysis of his Commentary on Luke XVIII, 34–XIX, 42* (New York: University Press of America, 1985), 34–42; and George H. Tavard, *Transiency and Permanence: The Nature of Theology According to St Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1954), 41–55; and J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, trans. Jose de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild, 1964), 90–93.

<sup>4</sup> To be precise, he suggests that the subject matter is multivalent, including, for example, God, Christ, works of redemption, and content of belief (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 4.2). The source is from God through Christ and the Holy Spirit, and to various pens of human authors at different times (*ibid.*, prologue 4.4). The purpose of Scripture is to guide us in what we must know, do, and desire. Scripture thus engages the whole person, becomes the storyline of the person, and moves the person towards union with Christ (*ibid.*, prologue 0.1–5; cf. Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 30, 48, 5n).

*sensus spiritualis*) in addition to a literal sense. Bonaventure summarizes, “The tropological meaning lets us know what we should resolutely do; the allegorical meaning, what we should truly believe; the anagogical meaning, what we should desire for our eternal delight.”<sup>5</sup> The allegorical meaning thus relates to the gospel-centered meaning that is conveyed in the text that is pointing to Christ, the tropological meaning refers to what we ought to do in light of the text, and the anagogical meaning refers to that which we hope in light of the text.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that these four senses or meanings stem ultimately from a Christocentric reading of Scripture. This kind of reading acknowledges that Christ is indeed the Word himself; namely, he is the moral ideal and means to achieving the ideal through his Spirit (tropology), the thing believed (allegory), and the ultimate hope for the Christian (anagogy). As Christ is the basis of these senses, so Scripture becomes personal for the Christian. Indeed, Christians are united to Christ, and Christ fulfilled all of God’s promises; thus, vicariously, all promises are a yes to them in Christ (2 Cor 1:20).

## COMMENTARY ON THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Now, the article will evaluate how Bonaventure’s quadrigal method is carried out in his *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (henceforth, *Commentary*).<sup>7</sup> The article will explore this method using his comments in three passages as examples: Luke 4:18, 24:44–45, and 9:28–31.

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<sup>5</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 4.5. In other words, when texts with mystical import are found, they must be brought out and expounded clearly. He clarifies this beforehand (*ibid.*, prologue: 4.1): the allegorical sense “occurs when by one thing is indicated another which is a matter of belief;” the tropological or moral sense “occurs when, from something done, we learn something else that we should do;” and the anagogical sense “occurs when we are shown what it is we should desire, that is, the eternal happiness of the blessed.”

<sup>6</sup> In this sense, I would reject the modern distinctions between allegory and typology. While the former is sometimes associated with the Alexandrian school in the early church and the latter with the Antiochene school, Frances Young corrects this dichotomy in her work, “Alexandrian and Antiochene Exegesis,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1, ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 334–54.

<sup>7</sup> The *Commentary* was written in his early thirties, about eight years before his *Breviloquium*, but it is marked by continuity with that book. He probably wrote his *Breviloquium* in 1257, toward the end of his teaching career, whereas he plausibly wrote his commentary from 1248–1250, toward the beginning of his teaching career as *baccalaureus biblicus*—even though the *Commentary* manifests mature thought (see Dominic V. Monti, “Introduction,” in Bonaventure’s *Breviloquium*, ed. Dominic V. Monti [Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2005], xiv; Robert J. Karris,

*Luke 4:18*

The quadrilateral method is implicitly evident in his treatment of Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me [Jesus], because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”<sup>8</sup> Bonaventure locates this important verse within the overall structure of chapters 4 to 21, the structure of which he suggests broadly encompasses Jesus’ preaching. This verse is an excellent place to begin, for it is not only Luke’s programmatic passage of Jesus but also Bonaventure’s preferred launching point for his commentary.<sup>9</sup>

Bonaventure begins his exposition in the preface by noting that v. 18 has a general, special, and unique understanding. First, by general understanding, the verse refers to “the twofold person necessary for understanding, that is, the teacher and listener.”<sup>10</sup> He refers here to any reader of

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“St. Bonaventure’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke,” in Bonaventure’s *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, vol. one, ed. Robert J. Karris [Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2001]; idem, “Bonaventure and Talbert on Luke 8:26–39: Christology, Discipleships, and Evangelization,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 28:1 (2001): 57–59; Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 94–95; and Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 68–70). Robert J. Karris, disagrees, arguing that on account of its “scientific exegesis and preachers’ aids,” the commentary was probably written later while Bonaventure was a master (~1257) (Robert J. Karris, “St. Bonaventure as Biblical Interpreter: His Methods, Wit, and Wisdom,” *Franciscan Studies* 60 [2002]: 162). The dating of the commentary, however, does not change the substance of this thesis.

His *Commentary* is also marked by continuity with his other commentaries. Namely, see Bonaventure’s *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Robert J. Karris, trans. Campion Murray and Robert J. Karris (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2005); and idem, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Robert J. Karris (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2007). For Karris’ understanding of the relation between the commentaries on John and Luke, see Robert J. Karris, “Introduction,” in *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Robert J. Karris (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2007), 18–21. At the end of the day, it is clear that the commentaries are marked by continuity, if not, strict continuity, excepting two small factors: the existence of *quaestiones* in John and Ecclesiastes and the existence of more spiritual meanings in Luke (at least compared to John) (cf. Karris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 20).

<sup>8</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

<sup>9</sup> He begins his preface with this verse, explaining, “it occurred to us that none would be a more suitable [introduction] than that which Blessed Luke himself says” (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: preface 1).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I: preface 2.

Scripture.<sup>11</sup> Second, by special understanding, the verse refers to Luke, the original author.<sup>12</sup> Third, by unique understanding, the verse refers to Jesus Christ, that is, in the sense that Christ is the material principle of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> One might summarize Bonaventure to say that the “me” in “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” primarily and uniquely refers to Christ as the anointed one and representational figure of the new human race; thus, it also refers specially to Luke, the scriptural author who seeks to teach us of Christ, and generally to the teacher/listener of Scripture who is in Christ

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<sup>11</sup> He then elaborates the requirements for this twofold person—anointed with grace, obedience, love, humility, gentleness, and belief—by a plethora of intra-canonical verses related to the virtues described in Luke 4:18. He concludes this discussion by noting that the teacher must be anointed by grace, obedient, and loving; and the listener must be meek, humble, and faithful. The verses used include 1 Kings 19:6, 1 Sam 16:3, 2 Pt 1:21 for those anointed by grace; Ex 3:11 and 4:10 for obedience; and 1 Thess 2:7–8 for love (for more detail, see Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: preface 2, cf. 3–8). He justifies this reading by appealing, “If, therefore, the Scriptures are to be interpreted by the same Spirit through whom they were written—and ‘holy men of God spoke, the Holy Spirit inspiring them’ (2 Pet 1:21)—, then it is necessary that the teacher be anointed with heavenly grace, so that he might be an apt teacher of the things propounded by Christ and written by the Holy Spirit” (*ibid.*, I: preface 3). In other words, Bonaventure applies this verse directly to any believer (any listener and teacher of God) by the fact that the virtues of the verse necessarily speak to him.

<sup>12</sup> Specifically, he argues that Luke exemplifies the twofold extrinsic causes, efficient and final: the efficient cause is the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Luke, and the final cause is its result in manifesting truth, healing, and preaching salvation. The verses that he cites here are John 16:13; Matt 10:20; Luke 21:15; 2 Cor 8:18; Sirach 15:5; and John 2:27, for the former cause; and Ps 63:10; John 1:1; Wisdom 16:12; John 20:31; and Mark 16:15–16, for the latter cause (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: preface 9–16). He concludes, “Thus the aforementioned saying, specially understood in the person of Blessed Luke, points to the twofold extrinsic causes, namely, efficient, and final” (*ibid.*, preface 16), or he says, “Here the text notes the fittingness of [Luke’s] testimony” (*ibid.*, I: Chapter IV, 36 [v. 18]).

<sup>13</sup> This is true because Jesus is mediator, preacher, restorer, and conqueror. These four dispositions are the means by which Christ is the material principle of Scripture. Later in his commentary he refers to the four slightly differently: mediator, teacher, restorer, and rewarder (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: Chapter 4, 36 [v. 18]). Regarding the latter disposition, conqueror, he uses Colossians 2:15 and Psalm 67:19 especially, concluding, “Therefore, because Christ the Lord, under this fourfold disposition, is the object of faith and the subject of the Gospel, it is right that in the proposed saying he is designated the material cause or subject” (*ibid.*, I: preface 21; cf. Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 75).

and thus participating in his ministry.<sup>14</sup> Bonaventure suggests that, given the layers of meaning in Scripture, this passage—and thus the rest of the gospel—is directed at the present reader of Scripture. It is not simply about Christ but also those in Christ who are readers of Scripture today. While it is challenging to correlate these three existing understandings of Luke 4:18 with the traditional fourfold sense, it is clear that Bonaventure’s exposition of Luke 4:18 at least implicitly suggests that the interpretation of Scripture is quadrival. This idea, however, shall be developed more clearly later.

### *Luke 24:44–45*

In Luke 24:44–45, Bonaventure explicitly addresses the quadrival method as he comments on the text. The passage thus helps to illumine his specific method and understanding of the quadriva. The text reads, “Then [Jesus] said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures.”

After placing this passage in its Lukan structural context,<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure begins his discussion by noting the Christocentric dimension and thus the necessary spiritual senses of Scripture. First, he avers that Christ is the formal principle of Scripture. This means that Christ fulfills the form of Scripture (as law, prophet, psalms) and the form of the Gospel of Luke (as mediator, preacher, restorer, and conqueror).<sup>16</sup> Bonaventure establishes

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<sup>14</sup> Compare, for example, Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: preface 3, 11, and *ibid.*, Chapter IV, 36 (v. 18). In the first instance, Bonaventure is clear that “me” refers to any Christian; in the second, it refers emphatically (and it seems, exclusively) to Luke; in the third, it again refers emphatically (and it seems, exclusively) to Christ. The only possible conclusion is that Bonaventure holds together multiple meanings.

<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure locates Luke 24:44–45 in the fourth and final section of Luke. The section pertains to the triumph of the resurrection. It begins by speaking about the revelation of the resurrection (vv. 1–12), continues with the appearance of the resurrected one (vv. 13–16), then with the certitude of that appearance (vv. 17–32), and finally with the spreading abroad of the certitude of truth (vv. 33–47) (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, III: Chapter XXIV, 1, 17, 42). The verses in question particularly deal with the infallible foundation for faith, especially as it relates to Christ (*ibid.*, III: Chapter XXIV, 56–58 [vv. 44–45]). He says that Luke intends to show that the appearance of Christ is “doubly confirmed, that is, by the means of the authentic witness of scripture and through the infused life of understanding” (*ibid.*, III: Chapter XXIV, 56 [v. 44]).

<sup>16</sup> Regarding the former, Bonaventure notes that Christ’s mention of law, prophets, and psalms (v. 44) encompasses the entire Old Testament and provides a firmer base of testimony. As Luke says, “All things must be fulfilled that are written in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms concerning me [Christ]” (*ibid.*, III: Chapter XXIV, 57 [v. 44]).

this statement through an allegorical interpretation. Namely, quoting Deuteronomy 19:15, he states that just as “in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word stands,” so also by three witnesses—the law, prophets, and psalms—Christ’s testimony is firmly established.<sup>17</sup> He develops this idea more fully by extending his allegory into the Triune God: the law corresponds to the authoritative Father, prophecy stands for the perspicacious Son, and the psalms represent the harmonious Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Lest the reader think that the Triune God is the formal principle of Scripture, he continues to say that Christ fulfills each of these offices as the ruler (law), teacher (prophets), and high priest (psalms).<sup>19</sup> His Triune and Christological hermeneutic is clear. In other words, as Christ fulfills Scripture, he also fulfills its form.<sup>20</sup> Regarding the Gospel of Luke in particular, Christ is the formal principle in the sense that his four *material* dispositions—mediator, preacher, restorer, and conqueror—are indicative of the structure of the book: chapters 1–3 (mystery of the incarnation), 4–21 (magisterial preaching), 22–23 (medicine of the passion), and 24 (triumph of the resurrection).<sup>21</sup> His conclusion is clear: “the scriptures are about him and for his sake. And therefore, they are explained by him.”<sup>22</sup> For Bonaventure, Scripture in general and Luke’s Gospel in particular are organized and understood through Christ. Christ is the formal principle of Scripture. While one can dispute the idiosyncratic interpretations that Bonaventure makes, he certainly is right to place Christ as the formal center of the book and Scripture as a whole. (This discussion will be continued later.)

Second, Christ is the efficient principle of Scripture. Bonaventure says, quoting Luke, “Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (v. 45).<sup>23</sup> Bonaventure understands this verse both intra-canonically and spiritually. He writes, “He, I say, opened [their minds] because he alone has the key.”<sup>24</sup> What is this key? As Bonaventure continues, it is the key of David in Isaiah 22:22, the key that opens and shuts. Therefore, in

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “But,” he continues, “all bear witness to Christ as the most excellent ruler, teacher, and high priest” (ibid., III: Chapter XXIV, 57 [v. 44]).

<sup>20</sup> He explains, “And therefore, all have been fulfilled in him” (ibid., III: Chapter XXIV, 57 [v. 44]).

<sup>21</sup> See his discussion in Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: preface 23; cf. Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 75. In fact, the four material dispositions of Christ each correspond with the form of the four gospels, on the one hand, and the form of the Gospel of Luke, on the other. He quotes Aristotle, saying, “knowledge is divided to correspond with the realities” (*De Anima*, Book III, chapter 8), in order to begin to prove this point. He thereafter quotes Ezekiel 1:5–6, and traditionally shows that each face of the animal corresponds with each book of the Gospels (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, I: preface 24).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., III: Chapter XXIV, 58 (v. 45).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

its ultimate allegorical and anagogical senses this key refers to Christ, the Davidic King. Namely, just as the key stands for Christ (allegory), so also Christ has the power to open people's eyes to contemplate Scripture by his possession and revelation of the overwhelming "light" (anagogy).<sup>25</sup> As Bonaventure concludes, "The scriptures . . . are explained by him. For it is said in Revelation that the risen lion and the slaughtered lamb opened the book."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Christ makes Scripture comprehensible; therefore, he is the efficient principle of the Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

The importance of this passage, then, lays in the two major advancements that it makes toward this article. First, Bonaventure ties the Christocentric dimension of Scripture to the correspondingly necessary spiritual senses, including (at this point) allegory and anagogy. As the formal center and efficient cause of Scripture, he is the form that organizes and comprehends the breadth, length, height, and depth of the Scriptures, on the one hand, and he is the cause of its being opened and understood, on the other. Second, more essentially to the thesis, Bonaventure is true to his quadrigal method as he draws clear allegorical and anagogical readings from this passage. In other words, he is saying that, if God really is triune and revealed himself ultimately in Christ and in Scripture, then Scripture (the Word of God) will naturally contain implicit but real Trinitarian and Christological spiritual meanings.

### *Luke 9:28–31*

While this article has expounded the basic structure of Bonaventure's method, it remains to be seen how his interpretation would be carried out in a narrative passage. This final section will briefly explicate such a narrative passage. For space constraints, however, the exposition will concern itself only with verses 28–31 of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ: "Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling

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<sup>25</sup> Here he quotes Psalm 118:18 and Daniel 2:22. As he says, Christ "reveals profound . . . things and knows what has been established in darkness. And the light is with him" (*ibid.*, III: Chapter XXIV, 58 [v. 45]).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> At this point, the reader might begin to object that, as Bonaventure himself has heretofore acknowledged, the Spirit is the efficient principle and not Christ (*ibid.*, I: preface 9–16). However, Bonaventure does not contradict himself. As he explains in the present context, "Now these profound mysteries in scripture no one understands but Christ crucified and risen and proclaimed . . . by the Holy Spirit" (*ibid.*, III: Chapter XXIV, 58 (v. 45)). Therefore, just as Christ cannot be separated from his Spirit, so also Christ is the efficient principle of interpretation.

white. Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”<sup>28</sup> The passage wonderfully demonstrates the quadrigal nature of interpretation as Bonaventure uses all three spiritual senses of interpretation.

Bonaventure first discusses the literal sense of each verse. He starts by finely detailing the structure of the passage: he places the story within Jesus’ ministry of preaching (chapters 4 to 21).<sup>29</sup> After structurally locating the story, he expositis verse 28 in three parts: the timeframe of the transfiguration, the companions involved, and the eminence of the mountain. First, he speaks about the timeframe of the transfiguration. Reading Scripture intracanonically, he uses 2 Peter 3:9 to show that the Lord does not delay his promises for a long time, or, in the case of this passage, more than a week (v. 28).<sup>30</sup> This number, he immediately interjects, has a “figure” in the marriage of Rachel (Gen 29:27), since Jacob had to work a week before attaining his bride. This anticipation, he thought, was a type that points towards the greater anticipation before the transfiguration. Second, he speaks about the companions involved. He notes that Peter, John, and James were Jesus’ closest companions (Luke 8:51). He then elaborates the meaning of the passage through an allegory of the three, noting that the three disciples stand for “the mystery of the Trinity” and “lay a foundation for firm testimony.”<sup>31</sup> Lastly, he speaks about the eminence of the mountain on which the event occurred. Because a mountain stretches between heaven and earth, the setting is an excellent place for contemplation and prayer, and it naturally separates the three companions “from the crowd and from earthly matters.”<sup>32</sup> He then

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<sup>28</sup> In defense of this decision, let the reader take note of two things: First, by the space allotted, Bonaventure clearly believes that verses 28–31 are the most significant ones. (Verse 28 alone constitutes twelve of the thirty-two pages of his exposition of the transfiguration.) Second, since this paper seeks merely to understand the method of interpretation, and since this verse is a beautiful example of his method of interpretation, the few verses should suffice for our purpose.

<sup>29</sup> Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, II: Chapter IX, 1, 29, 43–69 (vv. 28–36).

<sup>30</sup> He then attempts to settle the contradiction between Luke’s eight days (Luke 9:28) and Matthew’s six days (Matt 17:1; cf. *ibid.*, II: Chapter IX, 44 [v. 28]).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, II: Chapter IX, 45 (v. 28). He then speaks about the outstanding eminence of these men, as Peter would become the leader of the church, James would become the first martyr among the apostles, and John cared for Jesus’ mother after the latter’s crucifixion (*ibid.*). He also gives other “interpretations” of why Jesus took these three particular disciples, saying, for example, that Jesus taught about the nature of those being saved in the church through these three figures—the prelates in Peter, the active believers in James, and the contemplative believers in John; or alternatively, the married in Peter, the continent in James, and the virgins in John (*ibid.*).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* He continues, “Such places are fitting for divine revelation” (*ibid.*).

forms the allegorical connection between this mountain and Mount Sinai (Ex 3:1–2; 24:12) and also the mount on which Moses saw the Promised Land (Deut 34:1).<sup>33</sup>

Using this spiritually-girded literal sense, Bonaventure then continues to exposit the spiritual sense of verse 28. He says, “Now spiritually in these three there is profound formation for those desiring to attain to seeing the transfiguration of the Lord through the vision of contemplation.”<sup>34</sup> Regarding the timeframe, he interprets the six days (according to Matt 17:1) anagogically, since they correspond to Bonaventure’s conception of the six successive steps of contemplation. While this Augustinian characteristic is a bit odd for modern readers, it is a common feature of Bonaventure’s philosophy and his contemporary readers; thus, he believed that it is important to note that seeing and experiencing God’s glory is not something that can be taken lightly but requires a humble, ready posture of receiving, which in this present context was communicated by the classic Augustinian ladder.<sup>35</sup> Regarding the companions, he interprets them tropologically, since they are signs of the three virtues that are necessary for contemplation of God, namely faith (Peter), hope (James), and charity (John).<sup>36</sup> Regarding the place, the mountain, he again interprets it anagogically by saying that it aptly stands for the eminence of the proper, contemplative life. To buttress his point, he uses a vast variety of biblical and apocryphal texts.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> He concludes his discussion by noting the fittingness of a mountain for revelation: “Therefore, from this one gathers that a mountain is an apt place for God to appear, to teach, and to be contemplated,” quoting Bede likewise (*ibid.*).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 (v. 28).

<sup>35</sup> He quotes Richard of St. Victor and King Solomon approvingly. Specifically, he quotes *On the Ark* or *On Contemplation* and 1 Kings 10:18–19. Cf. *Ibid.*, II: Chapter IX, 47 (v. 28). Bonaventure also gives an interpretation of Luke’s eight days. He argues that Luke says eight days since he “treats this apparition from the perspective of glory after the resurrection.” He believes that this argument is certain because Luke mentions the sleeping and awakening in 9:32. He therefore indicates an eighth, Augustinian step (*ibid.*, 48 [v. 28]; cf. Delio, *Simply Bonaventure*, 130–144).

<sup>36</sup> “Faith by Peter, whose name means understanding. Hope by James, whose name means wrestler. Charity by John, whose name means in whom is grace” (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, II: Chapter IX, 49 [v. 28]). These three disciples, in fact, often stand for these virtues in Bonaventure (cf. *ibid.*, I: Chapter VIII, 91; cf. Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 78, 140, note 72). Bonaventure quotes Augustine and Dionysius approvingly regarding two other interpretations. For example, he says that the three may stand for the three dispositions necessary for contemplation—industry (Peter), discipline (James), and grace (John) (*ibid.*, II: Chapter IX, 49 [v. 28]).

<sup>37</sup> Namely, he suggests that the mountain signifies the fact that the contemplative life is one of discernment, devoted dedication, love, security, tranquility, sweetness, and the ability to rise up. He uses a vast variety of texts to show this (Matt 5:1; Isa 2:3; Ex 24:18; Gen 22:2; Ex 3:12; Song 4:6; Sirach 43:4; 1 Macc 6:39; Ex 19:18; Gen 19:17; Matt 24:16; Ps 120:1; 1 Kings 19:8–9; Matt 14:23; Ps 71:3; Ezk 34:14; Joel 3:18; Isa 2:2, 1 Kings 18:42–44; Tobit 11:5; Phil 3:20; cf. *Ibid.*, II: Chapter IX, 50 [v. 28]).

In the end, the spiritual sense of the passage is primarily anagogical and tropological.

After expositing the literal and spiritual senses of verse 28, Bonaventure considers verses 29–31.<sup>38</sup> He again distinguishes the literal meaning of these verses by three ideas: the brightness of Christ's appearance, the radiance of his clothing, and his companions. First, regarding the brightness of his appearance, Bonaventure notes that Christ transfigured into glory. This transfiguration, he continues, "shows the glory of the resurrection" for all believers according to Matthew 13:43.<sup>39</sup> He then elaborates this idea by going to 1 Corinthians 15:40–42, where brightness and glory are the two principal gifts intended for the resurrected believers. He finally considers Christ's actual transfiguration, for, indeed, "Christ assumed this gift"—subtly when he was born, agilely when he walked on water, and impassibly when he handed his body over to his disciples in the sacrament.<sup>40</sup> Second, regarding the brightness of his clothing, Bonaventure quotes Mark 9:2 and relates the whiteness to that which will appear for the saints according to Revelation 3:5 and 7:13.<sup>41</sup> Third, regarding the companions, he says that their presence was necessary because it is not fitting for the Lord's glory to be seen alone. Moses, he continues, symbolized the Law, and Elijah symbolized the prophets.<sup>42</sup>

Bonaventure then moves to consider the spiritual meaning of verses 29–31. First, with regards to Christ's shining appearance, Bonaventure says that it is anagogically indicative of the contemplative believer who turns his face to God and is illumined and perfected through Christ. He cites in support Moses' shining face and the believers' unveiled and transformed faces of glory.<sup>43</sup> Second, regarding the shining clothing, he says that this tropological reality represents that the believer's life will one day become blameless and thus they ought to seek sanctification through the Spirit in the present.<sup>44</sup> Third, regarding the companions, he says that they are

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<sup>38</sup> He notes that whereas verse 28 is about the antecedents of the transfiguration, these verses are about the things that accompany transfiguration (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, II: Chapter IX, 51 [v. 29]).

<sup>39</sup> "Then the just will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (ibid.).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 52 (v. 29).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., II: Chapter IX, 53 (v. 29). Again, Bonaventure quotes a plethora of biblical passages and notes other possible interpretations. These interpretations include the fact that Christ appeared to both of them because one was dead and the other alive, so by appearing to them there might be witnesses of every kind (*Glossa*); or the fact that both appeared so that the Law and the prophets might be shown to be in harmony with Christ (Bede).

<sup>43</sup> He cites Exodus 34:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18 (ibid., II: Chapter IX, 55 [v. 31]).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Their brightness, then, will shine like stars among a perverse and depraved people. He cites Philippians 2:14 and Romans 13:12–14.

allegorical witnesses who give certitude of the vision, as the Old and New Testaments give certitude to Christ.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the spiritual meaning is anagogical, tropological, and allegorical. Again, these three spiritual senses are present, not for theological precision, but rather to incite the reader to understand the deeper and more personal meaning of Scripture for the purposes of formation and contemplation.<sup>46</sup>

### *General Observations on Luke*

While his quadrilateral method has been explored, some additional general observations emerge about the ordering of his scriptural method of interpretation. His ordering, as this article conceives it, is the following:

*First.* He places the passage within the fourfold structure of Luke, a fourfold structure that is indicative of Christ. His placement is important: it is not capricious but intrinsic to the text.<sup>47</sup>

*Second.* He discusses the literal sense of the passage, usually under several categories that correspond to the overall structure of that passage (the companions involved, the place it concerns, etc.). As Dominic Monti rightly recognizes, Bonaventure held that “the literal sense of Scripture is decisive. . . . This literal meaning is the only way Scripture may be used as an ‘authority’ to ground theological arguments.”<sup>48</sup>

*Third.* He girds the literal sense with a vast intra-canonical reading of Scripture that is related to those literal categories. As Bonaventure claims, “All of scripture is like a single zither [stringed instrument]. And the lesser string does not produce the harmony by itself, but in union with others. Likewise, one passage of scripture depends upon another. Indeed, a thousand passages are related to a single passage.”<sup>49</sup> Bonaventure, in other words, interprets Scripture by Scripture as he quotes other passages containing the same word, phrase, or idea.<sup>50</sup> He does not wish to prove his exegesis so much as to illuminate it.

<sup>45</sup> He also quotes Richard of St. Victor here. See *ibid.*, II: Chapter IX, 55 (v. 31).

<sup>46</sup> See Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 4.2–4.

<sup>47</sup> See Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 142–43. His divisions, moreover, were “not foreign to the writers of the thirteenth century” (*ibid.*, 142).

<sup>48</sup> Monti, “Bonaventure’s Use of ‘The Divine Word’ in Academic Theology,” 87; cf. Karris, “St. Bonaventure’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke,” viii–ix; Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 147. “Put another way, Bonaventure’s literal exegesis is not primarily determined by ecclesiastical creeds or pious sentiment. It is scientific” (Karris, “Bonaventure as Biblical Interpreter,” 165).

<sup>49</sup> Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, 19:7.

<sup>50</sup> See Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 147.

*Fourth.* He (often, if not typically) supports the literal sense with the spiritual sense(s). These three spiritual senses, he explains, are the “loveliness of the mysteries of holy Scripture.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, “the spiritual senses are not really additional senses but signify figurative aspects that in Bonaventure’s view are contained in the literal sense by its very nature.”<sup>52</sup>

*Fifth.* He concludes and returns to the literal sense.<sup>53</sup>

This ordering, though not itself determinant of the thesis, unexpectedly illuminates it.<sup>54</sup> Bonaventure is *quadrigal*, for he moves from a literal and canonical reading to a spiritual one, whereby the meaning is expanded to include doctrinal truths (allegory), practical reflections (tropological), and joyful contemplation (anagogical).

## BONAVENTURE AND A WAY FORWARD FOR EVANGELICALS

At this juncture, it remains to be seen how Bonaventure’s method can and ought to be retrieved for today. The rest of this article proceeds to

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<sup>51</sup> “*amaenitas mysteriorum sacrae Scripturae*” (qtd. in Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, II:392, n. 117). See also Karris, “St. Bonaventure’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke,” viii–ix, note 7; and Dominic Monti, “Bonaventure’s Use of ‘The Divine Word’ in Academic Theology,” 65–88, esp. 87. As Reist correctly comments, Bonaventure never distinguishes the various spiritual senses, and yet the meanings of the text “may be reduced to one of these terms” (Reist, *Saint Bonaventure as a Biblical Commentator*, 152).

<sup>52</sup> Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, 210.

<sup>53</sup> One could also add another dimension or step to Bonaventure’s interpretive method: *ecclesiastical*. Namely, Bonaventure, after venturing to understand the spiritual sense, usually consults the Church Fathers to support or to broaden his spiritual sense. For example, commenting on the transfiguration, he uses Richard of St. Victor to support and expand his six successive steps of contemplation, that is, his anagogical reading of Luke 9:28 (Bonaventure, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, II: Chapter IX, 47 [v. 28]). Bougerol, in fact, notes that throughout the Luke commentary Bonaventure quotes Ambrose’s *Exposition* seventy times and Bede’s *Commentary* one hundred and sixty-four times, in addition to several other *glossae* and homilies (Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure*, 95). As Karris summarizes and systematizes this material, he argues that most of these sources come from Hugh of St. Cher and his commentary (Karris, “Bonaventure as Biblical Interpreter,” 189–190). However, because the ecclesiastical dimension is less regular and, for purposes of clarity and brevity, the dimension has been excluded from the thesis.

<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed listing of Bonaventure’s hermeneutical ordering, and a comparison of Bonaventure with Gordon D. Fee’s *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), see Karris, “Bonaventure as Biblical Interpreter,” 167, cf. 168–208. Karris’ ordering, while not following the same verbiage as this paper, consistently supports the paper’s thesis.

retrieve Bonaventure, first, by defending the quadrigal meaning by appealing to Scripture itself and to pastoral reasons for using the quadriga, and then by exploring the helpful practice of *lectio* and how it relates to the quadriga.

To be clear at the outset, while some of Bonaventure's speculative and idiosyncratic spiritual readings might be disagreeable, this is missing the point. He is not saying that these three spiritual meanings are intended authorial meanings (literal meanings); rather, he believes that they are helpful insight to the intra-canonical context and spiritual meaning for contemporary individuals. Perhaps the phrase, "spiritual readings," is less than helpful today, since it connotes a kind of spiritual meaning that is abstracted from the literal text. It might be more helpful to call it a "gospel-centered reading" or "personal reading," a meaning that is grounded in the literal text and directed towards the edification of the reader for the purposes of the gospel. That is how he meant it. For example, Bonaventure likened the six days before the transfiguration to an Augustinian-type ladder of knowledge in which the reader is prepared by God to experience God more fully. While one might not personally see this correspondence between the literal text and spiritual reading, Bonaventure found it helpful to picture God as qualitatively other in holiness, thus entailing the disciples' preparatory wait for the beauty of his glory. It is certainly a true statement, and it helps to capture an overt idea inherent in the text, that is, waiting and longing for the fuller revelation in Christ. Indeed, the transfiguration is a formative moment in the Gospel of Luke, a moment that is meant to represent the perfect sublimity and beauty of the Christ so that one can imagine and contemplate the exhausting glory of Christ as the God-man. There is a nice point to his reading after all, even as one might deny the helpfulness of the specific Augustinian ascent to knowledge. Again, this is not the point. In other words, Bonaventure found it helpful, as the ancients always practiced, to see the literal and spiritual meanings simultaneously, while evangelicals today tend to see the spiritual meanings as mere application after the fact.

As the rest of this article will argue, Scripture ought to be interpreted in terms of literal and spiritual senses, while one might deny the helpfulness of some of the language. The literal sense includes the intra-canonical senses, since Scripture is one as breathed out by God. The spiritual senses are completely based in the literal sense and are Christocentrically focused, since the doctrinal (allegorical), tropological, and anagogical meanings are all necessarily fulfilled in Christ and thus spiritually applicatory to the Christian person. Thus, in its very reading and purpose, Scripture speaks to the formational attributes of the Christian—faith (allegory), hope (anagogy), and love (tropology). In reality, these three spiritual senses are so overlapping and related that they may as well be one, of course, but the threefold nature of them reminds the Christian of the present chief virtues and thus his or her personal response to the text. To begin, therefore, a defense of why the quadrigal method ought to be retrieved for biblical and pastoral

reasons is in order. (The article bypasses the historical discussion in the meantime.)

### *Biblical Grounds for the Quadriga*

First, there are biblical grounds to holding to the spiritual senses. For sake of space, the article will primarily show that the New Testament authors practiced hermeneutical methods that highlight the same practices as the quadriga.

For example, the Apostle Paul himself practiced allegory. As a typical but helpful defense, it should be noted that, in order to combat the Judaists, he set up the case of Abraham's wives as an allegory of the "present Jerusalem" and the "Jerusalem above" (see Gal 4:21–26). "Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants" (v. 24, NRSV). One may quibble about the particularities at this point, but it seems that Paul perceives the two wives as a historical truth with theological meaning as well. This is an allegory, that is, a helpful theologizing of a historical reality. It is akin to suggesting that Israel's exodus is an allegory for the spiritual exodus from sin. While the latter example has more biblical warrant than the former, this does not keep Paul from seeing a spiritual parallel in Abraham's wives.

An example of a proper "allegory" that Christians can make is from Jeremiah 29:11, if only because the verse is often used as a case against allegory: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." While the text is more plainly speaking about God's plans for ancient Israel, the Christocentric reader recognizes that the Second Israel, Jesus Christ, fulfills the mission and ministry of Israel in his perfect life and vicarious death and resurrection, so that the intention of the author here spiritually extends to those in Christ, "for in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'" (1 Cor 1:20). In other words, the plans that God has here are ultimately fulfilled in the New Israel, the one who offers us this promise in him *now* through his redemption accomplished on the cross and *eternally* through the new heavens and new earth.

Allegory can obviously be applied problematically, as the history of interpretation shows. However, at its heart allegory is about seeing Christ and the gospel on every page of Scripture. It is about believing that the Old Testament really is concerning the gospel, since the gospel was "promised beforehand" within it, as Paul claims (Rom 1:1–2). This kind of argument follows from the biblical articulation of the Christocentric nature of Scripture, as adeptly shown by Bonaventure: Christ is the subject for which Scripture ultimately speaks, the organizing principle by which Scripture is formed, and the regenerating activity, through his Spirit, through which Scripture may be understood. Indeed, these three principles are merely implications of Christ's own clear words: he "fulfills" Scripture (Matt 5:17–20), he is

the subject of it (i.e., it is written about him: Luke 24:44), he “interprets” it in light of himself (v. 27), and he “opens” minds to understand it (v. 45). Bonaventure’s Christocentric or spiritual language, then, accurately reflects what Scripture already suggests.

Moreover, to continue this discussion, it is worth noting that Paul not only makes allegories from history but also perceives Scripture’s literal meanings as presenting a moral guide (i.e., a tropological meaning) for his own day. His warning to the Corinthian church is a clear example:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:1–4).

Paul reads the Mosaic texts as a telling moral account that applies to his day in virtue of Christ. He continues, “Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did” (v. 6). Paul thereby provides strong warrant for the early church tendency to see tropological meanings in the biblical texts. The text speaks not only to what we believe but also to what we should do.

As a final example, the author of Hebrews sets up the progress of the Old Testament as a tropology for the purposes of anagogy. Using the examples of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others, the author suggests that these men believed the promises of God by faith—but without sight: “Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised” (Heb 11:39). These men are thus examples for our own hope that is finally and ultimately founded in Christ. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (12:1–2). The author reads these Old Testament narratives as tropologically significant for his contemporary readers. These ancient men are examples, that is, a “great cloud of witnesses,” so that Christians today might “also” lay aside sin and run the race (v. 1). The tropology, what the person ought to do, is then grounded in the ultimate hope that the new example, Christ, endured it all himself perfectly and “has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (v. 2). Again, the author is reading the Old Testament well and also using it as an exemplar for Christians’ present experiences (tropology) and hope for their endurance (anagogy). There is strong warrant for this kind of method.

Before continuing, some clarifications are in order. First, while spiritual reading ought to be practiced, this does not mean that the reading is easy or its meanings are plain. As Bonaventure also quips, “No one will find this kind of thing an easy task except by long practice of reading the text,

committing its literal sense to memory.”<sup>55</sup> What is important is (1) reading the text well in the literal sense, then (2) reading it carefully in its ultimate Christocentric sense, and finally (3) as a person in Christ, reading the text personally (or spiritually). This practice is not simple or easy; indeed, spiritual readings will depend upon the person, since the practice is a personal way to read the text. Second, as Bonaventure notes, not every passage has a spiritual meaning. Christians should not look for spiritual meanings unless they are apparent from the Christocentric nature of Scripture. If the passage is already about the messiah, love, and/or faith, its plain sense is probably already sufficiently communicating the gospel.<sup>56</sup> While Bonaventure could be truer to his words, these clarifications are helpful for Christians today.

### *Pastoral Grounds for the Quadriga*

Second, there are pastoral reasons for holding to an understanding of the quadriga today. The Bible is fundamentally a personal book directed from a personal God.

The Scriptures are written for our own understanding of the gospel: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Yet, it is a travesty to think that the Bible is a book written merely to summon the mind to know and understand the gospel. Rather, “All created things, being the result of God’s action, point towards their cause,” as Bonaventure well-articulated.<sup>57</sup> Thus, following a Christocentric framework—a framework that also appreciates the Triune God’s sovereign activity in all things—Scripture assumes that its words are “examples” for the believer, “so that,” as Paul continues in the same passage, “everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). The Scriptures in this sense assume that believers are reading them as a book written for their personal edification, both in terms of learning and doing. As the quadrigal method empowers Christians to place Christ and thus themselves in the text, so also they are compelled to read the text personally.

In this sense, the method attempts to return to more holistic assumptions about meaning and truth, while rejecting the modern/Kantian dichotomies inherent in contemporary theology, such as meaning/application, truth/belief, thinking/action, etc. Take the example of Genesis 3. A plain or literal reading of the text would relate the relatively straightforward historical-theological reality that, while creation at one time was created without sin and was good (even very good), Adam and Eve, following the advice of the Serpent, sinned, leading to the Fall of creation, including its death,

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<sup>55</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 6.1.

<sup>56</sup> Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, prologue: 6.2–3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, prologue: 4.4.

brokenness, pain, weeds, and competition. A modern commentary would stop here. A spiritual reading of the text, as suggested, would additionally read that text as a presently applicable text addressed to the reader. It would relay the personal stressful psychological disorder in life, the struggle against constant-weed-like sin, and the earnest (but sometimes not-so-certain) desire for restoration, to which the protoevangelium points. It would read the text, in other words, straightforwardly as if the reader was Adam/Eve (for they are in Adam apart from faith in Christ) and then theologically reflect on the gospel's transference to the Second Adam. It would, moreover, personally pray, mediate, and contemplate God as described in the particular text.

This is why the ancients developed a spiritual reading of Scripture as epitomized in *lectio divina*.<sup>58</sup> *Lectio* typically involved a four-part interconnected process: (1) reading Scripture well and accurately (*lectio*), (2) meditating on it, personally connecting themselves to the passage and allowing the Spirit to apply it to their hearts (*meditatio*), (3) speaking or praying the passage aloud to God, asking for transformation (*oratio*), and (4) contemplating the passage in terms of the joyful and sublime gaze of God (*contemplatio*).<sup>59</sup> While one might quibble with particular formulations, *lectio* is a helpful way for modern readers to overcome the over-analysis of the culture and spiritually know and enjoy God through reading Scripture.

*Lectio* not only represents an ancient and proved practice but also properly balances the ardent desire to be true (1) to the literal sense through hard, analytical study and intra-canonical connections and (2) to the spiritual senses through methodical personal application, meditation, and contemplation. Bonaventure's understanding of the quadriga nicely highlights both of these pillars, though he does not explicitly address *lectio* in any currently translated works. *Lectio*—and any proper understanding of spiritual reading—thus brings together the rather dichotomous practices of analytical reading and spiritual reading.

Modern analytical reading less helpfully, even tragically, separates the meaning of the passage (which loosely corresponds to the ancients' understanding of the literal sense), and the application, which is often an afterthought in its reading. Look to the modern commentaries, which primarily seek to engage authorial intention in terms of historical and culture context, and then continue to understand the theological message of the writer. These commentaries are helpful insofar as they go, but they also ought to emulate to readers how to move towards personal meditation and contemplation.

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<sup>58</sup> See *The Rule of St. Benedict: In Latin and English with Notes*, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1981), chapter 48 (249–252).

<sup>59</sup> I am following the influential fourfold description of Guigo II (the Carthusian) of the late twelfth century (see Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations by Guigo II*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh [repr., Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1979]).

Take one final example for clarification: analytic reading is like studying the Grand Canyon, understanding it, and processing it for the purposes of information, for science. A spiritual reading begins here and remains here for a bit, but it continues to gaze and enjoy such a sublime and glorious object. The person gazes upon it, is in awe of it, and is changed in the process. Indeed, the beauty of something like the Grand Canyon is so overwhelming that we naturally immediately gaze upon it and only later analyze it. God is something like this, but he is qualitatively even greater. Scripture paints a picture of the Triune God, sometimes more directly and sometimes implicitly; it does this so that Christians can contemplate God in a state of awe wrought by the Spirit. Reading Scripture and doing theology well entails gazing upon God and being transformed, which is typological of the ultimate, beatific gaze: "And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

## CONCLUSION

In summation, Bonaventure is an especially helpful guide as he offers a holistic and comprehensive theological approach to spiritual reading. This article hopes to commemorate the forgotten pillar of the church for two reasons. First, even though it is easily overlooked, his biblical interpretation is rightly the basis of his theology and philosophy.<sup>60</sup> In light of the Italian doctor's biblical method, even a theologian of Herman Bavinck's caliber can say that Bonaventure possesses, not only "a firmly methodological approach," but also a "complete mastery of the material."<sup>61</sup> Second, and more broadly, one can say that Bonaventure's astute and dense method of interpretation itself warrants his honor. While the Prince of Mystics's spiritual exegesis may be fanciful at points and his intra-canonical readings may sometimes seem unwarranted, they helpfully and correctly display both the multiplicity and interconnected nature of Scripture that is written for the believer's edification.

It has been asserted that Bonaventure's method ought to be retrieved today by students and scholars in order to know and love God through

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<sup>60</sup> As one scholar notes, "Thus, in Bonaventure's view, we must begin *with faith in the revelation given us in Christ*. From there, we can proceed to philosophy, then to theology, and finally to mystical union with God" (Hayes, *What Manner of Man?*, 7, italics mine; cf. Tavad, *Transiency and Permanence*, 33–34).

<sup>61</sup> "We find here a firmly methodological approach, complete mastery of the material, a clean delineation of the topics, and a purposefully chosen principle of division" (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. John Bolt and John Vriend [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], 97–98).

the text of Scripture. It maintains that Scripture is not only a source of cognitive knowledge but also transformative grace and contemplative joy. Scripture sculpts for us the beauty of God which, certainly, must be understood through proper exegetical and theological tools; it also sculpts God in a way that necessarily requires awe-filled attention and imagination. A method like Bonaventure's allows us to synthesize these two together in one act of spiritual reading.

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