Works of St. Bonaventure

Itinerarium Mentis in Deum

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and Zachary Hayes, O.F.M.
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Latin text from the Quaracchi Edition
New English Translation by Zachary Hayes, O.F.M.
Introduction and Commentary
by Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M.
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PREFACE

The year 2001 marked the first centenary of the birth of Fr. Philotheus Boehner, O.F.M. Born in Lichtenau, Germany, Fr. Philotheus was a member of the Province of Saxony who came to Canada and then to the United States where he worked as one of the founding members of the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure’s College (now University) in New York. He died quite unexpectedly at the age of 54 in May of 1955.

There can be little doubt that his work has played a major role in reviving an awareness of the great figures of the Franciscan medieval tradition in the English-speaking world. His courses on the history of the medieval Franciscans reached out in many directions through the students who were able to take part in them. For many, these courses opened a much richer reading of the great medieval period than was common during the twentieth century in a Catholic intellectual world dominated by a narrow vision of neo-Scholasticism. Those who knew Fr. Philotheus and experienced his lectures, courses, and writings, were deeply impressed with his reading of the work of St. Bonaventure whose spirit he seemed to embody in his own life and work.
Toward the end of his life, much energy and work was going into the inauguration of a series of English translations known as *Works of Saint Bonaventure*. Among the many works of the great Seraphic Doctor, one stands out as an exceptional jewel: the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. The translation of this text together with a rich introduction and commentary which relates the text to the other works of Bonaventure and to the historical sources that played such a part in the development of his thought was an unfinished project at the time of the death of Fr. Philotheus. Fortunately Sr. Emma Jane Marie Spargo, S.N.J.M., who had worked on this project with Fr. Philotheus, was able to complete the task after his death. So it was that in 1956, the Franciscan Institute was able to publish a small volume of unusual richness that brings together so much of the precious insight of one of the great masters of Christian thought and spirituality and the vision of one of the outstanding modern interpreters of that work.

Precisely because of the richness of this text it was felt that it should not simply appear in future catalogues as “out of print.” At the same time, because of the development of medieval studies in the intervening years and because of cultural changes that have taken place affecting English linguistic usages, the suggestion was made to provide a new printing of the volume that would contain all the commentary of Fr. Philotheus from the original edition together with a new translation of the Latin text. It is from that suggestion that the present volume has been developed. It is the hope of the publishers that this will remain a precious source for a serious introduction to the work of the Seraphic Doctor and an appropriate memorial of the outstanding work of Fr. Philotheus.

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There are few writings of Saint Bonaventure so deeply impregnated with the spirit of Saint Francis as is the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*. In his great theological writings, the Seraphic Doctor is bound by the fetters of scholastic method and tradition. These allow little freedom to the seraphic spirit which, though everywhere present in his writings, seldom makes its presence felt to one unfamiliar with it. In his ascetical writings, too, with few exceptions, Saint Bonaventure seems to be less influenced by Saint Francis than by such great Masters of the spiritual life as Saint Bernard, the Victorines, and the Fathers of the Church, although even in these writings he places special emphasis on typical Franciscan virtues and exercises. His sermons, likewise, are hampered by the highly artificial method of medieval preaching, a style far from the simplicity of Saint Francis’ exhortations and admonitions. But when we open the *Itinerarium*, we discover a new Bonaventure, the true Franciscan, who has learned from Saint Francis not only the rules and form of life, but his whole outlook, his ideal. To be sure, it is the great Master of Paris who is speaking to us in the *Itinerarium*; and he did not unlearn his philosophical and theological
wisdom and language, of which he had such masterly command. Yet in the Itinerarium it is rather the great Master, the Seraphic Doctor, who could not find satisfaction and peace in the lecture halls on Mount Genevieve at Paris, but who humbly climbed, in the footsteps of his Holy Father, up Mount Alverna and learned there the secret of peace, as Saint Francis understood it, a peace that is the perfection of wisdom. It was Saint Francis who there dictated to the pen of the Seraphic Doctor these few but highly condensed lines which can teach us how to follow Saint Francis in the pursuit of his sublime goal, even though we are called by the Lord to devote our lives to intellectual culture, which the Seraphic Father neither wanted nor needed. The Itinerarium, then, is an essentially Franciscan tract, guiding learned men and women in the spirit of Saint Francis to his mode of contemplative life.

I
SAINT FRANCIS,
THE MODEL OF THE ITINERARIUM

Saint Francis wandered through the world like a pilgrim and a stranger. When the Lord had called him to live in accord with the form and pattern of the Holy Gospel, his body found no permanent dwelling place anywhere, and his mind felt no longer at home here upon earth. He became an itinerant, both in the literal and in the spiritual sense. There came a holy restlessness into the life of the Seraphic Saint. At times he preached the word of penance and salvation in the streets of the towns and in the fields of the country; then he retired to his favorite hermitages in the mountains and wildernesses; again he traveled to take care of the needs of the brethren. Nowhere did he
stay for long. Saint Francis, like his divine Master, did not have any place that he could call his own, not even for use. This restlessness was not caused primarily by his zeal for souls or forced upon him by the care of the brethren. It sprang from a deeper source. In his heart there was burning a desire and a longing for his true home, where his Father in heaven had prepared a dwelling place for him. How then could he feel at peace or even at ease in this world?

To Saint Francis this world was truly his place of exile. And hence, as Celano relates, he hurried to make his exit from it as from an exile. According to what we know from the early biographers of Saint Francis, we may be assured that seldom has a man more deeply felt and more literally lived the words of Saint Peter: “Beloved, I exhort you as strangers and pilgrims...” (1 Pet 2:11). Saint Francis wanted these ideas – of strangeness and pilgrimage – to be so much a part of the life of the Friars Minor that he inserted them into the Rule.

It may appear very odd, at first glance, that this same Saint Francis is commonly admired for his great and tender love for all creatures, for a new feeling toward nature, and for a hitherto unheard of conversation with them. Who can count the many pictures and drawings representing the Saint surrounded by birds and various animals, with mountains and trees as background and herbs and flowers as decorations? And, in fact, Saint Francis had made a great discovery. He had discovered nature, unspoiled by human greed and selfishness, as it had been on the morning of creation. A neglected stone on the wayside could

1 *Nam per decem et octo annorum spatium, quod tunc erat expletum (that is, two years before his death), vix aut numquam requiem habuerat caro sua, varias et longissimas circuiens regiones, ut spargeret ubique semina verbi Dei spiritus ille promptus, spiritus ille devotus, spiritus ille fervens.* Celano, Vita I, pars II, c. IV (97).

2 *Mundum quasi peregrinationis exilium exire festinans....* Celano, Vita II, pars II, c. 124 (165).
hold his admiring attention and lift his soul to heavenly joy. He loved the mountains, the solemn solitude of the forests, the joyous play of silvery springs and murmuring brooks; he loved the wind and the storm, rain and hail, the earth with its inexhaustible fertility and ever-renewed beauty, the moon and the sun and all the stars in their silent splendor. How dear to his heart were the birds! Even the ravening beasts of the wilderness found in Saint Francis their friend.

We must be careful, however, not to misunderstand this deep love and reverence of Saint Francis for all creatures. It was neither a purely naturalistic enjoyment of nature, nor a sentimental enthusiasm for nature, nor a worship of it. Nor was it a superficial, symbolic consideration of creatures. Saint Francis’ outlook on each and every creature was essentially religious. He felt a great reverence toward all creatures, since they were created and owned by his almighty Lord, and hence he greeted them with reverence; he loved all of them dearly, since all were children of the good Father in heaven, and hence he greeted them as brothers and sisters. He called on all of them to praise and adore the great Lord who had so lavishly given the beauty, splendor, variety, and goodness, overflowing in creatures, given solely that they might manifest and glorify God. And hence he sang with Brother Sun and with the rest, yes, even with Sister Death.

But Saint Francis’ relation to creatures was not only religious; it was also immediate, surpassing the symbolism so commonly encountered in the Middle Ages. He was able to penetrate into their inner secret, to drink their beauty, to be warmed by their goodness, to hear their voices and even their silent hymns, to taste their sweetness, and to speak with them. And all this immediate communing was a conversation with creatures in their common Lord. For that reason it was given him to sing with them the hymn of creation which in thousands and
thousands of harmonies had filled the vast spaces of the universe since the morning of creation. It needed a Saint to discover nature’s secret in its original beauty, goodness, and meaning. After he had discovered this secret, the Seraphic Saint could not help but see, taste, admire, and praise his heavenly Father in every creature. For that reason he could be wholly with them and nevertheless not rest in them.\(^3\)

Thus the exceedingly tender love of Saint Francis for all creatures did not make him forget that he was a pilgrim and a stranger. On the contrary, all creatures were transformed in his immediate experience to signposts, as it were, to remembrances and admonitions – in a word, to mementos. Each of them recalled to his mind and heart something of his heavenly Father. Just as a souvenir is dear to the heart, since it is a sweet token of love and reminds us of one beloved, and yet, at the same time, fills the heart with sadness and longing, since it is a token of one beloved who is far away, so creatures, the souvenirs of the good Father in heaven, caused at one and the same time in Francis’ heart both joy and woe. Saint Francis could rejoice in creatures; he could sing with his brothers and sisters in the Lord. But with his joy mingled easily tears of longing and desire for his real home, of which creatures were only mementos. This earth, this valley of tears, remained his exile. He did not feel himself a citizen of this world, since he knew that he was a citizen of a still better one. Only his body separated him from his goal; his mind no longer belonged to this world. He sighed in his captivity, longing and desiring with burning heart for union with

Christ in the arms of the heavenly Father. If he could help shedding tears even in his beloved wilder-nesses and in the delightful beauty of meadows and forests?

Thus by an inner necessity, if we may presume to say so, Saint Francis became and was a mystic. He did not need to study learned treatises on mysticism, nor did he need to learn from the mystical experiences of others. His whole life as pilgrim and stranger impelled him to the heights of religious experiences in which the longing of the heart transcend the body, and the soul rests in that peace which the world does not know. It became almost natural to Saint Francis to live in the Heavenly City, not in body, but in the fervor of his spirit, which anticipated the sweetness and the joy of things to come. The inevitable climax of this mystical union with Christ, ever renewed by an ardent love of the Crucified, occurred in the wilderness of Mount Alberna when the Seraphic Saint was sealed with the stigmata. His union with Christ became union with the Crucified.

4 Corpus peregrinus a Domino vir Dei Franciscus praesentem spiritum caelo contendebat inferre, et angelorum civem jam factum solus carnis paries disiungebat. Tota in Christum suum anima sitiebat, totum illi non solum cordis sed corporis dedicabat. Celano, Vita II, pars II, c. 61 (94).

5 In silvis vero et solitudinibus orans, nemora replebat gemitibus, loca aspergebat lacrimis, pectora manu tundebat, ibique quasi occultus secretarium nactus, confabulabatur saepe cum Domino suo. Ibi respondebat judici, ibi supplicabat patri, ibi colloquebatur amico, ibi colludebat sponso. Celano, Vita II, pars II, c. 61 (95).

6 Experienti dabitur scire, non conceditur inexpertis. Sic fervore spiritus bulliens actus, et omnis aspectus et tota prorsus anima liquefacta jam incaelesti regni summa republica versabatur. Celano, Vita II, pars II, c. 61 (95).

7 Et quia minor amore semper in corde suo gerebat et conservabat Christum Jesum et hunc crucifixum, propterea signaculo suo gloriosissime supra caeteros est signatus, quem etiam, mente excedens, contemplabatur in gloria indicibili et incomprehensibili sedentem ad dextram Patris.... Celano, Vita I, pars II, c. 9 (115).
Saint Francis, therefore, a pilgrim and stranger in this world, loved creatures, since in them the well–spring of that goodness that he longed for and that he tasted in his raptures was opened before his eyes.8

The Seraphic Doctor, Saint Bonaventure, follows, in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, the model of his Master and Father in religion. What Saint Francis lived, the Seraphic Doctor transforms into thoughts and ideas, analyzing them, clarifying them, and formulating them into a system and method. And that is what the *Itinerarium* actually is. We do not mean to say, however, that the Seraphic Doctor singly and solely transferred the experiences and visions of Saint Francis into philosophical and theological language. For the Seraphic Doctor is both less and more than Saint Francis. He certainly is less in so far as originality and immediacy of life are concerned, for in these the Seraphic Father is unsurpassed; on the other hand, Saint Bonaventure is more because of his philosophical and theological learning, which, however, in comparison with Saint Francis’ own richness, is only a substitute. Saint Francis does not need to detour over intellectual ways with reasonings and cumbersome speculations; the Seraphic Doctor needs them. But – and this matters here – he has caught in his own way the spirit of Saint Francis, the meaning of his life, his ideal, and he has made it the formative principle of a philosopher and theologian.9 The result is the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, the pilgrimage of the soul to God, or rather, a plan of pilgrimage which the mind of an intellectual Franciscan must follow if he wishes to reach the high goal of Saint Francis, peace and rest in the foretaste of the things to come in mystical experiences.

8 *Siquidem fontalis illa bonitas, quae omnia in omnibus est futura jam sancto huic omnia in omnibus clarescebat.* Celano, Vita II, pars II, c. 124 (165).
9 *Itinerarium*. Prol. 2.
The *Itinerarium* was conceived on Mount Alverna, as Saint Bonaventure does not fail to mention. In fact, it is nothing else but an adaptation or interpretation of the great miracle of stigmatization wrought in the body of Saint Francis. Hence the treatise starts with the love of the Crucified, the only safe way, and ends with the mystical falling asleep with Christ on the Cross. The Seraphic Doctor has learned from Saint Francis that the Cross is not only our only hope of salvation, but also the resting place of the soul in mystical sleep. One may even go so far as to say that Saint Bonaventure’s mysticism is distinguished from all preceding by the place he assigns to the Crucified in the mystical union. In the mystical crucifixion of Saint Francis was reached the climax of perfect contemplation. Saint Francis is the model thereof.\textsuperscript{10} The Seraphic Doctor, therefore, received his deepest mystical inspiration from Saint Francis, and not from Saint Bernard nor from Dionysius. From the latter he borrowed the language; from the former, many details; but from Saint Francis he learned that the mystical experience takes place with Christ on the Cross. Whereas Saint Bernard considered meditation on the Passion of Christ a rather imperfect devotion, belonging to the *amor carnalis* (carnal love), and whereas he associates mystical experience more with the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, Saint Bonaventure gives devotion to the Passion a central position and connects mystical experience more with Christ crucified. This mysticism is essentially Christocentric, as is his philosophy and theology.

The Seraphic Doctor learned likewise from Saint Francis the utmost importance of desire. Here again, we are in a typically Franciscan atmosphere. Like his Father, Saint Bonaventure is deeply impressed by the conviction that the life of men and women here upon earth is a pilgrim-

\textsuperscript{10} *Itinerarium*. VII, 3.
age and that the acute consciousness of it prepares one for the contemplative life. Not only does the title of the work suggest it, not only do the ardent words of the Prologue, speaking time and again of the heart’s deepest desire for peace and ultimately, for ecstatic peace, leave no doubt about it, but the short yet significant beginning of the work after the Prologue: “Here begins the contemplation of the poor man in the desert,” shows that the whole tract is of truly Franciscan inspiration. The Seraphic Doctor went to Mount Alverna to find that peace for which Saint Francis had sighed in every prayer. He knew well that he was still in the desert, but at least he also could sigh for peace and try to get a foretaste of the peace of the Heavenly City, the City of peace – Jerusalem, by following Saint Francis to the height of his contemplation. He knew that men and women of desire would not fail to rest for at least a few moments in the peace which is not of this world.

For such men and women of desire, truly strangers and pilgrims in this exile, the Seraphic Doctor has written his Itinerarium, a guidebook for pilgrims on their way to the City of peace. He would help them prepare for a foretaste of the delights of this peace in mystical union. In this the Seraphic Doctor leads us in a way different from that of Saint Francis, although still in his spirit. He would help especially those to whom Providence has allotted the vocation of learning. They too, not only the simple ones like Saint Francis, are called to the contemplative life. They too, although less unsophisticated and so often spoiled by their intellectualism and so often in danger of pride and vainglory, may aspire to the mystical peace and may taste how sweet the Lord is by means of their scientific culture. In the Itinerarium a Saint and great Master of Theology has made the successful attempt to force scientific culture in its broadest ambit into the service of mysticism.
Did the Seraphic Doctor abandon his Seraphic Father in this? As to the letter, yes; as to the spirit, no. Saint Francis did not need or want scientific culture for himself; the simple word of God and of nature provided his rich soul with all necessary spiritual food. Saint Bonaventure needed a scientific culture, but he transformed it in the spirit of Saint Francis. Everything that nature and culture could offer him became for him, too, a means of lifting his mind to his Father in heaven. When Saint Bonaventure went to the venerated Mount Alverna, he brought with him his great learning, yet he submitted it to the spirit of Saint Francis. What he tasted and what he experienced there entered into a fruitful union with the treasures that had been handed down to him from the Fathers, especially from Saint Augustine, and from the great philosophers of the Greek and Islamic world – treasures which had been analyzed, discussed, purified, and enlarged by contemporary theologians. Everything that was true, honest, and useful had to serve as steps which would enable him to reach the high goal of the mystical union, of which the Seraphic Father was the model. “This, then, must be the fruit of all sciences: that through them faith is strengthened, God is honored, morals are well-ordered, and those pleasures are experienced, which result from the union of the Bridegroom and His bride...”11

For that reason, the Seraphic Doctor turns toward all creatures and asks them to tell him something about God, Who is his heart’s desire. He not only asks the world as it appears to his senses; with the help of Aristotelean and Augustinian psychology, he also gets answers from the same world as it is perceived in sense-apprehension, in the delight of the senses, and in the immediate judgment about them in abstraction. He then turns with Saint Augustine to the wide halls of his memory, the mind’s consciousness, and beholds, full of admiration, the image of

11 Bonaventure, *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, 26 (V, 325).
the most blessed Trinity reflected in the soul. But imme-
diately the theologian reveals to him a still more excel-
lent beauty in the supernaturally transformed similitude
of God, a soul in grace, where God dwells with all God’s
supernatural treasures of various gifts. Again he takes a
step forward, beholding and fixing his mental eyes on the
idea of being in an unsurpassed Meditatio metaphysica
(Metaphysical Meditation), which brings his soul, flooded
by grace, into immediate touch with God the One. Again
the theologian, now at the utmost extent of his powers,
leads the mind to the spectacle of the abundant goodness
of God unfolding itself in the mystery of the blessed Trin-
ity.

Such speculations we do not expect from Saint Francis;
we do, however, expect them from a Seraphic soul filled
with the treasures of philosophy and theology. Hence we
conclude, by way of repetition, that the Itinerarium Men-
tis in Deum of Saint Bonaventure is an essentially
Franciscan tract, outlining for men and women in the spirit
of Saint Francis the contemplative life of Saint Francis.
Saint Francis is the model of the Itinerarium, since Saint
Francis is the model of the contemplative life itself.

II
The Meaning and Place of the Itinerarium

The Itinerarium is a mystical writing. It is not concerned
with a metaphysical approach to God or even with giving
proofs of the existence of God, nor is it simply the pious
meditations of a philosopher or a theologian; rather, the
Itinerarium is addressed to those who are ready to an-
swer the divine call to live the mystical life and to taste of
God’s sweetness in ecstatic union. This mystical meaning
and character of the Itinerarium will become more evi-
dent in the following short outline of the Seraphic Doctor’s
mystical theology. We shall assign the work its proper place within this mystical theology, and then attempt to explain the meaning of “speculation” (speculatio).

Saint Bonaventure has a definite system of mystical theology and has conceived it as something different from theology in general, though, of course, in intimate connection with it. In order to discover his mystical theology, we need to consider, not so much his main work, the Commentary on the Sentences, as a few smaller tracts and sermons where the Seraphic Doctor teaches us not a system but rather the practice of mysticism. It is not too difficult to abstract from these works the teachings of Saint Bonaventure in mystical theology, as has been done in so masterly a way by Fr. Ephrem Longpré, who has given us an excellent synthesis based on his own research and that of others, in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité. We shall make extensive use of it in the following exposition.

The mystical life is based on the order of grace. In his original state in Paradise, man was fit for the quiet of contemplation. Sin, however, has thrown man into utter incapacity; it has crippled and stooped and blinded him. Man, who was created after the image of God and distinguished by the supernatural likeness of God, lost this likeness and was left with a disfigured and dull image far removed from Him. He cannot help himself to regain his former dignity. Only grace with all its ramifications can transform him and restore him to his original state. Through Christ, sanctifying grace will create anew the supernatural likeness of God in the soul (recreatio); the infused virtues – the theological and cardinal virtues – will rectify and

straighten the stooped soul (*rectificatio*); the sacraments will cure the soul of its sicknesses and weaknesses (*sanatio*); the gifts of the Holy Spirit will facilitate the soul’s spiritual progress (*expeditio*); and finally, the beatitudes will lead the soul to the height of perfection (*perfectio*). All this is accomplished if grace meets with an active cooperation by a just life, one led in accordance with the precepts of God.

As by grace, man’s deadly wound is finally cured and original health restored, so the blindness of his mind, contracted by original sin, is illuminated by the revelation in Christ. The Book of Holy Scripture, or theology, in its three ramifications, gives back to man his true vision. Symbolical theology enables him to decipher the Book of Nature and to understand the various analogies of creatures; theology in the proper sense opens the treasures of knowledge; and mystical theology teaches the way to mystical union.

This is, as it were, the foundation of the spiritual edifice of man’s supernatural life. Within it and on it must be built up the mystical or the contemplative life of man. There is no separation between them. On the contrary, according to the Seraphic Doctor, the latter is, so to speak, the natural crowning of the former, and hence all men are called to the mystical life, although only a few actually reach it.

A description of the mystical life can follow either the three ways that lead up to mystical union and each way by means of three exercises, or it may follow out these exercises which in a certain sequence prepare the soul for mystical union on each way.\(^{14}\) We shall adopt here the method of following the three ways, since it will help us considerably to assign the *Itinerarium* its proper

\(^{14}\text{Cf. *Breviloquium*, V, 6 (V, 258-260).*}
place, although Saint Bonaventure chose the method of the three exercises in his precious work, *De Triplici Via*.

The mystical life consists in three ways and in three exercises. The ways are the purgative, the illuminative, and the perfective or unitive; the exercises are meditation, prayer, and contemplation. When emphasizing the activity of the soul on these three ways, the Seraphic Doctor prefers to speak of hierarchical acts, since they cause the soul to conform to the celestial hierarchy. All these ways or hierarchical acts lead to contemplation in the strict sense. Although they have an order, the purgative way being the first and the perfective way the highest, nevertheless, the soul, striving after the highest experience of the religious life here upon earth, always remains on these ways and always has to practice the hierarchical acts. The first leads to peace; the second, to truth; the third, to charity. Correspondingly, the soul makes use of its three powers or aspects, of the *stimulus conscientiae* (self-examination), the *radius intelligentiae* (the ray of intelligence), and the *igniculus sapientiae* (the spark of wisdom).

On the purgative way, the soul is mainly concerned with its own misery and pitiful condition because of original and personal sin. The purgative act is practiced in meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Purgative meditation has as its main object, self-examination; its main purpose is to bring to bitter consciousness the soul’s moral disorder and the grave danger which it entails, thus achieving a complete detachment from all sinful inclination. Purgative prayer transforms meditation into weeping and deploiring sin and into asking for mercy; its main affections are pain, shame, and fear. Purgative contemplation, finally, leads the soul from shame to fear, from fear to pain, then to imploring prayer, to rigor and severity, and finally to ardor which culminates in the desire for martyrdom, the
ultimate purification of love, and makes the soul rest and fall asleep in mystical peace under the shadow of Christ.

On the illuminative way, the soul is mainly concerned with a penetration into truth. The illuminative act is likewise practiced in meditation, in prayer (which is less clearly expressed by Saint Bonaventure), and in contemplation. Illuminative meditation turns the ray of intelligence to the multitude of sins forgiven by God’s mercy, broadens it then to show all the benefits of God, natural and supernatural, and finally turns it back to the Giver of all of them, who has still greater rewards awaiting the soul in heaven. Illuminative prayer, according to Saint Bonaventure, has, it seems, as its main task to ask for mercy and help in union with the Holy Spirit, groaning in us by an ardent desire, in union with Christ by trusting hope, and in union with the Saints by their intercession. Illuminative contemplation finally leads to the splendor of truth by imitating Christ, or to be more exact, by an impregnation of our mind with the passion of Christ, and that again in seven steps: first there is a humble submission of reason to a God who was crucified, followed by deep compassion, admiration, grateful devotion, the putting on the form of the suffering of Christ, and finally, the ardent embrace of the Cross, in which and through which the splendor of truth will dawn.

On the perfective or unitive way, the soul is mainly concerned with charity. It is the perfective act that is now practiced in meditation, in prayer, and in contemplation. In meditation the spark of wisdom must be kept aloof from all attachment to creatures, must be enkindled by turning to the love of the Bridegroom, and must be elevated beyond the senses, the imagination, and the understanding into a blaze of desire for the Bridegroom who is absolutely desirable. In perfective prayer the soul is prostrated in adoration and deep reverence, in benevolence and complacence, becoming one with God in the fire of
love. Here Saint Bonaventure adds the six degrees of the love of God. In perfective contemplation the soul again reaches the sweetness of love in seven degrees: vigilance for the coming of the Bridegroom is first; then confidence in him; third, a deep longing for him; fourth, a rising beyond oneself to the height of the Bridegroom; fifth, complacence that dwells on the comeliness of the Bridegroom; sixth, joy in the abundance of the Bridegroom; seventh, a union of the soul with the Bridegroom in the sweetness of love.

These are the ways and the three main exercises of the soul which has followed the call to mystical union, as explained by the Seraphic Doctor in De Triplici Via. But when we open the Itinerarium, we see immediately that the scheme of this mystical tract is quite different. Neither the three ways nor the three main exercises are clearly distinguished. Is the Itinerarium, if not in contradiction, nevertheless in opposition or at least indifferent to the mysticism of De Triplici Via? We know that Saint Bonaventure wrote the latter work after the Itinerarium; yet a change in his mystical doctrine is out of the question. In fact, it is not difficult to place the Itinerarium within the system of mysticism that we find developed in De Triplici Via. Where would be, then, the proper place of the Itinerarium?

It has been said that its proper place is in the perfective way, but we believe that it belongs rather to the illuminative way, reaching at the end the contemplation of the unitive way and merging with it. For throughout the six chapters of the Itinerarium we are concerned with six illuminationum suspensiones (uplifting illuminations), as the Prologue (n. 3) says. This is confirmed by the introduction to the first chapter, where the Seraphic Doctor, after having explained the division of the various illuminations, finally, in (n. 8) gives an unmistakable indication of the proper place that the Itinerarium occupies in his mystical
system. There he teaches that those who desire to ascend to the height of mysticism must first turn away from sin; given this, they must pray that grace may reform them, and lead a holy life that justice may purify them. This stage seems clearly to be of the purgative way. Thereafter, they must practice meditation that they may be illumined by knowledge. This stage seems to be of the illuminative way. Finally, they must devote themselves to contemplation that they may be perfected by wisdom. This stage certainly belongs to the perfective way. The six steps of the *Itinerarium*, as expressly stated by Saint Bonaventure, precede perfective or unitive contemplation, and follow upon prayer and a holy life:

“Thus we must first of all pray; next, we must live holy; then we must gaze at the spectacles of truth, and by gazing at them, ascend step by step, until we reach the mountain height, ‘where the God of gods is seen on Sion.’”

On the illuminative way, the speculations of the *Itinerarium* belong partly to meditation, partly and mainly to contemplation. They belong partly to meditation, for they concern the benefits of God in nature and supernature, yet they belong mainly to contemplation, because illuminative contemplation is centered on the Passion of Christ, which is reached in the *Itinerarium* at this point. Hence we could justly say that the *Itinerarium* is but a different method of contemplation in the illuminative way. In the *De Triplici Via* the Seraphic Doctor has described various methods for perfective contemplation. He has presented only one method for illuminative contemplation, which is

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15 *Itinerarium*. I, 8.

16 There is also the correspondence between contemplation and the angelic hierarchies: the Thrones, corresponding to the purgative way (*sopor pacis*); the Cherubim, corresponding to the illuminative way (*splendor veritatis*); and the Seraphim, corresponding to the perfective or unitive way (*dulcor caritatis*). Cf. *De Triplici Via*, III, 1 (VIII, 11-12). Cf. also *In Hexaëmeron*, XXII, 21-23 (V, 440-441).