

9 | The spiritual stream: the theology of wisdom

9.1 Introductory remarks

We closed our examination of monastic theology by noting that its heart – the importance of experiencing God and the epistemological role of love – continued to beat in the mystical movements of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, where it would be rather isolated from the mainstream of theological discussion. However, we also noted that it did find a niche in mainstream theology in discussions on wisdom as a gift of the Spirit. We can conclude our survey of a period dominated by scholastic theology with an examination of what was regarded as the greatest of the Spirit's gifts – the wisdom that tasted God's presence in the soul and which was illuminated by the love created by that presence.

9.2 The theology of the 'gifts of the Spirit'

When people speak today of the 'gifts of the Spirit', they normally have in mind the list of gifts to be found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. However, in patristic and medieval times and until very recently within Catholicism, the phrase 'gifts of the Spirit' referred to the list of gifts drawn from Isaiah 11:2. The gifts referred to in Paul's letter to the Corinthians were called 'charismata' or 'charisms'.

As translated by the Latin Vulgate, there rested upon the person referred to in Isaiah 11:2 a seven-fold Spirit: of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, fear of the Lord and piety. The number seven was arrived at by translating the Hebrew for 'fear of the Lord' in two ways: 'fear of the Lord' and 'piety'. The number had immense symbolic significance – it indicated fullness, perfection.

Since Isaiah 11:2 was seen as a messianic poem and therefore as referring to Christ, the qualities listed there (qualities required for exemplary kingship) were qualities that belonged to Christ. For Christians, the Spirit that descended on Christ at his Baptism brought with it the qualities or gifts (as they were called) listed in Isaiah 11:2. However, that same Spirit is given to all believers. Hence, it was reasoned, all who are united to Christ and who share Christ's Spirit receive the same gifts. The gifts therefore are enjoyed not merely by believers in this life but also by the blessed in heaven and indeed the angels, since they too are united to Christ (cf Lombard's *Sententiae*, III, d 34).

That was the broad idea and it remained a broad idea until medieval times, when systematic thinking on the topic began for the first time (for details see Gaybba 1987:88). The earliest discussions seemed to revolve around the relationship between these gifts and the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Initially it was believed that the gifts were simply the virtues in another form. However, in 1235 Phillip, Chancellor of the University of Paris, argued for a distinction between the two – and indeed the superiority of the gifts over the virtues. Phillip wanted to link the theology of the gifts to a theology of the spiritual progress of the soul. The soul moved from the stage of practising the virtues to the stage of being under the influence of the gifts, finally reaching the stage represented by the beatitudes. As a result, the idea became widespread that the gifts of the Spirit enabled Christians to perform the virtues more easily, with a greater openness to the influence of the Spirit. This became the position espoused in particular by the followers of Thomas Aquinas. However, the older viewpoint which saw no real difference between the gifts and the virtues also remained widespread. It was espoused by Scotus and, after him, Ockham (who disliked unnecessary distinctions) and therefore represented the more widespread viewpoint for the rest of the medieval period. This meant that the literature exploring the topic of the gifts of the Spirit was limited for the most part to those who accepted Thomas Aquinas as their theological luminary.

Strange to say, the gifts of the Spirit were not a major point of interest for the spiritual or mystical writers of the period running from the late thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries – though two such writers did devote lengthy treatises to the topic (Rupert of Biberach in the fourteenth and Denys of Ryckel ('the Carthusian') in the fifteenth), one of which (that of Denys) was, to my mind, the most exhaustive and illuminating treatise on the subject until it was eclipsed in the seventeenth century by John of St Thomas's 'The Gifts of the Holy Spirit'. But while by and large they were not interested in the gifts as a whole, they were intensely interested in one of those gifts: the gift of wisdom. Apart from love (that is, the love poured into the believer by the Holy Spirit, the theological virtue known as *caritas*, the translation of which hardly conveys its meaning any more – 'charity'), wisdom was seen as the greatest of all the gifts showered on believers by God. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to distinguish between the claims of love and the claims of wisdom for the top position, since in the life of the believer the two were seen as being inseparable. The love that the Spirit pours into the hearts of believers brings with it wisdom, and the wisdom that is given by the Spirit has as its purpose the experiential knowledge of divine realities that only love can bring. The connection between this and the bond between love and understanding forged by Augustine and taken up into monastic theology is evident. In what follows, then, we will concentrate on wisdom (though the connection between wisdom and understanding was sufficiently close for the latter to be discussed fairly often as well).

9.3 Setting the pattern: Peter Lombard on the gift of wisdom

The pattern for medieval discussions of the gift of wisdom was set – as in so much else – by Peter Lombard's treatment of the theme in his *Sentences*. In distinction 35 of the third book, he discusses the difference between the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. Wisdom differs from knowledge, he argues, in that wisdom is the loving contemplation of eternal realities, while knowledge is concerned with information on how to use temporal realities in a good and proper way. As regards the difference between wisdom and the gift of understanding, the scope of wisdom is limited strictly to the divine while that of understanding goes beyond the divine so as to include spiritual creaturely realities. This could give the impression that wisdom is really a subdivision of understanding. However, this is not so,

since wisdom's action not merely grasps the divine intellectually but also savours it.

All of these points will be raised and discussed again and again by commentators down the ages. As regards wisdom, the idea that it is the contemplation and savouring of eternal realities will constitute the framework for all subsequent discussions of the gift up to the seventeenth century, when we see a shift of emphasis from classic medieval ideas about contemplation to a broader conception of spirituality.

In what follows, however, we will limit ourselves to three examples, all taken from the thirteenth century: Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Aquinas. They not only have provided us with the first reasonably detailed expositions of the gift of the wisdom but represent between them virtually all the major points that will be made in the future about the gift. Later expositions may concentrate on various aspects and explore various points in greater depth. But the link between what they have to say and what is to be found in Albert, Bonaventure and Aquinas is clear. Moreover, of the three it is Aquinas who will most influence future development and it will therefore be in order for us to conclude our sketch of medieval thinking on this topic with a consideration of his views. In the fifteenth century Denys of Ryckel will provide a magnificent treatise on the gifts of the Spirit that are a mixture of mystical and Thomistic thought. But space precludes us from examining the specific contributions he makes there.

9.4 Albert the Great

Commenting on distinction 35 of the third book of the *Sentences*, Albert devotes three articles to the gift of wisdom.

The *first article* examines three definitions of wisdom, notes certain objections to the definitions and proceeds to discuss the nature of wisdom in response to the issues raised by the definitions and the objections against them. The definitions are: (1) wisdom is the cognition of divine realities; (2) it is the cognition and love of that which is eternal and immutable, namely, God; (3) it is the gift that refreshes the mind with the hope and certitude of eternal realities.

These are not mutually contradictory, because the first definition deals, he says, with wisdom's subject matter; the second notes that wisdom is not

limited to the genus of cognition but is also part of the genus of love (*dilectio*); the third refers to the effects of wisdom and therefore says nothing about its substance.

It is in response to the objections that his views on the nature of the gift of wisdom are clarified.

His starting-point is the observation that wisdom is not the same as faith, even if both deal with what is eternal. Wisdom is a different light, one that enables the recipient not merely to see but also to taste divine realities by experiencing them. The light therefore not merely illuminates but also warms – a striking image that is appealed to by several writers on wisdom. What is specific to wisdom is that ‘it tastes God in God’s gifts’.

This does not mean that wisdom’s knowledge is freed of the veiled character of all knowledge of God acquired in this life, freed of having to know God through the medium of creatures. Like faith, wisdom too knows only dimly and through the mirror of images. But ‘tasting God in God’s gifts’ does mean that one of the images through which wisdom knows is the self’s own likeness to God and to the goodness that is God. This provides a medium for knowing God that is based on the immediacy of God’s presence to the soul and of the effect of that presence on the soul, conforming it in a unique way to God and the Goodness that is God. This in turn enables the soul to have a knowledge of God in this life that has about it an immediacy of contact between knower and known despite being through the medium of creatures.

The connection between truth and goodness in all this is significant. Albert is making a point that, I believe, is of crucial importance but which unfortunately was to a large extent lost sight of in the later history of the gift: namely that wisdom sees the truth in goodness and experiences the goodness of truth. Indeed (to bring out the full significance of Albert’s words) wisdom has about it something of the ontological identity of truth and goodness as it exists in God (*In Sent*, d 35, a 1, ad aliud 1).

This unity is important. Because it means that wisdom is not, as one objection put it, a composite made up of two different activities rooted in two different dispositions or ‘habits’ (*habitus*): love and cognition, the love that is *charitas* and the cognition brought by faith. Rather is wisdom something that has its own proper activity and therefore its own proper *habitus*, one that certainly includes cognitive and affective elements but in such a way that both are transformed and taken up into a unity that is more than the result of

the two working together (*ibid*). In short, wisdom is a form of knowing that is also loving and loving that is also knowing – and not simply a composite of an act of knowledge and a separate act of love.

The experiential knowledge brought by wisdom refreshes the soul. However, it also leaves the soul with a desire for more, since what refreshes it is only the savour, the odour of the infinite reality it knows. It is this restless reaching out for growth in the knowledge and love of God that distinguishes wisdom from the ‘fruits’ of the Spirit. For what is typical of the fruits is the peace, the stilling of the soul’s restlessness or appetites that they bring. What is typical of wisdom, however, is its constant search for an ever-greater tasting and knowing of God (*In Sent*, d 35, a 1, de 3a).

In the *second article*, Albert focuses his attention on wisdom’s subject matter. It had already been said to be eternal realities. But is wisdom limited to that? Albert’s answer is that, strictly speaking, it is – for it is only divine realities that can produce wisdom’s distinctive taste.

Since it is this taste or savour that is clearly the distinguishing mark of the gift of wisdom, *article three* appeals to it as the element that distinguishes the gifts of wisdom and understanding from each other. Wisdom’s light carries with it a savouring of what is known, whereas understanding’s light only sees. It does not taste.

Wisdom’s savour through experiential contact with what it knows is also the way in which it perfects the virtue of faith. As was seen above, Peter Lombard raised the issue of whether the gifts and the virtues were distinct from each other. Albert’s position is that they are. He aligns himself with the view of Gregory the Great that the gifts perfect the virtues by enabling them to be exercised more expeditiously (*In Sent*, d 34, a 1 & a 2).

9.5 Bonaventure

That the gift of wisdom incorporates both cognitive and affective elements is the focus of Bonaventure’s rather brief treatment in his commentary on distinction 35 of the *Sentences*. The central issue (q 1) is whether wisdom’s specific act is knowledge of the truth or experiencing the good. He lists all the arguments in favour of the thesis that wisdom’s specific act is a cognitive one. He then lists all the arguments in favour of the thesis that its specific act is an affective one. His own position – given after distinguishing four senses

in which the term wisdom is used – is that wisdom is a bit of both, but in such a way that the cognitive leads to the affective, which has its own form of knowing through tasting. (The four senses, incidentally, are as follows: the common meaning of the term, namely that wisdom is a knowledge embracing all reality, divine and human; a less common meaning, limiting wisdom to the knowledge of eternal realities; a proper meaning, namely a knowledge of God that is also an act of piety or worship; and the most proper meaning, which is an experiential knowledge of God involving savouring God.)

Unlike Albert, then, who rules out any talk of wisdom being a composite reality, Bonaventure seems happy to remain within such a framework of thinking. He does not actually speak of wisdom as being a composite reality but he does say that wisdom is ‘partly cognitive and partly affective’. He is fully aware of what this implies, because he discusses the obvious objection that since knowledge and affectivity are acts of two different powers of the soul, arguments in favour of affectivity would seem to rule cognition out altogether and make wisdom *solely* an affective activity. Albert’s reply to such an objection would surely have been that wisdom is a form of knowing that is also loving and a form of loving that is also knowing. Bonaventure, however, responds by keeping the cognitive and affective activities distinct from each other and making one of them the primary purpose of the gift and the other the necessary precondition for it. For Bonaventure, then, wisdom is *primarily* an affective activity. The cognitive element is simply the necessary precondition for the affective savouring of God (*In Sent*, d 35, q 1, resp).

This clear ordering of activities – from cognitive to affective – is also brought out in his *Collationes de Donis Spiritus Sancti*. The ninth collation is devoted to wisdom and in it he speaks of wisdom as a light, descending to us through the Son from the Father of lights (James 1:1). It descends initially to the soul’s cognitive powers in order to illuminate them and then moves on to the soul’s affective powers to give them joy and shifts finally to its operative powers, to strengthen them. Wisdom therefore ‘descends from God on high into the intellect, from the intellect into the affective powers until it finally reaches the operative ones.’

However, it would be a mistake to think that Bonaventure is dividing the gift of wisdom up into cognitive and affective elements in such a way that the only relationship between them is one of cause and effect. He is clearly limiting the word ‘cognitive’ here to what is grasped by the mind through the

intellect's normal conceptual activities. Bonaventure's point in speaking of the gift as partly cognitive and partly affective, with the former the precondition for the latter, is to honour the classic principle that one cannot be united in love to something without first knowing that to which one is united. The gift of wisdom draws on the knowledge of God given by faith but then moves into its own form of knowledge – the *cognitio experimentalis Dei*, that is, the experiential knowledge of God.

Like Albert, Bonaventure believes that what is distinctive of wisdom is a grasp of divine realities that is *at one and the same time* cognitive and affective: namely the experiential knowledge of God that is a knowledge through tasting God, savouring God. That this is truly a form of *cognition*, of knowing, is perfectly clear from Bonaventure's assertion that 'the very tasting or savouring is an experiential form of knowing' (*In Sent*, d 35, q 1, resp) and that this is 'the best way of knowing God'. This last comment is all the more interesting because it is made in the context of an objection that no one is wise simply by loving. Knowledge too is required. Bonaventure's answer is that it is indeed true – but the love of God brings with it its own form of knowledge, one that is the best way of doing so, far greater, nobler and more delectable than any that is gained through rational argumentation (*In Sent*, d 35, q 1, ad 5). Indeed, as Schlosser 1990:209 points out, for Bonaventure this experiential knowledge can in some way or other give greater depth to one's speculative knowledge of God. But this is not an assertion that such greater depth is one and the same act – only that the knowledge one has of God through tasting the divine can have a spill-over effect on one's speculative knowledge of God.

As can be seen, Bonaventure retains the idea that wisdom brings with it a distinctive 'taste'. 'Savouring' is central to the exercise of the gift. However, he is careful to distinguish this savouring from that associated with the gift of understanding. For – as the philosophers had already indicated – knowledge brings its own delights. As a supernaturally enabled grasp of the truth, the gift of understanding too has its delights but it is the delight of knowing the truth – as distinct from the delight that flows from tasting or experiencing the reality that is the truth (*In Sent* d 35, a 1, q iii, ad 3).

Of course, wisdom's effects do not flow from the gift automatically. As with the rest of grace, the gift confers a possibility that did not exist before, an ability that needs to be utilised for the gift to have its full effect. The exercise

of the gift demands spiritual effort. One must therefore distinguish between the infused disposition or *habitus* and its actual exercise (see on this Schlosser 1990:188) and take note of the prerequisites (mostly moral ones) for the gift to flower. In his *Collationes de Donis Spiritus Sancti*, he describes these prerequisites as wisdom's seven pillars, each of which is drawn from James 3:17: modesty, innocence, moderation, openness to the truth (*suadibilitas*), liberality, maturity and simplicity.

Furthermore, wisdom has effects other than tasting the divine but they are all related in one way or another to this experience. Bonaventure lists these effects briefly when discussing the suitability of the number seven for the gifts (*In Sent*, d 34, a 2, q 1). If one looks at the dispositions (*habitus*) that are annexed to the gifts, each gift corresponds to a virtue and the virtue that wisdom corresponds to is love, *caritas*. If one looks at the capital sins, the gifts are opposed to these and the sin that wisdom opposes is carnality (*luxuria*). If one looks at the moral debilitation caused by sin, the debilitation that wisdom helps overcome is *stultitia*, foolishness. If one views the gifts as conforming believers to the suffering Christ, then wisdom is the gift that provides delight, *delectatio*, in performing the Father's will. If one views the gifts as expediting the actions required for attaining our ultimate end, then wisdom does so by enabling us to taste it. If one views the gifts in relation to the contemplative and active lives, then wisdom belongs to the former and indeed to its highest level, the perfection of contemplation. Finally, if one looks at the powers of the soul, wisdom helps the concupiscent appetite to overcome the impediments to its reaching out for the good – it does so by enabling that appetite to taste the good.

Finally, Bonaventure aligns himself with the view (which he describes as the common one) that the gifts are really distinct from the virtues. The distinction consists principally in this that the gifts give a greater facility to the exercise of the virtues than would otherwise be so. Wisdom obviously does this through enabling the believer to taste and relish God's goodness (*In Sent*, d 34, a 1, q 1, resp).

9.6 Thomas Aquinas

Thomas dealt with the topic at some length – first in his commentary on the *Sentences* and then in his *Summa*. In the *Sentences*, the context is the contemplative

life (he begins his commentary on d 35 with a major discussion of the nature and respective merits of the contemplative and active lives, the reason being that ever since Anselm (Blic 1946:169) the gifts of the Spirit were seen as being given, some for the contemplative and some for the active life, with wisdom falling under the contemplative one). In the *Summa* the context is love, *caritas*.

9.6.1 The Commentary on the *Sentences* (Bk III, d 35)

We have seen how both Albert and Bonaventure stress the experiential element, the tasting element in wisdom. This is retained in Thomas's thought, but it is now linked to the philosophical idea that wisdom's function is to judge and put everything into its proper order (on the concept of order in Aquinas see Woznicki 1990). Thomas's thought on wisdom, as in so much else, sees the natural as the framework within which God works and elevates and reveals. Hence, natural wisdom, as expounded by Aristotle, becomes the main analogy for the gift. From a philosophical point of view, wisdom implies a grasp of the highest principles – whether within a particular discipline or as regards reality taken as a totality – and that grasp enables the wise person to judge and put into its proper order all that falls within the scope of those principles. Something similar applies therefore to the gift of wisdom.

What is specific to wisdom *as a gift of the Spirit* is that the highest principles are grasped not so much through a process of study or intellectual insight but rather through an affinity with the divine. Wisdom implies 'an outstanding degree of sufficiency of knowledge ... However, in some people this sufficiency is attained through study and teaching combined with intellectual ability... whereas in others it is attained through a degree of affinity with the divine' (*In Sent.*, d 35, q 2, a 1, resp). Grasping the highest principles simply through study or intellectual insight is the province of the *intellectual virtue* of wisdom. The *gift* grasps its object through being conformed to it by the unity forged by love.

This affinity is, then, the result of the same reality that causes the 'tasting' referred to by Albert and Bonaventure: the unity forged by love between the person and God. It is this love that gives wisdom its distinctive 'savour' (see *In Sent.*, q 2, a 1, ad 1).

Thomas's placing of judging and ordering at the centre of his exposition of wisdom immediately shifts the balance from the affective to the cognitive aspect of the gift. We saw how Bonaventure believed that wisdom was primarily

an affective activity, since what distinguished it was its 'savouring' the divine. Thomas, however, holds that wisdom is primarily an intellective, a cognitive activity – since the whole point of the affective basis for the savouring is to enable a 'connatural' type of judging and ordering divine realities to occur. A 'connatural' way of making judgements is one that flows from becoming assimilated to, similar in nature to, the reality that is being judged.

Hence Thomas places the knowledge and love that make up wisdom in exactly the opposite order from that in which Bonaventure placed them. For Thomas, wisdom begins with the love that bonds and conforms and it ends with the knowledge that results. Hence, whereas for Bonaventure the cognitive was simply the precondition for the affective, for Thomas it is the other way around – the affective is merely the precondition for the cognitive (though he grants that the cognitive can be accompanied by its own delights, as is often so with knowledge). Moreover, whereas Bonaventure stated that the very tasting or savouring was an experiential form of knowing, Thomas distinguishes between the savouring and the knowing, making savouring the preparatory stage for knowing: 'It must be said that wisdom's savour refers to the love that precedes and not the knowledge that follows – unless it is a question of the delight that arises out of an act of knowledge' (*In Sent*, d 35, q 2, a 1c, ad lum). It is the beginning of a process of shifting wisdom's 'taste' to a more marginal position.

Thomas's shifting of the emphasis from the affective to the cognitive as the primary purpose of the gift is marked. To appreciate just how marked the shift is, one has to recall that the widespread view was that wisdom's whole purpose was to provide its distinctive taste. The gift was given in order to assist the contemplative life and it did so by adding to contemplation the all-important dimension of 'taste'. Nevertheless, it is more of a shift of emphasis than a radical break. The opposition between Thomas and Bonaventure – representing apparently opposing positions – is not as great as it may seem to be. For the cognition that Bonaventure holds as a prerequisite for wisdom's savouring of the divine is the sort of cognition that Thomas himself would admit as preceding the love that gives rise to wisdom – namely the knowledge that the faith gives us of God. Also, the idea that loving unity with God is the prerequisite for the experiential knowledge that follows on it is something that Bonaventure would agree with. Moreover, if one takes Thomas at his word here, he is saying that the experiential knowledge should be categorised

primarily as a cognitive rather than as an affective reality. He is concentrating, in a way that Bonaventure does not, on the epistemological power of love. Thomas is in fact saying that as regards the gift of wisdom, love is the major epistemological power: uniting and conforming, thereby enabling an understanding of the divine to occur that goes beyond that of study and therefore enabling a type of judgement and ordering to take place that rests primarily on love and not on study. By contrast, Bonaventure concentrates on love's unitive power and its concomitant ability to delight – while certainly noting its epistemological consequences.

Like Bonaventure, Thomas too notes that the gift of understanding brings its own delights (though he does not use the term 'savour' at this point, he is dealing with the same reality) but that they are quite different from those brought by wisdom. Hence, wisdom and understanding differ not simply in that the one grasps the meaning of something while the other exercises 'judgement' about it and related matters. The difference is also in the epistemological basis of knowledge. For the delights that flow from love are not central to the gift of understanding. The delights proper to that gift are nothing more than the delights that accompany a faculty operating properly – the sort of delight that the mind experiences in knowing truth. Wisdom's delights, by contrast, flow from the love that binds one to the divine and makes an experiential knowledge of it possible (*In Sent*, d 35, q 2, a 2, quaest 3).

Finally, we can note that Thomas applies all of this to the relationship between the gift of wisdom and the virtue of faith. Both involve knowledge of the divine. However, one can compare the relationship between the gift of wisdom and faith with that which obtains between the intellectual virtue of wisdom and the first principles of all knowledge. The intellectual virtue probes these principles, makes judgements in the light of them and can put them and all that relates to them in their proper order or relationship. Similarly, the gift of wisdom probes, etc, the articles of faith, which for Thomas form theology's first principles, but probes them through a 'deiform contemplation'. And this brings out the distinction between the gift of wisdom and the virtue of faith, since faith grasps its object in a human way (through images and concepts) while wisdom grasps it through the believer's ontological conformity to it, that is, through the divinely engendered likeness to it (*In Sent*, q 2, a 1, ad 1).

9.6.2 The *Summa Theologiae* (IIa IIae, q 45)

Fundamentally the same position is taken in the *Summa* as regards the nature and purpose of the gift of wisdom. The analogy with wisdom as conceived by Aristotle continues: wisdom's purpose is to be able to judge all things and place them in their correct relationship to each other. It does so through its knowledge of the God that is the supreme cause of all things. This knowledge can be obtained in one of two ways: either through philosophical thought, in which case we are talking about the intellectual virtue of wisdom; or through a degree of conformity to divine things, in which case we are talking about the infused gift of wisdom (a 2, resp).

Moreover, the order of affectivity leading to cognition is maintained in the *Summa*. Love conforms us to God by uniting us to God thereby allowing connatural judgement to take place: 'wisdom therefore has indeed got its cause in the will, namely, in charity, but its essence is in the intellect, whose act it is to judge correctly' (a 2, resp).

Wisdom's distinctive 'taste' occupies even less attention here than it did in the commentary on the *Sentences*. Thomas does not exclude it, but associates it with the love that leads to knowledge and leaves the matter at that (see q 45, a 2, ad 1 & 2). It is the ability to judge by connaturality, and not wisdom's delights or distinctive taste, that is the centre of Thomas' attention when dealing with the gift of the wisdom.

Once again, if we take Thomas at his word, he is saying that the knowledge specific to the gift of wisdom is that which is derived through an affinity with its object, through connaturality – as when someone who is chaste can instinctively judge what is or is not chaste, without having to go through a lengthy analysis of the matter. However, it is difficult to believe that Thomas seriously thought that such connatural knowledge was even the major source of the gift's ability to judge. He had already stated earlier (a 1, ad 2; see also his commentary on the *Sentences*, above) that wisdom presupposes faith. It differs from faith for, while faith assents to its object, wisdom uses the knowledge gained by faith to judge all things. He also speaks of wisdom using the knowledge gained by the gift of understanding to do its judging (see below). It would seem then that the knowledge gained other than through connaturality plays the major role in the exercise of the gift of

wisdom. If so, then such knowledge must be coloured by the unity that love forges, giving it a connatural flavour, so to speak. For otherwise Thomas's insistence on wisdom's distinctive mode of judging as being the connatural mode becomes rather pointless. It would seem, then, that like Bonaventure, Thomas has in mind a spill-over effect from the experiential knowledge of God onto the speculative knowledge contained in the articles of faith.

This interpretation is further supported by Thomas' solution to an objection that not everyone in the state of grace, that is, not everyone united to God in love, receives the gift of wisdom (a 5). The ground for this objection is the obvious one that there are many such people who do not display this ability to judge and order all things. Indeed, infants and small children are graced by God's presence and they cannot really judge anything. Thomas's solution is based on two distinctions. The first distinguishes between a divinely infused disposition (*habitus*) and its actual exercise. Children and infants have the former but not the latter. It is a distinction that we saw Bonaventure appeal to above. The second distinction applies to those who do have the use of reason and can therefore exercise the gift. In their case, Thomas distinguishes between two grades of wisdom. The first grade is the most basic one and is granted to all. It is the ability to judge of those matters necessary for one's own personal salvation. The second grade is a higher one and is granted only to a few. It is the ability to know the higher mysteries and give direction not only to one's own life but the lives of others. This is in the unusual position of being both a grade of the gift of the Spirit and a *gratia gratis data*, one of the charisms listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 (see a 5, resp). But what is of significance for the point being discussed above is that it therefore implies that this higher knowledge is shot through with the insights that come from a connatural knowledge of divine realities.¹

Thomas makes the point here that all receive wisdom in at least its lowest grade. Indeed, this gift, like all the other seven gifts of the Spirit, is necessary

1 It seems to me that this is the only way to make sense of this particular text. For a brief discussion of its problematic character see, for example, Solignac 1990:111. Commenting on Thomas in the sixteenth century, Cajetan was of the opinion that the the *gratia gratis data* aspect applied to the quantitative increase of knowledge that an individual can develop regarding the faith (an increase *extensive*) and which can be used for the good of others, while the *gratia gratum faciens* aspect was the deepening of a person's goodness, ie unity with God (an increase *intensive*).

for salvation. He argues this point in the Ia IIae, q 68, a 2. He views all the gifts as perfecting the virtues in the sense of enabling them be exercised under the impulse of the Spirit. It is essential that we be open to the movement of the Spirit and since the gifts enable us to do that, they are essential for salvation. Wisdom, for example, enables one to judge things not simply by the use of reason but by an instinct for the divine given us by the Spirit (q 68, a 1, ad 4).

All in the state of grace (that is, graced by God's saving presence) receive the gift in some form or other, then. Moreover, it is *only* those in the state of grace who receive it. Precisely because the gift of wisdom depends for its very existence on the unity forged with God by love, it cannot exist in those alienated from God through mortal sin. Such sinfulness not only breaks one's unity with God but deprives a person of that connaturality with divine things that is essential to wisdom's distinctive form of judging (a 4).

Wisdom's central act, therefore, is to judge. It is this ability to judge that differentiates it from the gift of understanding. The latter gift's purpose is simply to understand, to penetrate the cognitive content of the faith. Wisdom's purpose is to make the sort of judgements referred to above on the basis of that understanding (a 2). We can see here once again the speculative bent of Thomas's approach. His mentor, Albert, had distinguished the gifts of wisdom and understanding by saying that understanding merely saw, wisdom also tasted. In Thomas's hands the distinction becomes that understanding merely sees, wisdom also judges.

Despite its essentially intellectual character, wisdom's judging function means that it is not merely a speculative but also a practical gift, for part of its function is to direct the way people should act (a 3). As was seen above, all who receive it and who have reached the age of reason can and must use it to direct the way they should act in matters essential for their salvation. However, a few receive a higher grade of the gift, enabling them to direct others not merely in such matters but also to impart to them a knowledge of the higher mysteries and to direct their actions accordingly.

Precisely because it is able to put things in their proper order, wisdom has an inner dynamism to harmony and with harmony comes peace. Of all the beatitudes, therefore, the one most closely allied to wisdom and which is in a way a fruit of wisdom is the one which proclaims the peacemakers blessed. Moreover, the reward for being such illustrates the beatitude's link with

wisdom: such people will be called God's children. Being God's children implies being conformed to God and it is this conformity, wrought by love, that is, as we saw, the root of wisdom's distinctive connatural form of judging (a 6).

9.6.3 Wisdom as a gift of the Spirit and wisdom as theology

For Aquinas, the distinctive way in which the gift of wisdom judges – namely through connaturality – also distinguishes it from theology as a discipline.

Theology had traditionally been regarded as wisdom in the sense of an ability to understand divine realities through experiencing them. When the discussions about theology's scientific character took place in the first half of the thirteenth century, it was this idea of theology-as-wisdom that led theologians to assert that theology went beyond mere *scientia* or intellectually constructed knowledge. Wisdom outstripped such knowledge since it went beyond purely intellectual categories so as to come into immediate and experiential contact with the divine, a contact that illuminated the divine in a way that purely intellectual categories could never do. This is why Roland of Cremona could insist that 'those who do not have a formed faith [a faith suffused with love] do not know theology... Without experience there is no art or science, and all intellectual knowledge flows from a prior sentient one. For just as someone who never tasted honey can never have a true knowledge of its taste ... so too is it impossible for someone who is not proficient in living out a faith suffused with love to know theology. Such a person may know how to talk about theology. But this is simply like the case of one born blind who can know how to talk about colours without really knowing them' (*Summa*, prol, q 2; as quoted by M-D Chenu 1957a:61–62).

With the increasing influence of Aristotelian ideas that occurred in the thirteenth century, we can see the tension beginning to develop between Aristotle's concept of wisdom and this more traditional one. As we saw, Aristotle's concept of wisdom was a purely intellectual one. It was the purely conceptual understanding of the supreme cause, the cause of all causes. No 'tasting' of the divine exists in such an intellectual view of wisdom.

The tension between the traditional Augustinian-Christian view and the Aristotelian one manifested itself in that when arguing that theology was 'wisdom', writers increasingly had to note that it was wisdom *not* in the

Aristotelian sense but in the more traditional sense of knowing the divine through experiencing it. Thus, for Kilwardby, the traditional meaning of wisdom dealt with the divine not merely as truth but also as goodness – a goodness that could be ‘tasted’, that is, experienced. ‘The knowledge [*scientia*] that deals with the cause of all causes does so either by focusing on its character simply as truth or on that truth as goodness. The former is the province of metaphysics and limits itself to [intellectual] sight. The latter is the province of theology and looks to the movement of one’s affections. It is this latter that is properly called ‘wisdom from savouring’ [*sapientia a sapore*], since it brings about a knowledge derived from tasting [its object]. The former is called wisdom in a less proper sense, since it limits its knowledge according to what can be seen [with the mind]’ (*De natura theologiae*:49).

However, the extent to which Aristotelian ideas were becoming part and parcel of the accepted philosophical framework of academic institutions made it almost inevitable that theology would come to be seen as being ‘wisdom’ in the Aristotelian sense of the term. The changeover took place in Aquinas, who relegated the traditional concept of wisdom to the area of the gifts of the Spirit, while applying Aristotle’s sense of the term ‘wisdom’ to theology.

In article 6 of the opening question of his *Summa* he poses the question as to whether theology is ‘wisdom’. He lists as one of the main objections to its being wisdom the fact that wisdom is a gift of God, more precisely one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, while theology’s body of knowledge is acquired through study. His reply to this objection is as follows:

Since judgment appertains to wisdom, the twofold manner of judging produces a twofold wisdom. A man may judge in one way by inclination, as whoever has the habit of a virtue judges rightly of what concerns that virtue by his very inclination towards it. Hence it is the virtuous man, as we read, who is the measure and rule of human acts. In another way, by knowledge, just as a man learned in moral science might be able to judge rightly about virtuous acts, though he had not the virtue. The first manner of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is set down among the gifts of the Holy Ghost: ‘The spiritual man judgeth all things’ (1 Cor 2:15). And Dionysius says (*Div Nom ii*): ‘Hierotheus is taught not by mere learning, but by experience of divine things.’ The second manner of judging belongs to this doctrine which is acquired by study, though its

principles are obtained by revelation (English version, London: Burns & Oates, 1920).

Theology, therefore, is no longer wisdom in the older sense of the term but rather the Aristotelian sense. Granted, Aquinas is not asserting that theology is simply the philosophy of the highest cause. On the contrary, he acknowledges that theology gets its principles from revelation. But he does seem to be ruling out the idea that central to theology's way of going about its business is the need for the theologian to 'taste' the realities being discussed.

This will eventually lead to the conclusion that one could be a competent theologian even if one lacked the love that was an essential ingredient of the Spirit's gift of wisdom. We have already seen how in the fourteenth century it was pointed out that in principle anybody – not necessarily a Christian – could perform the academic activities associated with theologising. In the fifteenth century we see Denys of Ryckel making the same sort of distinction Aquinas made between the wisdom that is theology and the wisdom that is the Spirit's gift and going on to bemoan that the former type of wisdom is one that can be found in both the morally good and the morally evil. 'The wisdom that is theology is common to those who are good and those who are evil: for, sad to say, there are many doctors of theology living in the state of mortal sin who nevertheless display such wisdom' (*De donis*, II, iv; p 178). 'The wisdom that is the Spirit's gift, however, is a savourous knowledge of God derived from experiencing God' (*ibid*).

Aquinas's shift to a purely intellectual understanding of the sense in which wisdom is theology became widespread, being followed even by mystics such as Denys of Ryckel. However, it is interesting to note that, in the opinion of the great Thomist scholar Chenu, Aquinas does seem to have preserved some role in theology for the sort of love-filled unity with God that was at the heart of the older idea of wisdom. When dealing with Thomas's theory of theology as a subalternate science, we saw that a continuity between the knowledge making up the subalternate science and that making up the subalternating one was essential to the former being a true *scientia*. Chenu believes that for Thomas there was indeed some continuity and that the continuity in question was the experiential contact with God (and therefore with the subalternating wisdom of God) that the believer's love-filled faith brought about. The experiential knowledge that was essential to the older concept of wisdom therefore is now being appealed to in order to provide

the necessary continuity within the theologian between theology's principles (God's knowledge of God as revealed to us) and the body of knowledge built onto them. If Chenu is correct, then his comment is apt: 'that which makes theology a science is [for Thomas] precisely that which makes it mystical' (Chenu 1957a:74). However, whether he is correct or not, what is clear, as I wrote elsewhere, 'is that the whole thrust of Thomas' approach was to push love's illuminating role into the background of theological work. The only place where it may fulfil a role was as regards the principles on which theology was based. After that, logic took over. Theology's conclusions were entitled to stand as scientifically established ones only if the logical coherence between them and the principles was perceptible' (Gaybba 1990:100). As we saw when dealing with monastic theology, it was at that point above all that monastic and scholastic theology parted company.

9.7 Conclusions

After Aquinas, the medieval theology of the gift of wisdom came to rest on two pillars. The first pillar was the older of the two in Christian theology: a knowledge rooted in an immediate experience of the divine, one that is in turn rooted in a love that binds the knower to God. The conceptual framework within which medieval discussions of such knowledge took place was neo-Platonist mysticism, particularly in the form given to it by Pseudo-Denys in his *De nominibus divinis*. But the idea of such knowledge was seen as having strong biblical roots. The most favoured text appealed to again and again was Psalm 34:8, 'taste and see that the Lord is good', since the text appeared to combine experiential ('taste') and cognitive elements ('see'). The second pillar was a knowledge of the cause of all causes that enabled someone to grasp the conceptual connection between that supreme cause and everything else. This pillar was Aristotle's idea of wisdom.

The two pillars were united into a single structure for the first time in Aquinas's theology of wisdom as a gift of the Spirit. However, the tensions between the two very different types of knowing represented by each pillar remained: one that operated with clearly delineated concepts, tracing as clearly as possible the logical connections between them; and one that operated more with instincts and feelings that are aroused in the believer through a loving unity with God.

The only way in which such tensions could be resolved was by seeing the latter as giving a depth of insight and certitude to the former that would otherwise be lacking. For in the last analysis the gift of wisdom was seen as the place where mind and heart were united in the believer's grasp of God's revelation. Christians were people who were meant to be able to taste the goodness and rightness of their faith because they were able to taste the God at its core: and such an ability, the followers of Thomas argued, was absolutely necessary if a Christian was to be a Christian. Christians were people who, through their being formed in God's image, were meant to be able to judge with a sure instinct what was and what was not in conformity with their faith.

In the writings of the mystics, the power of the gift becomes awesome. It can flood the intellect with light and create a spiritual 'feast' within the soul, one in which the believer 'can become drunk on the wine of divine love and light' (see for example, Rudolph of Biberach's *De donis*, chapters 5–11). It brings a joy and a facility to exercising the Christian virtues. It gives to faith a firmness that comes from experiencing its truth. It overwhelms one with what Ruusbroec calls its 'delicious taste'. And so on.

Needless to say, the gap between such claims and empirical experience (since the gift was said to be given to all) did not go unnoticed. Authors were aware that Christians in general did not display all the effects attributed to wisdom. The main explanation for the gap is the same that Christians to this day use to explain the difference between faith-assertions about the believer's inner renewal or sanctification and the fact that Christians by and large do not live outstandingly saintly lives. The explanation is that the gift opens up possibilities that can only be activated through moral effort on the part of the recipient. More detailed explanations depended on which theology of wisdom one was emphasising. If one emphasised wisdom as a gift enabling one to reach the heights of contemplative mysticism – which was by and large the approach of the mystics – then clearly the gift would be wasted on anyone not willing to travel the long and hard road of self-discipline required by such a contemplative life. If one emphasised wisdom's ability to judge con-naturally of divine things, as Aquinas did, then one response (which was that of Aquinas) was that the gift existed in two grades, the basic grade being an ability to make the necessary instinctive judgements about what is essential to one's salvation and which is given to all, the higher grade being the ability to make more difficult judgements and guide others as well as oneself, a

grade that is given only to a few. Another response, which we find in some seventeenth-century popular spiritual writers, is that the grip of sin even on the life of the believer reduces the ability of the gift to achieve its full potential.

But even after all the necessary reservations have been made about some of the claims that have been made for the gift, there remains an important insight preserved within the theology devoted to it, namely that all who have been justified and sanctified by Christ have an experiential insight into God and the things of God, thanks to the presence of God and God's love within them. Even if one divests this insight of a theological packaging that may seem strange to many a Christian today, it remains a valuable one. It is interesting that after Protestantism spawned its own dry scholasticism, the Pietist reaction was one in which precisely this experiential element came once more to the fore. For the Pietists, doctrinal formulae are meaningless if they do not correspond to one's spiritual experience.

As has been pointed out repeatedly, the theology of the gift of wisdom retains at its heart the idea that love illuminates, an idea that goes back to the gospels, found explicit expression in Augustine and became the centre of monastic theology's insights. It is an idea that is still influential today, albeit under a different guise. For the central insight of liberation theology that action influences theory, that orthopraxis is a prerequisite for maintaining orthodoxy, is but a sophisticated expression of the fundamental thesis that, as regards the things of God, love illuminates in a way that mere abstract knowledge can never do. This insight owes a great deal to what the sociology of knowledge has taught us. But the insights of this modern discipline are ones that, in the final analysis, en flesh the central medieval conviction of love's ability to illuminate, since the social relationships that affect knowledge are relationships that give structure to love.

In our own day, therefore, the split between heart and head that occurred shortly after theology became an academic discipline is being healed to some extent. In this process of healing we need the insights of a very wide range of contemporary disciplines. But we also need to retrieve the insights of the past. The theology of wisdom as a form of knowing that combines conceptual and experiential knowledge of the divine should form the core of any balanced modern theory of theology. It also has valuable contributions to make to a theory of the bases for inter-religious dialogue. For if, as Christians

believe, God is love and if the most widely experienced and universally valued experience amongst human beings is love (however it may be defined), *the* key to mutual understanding is to explore the relationship between our experience of love, love of God and love of neighbour, and the doctrinal constructs that make up the explicit content of our differing faiths. But that is a different story and one that requires far more discussion than the few thoughts offered here.

Clearly there is still a long way to go and much we need to learn about ourselves, our experiences of the divine, the way in which our hearts and heads interact both within the individual and in society. But in learning those lessons we should remember not to jettison the insights bequeathed to us by our Christian forebears, for however strange the packaging of those insights may be to us today, the insights themselves are of enduring value.

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