

- 1 *Although the Incarnation of the Word of God was not absolutely necessary for the redemption of sinful humanity, “no other way would have been so fitting or so appropriate to the Redeemer, those redeemed, and the nature of redemption” (4.1.1).*

- 1a. *“[N]o other way [that the Incarnation] would have been so fitting or so appropriate to the Redeemer, those redeemed, and the nature of redemption” (4.1.1).*

Considered in relation to the Triune appropriation of names (cf. 1.6), power, wisdom, and benevolence, Bonaventure argues that the Incarnation is the most fitting way for the *Redeemer* to manifest Himself in redemption (4.1.2). Considered in relation to the corruption of sin, and therefore the *nature of the redeemed*, he argues that the Incarnation is most the fitting way for God to heal and restore the human nature of those whom he would redeem (4.1.3).

Likewise, the Incarnation is the most fitting means considered in relation to the *nature of redemption* as the restoration of the original excellence of creation (4.1.4). In order for the restoration of humanity as subjects of God, God must be the One to restore them (cf. 4.2.4; Anslem, *Cur Deus Homo*, I.5). In order for the restoration of humanity as friends of God, “a suitable mediator, who could touch God with one hand and humanity with the other, who would be the likeness and friend of both” (4.1.4; cf. 4.2.6). In order for the restoration of humanity’s innocence before God, satisfaction must be made. “But only God could make such satisfaction for the whole human race, while humanity alone was bound to make it because it had sinned” (4.1.4; cf. 4.2.5). That which the nature of redemption requires, the Incarnation provides: an excellent redeemer, amicable mediator, and adequate satisfier.

These three considerations are reflected in the threefold structure of chapters 2-10. Bonaventure considers the appropriateness of the Incarnation with respect to the nature of the Redeemer (2-4), the nature of the redeemed (4-7), and the nature of redemption (8-10).

- 1b. *The powerful union of natures in the Incarnation was the most appropriate way for God the Redeemer to manifest His wisdom in completing creation and benevolence in heal humanity.*

Considered in relation to the Triune appropriation of names (cf. 1.6), power, wisdom, and benevolence, Bonaventure argues that the Incarnation was the most fitting way for the Redeemer to manifest Himself in redemption. The Incarnation manifests the power of God by uniting two disparate natures in one person, for the greater the disparity between natures the greater the power that has united them (cf. 4.1.2; 2.10.3; 4.3.5). Wisdom is manifest in the Incarnation, wherein the First Principle is united to the last (*ultima*); through the Incarnate Word the Father redeems those whom He created through the

Uncreated Word (cf. 4.1.2, 4). Benevolence is likewise manifest in the Word becoming a servant to heal those who have rebelled against His inspired word (4.1.2).

The threefold structure and order outlined in chapter 1, and summarized above, is reflective of the structure of the entire *Breviloquium* and, for Bonaventure, reality itself.¹ Part 4, on the Incarnation, is perfectly located as medium between Parts 1-3 and 5-7. That which unites the text, and thus reality itself, is the power of God manifest in the union of natures in the Person of Christ. By virtue of the wisdom manifest in this union, the Triune God (Part 1) brings creation (Part 2), which has been corrupted by sin (Part 3), to its perfect completion.² “Part 4...brings these two movements to completion since... Bonaventure describes the incarnate Word in part four as the fulfillment of creation. Christ therefore functions as the *fructus* of creation’s movement out from God—the *medium* in whom all things are brought to completion.”³

Likewise, the union of two natures becomes, not only the end, but the source (First and Restorative Principle) of healing and restoration for humanity. By virtue of this union, grace flows to us from his fullness (Part 5)⁴ through his sacraments (Part 6) and is thereby completed/perfected in the saints’ everlasting reward (Part 6),⁵ God’s own self. The end or completion of all things through Christ returns to its ultimate source, the Triune God (Part 1).

By virtue of the union of natures, Christ is the completion/perfection of creation and the principle source of healing/restoration of humanity. In this way, Part 4 not only forms the medium of the entire text, but especially argues that the Incarnation is the most appropriate medium of reality itself.

1c. *The Incarnation was not the necessary, insofar as other means of redemption were possible, but only the Incarnation could perfectly accomplish creation’s completion and humanity’s restoration.*

Bonaventure maintains that the Incarnation was not necessary for redemption (4.1.1), but he does not suggest how God could have redeemed otherwise. Instead, he argues

¹ Joshua Benson, “The Christology of the *Breviloquium*” in *A Companion to Bonaventure* (Brill, 2013). Benson convincingly demonstrates that Bonaventure has structured the *Breviloquium* according to the threefold pattern (*ortus, progressus/modus*, and *status/factus*) outlined in Prol.1.1.

² “By similar reasoning, therefore, we come to the conclusion that the highest and noblest perfection cannot exist in this world unless that nature in which the seminal principles are present, and that nature in which the intellectual principles are present, and that nature in which the ideal principles are present are simultaneously brought together in the unity of one person, as was done in the incarnation of the Son of God” (*On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 5.324, translation by Zachary Hayes, 1996, 57).

³ Benson, “Christology,” 255.

⁴ 5.1.1, “Now that we have examined the Incarnation of the Word, which is the origin and wellspring of every gratuitous gift, we must say something about the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

⁵ 6.1.6, “Their source is Christ the Lord; their function is to prompt, to instruct, and to humble; their fruit is the healing and salvation of humankind.” Also 6.2.2, “The Incarnate Word, who is the principle of our restoration and the font and origin of the sacraments, is supremely merciful and wise.”

throughout Part 4 for the supreme appropriateness of the Incarnation. Yet, Bonaventure's defense of the Incarnation as the most appropriate means to accomplish creation's completion and humanity's healing often becomes an argument for its necessity. It would seem, however, that Bonaventure does not view it as an absolute necessity, but only relative to the completion and perfection of the ends in view. But, if he maintains that "the utterly perfect First Principle could not allow an imperfect work to leave his hands, so the principle of the redemption of humankind had to make that remedy a perfect one," then it seems impossible to posit other possibilities.⁶

2-4 *The union of the two natures in the Incarnation was the most fitting means of redemption with respect to the Redeemer.*

2. *The nature of the Incarnation, in the union of the two natures, is a work that most appropriately terminates on the Person of the Son, who is the principle of our restoration.*

Bonaventure argues in four stages, from the more general to the more particular. First, the work of restoration must necessarily be the undivided work of the Triune God, who is the First and Restorative Principle of all things (4.2.3).

Second, the work of healing necessitates a truly divine-human work. Arguing in a manner similar to Gregory of Nazianzus, Bonaventure asserts that the work of healing requires that God, in the Incarnation, assume our whole nature, uniting it to Himself, in order to heal the whole of humanity (4.2.4).

Third, the nature of atonement requires the work to be performed by a divine *Person*. Bonaventure offers a sophisticated syllogism. First, the work of making satisfaction for sins requires one who *ought to* (man) and is *able to* (God) make it. Second, he argues that, insofar as the two natures must subsist in the union of a person or hypostasis, it is contrary to the divine nature to "subsist in any subject other than its own hypostasis" (4.2.5). Therefore, he concludes, "there is but one person, and one personal unity, that is, of the [divine] person who assumed humanity" (4.2.5).

Lastly, the Trinitarian work of the Incarnation appropriately terminates on the Person of the *Son* in particular. Bonaventure again utilizes a syllogism. First, a mediator's proper role is to lead man back to God in true knowledge, likeness, and familial relation. Second, the Son is alone supremely fit for such an office, as the Word of God who is able to make God known, as the Image of the Father who is able to restore the image of God in man, and as the natural and eternal Son who is able to restore adopted sons. Therefore, he concludes, "since mediation is proper to the Son of God, incarnation is also" (4.2.6).

⁶ 4.10.2.

3. *The work of the Incarnation was executed in a manner most fitting to the nature of the Redeemer, manifesting the wisdom, benevolence, and power of God.*

The wisdom of God is evident in the manner of redemptions recapitulation in Christ (4.3.3). Similarly, the all-embracing benevolence of God is manifest in the universality of its benefits. "Hence, if the cure was to be universal, it was most fitting that an angel, a woman, and a man should concur in the mystery of the Incarnation" (4.3.4). Moreover, the perfecting power of God, according to Bonaventure, can be seen in the manner of the Savior's conception (4.3.5).

4. *The work of the Incarnation was executed at a time most fitting to the nature of the Redeemer as the one who completes creation.*

Bonaventure argues that the "when" of the Incarnation, though it could have been otherwise, was perfectly timed. Like a most wise Artisan, he took all circumstances into account. The mystery of the Incarnation required that God prepare the way with prophesy, creating anticipation and hope, in order that humanity might be prepared to receive it. Thus, it occurred at the most fitting time to accomplish its ends, after a time of preparation and before the time of judgment, that he might lead us by a perfect example to press on from virtue to virtue moved by the fear of judgment and hope of reward. It occurred at the "fullness of time," or the time wherein God was, in Christ, bringing creation to its completion and perfection (4.4.5). Therefore it was fitting that that which is most perfect come last (4.4.4).

- 5-7 *The fullness of Christ, by virtue of the union of the two natures in the Incarnation, is the most fitting source of restoration with respect to those who are to be redeemed.*

5. *Jesus Christ must be full of grace, so that, as the principle of our restoration, the mystical body of Christ throughout all ages might receive the grace necessary for upright and holy living (cf. 4.7.2).*

Bonaventure elaborates in three ways. First, in order to make satisfaction, Christ had to be impeccable, which can only be by a gift of divine grace. Second, in order to be the means of reconciliation, there must be a gracious union of two natures in one mediator, thereby exalting the human nature in the fullness of perfection in the divinity of his Person (4.5.4). Third, in order to effect change in us by grace, such that leads us back to God in conformity, Christ must be full of grace in himself; the cause must always be greater than the effect. In order to be the source/principle of an effective over-flowing influence, Christ must possess a superabundance of grace in himself. His fullness overflows to the body.

6. *Jesus Christ, as the principle of our restoration, must be full of wisdom that we also might have possess the wisdom necessary for upright and holy living (cf. 4.7.2).*

Bonaventure argues that Jesus possess “perfect knowledge according to both natures in their proper cognitive powers, and according to every mode of the things that are” (4.6.2). There are five modes in which Jesus possessed knowledge. More precisely, he speaks of two modes, according to the divine nature and according to the human nature, wherein the latter is distinguished in four parts. The Word, by virtue of the divine nature, knows all things infinitely and absolutely. By virtue of his human nature, Jesus possessed a comprehensive knowledge of all things within the grasp of the finite. Thus, “the created mind [cannot] be equated with the Word” (4.6.5).

Accordingly, he possessed a glorified intellectual knowledge, whereby he possessed abstract knowledge of all actual and finite things. Secondly, he possessed a grace-infused knowledge, exceeding every prophet and saint who had been illumined by the Holy Spirit, whereby Jesus knew all things pertaining to our redemption.⁷ Thirdly, Jesus possessed an innate natural knowledge, whereby he knew all things to do with the natural world, far better than Adam who comprehended the nature of the animals in naming them. Fourthly, he possessed a sense-experienced knowledge, whereby Jesus knew all concrete things that he perceived and experienced.

Bonaventure is especially interested in the last distinction. “In the rest of us the latter makes something previously unknown to be known, whereas in Christ it made a thing already known in one way to be known in another” (4.6.3; cf. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, I.9). What he knew abstractly in a divine way, he experienced concretely in a human way (Heb. 5:8), thereby enabling him to lead us in upright and holy living.

7. *Jesus Christ, by virtue of the fullness of grace of the Holy Spirit, possesses the fullness of merit in such a way that all of the believer’s merit, both of satisfaction and reward, may be founded on his merit.*

Bonaventure makes seven distinctions regarding the merit of Christ, all of which are intended to demonstrate the infinite value and sufficiency of Christ’s obedience on behalf of the body of Christ. As our restorative principle, he is the source of all our merit before God. In the concluding paragraph he argues that Christ’s merit consists of two sorts, “those that satisfy punishment or those that merit eternal life” (4.7.7). Bonaventure suggests that the evil of sin is proportionate to the supreme Good of the One against whom it is committed; thus, sinners need the supreme dignity of the satisfying-merits of the God-man. Likewise, sinners are undeserving of the “immensity of the eternal reward that is God’s own self” (4.7.7); thus, we also need the infinite rewarding-merits of the God-man.⁸

⁷ How would Bonaventure interpret Mark 13:32? Is this an imperfection in Jesus’ knowledge of redemption, or does it merely suggest there are some things the divine nature does not graciously impart to the human nature during his earthly ministry?

⁸ Is this a soteriological or ontological necessity?

The supreme merit of Christ, and thus for us, complete/perfects his fullness of grace in chapter five. His “union of grace” in the Person of the Son underscores the supreme dignity of the Agent who acquired this merit from the moment of conception (4.7.2); supreme dignity is ascribed to the work on account of the dignity of the One who accomplished it. Christ, by virtue of his divinity, already possessed the rewards of merit and the blessedness of his soul from conception (4.7.5); in the flesh, he merited “a fuller title to what was already due to him for a different reason,” for the exaltation of his humanity and for those by his merit exalted together with him (4.7.6).

Therefore, the “grace of particular person” not only assures the dignity of the work, but also the unswerving perfection and impeccability of his merit, both in habit and in acts (4.7.3). Similarly, the “grace of headship” assures that, in his humanity, he has merited for his body all of the rewards of this life and the glory to come (4.7.4).

8-10 *The suffering of God Incarnate was the most fitting means, given the nature of redemption, for the Redeemer to sufficiently and effectually complete/perfect creation and heal those who are to be redeemed.*

8. *Christ, as mediator, not only assumed a human nature but also every misery belonging to sinful humanity that is not incompatible with his own perfect innocence.*

According to Bonaventure, Christ suffered not only in death but in a perfect life lived unto death. From conception, Christ assumed the defects or miseries associated with the fallen human condition, with the exception of those that would presuppose of him original sin or guilt: “ignorance, bodily infirmity, malice, and concupiscence” (4.8.4). “Bodily infirmity” is listed among the moral imperfections, for, as he comments in an earlier section, “[i]t also follows that in governing humankind, God cannot permit any distress to exist in us without some antecedent offense” (3.5.3). Thus, in 3.5.5, he concludes, “And so, by losing original justice, the soul loses the temporal tranquility of its body, and instead is made to suffer in many ways from decay and death.” Within God’s moral government, Jesus was not *liable* to decay and death, though he voluntarily subjected himself to mortality.

Christ did, however, assume other penal miseries and weaknesses that provided opportunity for the exercise of virtue, and demonstrated his genuine humanity (e.g., fear, hunger, etc.). Bonaventure is careful to maintain that Christ suffered voluntarily, for it would be contrary to God’s moral order if an innocent man were obligated to suffer (4.8.5). His flesh naturally retreated from suffering, but he placed reason above bodily instincts; he willed to suffer, but not as its own end. Bonaventure goes so far to say that “there was in Christ no struggle or resistance, but peaceful order and ordered tranquility” (4.8.5), which may be an overstatement.

9. *Christ suffered thoroughly in his humanity, as our restorative principle, in order to counter the disorder of sin and repay God, with a “fully satisfactory obedience,” the honor due to Him.*

Bonaventure argues that just as the restorative principle created all things in an orderly manner, and sin having introduced disorder, it is fitting that creation also be restored in an orderly manner—that is, in a manner befitting God’s moral government. Accordingly, Bonaventure asserts that the “nature” of Christ’s suffering is such that it most fittingly restores sinners *and* preserves the integrity of God’s moral government.

He is concerned about three things. First, Christ suffered in such a way that preserves the integrity of human freewill; he was not coerced to lay down his life for others. Moreover, he is the supreme and attractive example for us, by suffering willingly, lovingly, and with resolute obedience. “By this fact we are invited to love him, and in loving him, to follow his example” (4.9.2). Second, Christ preserves the honor of God. Bonaventure agrees with Anselm, that sin is that which robs God of his honor, and “satisfaction means the repayment of the honor due to God” (4.9.3). Therefore, in perfect conformity to the order of God’s moral government, the suffering obedience of Christ was a “fully satisfactory obedience” (4.9.3).

Third, Christ suffered in such a way that preserves the integrity of “the orderly functioning of the universe” (4.9.4). Bonaventure’s argument presupposes the accepted medical belief of his day, that an illness is caused by a biological imbalance and health is restored by introducing its counterbalance. Theologically, this is translated into a version of redemptions recapitulation in Christ. Christ is the counterbalance that brings restoration; wherein Adam rebelled and suffered unwillingly, Christ submitted and suffered willingly (4.9.4), etc. Like a counterweight, Christ balances the scales of God’s moral government.

A consequence of this view of the nature of the atonement is the conspicuous absence of any mention of righteousness, either imputed to sinners as the forensic ground of their justification or as the forensic ground of Christ’s resurrection and victory over death. Instead, Bonaventure locates Christ’s victory over death purely in the metaphysical context of his divinity, which ever lives and ever remains in union with his human body and soul (4.9.8). For Bonaventure, “the merit of the death of Christ” is more of a feudal concept than a forensic one (4.9.8).

10. *The fitness of the suffering of the Incarnate Word is evident in the perfection of its sufficient and efficacious effects and in its appropriateness for establishing the virtues of faith, hope, and love in his people.*

No imperfect work ever left the hands of the First Principle, therefore is it fitting that the Restorative Principle should also perfect all things; thus, the suffering of the Incarnate

Christ sufficiently and efficiently achieves its ends (4.10.2). Bonaventure traces the fruit of Christ's passion and resurrection along historical lines. Its completing-sufficiency is manifest in its comprehensive effects. By virtue of his passion, those in limbo who awaited the Redeemer with a living faith were released; by virtue of his resurrection, those on earth are restored in newness of life; by virtue of his ascension, "those in heaven are replenished" (4.10.3). Moreover, upon his ascension, he sends his Spirit to build the earthly Jerusalem.

Likewise, the completing-efficacy is manifest through his passion for those who preceded him in faith, hope, and love (4.10.4) and through his resurrection for those who come after him, in order to draw them to faith, hope, and love. In every way, the precise timing of his death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost testify to the perfection of his work in effecting faith, hope, and love in those who are being redeemed. Thus, he has united the Church to himself, who has become for us the source and over-flowing fullness of grace.