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“REVELATIO ABSCONDITORUM”:
ON THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION
OF SAINT BONAVENTURE
TO THE CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION
ON DIVINE HIDDENNESS

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary version of the discussion on divine hiddenness, initiated by John L. Schellenberg’s argument (SCHELLENBERG 1993),¹ the problem is presented in a way that significantly departs from its traditional formulation. This shift is, in part, due to the fact that the term “hiddenness” has acquired a distinct meaning in our era, as another name for the phenomenon of “nonresistant nonbelief”. Moreover, some have argued that recourse to traditional solutions, particularly those of a theological nature, should be

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¹ Schellenberg (2015, 103) provides another version of the argument:

(1) If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.

(2) If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

(3) If a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists (from 1 and 2).

(4) Some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

(5) No perfectly loving God exists (from 3 and 4).

(6) If no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist.

(7) God does not exist (from 5 and 6).

avoided, as the contemporary understanding of the problem of hiddenness concerns a different range of religious phenomena than those that were the subject of reflections in earlier iterations of the debate.

Despite these differences, references to thinkers from the past who grappled with the problem of divine hiddenness are abundant in contemporary discussions. Scholars invoke them out of the conviction that points of commonality can be found between the contemporary version of the argument and more traditional versions, and that the views of earlier thinkers may prove useful in dealing with the problem of hiddenness in its contemporary form. Among the most prominently cited are undoubtedly modern thinkers such as Blaise Pascal (NEMOIANU 2015) and Søren Kierkegaard (MOSER and MCCREARY 2010; EVANS 2006). However, there are also occasional references to authors belonging to the medieval period, such as Saint Anselm of Canterbury and Saint Thomas Aquinas. It is noteworthy that references are made by both those who seek to weaken the eloquence and force of the “argument from hiddenness” and proponents of the argument. Those among the latter see in the thought of Anselm of Canterbury a pattern of thinking which Schellenberg has termed “ultimism”. According to him, such a position may provide a useful conceptual framework in which all possible discoveries in the field of the religious can be contained. Schellenberg points out, however, that, in his opinion, the author of the *Proslogion* too hastily filled the ultimist scheme with Christian content (SCHELLENBERG 2009, 104; 2013, 140–43).

Opponents of the “argument from hiddenness” second to most frequently cite Aquinas. While there is a theme of *Deus absconditus* in his thought, he relates this concept primarily to the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. According to him, in Jesus, God is hidden, as it were, “doubly”—not only in Jesus’ very humanity, but also in his weakness seen in his crucifixion.² Aquinas’ thought is invoked in the context of formulating “defences”—ways of refuting the “argument from hiddenness”, which draw scenarios to explain why God allows phenomena such as “nonresistant nonbelief” to occur (DUMSDAY 2013; 2014a).

Most remarkably, none of the authors involved in the contemporary discussion refer to the thought of Saint Bonaventure. This may be because it is difficult to identify a strict, separate philosophical section of his work. Scholars debate whether Bonaventure’s thought can be described as a separate philosophy, as a “Christian philosophy”, or whether his philosophical

² His views, citing numerous references, are discussed by Przanowski (2018, 82–97).

thought is completely integrated into his theology.³ Regardless of this dispute’s resolution, it is possible to draw on the work of this great medieval thinker. Given the significant precedent of employing Aquinas’ thoughts to formulate defences in the context of the “argument from hiddenness”, making use of explicitly theological themes, why should it not be permissible to draw on the thought of Bonaventure? His thoughts on divine hiddenness may even offer themes of greater “philosophical purity” than those that can be extracted from Aquinas’ work.

In this text, I intend to explore and discuss the themes of divine hiddenness present in the theological works of Bonaventure. Specifically, I will show the place and significance of these themes in the theological system of the Master of Bagnoregio. I will then suggest how these threads can be applied to purely philosophical discussions surrounding the concept of divine hiddenness. Finally, I will highlight what the distinct threads embedded in Bonaventure’s thought can bring to a philosophical discussion of God’s hiddenness.

“HE HAS BROUGHT FORTH INTO LIGHT HIDDEN THINGS”

In the *Proemium* to the *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, Bonaventure included a quotation from the *Book of Job* in the Vulgate translation that can be considered as the motto of his theological activity: “Profunda fluviorum scrutatus est, et abscondita produxit in lucem” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 1), meaning “He has searched the depths of rivers, and has brought forth into light hidden things.”

According to Peter Lombard’s proposal, which is followed and developed by Bonaventure, four kinds of causes play a role in theology. All of them must be taken into account if theology is to fulfil the task set before it of being a true science.⁴ The “material cause” must be identified with the “object of theology”, which is constituted by God’s mysteries. The “formal cause”

³ On the dispute over the status of philosophy in Bonaventure’s thought see GILSON (1940), STEENBERGHEN (1955), VEUTHEY (1971).

⁴ “Causa namque materialis innuitur in nomine *fluviorum*, causa formalis in perscrutatione *profundorum*, causa finalis in revelatione *absconditorum*, causa vero efficiens intelligitur in suppositione duorum verborum, scilicet *scrutatus est at produxit in lucem*” [For a material cause is hinted at in the nomenclature of rivers, a formal cause in the probing of the deep, a final cause in the revelation of the hidden, but the effective cause is understood in the supposition of two words, namely, it was searched and brought to light] (BONAVENTURE 1887, 1).

of theology is constituted by its method, through which it is possible to explore the depths of the “rivers” mentioned above. The intention with which reflection is undertaken constitutes the “final cause” of theology. The “efficient cause”, on the other hand, is the author, and thus the theologian himself, who searches the “depths of the rivers” and “brings to light what is hidden.”

It is clear that Bonaventure’s proposed scheme is very much dependent on the Aristotelian understanding of science as a means of explaining reality by reference to the four causes. Whatever one may think of such an understanding of science, I believe that it is worthwhile to take Bonaventure’s cue to find an answer to the question of what there is to do in theology and how it should be done. It is all the more worthwhile if important hints relating to the question of divine hiddenness can be gained from it. Let us first look at the question of the object of theology as presented in the *Commentaria*.

In dealing with this issue, Bonaventure uses the allegorical method. He searches the biblical texts for meanings to be retrieved from beneath the surface of the events, persons, or objects depicted in the texts of Scripture. He describes in great detail, for example, what the various “rivers” referred to in the quotation that forms the motto of his theological work are supposed to refer to. His proposed interpretations of the biblical “rivers” are based on the etymologies of their names.⁵ Quite apart from the etymological correctness of Bonaventure’s etymologies, his interpretations show not only a zeal for extracting hidden meanings but also the love of classification characteristic of scholastic theology.

The first of the rivers, the “Pishon”, whose name Bonaventure translates as “movement of the mouth”, is a symbol of the origin of everything from God the Father.⁶ Bonaventure explains that just as the word and the breath flow from the mouth, so the Son and the Spirit flow from the Father. Here, then, we are dealing with the question of intra-divine “origins” and thus with the problem of God’s nature interpreted in a Trinitarian manner. When speaking of the relationship between the Persons in the Trinity, Bonaventure uses the word “emanation”.⁷ He does not, however, understand it in the

⁵ Comparing the work of Bonaventure with the views of Thomas, Emmanuel Falque (2011, 2) writes that while Thomas, in referring to the same passage from the *Book of Job*, deliberately omits the biblical symbolism of the four rivers, Bonaventure uses them as the structure of his argument and even his entire theology. For a juxtaposition of the theological methods of Bonaventure and Thomas, see also GÓRNIAK (2012).

⁶ The Bonaventurian understanding of the meaning of the names of biblical rivers is cited by Falque (2001, 4).

⁷ “Primo, propter perennitatem dicitur fluvius personarum emanatio, quoniam illa emanatio sola est sine principio, sine fine” [In the first place, because of its permanence, it is called the

manner characteristic of Plotinus’ metaphysics but understands it to mean the flowing of all things from a source which is itself devoid of beginning and end and is, moreover, personal in character. The name of the second river, the “Gichon”, is linked by Bonaventure to a word meaning ‘sand’. He explains that sand is something that cannot be counted. This corresponds well, according to Bonaventure, to the uncountable number of things created by God. The second river thus reveals to us “what is hidden” in creation of the world by God. The third river, the “Tigris”, derives its name from a word meaning ‘arrow’. According to Bonaventure, an arrow is an inseparable unity of iron and wood used to fight enemies. This is why it becomes a symbol of Christ who, being both God and Man, conquers all enemies through the cross. So here we have a reference to God’s action, which is expressed through the Incarnation. The last of the rivers, the “Euphrates”, takes its name from the word meaning ‘the fecund one’. Bonaventure explains that “the fecund one” is that which cleanses rivers of their sediment. Just as rivers are sometimes cleansed of what lingers at their bottom and makes the water unable to flow properly, so too, through the sacraments, people are cleansed of their sins. Thanks to this purification, the water of grace can flow through a person. We are speaking here of God’s permanent and interior action, which is hidden from the eyes of men, and yet takes place and transforms human lives.⁸

Bonaventure emphasises that each river symbolises some kind of “abyss”—an unfathomable mystery that theology aims to penetrate. The first is “the

emanation of persons, since that emanation alone is without beginning, without end] (BONAVENTURE 1887, 1).

⁸ Gregory Lanave (2013, 86) notes that Bonaventure also introduces another approach in this work, which is repeated and developed in the *Breviloquium*: “Qu. 1 of the *Sentences* prologue concerns the material cause, or object, of theology. Bonaventure distinguishes three aspects of the object: *principium radicale*, *totum integrale*, and *totum universale*. It is the third that gives the most formal definition of theology—what in later scholastic theology was called the formal *quo* object of theology.... The *totum universale* of theology is ‘the things of faith, insofar as they pass over into understanding, by the addition of reason’.... The *Breviloquium* offers a more compact definition: theology concerns ‘the things of faith as intelligible’ (*credibile ut intelligibile*).” In the text of the *Breviloquium*, where Bonaventure explains what the “depth” of Scripture consists of, we read: “Subjecto, inquam, competit, quia ipsa est doctrina, quae est de Deo, de Christo, de operibus reparationis, et de credibili. Subjectum enim illius, quoad substantiam, Deus; quoad veritatem, Christus; quoad operationem, reparationis opus; quoad omnia haec, est ipsum credibile” (BONAVENTURE 2009) [It is appropriate to its subject matter, for this is a teaching, which deals with God, with Christ, with the works of redemption, and with the content of belief. In terms of its substance, its subject is God; in terms of its virtue, Christ; in terms of the action described, the works of redemption; and in terms of all these things together, the content of belief (BONAVENTURE 2005, 14)].

abyss of God in Himself". By turning to this abyss, theology attempts to answer the question of who God is. The second, the "abyss of God hidden in created entities", reveals the paltry nature of all that exists in comparison to the power and greatness of God. According to Bonaventure, in God's wisdom is revealed in the created order of the world and through the entities that come from Him. The third mystery to be revealed is the power of God's power manifested in the Incarnation, the "abyss of Christ crucified". Bonaventure emphasises that this very mystery constitutes the "hidden mystery of Christianity", the "most sacred secret" into which one must penetrate. The last mystery is "the sweetness of God's mercy", where we discover "the abyss of the goodness of God's heart". This mystery manifests full light in the forgiveness of sins, the healing of wounds, and eternal reward. In turn, it is made available through the Sacraments, which constitute "the most perfect medicine".⁹

All four rivers therefore constitute what can be described as *abscondita* 'that which is hidden'. They are nothing less than the mysteries of God's nature and action. This term refers not only to the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity but also to God's action "outside" of Himself, manifesting in the act of creation, in the Incarnation, and in the life of grace accomplished through the Sacraments. It is worth noting, however, the alternative view of the subject of theology, as quoted above in the works of Bonaventure. According to this alternative view, God is the *principium radicale* of theology. Taking this into account, it can be suggested that the mystery of God's nature constitutes the central issue, while creation, the Incarnation, and the life of grace are derivative themes tied up by the mystery of God's nature.

Let us now turn to the question of method, which constitutes the "formal cause" of theology. Considering Bonaventure's various statements, it must be said that, in his view, not one but two kinds of methods are used in theology. One of them is of a more "external" nature, while the other can be described

⁹ "Cum igitur quatuor sint fluvii, quatuor sunt fluviorum *profunda* praedictis fluviiis correspondentia. Profundum *aeternae emanationis* est sublimitas esse divini.... Profundum *creationis* est vanitas esse creati.... Profundum *incarnationis* est meritum humanitatis Christi, quod tantum fuit, ut vere possit dici profundum, quasi non habens terminum nec fundum.... Profundum *sacramentalis dispensationis* est efficacia perfecti medicamenti" (BONAVENTURE 1887, 3–4) [Therefore, since there are four rivers, there are four depths of the rivers corresponding to the aforesaid rivers. The depth of the eternal emanation is the sublime being of the divine.... The depth of creation is the vanity of being created.... The depth of incarnation is the merit of Christ's humanity, which was so much that it can truly be said to be deep, as if having no limit or bottom.... The depth of the sacramental dispensation is the efficacy of the perfect medicine]. See also FALQUE (2011, 8–9).

as “internal”. The former is used when the extraction of “what is hidden” aims at “external” goals, such as teaching, correcting, consoling, and strengthening. The latter, the most important method for bringing to light what is hidden, is “internal” in the sense that it is used for no other purpose than to know and reveal God’s hidden mysteries.

“External” methods such as *modus ratiocinativus* (inquiry or investigation) and *modus inquisitivus* (reasoning or calculation) are characteristic of scholastic theology. However, they fall short in fulfilling the most important of the task of theology, which is to fathom the mysteries of God. For this goal, *modus perscrutatorius* serves as the most significant method.¹⁰ The exact connection between the “external” methods “internal” methods of theology remains unclear, though from Bonaventure’s texts, a conviction of the peculiar dependence of *modus ratiocinativus* and *modus inquisitivus* on the most fundamental method can be gleaned.¹¹ The term *perscrutatio* is challenging to define. It could mean ‘exploration of the depths’ or ‘exploration of the abyss’. Bonaventure likens this method to a treasure hunt, solely employed to delve into the mystery of God. As such, it is the most fitting theological method, serving the ultimate goal of theology.¹²

Bonaventure cautions against *perscrutatio curiosa* when using this method, and instead, recommends pursuing *perscrutatio studiosa*. He highlights the danger of *curiositas*—vain curiosity—which, he believes can be fatal to any study of God. Instead, he recommends developing the virtue of *studiositas*, which means enthusiastic learning, disinterested and devoid of vanity.¹³ The

¹⁰ According to Falque (2001, 11) *perscrutatio* is “a unique theological method capable of supporting this sort of dive into mystery without either destroying the mystery or priding itself on the discovery on it”.

¹¹ Falque (2001, 11) comments: “Even if the *modus inquisitivus* is still sometimes linked to the *modus ratiocinativus* in order to define the theological rationality of his determinations *ad extra* (*ad confundendum adversarios, ad fovendum infirmos, ad delectandum perfectos*), only the *modus perscrutatorius* gives meaning to the theological penetration of the mystery *ad intra*.”

¹² “Ergo cum fides nostra credat necessaria, et illa habeant rationes latentes, et talia indigeant perscrutatione, ut enodentur; patet quod modus perscrutatorius maxime convenit huic scientiae” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 10) [Therefore, when our faith believes that they are necessary, and that they have hidden reasons, and that they need such investigation, that they may be discovered; it is clear that the investigative method is most suitable for this science].

¹³ “Quod ergo obiicitur in contrarium, dicendum, quod omnes illae auctoritates intelliguntur de perscrutatione curiosa, non de perscrutatione studiosa. Nam ipse Dominus dixit Iudaeis, Ioannis quinto: Scrutamini scripturas etc” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 11) [What is objected to the contrary, then, is to say that all those authorities are understood to be a curious investigation, not a studious investigation. For the Lord himself said to the Jews, in the fifth of John: Search the scriptures, etc.]. Lanave (2013, 107) writes: “Opposed to this evil is the virtue of *studiositas*, which may be

only purpose for which *perscrutatio* is undertaken is to bring to light the four hidden things—“the four mysteries of God”.¹⁴ Given this, it must be said that, in Bonaventure’s view, *perscrutatio* excludes all, even the most pious “business”.

An essential component of Bonaventure’s proposed method is that it is not merely intellectual. Indeed, theology is based on the formation of an attitude, of which *affectus* is an essential component. Being a theologian is a kind of virtue (*habitus*) that combines the intellectual with the affective.¹⁵ As Falque points out, the term *affectus* does not mean ‘emotion’ in the modern sense of the word, but a personal attitude that could be compared to the attitude symbolised by Pascal’s ‘heart’ (FALQUE 2001, 17). *Affectus* is a desire that is inspired by the love of the One towards whom one turns, engaging all the powers and faculties of man.

Moreover, the action directed by the *affectus* changes the knowing subject. Therefore, Bonaventure suggests that whoever seeks to reveal “what is hidden” cannot remain the same. Without consent to change on the part of the knowing subject, there is no theology. In the action guided by *affectus*, theory and practice merge in love, making possible a kind of knowing that can be described as “knowing through love”. *Affectus* makes possible a new and different type of rationality (FALQUE 2001, 10). Without attempting to awaken in oneself the attitude described by the concept of *affectus*, it is impossible to fulfil the requirements of the *perscrutatio* method.

As for the “final cause” of theological endeavour, Bonaventure understands it in a practical way. That which is hidden is not brought to light out of pure curiosity. The most important point is that through theology, man becomes better. Although the second essential aim of theological inquiry is contemplation, the transformation of man through theology is the most fundamental aim.¹⁶ In the light of Bonaventure’s words, when attempting to

further delineated onto the disposition of order, assiduity, satisfaction, and due proportion, all oriented toward a life that is revered, pure, religious, and edifying.”

¹⁴ “Ex perscrutatione autem quatuor profundorum in quatuor libris elicitur *finis*, scilicet revelatio *quatuor absconditorum*” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 4) [But from the investigation of the four depths in the four books the end is elicited, that is, the revelation of the four hidden things].

¹⁵ “Scientia theologica est habitus affectivus et medius inter speculativum et practicum...” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 13) [Theological science is an affective attitude and a middle ground between the speculative and the practical].

¹⁶ “Omnis doctrina, quae est de his, sine quorum cognition non contingit recte vivere, est, ut boni fiamus” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 12) [All the teaching that is about these things, without the knowledge of which it is not possible to live rightly, is that we may become good]. “Scientia theologica est habitus affectivus..., et pro fine habet tum contemplationem, tum ut boni fiamus, et

bring to light “that which is hidden”, one must not only be ready to experience transformation, but the desire to experience it must also guide the person who undertakes this kind of reflection from the outset. The lack of transformation in the theologian can be seen as proof that the theological search is not being properly conducted.

The way Bonaventure presents the role of the last of the causes, the “efficient” cause, is also noteworthy. He regards the theologian as the true “author” of theology, a title that bears significant esteem in medieval nomenclature. Indeed, medieval literature recognizes various “types” or “levels” of contribution to the creation of a work, namely *scriptor*, *compiler*, *commentator* and *auctor*. The latter contributes by supplementing the work with his own thoughts, and it is what comes from the author that is paramount. The views of others are only cited by the author in support of his own thoughts.¹⁷ For Bonaventure, it is clear that, in the case of theology, the sole and true Theologian who makes manifest and helps the theologian to make manifest what is hidden is the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the theologian’s action is “consecrated by the Holy Spirit”, Bonaventure emphasises. Nevertheless, the theologian is a true author, and in the work of producing theology, an important role is played by the effort of the man who, aided by the Holy Spirit, truly explores what is hidden and brings it to light. His role can be defined, in Bonaventure’s words, as: “Magister etiam, Spiritu adiuvante, factus est revelator absconditorum” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 5) [The Master (theologian), therefore, became, aided by the Spirit, the revelator of the hidden things].

All four causes of theology therefore involve bringing to light what is hidden in the depths of God’s mysteries. All theology is directed towards measuring itself against the hidden and all its efforts can be described as

quidem principalius, ut boni fiamus” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 13) [Theological science is an affective attitude..., and has as its end both contemplation and that we may become good, and still more principally, that we may become good].

¹⁷ “Ad intelligentiam praedictorum notandum, quod quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit aliena, nihil addendo vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur *scriptor*. Aliquis scribit aliena, addendo, sed non de suo; et iste *compiler* dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena et sua, sed aliena tamquam principalia, et sua tamquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur *commentator*, no *auctor*. Aliquid scribit et sua et aliena, sed sua tamquam principalis, aliena tamquam annexa ad confirmationem; et talis debet dici *auctor*” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 13) [To mark the understanding of the sayings, which is a fourfold way of making a book. For some one writes something else, without adding or changing anything; and he is merely called a writer. Someone else writes, adding, but not about his own; and this is called the compiler. Someone writes both foreign and his own, but the foreign as principal, and his own as appended to evidence; and he is called a commentator, not an author. He writes something both his own and another’s, but his own as the principal, the other’s as annexed for confirmation; and such must be called the author].

revelatio absconditorum. Such a description is reason enough to take an interest in the Bonaventurian view of theology. There is, however, another reason, which is linked to the notion of “reduction”.

One can see “reduction” as a method stemming from the conviction that there is a close relationship between theology and all other fields of knowledge. It should be noted that the method of “reduction” does not aim to undermine or diminish the value of sciences other than theology. It is born as a result of reflection on the capacity of the human intellect to discover the traces of God in the world He has created. It is essential to develop a “hermeneutical key” through which it is possible to find answers to questions such as “Where is God?” or “Where can His traces be found?”¹⁸ This perspective on the relationship between theology and other sciences was also characteristic of other medieval theologians, such as Hugh of Saint Victor. In his *Didascalicon*, in which we find an explanation of how all sciences are related to theology. Hugh explains that it is necessary to look for this type of connection so that all the sciences can fulfil their task in the process of the renewal of man wounded by sin (HUGH OF SAINT VICTOR 2012).

In Bonaventure’s works, there are essentially two distinct ways of conceiving of reduction.¹⁹ The term functions either as a metaphysical term, evoking the idea of a “circle of creation” that emanates from God in order to return to its starting point at the end. As a cognitive term, on the other hand, the word “reduction” refers to the way in which the human subject comes to know and understand the reality of the created order in light of the metaphysical belief described above. Zachary Hayes points out that what Bonaventure means when he writes of “reduction” is not so much a neutral cognition of the relationship between God and his creation but an “involved” cognition. This is because, according to Bonaventure, the human spiritual journey is part of a great “journey”—the return of all creation to God (HAYES 1996a, 1). This is

¹⁸ Zachary Hayes (1996b) writes: “The divine wisdom lies hidden in every form of secular knowledge. We need but to find the key to discover and unfold the appropriate analogies to allow that which is hidden to shine forth” (22).

¹⁹ Dominic Monti explains: “There are two techniques of reduction in Bonaventure’s work. One in the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, the other in the *Breviloquium*. In the former, as the mind speculates over the various degrees of the order of constitution, it perceives more and more clearly the relationship of all reality to God. Reductio leads from the lower through the intermediate to the higher. Through the knowledge of the layers of reality, one arrives at a philosophical metaphysics and then at the theological. By contrast, in this second work, the reduction is embedded in theological metaphysics. It begins with the mystery of the Trinity, then proceeds to reduce or trace the various elements of the Catholic tradition to the fundamental mystery of the Superior Principle, in order to show how they flow from it” (MONTI 2005, xxxvii).

why it is so important that man is able to see the connection between God and the world.

By writing about “reduction”, Bonaventure wants to draw attention to the fact that he who is able to see properly and, moreover, has the right “hermeneutical key”, is able to see that there is a God hidden in everything. Moreover, he will also be able to perceive the fact that divine wisdom lies hidden in every form of secular knowledge. The method of “reduction” makes it possible to find common ground, common ground for the search undertaken in different sciences. This ground is theology, which focuses on bringing to light “what is hidden”.²⁰

Another theme, also present in the above-mentioned Hugh, is that all cognition enables man to travel the path of enlightenment. In the light of this, the postulate arises that it is worthwhile to try to know as much as possible, since everything we learn can bring us closer to knowledge of God. Bonaventure argues that all the sciences (with theology at the forefront) are intended to build faith, glorify God, form good morals, bring consolation, and, above all, mature love.²¹ They are, therefore, not a purely theoretical reflection on reality, but their task is to change man, perfecting him on his journey towards God. Theology, with its ability to bind together all the sciences by concentrating on the hidden, gives all kinds of knowledge their proper direction and brings them into order.

²⁰ “Et sic patet, quomodo *multiformis sapientia Dei*, quae lucide traditur in sacra Scriptura, occultatur in omni cognitione et in omni natura. Patet etiam, quomodo omnes cognitiones famulantur theologiae; et ideo ipsa assumit exempla et utitur vocabulis pertinentibus ad omne genus cognitionis. Patet etiam, quam ampla sit via illuminativa, et quomodo in omni re, quae sentitur sive quae cognoscitur, interius lateat ipse Deus” [And so it is evident how the *manifold wisdom of God*, which is clearly revealed in sacred Scripture, lies hidden in all knowledge and in all nature. It is clear also how all divisions of knowledge are servants of theology, and it is for this reason that theology makes use of illustrations and terms pertaining to every branch of knowledge. It is likewise clear how wide the illuminative way may be, and how the divine reality itself lies hidden within everything which is perceived or known (BONAVENTURE 1996, 61)].

²¹ “Et hic est fructus omnium scientiarum, ut in omnibus aedificetur fides, *honorificetur Deus*, componantur mores, hauriantur consolationes, quae sunt in unione sponsi et sponsae, quae quidem fit per caritatem, ad quam terminatur tota intentio sacrae Scripturae, et per consequens omnis illuminatio desursum descendens, et sine qua omnis cognitio vana est, quia nunquam pervenitur ad Filium nisi per Spiritum sanctum, qui docet nos *omnem veritatem; qui est benedictus in saecula saeculorum. Amen*” [And this is the fruit of all sciences, that in all, faith may be strengthened, *God may be honored*, character may be formed, and consolation may be derived from union of the Spouse with the beloved, a union which takes place through charity: a charity in which the whole purpose of sacred Scripture, and thus of every illumination descending from above, comes to rest—a charity without which all knowledge is vain because no one comes to the Son except through the Holy Spirit who teaches us *all the truth, who is blessed forever. Amen* (BONAVENTURE 1996, 61)].

The above description of the various elements of theology, from its “matter” (which is the mysteries of God’s nature and action) to its set of methods (some of which serve an “external” purpose and the most important of which, *perscrutatio*, an “internal” purpose), to its “final cause” (which is the transformation of man for the better through the exploration of God’s mysteries) and “efficient cause” (which is the theologian assisted by the action of the Holy Spirit) leads to the conclusion that the task of bringing to light “the hidden” is a very complex and, therefore, very demanding task. However, if theology is to fulfil the task that constitutes the meaning of its existence, the theologian must be ready to accept what such an effort entails, as well as to engage in all the necessary activities leading to the realisation of the theologian’s essential purpose. His most important task is his readiness to become a “revelator absconditorum”—someone who reveals “what is hidden”.²² It is also the ability to bind all spheres of human cognition into a whole, to which the question of God’s hiddenness is the key.

A POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION

Although Bonaventure’s thinking is deeply rooted in the medieval understanding of science and the medieval hermeneutical tradition, and above all has a clear theological character, it is possible to use the themes he suggests also in the philosophical field.

Of course, we should leave aside the fact that Bonaventure considers philosophy to be part of man’s spiritual journey, which leads from faith through

²² “Horum igitur absconditorum propalatio est finis libri generalis, ad quem perducere et perducere volens Magister sententiarum *perscrutatus est profunda fluviorum* praevia gratia Spiritus sancti. Ille enim est praecipuus perscrutator secretorum et profundorum, secundum quod dicitur primae ad Corinthios secundo: *Spiritus omnia perscrutatur, etiam profunda Dei*. Huius spiritus caritate agitatus et luce et claritate illustratus, composuit Magister hoc opus et *scrutatus est profunda fluviorum*; hoc etiam spiritu adiuvante, factus est *revelator absconditorum*” (BONAVENTURE 1887, 5) [Therefore, the disclosure of these hidden things is the general goal of the book, to which the Master of sentences, wishing to be led and led, has searched the deep rivers with the prior grace of the Holy Spirit. For he is the principal searcher of secrets and deep things, according to what is said in the first to the second Corinthians: The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. His spirit, moved by charity and illuminated by light and brightness, the Master composed this work and searched the depths of the rivers; also with the help of this spirit, he became the revealer of the hidden things].

philosophy to contemplation.²³ Philosophy understood in this way makes use of the intuitions provided by faith, which make it possible, for example, to see that the world is filled with divine light and to perceive deep analogies between the various elements of reality.²⁴ Thanks to faith, it is possible, according to Bonaventure, to recover at least in part the ability to see reality, which was impaired by original sin. Philosophy must submit to theology in order to develop. Only faith can “separate the light from the darkness” (VAN NIEUWENHOVE 2012, 212). Faith makes it possible to take up issues and questions in philosophy that could not have arisen without recourse to faith-derived intuitions. Precisely for this reason, Bonaventure emphasises that only a believer can be a true metaphysician and that only in faith can metaphysics fully develop its possibilities.²⁵ With such an understanding of it, it is also not difficult to see philosophy as bringing to light “what is hidden”. Thanks to the intuitions flowing from faith, the philosopher is able to see what a person without faith does not see, and which could not even be perceived in a philosophy remote and independent of faith.

However, even if one conceives of philosophy differently from Bonaventure—as an independent field, separate from faith and contemplation—it is still possible to draw from the themes he raised. This is especially important when it comes to the theoretically complex and existentially momentous question of God’s hiddenness. Bonaventure’s treatment of the object of theology and his theses on method, purpose, and authorship can serve as a starting point for seeking insights that can be applied to a philosophical discussion of God’s hiddenness.

Let us begin with the object of theological reflection. The Bonaventurian “rivers” were attempts to name the “hidden things” to be brought to light. Given Bonaventure’s proposal discussed above, it should be concluded that these are the mysteries of God’s nature, of God’s creative relation to the world, of God’s entry into the history of the world through the Incarnation, and of God’s hidden action that transforms human life.

²³ The Polish historian of philosophy, Stefan Swieżawski (2000, 603–4), explains that Bonaventure was concerned with a system of sacred knowledge that was a fusion of revelation, philosophy and theology. According to the Master of Bagnoregio, philosophy can only fulfil its purpose of leading us to God if it is subjected to theology. The starting point of all cognition, including philosophy, is faith, and the ultimate goal is mystical contemplation. Swieżawski recalls Bonaventura’s words: “Ordo est enim, ut inchoetur a stabilitate fidei et procedatur per serenitatem rationis, ut perveniatur ad suavitatem contemplationis” [For the order is to begin with the stability of faith and to proceed through the serenity of reason, so as to arrive at the sweetness of contemplation].

²⁴ This way of perceiving reality is shown by Bonaventure (2002).

²⁵ On this subject, see SPEER (2002, 237).

The contemporary philosophical discussion of divine hiddenness includes analogous issues. In the dispute over the nature of God, the question of divine attributes is relevant. There are proposals that certain traditional attributes of God (such as omnipotence or omniscience) should be avoided, or at least that the scope of these attributes should be significantly reduced. Schellenberg, in proposing his “ultimism”, sought a “framework” that would accommodate not only hitherto neglected conceptions of the divine, but also all that is yet to be discovered by those who seek answers to questions about the ultimate. However, there is no shortage of those in this discussion who argue that there is no need to modify the concept of God referred to as classical theism. Emphasising the importance of the problem of divine hiddenness, they suggest that the argument proposed by Schellenberg is not strong enough to lead to the invalidation of classical theism. They also suggest ways in which the issue of hiddenness can be built into the classical theistic position (REA 2018).

The second widely discussed topic is on the relationship between God and the world. At issue is the “hiddenness of God in creation”, and thus, on the one hand, the possibility of seeing God’s traces, and on the other hand, everything that stands in the way of seeing God present in the world. The fundamental meta-problem that arises in this context is how it is possible to perceive God’s traces if the fundamental way of explaining the world is scientific explanation, which by its very nature avoids references to supernatural entities. Within the framework of the discussion, there are proponents of the solution that it is possible to look for God in a metaphysical perspective (LAMBERT 1999) or to discern His traces in the rationality that manifests itself in the world and makes scientific research possible (FERGUSON 2007). This points to the difficult and controversial problem of the relationship between explanations of a scientific nature and explanations from the field of natural theology, in which there could be room for invoking the existence of a “hidden God”. Within this group of considerations, the discussion also involves determining which conception of the relationship between God and the world is best able to deal with the problem of hiddenness.

The third theme in Bonaventure’s theology concerns God’s action in the world. He emphasises the role of the Incarnation as an extraordinary intervention of God in the history of the world. This theme is relevant to the philosophical discussion of God’s hiddenness, which includes the problem of the possibility of divine intervention. Some, for reasons of theodicy, deny God the possibility of extraordinary interventions in the order of natural

causes (EDWARDS 2010), while others defend an interventionist conception of divine action (HOŁDA and LAMBERT 2021). The question of whether and how God can act in the world is particularly relevant to the issue of hiddenness. The stronger the conception of God's action one adopts, the more dramatic the question of God's hiddenness becomes. In situations where such intervention could and should be expected, it is understood as the absence of intervention.

The fourth theme is on the way in which God can be in relationship with man. Bonaventure considered this issue when writing about the life of grace through which the purification of man takes place. Philosophically, the problem becomes one concerning religious experience, including not only experience in the broad sense of the word, starting with the experience of interpretable traces of God in the world, but also of more explicit types, such as those defined as experiences of relationship with God, or mystical experiences (COAKLEY 2015). The question of the credibility of testimonies purporting to show that God, at least to some people, can be experienced, is discussed. Another question is whether reference to the testimonies of other people, in the absence of having testimonies of one's own, can be an argument in a discussion about God's hiddenness (DUMSDAY 2014b).

Thus, in the contemporary philosophy of divine hiddenness, there are discussions of issues analogous to those that Bonaventure wrote about in his study. However, this does not seem to be the most relevant. More important seem to be the connections that can and should occur between these themes. Since, in Bonaventure's case, all four types of "rivers", and therefore the four theological themes, are closely linked, one would have to consider the possibility of finding such a connection also at the philosophical level. Regarding the philosophical discussion, it must be stated that it is not only important to not overlook any of the types of problems described above but also to consider them together. The issues of God's nature, the relationship between God and the world, God's action, and God's way of revealing himself, taking the form of religious experience, should be related to the problem of God's hiddenness, which is treated as one common and very fundamental problem. Not only the omission of any one of them, but also their disconnected treatment can make the question of God's hiddenness not only unsolvable but even inadequately posed. In doing so, it seems that the issue of God's nature is the central issue to which the other issues mentioned above are linked.

All the topics of theology mentioned by Bonaventure have, according to his term, an “abyssal” character. They are, therefore, subjects to be approached not only with due seriousness but also with far-reaching respect. From the point of view of the philosophical reflection that is of interest to us, it is necessary to emphasise the necessity of approaching the question of God’s hiddenness with a sense of the “abyssal” character of the problem. It is not only a matter of being aware of the complexity of the issue, but also of realising that the problem is not only a purely theoretical issue (even though there is a clear tendency in contemporary discussion to treat it as a purely academic problem) but also an existential issue. Therefore, one should not expect a solution to the problem of hiddenness in the form of a conclusive theorem or an ultimately convincing concept but rather see the theoretical reflection as part of a broader effort to deal with the issue, which includes various dimensions of life. Moreover, it should be taken into account that dealing with the problem of hiddenness requires a commitment of a personal nature and that a proper response to this problem may require the human being to activate powers and abilities other than purely intellectual ones.

Let us now consider what implications Bonaventure’s proposed description of the methods of theology might have for philosophy. The Master of Bagnoregio stressed the importance of distinguishing between the methods used to bring to light “that which is hidden”. The most important method was that of *perscrutatio*, which served to explore God’s mysteries. Other methods served “external” purposes. In a philosophical discussion, it should be emphasised, in this connection, that an exploration of the problem of divine hiddenness undertaken “on its own behalf”—which is a search for answers to the existential questions posed in earnest about the hidden God—will be different from a purely theoretical reflection aimed only at contributing to a discussion of the issue. What is important here is that not only the kind of quest that aims to demonstrate the non-existence of God or the necessity to reduce His attributes, but also those aiming to defend the classical theistic position, will involve the use of methods “external” to this problem. Only a question that is posed from within one’s own life can lead us to find an answer, the main addressee and beneficiary of which will be the questioner himself. The depth and dramatic nature of the problem of hiddenness are only fully revealed in a question asked in one’s own name and on one’s own responsibility. While it is possible to attempt to “translate” and expand the answer thus obtained into more universal answers, such answers will necessarily be limited.

Bonaventure's admonition to avoid vain curiosity and cultivate the virtue of *studiositas* is pertinent to philosophy as well. The question of divine hiddenness is not a matter to be approached casually or as a mere intellectual exercise. Its gravity demands a desire to understand and penetrate the mystery, not merely to satisfy one's curiosity. Furthermore, it requires a sustained effort expressed by a learning full of enthusiasm, disinterestedness, and devoid of vanity.

Another theme in Bonaventure's thinking concerns the purpose of reflecting on the hidden. According to him, the aim of theology is to effect positive change in man. Similarly, with respect to the philosophical treatment of the problem of God's hiddenness, a change for the better may be postulated. This could involve greater awareness of the issues, deeper sensitivity to the problem's significance and more careful reflection. The pursuit of divine hiddenness should lead us to develop virtues of an epistemic nature, the most important of which would be patience, honesty, and the courage to ask radical questions and formulate answers. In this regard, the philosophy of divine hiddenness is not just one of the many possible topics available in the philosopher's arsenal but becomes something akin to a life vocation.

Moreover, just as in theology one should consider the possibility of building one's life on the answers obtained through exploration of the hidden, so in philosophy one can speak of the existential significance of answering the philosophically discussed problem of divine hiddenness. It is not difficult to identify the topics in philosophy that have little or no existential significance, and which are of "life-changing" consequence for the philosopher who engages with them. The problem of hiddenness, next to the problem of evil, seems to be the most important of such issues. Interestingly, one can infer the existential importance of the problem of hiddenness not only from the views of its opponents and the ardour with which they engage with it but also from the zeal of its supporters and the declarations they formulate.²⁶

If we turn our attention to the attitude that Bonaventure postulated, described by the word *affectus*, it becomes clear that dealing with divine hiddenness cannot be a mere matter of intellect. In the quest to solve the problem of hiddenness, all of man's energies and faculties must be involved, otherwise this search will be futile. According to Bonaventure, *affectus* expands the possible area of rationality. Applied to philosophical matters, this postulate does not necessarily endorse irrational methods, but it certainly involves de-

²⁶ Schellenberg (2004, 41) claims that thinking about the problem of hiddenness is a way for him to search for the "true God".

fending the use of speculation and intuition. One must also learn to consider contents from the realms of theology or mysticism, treating them as possible voices in philosophical discourse. Disregarding these voices will lead to a narrow conception of the problem of hiddenness. This problem is so significant and profound that philosophical “purity” should not be allowed to prevent us from taking into account possible sources of knowledge.

Lastly, let us consider Bonaventure’s discussion of the “efficient cause” of authorship. While he recognises the Holy Spirit as the first and principal author of theology, he does not treat the theologian as a passive instrument. He values the theologian’s effort. From a philosophical perspective, we should highlight not only the importance of reflecting on divine hiddenness but also the ingenuity of presenting possible solutions. Furthermore, perseverance in the search for solutions and the ability to unify the different variations of the problem into a single fundamental issue are crucial.

In the context of Bonaventure’s writings on the “reduction” of the sciences to theology, a critical question arises: can we treat the problem of divine hiddenness not only as a central philosophical issue but also as a meeting ground for representatives of various sciences? The problem of divine hiddenness has the potential to become a place where people who ask questions beyond the limits of science can meet—questions concerning the rationality of the world, the justification for formulating scientific knowledge, and the motivation for scientific research. It could also entail a “reduction of the sciences to the problem of divine hiddenness” without compromising the methodological integrity of individual sciences, but instead would express the search for a hermeneutical key to the question of the possible unity of knowledge.

In view of the contemporary challenges related to the fragmentation of knowledge and the search for a common platform for conversation, the need to find topics that bind together various perspectives, methodologies, and approaches to the world becomes all the more urgent. The issue of divine hiddenness is so profound and all-encompassing that it could potentially serve as a focal point for a comprehensive project that aimed at discovering common ground for all human inquiry. After all, we may approach the search as one centred on the “Mind of God”, indicating that science is an attempt to decipher the creative thought of God (DAVIES 1993; HELLER 2008). It appears that the question of divine hiddenness, which also encompasses topics concerning history, individual experience and interpersonal relationships, may also serve as a valuable point of reference.

We can apply the elements of Bonaventure's concept of hiddenness discussed above to Schellenberg's argument directly and weaken the fourth premise of the "argument from hiddenness" which posits that "some finite persons are or have been nonresistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists." Bonaventure's insight helps us recognise that such unbelief could arise from a failure to consider all the relevant aspects of God's hiddenness. One may lack the ability to connect these aspects appropriately, or one may treat them too superficially without appreciating their "abyssal nature". Moreover, one may fail to adopt an appropriate attitude toward God, either through an idle curiosity that does not seek transformation or a reluctance to engage fully one's strength and abilities in the search for God.

Medieval authors have served as sources of inspiration for countering the "argument from hiddenness". Bonaventure's thoughts offer a valuable perspective that can lead to the development of what I call "The Depths of Hiddenness Defence". Here, the term "depth" is shorthand not only for the complexity of the threads that must be considered but also for the necessary attitudes that must be adopted to fully grapple with the problem of God's hiddenness. A strategy for countering "the argument from hiddenness" is to outline plausible scenarios that can explain how nonresistant nonbelief could be possible. "The Depths of Hiddenness Defence" asserts that if God exists and is who Christian thinkers like Bonaventure believe Him to be, then the issue of divine hiddenness is so profound that dismissing or treating it superficially could lead to a resulting disbelief that can be deemed culpable should such God indeed exist.

SUMMARY: THE "REVELATIO ABSCONDITORUM" IN PHILOSOPHY

In the light of the reasons outlined above, it is clear to see why the lack of reference to the thought of Saint Bonaventure constitutes a significant deficiency in the discussion of divine hiddenness to date. Although Bonaventure's proposal is theological in nature, it becomes possible to extract from it threads of a purely philosophical nature. The reference to Bonaventure's thought not only complements the references already made to medieval thinkers, but also opens up new possibilities that did not appear in the reference to the thought of St Anselm of Canterbury or St Thomas Aquinas.

Bonaventure's theology, with the issue of *revelatio absconditorum* at its centre, provides a set of valuable insights into not only what needs to be discussed when addressing the issue of divine hiddenness, but also how it should be discussed and how this discussion can influence those who engage in it. Given the themes discussed above, one may venture to argue that philosophy too, in addressing the question of divine hiddenness, can become a *revelatio absconditorum*. With all the important differences between reflection of a theological nature and that which takes place in philosophy, it becomes clear that bringing the hidden to light is not only the domain of theology.

To the philosopher, too, the words can apply that he has become one who explores the depths of the mysteries and brings what is hidden to light. The philosopher does this by the power of his own reason. And he is the first and primary author of the work he does. The question remains open as to where this search may lead him and what the "abysses of mysteries" will reveal to him. It may well be that the "hidden things" studied in a philosophical manner are precisely the same *abscondita* that St Bonaventure encouraged us to study. There is nothing to prevent us from accepting his invitation and seeing where *revelatio absconditorum* leads us.

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"REVELATIO ABSCONDITORUM":
ON THE POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION OF SAINT BONAVENTURE
TO THE CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION
ABOUT DIVINE HIDDENNESS

Summary

In the contemporary version of the discussion around the problem of God's hiddenness, which was initiated by the argument presented by John Schellenberg, the problem is posed in a way that differs significantly from its traditional presentation. However, there is no shortage of references to thinkers of the past who have grappled with the problem of divine hiddenness. Among these, there are occasional references to authors belonging to the medieval period: Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas. However, none of the authors involved in the contemporary dispute refers to the thought of Bonaventure. In my paper, I intend to present and discuss the themes related to divine hiddenness that can be found in the theological works of Bonaventure. I will show their place and importance in the theological system of the Master of Bagnoregio. I will also indicate possible ways in which these themes can be used in contemporary philosophical discussion.

Keywords: Saint Bonaventure; revelatio absconditorum; divine hiddenness; perscrutatio.

"REVELATIO ABSCONDITORUM".
O MOŻLIWYM WKŁADZIE ŚWIĘTEGO BONAWENTURY
DO WSPÓŁCZESNEJ FILOZOFICZNEJ DYSKUSJI O BOŻEJ UKRYTOŚCI

Streszczenie

We współczesnej wersji dyskusji wokół problem Bożej ukrytości, którą zapoczątkował argument zaprezentowany przez Johna Schellenberga, problem ten postawiony jest w sposób znacznie odbiegający od jego tradycyjnego ujęcia. Nie brakuje jednak odniesień do myślicieli z przeszłości, którzy zmagali się z problemem Bożej ukrytości. Wśród nich pojawiają się sporadyczne odwołania do autorów należących do okresu średniowiecza: św. Anzelma z Canterbury i św. Tomasza z Akwinu. Żaden z autorów biorących udział we współczesnym sporze nie odwołuje się jednak do myśli św. Bonawentury. W swoim tekście zamierzam przedstawić i omówić wątki związane z Bożym ukryciem, które można odnaleźć w teologicznych dziełach św. Bonawentury. Ukażę ich miejsce i znaczenie w systemie teologicznym Mistrza z Bagnoregio. Wskażę także możliwe sposoby wykorzystania tych wątków we współczesnej dyskusji filozoficznej.

Słowa kluczowe: Święty Bonawentura; revelatio absconditorum; Boża ukrytość; perscrutatio.