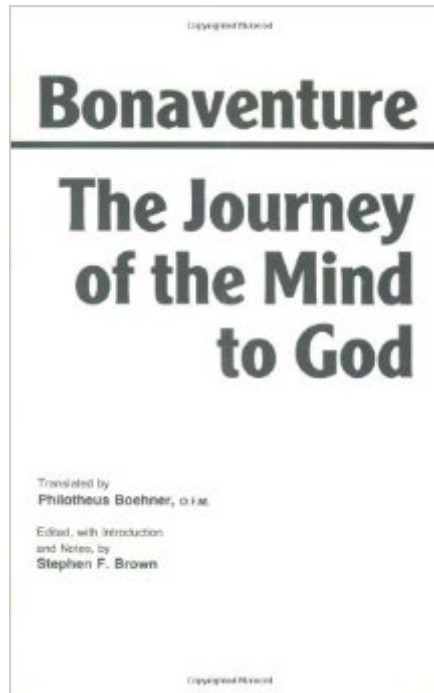


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The Journey Of The Mind To God (Hackett Classics)



Synopsis

The Hackett edition of this classic of medieval philosophy and mysticism--a plan of pilgrimage for the learned Franciscan wishing to reach the apex of the mystical experience--combines the highly regarded Boehner translation with a new introduction by Stephen Brown focusing on St. Francis as a model of the contemplative life, the meaning of the *Itinerarium*, its place in Bonaventure's mystical theology, and the plan of the work. Boehner's Latin Notes, as well as Latin texts from other works of Bonaventure included in the Franciscan Institute Edition, are rendered here in English, making this the edition of choice for the beginning student.

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Customer Reviews

In this short book Bonaventure traces out the spiritual ascent which leads to the vision of God, dividing the journey into six stages. The first step after accepting Christ is to turn to God, completely. "Divine help", writes Bonaventure, "comes to those who seek it from their hearts humbly and devoutly; and this means to sigh for it in this vale of tears, aided only by fervent prayer. Thus prayer is the mother and source of ascent in God". The importance of prayer lies in that it opens the doors to grace, without which the ascent cannot be completed. Apart from prayer and humility before God, Bonaventure also exhorts the aspirant to live a holy life. For sin deforms nature, and becomes an obstacle on the way. The next stage is reflection. Apart from contemplating scripture, Bonaventure adjures the way-farer to reflect over what is outside of himself, namely the world of the senses.

Being an image of God, its contemplation is support to reaching the end of the journey; for in the world "there are traces", writes Bonaventure, "in which we can see the reflection of our God". But God is not only found outside, he is also found within, and his traces can be seen in the natural powers He has bestowed upon humans. Memory is one such example. Through reflection over what is within the soul rises closer to God. Since nothing is greater than the human mind except its Creator, the mind yearns for its Source, longing for its Origin. If the individual receives grace, he will see the affinity to what is inside of him to what is above, i.e. God. However reflection is not the highest state. The mind does not simply wish to know, but also to see; vision is the culmination of the ascent. Bonaventure elaborates upon this theme in the last chapter.

The book has the form of a philosophical-mystical literature. The language is metaphorical and allegorical. For instance, he uses the imagery of the Seraph, a biblical six-winged creature, which wings represents the six steps that the mind has to travel to reach God. Still, he makes an allegorical statement, "creatures of this visible world signify the invisible things of God (II.12). The book is an articulated way of integrating the spirituality of the monastic life and the scholasticism of his time. Yet, Bonaventura was against the equating of Aristotle's philosophy with Christian's authorities, a common practice among the scholars of his time, although, he was not against the use of Aristotle, for he himself uses it. For instance, one obvious idiosyncratic Aristotelian usage is his statement that the power to ascend to God is already "implanted within us by nature" (I.6), and the emphasis on moderation (or the mean) as better than the extremes (II.5). Likewise, he uses Aristotle's 'trinitarian' view of the soul as the paradigm for his argumentation of the three steps of the soul's contemplation. For Bonaventura, divine revelation, not human reason, is the highest way to achieve the correct understanding of God. God is to be revealed, not reasoned. Indeed, contemplation is the word that better can express his thought, as he says, "man was created fit for the quiet of contemplation." (I.7). Therefore, even the material world is not a hindrance to attain the soul's greatest desire, i.e., to contemplate God. He says, "The material universe itself is a ladder by which we may ascend to God." (I.2). But, interestingly, Christ is also called "our ladder" (I.3). Thus, he clearly shows that any God/World antagonistic dualism is not acceptable.

Saint Bonaventure was a medieval Franciscan theologian. He wrote this brief but dense work inspired by Francis of Assisi, who often focused on seeking peace as a way to God. Bonaventure meditated on this peace and found a way to the mystical contemplation of God. He describes six steps that lead to God. The first step considers the very faint image of God in the "vestiges of the

universe." By our human sense powers, we come to a knowledge of the world and perceive the orderliness and abundance in the universe. Bonaventure's idea here isn't how we can see an intelligent design to the universe, but how the rationality and immensity of it is reflective of higher and more perfect things, leading to the highest and most perfect God. The second step looks to that faint image of God in the visible world. How is this different from the first step? Bonaventure explains--in this step we see the universe not as a product of God but as God is present in the universe. After some scientific explanations (which, quite frankly, are no longer valid), he cites Augustine's argument that numbers can be found in all things, and these numbers reflect an order and harmony that leads to God. The third step sees God's image in our natural powers--memory, knowledge, and desire. Memories are made in the present and include the past; memories also give a hint to the future. So memory gives a shadowy reflection of the eternity in which God lives. Knowledge seeks the truth of things, understanding what they are and how they are related to one another. Truth relies on knowing the being of things (which ultimately relies on the Supreme Being) and the relationship they have to each other (which is a shadowy reflection of the Trinitarian community of the Godhead).

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