



St. Bonaventure on God and Philosophy

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St. Bonaventure, an intellectual in the 13th century whose ideas are formed by Augustinian principles and whose Franciscan vocation defined his sanctity, is regarded as a mystic of first rank. Declared by Pope Leo XIII as the “Prince of Mystics,” his writings have influenced prominent spiritual writers across the ages. Considering these things, can we really consider St. Bonaventure a philosopher? Was he able to contribute something in the progress of the philosophical sciences? It is the purpose of this paper to lay out St. Bonaventure’s understanding of what philosophy is and how it is essentially grafted to faith, particularly to the Christian faith. My intention is fairly a simple one, to present the arguments of the Seraphic Doctor and offer a viable interpretation palatable in our own time. Indeed, it is my objective to prove that St. Bonaventure’s philosophy is a reflection of the mind’s progressive mental exercise leading towards the knowledge of God. It is not a cold philosophical speculation, rather, it is a loving contemplation which, if it has the rigor of philosophic reasoning, also have the warmth of mystical contemplation. The truth is sought by the intellect and further strengthened by the anxiety of love to embrace with intensity the object known. Only under this condition that knowledge brings us closer to God, only in this way that the mind is truly on a journey towards God. A man may have the clearest ideas about God and still be far from Him. St. Bonaventure insists that knowledge of God is incomplete unless it is also founded on admiration and authentic love.

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The eminent scholar of medieval philosophy Etienne Gilson remarked that St. Bonaventure¹, the man, disappears behind the work that he did.² If only the work of the Franciscan Gilles de Zamorra, a Spanish Franciscan and his contemporary, was not lost, then we can know so much about the details of this great man. At best, what we have are reconstructions of his *vita*, which is altogether uncertain because so many details are missing.

The earliest biography which is still extant was written by a certain Mariano of Florence at the end of the 15th century, almost 200 years after the death of St. Bonaventure. A very important resource on his life is found in the *Chronicle of the Twenty-Four Generals*. This work in particular concerns the life of the Minister General and dates from 1369 and it incorporates an earlier text written by Bernard of Besse in the 13th century who was a secretary-companion of St. Bonaventure for a time.³ As a Minister General of the Order of the Friars Minor and regarded as the second founder of the Franciscan Order, St. Bonaventure's life is included in this work.

But we will not concern ourselves with the intricacies and complexities surrounding the life of St. Bonaventure. It is the purpose of this paper to lay out St. Bonaventure's understanding of what philosophy is and how it is essentially grafted to faith, particularly to the Catholic faith. My intention is fairly a simple one, to present the arguments of the Seraphic Doctor and offer a viable interpretation palatable in our own time. The paper is thus divided into three parts, the first part is on Faith and Reason, the second part deals on how God is known to men, and the third part will contain the concluding remarks.

St. Bonaventure on Faith and Reason

To speak about God and to speculate about Him should always be within the context of *Credo ut Intelligam*, as St. Bonaventure said: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights . . . So it is fitting at the outset of any good work to call upon Him from whom all goods proceed as from

¹ St. Bonaventure, a native of Bagnoregio in Tuscany, Italy, was born Giovanni di Fidanza about 1217. He entered the Franciscan Order in 1243 and in the short space of fourteen years became the 7th Minister General of the Order of the Friars Minor. He was a Professor of Theology at the University of Paris and was appointed Cardinal-Bishop of Albano shortly before his death by Pope Gregory X. He died in the year 1274 at the 2nd Council of Lyons, the 12th Ecumenical Council of the Church. He was widely known and venerated during his lifetime and is even mentioned as a Saint in Dante's *Paradiso*. He was formally canonized as a Saint in 1482 by Pope Sixtus IV and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1587 by Pope Sixtus V. He is regarded as the *Doctor Seraphicus* or the Seraphic Doctor.

² Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*. Translated by Dom Iltyd Trethowan and Frank J. Sheed. (New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965), p. 1.

³ Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 8.

their source, by whom they are produced as by their exemplar, and to whom they return to as their end.”⁴ This gift is basically the gift of faith.

Every medieval philosopher or theologian admits without doubt that there are two sources of human knowledge. Those two sources are Reason and Divine Revelation.⁵ From the latter comes forth the truths of faith which have their basis in the Sacred Scriptures and the authority of the Catholic Church. The former on the other hand is based on empirical data, truths that are founded on experience and evidence. Most often problems arise regarding the truths arrived at by reason and truths established by revelation. Every now and then the results established by philosophy appear to be in stark contradiction and disagreement with that which must be held on by faith. Logically, one should be suppressed to give way to the other in order to resolve the issue. Either faith must give way to reason or denounce reason to exalt the gift of faith.

The approach of St. Bonaventure to the issue between faith and reason is a unique one. The truths of faith and the truths of reason have their origin in God, and therefore, any contradiction between the two is definitely superficial if not totally non-existent. In his study of the Epistles of the Apostle James, St. Bonaventure explains:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, as James writes in the First chapter of his Epistle. This passage both indicates the origin of every illumination, and suggests that there are many lights generously flowing from this frontal brilliance. Although every illumination of knowledge is within, we may rationally distinguish, in a manner of speaking, an EXTERIOR LIGHT, that of the mechanical arts; an INFERIOR LIGHT, that of sense knowledge; an INTERIOR LIGHT, that of philosophical knowledge; and a SUPERIOR LIGHT, that of grace and of Sacred Scriptures.⁶

In case there is a contradiction between reason and faith, St. Bonaventure maintains that such a contradiction is only an apparent one. One has to search out with good will the error he has committed either in the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures or in his very rational analysis. He insists that such a contradiction is never an objective one, rather, it is always a subjective. He is very clear when he said: “Doubt (apparent contradictions) arises because of a defect in the act of analysis when the carnal mind is not capable of resolving beyond those things which are evident to the senses, as are corporeal realities.”⁷ He even gave an analogy to prove his point. “Some

⁴ Soliloquy, II.

⁵ Cf. Anton Pegis, *The Middle Ages and Philosophy*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1963), p. 55-65.

⁶ On Retracing the Arts to Theology, I.

⁷ Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity, Q. 1, Art. 1.

have thought that the visible sun . . . was God since they did not know how to resolve things further to an incorporeal substance nor to the first principle of things.”⁸ For St. Bonaventure, contradictions therefore are never in the object of the intellect, rather it is always in our thinking, in the manner by which we understand things.

In acknowledging the value of faith and reason, we now ask a further question: why is divine revelation still necessary? Is reason not capable enough to resolve speculative issues and concerns without recourse to revelation? No one will deny that human nature is intrinsically imperfect, and therefore, it is not capable of attaining the complete development that is proper to him. Following the Augustinian doctrine that man is capable of God (*Capax Dei*), St. Bonaventure argues that men must be able to know all that will ultimately order his perfection. He unhesitatingly referred to men as Lovers of Wisdom (*Sapientiae Amatores*)⁹, for without comporting oneself to wisdom, we can never know happiness that will satiate our innermost desires and longing. Cullen explains this point saying: “Bonaventure’s quest for wisdom is always a striving for happiness, which he regards as man’s final end. Hence there is an urgency and passionate intensity evident throughout his writings. The quest for wisdom originates here in this world through the use of reason, but it finds its most fruitful and direct way in the science of God’s own revelation, namely, Theology.”¹⁰

St. Bonaventure then has a very different conception of the human understanding. Different from St. Thomas Aquinas who argued that the proper object of the intellect is the *Quidditas rei materialis*,¹¹ St. Bonaventure thinks that God is the proper object of the intellect. For him the *quidditas rei materialis* always direct the mind to its exemplar who is none other but God.¹² Needless to say, for

⁸ Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity, Q. 1, Art. 1, ad 1.

⁹ The complete passage states: “Now since we must ascend before we can descend on Jacob’s ladder, let us place the first step of our ascent at the bottom, putting the whole world of sense-objects before us as in a mirror through which we may pass to God, the highest creative Artist. In this way we may become true Hebrews, passing from Egypt to the land promised to the forbears. And we shall be Christians passing over with Christ from the world to the Father. We shall be **lovers of that wisdom** which calls and says: Pass over to me, all you who desire me, and be filled with my fruits. For in the greatness and beauty of created things their Creator can be seen and known.” *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, I, 9. (emphasis mine).

¹⁰ Cullen, op. cit., p. 26.

¹¹ In the Summa Contra Gentiles 1:62, St. Thomas Aquinas seems to agree with St. Bonaventure when he said that “*the Truth of God is the First and Sovereign Truth*. The standard in every genus is the most perfect instance of the genus. But the divine truth is the standard of all truth. The truth of our mind is measured by the object outside the mind: our understanding is called true, inasmuch as it is in accordance with the divine mind, which is the cause of all things, as the truth of artificial objects is measured by the art of the artificer.” (emphasis mine) It must be contended that in this passage, what the Angelic Doctor emphasizes is that God is the Highest, most supreme Truth. However, insofar as human intellection is concerned, what the mind grasped first in the order of knowing is the intelligible specie abstracted from the apprehension of things. Cf. Summa Theologica I: Q.78.

¹² Since St. Bonaventure strictly adheres to the system of St. Augustine, some may conclude that his vision of reality is definitely Platonic. Though it cannot be denied that St. Bonaventure’s

St. Bonaventure, the search for truth is the search for God. He was very emphatic in the *Itinerarium* when he said: "Open your eyes, alert your spiritual ears, unlock your lips, and apply your heart so that you may see, hear, praise, love, adore, magnify, and honor your God lest the entire world rise up against you."¹³ All knowledge then is merely a step to reach this objective. The material object of the intellect is not changed with the elevation of man to the supernatural; the only change is in the manner and perfection by which the material object is attained or grasped. In other words, only the formal object of the intellect is changed.

Having admitted that God is the proper object of the intellect, Bonaventure further elucidates the possibility of a knowledge of God which is more perfect compared with conceptual knowledge or knowledge arrived at by inference, albeit abstractly. He referred to this more perfect knowledge of God as contemplation. We can find his explanation of what contemplation is in a passage found in the *Breviloquium*:

For this triple vision (the vision of God as found in creatures – image, likeness, and similitude), man was endowed with a triple eye, as explained by Hugh of St. Victor: the eye of flesh, of reason, and of contemplation; the eye of flesh, to see the world and what it contains; the eye of reason, to see the soul and what it contains; the eye of contemplation, to see God and that which is in him. Through the eye of the flesh, man was to see the things outside of him; with the eye of reason, the things within him; with the eye of contemplation, the things above him. Now, the eye of contemplation cannot see with perfect clearness except through glory, which man may lose through sin, but restore through grace, faith, and the study of Scripture. By these means, the human soul is cleansed, enlightened, and perfected for the contemplation of heavenly things, unto which fallen man cannot reach unless he first admits this insufficiency and blindness; and this he cannot do unless he remembers the downfall of human nature.¹⁴

Contemplation then is a knowledge of God indescribable for him who has not or failed to experience it. We can say that at this point, the intellect no longer

Exemplarism is starkly similar to Plato's World of Forms, I should say that there is something very unique in it. St. Bonaventure's Franciscan spirituality always reminds him to see God in everything. Being a faithful follower of the *Il Poverello* (the Poor One) St. Bonaventure shares the same vision as that of St. Francis of Assisi. "The Canticle of the Creatures", composed by St. Francis of Assisi in 1225, is a classic in Franciscan Spirituality. While suffering intensely from his physical infirmities, St. Francis announced: "I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord's creatures, of which we (brothers in religion) make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator." Cf. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap., J.A. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv., and William Short, OFM, eds. *Francis of Assisi, The Saint: Early Documents*. (New York: New City Press, 1999), p. 113-114. St. Bonaventure's Exemplarism then is not simply a philosophical position which he inherited from St. Augustine. Rather, it has become more meaningful and more significant to him because it was animated by his Franciscan vision of created reality.

¹³ *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, I: 15.

¹⁴ *Breviloquium*, II: 12.5.

understands by means of concepts or ideas, or formulate truths within the domain of judgments and inferences. It is a form of knowledge that is penetrating, a form of knowledge sparked and inflamed with love, an act in which the highest capacity of the understanding is reached and all intellectual faculties blended together in one sublime moment.

It is in this sense that for the Seraphic Doctor, philosophical knowledge that is entirely divorced from faith or separated from the Sacred Sciences is empty and devoid of any meaning. If the goal of human knowledge is ultimately the contemplation of God, philosophy then can only be an initial step, a preparation towards this objective. Indeed, such knowledge is impossible to achieve given the fact that the mind is obscured and finite, distracted and so much engrossed with so many things – a fact that the history of philosophy will bear witness to. For St. Bonaventure, the fundamental task of the philosopher is to search and inquire into the structured multiplicity bound together by an organic whole, a wise plan which is manifested through many signs.

Many philosophers were able to reach the knowledge of the metaphysical and the physical structure of things, yet they failed to discover the profound design of the creation and realize the supreme wisdom of its Creator. This is precisely what happened to Aristotle. He has discovered and learned so many things. He was able to know the nature of reality, yet he failed to understand the profound design that binds all of reality itself. Plato and his follower Plotinus were wiser for St. Bonaventure. They saw clearly that the explanation of the world must be sought in God. But they too became entangled in various errors. Deprived by the light of faith, they failed to understand the unity of God in the Trinity and his manifestation is the beauty of creation. No wonder, for St. Bonaventure: “These are the foremost philosophers of the Gentiles, who could see God’s invisible attributes . . . being understood through the things that are made. Yet because they philosophized without the Mediator, that is, without the man Christ, whom they did not accept as the One who was to come to the prophets and who did come to the apostles, in wickedness they held back the truth.”¹⁵ Indeed, “Only Augustine, with the light of faith, achieved a comprehensive wisdom: He posited the forms as ideas in the divine mind, and yet, maintained that the things of the world was real.”¹⁶

This leads us unequivocally to the conclusion that “Philosophical knowledge is the way to the other sciences; but he who wishes to remain in this way falls into darkness.”¹⁷ The reason for this failure of philosophy is clearly explained by St. Bonaventure in the *Collations*. He explains:

¹⁵ *Collations on the Six Days*, VII: 9.

¹⁶ *Christus Omnium Magister*, XVIII.

¹⁷ *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 12.

It should be noted, however, that while the world serves man in his body, it serves him more practically in his soul; and that if it serves him more particularly in his soul; and that if it serves to forward life, it serves more particularly to forward wisdom. It is certain that as long as man stood up, he had the knowledge of created things and through their significance, was carried up to God, to praise, worship, and love him. This is what creatures are for, and this is how they are led back to God. But when man had fallen, since he had lost knowledge, there was no longer any one to lead creatures back to God. Hence this book, the world, (has) become as dead and deleted. And it was necessary that there be another book through which this one would be lighted up, so that it could receive the symbols of things. Such a book is Scripture which establishes the likenesses, the properties, and the symbolism of things written down in the book of the world. And so, Scripture has the power to restore the whole world toward the knowledge, praise, and love of God.¹⁸

Contemporary readers may find the above passage surprising, if not perplexing, and regard it as a sign that indeed St. Bonaventure is a theologian relevant only in the thirteenth century. This kind of language apparently goes well in spirituality and the heights of mysticism but not definitely in philosophy. But let me contend, St. Bonaventure was speaking here to philosophers, particularly those philosophers who professed themselves as followers of the Greek thinker Aristotle. It may sound mystical, but we have to admit here a philosopher speaking to other philosophers during that era.

In the passage we have just cited, St. Bonaventure regards the world as a book, and conversely, things as words. As words have significance, not so much as in themselves, but inasmuch as they signify reality, so creatures too, although they have significance in themselves, have this only because they bear witness to the majesty of God and his perfection. To make an analogy, as a book is entirely useless to an illiterate person who sees letters but does not comprehend the meaning of it, so the world loses its fundamental significance when man knows it only in itself but does not perceive its relationship with God. Every science therefore, even the most profound, is imperfect and ends in error for St. Bonaventure when it does not grasp the meaning which is so crucial in the things which it studies.

Man has lost this spiritual vision of reality which for St. Bonaventure is its most important and authentic aspect. Only in the realm of faith that man will be able to find this again and retrieve this understanding of reality. Unless philosophy is aided by faith, it will continue to err and fall short of the truth. St. Bonaventure explains: "Suppose that a person possesses natural and metaphysical science which reaches to the highest substances, and suppose this person strives to reach the point and there come to rest. This is impossible without falling into error unless this

¹⁸ Collations on the Six Days, XIII: 12.

person is aided by the light of faith by which this person comes to believe that God is one and three, most powerful, and the best with respect to the ultimate influence of goodness.”¹⁹ There is something that lies beyond philosophical knowledge which is theological science, and St. Bonaventure thinks that “God has given us theological science which is the pious knowledge of truth that is believable. The eternal light, which is God, is inaccessible to us as long as we are mortal and have the eyes of a bat. Therefore, Augustine says, ‘the high point of the mind is incapable of fixing itself on such an excellent light unless it is purified by the justice of faith.’ Thus theological science is founded on faith.”²⁰

Only in faith can we reach the fullness of understanding reality. All human sciences, including philosophy, give us an understanding of things as they are, but only faith tells us why they are such. Reason and philosophy gives us knowledge, but only faith and theology leads us to encounter the fullness of Truth itself.

God and Creation: How God is known to men

St. Bonaventure’s conception of philosophy, a conception which, as that of the saintly archbishop Anselm, is summed up in the famous phrase: *Credo ut Intelligam* – “I believe that I might understand.” In our previous discussion, that fact that St. Bonaventure refused to recognize the possibility of a philosophy independent from faith must not lead us to believe that his works does not at all contain a mastery of a rational system of understanding. St. Bonaventure believes that even within the ambit of theology, when reasoning is introduced, it does not cease to be reason. The same is true with philosophy. Even if philosophy does not comprising the totality of knowledge, unless guided by faith, it still remains an important aspect of human cognition. In the following discussion, I am going to lay down St. Bonaventure’s reflection on God and how he is known by us.

Etienne Gilson writes: “Philosophic reason has neither its origin nor its end in the natural universe; yet it must, as a reason, conquer certain truths which, as systematized, form the very content of philosophy. The first, the most urgent, is the existence of God; and it is perhaps also the easiest to seize, for it is in itself very evident – but this only if it presents itself in such a guise that nothing hinders us from perceiving it.”²¹ God’s existence is self-evident for St. Bonaventure, but a demonstration of his existence is still necessary because of the confused state of the human mind. The mind is darkened by the world of the senses; it struggles with great difficulty to perceive the very origin of its thought. St. Bonaventure was very clear

¹⁹ Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, IV: 12.

²⁰ Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, IV:13.

²¹ Gilson, op. cit., 107.

when he wrote: “Strange is the blindness of the mind, for it fails to attend to the first thing it sees, without which nothing can be known. But as the eye concentrating on the various distinctions of color, fails to notice the very light by which all are seen, or perhaps does notice it but it fails to attend to it, so the eye of our mind, concentrating on many beings of the particular and universal orders, fails to attend to Being Itself, who is outside every genus, although He is the first to meet the mind, and the One through whom all things are known.”²²

It is not difficult for man to admit that God exists, in fact, it is impossible for him to deny it. St. Bonaventure argues that the existence of God is an indubitable truth. According to him, there are three ways of arguing in favour of this. The first way is that every truth that is impressed in all minds is an indubitable truth. The second way is that every truth proclaimed by all of creation is an indubitable truth. And lastly, the third way speaks that every truth which in itself is most certain and most evident is an indubitable truth.²³ It is in this sense that for St. Bonaventure, one need only attend to what God is in order to be aware of his existence, which is proclaimed by men and every creature.

The first way speaks of the idea of God being impressed in the human mind. “It (the existence of God) is certain for as the knower is concerned, for the knowledge of this truth is innate to the rational mind in as far as it possesses the nature of an image. By reason of this, there is innate to the mind a natural desire for, together with the knowledge of a memory of that reality in whose image it is made, and to which it naturally tends for its beatitude.”²⁴ To think is to find the explanation of things, and the existence of things are justified not by any cause at all, but by an absolute cause which is the reason for itself and source of all explanation. Similarly, to will is merely surging forward toward a good, a tending towards an end. Conversely, no good or no end is ever such except insofar as it is absolute and therefore valuable in itself, or insofar as it is a means of attaining the absolute good or end. Etienne Gilson points this out saying:

St. Bonaventure finds in it the formal assertion of the innateness of this knowledge itself – incomplete knowledge, assuredly, but one which excludes doubt and which all we see within us helps to make manifest. The thought of man aspires to wisdom, but the most desirable wisdom is that which is eternal; therefore it is above all the love of this wisdom that is innate in the human mind. But it is impossible to love that which one is absolutely ignorant: therefore some kind of knowledge of this supreme wisdom must be innate in the human soul, and this is primarily to know that God Himself or wisdom exists. The same line of thought may be applied to our desire of happiness; since such a desire cannot be conceived

²² *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, V:4.

²³ *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Q. 1, Art. 1, *conclusio*.

²⁴ *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Q. 1, Art. 1, *conclusio*.

without a certain knowledge of its object, it follows that we must have a knowledge of the existence of God who is our Sovereign Good.²⁵

To deny the existence of the absolute is equivalent to denying the every existence of rational intellection and volition. Our understanding and willing affirm the existence of God, and in the very act of grasping a true understanding of his nature, man encounters and realizes the very presence of God.

St. Bonaventure's second way tells us that God's existence is indubitable because all of creation proclaims it. He argued that "all creatures, whether they are viewed in terms of their defects or in terms of their perfectibility, in voices most loud and strong cry out the existence of God whom they need because of their deficiency and from whom they receive their completion. Therefore, in accordance with the greater or lesser degree of fullness which they possess, some cry out the existence of God with a loud voice, others cry out yet louder; while others make the loudest cry."²⁶ This passage reflects the Franciscan spirituality that formed St. Bonaventure. Gilson pointed this out when he said that the Seraphic Doctor insists that the whole of nature proclaims God's existence as a truth beyond doubt, if only we will take the trouble to look. In fact, St. Bonaventure is simply following the Franciscan feeling for God's presence in nature when he passes before us in review the long series of creatures each in its own way proclaiming the existence of God.²⁷

The third way speaks about the truth that is most certain in itself is the first and most immediate truth. In truth, says St. Bonaventure, "it is not only the cause of the predicate included in the object, but it is the fullness of being itself which is predicated and which is the subject about which the predication is made."²⁸ These reflections definitely have taken into account the formulation of St. Anselm's proof pertaining to the existence of God. The indubitable truth of God's existence does not merely result from the consideration of the testimony of external existence; rather it can be discovered in the idea of God itself. God indeed is a Being nothing greater can be thought to exist. Now a being which cannot be thought of as not existing is certainly more true, more eminent, than a being which can be thought of as not existing. If therefore God is God, that is, a Being nothing greater can be thought to exist, therefore, he cannot be conceived as not existing. Gilson remarks that St. Anselm's proof reached its full self-consciousness in St. Bonaventure's elaboration. "The metaphysical substratum of the proof, which St. Anselm was certainly feeling for, here attains full self-consciousness: it is because the necessity of the divine being is communicated to the mind thinking of Him that a mere definition can turn out to be a proof."²⁹

²⁵ Gilson, op. cit., p. 111.

²⁶ Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity, Q.1, Art. 1, *conclusio*.

²⁷ Gilson, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁸ Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity, Q. 1, Art. 1, *conclusio*.

²⁹ Gilson, op. cit., p. 116.

Conclusion

St. Bonaventure's philosophy is a reflection of the mind's progressive mental exercise leading towards the knowledge of God. It is not a cold philosophical speculation, rather, it is a loving contemplation which, if it has the rigor of philosophic reasoning, also have the warmth of mystical contemplation. The truth is sought by the intellect and further strengthened by the anxiety of love to embrace with intensity the object known. Only under this condition that knowledge brings us closer to God; only in this way that the mind is truly on a journey towards God. A man may have the clearest ideas about God and still be far from Him. St. Bonaventure insists that knowledge of God is incomplete unless it is also founded on admiration and authentic love.

God is the highest Being, the Supreme Good, the Absolute, and because of this He is the supreme object of our will. Certainly, the human mind cannot entirely comprehend the marvels of this mystery. It is inevitable that it would despair in failure. But the contemplation of God is always guided by grace through the assistance of the God-man Jesus Christ. Encouraged by the Christ crucified, man increases the cries of prayer, enkindles his desire, and calls for the supreme union through grace. Indeed what St. Bonaventure wrote in the last part of his magnum opus exhorts us to consult ourselves and ponder how worthy we are before the eyes of God. "If you wish to know how such things come about consult grace, not doctrine; desire, not understanding; prayerful groaning, not studious reading; the Spouse, not the Teacher; God, not man; darkness, not clarity. Consult, not light, but the fire that completely inflames the mind and carries it over to God in transports of fervor and blazes of love."³⁰ ■

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³⁰ Itinerarium Mentis in Deum, VII: 6.

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