Death of St. Bonaventure at the Council of Lyons, July 15, 1274
(After a Nuremberg woodcut of 1512)
at once to the Pope, and after the strongest appeals he obtained the Pope's permission to stay on in the charge entrusted to him.37

Back in Paris, St. Bonaventure held his third General Chapter in the following year. Here were instituted the public disputations given by students of the Order, disputations which for several centuries were to accompany every General Chapter. At the same gathering it was also decided that all Lives of St. Francis save those written by St. Bonaventure were to be destroyed wherever they might be found. This resolution, though not ordered by St. Bonaventure as Clareno asserts, was undoubtedly approved by him. Very naturally such a decision was condemned without mercy by the Spirituals of the thirteenth century and almost as severely by the historians of the twentieth. Yet I think there is no point in loading the Chapter with the responsibility, by way of clearing St. Bonaventure. Such an attitude, altogether beyond the comprehension of men of the modern historical habit, came much more naturally at that period and in the special circumstances in which St. Bonaventure found himself. He had not written his Life of St. Francis as a party work; therefore he did not consider that by this work he was deciding in favour of one of the tendencies to be seen in the Order and against the others. On the contrary, he believed that, having taken all possible precautions and himself examined the witnesses most worthy of credence, he had produced a faithful image of St. Francis, one that might recreate harmony among divided minds and make it impossible for the person of the Saint—that living symbol of love—to become a cause of disunion within his own family. Holding all this, he naturally considered that whatever might be in Lives of St. Francis other than his was either superfluous or false; why then leave them in being? What purpose would be served by his work, if the accounts it was meant to replace had continued to circulate freely and foment discord in the bosom of the Order? St. Bonaventure was so far removed from the mentality of the modern historian that he has not even set down the Life of St. Francis in chronological order; the task he set himself was to draw a spiritual portrait and give men a model of holiness; where we accuse him of having tried to suppress historical documents, he had in mind the suppression of errors of the moral and religious order. It is an example of two different perspectives bearing upon one action, and in this matter, as in the matter of the charge against John of Parma, St. Bonaventure's attitude cannot be justly interpreted save from the point of view of a Minister General of the Franciscan Order.

The years that followed were spent probably in Paris, which was his normal place of residence. In the Lent of 1267 or 1268 he preached the Collationes de decem praeceptis. Towards the end of 1268 he left France for Assisi to prepare for the General Chapter which was to be held in 1269. By the 6th December, 1268, he was in Assisi. The Chapter was held, according to custom, at Pentecost, and the decisions there taken marked a new development of the Franciscan devotion to Our Lady. Apparently he returned to Paris during the year 1269, and there wrote his Apologia Pauperum against Gerard of Abbeville, or whoever was the author of the Contra adversarium perfectionis Christianae et praetorium et facultatum ecclesiae.38 It was the old quarrel of Guillaume de Saint-Amour, but other far graver questions were soon to arise.

In the accounts that have so far been given of these troubled years, St. Bonaventure makes practically no appearance at all.39 Two names dominate the events of the period—Siger of Brabant for the Averroists, and Thomas of Aquin for their opponents. It is worth noting that the struggle did not begin by controversy between these two leaders: so truly was their quarrel the central quarrel that it is not properly realized that the hostility began on another field, with the attack of a third person against one of these two. Yet that is what happened. The doctrinal controversies of 1270 were preceded by a violent discussion between the Augustinian John Peckham, the most illustrious Franciscan Master of the University of Paris, and Thomas Aquinas, who stood for the theological Aristotelianism of Albert the Great. We must choose
with some caution among the motives usually suggested to explain the doctrinal discussion which was to set the two Orders at grips. We are told that the Franciscans were jealous of the Dominicans, and there can be no question that there is a great deal of evidence, some of it even coming from the Franciscans themselves, to attest the existence of such a feeling. Salimbene’s humorous story of a Franciscan victorious in argument over an arrogant Dominican is the most vivid expression of it: \textsuperscript{40} it shows that the Franciscans were anxious to establish that in learning they are not second to men whose very profession it is to be learned. Yet no one has ventured to maintain that such a feeling could have been the chief cause of the conflict that was about to break out—especially as there was no reason for Franciscan jealousy if one compared, not the two Orders as a whole, but their most eminent representatives. Even in the presence of Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas, Alexander of Hales and St. Bonaventure cut no mean figures.

For the more serious cause of the conflict we must examine the divergence of doctrine which separated the two masters. Now here again it has been rightly noted that between them there is no trace of any personal animosity or spirit of contention. This would appear to be borne out by the fact that St. Bonaventure did not openly appear in the doctrinal discussions between the Thomists and the men of the Augustinian tradition. But on this point we must distinguish. It is true that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to suggest any personal animosity between St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas; to suppose that there was would be utterly gratuitous. But it seems to me that the tradition of their friendship has scarcely more foundation; and whilst it may be that here again legend expresses a truth deeper than the truth of history, yet it is important that a mere historian should not mistake the one order of truth for the other. \textsuperscript{41} In fact we may go further. If nothing up to the present has been found to prove the existence of a personal friendship between the two saints, it is probable that any esteem that may have existed between them did not extend to each other’s ideas.

It is not that St. Bonaventure ever attacked the Dominican ideal in the name of the Franciscan; in fact he places them on the same level, and in a famous text he formulates the fundamental reason which distinguishes one from the other while leaving them equal. \textsuperscript{42} It is no less certain that his character found the violence and the clamour of personal quarrel deeply repugnant; and the very office he bore would, we may assume, prevent him from entering into public controversy with a master belonging to an Order not his own. But we do not see the situation aright unless we grasp that behind John Peckham there was of necessity the figure of St. Bonaventure; and that no one of the Parisian masters could pretend to be unaware of it. I do not wish to discuss here the account John Peckham has left us of his controversy; nor the likelihood of the attitudes he attributes to himself and to St. Thomas Aquinas; his evidence is obviously that of an interested party; what is more to the point, these questions seem to me to be of only secondary importance. What we need to know, much more than the detail of the controversy, is the list of those whom John Peckham could count in his support—Etienne Tempier, the Bishop of Paris; the secular Masters of Theology, and perhaps even a few Dominicans “lingering partisans of the ancient form of Augustinianism.” \textsuperscript{43} All this is correct. But we must add St. Bonaventure to the list, and even attribute to him such a rôle in the controversy that, of him as of St. Thomas, it may be said that he dominates the events and ideas of that time.

Consider first how the situation looked to the men of the time. John Peckham, Master of the University of Paris and head of the school of the Friars Minor, speaks, disputes, and attacks St. Thomas upon matters involving equally philosophy and faith, under the eyes of St. Bonaventure, Minister General of his Order, normally resident in Paris. The least one can say is that the Minister General bore the responsibility of the controversy. A word from him would have ended it; a hint of criticism, even the most delicate, would have been sufficient to free him from all connection with it.
He did nothing. Surely, therefore, we must grant that he was party to it. Notice also the matter of the dispute. John Peckham charged St. Thomas with maintaining the unity of the substantial form in man. Now on this point St. Bonaventure was one of the highest authorities that John Peckham could quote on his own side. Not only had he maintained the plurality of forms as well as the rationes sentinales as early as the Commentary on the Sentences, but he was later openly to declare his agreement with the Franciscan Master in 1273 when he publicly declared: *insanum est dicere, quod ultima forma addatur materiae primae sine aliquo quod sit dispositio vel in potentia ad illam, vel nulla forma interjecta.* If it is “insanity,” it is the very insanity which St. Thomas was maintaining in this discussion.

Against this attack made by St. Bonaventure upon the unity of form in the human compound, we can see the ironic reflections of St. Thomas on the Augustinian argument for creation in time, as they have come down to us in the *De aeternitate mundi,* for by his *Commentary on the Sentences,* as everyone knew at the University of Paris. St. Bonaventure had already ranged himself with those subtle minds who (in St. Thomas’s ironic phrase) were the first to see the contradiction involved in the idea of a world created yet eternal, the first in whom wisdom dawned upon the world. St. Bonaventure’s words were clear: *ponere mundum aeternum sive aeternaliter productum, ponendo res omnes ex nihil productas, omnitno est contra veritatem et rationem.*

On this point as on the other, St. Thomas stands before us as one of the leading actors in the drama: but it was not between Siger and himself that the drama lay, nor was he the stage manager. He flashes back with admirable vigour upon those who attack him, and his coolness is remarkable considering that he was maintaining against Augustinianism that one of his own doctrines which seemed to concede most to the principles of Latin Averroism: but certainly his attitude is that of a brilliant swordsman defending himself against attack.

It may well have been as the best measure of defence that he took the offensive in his turn and became in 1270 the critic of Siger of Brabant. It is beyond doubt that St. Thomas, sharing the philosophic principles of Aristotle with the Averroists, must have realized keenly the necessity of distinguishing himself from them. And if the doctrine of the unity of the intellect had in fact represented a deviation from the thought of Aristotle it was for Aristotelians like himself or his Master Albertus Magnus to establish it.44 In a general way, a discussion upon the detail of Averroist doctrine could not usefully proceed save between philosophers holding the same principles and sharing a common ground. Whether or not the *De unitate intellectus* of St. Thomas was directed primarily at Siger, and whether or not it dates from 1270, it is at any rate certain that the Averroist controversy in this sense developed as a controversy between Siger and St. Thomas. But the refutation of Averroes in the name of the very principles of Aristotle constituted only one of the elements of the problem. For St. Thomas—as for twentieth-century Thomism—it was the whole problem; but seen by a spectator—unaware of the history of things which had not yet happened and naturally, therefore, not regarding the triumph of Thomism as practically a fait accompli—the discussion must have seemed very much wider in scope. It was not a question of this or that philosophic doctrine, but the very notion of philosophy that was at issue; and the battle then joined was so important that its result was to be decisive for the future of modern thought.45 While the Aristotelians saw the evil effect upon Christian truth of a definite metaphysical error and accepted battle upon the ground of pure philosophy, the Augustinians chose to remain upon the field of Christian wisdom and block the advance of Averroism by denying the principle of a pure philosophy—a philosophy independent of revelation. Thus one can see why the Augustinians did not undertake the philosophic refutation of Averroist doctrines, or refuted them only by discussing their relations with the most general principles of Aristotelianism itself. Albertus Magnus had posed the
decisive question: *utrum theologia sit scientia ab aliis scientiis separatam?* And his reply has been explicit: *quod concedendum est, et dicendum quod haec scientia separatur ab aliis, subjecto, passione et principiis confirmantibus ratiocinationem.*

In the eyes of St. Bonaventure all the evil springs from this. It was not only a question of Averroes, or even of Aristotle; for Plato and every other philosopher remains liable to errors, different but extremely serious, if philosophy is kept separate. Seen in this light, the Averroist controversy of 1270 and the succeeding years is reducible in its entirety to this one fundamental question: has philosophy any rights as a separate doctrine, as Albert puts it: or, in the phrase of St. Thomas, as a doctrine formally distinct from theology? Of this controversy the decisive figure was St. Bonaventure. To be assured of this we have but to listen.

Notice first that the *Commentary on the Sentences* had already given its own clear answer to the problem of the relations between faith and reason, leaving to philosophy no field of its own over which theology does not exercise jurisdiction. Already so early Bonaventure foresaw the danger. But as we come closer to the year 1270, we find him increasingly concerned to arrive at a definitive statement of his thought on this question of the exact place that belongs to philosophy as of right. It was not St. Bonaventure who changed, but the world that changed about him.

Everything he did makes it clear that his mind was occupied with the ever-widening gulf that separated him from the new philosophers and theologians. We do not know the date of his sermon *Christus omnium Magister,* but its matter makes it certain that it was addressed to the University and directed against the invasion of theology by the pagan philosophies. If Christ is our one Master, then true wisdom is represented neither by Aristotle nor even Plato. Augustine alone possesses it, and he only because he was enlightened by revelation. Of such a lesson no one could fail to see either the meaning or the application, and St. Bonaventure states his conclusion explicitly—Christ is our one Master, therefore He is the one remedy against the three evils at that time rending the scholastic world of Paris—*praesumptio sensuum, et dissenso sententiarum et desperato inventiendi verum:* the pride that makes men abound in their own sense and invent new doctrines; the doctrinal dissentions which result from this pride and range school against school within the bosom of Christianity: the despair of finding truth which leads the Averroists to juxtapose, without reconciling, the truth of the faith and the opposite conclusions of philosophy. *Ne desperemus, maxime cum ipse velit et sciat et possit nos docere.* There is in this phrase a warm and understanding compassion, such as we rarely come upon in all this Averroist controversy, for souls in torment, many of them undoubtedly sincere and suffering from their inability to harmonize their reason with their faith. Others may try to coerce these souls by forcing upon them the dilemma of the double truth; better inspired, St. Bonaventure feels that they believe but that they do not comprehend and are in despair at their incomprehension. There is no better psychologist than kindness.

St. Bonaventure’s lectures *De decem donis Spiritus Sancti,* which certainly come before the *Hexaëmeron* (1273) and probably after the *Collationes de decem praeceptis* (1267–68), must be practically contemporary with the controversy between Siger and St. Thomas. Now the errors of the Averroists are explicitly examined in the eighth lecture, whose subject is the gift of understanding. Against their three principal errors St. Bonaventure sets Christ as cause of being, ground of knowledge, and order of life. But the criticism he here directs against the errors of the Averroists is obviously closely linked with the general problem of human knowledge. The fourth of these lectures, dealing with the gift of knowledge, contains a stern criticism of every philosophy which would claim to be self-sufficient, and we shall later examine its content in greater detail; the place of Christian philosophy is tending to be fixed definitely between sheer faith and theology properly so called; in other words the plan of the *Hexaëmeron* is beginning to take shape.