

The Journey-Symbols in St. Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*

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W e humans feel the need to search for God—or for a “god”—because we yearn for someone or something to serve as a model and a reason for living. A personal commitment to such an ideal and such a way of life demands the orientation of our whole being to our God—or our “god”—a commitment which we express in worship, customs and usages.

Seeing life as a journey is one of humanity's archetypal symbols, and it is found in all religions and cultures. In the Christian religion, the Bible and the Fathers use many analogous terms to describe the search for God by the individual believer and by the group. This search, this journey, may be seen as “a way,” “an ascent,” “an exodus,” “a transition,” “a pilgrimage,” etc.¹ We intend to study the journey theme in Bonaventure in the context of universal and cultural (i. e. Christian) symbolism. However, we shall confine ourselves here to just one of his smaller works, his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* (*The Soul's Journey into God*), not only because of its significant title, but also because of the evocative language and the deep symbolism which the author uses.² This

¹On the symbolism of a journey in religions and cultures, see J. Chevalier-A. Gheerbrant, “Voyage,” *Dictionnaire des symboles* (Paris 1982) 1027-1029. G. Durand, *Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire* (Grenoble 1960) 26-269. C. -A. Bernard, *Teologia simbolica* (Rome 1984) 42-44, 212-219.

²Cf. M. -D. Chenu, *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle* (Paris 1969) 56, note 1: “Bonaventure obviously employs different literary ‘forms,’ especially symbolism and classical typology. His skill in this respect is one of his most notable gifts, as we can see especially in the *Itinerarium*, where he builds up an elaborate structure, using scriptural symbolism and images taken from nature, with

short work is perhaps the best known of the Seraphic Doctor's writings, and it still holds the interest of its readers.

I. The Symbolic Way

Etienne Gilson once held that Bonaventure was a philosopher rather than a theologian, that his whole thought was a metaphysic of Franciscan mysticism and that the *Itinerarium* was the most complete synthesis of that metaphysic. But with a humility worthy of his intellectual integrity, Gilson later acknowledged that he had been mistaken in this. Since then, the controversy about the existence of a specifically Bonaventuran philosophy has ended, and a clearer understanding of the Seraphic Doctor's actual teaching has been reached. To assess the *Itinerarium* properly, we must appreciate its original historical significance and keep in mind the author's purpose in writing it.³ We know the place, date and circumstances of its composition. The Prologue provides this information in detail and also tells us why Bonaventure wrote the book. He wished to leave a testament to his ardent desire to find "peace of soul" in contemplation. He set out to describe the path, or rather, the paths, of Christian wisdom and strove to show his readers how the soul can raise itself to God, can prepare itself for the mystical union.⁴ The *Itinerarium* was greeted as a manual on contemplation, written for the instruction of the friars. A friar of the 15th century, Bertram of Alen, set out to help the less learned brothers by commenting "in simple words and a plain style" on the Seraphic Doctor's book, which he, among others, regarded as being difficult and obscure even for doctors of theology. In the introduction to his commentary, Bertram wrote: "Bonaventure, the devout doctor, seventh General Minister after Blessed Francis, desired to teach his brothers how they could ascend to God by contemplation. To this end, he showed them seven paths by which they could easily attain their goal of divine knowledge, at least "dimly," while still on this earth."⁵

all the exuberance of an exemplarist philosophy and in a dialectic that is almost too rich in symbolism. [Translator's Note: The English version of the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* quoted here is *The Soul's Journey into God*, from E. Cousins: *Bonaventure*, Paulist Press, New York, 1978, pp. 53-116]

³Cf. C. Bérubé, "L'*Itinerarium* dans l'histoire de la pensée franciscaine," *Studi francescani*, Atti del "Symposium" sull'*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* di S. Bonaventura, 3-4 (1988) 273-276. G. Iammarrone, "Il posto e la funzione di Gesù Cristo nell'ascesa dell'uomo a Dio," *Idem* 280-283.

⁴*Itin*, Prol. 1-5, E. Cousins, *Bonaventure*, Paulist Press, N. Y., 1978, pp. 53-57.

⁵Prolegomena (vol. V, p. XXVI). Re "dimly," see 1 Cor 13:12—Trans.

The *Itinerarium*, therefore, is a spiritual, a mystical, book and not a philosophical treatise. Bonaventure's purpose was not to expound the philosophic proofs for the existence of God, although he sometimes does have recourse to philosophic arguments to explain his teaching. Instead, he wished to show us a path of contemplation which will lead us to God.

The symbols which Bonaventure used to illustrate his teaching on the soul's journey into God came from his own religious experience rather than from abstract thought. To our modern minds, some of these symbols seem strange, and we shall be able to understand them only if we take into account the medieval attitude to symbols and Bonaventure's own fondness for using symbols as teaching aids.

The symbols he chose express his spontaneous perception and come from the heart rather than from a discursive reasoning process. He held that theology has a threefold approach—symbolic, speculative and mystical. The symbolic approach uses the evidence of our senses; the speculative applies the mind; and the mystical raises us to rapture and ecstasy of soul.⁶ Symbolic theology and speculative theology both use the affirmative or cataphatic method, whereas mystical theology adopts the negative or apophatic approach. Bonaventure used all three theological methods in the *Itinerarium*, at least in the first six chapters of the book. From chapter 7 on, he borrowed the familiar negative method of Pseudo-Dionysius and the Victorine school but without abandoning the language of symbolism, which runs all through the work.⁷

Bonaventure, then, uses symbolic and affective imagery to describe the soul's journey into God.

II. Models of the Journey

The aim of theology is to make us better and lead us to love God. It is an "affective" science (*habitus affectivus*), that is, it is both inspiring and practical. Bonaventure wrote: "No one grasps this except him who receives (cf. Rev

⁶*Itin.* 1:7. On the symbolic mentality of the Middle Ages, see M. D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris 1976). *Idem*, "Théologie symbolique et exégèse scolastique aux XIIIe-XIIIe siècles," *Mélanges Gellynck*, II (Louvain 1951) 509-526.

⁷Cf. J. Bougerol, "Saint Bonaventure et le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Etudes franciscaines XVIII* (Supplément annuel 1968) 115-116. Bonaventure himself tells us that he had recourse to Dionysius's treatise, *Mystica theologia*, to introduce his readers to the raptures of ecstasy: cf. *Itin.* 1:1. For a general introduction to Bonaventure's symbolism, see L. Piazza, *Mediazione simbolica in S. Bonaventura* (Vicenza 1978); C. B. Del Zotto, *La theologia dell'immagine in S. Bonaventura* (Vicenza 1977); C. Bérubé, "Symbolisme, image et coincidence des contraires chez saint Bonaventure," *Collectanea Franciscana* 50 (1980) 235-251.

2:17), since it is more a matter of affective experience than rational consideration.⁸ We become better, not by reasoning alone, but rather by the movement of the will urging us to act. The will does not move by itself; it needs an example: "Affectivity is moved by examples rather than by arguments, by promises rather than by reasoning, by devotions rather than by definitions."⁹ In our journey towards the one goal of our life, we need enlightenment, guides and models. Bonaventure presents us with three examples—the exodus of the people of Israel through the desert, Francis's ascent of Mount La Verna and Christ's passing from this world to His Father. These journeys inspire the believer as he travels along his own road. They transform him by drawing him onwards, spurring him on to attain his ideal, giving him so vivid a hope that he can see, here and now, the future which he is striving to attain.

a) *Francis and Mount La Verna*

Much has been written about Bonaventure's Franciscanism. Some authors stress those features which separate Francis from Bonaventure, whom they even regard as the second founder of the Order after the Poverello. Others emphasize the things that unite the two Saints and see Bonaventure as the faithful imitator of his master. However, while no one can deny Francis's influence on Bonaventure, this influence was not the one and only source of his thought. Many other factors in the Seraphic Doctor's life moulded and in some ways reinforced the spirituality which he had learned from Francis's example. Moreover, what Bonaventure owed to his master was a whole way of being and thinking, rather than any specific ideas. In the prologue to his Major Legend, he describes Francis as "an imitator of angelic purity" (*imitator puritatis angelicae*), a perfect model for all those disciples of Christ who wish to conform themselves totally to their Divine Master.¹⁰ For Bonaventure and for the first generation of friars, Francis was the symbol of Gospel perfection, the "image" of Christ crucified. Their father's mystical experience on Mount La Verna, not only aroused in them the desire to imitate Christ in everything, but became the perfect example of every elevation of the soul to God. They saw the stigmata as a sign and symbol of Francis's ardent desire to conform himself totally in spirit and body to his Master.

⁸*Itin.* 4:3: "Nemo capit nisi accipit, quia magis est in experientia affectuali quam in consideratione rationalis." Cf. *I Sent* Proemium q. 3 (I 13).

⁹*Breviloquium*, Prol. 1.

¹⁰LM Prol.

Beginning with the Prologue, the *Itinerarium* often holds Francis up as the perfect example of the pilgrim in search of the Eternal God. Like Francis, we must ascend the high mountain and remain there. Bonaventure writes:

Following the example of our most blessed father, Francis, I was seeking this peace with panting spirit... It happened that about the time of the thirty-third anniversary of the Saint's death, under divine impulse, I withdrew to Mount La Verna, seeking a place of quiet and desiring to find there peace of spirit.¹¹

Also in the Prologue (1; 3), Bonaventure compares this peace of spirit to "the peace of Jerusalem" and that of Sion, where God took up His abode. The parallel between Mount La Verna and the city of Jerusalem on the one hand, and between La Verna and Mount Sion on the other, is fairly obvious, but the biblical symbolism is complex and elaborate.

The ascent of La Verna evokes going up to the city of the earthly Jerusalem, the Center of Israel's worship. In its turn, the earthly city of Jerusalem summons up the vision of the heavenly city, where God manifests Himself and where we can contemplate Him in His glory. Those who are searching for God and "sigh(ing) for ecstatic peace, like a citizen of that Jerusalem..." must take the same route that the Poverello of Assisi travelled and must set out for that meeting-place, that place of intimacy and peace, where God speaks and, in the case of La Verna, where Christ speaks also. The ascent is twofold, physical and spiritual, the physical climb symbolizing the spiritual ascent and, at the same time, sustaining it.¹² In the same way, the heights of La Verna evoke, first, Sion, the holy mountain of the Bible (cf. Is 2:2-3; Mic 4:1-2; Ps 48:3), and then the gradual ascent of the contemplative soul to the summit of divine knowledge, to "the heights of the mountain where the God of gods is seen in Sion" (Ps 83:8).¹³

The Quaracchi editors observe that, in the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure drew his basic inspiration from Francis's contemplative journey, rising from God's creatures to God Himself, from the beauties of this world to Absolute Beauty. The Seraphic Doctor simply expressed in his teaching what Francis had lived intuitively and, with his wide knowledge of philosophy and theology, "transformed St. Francis's journey or ascent."¹⁴

¹¹*Itin.* Prol. 2.

¹²*Itin.* Prol. 1; cf. 4:3.

¹³*Itin.* 1:8; cf. 7:3.

¹⁴*Opera theologica selecta*, Preface (Quaracchi 1964) 3*-4*. The images and symbols which Bonaventure used in his *Itinerarium* and *Collationes in Hexaemeron* came from different sources—St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and the school of St. Victor. But he was inspired

b) *The People of Israel and their Exodus*

The subtitle of the *Itinerarium* is significant: "Here begins the reflection of the poor man in the desert," alluding as it does to the Israelites long march through the desert to the Promised Land. In biblical symbolism, the Israelites are also a figure of the Church, the people of the New Covenant, travelling towards their heavenly homeland. The symbol of the Exodus evokes two images: the desert and the passage through it.

Like every symbol, the desert can represent many things. M. Girard remarks:

From the negative point of view, the psychological aspect of the desert can suggest the idea of a trial, of solitude and, indeed, of the futility of human desires; or, on the religious plane, it can signify the dwelling-place of hostile forces. But from the positive angle, it can be seen as an image that carries with it many possibilities of life. Both views are found in the Bible.¹⁵

The same ambivalence exists in the *Itinerarium*.

The desert is a place of purification. Those who are searching for God must divest themselves of everything and, in poverty, rely, not on their own strength, but on the help of God, who assists those who ask Him with humble hearts and "sigh for (His help) in this valley of tears." For the poor man, then, prayer is "the mother and source" of the ability to rise above self.¹⁶

Death is the supreme trial. The pilgrim must enter the shadows, die to his own preoccupations, concupiscence and sensory imagination, for, as God said to Moses on the Mount and to every soul that wishes to raise itself up to Him: "Man cannot see me and live" (Ex 33:20).¹⁷ The one desire that the poor man can allow himself is the desire for the Beloved, who shows Himself only to the purified soul.

Going into the desert also means having the opportunity to leave one's problems behind, to be born again, to prepare oneself for a mission and even to meet God in ineffable intimacy. Paradoxically, the arid desert is seen as the source of spiritual fruitfulness. Holy Scripture abounds in texts which mention the desert, the wilderness, as a place of hope.¹⁸ Patristic tradition readily

principally by the spirituality of St. Francis, for whom creatures were the "ladder" and the "mirror" of God. Compare, for example, *Itin.* 2:11; 12:14; LM 9:1 and 2Cel 165. Bonaventure put into words what Francis expressed in action.

¹⁵M. Girard, *Les symboles de la Bible* (Montreal-Paris 1991) 741-732.

¹⁶*Itin.* 1:1.

¹⁷*Itin.* 7:6.

¹⁸Cf. M. Girard, *Op. cit.*, 734-736; cf. J. Chevalier-A. Gheerbrant, "Desert," *Dictionnaire des*

developed this positive image of the wilderness as a place of fascination rather than of menace.¹⁹ Those who, oblivious of the outside world, search in the desert for the Supreme Good, will experience the gift of love and, alone with Christ, will taste the hidden manna.²⁰

The symbol of the Exodus also contains the idea of a passage, a transition, and is easily applied to spiritual progress. We are ever aware of the precariousness of time and space, aware that we are always passing from one situation to another until we reach God, the final aim and end of every Christian's journey. Thus "we shall be true Hebrews passing over from Egypt to the land promised to their Fathers (Ex 13:3ff)."²¹ Bonaventure also compares the three stages in raising the soul to God, namely, meditation on the material world, the soul's reflection on itself, and the contemplation of the transcendent God—he compares these three stages to the march of three days into the wilderness which the people of Israel had to make to offer sacrifice to God (Ex 3:18). He points out that we can experience intensely this triple illumination, which "corresponds...to the threefold intensity of light during a single day. The first is like evening, the second like morning, the third like noon."²² The more we advance, the closer we come to the dazzling light of noon; and the more we are enlightened, the freer we become. The darkness of the desert will gradually lead to a land bathed in endless light. Hence passing and transition mean liberation and elevation. Freed from every obstacle to union with God, we shall enter freely into the free city of Jerusalem, as the Apostle says: "The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother" (Gal 4:26).²³

c) *Christ's Passing to the Father*

The image of Christ's passing to the Father completes the basic elements in the symbolism of the journey and, to some extent, confirms everything which has been said about Francis and the people of Israel. Bonaventure often has

symboles, 350-351.

¹⁹For example, Origen regarded "going into the desert" as entering the place of peace where one prepares oneself to meet one's God: "... To go out to the hermitage, to come to the place that is free from the troubles and vicissitudes of the world, to come to the peace of silence," as he wrote in his homily *III In Exodum* (PG 12, 138). See also "Exodus," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, IV, 2, 1957-1995; "Fuite du monde," *Idem*, V, 1575-1605; C. -A. Bernard, *Teologia simbolica*, 178-180.

²⁰*Itin.* 7:2

²¹*Itin.* 1:9.

²²*Itin.* 1:3. In *Itin.* 4:3, Bonaventure says that "the soul becomes like the dawn, the moon and the sun (Song 6:10), according to the progressive steps of enlightenment that lift up the soul."

²³*Itin.* 4:3.

recourse to the symbolism of Christ the Pilgrim and of Christ "who passes from this world to His Father" to illustrate, like Francis, the idea of Gospel poverty and the itinerant nature of the friars' life. In his *Major Legend* (7:9), Bonaventure relates an incident which occurred at Easter, the day of our Lord's passing from this earth:

Once on an Easter Sunday, (Francis) was staying at a hermitage that was so far from any houses that he could not conveniently go begging. And so in remembrance of him who appeared that very day in the guise of a pilgrim to his disciples on the road to Emmaus, Francis then begged alms from the friars themselves, like a pilgrim and beggar. When he had received it humbly, he informed them with holy eloquence that they should pass through the desert of the world like pilgrims and strangers (1 Pet 2:11) and, like true Hebrews, continually celebrate in poverty of spirit the Lord's Pasch, that is, his passing over from this world to the Father (John 13:1).²⁴

Christ's exodus, prefigured by that of the people of Israel, is the symbolic basis of the spiritual exodus of every Christian who, like Christ and with Him, must go out across the desert of this world to reach the Father. "Whoever... beholds (Christ) hanging on the cross..., with faith, hope and love, devotion, admiration, exultation, appreciation, praise and joy..., such a one makes the Pasch, that is, the passover with (Him)." With Christ, "he passes over the Red Sea, going from Egypt into the desert..., and with Christ he rests in the tomb as if dead to the outer world, but experiencing, as far as possible in this wayfarer's state," the happiness of Paradise.²⁵ This restriction, "as far as is possible...", serves to emphasize that, in our earthly life, no ecstasy can compare with the face-to-face meeting with God in the next life. Here Bonaventure's analogies inevitably fall short of the desired reality.

Christ is present, not only at the end of the soul's journey, but accompanies us throughout our whole pilgrimage. In the *Breviloquium*, Christ is both the wayfarer and the welcomer (*viator et comprehensor*), who in Himself unites heaven and earth while remaining in union with His Father. In the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure does not use the term *viator* ("wayfarer"), which, however, often appears in scholastic theology but prefers the term *via* ("way"), which seems closer to the Bible (cf. Jn 14:6). The "way" by which we must pass to ascend towards the contemplation of God is found in Christ, in Christ cruci-

²⁴LM 7:9. Cf. RegNB 6; see also A. Ménard, "Spiritualité du transitus," *S. Bonaventura*, 174-1974 (Grottaferrata 1974) 614-622; A. Nguyen Van Si, *Théologie de l'imitation du Christ chez saint Bonaventure* (Rome 1991) 112-112.

²⁵*Itin.* 7:2; cf. 7:6; 1:9.

fied. By His passing to the Father, Christ becomes "the way and the door, the ladder and the vehicle" (*via et ostium, scala et vehiculum*) that lead us towards the Father. He is the Way, the only Way, in which all levels and degrees of Christian life must converge. And Bonaventure concludes: "There is no other path (*via*) but through the burning love of the Crucified."²⁶

Other minor sources add further to these basic elements of the symbol of the journey—for instance, the symbolic medieval mentality that saw life as a pilgrimage²⁷ and the very marked symbolism of Augustinian and Dionysian derivation. We shall speak later about Pseudo-Dionysius's theory of hierarchies.

III. Terminology and Symbols

The word *itinerarium* ("itinerary") occurs only in the title of the book and not in the text itself, and Bonaventure uses the term *iter* ("journey") just twice, at the beginning and end of his work.

In the Prologue, he sees the six-winged seraph as the symbol of the six elevations or illuminations which, like so many steps or paths (*itineribus*), lead the soul up to the possession of ecstatic peace. In chapter 7, he quotes Pseudo-Dionysius's description of the total purification of the soul and its joy when it has resolutely set out on the way of mystical contemplation: "...concerning mystical visions, with your journey more firmly determined" (*circa mysticas visiones corroborato itinere*). There is a long road to be travelled, and strenuous efforts will be required to reach the end. The word *itinerarium* comes from *iter* and denotes the description of a journey.²⁸ Bonaventure's purpose is to describe the soul's journey to God, and he uses many other terms to convey the idea of that journey, such as *vehiculum*, "vehicle" (once); *via*, "way" (11 times, used either of Christ or man); *transitus*, "transition" (6 times) and especially the verb *transire*, "to cross or to cross over" (17 times); *ascensio*, "ascent" (6 times) and particularly the verb *ascendere*, "to ascend" (12 times); *scala*, "ladder" or "stairway" (6 times); *gradatim*, "gradually" (4 times) and especially the noun *gradus*, "step" (28) times; *porta*, "door" (8 times) and the associated verbs, such as *intrare* "to enter" (26 times) or *introire*, "to go into"

²⁶*Itin.*, Prolog. 2,3; 7:1. On Christ, *viator*, see *Breviloq.* Prolog. See also G. B. Ladner, *Homo viator: Images and Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Rome 1983) 937-974.

²⁷Cf. M. -M. Davy, *Il simbolismo medievale* (Rome 1988) 39-40.

²⁸Cf. Forcellini, *Lexium Totius Latinitatis* (Padua 1940). St. Ambrose also used the word *itinerarium* but in the sense of "the order of march given to a soldier" (cf. *Expositio in Ps 116, sermo 5, 2*; PL 15, 1317).

(5 times) and *egredi*, "to leave, go out of" (twice), etc.²⁹ These various expressions shed light on the different aspects of the journey—passing or changing, ascending, gradual progress, etc.—and they are often accompanied by appropriate symbols. That is why we can speak of a variety of symbols for the journey, symbols that are as diverse as the terminology.

These symbols can be divided into two groups: symbols of ascent and symbols of integration.

a) *Symbols of Ascent*

The symbols for ascent depict the soul's climbing towards God the Transcendent. They imply that God or Christ speaks to the soul, that is, they describe the movement of God towards the soul, for it is God who brings the soul closer to Him. In fact, the soul's ascent (*ascensio*) is possible only because of God's coming down (*descensio*) to it as it calls out to Him. Bonaventure opens the *Itinerarium* by begging God the Father to shed His light upon us in order to "enlighten the eyes of our soul and to guide our feet in the way of that peace which surpasses all understanding."³⁰

The first image that suggests this ascent to peace is that of the *mountain*. The mountain appears as a symbol in every religion, it is often used in the Bible and Christian tradition and it has many meanings. It can represent the unapproachable dwelling-place of transcendent Powers, so that anyone who dared to set foot on the summit would be guilty of sacrilegious disrespect. However, most often, approach to the sacred mountain is not forbidden, since the heights are seen as the Center of the world, the place where humanity can return to the First Principle and gain access to the divinity who lives and manifests himself there.³¹

And this the way Bonaventure usually refers to the image in his work. We have already mentioned Mount La Verna as a symbol of the elevation of the soul, a place of refuge and, at the same time, the place where God speaks. It is a sacred mountain and calls to mind Mount Sion, where God dwells, as well as those mysterious lofty mountains of which the psalmist sings: "You enlighten wonderfully from the eternal hills." It also evokes Mount Tabor, where Christ, "after six days," was transfigured before His three Apostles. The six days

²⁹These references can be found in J. Hamesse, *Thesaurus Bonaventurianus*, I (CETEDOC, Louvain 1972).

³⁰*Itin.* Prol. 1.

³¹Cf. M. Girard, *Les symboles de la Bible*, 797-798.

which St. Matthew mentioned symbolize the six stages of the journey.³² The mountain summit represents the heights of contemplation, where the soul is intimately united with God. The heights and the corresponding depths are images of the heights of contemplation and the depths of the mystery of God into which the soul is plunged in unfathomable darkness: "darkness, not clarity, not light but the fire that totally inflames."³³

Bonaventure meditated upon the seraph, the angel with six wings which had appeared to Francis "in the form of the Crucified. While reflecting on this, I saw at once that this vision represented our father's rapture in contemplation and the road by which this rapture is reached."³⁴ We have here a twofold symbol, of *angels* and of *wings*, both of which belong to the symbolism of the soul's ascent to God.

Essentially, the *wings* imply flight, detachment from the earth, elevation. They bring to mind the upward flight of the soul, freedom of movement, going beyond earthly limitations, breaking out of the confinement of the human condition, escaping for a time from the downward pull of "the world."³⁵ The six wings of the seraph suggest to Bonaventure the six stages of elevation and, according to a very strained symbolism, the very structure of the first six chapters of the *Itinerarium*. Just as "the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high" (Job 39:27), so, too, do earthly pilgrims begin their journey down on the plain and thence mount up gradually towards that which is purer and more beautiful until they reach "the Being who is at once unchangeable, eternal and ever-present."³⁶

The *angels* are also part of this dynamic symbolism of ascent. Bonaventure was not concerned here with the problem of the reality of their existence, which he took for granted. What did interest him was to show how the image of angels brings us face to face with the mystery of God and leads us to visualize ways of reaching Him. The angels are dealt with under their strictly symbolic aspect. Following Pseudo-Dionysius, Bonaventure observes that the

³²*Itin.* Prol. 2; 1:5; 1:8; 3:7; 7:3. The biblical texts to which Bonaventure refers are Ps 75:2f.; Mt 17:1.

³³*Itin.* 7:6; cf. *Breviloq.* p. 5, c. 6. When the soul reaches the last step on Jacob's ladder, "it is swept up above itself into darkness and transcendence by a kind of learned ignorance."

³⁴*Itin.* Prol. 2.

³⁵Cf. M. Eliade, *Mythes, rêves et mystères* (Paris 1957) 126-154; G. Bachelard, *L'air et les songes* (Paris 1943) 27-185.

³⁶Bonaventure quotes Job 39:27 in *Hexaem* 3:30, comparing ecstatic contemplation with the eagle's flight.

soul "has been made hierarchical," that is, the "purified, illumined and perfected" soul has become analogous to the angelic hierarchies in its inner ascents:

Our soul is also marked with nine levels when within it the following are arranged in orderly fashion: announcing, declaring, leading, ordering, strengthening, commanding, receiving, revealing, and anointing. These correspond level by level to the nine choirs of angels. In the human soul the first three of these levels pertain to human nature; the next three, to effort and the last three, to grace.³⁷

Among the hosts of angels in heaven to whom Bonaventure refers, the seraphim and cherubim occupy a special place. The seraphim are symbols of the ardent love with which the soul clings to God, who is love. Christ crucified, Love Incarnate, took the form of a winged seraph on Mount La Verna, while the cherubim signify the total surrender of the contemplative's mind when confronted with the mystery of God. Quoting St. Bernard, Bonaventure declares: "God loves in the Seraphim as charity (and) knows in the Cherubim as truth."³⁸ The seraphim and the cherubim are symbols of the soul's ascent towards ecstasy. If we consider this ascent from the point of view of love, we see that the image of the six-winged seraph is the more apt, whereas if we look at the journey under the aspect of enlightenment of the mind, the six-winged seraph becomes, for Bonaventure, a six-winged cherub, both combining to form a symbol of the six stages of the soul's intellectual progress:

They are also like the six wings of the cherub by which the mind of the true contemplative can be borne aloft, filled with the illumination of heavenly wisdom.³⁹

When we contemplate those mysterious cherubim who "stand over the ark, overshadowing the Mercy Seat" with their wings, "the eye of the intelligence is raised to look upon" the Essence and Persons of "the most blessed Trinity."⁴⁰ The symbolism of the wings can be interpreted to mean that they at once conceal and reveal the mystery of God.

In addition to the mountain, the angels and the wings, Bonaventure uses the ladder as a symbol to explain the idea of communication between heaven and earth. The ladder is seen as a means by which earth and heaven can be

³⁷ *Itin.* 4:4; cf. Dionysius, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* 4:10.

³⁸ *Itin.* 4:4; St. Bernard, *De consideratione*, V, 5:12 (PL 182, 795).

³⁹ *Itin.* 7:1; cf. *Prol.* 2; 1:5; 7:3.

⁴⁰ *Itin.* 5:1, etc.; 6:1.

joined together; it is a symbol of ascent, of rising higher. It is also an image of the connection between the various upper levels to which the soul can aspire to ascend. In this regard, Bonaventure recalls Jacob's ladder, upon which the angels of God ascended and descended. This mystical ladder, the steps of which mark the stages of spiritual progress, is found also in Buddhism and in the ancient Egyptian *Book of the Dead* and is common to many religions and myths, but Bonaventure uses it as a symbol which is firmly based on the Bible and the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. With it, he depicts the soul's journey as a gradual ascent in stages. The steps of the ladder between heaven and earth are constantly employed as symbols in the Fathers and the medieval mystical authors, for the soul always climbs that ladder step by step.⁴¹

In the *Itinerarium*, the ladder is, first, the entire universe arranged in an order or hierarchy that can lead us up to its Creator. When we contemplate God's creatures in their variety of forms and diversity of function, we shall gradually ascend as on a ladder to the Creator Himself. We shall discover the ineffable presence of God in ourselves and in every other creature.

In our present state as pilgrims or wayfarers (*viatores*), this upward movement towards God by contemplating the universe is possible only through Christ, who, by His Incarnation and death, has become "a ladder, restoring the first ladder that had been broken in Adam."⁴²

In his analysis of *images* and *symbols*, Mircea Eliade observes that the symbolism of the ladder includes the ideas of sanctification, death and love of freedom. He believes that each of these steps represents an ontological break since, through holiness, death and love, we ascend to a higher level, to a reality that had hitherto been unattainable for us.⁴³ So it is that the image of the ladder is fittingly applied to Christ, who, through His cross, has freed us by making us pass through death to life. In fact, in the Middle Ages, the cross was often called "the divine ladder" (*scala divina*) or "the sinners' ladder" (*scala peccatorum*).⁴⁴ Christ is not just a stage on this new ladder: He is the ladder by which all must ascend to His Father.

Bonaventure uses the images suggested by the double purpose of the ladder, for ascending and descending. The angels' ascent and descent on Jacob's ladder signify the two types of contemplation. The first six chapters of

⁴¹ Cf. L. Benoist, *Signes, symboles et mythes* (Paris 1975), 55; J. Chevalier-A. Gheerbrant, "Echelle," *Dictionnaire des symboles*, 383-387.

⁴² *Itin.* 4:2; cf. 7:1. Regarding the ladder of the universe, see 1:2, etc. ;1:3.

⁴³ Cf. M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols* translated by Philip Mairet, (NY: Sheed and Ward) 1961.

⁴⁴ Cf. M. M. Davy, *Il simbolismo medievale*, 227.

the *Itinerarium* are arranged in pairs—1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6. Bonaventure links the chapters together in an antithesis expressed by the Latin words *per* (“through”) and *in* (“in”). We rise to God by successive stages *through* His “vestiges” (chap. 1) and *in* those vestiges (chap. 2), *through* His image in the soul (chap. 3) and *in* that image (chap. 4), *through* the concept of Being (chap. 5) and *in* the idea of the Good (chap. 6). First, we ascend and then we descend, as did the angels on Jacob’s ladder.

Henry Duméry observes:

The motion *per* (‘through’) is an ascent; it goes from the sign to what is signified. The motion *in* is a descent; it returns from what is signified to the sign. The first motion goes from the ‘vestige’ and the image of God to discover Him. The second, taking advantage of this discovery, considers how God expresses Himself in His ‘vestige’ or image. In the one case, the soul meditates on its ascent to God; in the other, it meditates on God’s presence in His expressions of Himself. The two motions complete each other: the first precedes the second in time since we must first ascend before we can descend; but logically the second conditions the first because God must be present before we can discover Him.⁴⁵

In addition, Bonaventure’s ladder has three principal stages. Just as Christ, “who is our ladder” (*qui est nostra scala*), possesses a threefold substance, corporal, spiritual and divine, so our journey towards conformity with God has three degrees or movements: first, by way of the unconscious symbolism in material things, which is His vestige, i.e. the universe “outside us” (*extra nos*); second, by way of the expressive resemblance to God found in spiritual beings, which is His image in our souls, i. e. the world “within us” (*intra nos*); and third, by way of an unmerited similarity which is our resemblance to God, i.e. the soul enlightened by grace beyond or above us (*supra nos*). Each basic stage then unfolds according to the two types of contemplation, “through” and “in,” about which we have just spoken. In the last analysis, we have a ladder with six stages arranged in three groups.⁴⁶ The ladder with its six stages combines with the six-winged angels to symbolize “the six steps of illumination that begin from creatures and lead up to God,” as we are told in the Prologue.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Saint Bonaventure, *Itinéraire de l'esprit vers Dieu*, Introduction, translation and notes by H. Duméry (Paris 1981) 31, note 2.

⁴⁶ *Itin.* 1:2f.

⁴⁷ *Itin.* Prol. 3.

b) Symbols of Integration

Contrary to what Freud thought, the meaning of a symbol does not consist in a simple evocation of the past but must be sought instead in the expression of a spiritual connection. A symbol anticipates the purpose for which it is intended and expresses in some way the yearnings that inspire the soul in its spiritual quest. As Jung wrote:

A symbol is living only when, for the spectator, it is the supreme expression of what is presented but not yet recognized. It urges the unconscious to participate. It begets life and stimulates its development.⁴⁸

This tension of expectation is especially significant in the symbols of the soul's journey into God, a journey which is purposeful and not just an idle meandering. The soul does not go round in circles but moves in one direction, towards the future, towards the complete fulfilment of its being. We go towards God as our final end, for ours is a journey "into God" (*in Deum*). All those symbols which evoke this search for the synthesis and unity of being are *symbols of integration*. We shall comment only upon the two principal ones, the Center and the darkness.

The Center

When we go in search of God, we are seeking a meeting place which may be a tree, a temple, a mountain or a sacred stone, since all these are images of an encounter between heaven and earth. The *Center* must not be thought of as a static point, for

...it is the focal point from which movement starts—the movement of the one towards the many, the interior towards the exterior, the hidden towards the evident, the eternal towards the temporal—that is, all the processes of emanation and divergence. And the Center is also the place where all the processes of return and convergence come together, as in their beginning, in their search for unity.⁴⁹

We have already seen how the high mountain and the holy city fill the role of Center in the *Itinerarium*. There Mount La Verna, Mount Sion and the city of Jerusalem are the places where God and the soul meet. The spiritual journey is seen as an ascent towards these Centers of peace, truth and light, where the soul rediscovers itself.

The Center can also be the human heart. Following St. Augustine, Bonaventure exhorts the pilgrim to enter into himself, to descend into his

⁴⁸C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, translated by H. G. Baynes (NY: Harcourt, Brace) 1946.

⁴⁹J. Chevalier-A. Gheerbrant, "Center," *Dictionnaire des symboles*, 189.

heart in order to discover there the image of God. But in his present condition as a pilgrim, his heart is so "distracted with cares," so "clouded by images" and "allured away by concupiscence" that he cannot be recollected. He must first free himself from all external obstacles before entering into himself as into the heavenly city of Jerusalem, because, as Bonaventure writes: "No matter how enlightened one may be by the light of natural and acquired knowledge, he cannot enter into himself... unless Christ be his mediator." Hence, the search for God consists in a search for such a purified heart, the Center which "has been made hierarchical" and in which God dwells with all His angels.⁵⁰

But the Center is, above all, the First Principle, Absolute Reality, because the Center of Centers can only be God, since He unites everything in Himself. "He is totally within all things and totally outside them and thus is an intelligible sphere whose Center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."⁵¹

The image of the sphere reinforces the idea of totality expressed by the symbol of the Center. Physical objects, such as mountains, temples, etc., become Centers to the extent that they turn our minds to God, the First and unifying Principle. Bonaventure illustrates this idea of the Center by a series of connected symbols, such as the "fountain-spring," the "medium" and the cross.

Creatures are in an ontological relationship with God, that is, they come from Him (*egressus*); and by an ascending, "hierarchical" movement, they return one day to God, their Principle and Beginning (*regressus*). In this universal ascent, we occupy a privileged place. Enlightened pilgrims, "made fit for the quiet of contemplation," we set out "as to the fountain-source and object."⁵²

Our return to our own source is possible only through Christ, who became for us, on our earthly journey, the supreme meeting place with our God, who is the absolute, unifying Center, the "sevenfold medium" of which Bonaventure was to speak at length in the first part of his *Hexameron*.

⁵⁰ *Itin.* 4, especially 4:4. According to St. Augustine, the heart is the place for the interior life and the religious experience that defines a person's individuality: "My heart is where I am, and what I am" (*Confessions* X:3,4:PL 32,781). See also M. Meslin, *L'expérience humaine du divin* (Paris 1988) 222.

⁵¹ *Itin.* 5:8. Bonaventure is here quoting Alan of Lille, *Regulae theologicae*, reg. 7 (PL 210,627).

⁵² *Itin.* 1:7; 2:7. In God, there is a perfect reconciliation of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*): *Itin.* 6:3. Cf. Ewert H. Cousins, "St. Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites," in *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978) 1-28. On the *egressus* and *regressus* of creatures, see *Lexique Saint Bonaventure* (Paris 1969).

For if an image is an expressed likeness, when our mind contemplates in Christ the Son of God, who is the image of the invisible God by nature, our humanity is wonderfully exalted, so ineffably united, when at the same time it sees united the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the Center, *the Alpha and the Omega*, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature, that is, *the book written within and without*.⁵³

This reconciliation of opposites is shown uniquely in the Cross, the tree of life, which binds heaven and earth together. In general symbolism, the cross is the "symbol of the whole world:" it "synthesizes and acts as a point of reference."⁵⁴ On this matter, it is essential to read, in the mystical rather than in the literal sense, the words of St. John: "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). The Christian cross contains all the richness of the mystery of Redemption. Tradition, especially the traditional mystical authors, habitually uses the symbolism of the cross to describe the completion of the spiritual process. The cross is not only a means of reaching God; it represents Christ, who is the very object of the journey of salvation.

Whoever turns his face fully to the Mercy Seat and with faith, hope and love, devotion, admiration, exultation, appreciation, praise and joy beholds him hanging upon the cross, such a one makes the Pasch, that is, the passover..., experiencing as far as it is possible in this wayfarer's state, what was said on the cross to the thief who adhered to Christ; Today you shall be with me in paradise.⁵⁵

Perceiving the symbolism of the Cross seems to be both the means to obtain, and the effect of, inner unification. By grasping the significance of the Cross, we become reconciled with ourselves, with creation and with God, the Source and End of all things. We go beyond the limitations of time and space. Earth meets heaven, and we discover the inner Center for which we have been searching. In a total transformation, we become one with that Center.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Itin.* 6:7; cf. 6:5: cf. *Hexaem.* I, especially n. 11.

⁵⁴ G. de Champeaux-S. Sterckx, *Le monde des symboles* (Paris 1966) 31; J. Chevalier-A. Gheerbrant, "Croix," *Dictionnaire des symboles*.

⁵⁵ *Itin.* 7:2. It is interesting to note that Bonaventure sees in Christ's Ascension to heaven the deep meaning of our ascent to the Father. Christ is our Center, to which we ascend through the virtues. Cf. A. Nguyen Van Si, *La théologie de l'imitation du Christ d'après saint Bonaventure*. 152-153.

⁵⁶ Citing St. Paul's journey towards God, Bonaventure writes: "There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified, a love which so transformed Paul into Christ when he was carried up to the third heaven that he could say: With Christ I am nailed to the cross. I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20)" *Itin.* Prol. 3.

Darkness

The need for total union with God is also expressed by the symbols of depth. We must go down into the depths, we must descend into the darkness if we are to be re-born into the light. Our earthly journey ends when we enter "the Holy of Holies," where we contemplate God in silence beyond all words and concepts.

But darkness does not mean obscurity since "the greatest darkness is itself the enlightenment of our mind." In its ascent to the summit of the holy mountain as in its descent "into darkness," the soul re-integrates itself with the oneness of Him who goes beyond all being and all knowledge. The soul abandons itself and, in that abandonment, regains the fullness of its being in God.⁵⁷

The symbol has a transforming effect on the soul that accepts it. The soul passes from one level of the symbol to another, from the visible to the invisible, from the comprehensible to the incomprehensible. Time and space become sacred and real, more real than we thought they were. The soul that is seeking God experiences the mystery of meeting God Himself and not just a representation of Him.

This is what Francis of Assisi experienced. In his *Canticle of Brother Sun*, he describes his own journey into God by symbols of an extraordinary spiritual depth. The goal which the stigmatized Saint of La Verna reached was "an immense leap to the heights allied with a descent to the depths of the greatest humility."⁵⁸ This is also what Bonaventure endeavours to describe for us in his *Itinerarium* by using symbols of descent and integration.

IV. Stages and Forms of the Journey

Whether the soul's journey is an ascent to the heights or a descent into the depths, it always proceeds by stages, steps or levels, each stage being an aspect or form of the soul's spiritual development.

⁵⁷ *Itin.* 5:1; cf. 4:6 and all of chapter 7, especially 7:5f, where Bonaventure quotes at length from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, for whom "affirmations are tentative and negations true." In his *De triplici via*, Bonaventure says: "And then the vision of the truth is borne into the darkness of the mind, so that the mind is uplifted and penetrates more deeply, going beyond itself and everything created" (*De triplici via*, 3:13). The Lord "called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud" (*de medio caliginis: Itin.* 1:5; Ex 24:16). On the concept of darkness, see also I. Deug-Seu, "La mistica della caligo in S. Bonaventura da Bagnoreggio," *Studi francescani* 3-4 (1988) 339-352.

⁵⁸ E. Leclerc, *The Canticle of Creatures Symbols of Union*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press) 1970..

It is interesting to note that to express the gradual nature of the scale of beings and values, Bonaventure adopts a very varied numerical system in which groupings of three are the most frequent.

Contemplation has a twofold movement, *per* ("through"-ascent) and *in* (descent), as is suggested by the two cherubim seated at the sides of the propitiatory.⁵⁹ Bonaventure states that the ascent of the soul consists in its going "from the lowest to the highest, from the exterior to the interior, from the temporal to the eternal."⁶⁰

The journey is composed of three steps: "Our mind has three principal perceptual orientations. The first is towards exterior material objects.... The second... is within itself and into itself." The third is towards "the threefold substance in Christ," body, soul and divinity. The soul's three "modes of consideration" correspond to the three ways of the spiritual life or the soul's three "hierarchical" stages, namely, the purgative, illuminative and unitive ways.⁶¹

The three steps of the spiritual ascent are then subdivided into six smaller parts or modes of action, giving us a ladder with six rungs. The division of the journey into six steps is suggested by many symbols drawn from the Bible and perhaps assembled without closer examination. Having compared the six degrees of contemplation to the six days of creation, Bonaventure continues:

This is symbolized by the following: six steps led up to the throne of Solomon (1 Kings 10:19); the Seraphim which Isaiah saw had six wings (Is 6:20); after six days the Lord called Moses from the midst of the cloud (Ex 24:16); and after six days, as is said in Matthew, Christ led his disciples up a mountain and was transfigured before them (Mt 17:1f.).⁶²

Bonaventure adds ecstasy as a seventh step on the ladder of contemplation and writes about it in chapter 7 of his book. He does so because, on the seventh day, the day of rest, the soul reposes in God in that peace which passes our understanding and perception. To complete the circle, the Seraphic Doctor will speak later, in the third section of his *Hexaemeron*, about the eighth day, which, however, does not form part of the soul's journey, or, rather, which reduces the whole journey to a unity.⁶³

⁵⁹*Itin.* 5:1; 6:4.

⁶⁰*Itin.* 1:6; cf. 1:9.

⁶¹*Itin.* 1:3; 4:3f.; 5:1. Bonaventure deals particularly with these three stages of the soul's "hierarchization" in his *De triplici via*.

⁶²*Itin.* 1:5

⁶³*Hexaem.*, coll. 3:31: "The seventh day is release from the body: "Today you will be with me in

This numerical and scriptural symbolism must not be seen merely as a literary device. Each symbol that corresponds to a hidden reality is seen as an aspect of life. For example, the number "two" indicates the duality or polarity of the soul's spiritual advance, while the number "three" symbolizes the aspect of growth and the completion of the journey. The numerical gradation depicts the progressive, dynamic movement of the soul as it searches for God. The difference between Bonaventure and Pseudo-Dionysius is that the Seraphic Doctor's symbolism is realistic and ontological. The result is that the division into "hierarchies" which is so paramount in the Areopagite's teaching becomes a living reality in Bonaventure. The important element in Bonaventure is not the idea of hierarchical division itself but the contact with real beings, arranged in a real hierarchy that invites us to ascend to God. Each being, in its own fashion and its own place in the universe, shows us an aspect of the mystery of God. The symbolism of nature is not just a literary concept but is ontological since each creature, precisely because it is a creature, bears the imprint of its Creator. M. D. Chenu remarks: "Dionysius remains completely faithful to Neoplatonism, which is essentially a method for gaining access to intelligible reality and not an explanation of that which is perceived in that reality."⁶⁴

But that is not what Bonaventure teaches. For him, every symbol of God reveals and yet conceals Him at the same time. St. Augustine's theory of "sign" comes to the aid of Bonaventure's expressionist teaching,⁶⁵ and turns the methodological hierarchy of Dionysius into an ontological turning of all beings to God. Everyone and everything in the heavenly, earthly and ecclesiastical hierarchies are stages, steps, in that unique journey which leads us to the First Principle. They are not myths but realities endowed with a spiritual capacity to convey meaning. By their "sevenfold properties," creatures give "a sevenfold testimony to the divine power." The word "testimony" is entirely

Paradise' (Lk 23:43), a day which has no evening. And then follows the eighth day, which is not different from the preceding ones but is a repetition of the first day, when the soul takes up its body again" (V 348b). In the *Itinerarium*, the movement is linear, ascent or descent, whereas in the third part of the *Hexameron*, the movement is circular, with the point of departure meeting the point of arrival. The first day of creation and the last are the same: the soul regains its body.

⁶⁴M. D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris 1976) 131.

⁶⁵*Itin.* 2:12: "The creatures of the sense world signify the invisible attributes of God, partly because God is the origin, exemplar and end of every creature, and every effect is the sign of its cause, the exemplification of its exemplar and the path to the end, to which it leads: partly by their own proper representation, partly from prophetic prefiguration, partly from angelic operation, partly from additional institution."

apt here because the created universe speaks of God and bears witness to Him.⁶⁶ The symbol is not just an ordinary means or mechanical instrument for putting us into contact with the Transcendent God. Instead, it speaks to us of Him.

In Bonaventure, the soul's return to God has a wider meaning and greater dynamism than it does in Pseudo-Dionysius. "Dionysius's analogy fits the history of universal salvation as well as the personal history of the destiny of each member of the Church hierarchy."⁶⁷

Besides the ontological symbolism, the *Itinerarium* also has an existential symbolism. The symbol is not only conceived in its author's mind but perceived as an actual experience with all its resonance in the author's life. We allow ourselves to be transformed along with our symbols, and we follow the movement of these symbols. While our experience of God which the symbol expresses is always imperfect because we see the reality "as through signs to what is signified," this does not prevent that experience from being true.⁶⁸ Bonaventure did not write his *Itinerarium* in Paris but on the summit of Mount La Verna, where he had retired to meditate. He allowed himself to be led along the road to God by means of the contemplation of His vestiges and image to attain and rejoice in full knowledge of Him. The journey he presents to us is, above all, his own journey. In this personal context, the symbols he uses have a greater power and deeper resonance for him and for anyone who follows the same route than they do for the uncommitted reader. Indeed, from the very beginning of his book, Bonaventure warns the reader against undertaking the journey merely as an intellectual pursuit because study is not enough without prayer nor does knowledge suffice without love. The universe becomes a sign and symbol of God only for souls who have been prepared by

⁶⁶ *Itin.* 1:14.

⁶⁷ J. G. Bougerol, "Saint Bonaventure et le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite," *Etudes franciscaines* (Annual Supplement 1968) 122.

⁶⁸ *Itin.* 2:11. We can see the Augustinian inspiration in this teaching also: "Augustine's sign is conceived at the level of, and according to, the resources of the psychology of knowledge, as the instrument of a spiritual experience covering, not only the whole field of language, but also the different figurative modes of expression": (M. D. Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle*, 176). Cf. H. M. Féret, "Sacramentum, Res, dans la langue théologique de saint Augustin," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 22 (1940) 218-243. St. Augustine expounded the principles of his theory of signs in his *De doctrina christiana*.

grace, who are humble and pious and whose hearts are filled with the love of wisdom: "The mirror presented by the external world is of little or no value unless the mirror of our soul has been cleaned and polished."⁶⁹ We are searching for God but in fact it is God who is searching for us, because "no one possesses God who has not already been especially possessed by Him; no one can possess or be possessed by God who does not love Him incomparably above everything and who is not loved by Him as a wife is by her husband; no one is loved in that way who has not been adopted as a son for the eternal inheritance."⁷⁰

Our journey merges with God's, and the two become one, a unity that is especially experienced in the symbolic perception by which the soul reaches the Eternal through the temporal and particularly in its relationship with the God-Man, which is the perfect reconciliation of opposites, of the *viator et comprehensor*, the "wayfarer with the welcomer."

⁶⁹ *Itim.* Prol. 4; cf. Prol. 1; 7:5f.

⁷⁰ *Breviloq.* p. 5, c. 1.