

The third part consists of chapter 10, aptly dubbed ‘Trouble in Paradise’. This discusses the later Augustine, his contact with women, and his attitudes to marriage and sexuality. The chapter is perhaps the book’s most ambitious, and conveys that for Augustine, impotence rather than desire was the most salient marker of the postlapsarian state. Cooper also offers a positive contextual reading of *On the Good of Marriage*, highlighting the text’s insistence on the husband’s fidelity.

Cooper writes with refreshingly lucid prose and combines an impressive lightness of touch with an extreme sensitivity to some of the challenging and uncomfortable issues which such a book inevitably must address. Cooper’s analysis is direct and unencumbered with excessive footnotes, allowing the book to bring many insights from recent scholarship on women in late antiquity and the author’s own analyses to the general reader just as fruitfully as to the specialist. Not all will agree with some of Cooper’s characterisations and emphases, but they are presented with honesty.

The very names, Tacita and Una, which Cooper assigns to the unnamed women of the *Confessions* remind the reader each time they are used that so much about them and their stories is withheld by Augustine. Cooper’s presentation of Monnica focuses less on her religious practice than some might have expected. The author is, however, more than open about finding Augustine’s presentation of his mother’s piety ‘cloying’ (p. 238). The particular strengths of the book lie most especially in the second and fourth chapters, as well as the eighth and ninth, which discuss the women in the background of the *Confessions* most neglected by history. Overall, *Queens of a Fallen World* is a brilliantly executed exercise in emotional intelligence, and ought to be read by anyone interested in women in the fourth century as well as those seeking an up close and personal reading of Augustine in one of the most formative stages of his life. While this book is eminently readable, the nature of its subject makes for a challenging read, but it is only through being so challenged that we improve our understanding of Augustine the man.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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Bonaventure’s ‘Journey of the Soul into God’: Context and Commentary. By Randall Smith. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. 512. £120.00

Randall Smith’s *Bonaventure’s ‘Journey of the Soul into God’: Context and Commentary* is a welcome addition to the current literature on Bonaventure and one of Bonaventure’s most influential treatises, *Journey of the Soul into God (Itinerarium mentis in deum)*.

Bonaventure (d. 1274) was one of the most influential figures in the medieval West: a philosopher, a theologian, a prolific author of spiritual treatises, the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, the Cardinal Bishop of Albano, and a papal legate at the Second Council of Lyon—and, after his death, a saint and a Doctor of the (Roman Catholic) Church. The *Itinerarium* is his masterpiece in which he distils the essential features of his philosophy, theology, and mystical theology, even if it is not his most historically influential treatise. (His longer *Life of St Francis* is his most influential treatise.) Bonaventure wrote the *Itinerarium* shortly after he had been elected Minister General in February of 1257. He wrote it, he tells his readers, to stir their desire to know and love God. But his readers were well-trained in the schools of the liberal arts and theology or, more precisely, philosophical theology, of the later Middle Ages, which renders the treatise particularly difficult for those who have not studied in those schools or remain unfamiliar with their wisdom.

Standard academic editions of the *Itinerarium* in English, as well as other languages, normally include an introduction to the treatise and occasional commentary on particularly difficult passages, such as Boehner’s translation and commentary (The Franciscan Institute Press, 1956, revised [2003]), Brown’s commentary on Boehner’s translation (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), and Cousins’s translation and commentary (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). But none of them provides a sufficient degree of commentary to render the full extent of the treatise intelligible to those without a thorough education in the scholastic tradition.

Smith’s *Context and Commentary* renders the treatise more intelligible. He employs two means to accomplish this end. First, he sets the *Itinerarium* within its historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts, which

enables the reader to approach it with greater insight. Second, he provides a thorough commentary. (However, he does not provide his own translation of the treatise in its entirety).

He begins with an introduction in which he develops Gilson's insight into the homiletic structure of the *Itinerarium*, an insight neither Gilson nor later translators had explored in detail. The *Itinerarium*, similar to sermons in the innovative *sermo modernus* style of preaching which the Franciscans and other friars had championed, begins with a preface which presents its *thema* or theme: a pastiche of passages from Genesis (1:1), the prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1), and the Epistle of James (1:17) which invokes the 'First Principle' (*Primum Principium*), the 'Father of Lights' from whom comes 'every perfect gift'. It continues with a *divisio* or division of the theme into a series of stages in which the soul ascends on a ladder (*scala*), reminiscent of Augustine's reformulation of Socrates's ladder of love (from the *Symposium*). It begins in the soul's contemplation of the physical realm of being outside itself, continues in its contemplation of the spiritual realm of being inside itself, and ends in its contemplation of the divine realm of being above itself. The rest of the treatise is a lengthy *dilatatio* or expansion of each stage of the soul's journey until it comes to a sabbath day of rest, so to speak, in its apophatic union with the Father from whom comes 'every perfect gift'.

Smith continues the first part of his *Context and Commentary* with a series of chapters which explore the treatise's debt to the *sermo modernus*, its extensive divisions and subdivisions, its varied sources, and the role of images which illustrate its theme and reinforce its structure. Smith is adept at helping the reader make sense of the countless sub-themes which Bonaventure weaves throughout the *Itinerarium*, such as: the reading, meditation, and contemplation of monastic practice, which informs the reader's approach to the treatise; the principle subdivision of the treatise into six steps analogous to the six days of creation; the triple way of spiritual reformation which renders the reader worthy to embark on the journey; and the doctrine of the spiritual senses which accounts for the soul's ability to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the mystical presence of Christ and thus the divine being within itself.

He is also adept in his assessment of Bonaventure's sources, notably Augustine, whose reformulation of the Socratic ladder of love provided Bonaventure with the fundamental structure of the *Itinerarium*; Hugh, Richard, and Thomas Gallus of the School of St Victor, who provided Bonaventure with the principle subdivision of the treatise into six steps analogous to the six days of creation; Dionysius the Pseudo Areopagite, who inspired Bonaventure's account of the soul's apophatic union with God the Father in its seventh day of rest; but above all Francis of Assisi, whom Bonaventure identified in the subtitle of the treatise as 'the poor one in the desert' which placed *il poverello* within the tradition of Anthony and other desert fathers. Indeed, Smith provides a particularly insightful assessment of the significance of Francis's vision of the crucified seraph (in which he received the stigmata) as a testament to his conformity to Christ crucified as well as a 'sign' of the 'death' of the mind's principal faculties, its memory, intellect, and will, in its apophatic union with God the Father.

He begins the second portion of *Context and Commentary* with a careful exposition of the preface to the *Itinerarium*, in which he provides ample evidence in support of Bonaventure's debt to the *sermo modernus*. He continues with a careful exposition of each step of the treatise, which includes valuable insights into Bonaventure's philosophy—that is, his metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics—his theology, particularly his Christology and trinitarian theology, and finally his mystical theology, in which he invokes the language of Dionysius to describe the soul's apophatic union with God the Father in which it 'sees' but is blind, it 'hears' but is deaf, it 'knows' but cannot fathom what it knows. All that remains at this point in the soul's *itinerarium*, Smith rightly notes, is its love of God in the 'peace' which 'surpasses all understanding'.

He concludes with a reiteration of the assessment of Gilson and the many translators and commentators of the *Itinerarium*: it's a masterwork, which rewards careful reading and re-reading. He also considers a number of pros and cons to his approach, which includes his emphasis on the treatise's debt to the homiletic tradition and his relative neglect of the *disputatio* which characterises Bonaventure's other works in philosophical theology, notably his *Commentary on the Sentences* and his influential series of *Disputed Questions*. Nevertheless, he is quite correct in his assessment that the *Itinerarium* is a treatise that encourages its readers to know and to love God, which provides some justification for his neglect of the *disputatio* which emphasises the former. Indeed, Bonaventure explicitly admonishes his readers that the knowledge of God without love misses the mark. This emphasis also justifies Smith's final point: he exhorts his own readers to take up the journey.

He also adds a set of appendices. The first is particularly helpful. It provides a detailed outline of the *Itinerarium* which lists its many themes, subthemes, and divisions to help the reader keep track of their place in the treatise. The second provides a list of passages in Bonaventure's commentary on Lombard's *Sentences* in which Bonaventure explores those themes and subthemes in greater detail. It also includes a list of parallel passages in Aquinas's commentary on the same text. Smith insists the comparison is instructive, perhaps so to those more familiar with Aquinas's thought.

Still, no commentary is complete. Smith passes over a number of points which would have benefited from closer consideration, notably Bonaventure's doctrine of illumination, which has long been the single most disputed element in his philosophical theology and the key to the soul's successful completion of its *Itinerarium*: it accounts for the soul's ability to 'see' creation's testimony to its creator with epistemological certainty. He also, although only occasionally, relies on secondary sources which are no longer relevant, such as E. Spargo's *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (The Franciscan Institute of St Bonaventure University, 1953). He would have done well to consult more recent accounts of Bonaventure's aesthetics such as my own *Bonaventure's Aesthetics: The Delight of the Soul in Its Ascent into God* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2020) which includes a detailed analysis of the aesthetic dimensions of the *Itinerarium*.

Nevertheless, Smith's volume is and I imagine will remain the new standard scholarly introduction and faithful guide to Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* for many years to come.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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A Hidden Wisdom: Medieval Contemplatives on Self-Knowledge, Reason, Love, Persons, and Immortality. By Christina Van Dyke. Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 258. £35.99.

Christina Van Dyke frames her *A Hidden Wisdom: Medieval Contemplatives on Self-Knowledge, Reason, Love, Persons, and Immortality* through mirrored lacunae in two different volumes from Cambridge University Press. Van Dyke writes that it was while she was at work co-editing the *Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy* (2010) that she realised the extent of the total absence of women authors from the academic study of medieval philosophy in which she had been trained. Simultaneously, she notes that the roughly contemporary *Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (2012) contains no contributions from philosophers, and little-to-no engagement with philosophy as a discipline, despite the manifold contributions of mystical and contemplative authors to topics traditionally also examined in philosophy (pp. 20-21).

Van Dyke describes this volume, then, as an opportunity for dialogue between two traditions and disciplines who have been talking past each other, even as they discuss many of the same things. She chooses five subjects on which both medieval mystical writers and scholastic philosophers have had much to say: self-knowledge, reason and its limits, love and the will, the person and personalism, and immortality and the afterlife. While not focusing exclusively on women authors, Van Dyke highlights them in her treatment of these subjects within the medieval contemplative tradition. Van Dyke frames her project as both 'corrective' and 'complementary' for the study of philosophy (p. 1). It is imperative for the academic discipline to acknowledge philosophical thinking and writing that occurred outside schools and universities in the Middle Ages; moreover, expanding the canon to include these authors also meaningfully expands our knowledge of medieval philosophical approaches to these subjects, particularly with regard to embodiment, humility, and relationality, where Van Dyke frequently describes contemplative authors as offering particular insights.

The book is at its most engaging and most useful in chapters 2-6, in which Van Dyke explores these five philosophical topics with medieval mystical authors as her guides. Van Dyke is aware that each of these vast topics, as well as the wide array of potential contemplative interlocutors, can only be sampled here, and she structures her chapters adroitly, introducing three or four specific arguments or interventions into each given topic, bolstered by supporting evidence from a variety of contemplative thinkers. One strength of this approach is that it allows Van Dyke to showcase the diversity of the contemplative tradition itself, as well as the ways in which these authors diverged from scholastic thinkers.

So, in chapter 2, on self-knowledge, Van Dyke aptly uses examples from mystical and contemplative authors to illustrate the significance of humility first as a necessary aspect of understanding oneself in relation to God the creator, and second, through spiritual exercises designed to stimulate the imitation of Christ, as a means of overcoming the sin of pride. She then, however, makes clear that there were diverging viewpoints about the role of the individual (and embodied) self, from its annihilation and transcendence in mystical union, to the restoration of the human self within the relationship to God. Chapters 3 and 4 follow a similar format, providing what Van Dyke calls a 'tasting menu' of contemplative approaches to the typically scholastic subjects of reason and the will (p. xxii). In chapter 3 she takes on the assumption that