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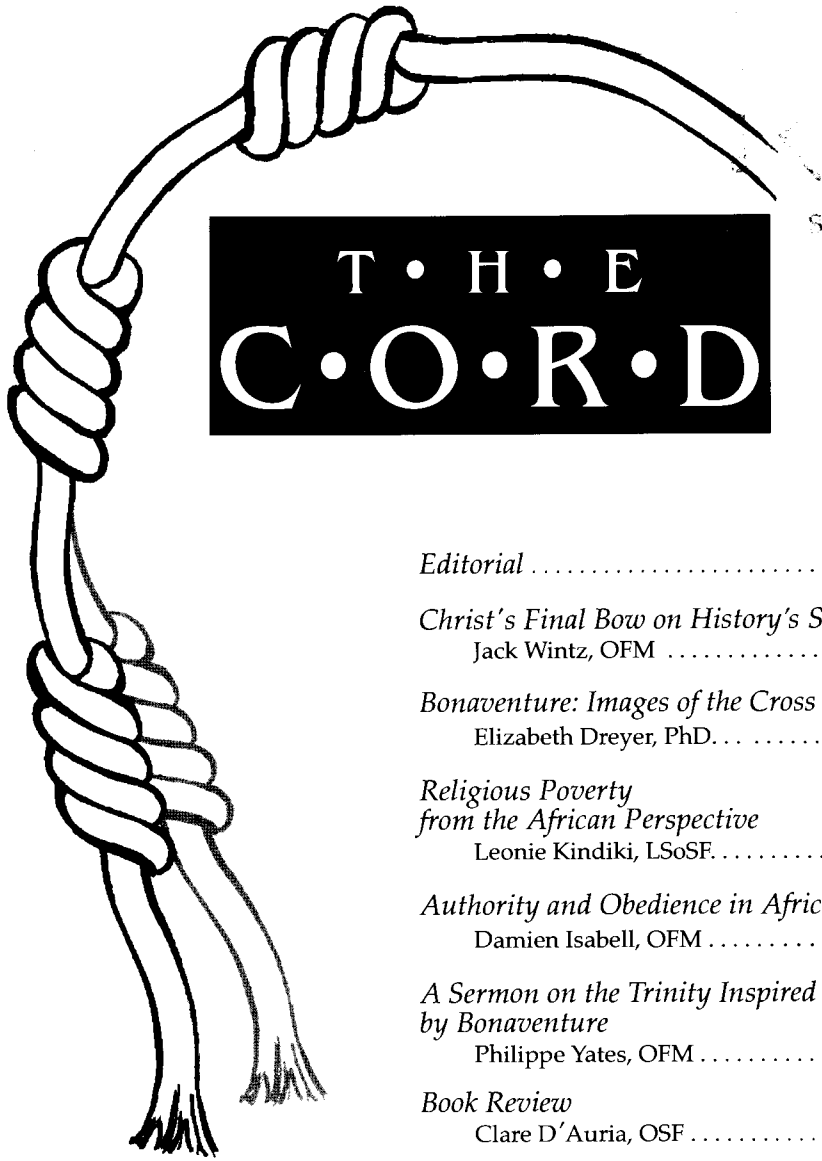

THE CORD

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THE CORD
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Publisher, Anthony M. Carrozzo, OFM
Editor: Elise Saggau, OSF
Editorial Assistant: Mary C. Gurley, OSF
Promotion: Thomas Blow, OFM
Distribution Manager: Noel Riggs

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Editorial

The Franciscan Family faces the celebration of Christmas and a new year with the kind of heart-ache that accompanies sudden and totally un-anticipated loss. Grief over the destruction wrought by earthquake in central Italy gives us all pause. We weep for lives and homes and businesses lost, for priceless art-work crumbled into dust, for glorious architecture irreparably damaged. And as Franciscans we experience the disorientation that families feel when the "home place" is exposed as vulnerable and transitory.

One is reminded of Jesus' words to the woman at the well: "Believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. . . . God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21, 24). The vulnerability of our material "treasures" casts us back on those spiritual treasures which form our true heritage. The Spirit moves and works in all things, but especially in the word and example of those who worship God in spirit and in truth.

The Cord, in its continued effort to "effect among us a deeper knowledge and more ardent love of the Franciscan way of life" (mission statement), is pleased to offer in this issue a significant reflection by Elizabeth Dreyer on Bonaventure's "Images of the Cross." Philippe Yates shares with us a sermon on the Trinity based on Bonaventure. Leonie Kindiki and Damien Isabell help us see some challenges for the Franciscan way of life in Africa. Clare D'Auria reviews Thaddée Matura's book on the writings of Francis. Jack Wintz offers a timely reflection on Word-Becoming-Flesh.

The end of our subscription year is an appropriate time to thank all our subscribers for their support of *The Cord*. It is our privilege to bring to the Franciscan family throughout the English-speaking world articles that help us on our way. This is also a good time to suggest again that those who are producing written work that is solidly grounded in the tradition and of practical value to the life of the brothers and the sisters offer it for sharing with the larger family. Send all contributions to The Editor, *The Cord*, Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778.

The Word became flesh and dwells among us (John 1:14)

Christ's Final Bow on History's Stage

Some years ago I attended a stage play. During the final curtain call an intuition flashed into my mind. It struck me that what was happening on that stage was a shadowy image of what will happen at the end of the larger drama of history itself.

We know well the ritual at the end of a stage play. When the curtain reopens, we once again see the familiar set and furnishings, the "world" of the drama just presented. Then all the characters, from the lesser to the greater, begin coming on to the stage. All have been a part of this one dramatic story, this "one word" or "conception" expressing the mind and heart of the author. The performers continue to fill up the stage until at the very end, as the lights grow brighter and the applause grows louder, the star of the show—glowing in the light—comes forward to take the final bow.

We can look at the drama of history and salvation in the same way. All of us humans, with our fellow creatures of all the centuries, have been offered a role to play in the drama, ***Word Becoming Flesh.*** *When the drama ends, we will all have a chance to take our little bows and then turn to await the reentrance of the lead player, Jesus Christ, the head of creation, the final judge and measure of what it means to be truly human. As he comes back on stage to take his final bow, the lights grow brighter, and the praise from the whole audience of creation is deafening.*

Prayer to the Divine Word

O Divine Word,
we listen to your voice
embedded deep within us,
within nature and, of course,
revealed in Scripture
and, most eminently,
in the Word made flesh.

May you lead us
to the full measure of creaturehood
we are meant to become,
and the very stature of Christ.

Guide us forward to this,
our glorious destiny. Amen.

From Jack Wintz, OFM, *Lights: Revelations of God's Goodness* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press,1995), 72-74. Reprinted with permission.

The Cord, 47.6 (1997)

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio: Images of the Cross

Elizabeth A. Dreyer

[This presentation was the keynote address to the Annual Conference of the TOR Franciscan Federation, Rochester, NY, August, 1997]

Introduction

Scholars today explore the risks, benefits, and methods in examining and retrieving medieval texts. Russian literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, warns against isolating the text from its broader socio-cultural matrix and from the long trajectory of history in which any given text must be situated. Language must be understood in a dialogic fashion, that is, the complex elements that impinge on both the reception and the creation of language must be seen in relationship to each other. The basic image through which he understands all language is two people talking with each other—each in the fullness of her or his specific time and place. He writes, "There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent development of the dialogue."[1] Such an understanding of the never-ending flow of language gives us courage to try to understand and relate to our own time Bonaventure's language of the cross. Elements of this retrieval include the understandings of the cross that were passed down to the Middle Ages; how the medieval community saw the cross; and how the symbol of the cross functions for us now, which meaning will lead into future understandings.

In particular, I focus on the imagistic language Bonaventure uses relative to the cross. In the volumes celebrating the seventh centenary of Bonaventure's death in 1974, Marigwen Schumacher has an article entitled "Mysticism in Metaphor."[2] She reflects on Bonaventure's word-choice and images in several of his sermons as reflective of his being in touch with his own religious experience. She posits that there is "an intrinsic, inescapable relationship between

the 'what' of Bonaventure's thought and the 'how' of his expression—mysticism tangible through metaphor."[3] Bonaventure's vividness of expression, sensitivity to nuance and cadence pulls the reader into the beauty and thence into the spiritual depth of what he is saying. Bonaventure lived in a world that included "the Gothic smile, the delicate tracery, intricate enamels and woodcarving, amazingly graceful flora and fauna, perfection of craftsmanship even to the tiniest detail, accompanied by soaring and grand cathedrals of exquisite, fragile strength and powerful beauty—all these bespeak a lyric freshness of awareness of God's world. Mosaics and stained glass windows radiated a kind of "mural poetry" that could not have but influenced those who saw them.[4]

Schumacher goes on to link Bonaventure's poetic and harmonious expression to the joy of Francis, the wandering troubadour of mystic rapture. Francis was clearly endowed with what some have called "enthusiasm"—Bonaventure often used the term "fervor"—a gift Bonaventure admired and in his own literary-mystical way, possessed. Schumacher describes it as the gift of being god-inspired, touched, attuned, gifted with that rare ability to "see" the direct equation between the divine and the human and express it in words both powerfully taut and simply clear.[5] In his book, *The Distancing of God*, Bernard Cooke writes of Bonaventure: "From his 'father in God,' Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure had inherited a contemplative awareness of the pervading divine presence. This mystical consciousness caused every detail of experience to be Word of God, to speak of God's loving blessing of human life. . . . The symbol world of Franciscan spirituality has a freshness that springs from its discovery of the mystery dimension of the ordinary."[6]

Schumacher investigates the poet-preacher-mystic's own personal intuitive, inspired, non-rational contact with Deity. She cites the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*:

> Throughout the periods of religious history, there has perhaps never been found a saint who has made the world hear an invitation to mystical union as broad and as urgent as the Seraphic Doctor. For these reasons, among many others, the spiritual doctrine of St. Bonaventure, totally infused as it is with unction and poetry, constitutes a unique monument in mystical literature.[7]

Bonaventure was a brilliant rhetorician and a learned theologian, but "there is something more that throbs and pulses through his works."[8] The reader might well follow Roland Barthes's invitation to take pleasure (*jouissance*) in the unresolved text, the ending that opens up rather than closes down.

In an article on the cross in Bonaventure's mystical works and sermons, Maurycy Suley notes a distinction between spiritual growth that comes as a result of grace and the sacraments and that which comes via personal assimilation of the works of salvation by listening and meditating on the word of God

through prayer and contemplation. In the latter, one is transformed through the practice of the contemplative gaze on the images and symbols of redemption. Bonaventure begins the Prologue in the *Tree of Life* with this idea.

> No one will have the intimate and lively experience of such a feeling [of being nailed with Christ to the cross] unless, far from forgetting the Lord's passion, or being ungrateful for it, he rather contemplates—with vivid representation, penetrating intelligence, and loving will—the labors, the suffering, and the love of Jesus crucified (LV Prol. 1).[9]

I begin with this discussion of Bonaventure's style, language, and use of metaphor because I find that his exposition of the passion of Christ must be read and heard with the inner contemplative ear. Bonaventure's theology of the cross reflects much of the tradition he inherited, but its central role and manner of presentation are distinctive. When one spends a good deal of time with this material, one begins to move beyond analysis and knowledge to a "felt sense" of what Bonaventure is trying to communicate about the experience and meaning of gazing on the cross.

Images of *Imitatio Crucis*

Bonaventure's treatment of the cross can be found primarily in *The Tree of Life*, *The Mystical Vine*, and *The Office of the Lord's Passion*, and secondarily in *The Soul's Journey into God*, *On the Perfection of Life for Sisters*, *The Major Life of St. Francis*, *The Minor Life of St. Francis*, and several sermons. Bonaventure inherited, brought to new heights, and influenced the future of the tradition of devotion to the suffering humanity of Christ.[10] He borrows from twelfth-century texts of Bernard of Clairvaux and Ekbert of Schonau. Like his predecessors, Bonaventure writes in an "intimate, affective, apostrophic style, marked by familiar address to Christ."[11] He extends the gospel material with graphic descriptions of the details of the passion, such as Christ being spit upon, hurled to the ground, pushed and pulled by his tormentors, stretched on the cross, left with gaping wounds. He is among the earliest to write about Mary's mental anguish at Christ's suffering. Bonaventure influenced many later texts on the passion, including one of the most popular in the Franciscan tradition, entitled *Meditationes vitae Christi*, a work probably composed in the Franciscan milieu of Northern Italy at the end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth.[12]

Much of this material is inspired by Old Testament texts from the Psalms and Isaiah that were applied to Christ—"They have numbered all my bones" (Ps. 21); Christ suffers from the sole of his foot to top of his head (Is. 1:6); Christ is covered with bruises and wounds like a leper (Is. 53:4); Christ's suffering and beauty is above that of humans (Ps. 44:3); the red apparel of the man in the winepress (Is. 63:1-2). In the *Lignum vitae*, Bonaventure begins

with a pericope from Paul's letter to the Galatians, "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. 2:19), and employs the metaphor of a tree to map the events of Christ's life, dividing the meditation into twelve fruits arranged in three groups covering the origin, passion, and glory of Christ. In the *Vitis mystica*, Bonaventure builds on the words, "I am the true vine" from John's gospel (15:1). The events of the Passion are compared to the cultivation, pruning, and tying up of the vine. Throughout, Bonaventure stresses the desirability of conforming to the Passion of Christ, participating in his sufferings so that we may regain the image of his divinity. We are invited to embrace the disfigured body of Christ "in language which is physical, intense, and reciprocal."[13] He writes: "Let us embrace our wounded Christ whose hands and feet and side and heart were pierced by the wicked vine-tenders; let us pray that he may deign to tie our hearts, now so wild and impenitent, with the bond of love, and wound them with love's spear" (VM 3:6)

For Bonaventure, Jesus' life has "normative significance in the spiritual search for an authentic human existence. Spirituality is, above all, the journey of the human soul "into God." And that journey is made by conforming one's personal life to the mystery of the eternal Word enfleshed in the history of Jesus."[14] The culmination of that life is the cross—the ultimate sign of God's love for humanity. Imitation of the cross has taken endless forms across the centuries. Some of those forms are better left behind, such as the extreme forms of asceticism that characterized some medieval practices. But one effect of meditation on the cross that seems fairly constant across the centuries is its ability to nurture compassion. This presumes that the motivation for contemplation of the cross is love; but when that is the case, it can create an identification with and sensitivity to the suffering of others. With this counsel to keep the compassion of God at the forefront of our reflections on the cross, let us turn to Bonaventure's images.

Fire

Francis had a heart of flesh that could feel, sing, praise, vibrate, weep, be moved.[15] The saints asked to experience the pain of Christ on the cross because they were in love, desiring to walk with, stand in solidarity with, and actually feel the pain of the beloved. Bonaventure uses a number of images from the tradition to speak of the pilgrim's encounter with the cross—fire, forms of the stigmata, nudity, and tears. He says that Francis was "assigned an angelic ministry and was totally aflame with a Seraphic fire" (LM Prol. 1). Francis's vision of the seraph on Alverna was given so that as Christ's lover, Francis "might learn in advance that he was to be totally transformed into the likeness of Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of his flesh, but by the fire of his love consuming his soul (*incendium mentis*; LM 13:3). On Alverna, Francis

"burned with a stronger flame of heavenly desires. . . . His unquenchable fire of love for the good Jesus had been fanned into such a blaze of flames that many waters could not quench so powerful a love" (LM 13:1,2).

Extending (and mixing!) the metaphor somewhat, Bonaventure writes of Francis: "Like a glowing coal, he seemed totally absorbed in the flame of divine love. Whenever he heard of the love of God, he was at once excited, moved and inflamed as if an inner chord of his heart had been plucked by the plectrum of the external voice" (LM 9:1). Inspired by Francis's witness, Bonaventure writes at the end of the *Itinerarium*:

> But if you wish to know how these things come about, ask grace not instruction, desire not understanding, . . . God not humans, darkness not clarity, not light but the fire that totally inflames and carries us into God by ecstatic unction and burning affections. This fire is God and his furnace is in Jerusalem (Is. 31:9); and Christ enkindles it in the heat of his burning passion, which only he truly perceives who says: My soul chooses hanging and my bones death (Jb. 7:15) (Itin 7:6).

A similar use of the symbol of fire is found in one of the sayings of the desert fathers, those eccentric fourth-century monks who went to the desert to fight the demons and live in humble deference to one another. The story goes: "A brother came to the cell of Abba Arsenius at Scetis. Waiting outside the door he saw the old man entirely like a flame."[16] Is not this image of "becoming all flame" a helpful metaphor by which to enter into the mystery of the union with Christ on the cross? It provides space in which to move around, to reflect on experiences in which we felt ourselves to be "all flame." Such experiences suggest gift, self-abandonment, total absorption, freedom, and spontaneity. Can reflection on such experiences move us toward insight into what Francis must have experienced and about what Bonaventure is trying to tell us through his image of falling asleep with Christ on the cross? And even beyond these insights, can we imagine ourselves, at some basic, primitive level, facing the cross and becoming "all flame"?

Tears

For most people, the Franciscan tradition evokes images of joy not tears. And in some instances tears are indeed a sign of joy. Bonaventure writes of Francis at the crib of Greccio: "The man of God stands before the crib, filled with affection, bathed in tears and overflowing with joy" (LM 10:7). When his father was pursuing him in anger, Francis begged for deliverance with a flood of tears which produced an experience of excessive joy (LM 2:2). And one day, while weeping for his sins (Is. 38:15), Francis experienced the joy of the Holy Spirit's forgiveness (LM 3:6).

But the symbol of tears is linked above all with redemption. Bonaventure

asks readers to weep for their sins and for others, to weep at the sufferings of Christ, indeed to join their tears to those of Christ. Again, Francis is the model. Bonaventure often recalls how Francis wept daily and so weakened his eyes by tears that he lost his sight (DM 69, 122, 138; LM 5:8; 8:1). Celano writes that Francis "wept bitterly because of the Passion of Christ, which he almost always had before his eyes. Remembering the wounds of Christ, he filled the roads with laments, without finding consolation." And after his experience before the crucifix at San Damiano, Francis had a "holy compassion for the Crucified" fixed in his soul (2Cel 10). The sources also tell us that Clare's prayer was often suffused with tears. The author of the Legend of Clare presents an image of Clare as another Mary Magdalen, weeping and kissing the feet of Jesus. And an angel of darkness comes to Clare in her sleep to deter her from weeping, threatening that it will cause her to go blind or to dissolve her brain (CL 19). Clare wept when a sister was sad or tempted (CL 38), and when Clare wept at prayer, her tears moved other sisters to tears of sorrow as well (Proc 1:7; 3:7; 6:4; 10:3). Clare wept with the suffering Christ and even wept as she taught the novices to do the same (CL 30).

Bonaventure tells us that Francis "strove with constant sighs of sorrow to root out vice and sin" from his heart and admonishes us to follow him in drenching the couch nightly with weeping (DM 63; LM 10:4). In a sermon on Luke 19:46—"My house will be a house of prayer"—Bonaventure mentions three things necessary for prayer. The first is getting ready; the second is attentiveness; and the third is passionate joy (RF 8). Bonaventure uses the metaphor of "being scrubbed clean" to describe the repentance of the first stage of prayer. One must be scrubbed clean from stubborn pride, from sensual amusement, and from frenzied activity. It is in the second stage of "scrubbing" that he uses the language of tears. Anna and Judith purified themselves with tears and weeping (1Sam. 1:10; Jdt. 12:78), and the psalmist is worn out groaning every night, drenching his pillow and soaking his bed with tears (Ps. 6:7).

And in his meditation on the passion, *The Mystical Vine*, the reader encounters an abundance of tears. In this text, Bonaventure presents a graphic picture of the bloody, sweating Christ—our son, brother and spouse condemned. He writes, "Who would not be filled with sorrow at the sight? Who could keep back sobs and tears? As it is a devout act to rejoice for Jesus, so it is devout to weep for him. . . . Pour out a torrent of tears for him who is dying in such bonds, since he first wept for us. Stand close to him as he hangs, be still and see to what a bitter, shameful death he is condemned" (VM 4:3-4).

Bonaventure scolds the one whose heart is made of stone or has even become as hard as a diamond. Only this kind of heart would be unable to weep at the sight of the suffering Lord. Bonaventure not only speaks about hearts being softened so that they might weep, but puts us close to experience, so that

the reader who enters into the texture and flow of the text is likely to have effected in him/herself what the text is suggesting. Notice the switch from imperative to declarative sentences here: "O heart diamond-hard, immerse yourself in the plenteous blood of our kid and lamb; rest in it and become warm; once warm, be softened; once softened, let flow a fountain of tears. I will therefore seek, and then find, a wellspring of tears in the sorrow, the cross, the nails, and finally, the scarlet blood, of Jesus most mild. I will consider and I will understand, as much as he grants me to do so, the ruddiness of body and soul of the Lover different from any other, Jesus most loving" (VM 15:3). And in an earlier chapter he describes the kind of careful, meditative attention to the cross we have been discussing, a kind of loving attention that can bring the cross to life, making it real and compelling. He entreats the reader, "Look upon the face of your anointed, O Christian soul, and let your tearful eyes behold his torments; lift up your grieving heart to see the manifold afflictions he found while he was seeking you. Open your eyes wide upon the face of your anointed; listen with eager ears to any word he may speak while in such pain. And whatever you hear, store as a most precious treasure in the secret vault of your heart" (VM 6:3).

This tradition of tears that Bonaventure inherits and passes on is one that may be quite foreign to modern sensibilities. But contemporary theology, especially in its feminist forms, is recovering our affective side and its relationship to bodiliness—both linked to the gift of tears. In our culture, the physical expression of tears is more acceptable for women. Elizabeth Johnson reminds us of the relational nature of weeping. We weep not only for our own sins but for the sins of the world that cause endless suffering for those we love. She suggests that "women do more than a fair share of the crying in the world." With Jesus who weeps over Jerusalem, Rachel weeps over her children, and South American women weep for the "disappeared"[17] Physical tears symbolize the depth of religious mourning.

Weeping is a deeply human activity. Gregory of Nyssa called tears "the blood in the wounds of the soul" (*Funeral Oration for Placilla*). As it is natural for a wound to bleed so it is natural for Christians to weep for their sins and for the suffering Christ. Tears bring about not only personal consolation, but can lead to the purification and peace of the world. Conversion that produces tears of affection cannot happen unless we *feel* deeply for ourselves and for our world. For Francis and Bonaventure, this begins with loving contemplation of the Crucified. To cut ourselves off from feeling is to cut ourselves off from compassion for the world and from imitating a compassionate God.

Bonaventure's theology and spirituality of the cross might also lead us to a renewed sense of the rituals in which we weep for our sins and for the sins of the world. In the past, frequent rote confession in the sacrament of penance

led many to a numbness about sin and perhaps to an eclipse of compunction. The same may be true of the penitential rite with which we begin each eucharist. For many worshippers these words and ritual gestures have become routinized and empty, no longer capable of moving us to the profound sense of loss and mourning that is at the heart of conversion. We are embarrassed to weep and gnash our teeth. Bonaventure's powerful texts on the cross can function as an invitation to bring new life to this confession by connecting it with events from the local community and the world. Every week we become aware of new expressions of violence and indifference to humans and the environment. By bringing these stark and sinful realities to worship, we can arouse in the community feelings of deep sorrow and expressions of tears that will give renewed truth and feeling to the words, "I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters. . . ."

Nakedness

A third image that Bonaventure links to the cross is that of nudity. The theme of spiritual nudity was popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Jean Châtillon traces the origins of the phrase "naked, to follow the naked Christ" (*nudum Christum nudus sequere*) to the correspondence of St. Jerome.[18] Ambroise Nguyen Van Si writes that in the Middle Ages, spiritual nudity functioned as a symbol of distance from the world and evangelical stripping, usually linked with the birth and death of Christ.[19] Bonaventure has recourse to this image when he speaks of St. Francis and Franciscan poverty.[20] In his text, *On the Perfection of Life*, Bonaventure exhorts his readers to embrace poverty by calling to mind the poor beginnings and poor ending of the Lord. On the cross, Christ was stripped and despoiled of everything—his clothing, his body, his life, even his divine glory (DPV 3:5). Bonaventure calls on Bernard, who wrote: "See the poor Christ, born without decent shelter, lying in a manger between an ox and an ass, wrapped in poor swaddling clothes, fleeing into Egypt, riding an ass, and hanging naked upon a gibbet."[21] And in his defense of poverty against the attack of Gerard d'Abbeville, Bonaventure suggests that the way of poverty is the best way to imitate Christ in his extreme state of nudity (*Apologia Pauperum* 7:5).

Perhaps the most famous use of the image of nudity can be found in Bonaventure's *Major Life* of Francis where he recounts the story of Francis's confrontation with his father before the bishop. "Drunk with remarkable fervor," Francis stripped himself naked in front of everyone. He then clothed himself in the rags of a beggar. Bonaventure goes on: "Francis accepted it gratefully and with his own hand marked a cross on it with a piece of chalk, thus designating it as the covering of a crucified man and a half-naked beggar. Thus the servant of the Most High King was left naked so that he might follow his naked crucified Lord, whom he loved (LM 2.4).

This story of nakedness at the beginning of Francis's conversion story is complemented with one at his death. Bonaventure says of Francis's last hours: "And so, in fervor of spirit, he threw himself totally naked on the naked ground so that in that final hour of death, when the enemy could still attack him violently, he would struggle naked with a naked enemy. . . . In all things he wished to be conformed to Christ crucified, who hung on the cross poor, suffering and naked" (LM 14:4). In the end, however, the theme of nudity is completed with that of clothing, for Bonaventure writes of how Francis was clothed in body and soul with Christ crucified. The nudity of the disciples is hidden by the glorious clothing of the cross (LM 15:1).[22]

Bonaventure also associates nudity with the poverty of renunciation. While Francis's life dramatized the rejection of material reality, Bonaventure extends this stripping to the intellectual life as well.

> Whoever desires to attain the height of poverty should renounce in some way not only worldly wisdom but also learning, that having renounced such a possession, he might enter into the mighty works of the Lord (Ps. 70:15-16) and offer himself naked to the arms of the Crucified. No one can be said to have perfectly renounced the world if he still keeps the purse of his own opinion in the hidden recesses of his heart" (LM 7:2).

This image of nudity invites us to reflect on this most common of human experiences that takes place in diverse settings. There is the forced nudity of the prisoner, who like Jesus, experiences humiliation or degradation. There is the nakedness of the poor who do not have the means to clothe themselves properly. Then there is nudity that is chosen. This kind of nudity can take the form of simplicity of dress and life or psychological, intellectual, and spiritual openness. There is also the nudity of illness, of bathing, and that most precious nudity of lovers, childbirth, and children. Throughout all these experiences, one notes some common threads. Nudity produces vulnerability. Clothes serve to protect vulnerable skin from damage. Clothes also hide bumps, scars, warts, and crooked limbs. Naked, I am not able to hide the truth of my physical being. But the choice to be nude with one's beloved can be the surest sign of trust and surrender to another. It is in this moment of simple, loving openness to another human being that many of us glimpse what the saints might have meant when they talk about standing naked before God—even though our Neoplatonic heritage did not allow them to see that this spiritual experience can be deeply embedded in the physical one.

Nudity also creates an odd kind of democracy. The clothes we wear usually point to class and status, although it can also signal the freedom to express one's particular personality. But all of us come into the world naked and in a true sense leave the world naked. At these moments all human beings share a

common humanity in its stark simplicity and nothingness. When one is mindful of these common experiences of life and death, it becomes more difficult to lord it over one another, to be arrogant or to treat each other with disdain. The nakedness of the cross can be a symbol of the linkage of these various experiences. In our willingness to be vulnerable with each other, we can learn to stand in solidarity with our suffering sisters and brothers. The cross stands as assurance and hope to those who languish in prisons, who are tortured, who suffer the ravages of war and famine. Bonaventure's counsel to live simply and humbly is connected to the imagery of nakedness—literal and dramatic in the case of Francis; metaphoric and reflective in Bonaventure.

The Tree of Life

Bonaventure begins the *Tree of Life* with Paul's statement: "With Christ I am nailed to the cross (Gal. 2:19)." In this text, Bonaventure explicitly refers to the role of the imagination in the spiritual life. He says:

> Because imagination assists understanding, I have arranged in the form of an imaginary tree the few passages selected from many, and have disposed them in such a way that, in the first or lower branches, the Saviour's origin and life are described; in the middle branches, His passion; and in the top branches, His glorification" (LV Prol. 2).

The quotations on each branch are in alphabetical order for easy remembering and there is a spiritual fruit growing from each branch.

This tree is reminiscent of that in Genesis 2:10. Its roots are watered by an eternally gushing fountain that becomes a great and living river that irrigates the whole garden of the church. There are twelve branches. The leaves serve as medicine, "for indeed the word of the cross is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16)" (LV Prol. 3). The flowers are fragrant, drawing our desires. "This is the fruit born of the virginal womb, and ripened on the tree of the cross to delectable maturity by the midday heat of the Eternal Sun, that is, Christ's love" (LV Prol. 3). Like the hands of Christ extended horizontally to link us to God, the tree of life images the vertical link between earth and heaven. The flavorful fruits of this tree "refresh and strengthen the soul who meditates upon them and carefully considers each one; abhorring the example of unfaithful Adam, who preferred the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17) to the Tree of Life" (LV Prol. 5).

The point of this image is to invite us to reflect on God's love shown on the cross, but above all to reveal the intimate connections that God has established with us in Christ. The image is a vertical one, stemming in part from Bonaventure's deep sense of the hierarchical nature of the universe. But while today we shy away from ladders and hierarchies of all kinds to describe the spiritual life and our relationship with God, I think we do share with Bonaventure an appreciation of the deeper experience of the profound solidarity and loving abandon that God shares with us. Transposed into a new twenty-first century key, the image of the tree of life can feed our hunger for a truly incarnational understanding of the faith and of God's presence in and to the world.

The Vine

A related horticultural symbol is that of the vine, to which Bonaventure devotes an entire treatise, *The Mystical Vine: Treatise on the Passion of the Lord.* This text is perhaps the most graphic depiction of the details of the crucifixion. It is obvious that his aim is to move the reader to empathy, to tears, to a heart that sorrows with the sorrows of the beloved savior (4:3; 11:2; 15:1). The vine is pruned, bound, hung on a trellis that resembles a cross, the leaves of the vine are Christ's last words, the flowers are virtues, the rose is the flower colored by Jesus' blood. This is certainly a text that deserves careful meditation—especially perhaps during the penitential season.

In this text, Bonaventure compares the pruning of the vine to the stripping endured by Jesus in his incarnation and passion. By becoming man, Jesus was not only made "less than the angels" (Ps. 8:6), but he was even humbled more deeply than any human. "His glory was cut away with the knife of shame, his power with the knife of abjection, his pleasure with the knife of pain, his wealth with the knife of poverty" (VM 2:2-3). He was born poor, lived poor and died on the cross the poorest of all (VM 2:3). And then even his "friends and relatives were cut from him with the knife of fear, so that there was none to comfort him among all those who were dear to him" (VM 2:4). But this cutting is consoling because of the "abundance of fruit it yielded" (VM 2:4), thus giving his readers a way to understand, in the light of the cross, the stripping that life inevitably brings through troubles, violence, addictions, illness, and aging. Bonaventure interprets Jesus' words, "It is consummated" (Jn. 19:30) as a model to help us "persevere in the face of all our troubles, until following our Guide, Jesus most kind, we reach the end of all our tribulations and can trustingly say with him: 'It is consummated'; that is: 'By your help, not by my own strength, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept faith' (2Tm. 4:7)" (VM 12:2).

A second image is that of the binding of vines. Bonaventure notes seven kinds of binding suffered by Christ: the virgin's womb, the manger, the ropes with which he was tied at his arrest, dragged to the tribunal, affixed to the scourging post, the binding of the crown of thorns, and that of the iron of the nails that held him on the cross. The one who is freedom itself is bound for the sake of our own freedom. Bonaventure entreats: "Let us be bound with the bonds of the passion of the good and most loving Jesus, so that we may also share with him the bonds of love" (VM 4:5).

Marked with the Cross

Bonaventure used another image to speak of human conformity to the cross—that of being signed or clothed with the sign of the cross—on the forehead, by wearing the Franciscan habit, and in Francis, by the stigmata. Bonaventure notes that Francis's ministry was to

> mark with a Tau the foreheads of those who moan and grieve, signing them with the cross of penance and clothing them with his habit, which is in the form of a cross. But even more is this confirmed with the irrefutable testimony of truth by the seal of the likeness of the living God, namely of Christ crucified, which was imprinted on his body . . . by the wondrous power of the Spirit of the living God (LM Prol. 1).

At the end of the *Major Life*, Bonaventure recounts the seven incidences in which Francis bore the arms of heaven emblazoned with the sign of the cross (LM 13:10). These signs culminate in the stigmata:

> Now, finally toward the end of your life you were shown at the same time the sublime vision of the Seraph and the humble figure of the Crucified, inwardly inflaming you and outwardly marking you as the second Angel, ascending from the rising of the sun and bearing upon you the sign of the living God. . . . The first six were like steps leading to the seventh in which you have found your final rest (LM 13:10).

The stigmata is the sign that Francis had reached the summit of gospel perfection and that he served as an example to others.

And in the Prologue to *The Tree of Life*, Bonaventure speaks again of this cruciform state. He tells us that the true worshiper of God and disciple of Christ who wants to conform to the crucified Savior should strive to "carry about continuously, both in his soul and in his flesh, the cross of Christ until he can truly feel in himself " what Paul says to the Galations (2:19): "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (LV Prol. 1). We might ask what it means to "carry the cross of Christ continuously in soul and flesh." In part 2 of *The Tree of Life*, Bonaventure suggests an answer. The four sections in this part recount Christ's passion and death in some detail. Bonaventure wants to convey a number of points.

The first is to assure the reader that Christ was fully human, suffering all the pains that we know as human beings. Bonaventure then leads us through a detailed account of Christ's passion and death. The account focuses on how Christ related to others, especially to those who were his enemies and to those who let him down—Judas the traitor, the guards, Peter, the high priest, the Jews, Pilate, Herod, the soldiers, and those who mocked Jesus. We watch to see how Jesus responds to the challenges of all these relationships. His behavior is characterized in these ways: meekness, silence, gentleness, mildness, submissive speech, charity, forgiveness, sweetness, love, grace, and words of blessing. These chapters are quite concrete in terms of presenting the most difficult of human relational situations and the ideal response that Jesus always gives. One can imagine Bonaventure himself, as administrator of the Order, faced with all kinds of opposition and contention. In this text, he might have been reminding himself and the friars of how to respond to people who betrayed or mocked or walked away from them. These are situations in which imitating Christ is challenging and difficult, indeed, but possible to those who bear the marks of the cross in their being.

Bonaventure also wants the reader to note the effect of the cross on Mary and Mary Magdalen. With Mary we are to feel desolation and to experience the Lord's word of consolation to her because her soul had been more "deeply pierced by a sword of compassion than if she had suffered in her own body" (LV 2:28). And even though the disciples fled, Mary Magdalen does not go away. She too is "ablaze with the fire of divine love," burning with such a powerful desire and wounded with such an impatient love that nothing had any taste for her except to be able to weep and lament with the psalmist, "Where is your God? (Ps. 41:4)" (LV 2:32).

> O human heart,
> you are harder than any hardness of rocks
> if at the recollection of such great expiation
> you are not struck with terror,
> nor moved with compassion
> nor shattered with compunction
> nor softened with devoted love (LV 2:29).
> . . . Grant to me that I may ponder [these events]
> faithfully in my mind and experience toward you
> my God crucified and put to death for me,
> that feeling of compassion
> which your innocent mother and the penitent Magdalene
> experienced at the very hour of your passion (LV 2:32).

Bonaventure wants the reader to develop an affection, a feeling for being nailed to the cross with Christ through contemplating "the labor, suffering and love of Jesus crucified" with vividness of memory, sharpness of intellect and charity of will" (LV, Prol. 1).

One can also reflect on the fruits of this experience of being marked by the cross. Zachary Hayes suggests that "when the human person responds to the offer of God's grace in an appropriate way, the basic effects of this response may be seen in a firm sense of fidelity to God, a strength of character in oneself, and an increasing generosity and love of one's fellow human beings. The fullness of grace is found when the human person is lifted above him or herself to love God above (and "in") all creatures, and to love not only those who

belong to one's household, but even one's enemies. This depth of love is the fullest meaning of the journey of human existence in the likeness of Christ."[23]

Conclusion

I hope that this brief excursion into some of the images that Bonaventure associates with the cross has whetted your appetite to linger over them, to allow them to wash over you, to let them penetrate those affective levels of the psyche that are most effectively touched by symbol and images, to understand their particular meaning for you, and to gain insight into how to translate that meaning into action. I began with Marigwen Schumacher's suggestion that Bonaventure's style, his choice of language and images is reflective of his being in touch with his own experience of the crucified. She wrote, "To touch—to probe—to, in a way, invade the mythic impulses of Bonaventure's heart and mind, is, I feel and think, an as-yet-unexplored path into his contact with God." There is "an intrinsic, inescapable relationship between the 'what' of Bonaventure's thought and the 'how' of his expression—mysticism tangible through metaphor."[24] Our appreciation of these images completes the hermeneutic circle—from our experience of the cross to Bonaventure's written description of his experience of the cross to our reading of his text and back to our own experience of the crucified. I close with a section from one of Bonaventure's sermons on St. Francis in which he lays before his audience a most compelling and burning question: "Do you desire to imprint Christ crucified on your heart?"

> How is it that we, wretched as we are, have such cold hearts that we are not prepared to endure anything for our Lord's sake? Our hearts neither burn nor glow with love. Ardent love is a quality of the heart and the stronger this love burns in a person's heart, the more heroic and virtuous are his deeds. Do you desire to imprint Christ crucified on your heart? Do you long to be transformed into him to the point where your heart is aflame with love? Just as iron when heated to the point where it becomes molten can take the imprint of any mark or sign, so a heart burning fervently with love of Christ crucified can receive the imprint of the Crucified Lord himself or his cross. Such a loving heart is carried over to the Crucified Lord or transformed into him. That is what happened to St. Francis. . . . The cross or sign of the cross imprinted on his body symbolized his love of Christ crucified and by the flame of that love he was totally transformed into Christ (DM 92-93).

Endnotes

[1]*The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Edward Arnold, 1994).

[2]Marigwen Schumacher, "Mysticism in Metaphor." In *S. Bonaventura 1274-1974*, Vol. 2 (Grottaferrata, Rome: Collegio San Bonaventura, 1973), 361-386.

[3]Schumacher, 362.

[4]Schumacher, 364.

[5]Schumacher, 365.

[6]Bernard Cooke, *The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 163.

[7]Schumacher, 366. *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1936ff) I, col. 1842.

[8]Schumacher, 384.

[9]The following abbreviations will be used in the text to refer to the works of Bonaventure: *Tree of Life/Lignum vitae* (LV); *The Mystical Vine/Vitis mystica* (VM); *The Office of the Lord's Passion/Officium de passione Domini* (OPD); *The Soul's Journey into God/Itinerarium* (Itin.); *On the Perfection of Life for Sisters/De perfectione vitae ad sorores* (DPV); *The Major Life of St. Francis/Legenda maior* (LM); *The Minor Life of St. Francis/Legenda minor* (LMin). References to the five sermons for the feast of St. Francis can be found in *The Disciple and the Master*, trans. Eric Doyle (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983)(DM); references to other sermons can be found in *Bonaventure: Rooted in Faith*, trans. Marigwen Schumacher (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974)(RF). Abbreviations for works on Francis and Clare include: *Second Life* by Thomas of Celano (2Cel); *Legend of Saint Clare* (CL).

[10]See *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* by Thomas H. Bestul (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) for an excellent analysis of this important medieval tradition.

[11]Bestul, 44.

[12]Bestul, 48. English translation, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961).

[13]Bestul, 46.

[14]Zachary Hayes, "Bonaventure: Mystery of the Triune God," *The History of Franciscan Theology*, ed. Kenan Osborne (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1994), 85.

[15]Leonardo Boff, *Saint Francis* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 27-28.

[16]*The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 13.

[17]Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 259.

[18]Jean Châtillon, "Nudum Christum nudus sequere: Note sur les origines et la signification du thème de la nudité spirituelle dans les écrits de saint Bonaventure," (Grottaferrata, 1974), 719-772.

[19]Ambroise Nguyen Van Si, *La théologie de l'imitation du Christ d'après Saint Bonaventure*. Bibliotheca pontificii athenaei antoniani, 33 (Rome: Edizione Antonianum, 1991), 114-115.

[20]Francis does not use this image at all. It occurs twice in Clare's writings, once in her Testament and once in her first letter to Agnes (TestCl 45; 1 LAg 27).

[21]Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones*, 3, "In Tempore Resurrectionis Domini," 1.

[22]Nguyen Van Si, 116.

[23]Hayes, 100.

[24]Hayes, 362.

The Cord, 47.6 (1997)

Religious Poverty from the African Perspective

Leonie Kindiki, LSoSF

Contemporary society has "baptized" Africa as a poor continent. Yes and no. The issue is relative. In terms of material benefits, and compared to the more advanced countries, Africa is poor. But Africa has been richly endowed with a rich cultural heritage and values, which she can give to de-valued societies. My task in this brief paper is to find some similarities between the concept of poverty in African traditional societies and Franciscan poverty today.

Who Were "The Poor" in Traditional Africa?

In traditional African society, there was no poverty or destitution in the ordinary sense of the words. Today, poverty and destitution are on the increase due to many factors, the main one being the introduction of a money economy to our societies.

The African idea of poverty is curious, to me. In some ways it has similarities to our Franciscan Gospel poverty.

The idea of material poverty was foreign to the African because, in the context of our traditional societies, people did not understand themselves to be surrounded by inanimate objects but rather by living human beings. People were more important than material possessions. Property and material wealth were sought after, but they were not a means to an end. Their importance lay only in that they were viewed as a blessing from God and the ancestors. One showed gratitude to God by generously sharing one's possessions with others.

On the other hand, those who had a piece of land on which to build a house and grow food were not considered materially poor. People could survive with a few domestic animals and fowls. One could manage with very few material possessions, but never without the community, clan, or family.

An individual in Africa saw him/herself as part of the larger community. The community was the hub and life of the individual; that is to say, there was

a mutual dependency—the individual contributed to the welfare of the community and vice versa. The community was central to relationships and to every social activity.

Poverty, for the African, was not to be able to share what one had with others in the clan or community. One shared things such as food, skills, abilities, talents, prowess, time, energy, celebrations, and religious rituals. Life revolved around the community. Communal activities such as tilling the soil, sowing, weeding, harvesting depended on a concerted effort. Meanness was therefore completely discouraged. Hospitality and generosity were very important values. Not to have these two values was to be poor. There was no room for individualism, for to be self-centered was to live and die poor. A person's wealth was measured not so much by what he or she possessed, but by the friends he or she had in the community. A poor person was one who did not have relatives, children, or friends. Such a person was poor because he or she was not able to share life and possessions with others.

There was another category of poor people. These were the social rejects such as witches, murderers, adulterers, thieves, and those who had committed incest. These people had defiled the land and society, and so were evicted from the community. They were publicly ostracized and sent into exile as a gesture of purifying the land. They became lonely fugitives with no family, name, or clan to call their own. To be cut off from the life of the community, from the ancestral land, and from one's clan was the ultimate form of poverty one could face.

In African traditional societies, therefore, material things were not a means to an end. Individualism, the scourge of our modern society, was something foreign. Not to be disturbed by the troubles, pains, and sufferings of other people in the community was the highest form of deprivation-destitution-poverty. To be rich and fully alive was to share in the flow of life, which had its mainstream in the community. The source of this life was God on whom everyone depended for life and well-being.

Pierre Brunette, OFM, (Canadian Province) gave a seminar on "contemplation as a source of our mission" to the men and women Franciscans in the Uganda region. Among the many things he said, the following struck me: "Once we opt to live in a religious community, we cease to be poor. We become rich because we have the presence and companionship of our brothers and sisters in the community/fraternity. The truly poor person in our modern world, is the one who has no one to talk to or turn to."

Our Franciscan vow of poverty goes beyond material poverty to poverty of spirit. The gist of poverty is total dependence on the goodness and generosity of God. Whatever we are and have are God's freely given gifts to us. We have nothing to call our own except, as St. Francis says, our vices and our sins

(RegNB 17). Our vow of poverty takes us, therefore, from the mire of self-centeredness to other-centeredness. In Franciscan poverty we share our skills, talents, time, love, etc. with others. It sends us out to empower others with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which we receive from contemplation and the sacramental life that we live.

With what can I compare the life of poverty? In Africa, most homes still have huge clay water pots. These are very useful, especially in the hottest months of the year. Each pot is filled with cool water, and the family members, or any passer-by who is thirsty, quench their thirst from it. When the pot gets empty, it is immediately refilled to continue serving the community.

God is always gift-giving, pouring forth what we need in a perpetual gesture of generosity. We receive God's gifts in a spirit of gratitude and humility and, in turn, let go by sharing them with others in our fraternities and ministries. Ultimately, all goes back to God and the circle of gift-giving continues.

Our vow of poverty thus builds up relationships, because the more one has, the less one has the need to interact with others. Our way of life demands inter-dependence if we are to grow spiritually. I think our vow of poverty, if lived authentically, has the capacity to make us fully human beings. The circle of gift-giving, which is at the marrow of God's poverty, is primarily living our identity as creatures created in God's image. In the end we return to God. The challenge for us African Franciscans is to incorporate and live these beautiful African values of generosity, hospitality, and relationships in our Franciscan way of life. May God give us the grace to live this gospel poverty we have freely chosen.

I wish to do something
that will recall to memory
the little Child
who was born in Bethlehem
and set before our bodily eyes
in some way
the inconveniences of his infant needs,
how he lay in a manger,
how, with an ox and an ass standing by,
he lay upon the hay
where he had been placed.
(Francis, 1Cel. 84.)

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Authority and Obedience in Africa: A Franciscan Reading

Damien Isabell, OFM

I have entitled this article "a Franciscan reading" and not "an African reading" for the obvious reason that I am not African. However, I have spent thirteen rich years in Zaire so I feel somewhat qualified to begin integrating and interpreting my experience. My hope is that this reflection will prompt other articles on inculturation of Franciscanism.

Structure of African Society

Hierarchy

Anyone who lives for even a short time in Africa discovers how the society is hierarchically structured. For example, no one dares to take an initiative that would affect the whole community without first addressing the chief. In African families the "grand frère," the oldest boy, as well as the paternal uncle, exercises great authority over the younger members of the family. Mediation is also a sign of this hierarchy for no one approaches a chief without first passing through a mediator.

The Africans I know have a great respect for authority. In some ways their identity depends on the acceptance of their place within the hierarchy. My friends in South Africa define this acceptance as "humility." Perhaps this explains why the Africans I know are not impulsive in their relationships with their superiors for they can never forget their place within the hierarchy.

God is at the top of the hierarchy; the ancestors are the mediators between God and the people. Ordinarily the elderly are considered to be closer to the ancestors than are the young. Chiefs, medicine men, diviners, and par-

ents also enjoy a special relationship with them. Hall is correct when he defines African identity as "I participate therefore I am."[1]

An example of how this hierarchy affects the treatment of mental illness is instructive. In the West, a classical psychiatrist analyzes a patient in private. But an African will pose the question: "Where does this psychiatrist's authority come from? Who gives him or her the right to intervene in my life?" Many Africans would prefer to have recourse to those with authority in the community, for such persons represent the ancestors. Therapy, then, would be done in a community setting. All the members of the community would help the troubled person to discover the source of his or her difficulty. In many cases the problem will stem from a breach of respect for the traditions and for the relationships demanded by these traditions. If, for example, someone did not perform all the prescribed rites before a wedding or at the time of a funeral, this could provoke serious problems both in a person's and in a family's life.

The people express respect for and obedience to the ancestors by pouring a few drops of beer onto the ground before drinking. Before undergoing an operation a person will invoke the ancestors. A woman who wants to have a child will appeal to the ancestors. When someone is preparing to leave on a journey, an elder will bless the traveler with saliva in honor of the ancestors. Obedience is not limited only to an individual or to a specific order; it is as large as the African tradition.

Tradition

It is evident that Africans live by traditions, as do all peoples. Respect for tradition is affirmation of identity. Refusal to respect a tradition means separation from the mainstream of the community, which is the equivalent of death for an African. A tradition may be changed or even rejected, but only by consensus and not by personal rebellion.

The authority of traditions is especially felt in critical moments of life. For example, when people face sickness and misfortune in the family, the cause may be attributed to the living dead, unless magic or sorcery and witchcraft are held responsible. The spirits of the living dead (the ancestors) serve as an explanation of what caused things to go wrong. In order to put things right the spirits have to be satisfied by the performance of rituals, by following their requests, or by correcting any breaches of the proper conduct towards them. Generally the diviner or medicine man is consulted in order to find out exactly what the alleged spirits may wish.

But on the whole, the spirits of those who died recently are benevolent toward their families as long as they are remembered and properly treated.[2] This is tradition in action. This is obedience. Traditions exist to preserve and

to increase life. But traditions are not frozen; they can admit new elements (such as Christianity) if they contribute to the life and well-being of the tribe.

> African Christians seem to accommodate Christianity readily in their traditional world-view. This is taking place particularly around the notion of God. They give up certain ideas, beliefs and practices in their traditional life, and assimilate newer understanding of God's dealings with men as proclaimed in Christianity. They also acquire the vision of a new hope of men being reunited with God at the end of the ages.[3]

Nonetheless, it is common for many African Christians to live on two rails. Instead of observing a monorail Christianity, many Africans obey their African traditions alongside their Christian faith. Many go to Catholic services and then to those of a sect; or they visit the medicine man in the afternoon. Many call on the priest to anoint their sick only after having consulted traditional healers or diviners. They have a great sense of obedience to the authority of the tradition.

When some Africans lose a close member of their family, they go into convulsions of crying. They isolate themselves in their rooms; they remove their shoes; they cut their hair; they will not eat with others. Their relatives and friends come to sit with them, to cry with them, to console them. According to the tradition, they must hold a wake and perform other rites which Westerners may scorn, but which depend on the authority of the ancestors. For example, in one tribe when the wife dies, her family comes and despoils the husband's house, taking with them everything that belonged to the wife. These people are Christians and see no incompatibility between the Christian spirit and the demands of the ancestors. (It would be interesting to analyze American customs to see which ones come from the faith and which ones are inspired by secular or tribal sources.)

Balance and Respect

> [Happiness] is not to be sought through a rapacious individual grasping after the power force latent in other human beings. That is the way of witchcraft. A man's well-being consists rather in keeping in harmony with the cosmic totality. When things go well with him he knows he is at peace and of a piece with the scheme of things, and there can be no greater good than that. If things go wrong, then somewhere he has fallen out of step. He feels lost. The totality has become hostile and, if he has a run of bad luck, he falls a prey to acute insecurity and anxiety. The whole system of divination exists to help him discover the point at which the harmony has been broken and how it may be restored.[4]

This thirst for harmony and communion explains the gregariousness of many Africans, for in it they feel reinforced in their identity. Silence, meditation, and isolated forms of prayer are not very popular among many Africans. A young African Franciscan writes: "A spirituality that is too individualistic and egoistic, which is separated from the community, is not welcomed by the African who thirsts for an affirming presence of his brothers. . . . African spirituality is a 'living with' in communion and fraternal charity. It is an active life."

Another young Franciscan doubts that this charity is always disinterested, for according to the tradition, solidarity is a two way street. One helps another in order to be helped later on when there is a need. That is the tradition. But the reality is that people do help out one another, and they do so in the name of the tradition. It is difficult to sort out motivations.

Among the "Shi" people, "it is wrong to burst out laughing at whatever moment for it would be a breach of solidarity, a lack of respect for the others." The Mushi "must control his gestures and words" because the presence of the other calls into question his spontaneity (a young Zairian Franciscan).

As we can see, obedience is considered a way of living together. It is based on respect, it seeks balance and equilibrium in the community.

Some Reflections on this Experience

Relationships with a Superior

It should be clear that a superior in this tradition is not just someone who has an official title. Ancestors are superiors, older brothers and paternal uncles are superiors as well. Obedience extends to them and to the traditions handed down by the ancestors. Of course, "the community needs a chief, a guide, a man of balanced judgment and self-control in order to reinforce the life of the clan, as well as the unity, fidelity, and confidence of its members" (a young Zairian Franciscan). If a man does not have these qualities, he can be removed, chased out, and in some cases killed. Instead of representing the will of God, which is the well-being of all, a bad chief has become a sorcerer and must be eliminated. A sorcerer is the opposite of the obedient person for he or she has no love for the well-being of the community.

Africans bring their living tradition into Franciscan life, eliminating what is negative in these traditions and reinforcing what is positive. This is an active obedience, an intelligent obedience towards all that have authority. In religious life many have a fearful respect for a superior and there is no buddy-buddy relationship between them. Expectations on a superior are very high, for the superior must promote life and represent the community to the outside world. In the case of someone who no longer seems to serve the community, the members, like Francis, would work for this person's removal.

The one who is chosen to be a superior in Africa has to balance the Franciscan idea of servanthood with the traditional image of a chief, somewhat like an American superior has to balance the model of religious superior with that of the benevolent head of a corporation! We have already mentioned the "initiatic mentality" which attributes the secrets of the traditions to the elders. These elders will, in turn, share these secrets only with those who are willing to undergo certain rites of initiation. A superior who would guard the secrets and not share them with the brothers or sisters would be a superior contested by African Franciscan subjects, for their assimilation of the Franciscan value of fraternity has created a desire for participation in the life of the fraternity.

African Franciscans feel the obligation to obey certain precious traditions such as hospitality, rites of the dead, feasts which reinforce life, rites of return after a journey, responsibility. A few examples might help us better understand African Franciscan obedience. Every Franciscan fraternity must know how to provide a warm welcome to outsiders as well as to members of their own families. Even when it is impossible to give food or drink to everyone who comes, the African Franciscan tries to be gentle and invites the guests to sit down somewhere. Because of the traditions, one is uncomfortable when there is nothing to offer guests. Instead of inquiring right away about the reasons for the visit, the African asks questions in order to discern how the visitors and their families are, where they are coming from, and so forth. Only after these introductory rites will one inquire into the reasons for the visit. A superior has to dialogue with the brothers or sisters in order to discern how this tradition can be preserved and to what extent the fraternity can respond to the demands of others. This is a perpetual source of conflict and of creativity.

Concerning the rites for the dead, tradition demands that bad news be revealed to the bereaved only when the latter is in a proper psychological state to receive it. For example, if a superior receives the news of the death of a close relative of a brother, and if that brother is doing his examinations, the superior must wait until the examinations are over before telling him. If the bereaved brother has to travel far in order to go to the wake, the superior will send along with him another brother in order to keep him company in his grief.

This same kind of obedience is applied to daily life. Never must a superior humiliate a brother or sister in public. A good superior is one who is sensitive to the physical and psychological needs of the brothers and sisters and does not humiliate them by depriving them of what is necessary. All authority is at the service of life. At times the superior has to help the members reflect on their lives and give them advice. "Donner des conseils" is a key expression in African life— give advice. Another key expression is "encourager," to encourage, give courage to, one another. One of the greatest sins in Africa is to "discourage" another person. This is true for Franciscan life as well.

Obedience

It seems that obedience is at the center of African life and, as we have seen, it is not limited to a superior-subject relationship. Obedience extends to the traditions and to all of creation as well. The laws of God's nature are to be obeyed. Perhaps this helps us give new importance to some of St. Francis's teachings on obedience. Recall how he spoke about being obedient to animals (Salutation to the Virtues); how he commanded his brothers to be subject to all peoples in mission lands (RegNB 16); how he told his brothers to live a life of servanthood, being willing to lay down their lives for others (Adm 3:9); how he told his brothers to keep very secret their brothers' sins, that which Africans would call solidarity (RegNB 11:5-11). Obedience is a fundamental attitude by which a person recognizes the presence of other persons and other things and respects their place in the hierarchy of creation.

Poverty

In this context we also have to reflect on poverty. For the highest law of God is that a person have life and contribute to the life of the community. The highest service that a person can render to another is to be with him or her, to encourage him or her. To close oneself up in possessions, not to use possessions to enhance the lives of others, this is to be an egoist, a sorcerer. One does not contribute to the life of others. Franciscan life professes to have nothing of one's own, but we do not forget how Francis insisted that the brothers have what is necessary for their body and soul and have everything necessary for their trades. No friar has the right to deprive another of what is necessary for life in the name of poverty. The highest law is that of life, the greatest obedience is to be at the service of life.

Conclusion

Admittedly, this article does not talk about authority and obedience in traditional terms. I feel that Africa is giving us a new or at least a renewed way of looking at these two realities. The elements that I have described reveal a profound respect for what has preceded us, a gentle and devoted service to the life which we are living, and a great sense of responsibility to contribute to the life of others. To do otherwise would be disobedience; it would be sorcery.

Authority and obedience are at the service of the cohesion of the clan. Evangelically, authority and obedience are at the service of God's kingdom. There is a tight relationship between how the brothers and sisters live and the implantation of the kingdom. Since each level of the hierarchy is held together

by an awareness of one's place and one's responsibility, we might conclude that humility and responsibility are at the center of African spirituality. True, these have to be broadened beyond the clan and the tribe, but it is potentially a great force that can contribute much to the Franciscan Order.

Endnotes

[1]In John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence Amid African Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 42-3.

[2]See John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 78-79.

[3]Mbiti, 189.

[4]Hall, in Taylor, 66-67.

From Bonaventure's reflection on the "Second Feast," Bringing Forth Christ: Five Feasts of the Child Jesus.
(Trans. Eric Doyle [Oxford: SLG Press], 7-8.)

Let us consider and mark well how the blessed Son of God, already conceived spiritually, is born spiritually in the soul. He is born when, after good advice, due thought and prayer for God's protection, we put into practice our resolution to lead a more perfect life. That is to say, he is born when the soul begins to do that which it long had in mind, but was afraid to undertake through fear of its own weakness. The angels rejoice at this most blessed birth, they glorify God and announce peace (Lk. 2:13).

Once this birth has taken place the devout soul knows and tastes how good the Lord Jesus is (Ps. 34:9). And in truth we find how good he is when we nourish him with our prayers, bathe him in the waters of our warm and loving tears, wrap him in the swaddling cloths of our desires, carry him in an embrace of holy love, kiss him over and over again with heartfelt longings and cherish him in the bosom of our inmost heart.

The Cord, 47.6 (1997)

A Sermon on the Trinity Inspired by St. Bonaventure

Philippe Yates, OFM

When Trinity Sunday approaches many priests wonder how on earth they can talk to their congregations about such an unearthly doctrine as that of the Trinity. It seems so much like a mathematical puzzle; you know, one of those that you receive in Christmas crackers where you have to fit various pieces together in order to make a pyramid or some other shape. No matter how hard you try there always seems to be one piece that doesn't quite fit. So it can be when we try to explain how three can be one and one three, perfect in unity yet differentiated into three persons. Not only is such a way of talking about the Trinity quite mind-boggling, but ultimately it doesn't help us to understand God any better and leads us to the conviction that the mystery of the Trinity is best left alone.

The Trinity in Our Life

But there are ways of looking at the Trinity that are not in the least mathematical and that lead, as well, to a richer understanding of what the Trinity means to us as Christians. Of course we can't ever hope to plumb the depths of meaning in the Trinity, but we can have greater insight into this wonderful mystery. I hope that as we come to some greater understanding of the implications of the doctrine of the Trinity, we will be able to contemplate it in prayer and so be drawn into the life of the Trinity which is the source and model of all life and of all that we know. This sermon is not supposed to be the last word on the Trinity, but instead a starting point so that we can meditate and reflect on the meaning of the Trinity in our own lives.

We can know some things about God just by reflecting on the world and on our human situation.[1] We can wonder that anything at all exists and surmise that God must be what underlies the existence of everything. So we can

see that God is at the root of all being and that our being is grounded in God's. We can say that God's Being is what supports the existence of all the universe. Similarly we can look at the harmony, the balance, and the order in the universe, despite all the forces that scientists tell us work to create chaos and imbalance, and we can surmise that there is one mind, one force behind all that exists. In this way we can see that God is One. These are the sorts of things that an open mind can surmise for itself about God. But the doctrine of the Trinity is so unusual that we could not guess at it unless it were revealed to us. We could not recognize the Trinity in our experience of the world and in our human situation without the help that God gives us in the Scriptures. So it seems that it is to the Scriptures that we must turn in order to get an inkling of how to approach this mystery of the Trinity.

In the Old Testament it is God's unity that is stressed continually.[2] In the New Testament the concept of the Trinity is introduced in Matthew's Gospel where the disciples are given the mission to go and baptize all nations "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19).[3] It took many years and much argument before Christians finally worked out the implications of this statement and realized that it was telling us there exist distinctions within God's unity. Within the Godhead there are three Persons of equal dignity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Now God doesn't reveal aspects of the godhead just so we can marvel at how complicated God can make everything. God's revelations always mean something for us. They tell us something about how we should understand God to be, how God treats us, and because we are made in God's image, how we should treat each other and the world around us. So the doctrine of the Trinity must also tell us something important about who God is, how God interacts with us, and how we should act.

When theologians investigated what the Trinity meant, various different theories emerged. One influential one was Augustine's, that the Trinity corresponded to a triad of powers in the human mind, the powers of memory, will, and understanding. But although this reveals something of the working of the Trinity, to my mind it is not very inspirational, and I prefer to start with some of the descriptions of God in the Scriptures rather than with human psychology.

The Trinity as Goodness

Christ tells us that "No one is good but God alone" (Mk. 10:18; Lk. 18:19),[4] so it seems that in our Christian understanding goodness is an attribute that can only fully be given to God. This attribute of God seems an appropriate place from which to start when trying to understand the Trinity.[5] Before we

look at the Trinity, though, let's look at our concept of goodness. Try to describe goodness to yourself. I'll bet that the way you described goodness was by using an example of a good action or a group of actions such as: goodness is somebody doing a completely selfless act, or goodness is caring for other people more than for yourself. We can't think of goodness in the abstract; it is always manifested by a reaching out to another person. We can say that goodness always reaches out and wants to share itself with another; goodness of its very nature needs to be communicated to another. If this is true of human goodness, then how much more must it be true of the goodness of God?[6] If God is good, then God must have an object that God can reach out to in goodness, otherwise it would be meaningless to speak of God being good.

So we may ask, if God is good, then what is the object of God's goodness—to whom is God good? Our first answer would probably be that God is good to us, to all God's creatures, but on reflection this answer seems inadequate.[7] God is absolutely boundless, infinite, and eternal, and so God's goodness is likewise boundless, infinite, and eternal. Can our universe with its limits in time and space really be thought of as an adequate object of God's goodness? God's goodness cannot be exhausted on a universe which, no matter how big, is in some way limited. We know from faith that God created the universe from nothing and therefore it is limited in time; but we also have confirmation of this from science which tells us that the universe started in a big bang and will end either in a big crunch or in a gradual dissipation. Scientists can also tell us the limits of our universe in space. God's goodness could not be adequately poured out on a limited universe.

We also know from faith that God is almighty, and yet by saying that God needed to create the universe in order to be good, we would be saying that a good God is obliged to create. Being obliged to create would put a limit on God's power—God could not choose not to do this. Thus if God were good, God could not be almighty; and if God were almighty, God could not be good.[8] This is clearly absurd and so we need to look outside creation for the object of God's goodness.

The only other possibility is that God's goodness is poured out within the Godhead. For this to happen there would need to be at least two members of the Godhead, one who is the source of goodness and one onto whom goodness can be poured.[9] God's goodness must be the most perfect goodness because of God's own perfection. So when God communicates goodness, God's communication must be the most perfect communication of goodness that is possible. But goodness can be communicated in two ways—either by nature or by an act of the will.[10] An example of both these types of goodness can be seen in a couple having a family. The couple pass on to each of their children their goodness in the form of the genes that each child inherits from both parents; that is what we call the natural communication of goodness. The couple pass

on another type of goodness when they take care to ensure that each child has enough to eat, is taught right from wrong, and is given a loving home environment in which to grow and develop. That is communication of goodness by acts of the will.

Since God's goodness must be perfect, God must pass on goodness in both ways. Within the Godhead, the Father passes on goodness to the Son in the first way by sharing with the Son the very being of God. All that the Father is he passes on to the Son through his generation of the Son. The Son as recipient of the Father's goodness is himself perfectly good and returns goodness to the Father. They then both join in choosing by an act of the will to communicate goodness to the Spirit who thus flows from the goodness of the Father and the Son. In this way both the types of goodness are communicated within the Godhead, and we can say that God is the highest good.[11] The doctrine of the Trinity has thus taught us how it is that God can be completely good and how it is that all goodness can reside in God even before God chooses to create any creature.

The Trinity as Love

Another way of understanding the Trinity comes from the New Testament insight that God is love (1Jn. 4:8).[12] We can follow a type of argument similar to that we just followed when discussing God as good. Love never exists in the abstract; when we hear that someone is in love our first reaction is to ask "With whom?" (or more probably but less grammatically "Who with?"). We know that one is never just "in love," but always in love with someone and that for love to exist there must be a lover and a beloved. In love the lover gives of oneself to the beloved, offering oneself for the good of the beloved, always seeking the good of the beloved, and thinking little of one's own benefit. The lover even goes so far as to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of the beloved. In order for love to be perfect the beloved must be proportionate to the lover—that is they must be equals. For example, the love of a husband for his wife is more perfect than the love of a pigeon fancier for pigeons, for the wife is equal to her husband, whereas the pigeons are in no way equal to the pigeon fancier. Each type of love may be genuine, but the former, when authentic, will always be more perfect. It is a true relationship in which the partners can reciprocate their feelings, whereas the pigeons can never feel in the same way about the pigeon fancier as he or she does about them.

For God to be love, God must have a beloved. Just as we saw that creation is inadequate as a recipient of the good that is God, so we can also see that it is insufficient as a recipient of the love that God offers. Creation is limited in time and space and so could never be proportionate to God who is eternal and infinite. Creation could never be an equal able to return with equality the love

that God pours out on it. Therefore if we are to say that God is love, then we must find a beloved who is proportionate to the lover. Once more we find the beloved in the person of the Son whom the Father begets and into whom the Father pours all his love, to whom the Father gives all that he is. The Son as the beloved returns to the Father all the love that he receives from the Father. The Son has been endowed by the Father with all the Father's dignity and honor and so is the co-eternal equal of the Father.

So much for the Father and the Son; but we must also explain how the predicate of love requires a third person also. When human love is perfect it does not remain narcissistically enclosed in a relationship of two people, but flows out into others, the two people join their wills in loving others. We recognize this in the marriage ceremony where the partners are asked if they are prepared to accept children lovingly from God. For the love of the spouses to be perfect, it must be open to children, so that the spouses can join their wills in loving another, their child. This openness to children is also symbolic of an openness to others so that the relationship between the spouses becomes a source of support for the community around them and not just a mutual appreciation society.[13] If this openness is necessary for human love then it is all the more important for divine love which must be perfect in every way. That is why the Father and the Son join in an act of the will to engender the Spirit, a third person whom they both can love conjointly and completely.

The Roles of the Three Persons

In both the understandings of the Trinity that I have detailed we can see the eternal roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit played out in a similar way, which is what one would expect if the understandings reflect anything at all of the reality of the Godhead. The Father is the source of the Godhead, the fountain head, the one from whom the other two persons emanate.[14] The Father offers goodness and love completely to the other two persons of the Trinity. The love is totally generous and the goodness likewise. The Father is the sole source of the Son and conjointly with the Son is the source of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is at the other end of the scale—the Spirit is totally receptive, responding with generosity to the love which both the Father and the Son lavish on the Spirit. The Spirit is the receiver of the goodness of both the Father and the Son and responds to both of them with equal goodness. The Spirit is the only totally receptive person in the Trinity, which is why the Spirit is often spoken of as Gift.[15] When we give a gift to someone we do not expect to get anything in return; if we did it would not be a gift but a bribe. When we are offered gifts, it is sometimes difficult for us to receive them graciously;

sometimes our pride intervenes ("I don't need your help") or sometimes it is our cynicism that gets in the way ("There's no such thing as a free lunch; what are you after?"). And yet, when gifts are freely offered and graciously received, they are signs of generosity, liberality, and mutual concern, and they do much to build up a relationship. We can see in the receptivity of the Holy Spirit, the gracious acceptance of the most perfect gift, the gift of self offered jointly by the Father and the Son. God's overflowing generosity and liberality are manifested in the relationship of the Spirit with the Father and the Son, and the perfect mutual concern of the persons of the Trinity becomes evident in the offering and acceptance of the gift of self.

The Son occupies an intermediary or central position between the Father and the Spirit. He receives goodness and love from the Father; the Father shares with him all that he is. The Son not only receives love and goodness from the Father and responds to that love and goodness, but also passes on love and goodness to the Spirit by cooperating with the Father in the production of the Holy Spirit. Thus we find in the Son both the generosity of the Father and the receptivity of the Spirit. The Son receives from the Father and offers to the Spirit, both goodness and love.

Names and Attributes

When God is spoken of in the scriptures and in theology, God is given many names or attributes. Some of the attributes, like "being," are attributes of God's nature and are therefore shared equally by all three persons of the Trinity. Some are personal and refer to one or other of the persons of the Trinity, for example their names—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We could not refer to the Father as the Son or the Holy Spirit because the name of Father sums up something about the first person of the Trinity that the other names do not.

There are other names or attributes that, while they refer to the nature of God and therefore are shared by all three persons, can also be said to be most appropriately given to one or other of them. By such an appropriation we can highlight the particularity of each of the persons of the Trinity. All three of the persons of the Trinity possess power, wisdom, and goodness, but we usually attribute these qualities most especially to one or other of the three persons. We say that the Father is most appropriately given the attribute of power because he is the source of the Trinity and the two other persons emanate from him. We say that the Son is most appropriately given the attribute of wisdom, because he proceeds from the Father and knows all that is in the mind of the Father. The Spirit is most appropriately called goodness because the Father and the Son join together in an act of freely willed goodness to produce the Holy Spirit.[16]

We have so far looked at the Trinity in terms of its interior life, but the conclusions we have reached also bear on the relations of the Trinity with creation, that is with us and the universe we live in. The Trinity is complete and sufficient unto itself and so has no need of creation. This means that the act of creating was not undertaken out of any necessity; instead it was a freely chosen act of goodness and love. God could have created any world God wanted, but God wanted to create a world that reflected God's glory outside the Godhead.

Relationship with Creation

When we look at Monet's paintings of London we can see the impression that Monet had of the old city. His paintings show a fog-bound yet elegant and stately metropolis, mysterious and yet familiar. From the work of art we discover something about Monet, his feelings and his genius. In a sense the paintings give glory to the artist and reflect his nature. We can say something similar about creation reflecting the glory of God.[17] But a work of art without anyone to observe it and find meaning in it is incomplete; it is like a word spoken in a deserted room, a communication which has no destination, or a book without a reader. Therefore it was most fitting for God to create creatures that could appreciate creation and see in it a reflection of God's glory, which is the purpose of humanity within creation. When we look at the world with eyes of faith, we are drawn to contemplate the glory of the Creator and in our contemplation to bring creation back with us to the Creator.[18] That is our role here on earth—to reflect on the world and so be drawn back into the life of the Trinity which it reflects. In doing this we carry the world back with us to its source, God.

This has significant consequences for our self-understanding and for our understanding of the world around us. Not only does it impact on our understanding but also on our actions. Our attitude to creation should be one of reverent awe, because it reflects the glory of God. To mar the beauty of Creation by thoughtless or greedy exploitation of natural resources is not simply foolish but in a sense blasphemous. It is like destroying the photograph of a loved one or scarring a painting that has contributed meaning to the lives of millions. It is like these but far worse, because the one we insult, the one whose image we desecrate, is the very one who has given us all that we are and who calls us only to return love for love and goodness for goodness. To treat another human being with anything less than respect is likewise an extreme discourtesy to the one whose image we find mirrored in each human person.

We are created in God's image and likeness[19] and so in a sense we stand at the head of creation, the best example of creation's possibilities; but we don't

reflect the dignity of our creation unless we act in accordance with our nature. We are the image of God. Therefore we are called to act with the goodness and love that are characteristic of God. These lead us into relations with our fellow creatures just as God's love and goodness are reflected in the perfect communication between the three persons of the Trinity. We cannot fulfill our destiny in isolation, but are called to reach out to others and build community with them, so that relations between creatures can reflect the harmony of the Creator.

Conclusion

These are just some of the ways that our contemplation of the Trinity can affect our lives. They serve to illustrate the never-ending process to which we are called—to contemplate the world and to see there the attributes of God. Through the Scriptures we come to a deeper understanding of God. We can then reflect on our position in the world in the light of our understanding of God. This reflection leads us back once more to God. In this way we are drawn ever deeper into understanding both the world we inhabit and the God we worship. If we are wise this process will never stop throughout our lives.

Endnotes

[1]"For from the greatness and beauty of created things, their Creator can be seen and known" (Wis. 13:5), quoted by Bonaventure in *The Soul's Journey into God*, 1: 9 (hereafter indicated as Itin.) All the citations from this work are taken from *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God; The Tree of Life; The Life of St. Francis*, trans. E. Cousins (New York, Paulist Press, 1978).

[2]"The first [method] looks chiefly to the Old Testament which proclaims most of all the unity of the divine essence." Itin 5:2.

[3]"The second method looks to the New Testament which determines the plurality of Persons by baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Itin 5:2.

[4]Cf. Itin 5:2.

[5]"Now just as being itself is the root principle of viewing the essential attributes, and the name through which the others become known, so the good itself is the principal foundation for contemplating the emanations." Itin 6:1.

[6]"For good is said to be self-diffusive; and the highest good must be most self-diffusive." Itin 6:2. Bonaventure draws his notion of good as self-diffusive from pseudo-Dionysius.

[7]"For the diffusion in time in creation is no more than a center or point in relation to the immensity of the divine goodness." Itin 6:2.

[8]"Il n'a besoin de rien en agissant hors de lui." *Breviloquium*, partie 2, 1:4, *Le monde créature de Dieu, texte latin de Quaracchi et traduction française* (Paris, Editions Franciscaines, 1967). All references to the *Breviloquium* are to this series of eight volumes. It is henceforth indicated as Brev.

[9]"Therefore, unless there were eternally in the highest good a production which is actual and consubstantial . . . it would by no means be the highest good because it would not diffuse itself in the highest degree." Itin 6:2.

[10]"Il n'existe que deux modes parfaits d'émanation, selon la nature et selon la volonté." Brev, partie 1, 3:2.

[11]Itin 6:2.

[12]This argument comes primarily from Richard of St. Victor, but is taken up by Bonaventure. "In analyzing the trinitarian dynamic as one of love, Bonaventure follows Richard of St. Victor in arguing that the three persons represent three modalities of love." Z. Hayes, "Bonaventure," in *The History of Franciscan Theology*, ed. K. Osborne (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1994), 58. In his commentary on the *Sentences* Bonaventure identifies the procession of the Spirit as the best example of procession by way of love because the procession of the Spirit is primarily an act of the will, which is the basis of love. I Sent. d. 6, a. u., q. 2, resp.

[13]Cf. I Sent. d. 10,a. 2, q. 1,resp.

[14]Brev, partie 1, 3:7.

[15]"L'Esprit Saint est proprement le Don." Brev, partie 1, 3:9.

[16]Brev, partie 1, 6:1.

[17]"On peut conclure que la création du monde est semblable à un livre dans lequel éclate, est représentée et est lue la Trinité créatrice." Brev, partie 2, 12:1.

[18]"In relation to our position in creation the universe itself is a ladder by which we can ascend into God." Itin 1:2. "Toutes les choses corporelles sont faites pour le service de l'homme, de sorte que par toutes ces choses, l'homme est poussé à aimer et à louer l'auteur des mondes, dont la providence a disposé toutes choses." Brev, partie 2, 4:5.

[19]Itin 3:1.

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Book Review

Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings. By Thaddée Matura, OFM. Translated by Paul Barrett, OFMCap. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1997. Pp. 194. Paper, $12.

> But as the Lord granted me to speak and to write the Rule and these words simply and purely, so shall you understand them simply and without gloss, and observe them with their holy manner of working until the end (Test 39).

To anyone familiar with the work of Thaddée Matura, OFM, it should come as no surprise that this, his latest book, not only focuses its content on the writings of Francis of Assisi, but also takes very seriously this "admonition" which the saint enjoined upon his brothers at the end of The Testament. For in this text Matura presents, as he writes in his "Foreword," "a systematic analysis of the global vision that inspired Francis to write," and he does so "simply and without gloss," deriving his synthesis from the texts themselves with nothing imposed from outside of them.

To attempt such a concordance-like approach to the writings is a daunting task to begin with, even when one considers the invaluable assistance which computers can provide. The process is akin to counting and separating out the pieces in a thousand piece puzzle. However, placing these same pieces side by side in such way that one is able to see both the message and the portrait of Francis come into full view takes the kind of painstaking faithfulness to the message and an uncompromising love of the man that only few scholars like Matura are capable of.

As he states clearly in his "Foreword," Matura's work with the writings of Francis over the past thirty years has convinced him that "the message conveyed in Francis's writings and the one which all the biographical literature attributes to him, not only do not overlap, but positively diverge, if only because the focus of each is different." Indeed, any student of literary genre knows that even the most carefully researched biography communicates more about the biographer than it does about the historical figure whose life is being chronicled. What Matura does in this book, then, is to maintain consistently the distinction between the historical figure of Francis and his written message.

In Chapter 2, "Keys to Reading Francis," Matura roots his close examination of Francis's written message in what he identifies as the two writings which "provide a comprehensive overview of Francis's vision, namely, chapter 23 of the Earlier Rule and the principal passages in the Second Letter to the Faithful." His examination of these texts clearly demonstrates his scholarship. However, the analysis is punctuated with lyrical, even poetic moments: God, "this abyss of love waiting to receive us" (36).

With his analyses of these texts, Matura also presents the main themes which Part II of his book explores: Francis's Trinitarian vision of God with its emphasis on the primacy of the Father, the sending of the Word, and the Spirit's holy manner of working; God's loving plan of salvation with the human person as integral to that plan; the journey of conversion as a turning toward this loving God in Christ; the different vocations which Francis distinguished and suggested as ways to walk that journey.

The divergence between the historical Francis and the author Francis is clearly visible in Chapter 4, "Humanity, a Vision of Contrasts." Even in the course of his analysis of Francis's view of the human person, Matura is aware that his listing of the words Francis uses to describe the human person creates a "nauseating catalogue" (99). This view contrasts with the images of brotherhood, sisterhood, and perfect joy which we want to and justifiably can also attribute to the more popular portrait of Francis. However, harsh as this view of human nature may appear to the reader, Matura contends that it is more "clear-sightedness and realism" than it is "pessimism" and is "based on an assessment of human behavior which [Francis] found in the Gospels but which is often overlooked" (100).

Matura attempts to create a work that straddles the fence between tedious and meticulous study that intrigues and delights specialists and a more popular and easily accessible approach. The author favors the technical, however, even with all of his efforts "to keep a foot in both camps" (xii). With the exception of Chapter 1, "The Man and His Message," and Chapter 7, "Interpretation and Relevance of Francis's Vision," which frame the text, this is a work for those who can be patient with exegesis and the scrupulous attention to the detailed analysis of words which the process necessitates. Moreover, as Matura recommends, unless the reader is very familiar with the writings of Francis, it would be well to have a text close at hand (xiv).

With the text of Francis's writings and Matura's work in hand, the reader can certainly come to understand more clearly the words of both—if not "simply," at least "without gloss." More importantly, both for Francis and for Matura, the reader's desire may be intensified to "observe them with their holy manner of working until the end."

Clare A. D'Auria, OSF

Contributors

Clare A. D'Auria, OSF, is a Sister of St. Francis of Philadelphia, Aston, and Associate Director of the Religious Formation Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland. The main focus of her writing and speaking activities has been Franciscan Evangelical Life.

Elizabeth Dreyer, PhD, of Hamden, CT, is a specialist in historical theology. She is presently writing a book on the theology of Bonaventure. She is author of *Passionate Women: Two Medieval Mystics* (Paulist Press), *Manifestions of Grace* (Liturgical Press), and *Earth Crammed with Heaven: A Spirituality of Everyday Life* (Paulist Press).

Damien Isabell, OFM, originally from the Sacred Heart Province, now teaches at Scholasticat Jean XXIII, in Kolwezi, Katanga, Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire). Previous publications include *Workbook for Franciscan Studies* and *The Spiritual Director: A Practical Guide.*

Leonie Kindiki, LSoSF, is a member of the congregation of the Little Sisters of St. Francis in East Africa. She has been a secondary school teacher in Uganda and is a 1995 graduate of The Franciscan Institute. Presently she is doing doctoral studies in Franciscanism at the Pontificio Ateneo "Antonianum" in Rome.

Clairvaux McFarland, OSF, is a Franciscan Sister of Rochester, Minnesota. Her art work has frequently graced the pages of *The Cord* and other Franciscan Institute publications. Her current work involves the creation of icons.

Jack Wintz, OFM, is a member of St. John the Baptist Province, Cincinnati. He is senior editor of *St. Anthony Messenger* magazine and edits *Catholic Update.*

Philippe Yates, OFM, is a friar of the English Province, currently pursuing doctoral studies in canon law at the Pontificio Ateneo "Antonianum" in Rome. An earlier contribution to *The Cord* focused on Franciscan eremitism (Jan./Feb, 1996).

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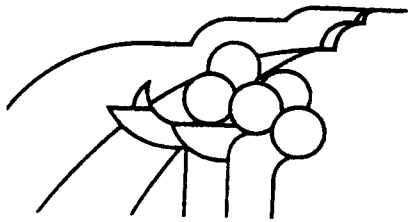

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Biographical Profiles

ON THE FRANCISCAN CIRCUIT
COMING EVENTS 1997-1998

Sunday, November 30-Sunday, December 7, 1997
Bringing Forth Christ. Advent retreat based on Bonaventure's Five Feasts of the Child Jesus. André Cirino, OFM. $230. Contact: Marie Therese Kalb, OSF, Shalom Retreat Center, 1001 Davis St., Dubuque, IA 52001.

Friday, December 5-Sunday, December 7, 1997
Facing the Christ Incarnate. At Immacualte Conception Convent, Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies. Ingrid Peterson, Maureen Clare Hall, Eleanor Granger. Contact: Franciscan Federation, P.O. Box 29080, Washington, DC 20017, ph. 202-529-2334, fax 202-529-7016.

Friday, December 12-Sunday, December 14, 1997
Advent Retreat Weekend. With Edward Coughlin, OFM. At Franciscan Spiritual Center, Aston, PA. Contact: Andrea Likovich, Franciscan Spiritual Center, 609 S. Convent Road, Aston, PA 19014, ph. 610-558-6152, fax 610-558-6122.

Sunday, February 1-Friday, February 6, 1998
Franciscan Gathering XVIII. Toward a Franciscan Spirituality for the 3rd Millennium. With Gabriele Uhlein, OSF. At Franciscan Center, Tampa, FL. Contact: Jo Marie Streva, OSF, Franciscan Center, 3010 Perry Ave., Tampa, FL 33603, ph. 813-229-2695, fax 813-228-0748.

Tuesday, February 3-Friday, February 13, 1998
Mexico GATE Pilgrimage Retreat for Franciscans. Roberta Cusack, OSF. Contact: GATE, 912 Market St., LaCrosse, WI 54601-8800, ph. 608-791-5283, fax 608-782-6301.

Sunday, February 8-Sunday, February 15, 1998
Walking in His Footprints. A Retreat for Franciscan Friars. With Joseph Rayes, OFM. At the Franciscan Center, Andover, MA. Contact: Franciscan Center, 459 River Road, Andover, MA 01810, ph. 978-851-3391, fax 978-858-0675.

Monday, February 23-Friday, March 6, 1998
LIFE program. With Joseph Rayes, OFM and Madonna Hoying, SFP. At the Franciscan Center, Tampa, FL. Contact: Madonna Hoying, 2473 Banning Road, Cincinnati, OH 45239, ph. 513-522-7516.

Thursday, March 5-Sunday, March 8, 1998
Legenda Major: Francis' Life as a Paradigm for the Spiritual Journey. With Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. At Tau Center. Contact: Tau Center, 511 Hilbert St., Winona, MN 55987, ph. 507-454-2993, fax 507-453-0910.

Friday, March 6-Saturday, March 7, 1998
Meeting Our Prophetic Tradition: Walking Beyond the Margin. With Marie Dennis and Joseph Nangle, OFM. At the Franciscan Center, Syracuse, NY. Contact: Marion Kikukawa, OSF, 2500 Grant Boulevard, Syracuse, NY 13208, ph. 315-425-0103.

Friday, March 6-Sunday, March 8, 1998
Franciscan Discernment Retreat. With Clare D'Auria, OSF. $80. Contact: Barbara Zilch, OSF, Franciscan Spirit and Life Center, 3605 McRoberts Road, Pittsburgh, PA 14234-2340, ph. 412-881-9207.

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	Admonitions
BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo
CantSol	Canticle of Brother Sun
EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo
EpMin	Letter to a Minister
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God
ExhPD	Exhortation to Poor Ladies
ExpPat	Prayer Inspired by the Our Father
FormViv	Form of Life for St. Clare
1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
2Fragm	Fragment of other Rule II
LaudDei	Praises of God
LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
OffPass	Office of the Passion
OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
RegB	Later Rule
RegNB	Earlier Rule
RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
Test	Testament
TestS	Testament written in Siena
UltVol	Last Will written for St. Clare
VPLaet	Dictate on True and Perfect Joy

Writings of Saint Clare

1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCl	Rule of Clare
TestCl	Testament of Clare
BCl	Blessing of Clare

Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum Commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection