Chapter 9

Critical Appraisal & Conclusion
Periodically throughout history great teachers and prophets have brought necessary wisdom to people of different cultures and countries. From their lives and teachings the great religions of the world have developed each having its own revered writings and sacred beliefs. One important characteristic of the modern world is the disappearance of various kinds of barriers because of which what we have is a global village and this leads to a novel synthesis of people and their belief systems. As the twentieth century is moving towards a civilization of a melting pot of cultures and spiritual traditions they impinge on one another, understanding of each other becomes a pressing need as Margaret Chatterjee observes, "Diversification is the order of things ... unless diversification is matched with understanding and with communication, we face the future at our peril. It is for this reason that the question of inter-religious communications, the ground of its possibility, can be regarded not only as a most pressing of problems for the student of comparative religion but as a matter of pressing urgency for all."¹ To make comparative study of religion, more than a vague rhetoric, a real understanding of each religion on its terms and its own distinctive answers to many of the fundamental questions are mandatory. By way of concluding in this chapter
a critical appraisal of the some of the important points raised by Śrī Rāmānuja and St. Bonaventure in their responses to the paradigm presented in the first chapter is carried out. Secondly, in an effort to penetrate into the guiding principles, with the view to work out a synthesis of their teachings by way of interpreting the underlying religious experience.

9.1 Scriptural Authority

To any theistic system the sacred scriptures function as the axis of truth, ethics, and also as identity for the respective religious communities. As theologico-philosophers to both Ramanuja and Bonaventure, the respective scriptures are significant path way to the knowledge of God. To Ramanuja among the three means of valid knowledge, scriptural authority is final in respect of the knowledge of Brahman. Perception is authoritative only regarding things knowable by the sense organs. Inference is authoritative regarding some unseen objects whose necessary concomitance or vyāpti with the known object, is ascertained by sensory perception as in the case of fire and smoke. But in case of things which lie beyond the reach of senses, āgamās or sāstras are
the only authority. The fourth sutra of Brahma Sutra declares, "the scripture (alone) being the source of right knowledge (with respect to Brahman)"\textsuperscript{2}. On the other hand Bonaventure holds a parallel view that understanding of the scriptures are necessary for salvation. The first principle, Lord, opens Himself to human mind through the sacred writings inspired through various prophets and saints. Moreover, he contended that in the scripture one finds what all we need to know.

\textbf{9.2 Creation}

As to the question of the \textit{terminus a quo} of the self, both Ramanuja and Bonaventure affirm that the finite self starts its journey from God. While Ramanuja subscribes to the theory of beginningless creation, that is the doctrine of periodic creation and dissolution which implies a cyclical view of time, Bonaventure demonstrates the validity of his position by offering various arguments to support the Biblical account of creation implying that the world is not beginningless, that it has a beginning. That time had a beginning implies the doctrine of \textit{creatio ex nihilo}, which is quite unfamiliar to Indian religious traditions. In fact, for Ramanuja \textit{srihti} consists in
the transition of actualization of that which is potential by the determining factors such as name and form. In creating the finite self Brahman is both material as well as the efficient cause. *Karma*, which persists through the cycle of births and deaths, determines the character of the finite self. From the Christian point of view, creation is an act of God’s free will and not determined by some factors outside himself. For Bonaventure, who was inspired by Plotinus, creation is the outflow of the boundless fecundity of the Father through the *medium metaphysicum*, the son.

In discussing the nature of the finite self they refer to the size of the finite self. The opposite views upheld by them and the explanations offered by them reflect the different traditions to which they belong. Ramanuja resorts to monadic size of the *jīva* to differentiate it from the infinite self, which is *vibhu* and secondly, to explain away the departure of the soul from one body to another at the time of death. Bonaventure, on the other hand maintains that the human soul is the form of the body and consequently, it is simple and secondly, the soul as the *motor sufficiens* of the body pervades every part of the body.
In respect of the purpose of creation, both the philosophers seem to hold quite similar views. They acquiesce on the love of God and on the view that God is in any way neither motivated nor compelled to create this universe. While Ramanuja emphasizing the creative spontaneity of the Lord subscribes to līlā theory. Bonaventure also stresses the same effortless, unnecessiated act of God through His spontaneous diffusion. For both creation from the standpoint of finite self is the expression of love of God and from the standpoint of God, it is wholly a gratuitous exercise of love of God.

An important parallel may also be drawn in respect of their answers to the question as to why the finite self, though the starting point and the end is the same, namely, God, embarks on its journey at all? Sin, disobedience of the law and commandments of God, might be the answer from theistic perspectives. Ramanuja would say that the bondage is due to ahamkāra which is the product of avidyā-karma complex. In its ahamkāra the finite identifies itself with the prakṛti and fails to distinguish self from the body, and it enters into the body of every kind - thus thrown into the cycle of birth and death. Bonaventure, following Christian tradition, holds
that man's fall from grace is due to the disobedience of the first parents, Adam and Eve. This original sin has enveloped the whole of human race. And, it infects the mind with ignorance and the flesh with concupiscence. The finite self either to be liberated from samsāra or to be restored to its pristine state it embarks upon the spiritual journey.

9.3 Transcendence and Immanence

The relationship between the finite self and the infinite self should be very carefully understood. These two religious thinkers brought out the relationship in their own characteristic way. An eminent Franciscan scholar who is actively involved in dialogue with the Hindu scholars emphatically suggested once that we need to have "an in-depth dialogue between Bonaventure's exemplarism in which world is the symbolic expression of God and Ramanuja's notion of the world as the body of God ...."³ The relation between the finite self and the infinite self pertains to the issue of transcendence of God and immanence of God in the world. Here the world is referred to as being comprehensive in which everything is included including the finite self. They agree on the point that there
is no tension between transcendence and immanence nor are they contradictory to each other since the one does not amount to the negation of the other. The way and manner in which they explain the relationship between the finite self and the infinite self demonstrates that not only transcendence and immanence are balanced but also they are inter-related in the divine. Though they begin and proceed differently, Ramanuja and Bonaventure arrive at a common position that God is both in and beyond the world, and the world is both outside and within God. Whereas Ramanuja, by using the analogy of soul-body relationship, shows how this organismic relationship reconciles God’s transcendence and immanence, Bonaventure uses the exemplarist way of explaining the relationship which shows how the self-diffusing Good by way of reflection accommodate transcendence and immanence in God.

One of the implications of śarīra-śarīřa-sambandha is a reconciliation between transcendence and immanence in Brahman. Brahman is considered as the immanent inner controller (antaryāmin) of the universe. In its wholeness and in its particularity the whole cosmos and every part of it are the body (śarīra) of Brahman. But
Brahman is not contained in them as water in a bottle. He is their container as well. He is infinitely beyond their dimension too. Secondly, though God is the inner controller, changes do not affect Him. Imperfections and sufferings are not due to Him, but due to the karma of the jīvas. One of the svarūpa of Brahman is amalatva which means purity, i.e. freedom from the hold of karma which is the cause of all imperfections in the jīva. In this sense His unaffectedness transcends the world.

Bonaventure resolves the problem by grounding God’s transcendence in His self-diffusion which is in fact the ultimate basis of His immanence. By exemplaristic reflection of the things of the world reflect the nature of God in four phases progressively as shadows, vestiges, images, and similitude. This reflection of things have their exemplaristic grounding in the Word as rationes aeternae. These eternal ideas by their two-fold reference locates transcendence and immanence in the divine. When these ideas are reflected by the things of the world they point to the fact of immanence, and when the ideas exist in the Son as the rationes aeternae, in whom the Father produced all that is in the world, His transcendence is implied.
While Ramanuja emphasizes the freedom of the self Bonaventure only hints at the fact. Though Brahman is the antaryāmin of the self and permits the jīva to choose, the desires and tendencies of the self emerge as actions. So the moral responsibility accrues only to the finite self. It may be mentioned here that for Ramanuja freedom and immanence are not incompatible. In Christianity man was created in the image of God and he is free to either obey or disobey the commandments of God it means that he has total freedom.

9.4 Sādhanas

Every religious system prescribes for its followers regular disciplines which are to lead them to the ultimate goal. These disciplines are formulated in tune with that system’s conception of the ultimate reality and the objective of life. Both Ramanuja and Bonaventure concur on the point that the finite self has to choose the path of devotion. All the mystical thinkers, whether eastern or western, recognise that the ascent to God consists in three broad ways, namely, purgation, illumination, and the way of perfective union or karma yoga, jñāna yoga and bhakti yoga. While Ramanuja rearranges the or-
der favoured by the Hindu tradition in general to give supremacy to bhakti yoga, Bonaventure in addition to endorsing the traditional order asserts the supremacy of devotion by declaring, "there is no other path, but through the burning love of the crucified."4

In order to take up the sādhana, there are some psychological prerequisites. The finite self must realise its pathetic present predicament in the world. When Bonaventure stresses that the sinful man must burn with spiritual passion is necessary to embark on its spiritual journey, Ramanuja defines a mumukṣu as the one who has intense desire for brahmānubhava. Unless one, according to both, yearns for God just as a man immersed in water pants for the air, with need, torment, and desire, one can not have the joy of experiencing God.

The first stage of the Journey, for both Ramanuja and Bonaventure, is purification of the finite self. The Christian purgative way consisting in self-purification corresponds to the vedantic stage of karma yoga as the performance of niṣkāma-karma. While purgation is effected by detachment and mortification, practice of niṣkāma-karma is vairāgya and abhyāsa. Vairāgya

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is the negative way of self-renouncement by the removal of avidyā and kāma. Avidyā is dispelled by viveka or the knowledge that atman is not the body and kāma is destroyed by the abandonment of sense pleasure arising from avidyā. By vairāgya, it is not necessary to develop an extreme dissatisfaction amounting to sick-mindedness but enough to renounce the desires on the things of the world to turn the desire to know oneself. Karma yoga consists in turning the viṣeyā-kāma into ātma-kāma.

Purgation through detachment and mortification is an effort to remake the self in conformity with the perceived reality. By detachment one develops first a mental state by severing its attachment to sin. The resultant empty space must be filled up with virtues. All the soul-cleansing spiritual exercises lead to repose of peace where the soul turns to know itself by the illuminating light of grace.

The finite self climbs up from the purification of sensuality to the second stage, the purification of inner self through jñāna yoga or illumination. In this stage mind withdraws itself from its contact with the outer world and focusses on the inner nature of the self. While in illuminative way by imitating and practicing the life of Christ the
self shifts its self-centeredness to a God-centered world.

*Jñāna yoga* is the process of self-realization in which the self retires from the circumference to the centre, and regains its own state. Through *jñāna yoga* the spiritual aspirant realises that *jīva* is not only *jñāna-gunaka*, but it is also *jñāna-svarūpa*.

Though they specifically point out how this second stage in the spiritual journey paves the way to the higher and principal way, viz. *bhakti yoga*, the way of perfective union, the tradition repeatedly warns that one may be lulled into quitism here. In the Christian tradition this danger has been described as “the spiritual gluttony.” This second stage must be used not as a stopping place but as a stepping stone. Both Ramanuja and Bonaventure, are emphatic that the resultant *jñāna* as Ramanuja put is optly, must be turned into *bhakti*.

The perfective may exercises and develops love to the point of mystical union. Till this stage the activity of the finite self is important. Now, the unitive way focusses on the passivity of the spirit and dominating act of grace.
The object of love in this way is the divine spouse. Here adoration reaches its farthest limits. The eucharistic life permeates all things.

*Bhakti* is ceaseless meditation on God. It is absolute self-surrender to the Lord and ceaseless Love for Him. This love is not the result of a fit of a sudden emotional outburst, it is illumined love of God. Here one does not relapse into the contemplative abyss of the absolute but also avoids extreme activism as well. This yoga develops an attitude which promotes the spirit of communion without any hindrance between the finite self and the infinite self.

### 9.5 Unending Bliss

Though there are some remarkable coincidences with each other, on soteriological issues, two views, viz, salvation and liberation, are discernible. In the Indian tradition liberation is to escape the cycle of endless births and deaths. Salvation, on the other hand, is escape from God’s wrath due to sin, it is salvaging man from fallenness to grace. Whatever be their differences, deep down
they mean a life of unending bliss. For Ramanuja *mukti* is ascent to the Absolute and absorption in the One without self-extinction. Even in the liberated state the finite self is different from Brahman, though it has the unitive experience of the bliss and becomes like Brahman, it does not have the power to create and rule the world.

When the believer reaches the unitive stage, the experience of joy is mystical and most sacred. To describe this most sacred experience, Bonaventure uses oxymorons such as superluminous darkness. However, while Ramanuja describes how even in the state of liberation the individuality of the finite self persists, Bonaventure emphasises on the experience and not on the annihilation of the self.

It is to be noted that they, Ramanuja and Bonaventure, hold that the mystical experience will be complete and unending only when the finite self leaves this mundane world. According to Ramanuja the finite self can remain in this mundane world only as subservient to the Lord though it is totally free, when this self sheds its body it is liberated. On the other hand Bonaventure maintains that the experience is only passing over and face to
face encounter is reserved only for the higher world after death.

9.6 Challenges of Religious Experience

The various questions related to the religious experience have been considered from the stand point of both Ramanuja as well as Bonaventure. They have displayed a bewildering medley of aspects of resemblance and contrast. As stated in the beginning efforts are focussed on an understanding of common pattern emerging from all this diversity. It is hoped to identify and articulate the fundamental points of concurrence and divergence to discern the general characteristics of religious experience.

It is true that on the surface level similarities and differences are palpably apparent when dealing with ideas, concepts, and images. But a serious comparison is made between the ways of thinking in thought-forms and the world-views presented in their works. At this level the views of one thinker cannot be considered as superior to another because deep down they are often complementary. A value-judgement or truth-value can not be
ascribed to a system of thought. During the course of examining the views of Ramanuja and Bonaventure, it has been noticed that both have concerned themselves with the pragmatic aspect of the present state of the finite self and what can be done to improve its conditions.

The fact that these two thinkers were born in different religious traditions, embraced different world views, experienced and expressed that reality in different thought-forms cannot be denied. Yet, they in their discussion on man and his destiny seem to reach certain similar views. Both were religious men, who were devoured by the passion for God. Both were theologians, none of them accepted superstitions or unhealthy dogmas, but in the genuine sense they developed a systematic philosophy. While they maintain a strict philosophical methodology to analyse the life’s questions, they turn to religion for a wholistic approach. They have taken the task of formulating an integral system in which “theological metaphysics” clarifies and enlightens the philosophical metaphysics.

Mystics, as they were, they remained faithful to the valid insights of the past. Yet they had the courage to
rethink their past in the light of the problems which confronted them and their societies. Their general outlook was essentially theo-centric.

The study of man and his destiny is concerned with the totality of man's experience culminating in religious experience. Usually experience is like a great marble block on which many sculptors are at work. Everyone has his own point of entry. The distinguishing factor is the conviction that their particular point of entry into the marble block will reveal a unique and indispensable aspect of reality. If they can be arranged in a spectrum, it will range from the experience of the natural world, through the inheritance of the past, the search for integrity, the encounter with the self and to the experience of the ultimate reality. Though religious experience cannot be derived from the experience of natural world and others in as much as the former is immensely superior to the latter and that not merely in degree, but by its very essence. Each kind of experience has its own limitations and beyond that it cannot go. So far as the natural world is concerned man can never rise above seeking for pleasure and making expediency and social approbation of the standards of life. In his search for the self man turns to himself and his place
in the world. Each experience paves way to the other experience and shades off into the other gradually. Religious experience is synthetic in its nature and it embraces the whole of experience. Unless man has a comprehensive experience of all the above said experiences religious experience is not possible.

In fact all the saints and mystics without exception lived through religious experience. These profound experiences in their limited temporal existence urge them to express it in different ways. They are explosive in quality as the experiencer always give vent to joy and pain. They are usually expressed through thought, action, and fellowship.

As the religious experience deepens, the intellect, constructively as well as critically help us to understand man. The function of intellect in religious experience, being ancillary throughout, is in elaborating and not creating, explanations. Religious experience and its expression can neither be straight-jacketed nor be falsified.

Generally most vital activities presuppose the
strongest feelings; the strongest feelings are evoked by vital experiences. The activities resulting from an intense religious experience is of a matter of immediate practical concern to the life of individual and of the community. When a religious experience preserves the rituals and rites it shows that they express themselves in action due to religious experience. By giving impetus to service to the humanity religious experience challenges humanity to control its emotions and command over the reserves of energy that is released by communion with God.

Lastly religious experience promotes inter-personal understanding and fellowship among the individuals. The conviction that on seeking the divine-human relationship, God responds to human approach and that fellowship with Him is possible, speaks for tolerance and spiritual hospitality. Tolerance results in accepting and loving with breaks down the prejudices that may exist and counteract fissiparous tendencies in one’s own attitude. As religious experience is above the barriers that divide men it tends to express itself in fellowship, everybody is invited to enjoy this religious hospitality.

After examining the responses of Śrī Ramanuja and St.
Bonaventure’s to the paradigmatic questions and how religious experience is lived through by man in his journey towards his destiny. We hold that their teachings radiates hope that they can be applied mutatis mutandistio the followers of any religious faith.