

Preface

This book is intended to mark the eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of St Bonaventure in 1217 and to introduce readers to the substantial commentary on St Luke's gospel that Bonaventure wrote while teaching in Paris and then leading the Franciscans as their Minister General in the middle of the thirteenth century. It comprises the bulk of the seventh folio volume of his edited writings in Latin, published in Italy in 1895, which has been very well translated by Father Robert J. Karris OFM, a Franciscan scholar working in America. His translation into English fills three substantial paperback volumes, running to over 2200 pages, with excellent introductions and exhaustive indices, published by the Franciscan Institute, St Bonaventure University, St Bonaventure, New York, as part of a series of translations of all Bonaventure's writings. This book relies heavily on this masterly translation for detailed reference, as indicated in the notes by volume and page number, and it is intended to spur readers to obtain and use this translation as a resource for study and preaching, as Bonaventure himself intended for his original work. This study is also intended to help interpret and communicate his teaching for a modern readership. I myself had the privilege for many happy years of teaching and discussing the meaning of St Luke's gospel with my teenage pupils at Marlborough College. The bibliography at the end of this book indicates the wealth of research into Bonaventure's distinctive exegesis of the Bible and its importance to his thought. Quotations from the Bible in this book are generally from the Revised English Version.

Bonaventure distilled and transformed a rich inheritance of patristic and medieval exegesis of the Bible developed within the monastic tradition and in the university schools in Paris, Oxford and elsewhere. In many ways his writing mirrors exactly the beautiful, detailed and ordered works of art, embroidery, stained

glass, carvings in cathedrals and illuminated manuscripts, which were produced in the thirteenth century across Europe as superb expressions of Christian theology and vision. Bonaventure's understanding of the Bible lay at the root of all that he taught and wrote. This book therefore serves as a bridge into his thought, by allowing the essence of his insight into Luke's gospel to be understood in his own words, as well as providing a succinct vade mecum for anyone wishing to read this gospel with the example of St Francis of Assisi in mind. Bonaventure had a formidable memory, and his capacity to draw from across the whole Latin Bible is extraordinary, instructive and enriching. His well-ordered mind was balanced, however, by a finely tuned spiritual and pastoral intuition, which means that how he approached the text of the gospel can be of real value to anyone today. It is intended to produce in due course a similar introduction to some of Bonaventure's other writings, in order that his significance as a theologian and spiritual teacher might be better known and become more widely accessible and appreciated in the life of the Church today.

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