

BONAVENTURE
THE JOURNEY OF THE MIND INTO GOD
(translated by Oleg Bychkov)

PROLOGUE

1. In the beginning I call upon that First Beginning from whom all illuminations flow down as from the *God of lights*, and from whom comes *every good and perfect gift*—namely, I call upon the eternal Father through his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that through the intercession of the most holy virgin Mary, the mother of that same Lord and God, Jesus Christ, and through the intercession of blessed Francis, our leader and father, God might grant clearly seeing eyes to our mind in order to guide our feet to the path of peace: that *peace which surpasses all understanding*. This is the peace, which our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed and granted to us. It was this message of peace, which our father Francis took over, proclaiming it at the beginning and the end of each one of his sermons. In every one of his greetings he wished for peace; and in every experience of contemplation he sighed for an ecstatic peace. He was like a citizen of that Jerusalem about which that man of peace—he *who was peaceable even with those who despised peace*—says: *Pray for those things that are for the peace of Jerusalem*. For he knew that it was only in peace that the throne of Solomon stood, since it is written: *His place is in peace, and his dwelling is in Sion*.

2. Now I, a sinner, who, unworthy as I am, had taken over the responsibilities of the most blessed father after his death to become the seventh minister general of the brothers, was moved by the example of our most blessed father, Francis, and eagerly desired this peace. As I was thus preoccupied, it happened around the time of the thirty-third anniversary of the death of the saint [year 1259] that, by God's will, I withdrew to Mount Alverna, as to a quiet place, seized with desire to seek the peace of mind. While I was there, reflecting on certain ways, in which the mind might ascend to God, I

recalled, among other things, that miracle which the blessed Francis himself had experienced in this very place, namely the vision of the winged Seraph in the form of the Crucified. As I reflected on this, it became immediately clear to me that this vision presented not only the uplifting of our father himself in contemplation but also the road by which one might arrive at this contemplation.

3. For those six wings can rightly be understood to stand for six levels of uplifting illuminations. By means of these illuminations—as by certain steps or pathways, so to say,—the soul is disposed to move on to peace through the ecstatic raptures of Christian wisdom. This road, however, can only go through the most burning love of the Crucified. It was that sort of love, which lifted Paul into the third heaven and transformed him into Christ to such a degree that he could say: *With Christ I am nailed to the cross; it is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.* It was also that sort of love that so absorbed the mind of Francis that his spirit became apparent in his flesh; and for two years prior to his death, he carried the most holy marks of the passion on his body. The figure of the six wings of the Seraph, therefore, stands for the six stages of illumination, which begin with creatures and lead up to God, to whom no one has proper access except through the Crucified. For anyone *who does not enter by that door, but climbs up another way, is a thief and a robber. But anyone who enters by that door will go in and out, and will find pastures.* For this reason, John writes in the Apocalypse: *Blessed are those who wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb, for they are nourished at the tree of life and they may enter the city through the gates.* This is to say that no one can enter into the heavenly Jerusalem by means of contemplation except through the blood of the Lamb as through a door. For no one is disposed in any way for those divine contemplations, which lead to ecstasies of the mind, without being, like Daniel, *a person of desires.* However, desires can be inflamed in us in two ways, namely through the *cry of prayer*, which makes us cry aloud with *groaning of the heart*, and through the *brightness of*

contemplation, by which the mind turns itself most directly and intently towards the rays of light.

4. Therefore, I first of all invite the reader to groans of prayer through Christ crucified, through whose blood we are purged from the filth of our vices—in order that you might not assume that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, examination without exultation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, merely mirroring things without divinely inspired wisdom. To those, then, who are already touched by divine grace—to the humble and pious; to those who are devout and sorrowful for their sins; to those anointed with the *oil of gladness*; to those who are lovers of divine wisdom and are inflamed with desire for it; and to those who wish to give themselves to glorifying, admiring, and even savoring God—I propose the following reflections. At the same time I warn them that to have a mirror placed before them externally¹ is of little or no use unless the mirror of the mind is first cleansed and polished. Therefore, O child of God, train yourself first to be more sensitive to the stinging bite of conscience before you raise your eyes to those rays of wisdom that are reflected in its mirrors—in order to avoid falling into an even deeper pit of darkness as a result of the very act of looking at these rays.

5. It seemed appropriate to me to divide this treatise into seven chapters with a title attached to each chapter for clarity. I ask, therefore, that you give more attention to the intent of the writer than to the work itself, more to the meaning of the things said than to the unsophisticated language, more to the truth than to the gracefulness of style, more to how much affection is being stimulated than to how much more learned the intellect becomes. In order to achieve this, you should not run through these reflections in a perfunctory manner, but should ponder them carefully.

¹ I.e., that would only mirror external things.