Chapter 8

Via Terminus ad Aquem of the Self
The three major themes of Bonaventurian metaphysics are emanation, exemplarism, and consummation. By emanation Bonaventure meant the creation of creatures from God; by exemplarism, the creatures have God as their exemplar; consummation indicates the journey of creatures back to God. The finite self, as Bonaventure contends, has "... to be illumined by spiritual rays and be led back to God."1 The way that leads to God is outlined by him in his major works: The Soul's Journey into God and The Triple Way. While the philosophical work, the former one, offers clues for the speculative consummation, the mystical treatise, the latter one, provides an excellent practical tips on the nuances of the spiritual journey. The Latin title of the former with the term Itinerarium signifies primarily an itinerary or a plan of a journey shows how much Bonaventure believed in an organised and regularised efforts on the part of the finite self which intends to take up a journey towards God.

When God created man, He created him in His own image and likeness. He was placed in the paradise of delight because he was not corrupted and found his enjoyment in the company of God. But instead of contemplating on the true light, he turned on his own to the changeable
good which was considered as the voluntary transgression of a divine law by man. Tracing the etymological meaning of the word sin, St. Jerome writes, “the basic word usually translated by sin ... means a missing of the mark, a failure; one who sins fails to meet what is expected of him in relation to other person.”

When man fails to respond to God’s loving call, it weakens and breaks down the personal relationship between God and man. And sin is basically this inner attitude of man which estranges man from God. There are different kinds of sin. The original sin infects human nature in two ways: the mind with ignorance and the flesh with concupiscence. From this infectious condition man is delivered by Jesus Christ who brought grace with justice to assist man to conquer the intense desires of flesh and knowledge with wisdom to illumine the mind against ignorance. To receive this, Bonaventure emphatically asserts that “there is no other path but through the burning love of the crucified...”

He quotes St. Paul who was transformed by that kind of love, who could say: “With Christ I am nailed to the cross, I live now not I, but Christ in me.”

In order to embark upon a journey in this path one must be a man of desires, that is he must be burning
with spiritual passion. To identify oneself with a man of desires one must search the labyrinths of one’s heart and fill it only with need, torment, and desire. Bonaventure urges such man to approach God “with the full might of our yearning love and resolute will, therefore, let us press on toward Him.” Through His blood mankind is cleansed from the filth of vice.

8.1 Jesus Christ: The Persona Media

The crucified Christ functions as a vehicle in transforming man from the worldly consciousness to a mystical consciousness. Jesus Christ is the persona media because He is the centre of Trinity as well as of creation. In Him only the Father produced all the eternal ideas of all the things of the world. Through the Son the world flowed out. All the created things refer back to Him because He is the exemplar of all creation. This doctrine of exemplarism directs the contemplation of soul’s journey. When an object is contemplated it leads back to archetype in the divine mind or man able to trace back to God. Only when man have faith in the death of Jesus on the cross, there is the possibility of union with God. This death on the cross looked at from two different per-
spectives. First, it is considered as a sacrificial death. Man owes so much to God and this debt has to be paid for. Only faith in Jesus, who has paid the price for every men on the cross, will free him. Secondly, it is called vicarious death because in the place of the sinner, Jesus himself has carried away the sins. This death of Jesus, who himself has carried away the sins. This death of Jesus, which is sacrificial as well as vicarious is instituted by God to redeem man of his sins. Hence, it is the free gift of God for all those persons who believe in Jesus. It is said in the Bible, “For God loved the world so much, that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believe in Him may not die, but have eternal life.”

The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ effects three important functions. These functions enable man to re-establish his relationship with God in the right perspective. The first is Jesus purged man’s guilt, then He enlightened him by leaving an example. And finally, He perfected man by allowing him to follow in His footsteps. In response a Christian must be purified from the malice of sin, enlightened by the word of Christ and made perfect by the food of the Euchrist and of contemplation. These are the three sign-posts on the way to God by which a
soul can follow, for Bonaventure observes, "the purgative way, which consists in the expulsion of sin, the illuminative way, in the imitation of Christ, and the unitive way in the reception of the spouse." It should be noted that these three ways are not mentioned in the sequential order, and that these three leads to the respective elements of Christian perfection.

8.2 The Soul's Journey into God

When Bonaventure meditated on the question of the St. Francis of Assisi at La Verna, the vision, the six winged seraph crucified left its indelible mark on his heart. He unfolded the insight in the book The Soul's Journey into God. Here he sketches the map of the journey. Six steps have been given for the ascent to God. The six steps are treated in the book in six separate chapters as follows: Chapter one deals with the material world as seen exteriorly; chapter two, with the material world as received into one's senses; chapter three deals with the soul in its faculties of memory, intellect, and will; chapter four, with the soul as reformed by grace; chapter five treats the consideration of God as Being; and chapter six the consideration of God as Good. These six steps symbolise
the ascent of man through three levels, namely, the perceived material world outside us, the realm of the soul within us and the realm above us, viz. of God. The first level is of sensual perception, the second level is of the spirit, and in the third, mind, connotes his regard for self transcending realities.

In the first stage of ascent referred to by the first chapter of *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure meditates upon the reflection of God in the material world. Everything leads man to the immensity of the power, wisdom and goodness of the Triune God. The second stage as indicated by the second chapter of the above book deals with the process of sensation. The sense objects are apprehended, enjoyed and judged through the five senses. The processes mirror the reflection of God in them. In the third stage as shown by the third chapter of the above book Bonaventure turns his attention within oneself, turning away from material world and sensation, to explore the image of God in the soul. The three faculties of the soul - memory, intellect, and will - reflect the image of God through their order, origin and inter-relatedness. The reformed image of man through the grace of God is meditated in the fourth stage of the ascent and this
is noted by the fourth chapter of the book. In the fifth and the sixth stages of ascent Bonaventure turns to God himself and meditates upon him, first as Being and then as the Good, and the last two chapters of the book disclose this. Bonaventure closes his meditation on God as Being with a focus, as Professor Ewert Cousins shows, on the coincidence of opposites: God is the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the *Alpha* and the *Omega*; he is an intelligent sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. In the final stage Bonaventure contemplates on the self-diffusiveness of the God as Good. The contemplation of the Trinity as self-diffusive good reveals that there is present in the Trinity a unity and difference, intimacy and communication, the equality and distinction. This coincidence of opposites, as it is cited elsewhere, occurs in Jesus Christ too who is the centre of metaphysics or the *persona media* of creation. This takes him into the mystical ecstasy.

8.3 The Triple way

The theological-mystical hand book, *The Triple Way*, clarifies and further directs the quest that man un-
dertakes following The Soul’s Journey into God. In the book Bonaventure treated in minute details the three traditional methods - purgative way, illuminative way and the perfective (unitive) way - for the realisation of soul’s communion with God. It is a typical medieval treatise which is geometrically constructed in a trinitarian frame. Purgation leads to repose of peace through the expulsion of sin. Illumination emphasizes the attaining the splendor of truth by imitating Christ. Perfection and the life of union make ready in charity the reception of the Spouse. In the purgative way, as much as in illuminative way, the activity of the soul predominates. In the third, the unitive way, while the soul’s passivity is matched by the activity of grace. These three ways are the ascending steps of the soul’s realisation. At any stage of advancement the soul may recede backward. The three stages of soul are therefore not successive, but alternate movements of up and down till it reaches God.

Bonaventure in The Triple Way applied the three traditional methods in succession the following three internal exercises, viz., meditation, prayer, and contemplation. It is important to note the above mentioned interior exercises are listed in a merely random manner without
any implication that every contemplation must necessarily be preceded by prayer, or every prayer, in turn, by meditation. Bonaventure also demands here that when a man meditates, prays, or contemplates, he should do so first through moral cleansing then through rational illumination, and through elevation. For Bonaventure all the three are important. Regarding the ends of the spiritual exercises Bonaventure remarks in The Soul's Journey into God: “by praying, to receive restoring grace; by meditating to receive illuminating knowledge; and by contemplating to receive perfecting wisdom.” They are also interdependent. Contemplation is possible only through a holy life, by penetrating meditation and devout prayer.

In the ordinary usage of the terms, meditation, recollection and contemplation are inter-changeable. But when applied to a medieval spiritual context a subtle difference is noticeable between these apparently synonymous terms. Meditation is a mental ability of the self aimed at relieving a state of deep concentration. Miss E. Underhill opines: “the unfortunate word recollection ... to the traditional term by which mystical write define just such a voluntary concentration, such a first collect-
ing or gathering in the attention of the self to its most hidden cell." This voluntary concentration is deliberate consideration of and dwelling upon some aspect of reality. Usually mystics of Christian tradition choose one of the names or attributes of God or a scriptural passage or an incident of the life of Christ to meditate. The ideas and feeling which flow from the meditation is led to occupy the whole mind. This powerful suggestion kept before the consciousness by an act of will will overpower the stream of suggestions from the outside world.

We can seek and secure the divine help through prayer. Prayer frees man from anxiety and sustains him in moments of suffering. Prayer frees man from tension by unburdening his mind. It helps man to solve his problem by putting it in a larger perspective. Prayer presupposes faith and as Jesus Christ said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." Sincerity is an essential condition for proper prayer. In the act of prayer, with words or without words, we place ourselves in the hands of God. The two-fold aspects of prayer are communicating or begging for our
needs or petitions and glorification of God through adoration, thanksgiving and love worship. Prayer creates a condition in which union between man and God can take place.

Contemplation is a process of direct perception. As a religious practiser meditation is a means to prayers. After sometime in meditation the individual directs the spiritual life into a more serious and quiet mode. Contemplation is opposed to meditation, is non-discursive form of prayer. Concepts and thoughts are viewed as distinctive and the human spirit is led to a quietness in prayer that is sometime called the prayer of simplicity. In most schools of spirituality meditation precedes and leads to contemplation. It is vital to differentiate contemplation from its ordinary usage where it connotes the mystical state of the direct union with God. In the present context it means the intellectual operation that consists in applying our spirit to the understanding of God. Mystical union proper is the point where this contemplation ends.
8.4 Purgation

All the systems of salvation place purgation or purification of the self at the preliminary stage because the self must be purged of all elements which stand between the self and God. As the real urge for salvation is shown only by the converted souls, purgation is a necessary corollary of conversion. When a spiritual aspirant changes his vision of life, he strives to conform to the character of reality, instead of the character of sin. The sin, represented by man’s sensuality and self-will, which defile the self must be purified. Purgation is remaking the self in conformity with the perceived reality. It consists in two essential acts: cleansing of that which is to remain and stripping off that which is to be done away with. Following Theologica Germanica, Miss E. Underhill call them as negative purification or self-stripping and positive purification or character adjustment. This two-fold purgation consists of detachment and mortification.

Detachment creates a mental state to help the self to free itself from emotional attachment to the superfluous, unreal things. It consists in the virtues of voluntary poverty, chastity (poverty of senses), and obedience
Poverty represents the mental attitude of not clinging to things or take seriously the things which do not possess the character of reality. This spirit is captured brilliantly by Jacopone da Todi, the spiritual descendant of St. Francis of Assisi: “Poverty is naught to have, and nothing to desire: but all things to possess in the spirit of liberty.”

Mortification or the self-control of the self leads man to a higher life bringing out the positive aspect of purification. By repressing man’s evil passions and desires, man gains control over them in accordance with the holy will of God. Again, the remaking of the self aims at freedom from the fetters of sins to bring about an environment which is conducive for the union of self with God.

In the The Triple Way, Bonaventure, with the help of meditation, prayer, and contemplation, explicates the process of purgation. The purgatory end can be achieved through the soul-cleansing spiritual exercises as well as by the deepest humility and the practice of virtues. To attain the peace of mind the primary condition is the peace of conscience.

The negative purification or stripping off the self from
the unwanted elements are done by arousing and sharpening what Bonaventure calls "the sting of conscience." It is done by remembering the sins and considering the human condition of sinfulness. When the self is painfully aware of its pitiable state, it will turn to the right direction by meditating on what is good. In order to avoid what is not good, one should examine one's past by remembering the sins of negligence of duty, concupiscence, and malice. In retrospection the self should analyse its own past to find out whether there was any failure on its part so that it can be on guard against evil ways. In examining the past one must pay attention to the concupiscence or the carnal pleasure, curiosity, or the desire of the world of vanity which breeds all evils and also anger, envy, acrimony and the like which make a soul evil. While the analysis of the past fills the heart with chagrin, the sting of conscience is sharpened by considering what is present before self. The hour of death, the blood on the cross and the face of the hour of one's death, one should be ready to face it anytime. When one meditates on the blood of Jesus Christ shed on behalf of the entire human race, one dares not to remain uncleaned. Once he is considered to be immersed and cleansed by the holy blood, one will be quick to purge oneself. Moreover, meditating
on the face of the judge who is infallible, inexorable, and inescapable, since no one deceive his wisdom or bend His justice or elude His vengeance, one’s sting of conscience is sharpened to strip oneself of all evils. The vacuum created by cleaning must be filed with what is good. While alacrity prepares the soul to be watchful, trustful and careful in the performance of Godly work against negligence, austerity against concupiscence makes the soul love hardship, poverty and lowliness, and finally benignly prepares the soul for kindness, tolerance and joy.

When a man is cleansed from the sins, he seeks Christ to attain the tranquillity of peace. The seven steps to attain this tranquility in Christ are shame, fear, sorrow, insistence, resoluteness, ardor, and quiet. It is like a chain-reaction, where one leads to the other, and as Bonaventure paraphrases it himself by saying that, “You must blush because of your crimes, tremble in the face of judgment, weep for the damage done, beg for remedy, fight for enticement of the enemy, desire martyrdom on account of reward, and come close to Christ, seeking shelter in Him.”16
8.5 Illumination

The soul is ready to pass onto the second stage known as the illuminative way, only when it has been purified from sensuality and removed of all that is opposed God. Now the soul takes up the harder task of purifying the inner self for it has purified from the grosser hindrance to the union with God and reforms its life in accordance with the divine expectations. In illumination the self follows Christ in all walks of its life. This reformed kind of mental life is radically different from that of a ‘normal man.’ If one follows Christ with all the faculties - thought, feeling, and will, by imitating and practicing the life of Christ, he will be walking in the light, for the Bible says, “He that followeth me walketh not in darkness but shall have the light of life.”17 When a man follows Christ, He (Christ) becomes the centre of soul’s thought and affections. So the essence of illumination involves a lifting of consciousness from self-centeredness to a God-centred world. In illumination the individuality of the subject, however profound his spiritual consciousness be and however close his apparent communion with the Infinite be remains separate and intact. If one remains in illuminative way for long a selfish preoccupation with the
transcendental joy, "the spiritual gluttony" which is condemned by St. John of the Cross, comes out. One should not lean to the extravagance of Quitism with its dangerous double character of passivity and beatitude.\textsuperscript{18}

The illuminative way consists in the imitation of Jesus Christ. Bonaventure in \textit{The Triple Way} sets in a clear focus on how the triple interior exercises - meditation, prayer, and contemplation - leads to the splendour of Truth.

In the illuminative way the self meditates on to the extend to which the sins are forgiven, the favours received and the promised rewards. When one learns the amount of guilt remitted and is redeemed by Christ, naturally his heart fills with gratitude. While trying to understand the present condition, it is revealed that he got a certain degree of perfection of nature, sound body with good sense, the help of the grace, and the gifts of the universe, the Son and the Holy Spirit point to the super-abundance of the gifts. In perceiving the relationship man weighs up to the promised rewards. It draws us close to God.
Meditation reveals how the self stands in relation to God. So Bonaventure urges the self to beg earnestly for God's mercy. What prompts the appeal to God arises out of the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is pleading for us with unutterable groanings. Jesus Christ who suffered, died, and resurrected, conquering the evil on the cross, raises hope in the hearts of man. Apart from these two he turns to the saints and the holy men for their intercession. When one is desirous, has hopes, and seeks help from the able follow believes, he will kneel before God begging for mercy.

When one contemplates on Jesus Christ, one attains the splendour of Truth. By considering who is suffering, it in turn results in surrendering oneself to God in faith, when one contemplates on the fact that God suffered for one's sin, it fills one's heart with deep compassion. Man is carried away with admiration as he contemplates on how great is God who suffered. Since, God is suffering for man's redemption, illumination, sanctification and glorification, man is thrown into a rapture of devotion. When one consider how He is suffering, he must hasten to imitate Him. The extent to which Christ suffers leads man to embrace the cross. By contemplating on the conse-
quences of Christ’s sufferings on the cross, man beholds the light of truth. Then one is willing to take up the cross and follow its way, as Christ explained “does not walk in the darkness, but will leave the light of life.”

8.6 Perfective Union

The mystic who has passed the stages of the purgative and illuminative way, now enters into the last stage of the way, which is also the goal of the quest, the unitive life. Then the soul passes from that which is imperfect to that which is perfect. Here the soul beholds the Supreme Reality face to face in the Beatific Vision and is joined there unto in conscious union, so that the devotee can now say with St. Paul in truth, “I live, yet not I, but God in me.” In the first stage of the way, that is of the purification, the soul had felt the divine to be in opposition to the human self then as it is passed through the illuminative life, the opposition had decreased and the soul had been conscious of its own greatness since it is in the image of the divine. Finally, the perfective union, the soul is conscious of God as Being, who surpasses the self and yet at the same time identified with it, “great enough to be God, intimate enough to be.”

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In the unitive way meditation on the little flame of wisdom must first concentrated, then fed and then raised aloft. Man must concentrate his love on God. By considering the love of God one must realise that through love only man is provided with whatever he lacks, i.e. the desirable presence of God. In the last stage the love of God reveals that He is above anything perceptible, imaginable, or conceivable.

The love of God necessarily generates an intense feeling. This finds a strong expression in the form of worship. In any worship, Bonaventure observes that the three following things must be done: "first, our hearts must bow before God to express reverence and adoration; then, it must open up to render love and gratitude; finally, it must rise aloft in mutual delight and converse as between the bride as her spouse, as revealed by the Spirit in the Canticle." When man considers God as the Father who formed, reformed, and informed him, as the Lord who redeemed him and the judge who is going to judge him, he is overwhelmed to worship Him. The veneration passes from a bow to genuflection and finally to a prostration. On the other hand when man considers himself unworthy, and how God's love is perfecting him, he must love God
strongly. Again, when man considers the abundance of God's grace which remitted the sins committed by him, he must love the abundance of His grace. He has promised a gift of super abundance. When we pray to God whom we revere and love, the worshiping delights our hearts. This is because in God only man finds happiness and secondly we are pleasing only Him and nobody else and thirdly the knowledge that other men also worship God delights man.

When man reaches the wisdom that God is the one to whom only the human love can be directed and through prayer worshiped, man comes to the experience of sweetness of love. This union takes place through watchfulness, comforting, trust, inflaming desire, uplifting rapture, joyful peace, transporting happiness and perfect intimacy. Bonaventure summarises the unitive way as "watchful must arouse you, since the Spouse is at hand; trust must strengthen you, since He is faithful; desire must inflame you, since He is sweet; rapture must uplift you, since He is lofty; delight in Him must bring you peace, since He is beautiful; joy must inebriate you, since His love is full; close proximity must weld you to Him, since His love is strong."24
8.7 Serenity of Contemplation

When a Christian climbs in the ladder of contemplation in the last stage, he enters into the sabbath of repose. It is termed as ‘passing over’ by Bonaventure. This is achieved only when the mind has been carefully trained. This ‘passing over’ is through Jesus Christ only for He is the way and the door. When the believer turns his face in contemplation to Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, the soul looks at Him in a profound mixture of faith, hope, charity, devotion, delight, exaltation, appreciation, praise jubilation and the like. Now the soul is ready to ‘pass over’, that is, it is ready for a transition from things temporal to the eternal. The meaning of the transition is highlighted by Bonaventure using Biblical illustrations. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea by the grace of God over to the Desert, God provided them with manna, which they had not tasted till then. Likewise, when the soul passes over by the staff of cross, it will experience the joy which it has not tasted before. Moreover, the soul “rests in the tomb with Christ as if dead to the outer world but experiencing”\(^{25}\) as the penitent thief who accepted Christ and received the promise “Today you shall be with me in Paradise.”\(^{26}\)
This ‘passing over’ was granted to St. Francis when in ecstatic contemplation he had the vision of six winged seraph. He was extolled by Bonaventure as a perfect example worth of emulation. St. Francis, who by his blessed activities, showed how a perfect action could be turned into a perfect contemplation set an example to the aspirants.

This ‘passing over’ to be perfect and genuine must satisfy the following conditions. First the soul must stop all intellectual activities. It should not use its reasoning faculty to grasp it in a dry and detached manner. Secondly, the soul’s deep affection must be centered on God and transformed into God. The resultant experience is mystical and most sacred. To receive it one must be desirous of receiving it as it is emphasized that “who is inflamed in his marrow by the fire of the Holy Spirit, who in Christ sent into the world.”27 And for this reason alone St. Paul is emphatic that this mystical wisdom will be revealed only by the Holy Spirit.

Bonaventure describes the state attained by the soul due to ‘passing over’ in the logic of the coincidence of opposites as “superluminous darkness,” “illuminating si-
lence”, and “superessential ray of the divine darkness”. In order that the soul must turn away from all created essences and to concentrate on the uncreated essence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Bonaventure exhorts the soul to pay little heed to inquiry but much to unction, little importance must be given to human knowledge but more to the internal experience of joy, and its attention must be weaned away from words and writings so that the soul can concentrate on the gift of God, that is, the Holy Spirit. When the soul arrives at a state where it realises that nature can do nothing and human industry carry little value, Bonaventure urges the soul to pray with Dionysius: “O supereminent and transcendent holy Trinity, inspiration of all Christian philosophy, direct our steps to the unknown, sublime, and resplendent heights of mystic utterances. On these heights are to be found the new, the absolutely unquestionable and unchanging mysteries of theology, hidden away as it were, in the obscurity of excessively lightsome darkness and illuminating silence. Here on these heights, so resplendent in their excessive light, men are enlightened and spiritual souls are filled with the splendors of the true good.”

The journey is almost complete as far as the present
life is concerned. The ultimate union possible in this life for the soul to repose in the mystical transport in which the soul’s understanding and affections go entirely over to God. Beyond such an ecstasy, a rapture and a extraordinary privilege, the soul, if it yearns to see God, it should be sought in death and as Job, “my soul chooses hanging and my bones death,”²⁹ for it is said with a definite finality, that man will not see me and live.³⁰ So Bonaventure urges the soul to enter into learned ignorance imposing silence upon anxieties, concupiscences and working of imagination. When faith in God and the preparation for the union with Him is complete, the soul will echo Philip: “It is enough for us.”³¹