Bonaventure's Journey of the Soul into God: Context and Commentary by Randall Smith. Cambridge University Press, 2024. x + 502 pp. $160.00.

In this learned and engaging book, Randall Smith offers a first-of-its-kind running commentary on Bonaventure's *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (chaps. 8–10), preceded by an illuminating introduction to that theological masterpiece's Franciscan motivation (chap. 1), its structure (chap. 2), its sources (chaps. 3 and 4), its dilative and imagistic methods (chaps. 5 and 6), and its content in comparison to that of Bonaventure's *Reduction of the Arts to Theology* (chap. 7). In addition to a brief conclusion (chap. 11) and an impressive bibliography, the book includes two appendices: the first, an analytical outline of the *Itinerarium*; the second, a detailed outline of Bonaventure's and Thomas Aquinas's respective commentaries on book 1 of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.

Smith envisions his book as a stimulus to reread Bonaventure's great treatise, which Bernard McGinn has praised as "one of the purest gems of medieval theology" (qtd. 1). One might imagine a triptych in which the *Itinerarium* itself is central, flanked by the complementary panels of Smith's two-part study.

Building upon his earlier monograph, *Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the Scholastic Culture of Medieval Paris* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), Smith paints an expansive picture of the Scholastic environment that gave rise to Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*. Citing Peter the Chanter's description of the scholar's threefold calling as inclusive of *lectio* (biblical commentary), *disputatio* (debate about theological questions), and *praedicatio* (preaching), Smith notes that the genre of the modern sermon (*sermo modernus*) required the "fairly extensive education and training" (55) of the preacher and his listeners. The methods and conventions of the *sermo modernus* exerted a formative power, Smith maintains, not only upon "university sermons" per se but also upon "the style and structure of some of the major theological works of the

thirteenth century" (3–4), notable among them, Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*.

In chapters 1 and 5, respectively, Smith describes the "homiletic revolution" of the thirteenth century and its eight methods of dilation or amplification. Instead of preaching verse by verse on a given book of the Bible, as Bernard of Clairvaux did in his eighty-six homilies on the Song of Songs, university-trained preachers like Bonaventure, using the *sermo modernus* style, chose a single biblical verse as a theme for a sermon. Highlighting keywords in the chosen verse, they then divided the overarching theme into three or four topics, each of which could be further subdivided and dilated in a variety of ways. The eight ways of amplification listed by Robert of Basevorn in his *Forma praedicandi* can be discerned, Smith shows, in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*.

Smith's claim is, first, that Bonaventure had so internalized these sermonic methods that he used them spontaneously in tracing the stages of the soul's intellectual ascent; second, that Bonaventure found such a "creative use" (8) perfectly in keeping with his Franciscan "right and duty" (58) as a preacher. Confronted with internal divisions within the Franciscan family, Bonaventure sought in the *Itinerarium* (a work he was famously inspired to write while on Mount Alverna, October 4, 1259) to convince his fellow Franciscans that advanced study could and should lead the soul to God (15), in company with Saint Francis, the *poverello*.

Favoring preaching over disputation in his argument, Smith cites James Murphy's influential work *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (1974). Murphy, however, focuses on handbooks like Basevorn's *Ars praedicandi* in order to present an overall argument that classical rhetoric became fragmented during the Middle Ages, when it was reduced to the separate arts of composing poetry, letters, and sermons. Smith's argument about preaching and Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* is actually more akin to that of Richard McKeon, who in a classic article entitled "Rhetoric in the Middle Ages," published in 1942 in *Speculum*, argued for an expansive influence of rhetoric upon

virtually every field of study at the medieval university, including theology. Smith does not cite McKeon's admittedly dense, erudite essay, but he could claim it as a forerunner for his own expansive view of a Scholastic culture affected holistically by preaching in the reformed, modern style for which the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) had called.

The 'Scholastic' quality of the *Itinerarium* is both demonstrated and explained by Smith's very helpful discussion in chapters 3 and 4 of the sources for Bonaventure's divisions and distinctions—notably for the triads "shadow, image, and vestige" (101–9), "weight, number, measure" (129–34), "memory, understanding, will" (134–39), and "purged, illumined, and perfected" (139–40, 364–74, 382–90) and for the nine orders of angels (chap. 4). Smith discusses what Bonaventure has drawn from Augustine, Gregory the Great, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hugh of Saint Victor, Peter Lombard, Richard of Saint Victor, John Scotus Eriugena, and Thomas Gallus. Knowing Bonaventure's sources enhances one's recognition of Bonaventure's extraordinary powers of memory, synthesis, and correlation.

That said, Smith, by his own admission, handles the particular philosophical and theological topics raised by Bonaventure and his sources rather cursorily, placing a pedagogical emphasis instead on the basic threefold structure of the *Itinerarium*, which is subdivided into six chapters, and on the visual imagery of the seraph's six wings, which make the work so memorable as a journey of spiritual ascent. Smith's analysis of Bonaventure's visual imagery provides a satisfying account of why and how Bonaventure accomplishes a shift from the imagery of the seraph's wings to those of the two cherubim guarding the mercy seat in the innermost sanctuary (89–91, 264–69). The latter image, Smith argues, "is one [Bonaventure] likely adopted from Richard of Saint Victor's *Mystical Ark*" (268).

Smith's running commentary on the *Itinerarium* in the second part of his book naturally repeats much of what he has said earlier in part 1, but in a different tone appropriate

to the expository genre. As Smith explains, he necessarily repeats material in order to accommodate readers who dip into the book at various points, rather than reading it from cover to cover. In the chapters of running commentary, one can hear Smith's voice as a masterful teacher of Bonaventure's work. Smith uses "we," "us," and "our" to identify with the students and readers he guides. He provides illustrative tables and charts. Occasionally interspersing quotations from T. S. Eliot's poetry, Thomas Merton, and Josef Pieper, among others, Smith shows himself to be not only an able exegete of the *Itinerarium* but also a hermeneutical teacher who wants his students to see how Bonaventure's intricate work is relevant to their own lives.

When I teach Introduction to Medieval Theology to master's students, I regularly begin that survey course with Augustine and Gregory the Great and end the semester with Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* and Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love*. Reading Randall Smith's wonderful book has helped me to understand more clearly why my students respond to Bonaventure's work both as a kind of capstone for the preceding Scholastic units and as providing impetus for another sort of mysticism in the later Middle Ages. If the "coincidence of opposites" (424–27) in Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* bridges Scholasticism and mysticism, Smith's book helps to build a bridge between that same theological masterpiece of the Middle Ages and the contemporary classroom. For that strong bridge building, we owe thanks to Randall Smith.

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