

## Article

# The Bonaventurian Synthesis of the Human Being as “Imago et Similitudo Dei”: The Existential Realisation of a Person as a “Seeker of Truth” and a “Wayfarer Summoned by Love”

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## Abstract

This study explores the Bonaventurian synthesis of the human being as imago et similitudo Dei, highlighting its anthropological and existential implications. Against the backdrop of contemporary reductionist approaches that fragment the understanding of the human person, Bonaventure offers a holistic vision that integrates intellectual, affective, and volitional dimensions within a Christocentric and Trinitarian framework. Through a systematic analysis of Bonaventure’s primary texts—particularly the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* and the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*—and supported by critical scholarship, the article argues that human fulfillment transcends the limits of pure rationality and culminates in the unitive act of love with God. The study identifies two central principles of what Lázaro Pulido calls “Christian Socratism”: (1) human life as a journey to the Father’s house, and (2) the configuration of the soul, in wisdom and love, as a dwelling place of God. By situating the moral and spiritual life within the logic of divine attraction, Bonaventure overcomes both Aristotelian intellectualism and postmodern individualism. Ultimately, his thought presents happiness not as self-realization but as conformity with Christ crucified, revealing a path where suffering acquires meaning and the human vocation to love finds its ultimate horizon in the Trinity.



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## 1. Introduction: The Need to Expand the Notion of “Rational” to Achieve a Bonaventurian Definition of the “Human Person”

One of the fundamental questions of philosophy—perhaps the most important—has to do with human existence: the great conversation that spans all of history and all cultures about who we are and what constitutes our peculiar existence. It seems like a good starting point to try to address the question of the metaphysics of knowledge in the thought of Saint Bonaventure from an anthropological and existential perspective.

Currently, the formulation of the question and, consequently, the elucidation of the answer and its implications have largely been replaced by “life methods” that propose to facilitate the experience of personal fulfilment. Perhaps the most evident consequence of this postmodern superficiality is the phenomenon of self-help literature (and, in general, methodology), in which reflection on human nature and its ends is replaced by a biased view of human behaviour, based on reduced thinking premises and built around three commercial principles: basic, affordable, and appealing. This mindset has replaced “being” and “doing” with “having” and “appearing”.

Bonaventurian thought flourishes in this moral wasteland as a proposal that combines the Augustinian philosophical tradition (Neoplatonic and Christian) with a series of aspects that are particular to it: a unique perspective on the issue of the human likeness to God, the integration of the “search for truth” and “desire for love” into a “reduced” notion of wisdom, the exemplary and model-centred centrality of the “Logos” also in the relationships between the human being and the world, and the teleological-historical character of human life and redemption.

As a 13th-century Franciscan, the Seraphic Doctor does not fit into the modern division of theory and praxis: the experience of the human being can only be understood in an integrated manner. Moreover, as a follower of the Augustinian tradition, Bonaventure transcends the limits of what he considers the science of philosophy in the strict sense (the knowledge developed by the ancients, especially Plato) and proposes as the fundamental criterion of his “eudaimonia” the recognition and love of God, following the doctrine of the Doctor of Grace:

“Now it is enough to recall that Plato determined that the end of the good is to live according to virtue and that this can only happen to someone who has knowledge of God and imitates Him, and that for this reason there is no other cause of happiness. Therefore, he does not doubt that to philosophize is to love God, whose nature is incorporeal. Hence, it is concluded that the lover of wisdom (for that is the philosopher) will be happy when he begins to enjoy God.” (Augustine 1841, p. 233).

Augustine affirms that for Plato the highest good for a person is the virtuous life. However, this life cannot be attained without the knowledge of God and the effort to imitate Him. These two initial statements are problematic since it is not entirely clear what the virtuous life consists of in Plato, nor how the concept of “imitation” should be understood.

In the first case, to avoid delving into the controversy regarding Socrates’ strict moral intellectualism in the “young Plato” and his evolution towards an acceptance of a more moderate intellectualism in his maturity (when he divides the soul into three parts: rational, spirited, and appetitive), we will accept the position of the mature Plato, closer to that of his disciple Aristotle (Vigo 2013; Santa-María 2008).

In the second case, however, “imitation” seems to signify different things in Platonic and Augustinian thought. Nor does it seem necessary to dwell on this problem, which would require further in-depth analysis to find a satisfactory solution. Augustinian imitation was enriched by Johannine theology and the wisdom of the Church Fathers and, therefore, presupposed the universal mediation of Christ, as the face of the Father and model of redemption. Thus, Augustinian imitation involved two dimensions that exceeded the bounds of Platonic philosophy: the theological-Christian and the moral-soteriological. For the founder of the Academy, imitation was fundamentally a metaphysical (participative) link that made it possible to explain the unity of real beings with ideas, meta-ideas, and the supreme good, thereby facilitating the knowledge of reality through its recognition by the ideas. Following this fundamental reflection, if philosophy consists of the love of knowledge that allows us to access the information of reality and transcend it toward the knowledge of ideas, their principles, and of God, then philosophy itself can be considered a path that, through wisdom, opens the doors to the awareness and love of God. Again, in this line of thought, the Doctor of Grace is deeply permeated by the principles of Christian theology. This synthesis allows him to conclude that true philosophy is the genuine path to happiness in human life, as it involves the knowledge and enjoyment of God.

Once again, in this line of reasoning, the Doctor of Grace is profoundly permeated by the principles of Christian theology. This synthesis allows him to conclude that true

philosophy is the genuine path to happiness in human life, as it involves the knowledge and enjoyment of God. For this reason, Saint Augustine chooses Plato (or the Platonists and Neoplatonists) as the one who, despite not having the message of Christ, best knew how to answer the fundamental question of human existence:

“We have chosen the Platonists as the most noble among all philosophers, precisely because they were able to understand that the immortal and rational or intellectual soul of man cannot be happy without participating in the light of that God, by whom both the soul itself and the world were made. Thus, they deny that anyone can attain that which all human beings desire, namely a happy life, unless they adhere to that one supreme good, which is the immutable God, with the purity of chaste love.” (Augustine 1841, p. 277).

Augustine attributes to the Platonic tradition the merit of discovering that human happiness does not depend purely on human effort, no matter how great its possibilities, but rather on the light of God and union with Him (a synthesis of intellectual apprehension and desire). Hence, the curious fact that Augustinian and Bonaventurian *synderesis* is not primarily a cognitive habit of the first principles of practical reason (Thomas Aquinas 1888, p. 281), but a power that “stimulates toward the good”. For the Seraphic Doctor, the happy life, the righteous life, is not primarily ordered by the first principles of practical reason, but rather it is the one directed toward the good as an end. *Synderesis* is the volitional power that drives a person toward the good: a power that is, therefore, affective or volitional rather than rational (where the end of the moral act takes precedence over its specification). The human soul, intrinsically illuminated by divine grace (as an image), knows and implicitly desires the good, which is fully granted only when it enters communion with God.

Therefore, if for Aquinas the debate on conscience or *synderesis* is a fundamental issue in the structure of human morality, for Saint Bonaventure it is rather a culminating issue, situated at the peak of the soul’s powers (Bonaventure 1964, p. 297). And if, for the Angelic Doctor, *synderesis* is an intellectual habit (of which conscience is a judicial act), for the Seraphic Doctor it is a volitional power (Lázaro Pulido 2008, p. 89). These two factors demonstrate that for the Seraphic Doctor, the ultimate synthesis of human fulfilment involves transcending rationality—understood as pure intellectual exercise—in the unitive act of love with God, the ultimate sublimation of all human powers in action: “From all these, one must dispose oneself to ascend to God, to love Him with all one’s mind, with all one’s heart, and with all one’s soul, in which consists the perfect observance of the Law and together with Christian wisdom” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 297).

In a profound and etymological sense, therefore, one should speak of “sublimation” rather than “transcendence” of rationality, especially if we consider the latter as defining the whole human being and not just his cognitive operational power. Indeed, a person as “*imago et similitudo Dei*” discovers within himself a “ratio” by which he is capable of knowing and loving everything in all things that relates to God and everything in himself that reflects the Trinity. Both relationships of knowledge-love are radically disproportionate: what is revealed of the Word in the vestige far surpasses the essence of the thing itself and man’s capacity to know it, and what a person discovers in himself as the image of the Word or as a resemblance to the Trinity is but a shadow of what God truly is.

In any case, what moves and gives meaning to the search for truth and every loving bond, from the very beginning, is a person’s deep need to return to the Father’s house: this is the fundamental model or “ratio”—in its paradoxical disproportion—that gives meaning, is implicitly present in, and illuminates all the reasons that mark human existence (those of the mind and those of the heart).

By placing the fundamental moral principle within this reductive perspective of human existence, the Seraphic Doctor sublimates the notion of “rational” to its ultimate

limits on the frontier of mysticism, which is the twilight of all possible proportion and order, the transcendence of all human capacity. Consequently, it is a gift beyond the reach of human will.

Ultimately, Bonaventure's perspective on the theme of the "great conversation"—a perspective qualified as "Christian Socratism" (Lázaro Pulido 2006, p. 245)—can be summarised in two fundamentally theological principles:

1. The human life naturally ordered to happiness is a journey to the Father's house.
2. Along this path, the human soul is shaped—in the light of wisdom and the fire of love—as a dwelling place for God (Lázaro Pulido 2007, p. 98).

Both principles turn out to be the axes of a fundamental truth that encompasses the meaning of human existence: every person has been created by God in His image and likeness; that is, everyone is naturally inclined toward love for and of God. Therefore, God is the Good that orders and gives meaning to human existence and all its works.

Thus, every complete free act of the human being (configured in the image of the Word, with intelligence and will) will perfect his nature—making him happy—insofar as it is directed towards fulfilling his fundamental vocation of encountering God. In this way, true Christian wisdom consists of building the dwelling place of God within one's own soul so that it is prepared at the decisive moment of the encounter with Him (Bonaventure 1964, p. 500), realising on an individual and biographical scale the historical mystery of the Incarnation of the Word.

In this regard, the Seraphic Doctor once again shows the great richness of his sources, all of them filtered through his Franciscan spirit. As a summary of these sources—St. Augustine, the Victorines, Plato, Aristotle, the Neoplatonists, Joachim of Fiore, Alexander of Hales, Pseudo-Dionysius, and John Scotus Erigena—it can be appreciated in the thought of the theologian of Bagnoregio a clear overcoming of the fundamental proposal of Master Socrates. While for the Athenian philosopher the principle "Know thyself" is a fundamental anthropological principle, as it fosters a consequent moral order (know thyself in order to act as you should in order to be happy), for St. Bonaventure—as the authoritative voice of Christian Socratism—the principle must be inverted: "It is not about seeking oneself in order to find in the soul the source of good; it is about finding in the interior the source of all good" (Lázaro Pulido 2007, p. 103). And in the interior of the soul, one finds the image of the Word, whose knowledge implies an immediate sublimation of that knowledge into a form of wisdom that also includes love. This love, directed toward the Trinity, of whom the Word is the true revealed Word, discovers the need to order one's life toward such good, in the image of the crucified Christ:

"We ascend in the knowledge of God from Truth, to Love, and to reach Good. Metaphysically, it operates inversely: God is the Good to which we arrive through Love and, from there, we find the Truth. In other words, God, the supreme Good, from whom all good proceeds, gives the good of His Love to the man who loves in Him and discovers his truth in the good of God's Truth that enlightens him" (Lázaro Pulido 2007, pp. 101–2).

Therefore, in the Bonaventurian definition of "human person" that can be inferred from all this, it is necessary to broaden the concept of "rational" to include both the intellectual and the affective and volitional aspects, understanding that the latter is the main or priority aspect that makes human nature "personal" and "human". But if one delves deeper into these general parameters—parameters that can be discussed and accepted in a philosophical horizon, although their discovery and clarification necessarily involve dialogue with theology—it seems necessary to insist that the definition of "human person" would be incomplete if it did not introduce the fundamental and definitive reference to

God as the Supreme Good. In this sense, we can revisit the two Bonaventurian principles of Christian Socratism to illuminate this definition from them.

## 2. A Human's Life Naturally Ordered to Happiness Is a Way to the Father's House

### 2.1. The Fundamental Ethical Principle: God Is the Beginning and the Fulfilment of Human's Vocation to Happiness Through Christ Crucified

A fundamental principle of the Christian anthropology that underpins Bonaventurian thought is that happiness, the completeness of human nature in the person, cannot come about without a reference to God. A reference, moreover, that comes about through the mediation of Christ crucified. This does not necessarily imply the affirmation that “ex parte subiecto” every action or every manifestation of thought, will and affection is explicitly ordered to the highest Good in a clear and immediate way, or that an explicit Christological orientation must be given in every free act of a person. Rather, it means that every free act makes the human being happy to the extent that it is ordered to that supreme Good and that the attainment of this freedom implies the search for a vital meaning that can only be fully found in the Cross. This second affirmation acquires a series of notes in Bonaventure's thinking:

1. “Ex parte Deo” every journey towards happiness (towards a person's encounter with God) has Christ as its door and God as its end. God is, therefore, really and truly the beginning and the end (the Alpha and Omega) of the human being's entire journey towards happiness. He takes the initiative in summoning, accompanying and personally embracing each one of us.
2. The Aristotelian principle that a person's happiness coincides with the ordering of his actions, according to a person's rational nature and by means of the virtuous life, towards his highest good, is sublimated by the explicit appearance of Christ crucified as the ultimate model of a person. The paradox of Christian happiness is thus introduced: the ultimate and definitive source of happiness is transferred from the very rational nature of the human being in the individual person who fulfils himself in society, to Christ crucified as the definitive image of the “Triplex Verbum” of the Trinity, who attracts to himself—according to the logic of the attracting causality of love—and who is, at the same time, the end and the finished model of this happiness.
3. Therefore, “ex parte subiecto”, the path to happiness implies an ordination towards this “Triplex Verbum”. This ordination need not be explicit from the outset, although it does presuppose an explicit, experiential and personal encounter with God. How that encounter takes place depends on the concrete circumstances of everyone, just as Aristotelian happiness is fulfilled individually, even if the “eudemonic” structure is universal. A clear example of this path of “conversio ad Deum” can be seen in the lives of St. Augustine, St. Paul and St. Francis of Assisi.

This centrality of Christ as origin, model and end—as Alpha and Omega and centre of all things—is constantly pointed out in the Seraphic texts. In a very clear way in the *Itinerarium* and the *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*.

#### 2.1.1. In the *Itinerarium*

In the *Itinerarium*, the beginning of the text already indicates this grand scheme by way of a preliminary invocation:

“In the beginning, the first principle, from whom all illuminations descend as from the Father of lights, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, namely the eternal Father, I invoke through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, (. . .) that He

may grant the enlightened eyes of our mind to direct our feet in the way of that peace which surpasseth all understanding” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 296).

The starting point is always the Father, who is the giver of all grace. Every gift—from existence and life (with all its circumstances) to every possibility of exercising one’s freedom—that we receive is a gift of his Providence. However, it is a gift we receive through his Son, who enlightens our reason (in its broadest sense: “oculos mentis nostrae”) so that we may attain the happiness that consists of walking towards that peace which “surpasses all understanding” (and which consists of the “rest of the seventh day” in communion, once again, with the Father: the return to the definitive home). In this invocation, then, is summed up the theological schema characteristic of scholasticism: “exitus, reditus” (Izquierdo Labeaga 2007), which sublimates the neo-scholastic schema of “descensus-ascensus” (Manuel and Gual 2006, p. 133).

The Seraphic insists on this centrality of Christ, which implies the bond of each person with the Father, concretised in a way in which the individual character of the subject is superseded by the higher logic of love. Every life journey supposes a pro-cession from the Father, a journey towards the Father and a life accompanied by the love of Christ, in a process of communion so great that it ends in a transformation into the crucified Christ: “The only path is through fiery love for the Crucified- the very love that swept Paul into the third heaven, remaking him in Christ’s image” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 297).

Therefore, the Christian’s identification with Christ in the personal journey of faith implies nailing oneself to the cross and suffering together with Him to collaborate in the redemption of humanity, making oneself a propitiatory sacrifice before the Father so that, through the Cross, we may experience the love of the Father. A love which, we anticipate, has little to do with the conventional images of today’s global culture, and which reaches its climax in the silence of the Cross experienced by the Word: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Mt. 27:46 and Mk. 15:14). This truth is repeated in two figures: that of the door and that of the blood of the lamb (Bonaventure 1964, p. 297). Both replicate the scheme of “going in-coming” to the Father’s house, which seems to indicate that the cross is truly the “joy of the Christian” because it does not imply any mediation: it is the very experience of union in love with Christ Crucified that brings happiness.

### 2.1.2. In the *Hexaëmeron*

In indicating how the theological discourse of the six days of creation should be approached, the Seraphicus points out the most prudent way to carry it out: “Secondly, it teaches where one ought to begin: namely, from the middle, which is Christ; for if this middle is neglected, nothing is gained.” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 329). Not only is Christ the centre, but without Him there can be nothing: the theological discourse collapses and is left without support. It is striking that both texts follow a biographical-historical scheme, although in different keys: while in the *Itinerarium* there are six “speculations” by which the mind ascends to the mountain where it meets God (thus a mental-topographical scheme); the *Collationes* are presented as six “days” of creation that summarise and embrace, at the same time, the whole history of salvation (thus a historical-temporal scheme) (de la Pienda 2003, pp. 131–32). However, it is easy for the reader to discover in both texts an identical vital scheme: an interpellation of a rhythm to which the discovery of truth and the search for the good are adjusted in a biographical key. Hence, these preliminaries to the Seraphic Doctor not only provide a necessary hermeneutical key to access the text but also reveal how the soul enters the path of grace towards its own salvation, how the human being begins his search for personal happiness.

Later the Seraphicus returns to focus on the question of Christ as medium. In the grand scheme of things, mediaeval theological discourse presents itself with a paradox-

ical relevance that sometimes makes it difficult to try to distinguish philosophical from theological thought. In fact, theology in the strict sense naturally attends to the ultimate causes of the human being, of the world and of their mutual relations (of knowledge and desire, fundamentally), providing a horizon of completeness and ultimate meaning that is proportional to the greatness of being. Its object is God, who has revealed Himself through His Son and whose maximum expressions are, therefore, His Word in Sacred Scripture and the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is a science reserved exclusively for ultimate reflection from a temporal or biographical point of view. In fact, scholastic theology in the broad sense is immediately linked to the premises of philosophy. It should be added that the place it occupies in the mediaeval epistemological scheme is not only superior to all human knowledge, but also central to all of them, since, for mediaeval Christian theologians, all true knowledge—whatever its field—is a participation of the truth of God in the being of things.

Therefore, all the affirmations that the Seraphicus puts forward as premises for his theological discourse have the claim to be universal, that is, to be truths that surpass all other knowledge and that, therefore, are present in all of them. And not in any way, but as the core and medium of every one of them: “All must begin from Christ, the true centre. As the Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), He is the fulcrum of all things—as Scripture reveals. None can reach Christian wisdom unless they start with Him, for no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him” (Bonaventure 1964, pp. 330–31).

This universal mediation of Christ leads to two other very important conclusions, which will be the premises for the rest of the theological development. The first is that this mediation is not only between every human and God considered as the end, but also between each human and God considered as the principle:

“It is likewise manifest that we must begin from Him from whom the two greatest sages took their beginning: namely Moses, the initiator of God’s wisdom, and John, its consummator. The one declared, ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth’ (Gen. 1:1)—that is, in the Son, as Augustine teaches; and John: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him’ (Jn. 1:1 ff.)” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 331).

The second conclusion is that all knowledge also implies the mediation of the Word. In this sense it is worth remembering that for St Bonaventure knowledge must be understood in a broad sense, that is, as ordered to love, which is the superior and definitive power of the human being. Thus, in the Seraphic thought, truth and good are not only convertible, but the former is reduced to the latter in the fulfilled and complete act of love. Therefore, the knowledge of all things implies the recognition in them of who made them (efficient cause), how he made them (exemplary cause) and for what purpose he made them (final cause). In this profound knowledge or “theological recognition” the Word is the universal mediator: “If, therefore, the knowledge of the creature cannot be attained save through that by which it was made, it is necessary that the truthful Word go before thee” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 331).

We conclude by asking how this God appears on the horizon of human faith. This question is answered with a specific description. To begin with, it should be made clear that God is not “absolute” (in the sense of “separate”) in relation to the human being—not because his Being depends on that relation, but because our being is only understood in relation to him. Therefore, each of the definitions we can make of God will imply a different form of relation. Hence, whether we define God by the name He has shown us in the Old Testament (“I am who I am”) or by the name revealed to us through His Son (“God is

Love”), does not imply variation or variety of aspects in God (which implies imperfection where there can be none), but implies variation only from our point of view. This double definition and presentation is given at a theological-co-metaphysical level and does not depend, therefore, on cultural, historical or any other kind of circumstance. The difference found in the distinction only occurs as part of a process of a person’s approach to God, through his likeness, and therefore entails a formal enrichment of the understanding and experience—spiritual, moral and religious—of the encounter with Him.

Finally, we will try to point out what anthropological notes shine through in each of these definitions. By establishing what each of these relationships implies for the human being in his personal journey towards happiness, we will try to identify what anthropological notes appear to enrich a Bonaventurian notion of “human person” that can be drawn as a conclusion to this analysis.

## 2.2. God as “I Am Who I Am”—Human as “I Am Because He Has Made Me”

St Bonaventure presents Being as the primary name of God in the fifth speculation of the *Itinerarium*. From the beginning he shows three possible links that are established between men and the consideration of God as “Being”. This variety does not concern God, but the attitude of the human being who approaches God: this approach is given as contemplation, that is, as an act of knowledge which is turned into love. And it can take place as it is discovered in the vestige (the being of known things); in the image, as it is found in us (the reflection of the light of Truth as it is discovered within the human spirit); and in the likeness, that is, as it is manifested in itself, as the light of Truth upon us. And again, the Seraphic relates each of these contemplative attitudes to a topographical arrangement ordered “ad Deum”: the first are those who enter the atrium, the second are those who come to the saint, and the last are those who enter the holy of holies accompanying the High Priest. The latter, in turn, discover two ways or degrees in which God shows himself to everyone: through his essential attributes (“what is most essential in God”) or through his personal properties (“what is proper to persons”).

Therefore, we must first distinguish between three ways of knowing God: those who come to know him in the vestige (like the ancient philosophers or all those who come to know God through the knowledge of things), those who come to know him as a reflection within themselves (as an image, from the discovery of Christ as Verbum in our spirit), and those who come to know him by seeing him in the likeness of the Trinity through the ascent of Mount Calvary accompanying Christ in his Passion (like the saints, especially St. Francis).

“I-am-that-I-am” as a name-definition of God not only brings into focus God’s sublime and particular mode of being but also presupposes his supreme unity: it is predicated in the first person and without other reference, as the great and only necessary (Bonaventure 1964, p. 308). God is, therefore, by himself and not in another or in relation to another. However, “God-is-the-good” presupposes openness to the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity since, while maintaining unity, God the Father loves his Son through the Spirit: “(. . .) according to the ninth, which determines the plurality of persons, by baptising in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 308).

The name “Being” in God is not to be understood as an entity containing a certain “non-being”, or a certain “potential being”. The being that is predicated of God is the actual aspect that we can find in the entity: “(. . .) ‘being’ names the very pure act of existence itself” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 308). Understanding that this “being” of entities is imperfect because it is linked to a potential co-principle and that it is caused and participated in by God, it can be concluded that the divine being consists of simply “being”, without any kind of limitation.

From this ontological premise it follows that the divine being is fully necessary, eternal, most simple, most actual, unailing, one and only (excluding the plurality “in many different ones”). All these characteristics are known not only because of the name “Being”, but also through the double method of affirmative and negative theology (according to which every perfection of God is affirmed and every limit connected with this affirmation is denied, so that this perfection is predicated to the highest degree). All these characteristics, by being predicated without any limit, reiterate the fact that God can only be one: “Which also, being said in an unqualified way by superabundance, it is impossible that it should belong except to one alone.” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 309).

But, furthermore, by the revelation of all these characteristics derived from the first divine name we conclude that God is ultimate (as “culminator”, i.e., in Him all perfections are fulfilled) precisely because He is first: “(. . .) And therefore it is necessary that it should be the ultimate end, the beginning and the completion, the Alpha and the Omega” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 309). Being first and last, he is also the universal principle of all that is manifold and, therefore, he is also the first and last cause of all that is created according to three great modes of causality, because “(. . .) is the universal cause of all things, efficient, exemplary, and final, as ‘the cause of being, the reason for understanding, and the rule for living’”. The fundamental link between God’s Being and human’s being is therefore causal and ontologically based: the fact that God is “omnipresent” is not a metaphysical pantheism—according to which God is in the essence of all things in some way—but participatory and causal: he is the transcendent cause of the being of all essence.

Moreover, from this first approach to the name of God, we can draw several conclusions that bring us closer to a description of the human being as the image and likeness of God. To begin with, we start with the fundamental ontological fact. If God is “Who Is by Himself”, every person is “who is by God”: our finite being depends on God according to the threefold causal relationship presented, i.e., from Him we come (He has made us), towards Him we go (as the ultimate meaning of our individual existence and as humanity), and our “particular way of being” consists of being made in His image and likeness. In every order of causality, the relationship between humankind and God is invested with a special novelty which is not found in any other real form. This special quality is manifested when we look at the human–God relationship in Christ. Christ on the Cross is the incarnate mediation of the relationship between God and humankind. It is also the origin of his design and its vital culmination: we are made in the image and likeness of God by Christ, with the saving plan at the heart of his creaturely design. For the same reason, the efficient causality in the case of an individual does not consist in receiving a certain “being” which gives us a mere material or physical existence, but we are “made” capable of reproducing in us the divine filiation in the image of the Triplex Verbum. Even the vital sense that humankind receives in Genesis—to dominate and care for the earth and its creatures (Gen., 1, 28)—is nothing more than the image and likeness of the action of creation and preservation that God exercises over all that exists. In a way it can be said that humanity is—insofar as it is the image and likeness of God and through the universal mediation of the Word—the expression of God’s love in the world.

This first conclusion leads to other anthropological conclusions: it speaks to us of the divine origin of human existence; it illuminates our higher powers and elevates them, giving them a deep intentional direction that reflects the intratrinitarian dynamic (although this will be better appreciated when studying the name of God as “Good”); and it implies a very clear vital sense upon which the path of human happiness can be broadly defined.

On the origin of the dignity of human existence we note that in the Seraphic thought the fact that everyone is a “person” depends precisely on being made in the image and likeness of the second person of the Trinity. Human nature reaches its perfection in the

incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Christ. He—hanging on the tree between heaven and earth—is the ultimate expression of human richness, which is found at the boundary of the material and the spiritual. In the image of the indissoluble unity of the divine and the human, which is discovered in Christ, the human being also discovers his indissoluble unity, although dependent on God. In the image of the divine creativity expressed in the Word, human beings discover their own reason in its broadest sense. Like the love which the Father professes to the Son through the Spirit, the human being discovers in himself the order of the will towards love, which alone can give meaning to his own existence. And this order of intelligence and will is also designed in the image and likeness of the Trinity, so that everyone is not only *capax Dei* but is made to love God in Christ. A human is a person, therefore, in the image and likeness of the Trinitarian relationship. And in the light of the Christological (Christocentric) mystery he discovers that which makes him human in a radical way: the discovery that he is in need of (dependent on) God's love (again, in the image of Christ on the Cross).

In the light of these fundamental characteristics, humankind also discovers the profound meaning of his participation in the secondary characteristics described above. The anthropological structure of the human being does not have the capacity to realise in himself all the divine characteristics, but—because of his special relationship with God—he participates in all of them according to the fundamental limit of his own contingency. Indeed, if God is fully necessary—and the Trinitarian relationship is therefore a relationship of fullness and not of dependence—humankind is fundamentally contingent and indigent. He is dependent not only on God: throughout his existence every person discovers to be radically dependent on society, on one's family, teachers, and on other creatures. However, all these manifestations of dependence are nothing more than phenomena that arise from a deeper structural dependence: the "thirst for more" that we discover in any itinerary of search for truth, goodness, beauty and that lead us irremissibly towards what is necessary. God as the only one capable of guaranteeing satiety.

This link of "otherness-relation", which describes the correspondence of the human with the divine, appears in all the other properties highlighted: to the eternity of God correspond both the peculiar historical way in which a person understands his temporality and the desire for eternity which he discovers in the light of this understanding; to the divine simplicity corresponds the human perplexity of discovering himself in the course of his own existence as one and as many and in discovering in himself the fundamental double desire to be united with the people he loves and at the same time to maintain his own independence; to the divine actuality corresponds the existential paradox of the desire to remain in being definitively and the satisfaction that we find in "completing the journey", in experiencing the completion of the work or the unfolding of being before its culmination; to the divine indefectibility corresponds the desire for perfection which genuinely drives the moral motivation of every human being and the appreciation of the imperfect, of the "human" as a definition of the imperfect; and to divine unity corresponds humanity's tragic longing to discover in itself principles of unity as individuals, as families and societies, as a species and as communion with God, while at the same time we experience the selfish tendency to place ourselves at the centre of existence, so that instead of imitating and resembling God in his Trinitarian oneness, we try to supplant him with our disordered sum of broken fragments.

To observe the functioning of man's higher powers in the light of Bonaventure's theological premise, it will be necessary to study God as the "Highest Good". This analysis will also help to achieve a better understanding of God as the cause of the "order of human living" and as the full and ultimate meaning of human existence.

### 2.3. God as “Highest Good”—Human as “I Am for Love”

The name of God as “Highest Good” focuses on the Trinitarian relationship, on the fundamental scheme of the vital and moral order, and on the structure of the meaning of all things.

To begin this line of argument the Seraphic Doctor proposes three fundamental principles or premises as a framework of fundamental understanding. These three principles clarify God’s difference in relation to the human in the reduction in the participatory good to the Supreme Good. Although such a relationship is not only possible, but necessary in order to attain happiness and holiness, the fundamental difference between the propositions “God is good” and “Anything that is not God is good” must be carefully safeguarded. In the same way, a human’s ability to ascend to a relationship of likeness with the Trinity—always through Christ—must not make us lose sight of the fact that in such a relationship of likeness there will always be more of difference than of simile and that “reductio” as a method does not deny this difference.

1. The first premise is that God’s goodness is discovered and said in a sublime degree because it is such. A degree of “being” that is sublime suits him. The Seraphic paraphrases St. Anselm to make it clear that the reference to which all other good is reduced is discovered as a “maximal” reality to which, therefore, being is appropriate “I saw, therefore, and observed that the being which is simply the best—that than which nothing greater can be conceived—is of such a kind that it cannot rightly be thought not to exist, because to be is entirely better than not to be” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 310). St Bonaventure avoids the famous criticism of the monk Gaunilo by affirming and justifying beforehand the real and most actual value of the divine being in the previous chapter of the *Itinerarium*.
2. The second premise is that the nature of the good is diffusive and that, therefore, the supreme good is highly diffusive. Therefore, it also has the following properties: actual and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, liberal and necessary, indeficient and perfect. All these attributes are fulfilled in the Trinitarian scheme: “(. . .) So that he might be the beloved and the co-beloved, begotten and breathed forth, that is, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; (. . .)” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 310). This implies that the good, predicated both of God supremely and of creatures in a participatory way, always presupposes a relation and, therefore, an intentionality. The peculiarity of this intentional relation in the realm of creatures is that it is not the object that moves the subject initially (as happens with knowledge, in which the subject “is enlightened”), but the initiative comes from the subject that wills and tends. In the case of God, of course, there is full unity in the exercise of his intelligence and his will: what he wills is and therefore is true; just as what he knows is and therefore is good.
3. The third premise is that the Supreme Good cannot be conceived outside a Trinitarian unity. The proof is simple: the good to be supreme must come from a source that is essentially unique (otherwise there would be “similar goods” or a certain plurality that would prevent the “supreme degree of good”); and the good presupposes a pure act—by way of principle—that loves with full gratuitousness, with love due and with love arising from the relationship between the first two. If we combine both parts of the proof, we obtain a fontal principle of the Supreme Good, which is a single Trinitarian God—by requirement of the very nature of such good—so that to each of the persons in the Trinitarian relationship is attributed one of the essential properties of the good (which are therefore predicated as “personal properties”). Indeed, being supremely good, and therefore supremely diffusive love, each person on the Trinity is supremely good, (therefore) supremely communicable, (therefore) supremely consubstantial,

(therefore) supremely similar, (therefore) supremely co-equal and co-eternal. The logic of this chain of properties is not entirely homogeneous. Starting from the unity of a Trinitarian God we obtain a principle of unity and a principle of intrinsic relationship. From the relationship between the two principles, we obtain the sum diffusivity which is expressed in its communication (i.e., relationship of three Persons: lover, beloved and love). In the light of these first two properties of the Supreme Good we discover the necessity that the Persons who are thus linked must be consubstantial, i.e., that they are necessarily in the relationship in themselves. This presupposes, in turn, a principle of essential equality between them—which, in turn, presupposes coeternity, that is, the intrinsic supreme dependence of the three Persons in the relationship not by necessity of privation, but by requirement of the very act of loving in relation to time: they have always had to exist as lovers, beloved and love. Thus, the difference between each person has to do with the properties according to the function they perform in the Trinitarian bond.

Having clarified these premises, the Seraphicus invites us to contemplate the properties of the Trinitarian Highest Good not only in themselves, but above all based on their truest expression in Christ and by comparing them with the properties of another theological unity: that between God and humankind, of which Christ himself is the ultimate model. From this division of the two possible theological relationships, a paradoxical unfolding takes place: the human being cannot fix directly on God as absolute Good but must focus on the relationship that is established between God and the human being himself. It is therefore a reflex or indirect study. The reason for this is simple: the properties of God as “supreme Good” consist in the negation of all imperfection raised to an unattainable eminence. Man cannot aspire to be omnipotent, nor to be the beginning and end of all good and of all truth. He can, however, discover from his radical destitution the need to establish a link with the One who can fill this emptiness. Thus, the imitation or likeness of human attributes in divine attributes is repeated, but not in themselves—as in the case of the attributes derived from “being”—but from the fundamental human–divine relationship, the model centre of which is Christ.

In this way, the sublime becomes small in the greatest paradox of all times: the first Principle is born of the Virgin, the Eternal One is introduced into history, the flawless Perfect One is hung on the cross and killed, the unique and all-embracing Principle with the human nature composed and distinct from all else. Here the theology of the New Testament surpasses that of the Old Testament:

“For if an image is an expressive likeness, then when our mind contemplates in Christ, the Son of God—who is by nature the image of the invisible God—our humanity, so wondrously exalted and so ineffably united, living together as one with the First and the Last, the Highest and the Lowest (. . .), it already attains something perfect, so that with God it reaches the perfection of its illuminations on the sixth level, as it were on the sixth day” (Bonaventure 1964, p. 312).

Thus, ultimately, Christ becomes the central anthropological model. In him are defined all the paradoxes that result from the contemplation of God as the end and beginning of human existence itself. In Christ the human being discovers the model of true wisdom and perfect charity. Happiness, holiness, the full meaning of one’s life will therefore consist in becoming like Christ in all the above-mentioned ways: making ourselves small for love, so that we may be great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18, 3–4); nailing ourselves to the cross of Christ as co-propriated victims for the sin of all mankind, so that, purified by the blood of Christ, we may be acceptable to Him (Heb. 13, 20–21; Rom. 12, 1); rising with Christ to a new life, so that we are not created to attain happiness in fullness in this life, but

to prepare ourselves for eternal happiness in eternal life, participating in the union of love of the Trinity (Jn. 6, 39–40; Rom. 8, 11).

### **3. Conclusions: Along This Path the Soul of a Human Person Is Configured—In the Light of Wisdom and the Fire of Love—As a Dwelling Place of God**

#### *3.1. First Conclusions: Theological Overcoming of Aristotelian and Socratic Eudaimonia*

The first conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that the Seraphic Doctor overcomes the Aristotelian premise that the happy life consists of a virtuous life—according to the dictates of human reason or from the demands discovered in this reason as defining human nature—and that, therefore, the moral life (i.e., the rightly ordered life) consists of a practical “eudaimonia” directed by reason. For St Bonaventure the scheme is structurally similar, but “elevating” all the terms involved in this principle: to be happy it is necessary to live in love, to live in love it is necessary to learn by contemplating in Christ how we must walk towards the Father’s house.

The proposal of the Stagirite seems more than sufficient to dismantle a good part of the post-modern ethical proposals, based on weak anthropological models, afflicted by emotivism, reductionism of all kinds, completely ideologised and, in the long run, unsatisfactory in human experience. Placing reason—a broad “logos”, expressed in very diverse virtues—as the driving force of ethical life provides a solid and secure pillar for the moral ordering of human life. Despite everything, Aristotle’s proposal is not very much in evidence in the eyes of the Christian tradition. It can be argued that the anthropological arsenal of the Macedonian thinker has notions close to the “will” or the “voluntary” in a human person as a faculty distinct from intelligence (cf. Vélez 2010; Ninet 1998; Salgado 2004). A point of universal consensus, however, is that he did not develop this notion too much, which had somewhat more trajectory in Stoic and Neoplatonic thought (cf. Espíndola 2014; de Estrada 2014). It was Saint Augustine who gave a definitive push to the incorporation of the will as a fundamental notion in the debate on human’s faculties and his freedom (cf. Maqueo 2017; Pegueroles 1994; Aguilar 2012; Camacho 2012; Meana 2016). In St Bonaventure reason is expanded even more than in the thought of the Stagirite and the will, which is the faculty of love, attains primacy (cf. Lázaro Pulido 2007).

In this way the aim of the individual project of freedom is transferred from a “desire to be happy” which is rooted in the very nature of the person—and which unfolds and becomes concrete in its various social dimensions—to a completely new horizon, in which the project is not individual because not even the initiative to be happy comes from human co-reason, but from God’s call. Not only that: the dignity of the person is raised to unequalled heights. If for the Stagirite what distinguishes the human being is a certain “rationality” (as a translation of “logistikón”), for the Seraphic—and Christian thought in general—what distinguishes the human being is being a person in the image and likeness of God, being sons with the Son. The theological value of human nature, investigated in its full extent by Bonaventure, reveals Christ to us as the cosmic centre—of all time, of all places and of every relationship between God and humankind—elevating—as has been said—the dignity of every person and making it divine. If for Aristotle the happy life consists of the virtuous life and this depends fundamentally on prudence (cf. Duplá 1993, p. 54), for St Bonaventure the happy life consists of the imitation of Christ in one’s own life and this depends fundamentally on the will ordered towards love.

This is precisely where the overcoming of the subjective bonding and self-sufficiency of Socratic thinking that characterises Christian wisdom—or Christian socraticism—lies. (cf. Lázaro Pulido 2007, p. 97). In discovering in God the source of all truth and of all good, the human being discovers himself to be originally and structurally destitute, in need of

being completed by a Truth and a Good commensurate with his infinite desire. This desire is neither completely autonomous nor completely heteronomous: mankind discovers God as source and end outside himself in the vestige, in himself in the image and above himself in the relation of likeness. Moreover, as with the Socratic approach to human happiness, God's summons to an individual is at once a universal and a most personal vocation: it is not born as a univocal or uniform dogma—an absolute moral commandment—but as a particular experience that occurs in every human heart. It is precisely in the intimacy of the human being (“interior intimo meo”) that, in an exercise that involves and surpasses self-consciousness, this impulse towards the Supreme Good (“superior supreme meo”) is discovered, which transcends nature itself and the possibilities of human freedom: in its interior every human discovers the imprint, image and likeness of God—the source of all truth and of all good—as something that transcends him. In this transcendence, in this “irrational ratio” or “disproportionate proportion”, lies the intrinsic and foundational relationality that defines the human person, in the image and likeness of the Trinity: man tends freely to the Father through the Son and thanks to the impulse of the Spirit, according to a logic of attraction that reduces the exercise of the intellect and the will. This is, in its essence, the deepest longing of the human heart, the longing that makes us realise that we are not made for this world and that makes us walk towards the house of the Father (Jn. 14, 2).

This scheme goes beyond both an intellectualist and a strictly voluntarist anthropology or ethics. One often speaks of Thomistic “intellectualism” and Bonaventurian “voluntarism”. Both labels are understandable in a general and descriptive way. However, if we spin more delicately, we discover that neither freedom in Thomas Aquinas is intellectualist (cf. [Benavides n.d.](#); [Acerbi and Romera 2006](#)), nor in Bonaventure is he properly a voluntarist. In the case of the Seraphic, we see an effort to synthesise or “reduce” in the love ordered to the supreme Good both knowing (“imago creationis”) and willing (“imago recreationis”). In this synthesis the will plays a definitive role, because it is through the will—as an impulse—that the act is produced and through the will that unity with God in love is achieved. The will “fulfils” what the intellect “specifies”. This implies an overcoming of the “Socratic self-discovery”: self-knowledge implies first of all a discovery of the soul “as the image” of God—and therefore as a freedom that opens up to the infinite desire to know and to will—while the full exercise of the will, based on this first discovery, implies reaching “(. . .) the union of the soul by grace from affection as likeness” ([Lázaro Pulido 2006](#), p. 663):

“The third mode of distinction is that the image lies in the power of knowing, and the likeness in the power of loving; and this mode likewise originates from the first distinction. For since the image consists in a correspondence according to configuration—and configuration is considered in origin, relation, and the distinction of powers—and this origin and relation reside principally in the cognitive part, the image is therefore placed primarily in the cognitive faculty. Likeness, however, denotes a correspondence in quality; and since the quality by which the soul is principally made like to God is found in the will or in affection, it follows that likeness is placed primarily in the affective power.

Hence it is that in the image of creation there are two powers on the side of cognition, namely memory and understanding, and one on the side of affection, that is, the will. Conversely, in the image of re-creation, which consists in grace, there are two virtues on the side of the affective power, namely hope and charity, and one on the side of the cognitive, namely faith.” ([Bonaventure 1887](#), p. 405).

The fundamental proof for both statements is as follows: the will as “imago Dei” commands the irascible and concupiscible tendencies. But it cannot do this without the

help of intelligence. Since the “*imago Dei*” is primarily concerned with the origin and form of the act, in this order of things reason is prior (“*origo*”), specifies (“*distinction*”) and orders (“*ordo*”) the will by means of intelligence and memory (which is prior even to the exercise of intelligence). On the other hand, the “*similitudo Dei*” consists of the union of the soul with God by means of grace. To speak of “*union*” means to prioritise affection (which is intentionally “*active*”) over knowledge (which is intentionally “*passive*”). Moreover, as has already been said, this union is a “*recreationis*” in grace, i.e., a genuine restoration of the created in the image of Christ, whereby the natural order gives way to the order of “*gratia gratis data*” or the supernatural. In this sphere—the supernatural—the virtues of charity and hope refer to the exercise of the will: the latter by reforming (giving a new form to) the irascible appetite, and the former by sublimating the irascible and concupiscible tendencies. Faith alone, on the other hand, corresponds to the exercise of intelligence in the supernatural life.

Therefore, relationship as likeness or similarity has to do with the unitive, volitional or affective faculty, because it indicates desirability in quality and God is Love. Therefore, likeness implies the introduction into Trinitarian logic, into the life of grace and into strictly supernatural or theological consideration. It is important to stress, too, that this attribution is by no means absolute or exclusive. It is not absolute because the whole argument is based on the logic of relationships: the image is linked to the likeness insofar as it aspires to it, and the likeness is linked to the image because it is sustained by it (at least from the dynamic of human action: every spiritual act is necessarily moral and vice versa). Moreover, in both, intelligence and will interact with each other in any act (moral or spiritual). That is why the Seraphic incorporates that “*principaliter residet ex parte cognitivae/affectivae*”.

However, what is most interesting for this conclusion is that the Seraphic “*reduces*” or “*synthesises*” the definitive moment of the constitution of the person in the supernatural order and that this reduction implies both a movement of anthropological and ethical development (creation), as well as a personal existential experience of redemption, as an eschatological echo (cf. Blanco 1993, p. 92). The same scheme applies to a single individual in his biographical reality as to mankind in its joint journey through history towards the “*seventh day*”. In either case, it presupposes a search for the fullness of the human *ama*, which consists of becoming more like the Trinity through Christ.

### *3.2. Second Conclusions: Human Life in the Image and Likeness of Christ’s Model Is a Way to the Cross*

Another of the great postmodern reductionisms involves identifying human happiness with immediate enjoyment in all its different expressions. This is the dictatorship of well-being, consumerism, pleasure or immediate satisfaction as criteria for defining people or imposing a moral order. Behind this quest for immediate pleasure—disqualified by Western philosophy of all times since the pre-Socratics—also lies the dogmatic principle of radical individualism, which paradoxically fits in with the perspective of an increasingly economically globalised world. Finally, the only motive that encourages a postmodern individual to abandon the pursuit of his own interest and comfort seems to be the defence of an ideological cause that is presented as an absolute and radical imperative (considered, therefore, as unique and imposed causes in the form of ideological dogma, without contrasting them with one’s own experience of reality, as radicalism). The inability to distinguish between absolute and relative goods, the inability to marry the implicit subjectivism of the base with the universalisation of the normative codes defended by each of these causes, the social indifferentism and the lack of moral and religious formation, make the development of this second conclusion contrast sharply with the “*forma mentis*” present in the current cultural design of the main media in the West.

### 3.2.1. The Mystery of the Cross from a Theological Perspective

For theology and philosophy founded in the Christian tradition, the confrontation between suffering and happiness is no more than an apparent conflict, which is resolved by enriching both concepts and their relationship to the point where the former is illuminated to the extent that it becomes a condition for the latter or where the latter becomes the meaning of the former.

In Franciscan spirituality the cross occupies a central place in all orders. For St Bonaventure the cross is the culminating expression of God's love for mankind in Christ, and since Christ is the definitive model of the human person, the cross must also be the aspiration of every Christian. Of course, it is by no means a matter of "suffering for the sake of suffering" or seeking death and suffering for its own sake. Christocentric theology goes much deeper and resonates also philosophically as the moral proposal for a truly happy life.

A person's starting point is the tendency towards moral evil into which the original sin has plunged us. For the Seraphic, every human lives "bent over" towards the earth, crushed by one's faults and misery: "(...) he has been bent in upon himself by his own fault" (Bonaventure 1964, p. 298). Mankind's original guilt has corrupted the mind with ignorance and the flesh with concupiscence, "(...) so that every human, blinded and bent over, sits in darkness and does not see the light of heaven unless grace with justice comes to his aid against concupiscence, and knowledge with wisdom against ignorance" (Bonaventure 1964, p. 298). This grace that restores righteousness and wisdom in humanity comes from Christ. So, whoever wants to be redeemed and restored to holiness, must approach Christ through prayer, holy living (virtuous in perfection), meditation and contemplation. These acts restore grace, righteousness, knowledge and wisdom to the soul, and constitute the necessary steps to climb the mountain of one's life towards God. This crucified Christ is part of the experience of life. So, we do not speak of the Cross as an eminent sign of the triumph of grace over sin, as manifested in Paradise, but as a mysterious and true sign of redemption in this life, the condition and door to enter eternal life:

"But the way is none other than through the most burning love of the Crucified (...). Therefore, the image of the six seraphic wings signifies six ascending illuminations, which begin with creatures and lead up to God—to whom no one rightly enters except through the Crucified." (Bonaventure 1887, p. 395).

The cross appears as a necessary condition for that person to be fully realised, to reach full union with God, as St. Paul expresses it: "For I died to the law that I might live to God: I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2, 19–20). In this Pauline key, the cross cannot be understood as a personal exercise of perfection: it is not simply an exercise of personal mortification to grow humanly and spiritually. It is about uniting ourselves to Christ as the definitive Passover, uniting ourselves to the salvific mystery of the Cross, making ourselves—with Him—a sacrifice pleasing to the Father for our own sins and for the salvation of mankind. In this way, suffering not only acquires meaning as a necessary ingredient in human life: as a mechanism for "fitting" negative experiences into a broader positive horizon (as one who accepts suffering to achieve a temporary and contingent good). Quite the contrary: the rest of life acquires meaning to the extent that it becomes a means to achieve this union with God in Christ crucified.

At this point the theological gaze becomes mystical. It is the experience of the dark night of the soul that so many saints experience and which consists of dying with God. The rest of the "mystical excess" of the seventh day is not, therefore, a rest like the end of the day, or perhaps it is. It is an exceptional situation of sunset in which the soul enters union

with God while still alive. It is a redemptive situation—painful and culminating—in which the soul joins in the cry of the crucified Christ “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Mk. 15, 34 and Mt. 27, 46) and experiences, at the same time, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12, 7–9). It is a situation of darkness in the light of which all other vital suffering can make sense.

### 3.2.2. The Mystery of the Cross from a Philosophical Point of View

The Western philosophical tradition has always regarded the ability to integrate suffering into one’s own life as an important stage in the growth of wisdom. This wisdom is to be understood as “sapientia” in its etymological sense: the ability to “savour” the events of life from a higher perspective. This was already intuited by the pre-Socratics, as in Heraclitus’ invitation to observe the things of the world from a higher (divine) viewpoint or the Parmenidean endeavour to relativise the negative (that is related to non-being), in the light of being. The Socratic anthropology gives a definitive impulse to this principle and Socrates’ death itself becomes an example of how it is worth suffering and dying with meaning rather than living in opulence without it, an idea that we also find in the genuinely dramatic intuition of Aeschylus—Socrates’ own contemporary.

In ancient myths the hero suffered in exchange for achieving some kind of good (be it fame, honour or the affection of the people). There is no victimised submission to suffering that outweighs the merit or value of the benefit acquired. Tragedy, on the other hand, reverses this logic, as in *Prometheus Unbound*. After violating the will of Zeus by revolting against his command and offering fire to mortal men, Prometheus is punished by being nailed to a piece of wood on top of a rock in the middle of the Orcus, and an eagle, “Zeus’ dog”, descends every day to tear out his liver so that he may be regenerated again throughout the day, forever (or as long as Zeus’ command lasts). The chorus and Oceanus first offer him the chance to ask for forgiveness, but he does not listen. Nor does he heed Hermes, who tries to make him see his suffering as a “just payment” for his impiety, which can be repaired. Prometheus rejects him, locked in his tragic pride. But even beyond his closed-mindedness there is the promise of a hope (the same one he had mockingly given to mortal men to fight against the despair of doom):

“Then indeed the winged hound of Zeus, the ravening eagle, coming an unbidden banqueter the whole day long, with savage appetite shall tear your body piecemeal into great rents and feast his fill upon your liver until it is black with gnawing. Look for no term of this your agony until some god shall appear to take upon himself your woes and of his own free will descend into the sunless realm of Death and the dark deeps of Tartarus” ([Aeschylus 1926](#), pp. 1021–29).

That “until some god shall appear to take upon himself your woes” points to the necessarily divine character of redemptive suffering to forgive the guilt of the greatest sin that can be committed: that of injustice through failure to do the will of God.

Another witness to the redemptive value of suffering in antiquity was the Athenian [Plato \(2008\)](#). His master’s gesture at his death left a deep impression on his spirit. Specifically, in *The Republic* (II, 360 e–362 c), when Glaucon takes the floor to compare the fortune of the unjust (the one who is proficient in injustice), as opposed to the misfortunes to which life seems to lead the just. This seems a definitive argument for rejecting justice, and yet Socrates insists on defending the righteous suffering, even though it seems that even the gods bless the unjust over the unjust (362 c). Socrates shows, not only with words but with his own life, how the suffering of the just is the crucible of truth: the just person shows his authenticity precisely amid suffering and injustice. And it is precisely at that moment, when he seems abandoned by the gods, that his justice becomes redemptive, not only as an exercise in personal ethics, but as an example for all humanity throughout history.

This tradition fits in with the mystery of the centrality of the Cross, which Christian thought brings with it. This marriage is not without serious philosophical and theological problems: for the Greco-Latin aesthetic the cross is a scandal, as is the monotheism of a God who humbles himself in his incarnation and death out of love for the redemption of mankind. However, largely thanks to the work of the Holy Fathers and the development of dogma in the Councils, this initial repulsion was overcome by a cultural revolution: the Christian worldview took over, taking over much of the classical Greco-Latin thinking, and the Cross emerged as the emblem of the new Christianity. This cultural revolution not only succeeded in getting the figure of Christ accepted, but Christological theology became interwoven with the philosophy of being and logos of the Socratic tradition, so that the whole metaphysical discourse—from being to transcendentals or categories—became intimately related to the discourse of existence and divine names.

Hence it is clear to St Bonaventure that any morally ordered life—in which our intelligence and our free will are rightly directed towards happiness—is not a life destined to pleasure for its own sake or to the pursuit of self as an absolute value. Quite the contrary: a life morally ordered towards happiness involves suffering for the sake of others. By integrating this intuition into the Trinitarian and Christocentric theology proper to Augustinian thought, and with such a Franciscan flavour, the result is clear: the true happiness of mankind is union with Christ on the cross. This unity will never be complete in this life and, therefore, the experience of the search for happiness will always have that “itinerant” character as long as humanity lives. The “seventh day” is beyond the confines of this world and the cross is only the portal that leads the soul to God.

### 3.3. *Third Conclusions: The “Theological” Approach of the Bonaventurian Method Enriches the Ethical and Anthropological Discourse*

The exercise we have carried out throughout this paper already shows what is stated in the title of this section. Another confirmation is to be found in the history of thought itself: we often observe how faith has gone beyond reason to solve problems which, in themselves, are not properly matters of faith and which should be within the reach of reason. For St Bonaventure this theological-philosophical perspective not only fits in fully with his fundamental gnoseological and metaphysical system but also proves to be particularly fruitful in intuitions. This ongoing dialogue between philosophy and theology takes various methodological forms: philosophical reflection is often seen as a support for a clearer exposition of theological doctrine, sometimes the same intuition or principle is approached in parallel in a philosophical and theological key—thus demonstrating two complementary orders of reflection—or philosophical reflection performs the function of “grounding” the theological argument. These three methodologies, which can be easily discovered in mature theological-philosophical texts such as the *Hexaëmeron*, the *Itinerarium* or the *Breviloquium*, etc., present more clearly the distinction between “philosophical argument” and “theological doctrine” when the Seraphicus ascends to mystical theology. On many other occasions both orders of knowledge are so closely interwoven in the exposition that it is difficult to distinguish between them.

This point is not problematic for the Seraphicus, any more than it is for any non-Averroist mediaeval theologian. In the intellectual atmosphere of the mediaeval universities, not only are there no contradictions between faith and reason, but if there were, they would immediately cease to be contradictory. Faith is reasonable because it cannot contradict human nature. Reason is the preamble and support of faith because our spirit has been created to seek the truth and cannot be satisfied with the irrationally incomprehensible. Hence all the scholastic effort to order, understand and systematise dogma. In any case, if the Seraphic or the Angelic discuss the relationship between philosophy and theology or the relationship between faith and reason, it is not because for their thought such relationships

are problematic (they are not in any sense: both are open to mystery and are capable of entering into the discourse of mysticism), but because the question entered into debate in their time due to the influence of Latin Averroism.

That said, in the matter at hand, theology has clearly enriched Bonaventure's philosophical discourse on the person and his pursuit of happiness. Presenting the human person as the "image and likeness" of God and elaborating his main properties on this—clearly theological—premise raises the dignity of the person to the highest degree, sublimates the richness of his "being" and resolves the main and fundamental tragedy of man: to desire the infinite without being able to obtain it. At the same time, placing the mystery of Christ Crucified as the centre, nucleus, principle and end of all anthropological and ethical reflection can offer the keys to reflect on and accept the drama of all human existence: that of the meaning of suffering.

Of course, these reflections do not descend to statements of a practical-concrete kind. The Seraphic thought can in no way be defined as "self-help" because it is based on the principle that we need divine grace to help us: on the path of moral perfection or holiness there is little "self". This does not imply that the Bonaventurian proposal is "abstract" or "vague". On the contrary, it presents a rhythmic, accompanied path, which starts with the daily experience of encountering the world, with things, and does not cease to accompany us until we reach the summit of the mountain.

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