

FRANCISCAN BODIES AND SOULS:  
BONAVENTURE AND BACON ON SCRIPTURE,  
PREACHING, AND THE *CURA CORPORIS* / *CURA ANIMAE*

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While accents vary according to author and audience, many medieval writers were keenly aware that the *cura animae* and the *cura corporis* were not autonomous, distinct activities but interwoven and interrelated, one with the other.<sup>1</sup> In contemporary parlance, they might be considered both holistic and wholistic, with holistic writings stressing the spiritual and wholistic texts underscoring the material dimension of care. The figure of *Christus medicus*, the incarnate, yet divine physician, who healed the body and soul was emblematic of this medieval vision, which united the invisible and visible, spirit and material.<sup>2</sup> This essay examines the positions of two Franciscans, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and Roger Bacon, who were contemporaries in thirteenth-century Paris. Each was committed to the *cura animae* and the *cura corporis*, but with far different methodologies and outcomes to match.

What emerges from this study is the significance of biblical hermeneutics and preaching in defining and developing the approaches these two medieval authors take toward caring for soul and body. While Bacon takes the spiritual sense for granted and focuses on the literal meaning of the Bible when speaking of preaching, Bonaventure assumes the literal sense of Scripture as a given and turns to the spiritual sense of the text. As a result of these divergent methodological biases, Bonaventure, the theologian, downplays physicality while cultivating the soul, whereas Bacon, the

<sup>1</sup> Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani "Medicina del corpo e medicina dell'anima: Note sul sapere del medico fino all 'inizio del XIII" in *Episteme* 10 (1976), 5-102. An abbreviated version of this essay was given at the colloquium "Cura Vitae in Medieval Thought" sponsored by the Universidad Nacional de San Martín in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 3-5, 2010. I would like to thank the president of the university, Dr. Carlos Ruta, for supporting my participation at the conference and the subsequent publication of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Fichtner, "Christus als Artz. Ursprünge und Wirkungen eines Motivs" in *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 16 (1982), 1-18. On the continuation of this theme into the Reformation period, see Johann Anselm Steiger, *Medizinische Theologie: Christus medicus und Theologia medicinalis bei Martin Luther um im Luthertum der Barockzeit* (Leiden, 2005).

philosopher, dwells on the materiality of the body and the care it requires. Bacon's conservative reading of the Sacred Scriptures explains why he looks backward to Adam and the beginning of biblical history when considering the nature of the archetypal healthy body while Bonaventure's progressive stance looks toward Christ, the second Adam, and the resurrection at the end of time.

### *Franciscans and Pastoral Care in the Thirteenth Century*

Franciscan ministry began with a decided commitment to the *cura corporis* visible in the Poverello's initial outreach to lepers outside the walls of Assisi. As his *Testament* recounts, it was a merciful concern for these outcasts that occasioned his life-changing conversion of body and soul:

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.<sup>3</sup>

Transformed both in body and soul, Francis quickly turned his back on the prevailing ecclesial and social conventions and embraced a radical evangelical life among lepers and others in need. The Bardi panel painting (1240),<sup>4</sup> found in Santa Croce in Florence, vividly depicts his profound immersion in the *cura corporis* of the lepers. Despite the vicissitudes of subsequent years, the Poverello never forgot the origins of his calling and those among whom God first revealed such mercy. His first biographer, Thomas of Celano, noted that the reception of the stigmata filled him with longing to serve lepers for the few years that remained.<sup>5</sup> The early companions of Francis were introduced into the same ministry when they chose to accompany him, as references to living among lepers and begging funds for leprosariums in the *Early Rule* of the fraternity reveals.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Dominus ita dedit mihi fratri Francisco incipere faciendi poenitentiam: quia cum essem in peccatis nimis mihi videbatur amarum videre leproso. Et ipse Dominus conduxit me inter illos et feci misericordiam cum illis. Et recedente me ab ipsis, id quod videatur mihi amarum, conversum fuit in dulcedinem animi et corporis; et postea parum steti et exivi de saeculo." *Test*, 1 in *Opuscula*, p. 438. The English translation is from *FAED* 1, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> Chiara Frugoni, *Francesco un'altra storia* (Firenze, 1988), p. 9; pp. 30–31; Plate 14 for the image.

<sup>5</sup> 7C 103. *FAED* 1, pp. 272–273; *Fontes*, pp. 380–381.

<sup>6</sup> *ER* 8, 11; 9, 3. *FAED* 1, p. 70; *Opuscula*, p. 385.

The absence of any mention of lepers in the *Later Rule* suggests this marginalized group soon receded, literally and figuratively, from the sight of most brothers and had little impact on their ministerial endeavors.

While evidence of corporal ministry to lepers by some brothers in the first years after the death of Francis is not completely lacking, it is anything but commonplace.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, by the middle of the thirteenth century the *cura animae*, not the *cura corporis*, was the single, driving institutional force behind the intense pastoral work of the friars within their walled urban centers throughout Europe. The rapid growth of the Minorite Order coincided in Paris and elsewhere with an expanding ecclesial commitment to pastoral care initiated earlier by, among others, Peter the Chanter, on the cusp of the thirteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Buoyed by a rising tide of papal bulls favoring clerical ministry,<sup>9</sup> second generation Franciscan ministers concentrated the personnel and financial resources of the fraternity toward preparing their confreres for the twin activities proper to the *cura animae*: preaching and confession. When it came to the question of the *cura corporis*, the followers of Francis directed their resources primarily toward preserving their own health and treating their sick confreres.<sup>10</sup>

As early as 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council mandated that preachers be well-versed in biblical studies, thereby promoting the *cura animae* and opening a wide field of pastoral opportunities for the Franciscans.<sup>11</sup> The tenth canon underscored the pressing need in dioceses far and wide for men who could care for the faithful by nourishing their spiritual hunger with God's word. The assembled clerics were quick to note that just as the body required food to live, so too, the soul.<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, the study of Scripture became a major focus of Franciscan ministerial preparation, and

<sup>7</sup> Angela Montford, *Health, Sickness, Medicine and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 5–7.

<sup>8</sup> Jörg Oberste, "Predigt und Gesellschaft um 1200: Praktische Moraltheologie und pastorale Neuorientierung im Umfeld der Pariser Universität am Vorabend der Mendikanten" in *Die Bettelorden im Aufbau: Beiträge zu Institutionalierungsprozessen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, hg. Gert Melville and Jörg Oberste (Münster, 1999), pp. 245–295. For an overview of pastoral care in the medieval period, see *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Ronald J. Stansbury (Leiden, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Landini, *The Causes of the Clericalization of the Order of Friars Minor* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 56–76.

<sup>10</sup> Montford, *Health, Sickness, Medicine and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, pp. 27–64.

<sup>11</sup> Dominic Monti, "The Divine Word' and Academic Theology" in *That Others may Know and Love*, eds. Michael F. Cusato and F. Edward Coughlin (Saint Bonaventure, 1997), pp. 66–67.

<sup>12</sup> On the tenth canon and the Lateran Council, see Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons* (Toronto, 1979), pp. 56–60.

their evolving educational system of *studia* responded to this ecclesial reality. The increasingly clericalized office of preaching and Minorite interest in liturgical celebration in conventual churches, in particular, necessitated the thoughtful interpretation of the Old and New Testament texts proclaimed during the liturgical seasons.<sup>13</sup> The educational orientation of the first *studia* in the 1220s and 1230s offered friars the biblical knowledge and accompanying doctrinal foundation suited to their emerging pastoral duties.<sup>14</sup> Although their presence in the great universities occasioned a shift toward speculative theology in some study centers, as was the case in Paris, the overriding concern of Franciscan educators remained the formation of efficacious preachers. Numerous resources were available, including biblical commentaries, concordances, dictionaries and the standard glosses on the Bible. In addition, friar masters often delineated their own hermeneutical stances toward the Scriptures for their confreres in formal *principia* or wove them throughout other writings.

The writings of two Parisian masters, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and Roger Bacon, disclose a genuine shared passion for preaching and the study of the Scriptures, but widely divergent views as to how to read the sacred text so essential to their pastoral duties.<sup>15</sup> Bacon railed against those who, appealing to Aristotle, utilized the analytical tools proffered by metaphysics and natural philosophy in their minute analysis thereby subjugating the word of God to philosophical reason. He was not opposed to employing the human sciences – quite the contrary – but he insisted that languages, geography, mathematics, astrology, and other ways of knowing largely unfamiliar to scholars in Latin Christendom were far better suited for biblical studies and preaching. These sciences did not foster the cold dissection of the text, but rather, the plummeting of the profound truths found hidden within the literal sense of the sacred page. Since the dawn of time, God had shared the treasures of divine wisdom with the sages of old, who cultivated the sciences. Arcane to some perhaps, they could be acquired by anyone who desires to understand the Bible.

<sup>13</sup> On the particular texts and the shift toward preaching as the interpretation of Scripture and not basic catechesis, see Louis Jacques Bataillon, "Early Scholastic and Mendicant Preaching as Exegesis of Scripture" in *Ad litteram: Authoritative Texts and Their Medieval Readers*, eds. Mark D. Jordan and Kent Emery, Jr. (Notre Dame, 1992), pp. 167–168.

<sup>14</sup> Bert Roest, *A History of Franciscan Education* (c. 1210–1517), (Leiden, 2000), p. 123; pp. 272–297. For the first Franciscan masters in Paris, see Ignatius Brady, "Sacred Scripture in the Early Franciscan School" in *La Sacra Scrittura e i francescani* (Rome, 1973), pp. 65–82.

<sup>15</sup> Camille Bérubé, "De la theologie a l'écriture chez Saint Bonaventure" in *Collectanea Franciscana* 40 (1970), 68–70.

When Bonaventure, for his part, interpreted the text he turned to the trusted heritage of speculative-spiritual exegesis employed by Augustine, Anslem, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Bernard. Allegorical understanding, moral responsibility, and anagogic ascent demanded he avoid drawn out ruminations over the Book of Creation and move swiftly to apprehend the spiritual senses of the Book of the Scriptures when preaching. If the world was rendered corrupted by sin, it was hardly a lasting abode of wisdom. The seventh minister general of the Franciscans, who was responsible for the eternal welfare of thousands of brothers, recognized in his English confrere's teachings an on-going temptation to turn away from matters of the spirit and, enraptured by the material world, dangerously digress from the journey upward into God. The hermeneutical biases of the two masters assured remarkably different perspectives on the *cura animae* and the *cura corporis*.

#### *Bonaventure of Bagnoregio*

Bonaventure's beloved mentor and holder of the first Minorite Chair at the University of Paris, Alexander of Hales, claimed there were three different levels to the office of preaching.<sup>16</sup> The first was the simple narrative teaching of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, which even an old woman does when she instructs children. The second, which is proper to priests and deacons, was the pious explanation of doctrine by appealing to the literal understanding of the biblical text. The third was the domain of those who hold the office and, due to their acquired knowledge, are capable of offering a tropological, allegorical, and anagogical exposition of Scripture. As numerous extant sermons and selected doctrinal writings amply demonstrate, Bonaventure practiced this admittedly sophisticated third level of preaching and introduced his confreres into this methodology. At first glance, an examination of the *Breviloquium*<sup>17</sup> (1257) and the magisterial *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*<sup>18</sup> (1273), together with the *Collationes de septem donis spiritus sancti*<sup>19</sup> (1268) could claim that the Seraphic Doctor held a well-balanced view of the literal and spiritual senses and their corresponding importance for biblical exegeses. He emerges,

<sup>16</sup> Alexander of Hales, "De officio praedicationis," q. 24, resp. in *Quaestiones disputatae 'antequam esset frater'* in vol. 1 (Quaracchi, 1960), pp. 518–519.

<sup>17</sup> *Brev. prol.* 6 (5:207a–b).

<sup>18</sup> *Hex.* 19.8 (5:421b).

<sup>19</sup> *De donis* 4:14 (5:76b).

in this analysis, as a counterweight to proponents of exaggerated scientific methodologies, exemplified by Roger Bacon, and the otherworldly spiritualism of Joachim of Fiore and his followers – some who were confreres of the minister general. The former would afford far too much significance to the literal sense of the text and the latter would ignore it completely.<sup>20</sup>

A second look, however, suggests Bonaventure's decided preference for the spiritual senses. In his wonderfully concise treatment of biblical hermeneutics addressed to students, fittingly named the *Breviloquium*, Bonaventure argues for the significance of the literal sense; however, it is ultimately only the outward husk covering the inner kernel of spiritual truth.<sup>21</sup> It can be discarded when necessary. For example, the reader is obliged to ignore the literal sense when the superiority of Christianity over Judaism is in question.<sup>22</sup> Preference for the spiritual sense and the frustrations of working with the literal text are apparent in the protheme of Bonaventure's sermon on Saint Nicholas. Here the literal sense has no meaning at all per se and cannot be explained by appealing to other similar verses. After quoting Deuteronomy 32:13, "He set him upon high land: that he might eat the fruits of the fields, that he might suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the hardest stone," he notes:

[but] nowhere in Scripture is it found that he had obtained 'oil from a stone' or 'honey from a rock.' It is necessary, therefore, to understand it spiritually since a literal reading cannot be made from it. This letter of sacred Scripture is the hardest stone because of itself it has no life, no spiritual sweetness, no internal refreshment; but when the Holy Spirit draws near to the letter by offering spiritual understanding, it then bestows 'honey and oil from the rock and the hardest stone.' And the people of God are nourished by this honey and oil which they imbibe from the letter of the sacred Scripture through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Beloved, it is not of human virtue or power to draw out honey from the rock or oil from the hardest stone, spiritual

<sup>20</sup> Pietro Maranesi, "Littera et spiritus: I due principi esegetici di Bonaventura da Bagnoregio" in *Collectanea Franciscana* 66 (1996), 97–125. For an overview of Bonaventure's exegetical method, see Hans Josef Klauck, "Theorie de Exegese bei Bonaventura" in vol. IV of *Bonaventura 1274–1974* (Grottaferrata, 1974), pp. 71–128. On Bonaventure's use of the literal sense, see also Monti, "The Divine Word' and Academic Theology," pp. 74–80.

<sup>21</sup> *Brev* prol. 4 (5:206a). See also Beryl Smalley, *The Gospels in the Schools c.1100–c.1280* (London, 1985), pp. 203–205. The subordination of the literal sense of Scripture in Bonaventure's hermeneutic is underscored in Joseph Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*, trans. Zachary Hayes (Chicago, 1971), pp. 65–69. On this question, see also Rudolf Voderholzer, "Offenbarung und Kirche" in *Gegenwart der Offenbarung: Zu den Bonaventura-Forschungen Joseph Ratzinger*, hg. Marriane Schlosser and Franz-Xaver Heibel (Regensburg, 2011), pp. 58–61.

<sup>22</sup> *Brev* prol. 6 (5:208a).

edification from the understanding of the letter and history of Scripture, but the Holy Spirit, who blows where he wishes, (John 3), is able to do this.<sup>23</sup>

Bonaventure evinces this pastoral preference for the spiritual interpretation of the Scripture in his reflections on the curative power of Jesus in the Gospels, whose divine medicine heals every malady of body and soul.<sup>24</sup> To care is to cure, that is to say, *cura* is *curatio*, and Jesus is the physician of physicians, who extends a healing hand.<sup>25</sup> Commenting on Luke 14:4, "And he took and healed him and let him go" in the *Sermones dominicales*, which were intended for the formation of his confreres,<sup>26</sup> the minister general delineates three ways the Lord Jesus as divine physician spiritually lay hold of the man healed on the Sabbath. First he grasped him by promoting penance, then by assisting him in following the divine precepts, and finally, by fortifying him against temptation. This spiritual dynamic is understandable since what Jesus accomplishes in the flesh is not isolated from what transpires in the soul.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the physical healing of bodies takes on polyvalent significance due to the underlying interior realities they manifest in sickness and health.

In the sermon on Luke 7:15–16, where Jesus heals a young man, the priority of the spiritual is evident when Bonaventure maintains that God does not cure the physical body without first curing the soul since the

<sup>23</sup> "[sed] non invenitur in Scriptura quod oleum acceperit de saxo vel mel de petra. Ideo istud oportet spiritualiter intelligere ex quo ad litteram non legitur esse factum. Saxum durissimum est ipsa littera sacrae Scripturae quae quantum est de se, nihil habet vitae, nihil dulcedinis spiritualis, nihil refectiois interna; sed quando Spiritus sanctus accedit ad litteram dando spiritualem intelligentiam, tunc dat mel et oleum de petra et saxo durissimo, et de isto melle et oleo pascitur populus Dei quae sugit de littera sacrae Scripturae per donum Spiritus sancti. Carissimi, non est humanae virtutis aut potentiae educere mel de petra et oleum de saxo durissimo spiritualem aedificationem intelligentiae de littera et historia Scripturae, sed Spiritus sanctus hoc potest facere qui ubi vult spirat, Ioannis 3." Sermo 39, prothema in *Sancti Bonaventurae Sermons de diversis*, vol. 2, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Paris, 1993), p. 470. All translations from the Latin are by the author unless noted otherwise. See also Sermo 8, n. 10 in *Sancti Bonaventurae Sermones dominicales*, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Grottaferrata: Collegio S. Bonaventura, 1977), pp. 189–190.

<sup>24</sup> Sermo 50, 2, in *Sermones dominicales*, p. 474.

<sup>25</sup> Sermo 189, 1, in *Sancti Bonaventurae Sermons de tempore*, ed. Jacques Guy Bougerol (Paris, 1990), p. 258.

<sup>26</sup> On Bonaventure's intent in the composition of the *Sunday Sermons*, see: *The Sunday Sermons of St. Bonaventure*, intro., trans., and notes, Timothy J. Johnson (Saint Bonaventure, 2008), pp. 31–56.

<sup>27</sup> Sermo 43, 1–5, in *Sermones dominicales*, pp. 426–428. The diseased condition of lepers, whom Francis treated, is a particularly poignant representation of the sickness of body and soul plaguing humanity after the fall. See Sermo 3, 12, in *Sermones dominicales*, p. 154.

spiritual lesion is always more serious than the bodily illness.<sup>28</sup> For the divine physician, the *cura animae* precedes the *cura corporis*. His compassionate care, spiritually conceived, is revealed in the willingness to visit patients and the wise use of suitable medicine. The incarnation in the womb of Mary manifests his corporal presence among the ill, and his gift of grace to them is manifest in his spiritual visitation. Like the Good Samaritan who found the wounded man on the road to Jericho, Jesus binds the wounds of a sinner by restraining the senses, pours wine to turn his tastes from sin, administers the oil of sweet hope and divine mercy, and leads him back to the inn so he can profit from the prayers of the just and receive forgiveness after examining his conscience.<sup>29</sup>

As the *Breviloquium* states, it is the Crucified Word that redeems humanity, but the Incarnate Word of God who cures them<sup>30</sup> with neither herbs nor bandages, but with his word.<sup>31</sup> From Bonaventure's perspective, the ministry of his confreres is the continuation of the compassion of the divine physician. In the corporeal absence of the risen Lord, they receive the Holy Spirit. Just as the body is dead without the soul, so too, is the soul dead without the Spirit. It is noteworthy that this gift heals without recourse to instruments of iron, fire, or magical words.<sup>32</sup> By means of preaching and the practice of sacramental confession, the ailing faithful in their care are brought to spiritual health through the grace of the Holy Spirit. After praying for those who, like him, share in the ministry of the word, the minister general draws an analogy between corporal and spiritual sickness.<sup>33</sup> The spiritually ill are similar to those on their deathbed who abhor food and refuse the appropriate medicinal remedy when they likewise shun the heavenly food of the divine word. God's word proclaimed by the brothers heals initially, and then refreshes and guides the convalescents so they may discern good from evil, the states of blame and grace, and the difference between life and death.

<sup>28</sup> Sermo 18, 2 and Sermo 42, 1, in *Sermones dominicales*, p. 259; p. 420 respectively.

<sup>29</sup> Sermo 26, 3 in *Sermons de diversis*, vol. 2, pp. 354–355.

<sup>30</sup> *Brev*, 6. 1, (5:265a).

<sup>31</sup> *Hex* 7.10, (5:367a).

<sup>32</sup> Sermo 25, 3 in *Sermones dominicales*, p. 310. See also *Hex* 7.10 (5:367a) and *Hex* 7.11, (5:367a), which state this healing grace is beyond the reach of philosophers. While Bacon rejects the use of magical incantations as worthless per se, he does note that experience shows that words have power, and they can play a positive role in a medical setting due to their placebo effect, see Orsola Rignani, *Ruggiero Bacone: Antropologia, Filosofia e Scienza* (Fidenza, 2002), pp. 121–122.

<sup>33</sup> Sermo 47, 9, in *Sermones dominicales*, p. 456.

Such insight leads to the sacrament of confession, which like all of the sacraments, is a medicine originating in the apothecary of the divine physician, and thus intrinsically linked to the *cura animae*. In the prologue to the *Commentaria in quatuor libros sententiarum*, Bonaventure interprets the sweet confections and ointments of health mentioned in Sirach 38:7 metaphorically to be the pleasant, wholesome sacramental remedies offered by God.<sup>34</sup> This specific sacramental medicine of confession efficaciously heals all the infirmities of the soul, in addition to reconciling the penitent to God and neighbor.<sup>35</sup> The process begins when the Lord invites the sick person to consider spiritual well-being by embracing the humility proper to penance. So as to convey the necessity of this virtue, Bonaventure recounts in the *Sermones dominicales* the story of when the devil wished to confess but refused to sit beside the priest, and instead insisted on sitting higher. The confessor easily saw through the ruse. Humility should be evident, of course, in the outward action of tears, but it also demands interior contrition if it is to be enduring. The sacramental dynamic culminates in satisfaction when the sinner offers prompt reparation for the corporal or spiritual harm that follows on the offense. This restitution is essential in the context of religious life where detractors can easily defame their brothers and ruin their reputations.

Although healing the soul together with the body in this life is cherished by Jesus, Bonaventure reminds his confreres that their ministry is determined by the medicine of the resurrection administered by the Risen Lord. The *cura animae* is of fundamental importance but spiritual health finds eschatological fulfillment in the eternal *cura corporis* displayed in the risen bodies of the redeemed. The ministry of preaching requires the friars to explain the spiritual meaning of the two denarii the Good Samaritan offered the innkeeper for the care of the wounded traveler.<sup>36</sup> This man, who was brought to the inn in order to examine his conscience and confess, is not destined to remain there. The two denarii represent the Old and New Testament, whose meanings were revealed in the resurrection so as to strengthen the weak and fallen. By explaining these texts to the penitent, they assist the invigorated wayfarer to continue the journey back to the eternal homeland. Lest it be forgotten, the exiled reality of the traveler is due to Adam's transgression, which closed the gates of Paradise

<sup>34</sup> *IV Sent* Prooemium, (1a–3b). See also, *Brev* 6. 1 (5:265a–266a). On confession in particular, see p. 6. 10 (5: 275a–276b).

<sup>35</sup> Sermo 30, 6–9, in *Sermones dominicales*, pp. 344–346.

<sup>36</sup> Sermo 39, 13, in *Sermones dominicales*, pp. 404–405.