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# From the Editor-in-Chief

In July we completed a three-year cycle of scholarly Franciscan conferences on the campus of St. Bonaventure University. The first one was devoted to the works of Peter of John Olivi; the second was dedicated to the works and world of Franciscan women in the medieval age; the third and final one of this cycle was focused on the spirituality, philosophy, and theology of St. Bonaventure. The proceedings of the first workshop have already been published in a special edition of *Franciscan Studies*. The papers from the second workshop are presently being assembled for a new book to be published in 2018. The proceedings from last summer's workshop will arrive by the end of the year. They too will become a fascinating tome of scholarship in the near future.

What is striking is the special space that St. Bonaventure University has become of late. Besides being such a lovely spot to do individual Franciscan studies and specialized work in Franciscan history and theology, St. Bonaventure is now offering scholars a unique opportunity to take specific Master classes with renowned scholars in specific areas of research. These Master classes allow graduate level study and doctoral students the opportunity to enrich their own research by engaging Master Teachers in Franciscan Studies in small cohorts of students. These will be one-week intensives with half-day classes and afternoons available for personal research in our renowned Friedsam Library and special collection of Franciscan materials.

Drew Belfield gives us a visual retrospective of the 2017 Bonaventure conference that brought together emerging and seasoned Bonaventure scholars in Western New York. Bonaventure scholarship is not dying. Last summer we gathered a large number of young scholars who are eager about his thought and brimming with enthusiasm for Bonaventure's relevance to the questions and concerns we face today. The articles within this magazine are similarly relevant and enthusiastic. They tell the story of God's existence and God's justice.

As the season changes to autumn, we enter the season of Franciscan feasts and festivals of saints. We share a story about a new Franciscan blessed in the Capuchin community in Detroit. Two authors write about a democratized mysticism and a Eucharistic mysticism rooted in social justice.

Whether deep articles on the existence of God in Bonaventure's thought or Franciscan anthropology and modern neuroscience, or more playful poems on a theophany experience at Walmart, this issue of *Franciscan Connections* will provide you with various pathways to God in the Franciscan tradition.



*Fr. Dave*

**David B. Couturier, OFM, Cap.,** is the Editor-in-Chief of *Franciscan Connections*. He is the Dean of the School of Franciscan Studies at St. Bonaventure University and Director of the Franciscan Institute.

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# “Vanishing Soul”: A Franciscan Anthropology

By Arokiam John, OFM

Francis of Assisi viewed the human person always in relation to the Triune God. From his writings, we come to know that he considered the human person as an *Image of the Son of God*,<sup>1</sup> a view in a stark contrast to many contemporary moderate and absolute dualistic views. These perspectives, borrowing from the pagan sources, held to the belief of the human person as a so-called “Vanishing Body.”<sup>2</sup> As in Francis’ time, today there are different views of the human person which treat body and soul separately and/or as one and the same reality, thus paving the way for the monistic concept of the human person and the acceptance of the theory of the so called “Vanishing Soul.” Today, the approaches of neuroscience and physicalists challenge the traditional religious and Christian way of understanding and speaking of the soul and consider them in general as promoters and supporters of dualistic views of what human person is. To our pleasant surprise, a section of science and theology has already contributed to the discussion about the hot topic called “Vanishing Soul” thus checking purely reductionist, materialistic and spiritualistic views of the human person. The recent issue of ESSSAT (European Society for the Study of Science and Theology) carries an article on this subject of “Vanishing Soul” and presents “some of the various approaches in neuroscience and other disciplines with regard to the concept of soul and the mind-body interaction, and how they challenge the tradition of so called ‘soul qualities.’”<sup>3</sup> In this write-up, my intention is neither to give an argument for the existence of the soul nor to explain the concept of soul by the physicalists and neuroscientists. Rather, my aim is twofold: on the one hand, pointing out the existing divergent views of the human person in Francis’ time, based on his writings to present his view of the human person and on the other, to explore its relevance, giving a Franciscan response to the discussion about the “Vanishing Soul” in the context of the church of our time.

## Major divergence from the biblical understanding of human person at the time of Francis

During Francis’ time, Catholic thought was dominated by Augustine’s philosophy and theology. Moreover, the whole of European civilization was influenced by the great classical philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle whose views of the human person were more dualistic than holistic. This has had consequenc-

es in the Christian thinking, understanding and expressions about the human person. The image of God or *imago Dei* is central to the biblical understanding of the human person. However, it is not always represented in the best tradition of the biblical revelation in the tradition of the church. In the last decade of our present century, this truth is recognized by the International Theological Commission in its reflection as follows:

Patristic and medieval theology diverged at certain points from biblical anthropology, and developed it at other points. The majority of the representatives of the tradition, for example, did not fully embrace the biblical vision which identified the image with the totality of the human person. A significant development of the biblical account was the distinction between image and likeness, introduced by St. Irenaeus, according to which “image” denotes an ontological participation (*methexis*) and “likeness” (*mimêsis*) a moral transformation...According to Tertullian, God created the human person in his image and gave him the breath of life as his likeness. While the image can never be destroyed, the likeness can be lost by sin...St. Augustine did not take up this distinction, but presented a more personalistic, psychological and existential account of the *imago Dei*. For him, the image of God in the human person has a Trinitarian structure, reflecting either the tripartite structure of the human soul (spirit, self-consciousness and love) or the threefold aspects of the psyche (memory, intelligence and will).<sup>4</sup>

The above observation acknowledges some dualistic and marginal differences in the interpretation of the *imago Dei* in the patristic and medieval theology. The Magisterium of the Church has always avoided an absolute dualism. Hence biblical scholars, Christian philosophers and theologians of Francis’ time joined with the Magisterium to oppose those views of the human person that completely diverged from the biblical anthropology and Christology. This was an alarming threat faced by the church from some of the popular movements of the 13th century. So much so, that Pope Innocent III believed there was a real danger of its collapse

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

1 Cfr. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, *The Admonitions*, no. 5. 1, in *Francis of Assisi: early documents*, vol. I, edited by R. J. Armstrong, J. A. W. Hellmann, W. J. Short, New York, 1999, p. 131. (The English translation of the writings of Francis and the Franciscan sources will be as given in this volume. Abbreviations will be as given in this volume. Hereafter the volumes in this series will be cited as FA:ED I, II or III, followed by page number).

2 In this article the phrase «Vanishing Body» is used to characterize the Cartharists’ heretical way of speaking of the human persons as spiritual ‘souls’ and denying the goodness of material reality (body) which also comes from God.

3 N. GEORGE, ‘Vanishing soul’: a non-reductive physicalists response, in *ESSSAT News & Reviews*, 27:1 (2017) p. 8.

4 International Theological Commission, *Communion and stewardship: human persons created in the Image of God*, no. 15, *The Holy See*, Internet (03.05.2017): [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20040723\\_communion-stewardship\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html).

# FRANCISCAN

## International News

On July 14, the Holy See released the pope's message to participants at the **International Congress "Laudato Si' and the Large Cities"**, held in Rio de Janeiro (July 13-15). The congress was organized by the Foundation "**Antoni Gaudi' para las Grandes Ciudades**" (Barcelona, in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro). The English text is available in the Messages section of [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

Visitors to [livelaudatosi.org](http://livelaudatosi.org) can sign a pledge to "pray for and with creation, live more simply, and advocate to protect our common home." The pledge is currently available in English, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian.

The **Franciscan Sisters, Daughter of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary** (Wheaton) are among five religious congregations, nine Catholic organizations and the Italian Archdiocese of Pescara-Penne who have recently pledged to disinvest themselves from fossil fuel corporations. This brings to 27 the Catholic entities making this pledge, according to the **Global Catholic Climate Movement**, a coalition of more than 100 Catholic organizations.

The ministers general of the First Order and the TOR have written "**Friars Minor in the World and in the Church: In Company with Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio.**" This year is being celebrated as the 800th anniversary of his birth.

The text (item above) emphasizes St. Bonaventure as a: 1) **man of God** seeking the divine face as revealed in Christ's humanity; 2) **university professor** seeking to bring faith and reason into unity; and 3) **minister general** strengthening the Order's fidelity to Francis and in service of the Church.

"Make a Dwelling" was the theme of the **Franciscan International Conference-TOR** that met last May in Assisi. Elections to four-year terms included Sister President Deborah Lockwood (Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity) and five councilors, including Sr. Joanne Brazinski (Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God, now living in Brazil).

The **Capuchin general council** met in Frascati last July with the Order's new provincial ministers and custodies.

Between May 2015 and May 2021, the **OFM general council** is meeting with each of the Order's 15 conferences. Their meeting with ministers of the **English-speaking Conference** will occur in Albuquerque, NM (October 7-16).

**Father Ibrahim Alsabagh, OFM** (Holy Land Custody) is pastor of St. Francis Parish in Aleppo, Syria. He recently received the Jan Karski award in Krakow for his work with all the people of that city. His diary (*An Instant Before Dawn. Syria. Chronicles of War and Hope from Aleppo*) has been published in several languages. Excerpts and photos appear in the July issue of Cincinnati-based *St. Anthony Messenger*.

In addition to its usual 2018 pilgrimages to Assisi and to the Holy Land, the **Franciscan Pilgrimage Program** in Franklin, WI will offer the "**St. Clare as Healer Pilgrimage**" (September 7-17). "We will explore St. Clare's life and role she took on, and continues to take on, in transforming those in need of healing."

Three OFMs participated in the annual **Run for Hope in Klaipedia, Lithuania** to benefit that city's **St. Francis Oncology Center**, founded by the St. Casimir Province. Evalda Darulis (pastor of St. Francis Parish in Vilnius) ran the full marathon. Algirdas Malakauskis (provincial minister there) and Michel Laloux (provincial in Paris) ran the half marathon. Thousands of runners participated to benefit the center, which provides information about cancer, treatments, therapy, counseling and community opportunities.

**Eight U.S. friars** of St. Barbara Province and Holy Name Province visited the friars in **Havanna, Remedios, and Trinidad, Cuba** last April 22-29. This was the tenth mission trip organized by Paul O'Keefe, OFM, mission promoter for Holy Name Province. The next trip will occur April 7-14, 2018. **Presently, there are three solemnly professed friars in Cuba (two of them elderly), two simply professed friars, two postulants, and two candidates.** They are part of the custody established by the former province in Murcia, Spain.

The **Society for Conservation Biology**, an international environmental organization, recently honored **Br. Herman Borg**, at friar missionary in Kenya. He has organized individuals, communities, school and institutions to **plant 1,000,000 trees in that country**, contributing to biodiversity and care of the environment.

On July 7, Pope Francis approved decrees regarding one miracle, two martyrdoms and the heroic virtues of five people, including **Louis Kosiba, OFM** (1855-1939), a brother in Poland.

## Key websites

[www.ciofs.org](http://www.ciofs.org)  
[www.ifc-tor.org](http://www.ifc-tor.org)  
[www.ofm.org](http://www.ofm.org)  
[www.ofmconv.net](http://www.ofmconv.net)  
[www.ofmcap.org](http://www.ofmcap.org)  
[www.francescanitor.org](http://www.francescanitor.org)  
[www.fiop.org](http://www.fiop.org)  
[www.sanfrancesco.org](http://www.sanfrancesco.org)

## National News

Some 240 attendees from 61 member congregations attended the June 16-19 conference in Buffalo of the **Franciscan Federation of the Sisters and Brothers Third Order Regular of the U.S.** They resolved "to stand in solidarity with Native American People in care of their land and of our Sister, Mother Earth."

During the conference (item above), **31 sisters and brothers of member congregations were honored for embodying the best of our teaching tradition or for embodying "the values of being incarnational, personal, communal, transformative, engaging the heart and developing servant-leaders."** The conference was entitled "Bonaventure's Journey into God: Franciscan Inspiration for the 21st Century." Next year's conference will again be held in Buffalo (June 11-15).

# ROUNDTABLE

The 19 Poor Clare monasteries in the **Mother Maddalena Bentivoglio and Holy Name Federations** in the United States and western Canada maintain a common website at [poorclaresosc.org](http://poorclaresosc.org). **Prayer requests and thanksgivings** submitted there will be shared with all the linked monasteries, each of which has its own URL with photos, contact information, and sometimes more.

A Franciscan friar (**Ponchie Vasquez**), a center sponsored by the **Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity**, and a former friar (**Antonio Trujillo**) are among the eight finalists for the Lumen Christi award to be given later this year by the **Extension Society** (headquartered in Chicago), the leading national supporter of missionary work in poor and remote parts of the United States.

Vasquez (see entry above) is pastor of the San Solano Missions among the **Tohono O'odham Nation on the US/Mexico border west of Tucson, AZ**. The St. Gabriel of Mercy Center in Mound Bayou in the **Mississippi Delta** partners with local organizations to provide the St. Gabriel Closet, parenting and GED classes, a computer learning lab, senior services and summer youth programs. Trujillo has revitalized **St. Joseph Mission School in San Fidel, NM**, which serves mostly Native American students. The school was about to close. More details about these finalists are available at [www.Catholicextension.org](http://www.Catholicextension.org). Nominations are made by local dioceses or archdioceses.

**The Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration have closed their Washington, DC monastery** and transferred those nuns to Sancta Clara Monastery in Canton, OH. The Washington property is now being used by the Sisters of Life.

**Sister Norma Rocklage, OSF** (Marian University, sponsored by the Oldenburg Franciscan sisters) has been honored by the Center for Interfaith Cooperation as **Interfaith Ambassador of the Year**. The mayor designated February 12 as "Sister Norma Day in the City of Indianapolis" for her contributions to the understanding and strengthening of relationships between people of different faiths.

More than half of the participants at the June 19-22 meeting in Atlanta of the **Association of U.S. Catholic Priests** came a day early for a retreat conducted by **Bishop Gregory Hartmayer, OFM Conv.** (Savannah). He recalled that the priest who blessed his chalice on his ordination day intentionally put a scratch on the inside of the cup. Hartmayer was irritated then but says: "Now I understand. I need to embrace my own vulnerability because the flaw is the place that allows the Spirit to come in and give life." The bishop went on to say that in Sabbath spaces "we see our dents and scratches."

The **Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement** serve in seven states in the U.S., Washington, DC, Brazil, Canada, Japan and the Philippines. In Assisi they run St. Anthony's Guest House.

**Doctor Chris Domes** began on July 1 as president of **Neumann University in Aston, PA**. Previously he was president of Silver Lake College in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.

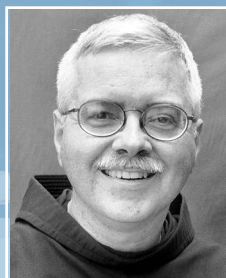
The cause of **Antonio Ciupa and companion martyrs in West Florida** is advancing, sponsored by the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, FL. The 16 friars and priests (Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit) and 67 laypeople (primarily Native American) were martyred for their faith (mostly by the English from nearby Georgia and their Native American allies) between the late 1500s and mid-1700s. More details on the cause are available at [news.wfsu.org/post/apalachee-martyr-among-cause-sainthood](http://news.wfsu.org/post/apalachee-martyr-among-cause-sainthood). **Timothy Johnson**, distinguished professor of religion at Flager College (St. Augustine, FL) is part of the cause's historical commission.

The cause listed above is separate from that of the five friars martyred on **St. Catherine's Island and the Georgia mainland in 1597** by a rival group among the Guale Native Americans. Excavations sponsored by New York City's Museum of Natural History at St. Catherine's Island have identified foundations for the church, friary and other structures.

Ministers of the OFM Holy Name, St. John the Baptist, Sacred Heart, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe and St. Barbara Provinces decided in August to petition their general council for the **reconfiguration of those six provinces** into a single province, probably in 2022. Each of the six provinces will hold a special chapter on the same day in May 2018 to vote on whether to join this single province.

## Key websites

[www.poorclaresosc.org](http://www.poorclaresosc.org)  
[www.poorclares.org](http://www.poorclares.org)  
[www.franfed.org](http://www.franfed.org)  
[www.USFranciscans.org](http://www.USFranciscans.org)  
[www.franciscancollegesuniversities.org](http://www.franciscancollegesuniversities.org)  
[www.FranciscanHealth.org](http://www.FranciscanHealth.org)  
[www.RuahMedia.org](http://www.RuahMedia.org)  
[www.franciscanpilgrimages.com](http://www.franciscanpilgrimages.com)



**Pat McCloskey, OFM**, the author of *Peace and Good: Through the Year with Francis of Assisi* (Franciscan Media). Send news items for this column to [pmccloskey@FranciscanMedia.org](mailto:pmccloskey@FranciscanMedia.org). He serves as Franciscan Editor of *St. Anthony Messenger* and writes its "Dear Reader," and "Ask a Franciscan" columns. He also edits *Weekday Homily Helps*.

### CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

before heresies.<sup>5</sup> The movements such as Catharists, Waldensians and others disregarded the Roman Catholic Church and preached their own version of the gospel and views of the human person which were considered as heretical. However, they regarded themselves as an alternative within the Catholic Church and were creating their own autonomous institutions and theories about God, human person and creation. Catharism was the most dangerous heresy and promoted dualism at the time of Francis. In fact, an adherent of Catharism, namely, Cathar makes an appearance in the hagiography of Francis written by the very first hagiographer of the

saint, namely, Thomas of Celano.<sup>6</sup> The Cathars claimed themselves to be belonging to a gospel-inspired movement. However, “the basis of Catharism was a non-Christian dualism deriving ultimately from Gnosticism.”<sup>7</sup> They used myths to explain the creation of the human person. Depending upon their views of the human person

in relation to the Creator, Cathars are classified into two types: moderate dualists and absolute dualists. They both believed that Satan had stolen the human soul from the heaven and put it in a body. For them, matter is evil. Therefore, we could say that they promoted the theory of “Vanishing Body” in opposition to today’s scientific theory of the “Vanishing Soul.” They held that the human person can free his soul from Satan’s rule by receiving spiritual baptism called *consolamentum*. Eating meat is discouraged as an animal may have an imprisoned angel or a human soul. Christ is considered as an “Angel, man, or God... sent to lead the fallen angels (the Cathars) back to heaven.” Finally, endorsement of the “Vanishing Body” or their cosmological and anthropological dualism of body and soul led them to reject sexuality and procreation, to take up

extreme asceticism and even voluntary suicide to attain sanctity or the liberation of the soul.

### Francis’ view of the human person: *Imago Dei* and *Imago Christi* -- Francis’ response to the most divergent views of the human person of his time

Francis’ approach to the heretical and absolute dualistic Catharists who favored belief of “Vanishing Body” was two-fold: biblical and Christian in the best tradition of the Catholic Church. He uses the religious vocabulary of the Medieval Church which is mediated by the liturgy and recognizes dualities that distinguishes God and creation, good and evil and biblical *Imago Dei* when speaking of human body and soul (anthropological dualities).<sup>8</sup>

Francis’ biblical and Christian view of human is seen in all his writings to a varying degree. His most striking attitude in the face of heresy and absolute dualism is gratitude to God for himself and thanking him for his creation, spiritual and corporal and for having created humans in his image. In Francis’ own words: “All powerful, most holy, almighty and su-



preme God, holy and just father, Lord King of heaven and earth we thank you for yourself through your holy will and through your only son with the holy spirit You have created all things spiritual and corporal and after making us *in your own image and likeness, you placed us in paradise*.”<sup>9</sup> It is clear here that he affirms the traditional and biblical view of the human person as *Imago Dei* (*imaginem et similitudinem tuam*). His approach also moves towards fuller interpretation of the Scriptures when he draws attention to *Imaginem dilecti Filii sui* which is similar to the Latin expression *Imago Christi*. He says, “We thank you for as through your son you created us, so through your holy love with which you loved us you brought about his birth as true God and true by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary and you willed to redeem us

5 Cfr. C. ADRESO, *Franciscan reform of the Church*, in *Go Rebuild my house: franciscans and the Church today*, edited by E. Saggali, New York, 2004, p 46-47.

6 Cfr. 2C 78-79; FA:ED II, 298-299.

7 Cfr. Y. DOSSAL, *Cathari*, in *New catholic encyclopedia*, vol. III, Washington - New York, 1967, p. 247.

8 In his writings, Francis not only uses the term “body” or “soul” alone to speak of the human person, but he applied as many as nine times, the words body and soul together to mean human person as a creature composed of the flesh. He utilizes the words soul, heart, mind and body together three times (ER 23, 8; I LtF 1-2; PrOF 5). It is important to note that Francis has used the term “heart” as the many as 42 times in his writings. His understanding of “heart” is more than a mere physiological organ of the human person. Its structure or function is important to understand Francis’ concept of the whole person. According to him, the human person adores and beholds the Lord God with a pure heart and soul (Adm 16, 2). Francis distinguishes the function of the heart from that of the mind (LtOrd 7).

9 ER 23, 1; FA:ED I, 81-82.

captives through his cross and blood and death.”<sup>10</sup> In the biblical tradition, he invites us to see our origin with Christ, as he admonishes his friars: “Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for he created and formed you to the image of his beloved son according to the body and to his likeness according to the spirit.”<sup>11</sup>

It is important to point out that, like St. Irenaeus and Tertullian, Francis makes the basic distinction between image and likeness in his understanding of the human person. But upon careful study of the critical edition, it becomes clear that the base of distinction is in line with the biblical phrase/idea, namely, *Imaginem dilecti Filii sui, imagine tuam* (Gen. 1, 26; Rm. 8, 29). Francis writes with conviction as a mystic rather than a professional philosopher or an academic theologian. The biblical vision of the human person by Francis, the mystic, is a synthesis of the Old and New Testaments, especially *Imago* as seen in Gen 1, 26; Gen 2, 15; Col 1, 16 and Rm 8, 29. At first glance, there seems to be no new awareness in Francis’ understanding of the human person. He showed creativity, originality and continuity in the interpretation of scriptural revelation of the human person when with great boldness he uses the concept of *Imago* in connection to Christ and human nature. It may be pointed out that Francis’ understanding shows that as God the father and God the son are distinct but inseparable persons of the reality called Trinity, so also the body and the spirit are the “two distinct but inseparably connected aspects of the one created reality,” called human person. The origin of the human person is God and his total well-being proceeds from “the most high and supreme eternal God trinity and unity, father, son and Holy Spirit, creator of all, savior of all.”<sup>12</sup> Francis is not interested in working out differences between corporal and spiritual, spirit and matter or body and soul, though he wrote his Earlier Rule for the “salvation of our souls,”<sup>13</sup> where he invites his followers “to guard their souls”<sup>14</sup> and discouraged them from loving the body more than the soul.<sup>15</sup> This is despite his awareness of humanity of Christ and an explicit acknowledgement that the entirety and unity of the human person comes from the Lord God who “has given and gives to each one of us our whole body, our whole soul and our whole life, who has created, redeemed and will save us by his mercy alone...”<sup>16</sup>

## Francis’ reference to the humanity of Christ as a response a theory of the “Vanishing Body”

The view of the human person of Francis calls to attention not only human person to himself or herself but to the humanity of Christ. He says boldly that Christ “received the flesh of our humanity and frailty.”<sup>17</sup> This indicates that the flesh represents the whole person. For Francis, the human person carries Christ in his heart and body.<sup>18</sup> The human person loves God with a pure heart and a pure mind.<sup>19</sup> The human person keeps the secrets of the Lord in his heart.<sup>20</sup> The Holy Spirit pours the Holy virtues into the heart of the human person.<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, the heart is the source of evils, vices and sins too.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the human body or the flesh is the temple of the Holy Spirit<sup>23</sup> and the human person should “preserve peace of mind and body for love of ... Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup> He uses the spousal language to reiterate how humans are connected to the humanity and divinity of Christ: “We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>25</sup>

By calling attention to the humanity of Christ, Francis’ view of the human person challenged the heretical and absolutist Catharists’ theory of “Vanishing Body” of his time. Accentuating the central mysteries of Christian faith was so fundamental to Francis that he even led people to celebrate Christmas at Greccio in an innovative manner in order to recall the memory of the little child.<sup>26</sup> He strongly admonished his brothers to desire, wish and delight in the creator, redeemer and savior, who is the one true God.<sup>27</sup> And he considers that an *Image of the Son of God, Imago Christi* “can boast in our weaknesses and in carrying each day the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>28</sup> He, himself, suffered from the infirmity of the eyes, stomach, spleen and liver.<sup>29</sup> He held that we are what we are because of the Triune God. His view of human person is lived out to the full in the footprint of Christ and his Holy Mother that there is no dichotomy between prayer and life, body and soul towards the end of his life as he received the stigmata<sup>30</sup> and laid on his death bed calling his body: “Brother Body,” and bodily death as “Sister Bodily Death,”<sup>31</sup> as they come from God.

- 10 ER 23, 3; FA:ED I, 82.  
 11 Cfr. Adm 5, 1; FA:ED I, 131.  
 12 ER 23, 11; FA:ED I, 85.  
 13 ER 24, 1; FA:ED I, 86.  
 14 ER 5, 1; FA:ED I, 67.  
 15 Cfr. ER 10, 4; FA:ED I, 72.  
 16 ER 23, 8; FA:ED I, 84.  
 17 II LtF 4; FA:ED I, 46; Also see II LtF 11-15; FA:ED I, 46.  
 18 Cfr. I LtF 1, 10; FA:ED I, 42; Also see II LtF 53; FA:ED I, 49.  
 19 Cfr. II LtF 18-19; FA:ED I, 46.  
 20 Cfr. Adm 28, 3; FA:ED I, 136.  
 21 Cfr. SalBVM 6; FA:ED I, 163.  
 22 Cfr. II LtF 37; FA:ED I, 48; I LtF 2, 12; FA:ED I, 46; ER 22, 7; FA:ED I, 79.  
 23 Cfr. ER 12, 6; FA:ED I, 73.  
 24 Adm 15, 2; FA:ED I, 134.  
 25 I LtF I, 8; FA:ED I, 42.  
 26 Cfr. 1C 84-87; FA:ED I, 254-257.  
 27 Cfr. ER 23, 9; FA:ED I, 85.  
 28 Adm 5, 8; FA:ED I, 131.  
 29 Cfr. 2C 96; FA:ED II, 311.  
 30 Cfr. 1C 115; FA:ED I, 283-284.  
 31 CtC 12; FA:ED I, 114.

## The Franciscan Response to the discussion about the “Vanishing Soul”

Francis' life and works have been the subjects of mediations and invitations to the following of Christ and his mother. His concept of human person as an “Image of the Son of God” points to the normative source of faith and theology, namely, the Holy Bible in itself and as it is mediated through the liturgy. Hence on the question of “Vanishing Soul,” Francis' biblically inspired theology does motivate a Franciscan theologian to represent the Church which deems the scripture as the *norma normans non-normata*, the norm which ultimately decides and is itself normed by no other criterion. The church also believes that in Christ the fullness of revelation has been revealed. However, there is a graduality in the awareness of this revelation, for revelation is progressive. Therefore, Christian and Franciscan theologizing is “an ongoing, continuous process of hermeneutics or interpretation.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike Francis, who lived in the feudal age and had limited access to the bible, we have access to the full bible in this digital age even in the digital form. Significant studies on the Admonitions of St. Francis have shown that his anthropology was neither pessimistic nor one-sided.<sup>33</sup> His vision of the human person, though Christ-centred, is said to be deeper and more universal than the one officially followed by the church of his time.<sup>34</sup> The same spirit which animated the scripture human authors, animated Francis and is still leading the sacred theologians of each age. Hence, throughout this process of theologizing and interpretation, it is utmost important to be like “St. Francis, faithful to scripture,”<sup>35</sup> in order to be relevant to our time and be always open to the new scriptural insights into the human person. For the Gospel of Jesus is always the same and fresh and we cannot go out of fashion if we live and be guided by the spirit of the gospel in our understanding the mystery of an image of the son of God.

A Franciscan response to the “Vanishing Soul” cannot take place without the influence of Franciscan anthropology. Hence, one needs to be expert or be trained to acquire the Franciscan vision of human person and the world besides training to the doctrine of the church. A Franciscan theologian, or a friar minor, indeed has his own singularly unique, personal vision. But in the process of training to Christian-Franciscan vision of human person, a formee undergoes deep formation into Francis' vision of the human person in today's context. It is not enough that Francis' anthropology is developed by great Franciscan scholars and saints

such as Anthony of Padua and Bonaventure and Blessed Duns Scotus. Today, there is need to integrate the new knowledge about humans which are the results of the significant studies made in the field of human sciences in general and neuroscience in particular from the anthropological and scientific perspectives. This is because our present generation knows differently about humans than those Franciscan scholars and saints knew in their own time.<sup>36</sup> The followers of Francis are called to be in constant openness<sup>37</sup> to the new dimension of Franciscan anthropology. This is required because in our age of neuroscience, communication revolution is taking place and they reinforce/complement each other in the new understanding of human person. The means of social communications have acquired such an important role that Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has observed that it must be considered as the integral part of “anthropological” question in the third millennium (WCD 2008).<sup>38</sup>

Any Franciscan anthropological response to the question about “Vanishing Soul” has to consider the communal, relational and Trinitarian dimensions of the human person, an image of the son of God. While the anthropologists see the individual person (the whole person) important as a member of a racial or a social group,<sup>39</sup> physicalists see human relationships as purely activities of brain and body. In this regard, it is observed: “The physicalists argument here can be based on these neuro-scientific researches and implies that human relational capacities are not to be consigned to the possession of a non-material soul. The deep social mind of human beings is due to the incredible capacity of our brains and bodies.”<sup>40</sup> Due to the limits of the “scientific” terms, the above view fails to recognize the Trinitarian key of reality and the problem of the lack of consciousness of solidarity.<sup>41</sup> In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis underscores the Trinitarian dimension of each person or creature taking recourse to the Franciscan argument: “St. Bonaventure went so far as to say that human beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature ‘testifies that God is three’... The Franciscan saint teaches us that each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key.”<sup>42</sup> Hence, the Franciscan approach recognizes the limits of the human language while speaking the realities of the human person's relation to the Trinity. Indeed, St. Francis has pointed out that the Triune God is “indescribable, ineffable, *incomprehensible*,

32 K. PATHIL - D. VELIATH, *An Introduction to Theology*, Bangalore, 2003, p. 27.

33 Cfr. R. J. KARRIS, *The Admonitions of St. Francis: sources and meanings*, New York, 1999, p. 80.

34 Cfr. H. SKOLIMOWSKI, *A Saint for all traditions: Francis of Assisi's challenge*, in *The Cord* 51 (2001), p. 242.

35 POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, Encyclical letter, no. 12, 2015. *The Holy See*, Internet (04-05-2017):

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

36 Cfr. G. UHLEIN, *Franciscan spiritual direction: some critical aspects*, in *The Cord*, 46 (1996) p. 219.

37 Cfr. CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Instruction: Starting afresh from Christ: a renewed commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium (July 14, 2002)*, no. 15, in *The Holy See*, Internet (04-05-2017): [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsclife\\_doc\\_20020614\\_ripartire-da-cristo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20020614_ripartire-da-cristo_en.html).

38 Cfr. POPE BENEDICT XVI, *Message for the 42<sup>nd</sup> World Communication Day, The media: at the crossroads between self promotion and service. Searching for the truth in order to share it with others*, in *The Holy See*, internet (04-05-2017) [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20080124\\_42nd-world-communications-day\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20080124_42nd-world-communications-day_en.html).

39 Cfr. F. BOAS, *Anthropology and modern Life*, New York, 1962, p. 12.

40 GEORGE, ‘Vanishing soul’: a non-reductive physicalists response, 13.

41 Cfr. E. BENZ, *The concept of the human person in Christian thought*, in *The concept of the human person*, eds. S. Radhakrishnan and P. T. Raju, London, 1960, p. 398.

42 POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, no. 239.



unfathomable, blessed, praiseworthy, glorious, exalted, sublime, most high, gentle, lovable, delightful and totally desirable above all else for ever.”<sup>43</sup>

Franciscan response will necessarily take into consideration the arguments of non-reductionist physicalists on “Vanishing Soul” that are explained in “scientific” terms but are compatible with the Catholic faith, namely existence of the human soul. Even in the case of the recognition of evolution as more than a hypothesis, it has been observed that: “While science can study these causal chains, it falls to theology to locate this account of the special creation of the human soul within the overarching plan of the Triune God to share the communion of Trinitarian life with human persons who are created out of nothing in the image and likeness of God...”<sup>44</sup> In this age of neuroscience, the Franciscan theologians cannot but respond to the discussion about the “Vanishing Soul” so as to help in the theological research of reaching fuller knowledge of the truth of what human person created as “an image of the son of God” is, in theological terms in dialogue with new scientific terminologies and new knowledge about the human person of today.

### Conclusion

Our age of neuroscience with its neuroscientific and physicalist views of human soul has occasioned relevant scientific and theological discussions about “Vanishing Soul.” The reductionist and non-reductionist physicalist approaches to the question of human soul challenge our Christian and Franciscan understanding of *imago Dei* (*imagine[m] et similitudinem tuam*) and *imago Christi* (*Imaginem dilecti Filii sui*). It may be true that Francis would not

have thought about “Vanishing Soul.” All the same his response to the “Vanishing Body” enables us to see his gospel insights with respect to the human person. As his approach towards the heretical and absolute dualistic views of human person was compatible with the biblical revelation of the identity of Jesus, the son of God and the human person, the image of the son of God, so also a Franciscan theologian’s dialogue with the theories of “Vanishing Soul” must be compatible to the Catholic faith and lead to new articulation of Franciscan tradition. Francis’ understanding of the human person created as “an image of the son of God” can clarify truths of human person in the ongoing interpretation of fullness of truth revealed in Christ. The Franciscan response that is concerned with discussion about the “Vanishing Soul” will continue to consider the whole of the human person (body and soul) as united and not divided or isolated or treated separately as if they are of two different origins without teleological and eschatological dimensions. This approach will surely be embraced by contemporary Franciscan spirituality as it seeks renewal of “an image of the son of God” and renewed interest in the theology of *Imago Dei* and *Imago Christi*.



**Arokiam John, OFM** is a member of the St. Francis of Assisi Mission Foundation in North East India. He is pursuing a doctorate in Theology (Franciscan Spirituality) at the Pontifical University Antonianum in Rome.

43 ER 23, 11: FA:ED I, 86.

44 International Theological Commission, *Communion and stewardship: human persons created in the Image of God*, no. 70.

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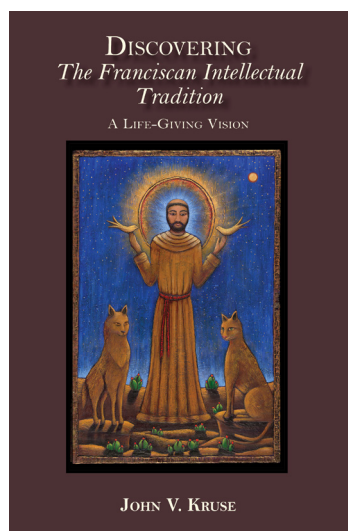
# Good Franciscan Reads During the Fall

By Fr. David Couturier, OFM Cap.



There's a certain chill in the air now that fall is at our doorstep. Reluctantly, the sweaters come out and the heat is turned on. The earth is tilting away from the sun and the days are getting shorter. It's time to think about what we will do with our longer nights.

I'd like to suggest some autumn reading Franciscan-style. Autumn brings us some great Franciscan rituals and feasts, starting with the Transitus and the Feast of St. Francis. Fall ushers in the Feast of All Souls and All Saints and Advent, with its attention on the humility of Christ and the celebration of the Incarnation. All of these are Franciscan-themed and are worth a deeper theological read and meditation. Franciscan Institute Publications has a host of new Franciscan books that I would recommend for the harvesting of thoughts and prayers as we make our way to the end of the liturgical year. Some of these books are for the general Franciscan-reader and some of these are the type of books meant for the more scholarly among us. All of them are Franciscan and well worth a read.

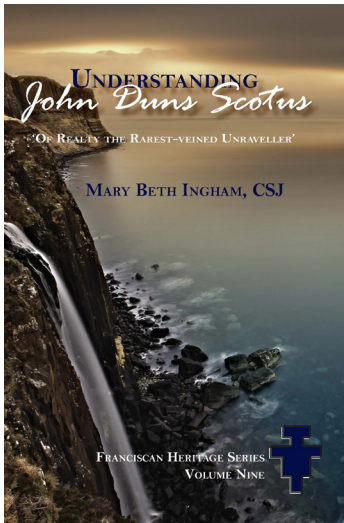


**John V. Kruse.** *Discovering the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: A Life-Giving Vision.* This new book is about 75 pages long and provides a wonderful overview of the central insights of Franciscan theology and spirituality. Written with today's college student in mind, this book presents in simple but rich terms all of the central insights that makes Franciscanism different from the other great spiritual traditions in the Catholic Church. For those who have been con-

fused by the sheer multiplicity of Franciscan values advertised by different groups in the Church, Kruse summarizes the essential features of Franciscan thought and does so in language that is true to the great tradition of Franciscan thought but also accessible to modern readers. This will be a classic text that college classes, Franciscan formation programs, and parish readings groups will read and profit from.

**Dominic Monti and Katherine Wrisley-Shelby,** *Bonaventure Revisited: Companion to the Breviloquium.* 2017 represents the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Bonaventure. What a perfect time to re-introduce yourself to his thought and work. This commentary is a wonderful introduction to the essentials of Bonaventure's thought. His original Breviloquium was used by Bonaventure to introduce theology to the friars just coming into the Order. This book is a primer for anyone who is just starting out trying to learn what Bonaventure thought about God, creation, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Sacraments and final judgment. Some of the best Bonaventure scholars are assembled here: Wayne Hellmann, Stephen Brown, Jay Hammond, Timothy Johnson, Boyd Coolman, and Bert Roest, among others.

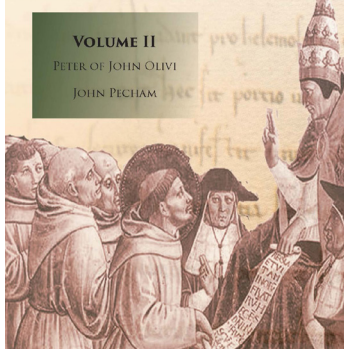




Mary Beth Ingham, *Understanding John Duns Scotus*. Pope Benedict XVI beatified this Scottish Franciscan scholar from the 13th century. He is undergoing a sort of “rock star resurgence” in the theological world, with his emphasis on freedom, the love of friendship, beauty and moral goodness. In this wonderfully written book, Ingham introduces Scotus’ greatest themes and demonstrates how these beautiful themes can help us to become re-engaged with the beautiful things in life and the more helpful things in our relationships. She uses the poetry of Gerald Manley Hopkins to help us appreciate this fascinating thinker and develop a finer appreciation for this treasure of “alternative” thinking in the Catholic Church.

**EARLY COMMENTARIES ON THE RULE OF THE FRIARS MINOR**

EDITED BY DAVID FLOOD, OFM



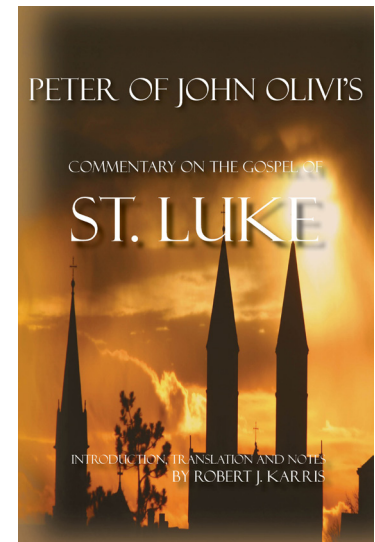
**David Flood, *Early Commentaries on the Rule of the Friars Minor Vol II. Peter of John Olivi and John Pecham.***

The autumn is often the time when friars celebrate the anniversary of their entrance into Franciscan life and it’s the time when they renew their vows. It’s a time of re-commitment to the promises we made when we first received the Franciscan Rule of life. In this short book, the eminent Franciscan scholar David Flood introduces us to the work of two early friars (Peter of John Olivi and John

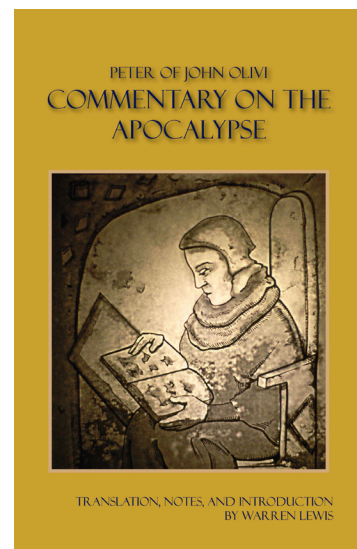
Pecham) as they first thought about the rule in their lives and for their time. Flood artfully separates myth from fantasy, fact from fiction and discerns what the early brothers understood about the Rule.

**Robert Karris, *Peter of John Olivi’s Commentary on the Gospel of Luke.***

Robert Karris, OFM, was the 2017 recipient of the Franciscan Institute Medal at St. Bonaventure University this past summer and he is a worthy recipient. He has amassed a virtual library of his own texts interpreting Scripture and the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition. One of his favorite authors to study is Peter of John Olivi. The Franciscan scholar, David Burr, reminds us that after Olivi’s death in 1298 his tomb at Narbonne became such a popular pilgrimage site that the crowds were said to rival those that visited the Porziuncula in Assisi. Peter of John Olivi is experiencing a bit of a well-deserved revival these days. There may be no better way to becoming introduced to his work than by reading one of the commentaries on his study of Scripture. Karris’ introduction to Olivi’s Commentary on Luke is a companion to other commentaries (on the Gospel of Matthew and his Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles). He introduces us to an Olivi who can be creative, engaging, frustrating, critical, inspiring, puzzling and rhapsodic, especially when he meditates on the Blessed Virgin Mary. For those who preach a lot and want new ideas, images, and metaphors for understanding Luke’s Gospel, this commentary provides a refreshing new starting point.



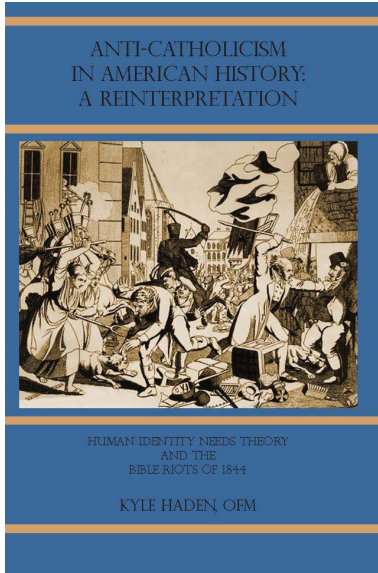
Warren Lewis, *Peter of John Olivi’s Commentary on the Apocalypse.* This 670-page tome is not for the faint of heart. It is an amazing work of Franciscan scholarship that represents some of the best work coming out of the Franciscan Institute today. It is the completion of a 50-year project by an eminent Olivi scholar on one of his Olivi’s greatest theological themes, the meaning of the Apocalypse and the Book of Revelation. Lewis gives us the reason why we should even tackle such a book – “We read Olivi’s (Lectura super Apocalypsim) in the awareness that we are in the presence of a systematic theological genius as brilliant as any other in the 13th century, and more brilliant than most, a genius of theological greatness that was capable of a ‘full integration’ of the biblical, the philosophical, the imaginative, and the charismatically edificational.” What Olivi does is introduce us brilliantly and evocatively into a meditation on the end of times.



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**Kyle Haden, OFM. *Anti-Catholicism in American History: A Re-Interpretation.***

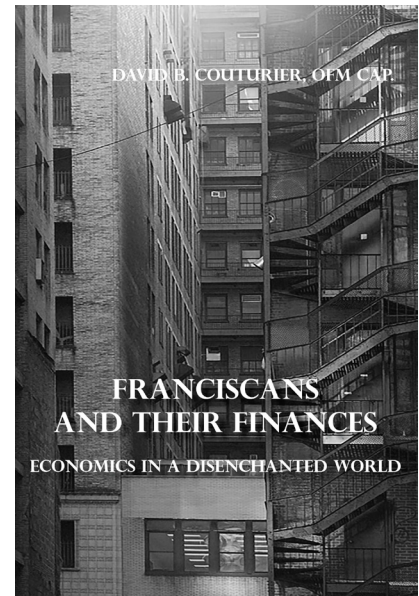
During this past year, we have seen a new rise of racism and anti-Semitism and the re-emergence of various white supremacy hate groups, among them, the KKK. In this well-reasoned work, St. Bonaventure University professor, Kyle Haden, gives us new clues as to why and when these sorts of hate-based social groups erupt. Using identity needs theory, he reinterprets the Bible Riots against Catholics in 1844 but does more.

He allows us to understand how human identity needs and bias functions in the formation and legitimation of religious, social and cultural concepts of belonging. Haden introduces readers to the work of René Girard and applies it the process by which unattended groups find new “victims” to blame and marginalize for emerging social and economic conditions. In a time of increasing polarization and victimization, this is a must read for the serious Franciscan reader.

**David Couturier, OFM Cap., *Franciscans and their Finances: Economics in a Disenchanted World.***

Most of us have been trained to keep economics and religion as far away from one another as possible. And yet, the economy runs on principles that have a lot to say about the nature of life, the motivations of men and women, and the ultimate meaning and purpose of life. From the beginning of the Franciscan movement, Franciscans have had a lot of (good) things to say about what makes an economy

healthy and productive. The pages of history are filled with Franciscans who have helped found banks, developed new banking processes, and initiated new economic measures to boost productivity and insure the welfare of the poor. Unfortunately, history forgets their names too easily. This book is not a history book of Franciscan economics. It is a book that applies what Franciscans have learned over the centuries and details in accessible language how ordinary Christians can begin to build a more “social” or “fraternal” economy that can better balance one’s personal and professional life, and one’s individual interest with society’s common good. The book begins with essays on how we got to today’s economic disenchantments, e.g. the Great Recession of 2007-2008, and explains its impact and implications on the generations just coming into the workforce today.



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# Bonaventure On The Existence of God as the Foundation of All Certain Knowledge

By Kyrian Godwin, OFM Cap

Bonaventure established two foundational issues, namely the existence of God and the existence of the Trinity. The existence of God is the foundation of all certain knowledge, while the existence of the Trinity is the foundation of all the knowledge of faith. These foundational themes play a prominent role towards the understanding of Bonaventure. They are the foundational keys, the pillars on which his entire theology is built upon. With regards to the existence of God, Bonaventure declares that the existence of God is beyond doubt for the human mind. It is an indubitable truth. In this affirmation, we see Bonaventure's total allegiance to the Augustinian tradition which maintained that the existence of God is self-evident.<sup>1</sup> Bonaventure, on this point remained the faithful disciple of St. Anselm from the beginning of his commentary to the end of his career,<sup>2</sup> upholding the position that the existence of God is absolutely evident. For "God is so universally attested by nature that his existence is almost self-evident, and scarcely needs demonstration."<sup>3</sup> All creatures, he says manifest the existence of God as the necessary, absolute, perfect and prior being.<sup>4</sup> On the matter of establishing God's existence, some scholars are in substantial accord in arriving at the conclusion that the Bonaventurian approach to God is not soundly based. Van Steenberghen, in contending that Bonaventure did not meditate deeply on philosophical problems as did his counterpart Thomas Aquinas, cites the questions of God's existence as a typical example in the following manner:

In the *Sentences*, the problem is treated in a summary fashion, although there was an obvious occasion to treat it fully. He claims that God's existence is evident; M. Gilson has shown that this opinion is due to the Franciscan sentiment of God's presence in nature, and to the affirmation of an intimate religious experience which is connatural to us. But all this is gratuitous and rather

confused; such a solution to the problem does not answer the very legitimate critical demands of reason.<sup>5</sup>

However, according to Thomas Mathias, it is important to note that all of Bonaventure's works are concededly theological in nature.<sup>6</sup> Allan Wolter confirmed this, affirming that "Bonaventure's fame rests primarily on his reputation as a theologian rather than as a philosopher. In both Dante's *Paradise* and Raphael's *Disputa* he appears as the equal of Aquinas, and in the field of mystical theology he has been considered without peer. It is more difficult, however, to isolate the philosophical component of his system. This is partly due to the fact that all Bonaventure's extant works postdate his entrance into the Franciscan Order and the beginning of his career as a theologian and ascetical writer."<sup>7</sup> Following the same trend, Etienne Gilson avers that Bonaventure was first and foremost a theologian and his spirituality "has exercised a decisive influence on the choice he made of a set of philosophical positions as well as on his way of handling them."<sup>8</sup> Consequently, he concludes saying that "into Bonaventure's system one can enter only by an act of faith."<sup>9</sup>

Bonaventure recognized and maintained the clear distinction between Philosophy and Theology as both distinct and autonomous disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Philosophical knowledge for Bonaventure falls short of theological knowledge. Philosophical knowledge he says "is nothing other than the certain knowledge of truth in as far as it can be investigated,"<sup>11</sup> whereas, theological knowledge "is the pious knowledge of truth as believable. The knowledge of grace is the holy knowledge of truth as lovable. The knowledge of glory is the eternal knowledge of truth as desirable."<sup>12</sup> Philosophical knowledge which is the certain knowledge of truth as open to investigation, according to Bonaventure has threefold division.

1 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Works of St. Bonaventure III, trans. Zachary Hayes, ed. George Marcil (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2000), 69.

2 Cf. Etienne Gilson, *Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, trans. I. Trethowan and F. J. Sheed, (New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965), 115.

3 Etienne Gilson, *Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, 114.

4 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 72.

5 Fernand Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West*, trans Leonard Johnson, (Louvain: E. Nauwelaerts, 1955), 159, 160.

6 Cf. Thomas R. Mathias, "Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason," *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 36, (Annual XIV, 1976), 225.

7 Allan Wolter, "Bonaventure, St." *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, Ed. Paul Edward (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc & The Free Press, 1967), 340.

8 Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. (New York: Random House, 1955), 331.

9 Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of Bonaventure*, 438. It is important to note that Fideism is out of question in this context. Fideism substitute faith for reason and denies the efficacy of reason. Whereas Augustinianism whose tradition Bonaventure uphold requires the help of faith for the right use of reason as reason.

10 Cf. Thomas R. Mathias, "Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason," 226.

11 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV:5, Works of St. Bonaventure XIV, trans. Zachary Hayes, (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2008).

12 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 5.

He describes it in terms of a triple order as natural, as rational, and as moral, namely, in as far as it is concerned with the cause of being, the principle of understanding, and the order of living. In as far as it is concerned with the cause of being, it is called natural science. In as far as it deals with the principle of understanding, it is called rational science. In as far as it deals with the order of living, it is called moral science.<sup>13</sup>

In his work, *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, Bonaventure lucidly explains that the light of philosophical knowledge is that which enlightens the human person in the investigation of intelligible truth.<sup>14</sup> The light of philosophical knowledge according to him, he says partakes of triple truth. “The truth of reality, the truth of speech, and the truth of morals, in as far as there is an identity of being with existence, and identity of being with its goal, and identity of being with its purpose.”<sup>15</sup> In elucidating the above statement, Bonaventure says

The truth of things is the identity of being with existence. The truth of speech is the identity of being with its goal. The truth of morals is the identity of being with its purpose. The truth of morals is uprightness according to which a person lives well interiorly and externally according to the dictates of law, because law is the criterion of uprightness. The truth of speech is the correspondence of the voice and what is in the mind. The truth of reality is the correspondence of the intellect with the thing. And because philosophical science teaches the words of truth, it involves a threefold truth.<sup>16</sup>

These threefold truths are natural, rational and moral knowledge. To these, the Seraphic Doctor says, “anyone who has a good description of these sciences would have a very great mirror for acquiring knowledge, since there is nothing in any of these sciences that does not bear the imprint of the Trinity.”<sup>17</sup>

Bonaventure was not against philosophical knowledge. For him, through reason philosophy can arrive at God’s existence, but though it reaches highest substance through physics and metaphysics, it is an avenue to other knowledge and not the terminus thereof.<sup>18</sup> According to him, “anyone who relies on Philosophical knowledge and esteems himself highly because of it and believes himself to be better has become a fool. This happens when he believes he has grasped the creator through this knowledge without any further light.”<sup>19</sup>

With regards to theological knowledge, Bonaventure

says, “it is the pious knowledge of truth as believable.”<sup>20</sup> It is the knowledge of things unperceived derived through belief. Theological knowledge is the knowledge of things above reason and unattainable through creatures, these include things such as Trinity, Redemption, Rite of worship, etc. Theological knowledge he says is beyond philosophical science/knowledge. He posited this in this manner:

Beyond philosophical science, God has given us theological science which is the pious knowledge of truth that is believable. The eternal light, which is God, is inaccessible to us as long as we are mortal and have the eyes of a bat. Therefore Augustine says: ‘The high point of the mind is incapable of fixing itself on such an excellent light unless it is purified by the justice of faith.’ Thus, theological science is founded on faith. Just as the philosophical sciences are on their first principles, so the science of Scripture is founded on the articles of faith which are the twelve foundation stones of the city.<sup>21</sup>

One can therefore affirm that the relation between philosophical and theological knowledge is apparent. For reason complements faith by enhancing its understanding and theology begins where philosophical knowledge ends. This was clearly articulated by Bonaventure

Theology is also the only perfect wisdom, for it begins with the supreme cause as the principle of all things that are caused – the very point at which philosophical knowledge ends. But theology goes beyond this, considering that cause as the reward of meritorious deeds and the goal of [human] desires. In this knowledge one finds perfect taste, life, and the salvation of souls; that is why all Christians should be aflame with longing to acquire it.<sup>22</sup>

Philosophical knowledge therefore is a mere prologue to theology and it is with this clearly in view that the Seraphic Doctor undertakes to present his philosophical pathway to God.<sup>23</sup>

Bonaventure makes use of this threefold divisions already described in his *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* and *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*,<sup>24</sup> namely, natural, rational, and moral philosophy to explain the Trinity. According to him, natural philosophy deals with the cause of being and therefore points to the power of the Father. Rational philosophy deals with the basis of understanding and therefore leads to the wisdom of the Word. Moral philosophy deals with the order of living and therefore leads

13 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 6.

14 Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 4. Works of St. Bonaventure I. Introduction, Commentary and translation by Zachary Hayes, (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1996).

15 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 7.

16 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 7.

17 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 11.

18 Cf. Thomas R. Mathias, “Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason,” 226.

19 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 12.

20 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 5.

21 Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 13.

22 Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, Works of St. Bonaventure IX, trans. Dominic Monti, ed. Dominic Monti, (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2005), Part 1, chapter 1:3.

23 Cf. Thomas R. Mathias, “Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason,” 227.

24 Cf. Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, IV: 6. See also Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* 3: 6. Works of St. Bonaventure II, trans. Zachary Hayes, ed. Philotheus Boehner and Zachary Hayes, (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2002).



to the goodness of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> He went ahead to subdivide each of these three parts into a threefold division giving a detailed description on each.

The first, or natural philosophy, is divided into metaphysics, mathematics, and physics. The first deals with the essence of things; the second with numbers and figures; and the third with natures, powers, and diffusive operations. Therefore, the first points to the First Principle, namely, the Father; the second points to the image of the Father, namely, the Son; and the Third points to the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Second, or rational philosophy, is divided into grammar which enables people to express themselves with power; logic, which makes people sharp in argumentation; and rhetoric, which enables people to persuade and move others. Again, this points to the mystery of the most blessed Trinity. The third, or moral philosophy is divided into the monastic, the familial, and the political. The first suggests the unbegottenness of the First Principle; the second suggests the familial relation of the Son; and the third suggests the liberality of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

### On the Existence of God as the Foundation of all Certain Knowledge

Beginning with the question regarding the existence of God, Bonaventure maintains that the existence of God is an indubitable truth. That God exists is self-evident. Bonaventure works out three approaches in affirmation of this position. According to Mathias, Bonaventure in his *Commentary on the Sentences* “notes that the ascent to God involves three stages: the first stage (or Way) deals with the visible; the second pertains to the invisible, such as the soul or another spiritual substance, and the third has reference to truth itself as united to God.”<sup>27</sup> In the *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, Bonaventure states as follows:

There are three ways of arguing in favour of this. The first way says: Every truth that is impressed in all minds is an indubitable truth. The second way says: Every truth proclaimed by all creatures is an indubitable truth. And the third way says: Every truth which, in itself, is most certain and most evident is an indubitable truth.<sup>28</sup>

In the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, Bonaventure reverted to another order:

In harmony with this three-fold progression, our mind has three principal ways of seeing things. One way relates to corporal beings outside the mind, and this is known as animality or sense power. In another way, the mind looks

at itself and within itself; and this is called spirit. In the third way, it looks above itself; and this is called mind. In the ascent to God, the soul ought to use all three of these so that God will be loved with the whole mind, the whole heart, and the whole soul. In this we see perfect fidelity to the Law together with Christian wisdom.<sup>29</sup>

In this progression, Bonaventure says,

It is in harmony with our created condition that the universe itself might serve as a ladder by which we can ascend into God. Among created things, some are vestiges, others are images; some are bodily, others are spiritual; some are temporal, others are everlasting; some are outside us, others are within us. In order to arrive at that First Principle which is most spiritual and eternal, and above us, it is necessary that we move through the vestiges which are bodily and temporal and outside us. And this is to be led in the way of God. Next we must enter into our mind which is the image of God, an image which is everlasting, spiritual, and within us. And this is to enter into the truth of God. Finally we must pass beyond to that which is eternal, most spiritual, and above us by raising our eyes to the First Principle. And this will bring us to rejoice in the knowledge of God and to stand in awe before God’s majesty.<sup>30</sup>

This triple way, according to him, is akin to

The three-day journey in the solitude of the desert; this is the triple illumination of a single day; the first is like evening, the second like morning, and the third like noon. This relates to the three-fold existence of things, namely in matter, in understanding, and in the eternal art, according to which it is written: *Let it be, God made it, and it was made*. This also relates to the triple substance in Christ who is our ladder; namely the corporal, the spiritual, and the divine.<sup>31</sup>

In his *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*, he ranked this triple way according to the degrees of simplicity.

It is the nature of the soul to be capable of turning to the intelligible outside itself and to the intelligible within itself, and to the intelligible above itself. Now, turning to the intelligible outside itself is the least simple matter. Turning to the intelligible within itself is more simple. And turning to the intelligible above itself is the most simple matter because that is closer to the soul than the soul is to itself. But the more simple a thing is, the greater priority it possesses. Therefore, it is natural that the turning of the soul to that truth which is closest to it is prior to its turning either to itself or to some external truth. Therefore, it is impossible for the soul to know

25 Cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* 3: 6.

26 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* 3: 6.

27 Thomas R. Mathias, “Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason,” 227. Cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* 3: 6.

28 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, par. 1.

29 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* 1: 4.

30 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 1: 2.

31 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 1: 3.



anything unless that highest truth is known first.<sup>32</sup>

In the *Hexameron*, another order is utilized by the Seraphic Doctor

The first insight is that God exists (the Third Way); it must be evident from every proposition because every negation or denial involves affirmation of the truth of such denial. It is truth which conforms and gives vision as in a mirror (the Second Way), and since every creature contributes to the fashioning of this mirror (the First Way), it integrates them according to order, source and fulfilment.<sup>33</sup>

From what has been stated above, one can therefore observe critically that Bonaventure seems indifferent about his starting point.<sup>34</sup> According to Mathias, “the presumed justification for deviating from the order of the ways as outlined in the Sentences is that since Bonaventure himself does not consistently follow that sequence, he either did not regard it as essential or in fact preferred another course.”<sup>35</sup> However, the refutation of this position, according to Mathias,

Flows both from the words of Bonaventure and from philosophical background which was condition precedent to the study of theology in Paris. This derives further confirmation in the very simile of the ladder when Bonaventure avers that it is necessary to ascend before we can descend on Jacob’s ladder, that is to say from being to God before attempting a return from God to being. Once having made the ascent, however, we are at liberty to move with less caution in order to enhance our perspective further, so long as we never overlook the underlying framework upon which the basic structure of our demonstration was initially built. That being so, it is unnecessary each time to set out as if we were embarking on our original journey through a close-knit philosophical demonstration. Accordingly, Bonaventure has quite freely chosen to vary the mode of his presentation.<sup>36</sup>

Anton Pegis observes also that Bonaventure seemed indifferent about his starting point and he further noted that the Seraphic Doctor does not elaborate the technicalities involved in following motion to an unmoved source.<sup>37</sup> This technical negligence as Pegis would say,

Is not a failure, but a genuine indifference to the starting point in sensible things of the Bonaventurian proofs. The

reason that St. Bonaventure does not want to construct ways to God, in the manner of St. Thomas, is that his aim is to show that God is so universally witnessed by nature that His existence is a sort of evidence and scarcely requires to be proved.<sup>38</sup>

For Bonaventure, proofs that begin with sensible things

Are proofs not because they begin from sense, but because they bring into play notions belonging to the intelligible order which imply God’s existence. Any chain of reasoning must lose much of its significance, if it uses some prior experiences sufficient of itself to prove the same conclusion. But, held Bonaventure, this is so here; our experience of God’s existence is the very condition of inference which we claim to establish that God exists. We think we are starting from strictly sensible data when we state as the first step in our demonstration that there are in existence beings mutable, composite, relative, imperfect, contingent; but in actual fact we are aware of these insufficiencies in things only because we already possess the idea of the perfections by whose standard we see them to be insufficient. It is only in appearance and not in reality that our reasoning begins with sense data. Our awareness, apparently immediate and primary, of the contingent implies a pre-existent notion of the necessary. But the necessary is God. So that the human mind discovers that it already possesses a knowledge of the First being when it set out to prove that He exists.<sup>39</sup>

On this very note, Pegis conclude affirming as follows:

If the idea of God is innate, the sensible world will never aid us in constructing it; it can only offer us the occasion to recover it, and it will necessarily constitute our point of departure. Now, for anyone who considers this problem attentively, this point of departure is itself a point of arrival. If we have the idea of God in ourselves, we are sure that He exists, since we cannot not think Him as existing.<sup>40</sup>

St. Bonaventure remained faithful to this fundamental point of doctrine from the beginning to the end of his career. His most extended and elaborate treatment of the argument for God’s existence is found in his *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*. Here, he presents twenty nine different arguments for

32 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Knowledge of Christ*. Chapter IV, fund. 31. Works of St. Bonaventure IV. Introduction, translation and notes by Zachary Hayes, (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2005).

33 Thomas R. Mathias, “Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason,” 229.

34 Cf. Anton G. Pegis, “The Bonaventurian way to God” *Mediaeval Studies* (Volume XXIX, 1967), 215.

35 Thomas R. Mathias, “Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason,” 228.

36 Thomas R. Mathias, “Bonaventurian Ways to God through Reason,” 228. According to Bonaventure, “Now Since we must ascend before we can descend on Jacob’s ladder, let us place the first step of our ascent at the bottom, putting the whole world of sense-objects before us as a mirror through which we may pass to God, the highest creative Artist. In this way we may become true Hebrews, passing from Egypt to the land promised to the forebears. And we shall be Christians passing over with Christ from this world to the Father. We shall be lovers of that wisdom which calls and says: pass over to me, all who desire me, and be filled with my fruits. For in the greatness and beauty of created things their Creator can be seen and known.” Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 1: 9.

37 Cf. Anton Pegis, “The Bonaventurian way to God,” 215.

38 Anton Pegis, “The Bonaventurian way to God,” 215.

39 Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of Bonaventure*, 114.

40 Anton Pegis, “The Bonaventurian way to God,” 216.



the indubitable truth that God's existence is self-evident. These arguments reveal much of his personal theological concerns.<sup>41</sup> The Franciscan Doctor works out three approaches in favour of his position. These three ways are based on the nature of mind, the notion of being and the nature of truth and each of them lead to an indubitable truth that God's existence is self-evident.<sup>42</sup>

There are three ways of arguing in favour of this. The first way says: Every truth that is impressed in all minds is an indubitable truth. The second way says: Every truth proclaimed by all creatures is an indubitable truth. And the third way says: Every truth which, in itself, is most certain and most evident is an indubitable truth.<sup>43</sup>

In the first way, Bonaventure presents ten arguments drawn from theological authorities,<sup>44</sup> and philosophical authority<sup>45</sup> to show that the existence of God is impressed in all rational minds. According to Hayes, the underlying anthropology in the first way is alluded to in the fourth argument which deals with man as an image of God.<sup>46</sup> In the fourth argument, Bonaventure cited Augustine *On the Trinity* saying thus:



In many places in his work *On the Trinity*, Augustine says that the image consists in mind, knowledge and love; and the concept of image is applied to the soul because of its relation to God. If, therefore, it is impressed in the soul by nature that it is an image of God, it follows that the soul has knowledge of God implanted in it by nature. But the first thing knowable about God is that He exists. Therefore, this is naturally implanted in the human mind.<sup>47</sup>

Bonaventure, according to Hayes,

Comments on two triads which had been introduced into Trinitarian theology by Augustine. Augustine himself had seen a certain difficulty with the triad: *mens – notitia – amor*, since the members are not coordinate. Bonaventure seems to be acutely aware of this difficulty, and yet he finds it possible to interpret this triad as an image of the trinity in as far as it reveals order, equality, and

consubstantiality. Order is found in that the mind is like a parent, knowledge like a child, and love is that which proceeds from both as a unifying bond. Equality is seen in that the mind knows itself in a way that corresponds to its being; and it loves itself to the degree that it knows itself. The knowledge and love are consubstantial with the mind. Even while Bonaventure discusses this triad, he employs little of the Augustinian psychological interpretation, but prefers to locate the analogy in terms of the structure of order, equality, and consubstantiality. In this style of interpretation, the term *mens* can be given a meaning more akin to Bonaventure's own understanding of the Father who is the fount source of all else. The *mens*, from which flow knowledge and love, is like the Father from whom flow the Son and the Spirit, and all of created reality.<sup>48</sup>

Bonaventure placed great significance on the triad: memory, intellect and will, and he discussed it extensively in his *Itinerarium*.<sup>49</sup> When one according to Bonaventure considers the order, origin and relation of these faculties (triad) to one another, one is led to the Most Blessed Trinity. He explains this in this manner:

Intelligence emerges out of memory as its offspring, because we come to understand only when a likeness which lies in the memory emerges to the forefront of consciousness. And this is nothing other than a word. From memory and intelligence, love is breathed forth as the bond that unites them. These three, namely the mind that generates, the word, and love, are in the soul as memory, intelligence, and will. They are consubstantial, coequal, and coeval, and mutually interpenetrating. Therefore, if God is the perfect spirit, there must be not only memory, intelligence, and will in God but there must also be the Word begotten and the Love breathed forth. And these are necessarily distinguished since one is produced by the other, not essentially, and not accidentally, but personally. Therefore, when the soul reflects on itself and through itself as through a mirror, it rises to the consideration of the blessed Trinity of Father, Word, and Love; three persons that are coeternal, coequal, and consubstantial in such a way that whatever is in one is in the others, but one is not

41 Cf. Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 64.

42 Cf. Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 64.

43 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, par. 1.

44 Theological authorities like St. John Damascene, Hugh of St. Victor, Boethius, Augustine and Anselm.

45 Aristotle.

46 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 69.

47 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q.1, a. 1, arg. 4.

48 Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 69.

49 Cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 3: 2 -4

the other, and these three are one God.<sup>50</sup>

Though the triad is drawn from Augustine, the analogy which is found in it departs significantly from Augustine's psychological theory. Bonaventure reshaped them in terms of his own Trinitarian views.<sup>51</sup> The soul is seen as an image of God in as far as these three faculties – memory, intellect and will – though of one nature manifest the elements of distinction, order and origin when they express themselves in act. Bonaventure argues that for anything to be an image of another, it must first possess a nature similar to that of which it is the image. Thus man as an image of God is structured in a way that he is ordered to perfection and fulfilment only in the knowledge and love of God. This structure reflected in the faculties – triads – must be actuated in knowledge and love by a personal turning to God who is present to man preconsciously in human memory.<sup>52</sup> Another level of actuation when the soul reflects upon itself is being recognized by Bonaventure:

Since the soul is an image of God, when it reflects upon itself, by being conscious of itself, it becomes conformed to that of which it is the image. Hence, the image of God resides in these same faculties in as far as they have the soul itself as an object. But when the soul turns to lower creatures in such a way as to remain with them, it has turned to that which is neither God nor an image of God but only a vestige. In as far as it allows itself to be conformed to such vestiges, it loses its quality as an actual image. Surely the structure of the three faculties remains, but to the degree that they are not formed by God or by His image, they are no longer an express image. Thus, while the structure remains, the fitting actuation of the structure is not present.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to note that when Bonaventure speaks of man as an image of God, his basic concern is chiefly on the dynamic of the human person by which the finite spirit is orientated to God as to that mystery in which it will find fulfilment and repose.<sup>54</sup> From all that has been said concerning the triads: memory, intellect and will. In Bonaventure's view, reason alone cannot move from the triadic structure to an express knowledge of the Trinity. Rather, the perfect understanding of the image is given not to reason, but to faith alone.<sup>55</sup>

In the second way, Bonaventure presents a series of ten arguments to show that every truth proclaimed by all creatures is an indubitable truth.<sup>56</sup> All ten arguments reflect the same structure. They represent a lengthy metaphysical reflection following Bonaventure's method of reduction.<sup>57</sup> These arguments lead to the

philosophical affirmation of being as absolutely first. According to Hayes,

The most fundamental fact that we know about any object is that it exists. As a positive state, being is the basis of the possibility of any knowledge. So crucial is the concept of being, that one cannot even affirm the non-existence of anything without moving through the positive concept of being. Being, therefore, is prior to all else and is that by which we know all else. But this must be being as first, absolute, and unlimited; it must be pure being. But such being is never found as an object of knowledge in the world. The beings which we encounter in the world are unlimited in many ways. They are dependent, relative, mixed of potency and act. Now, since a limit cannot be recognized precisely as a limit unless in some way we transcend it, it follows that whatever may be the form of limit we are confronted with in creatures, we do not fully understand it unless we reduce it to the pure, actual form of the positive attribute which is necessarily prior to the defective, limited form in which it appears in creatures, just as pure, actual being is necessarily prior to all limited forms of being. Thus, as non-being can be known only through being, and as privations can be known only through positive qualities, so every form of limitation must be reduced to the positive attribute which is necessarily prior.<sup>58</sup>

Now, since all creatures' manifests the above limits, it therefore follows that they all manifest the existence of God as the necessary, absolute, perfect and prior being.<sup>59</sup>

In the third way, Bonaventure presents another set of ten arguments to affirm that every truth which, in itself is most certain and most evident is an indubitable truth.<sup>60</sup> These arguments bear the mark of St. Anselm ontological argument. St. Anselm in the *Proslogion* developed the famous ontological argument which states that God is "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived."<sup>61</sup> Bonaventure clarifies what is meant by the term indubitable and indicates the sources that can give rise to doubt. For Bonaventure, "a thing is indubitable by reason of the absence of anything that could be doubted."<sup>62</sup> However, he noted that grounds for doubts may arise either from some deficiency in the process of reasoning or from a deficiency in reason itself.

A thing is said to be doubtful in two ways: either because of the process of reasoning or because of a defect in reason itself. The first way involves something on the part of the knower and on the part of the object known; the second

50 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, 3: 5.

51 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 70.

52 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 70.

53 Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 71.

54 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 71.

55 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 71.

56 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q.1, a.1, arg 11-20.

57 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 72. An example of Bonaventure's method of reduction is found in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* V: 2-8.

58 Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 72.

59 Cf. Zachary Hayes, 'Introduction' in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 72.

60 Cf. Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q.1, a. 1, a 21-29.

61 St. Anselm, "Proslogion" in *Basic Writings*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1962), n. 2.

62 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.

way refers only to the knower.<sup>63</sup>

In the first sense, with regards to the object known and the knower, a truth may be doubtful if the reason for its evidence is lacking in itself, or in its demonstration, or in the intellect of the knower. However, with regards to the existence of God, certitude is not lacking in any of these ways.

Since in Himself He is most evident, and since all creatures proclaims His existence, and since man himself is an image of God and is orientated toward God by a natural desire which, together with knowledge and memory, directs man from the core of his being to God as to that reality in which the created spirit finds its true beatitude.<sup>64</sup>

The second sense refers to doubt which comes as a result of the deficiency of reason. For “if there is doubt about the existence of God, it can arise only from subjective causes; from some deficiency in the finite subject.”<sup>65</sup> Bonaventure refers to this as blindness or ignorance in his *Commentary on the Sentences*.<sup>66</sup> In his *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, he avers that “it can be conceded that, because of human weakness, it is possible that some might doubt the existence of God because of a threefold defect in the mind of the knower.”<sup>67</sup> The threefold defect includes a defect in the act of apprehending, in the act of judging, and in the act of fully analyzing.<sup>68</sup> Concerning the first, defect in the act of apprehending, Bonaventure states that

Doubt arises when one does not correctly and fully understand what is signified by the term God, but understands it only in terms of a particular element. Thus the gentiles thought that God signified whatever was superior to man and could foresee future events. Therefore, they believed that the idols were gods and adored them as gods since they gave some true information about future events.<sup>69</sup>

With regards to the act of judging, he says

Doubts arise when the argument is based on partial knowledge, as when the foolish man sees that justice is not apparent in the case of the wicked, and he concludes from this that there is no law in the universe; and from this he concludes that there is no first and highest ruler in the world who is the glorious and high God.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, as regards the defect in the act of analyzing, he

63 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
64 Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 73.  
65 Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 73.  
66 Cf. Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 73.  
67 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
68 Cf. Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
69 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
70 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
71 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
72 Cf. Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 73.  
73 Cf. Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 74.  
74 Bonaventure, *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, q. 1, a. 1, c.  
75 Cf. Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 74.  
76 Cf. Zachary Hayes, ‘Introduction’ in *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, 73.

opines that doubt arises

When the carnal mind is not capable of resolving beyond those things which are evident to the senses, as are corporeal realities. For this reason, some have thought that the visible sun – which holds the highest place among corporeal creatures – was God since they did not know how to resolve things further to an incorporeal substance nor to the first principles of things.<sup>71</sup>

This above deficiencies as explained by Bonaventure can also mean a lack of proper understanding of the term God, or a conclusion drawn from inadequate evidence or the future to reduce the objects of sense experience fully to spiritual realities.<sup>72</sup> Notwithstanding these, none of the deficiencies according to Zachary Hayes jeopardizes the evidence which Bonaventure has explained.<sup>73</sup> For he clearly affirmed that though

Doubt may arise concerning the existence of God from the deficiency of the intellect itself that apprehends or compares, or resolves. According to this understanding, the existence of God can be doubted by some intellect if it has not sufficiently and totally understood the meaning of the term God. But for the intellect which fully understands the meaning of the word God – thinking God to be that than which no greater can be conceived – not only is there no doubt that God exists, but the non-existence of God can not even be thought. Therefore, the reasons given to prove this should be conceded.<sup>74</sup>

In the light of the above, it is therefore impossible to doubt God’s existence, for the mind that correctly understands God to be that being that which no greater can be conceived as Anselm would posit it, it is impossible to doubt God’s existence.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the existence of God is an indubitable truth, human blindness may present an obstacle to the full and deeper knowledge of God in this life, but the truth remains notwithstanding that the existence of God is the foundation of all human certitude.<sup>76</sup>



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# The Latest in St. Bonaventure Scholarship: When Emerging and Senior Scholars Meet *The Bonaventure 2017 Conference*

By Andrew Belfield

The year 2017 marks the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Giovanni di Fidanza, the man known to many today as Saint Bonaventure. Little is known of his childhood, but in 1243 he joined the young Franciscan Order and began his studies at the University of Paris. Assuming the Franciscan chair in 1253, he would not be received as Master until 1257 due to a dispute between the seculars and the mendicants at Paris. However, Saint Bonaventure's academic career would not last long, for he was elected to be the seventh Minister General of the Franciscan Order in 1257. Sixteen years later in 1273 Saint Bonaventure was made Cardinal Bishop of Albano by Pope Gregory X, though Saint Bonaventure did not seek the position; legend has it that the papal envoy who delivered the cardinal's hat to Saint Bonaventure found him washing dishes outside a convent near Florence. Saint Bonaventure requested that they hang this symbol of ecclesial authority and prestige on a tree until he was free to take it. Saint Bonaventure's death just one year later on July 15, 1274 during the Fourteenth Ecumenical Council at Lyons was sudden and unexpected. Pope Sixtus IV canonized Bonaventure in 1484, and Pope Sixtus V in 1587 named him along with Saint Thomas Aquinas, his Dominican counterpart, among the Doctors of the Church.

In honor of eight centuries of Saint Bonaventure, a diverse collection of scholars, ministers, religious and laypeople gathered on the grounds of St. Bonaventure University in western New York for an international conference dedicated to the life and intellectual heritage of the Seraphic Doctor. "Frater, Magister, Minister et Episcopus: The Works and Worlds of St. Bonaventure" began on July 12 and culminated with the celebration of Bonaventure's Feast Day on July 15. For me, these few days were something of a homecoming, both geographically and intellectually. As an undergraduate student of theology and philosophy at St. Bonaventure University, and it was on these very grounds where I was first introduced to a theologian's task of *fides quarens intellectum*. Moreover, it was under the instruction of my professors and the guidance of the friars that I came to a deep appreciation for the particular expression of theology and philosophy that the Franciscan intellectual tradition came to embody. It is this peculiarly Franciscan theology that I am eager to continue studying as I pursue a Ph.D. in Historical Theology at Boston College, where I begin this coming fall. This conference encouraged my interest in the Seraphic Doctor and the intellectual tradition that he helped shape, as it bore witness to the vitality and creativity of that tradition as it lives on in the current community of Bonaventurian scholarship.

Arriving at the first plenary session—"Sacraments: Healing unto Glory," a fascinating discussion of Saint Bonaventure's

sacramental ontology delivered by J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv.—one was immediately struck by the diversity represented at this conference. Women and men of all races—I later learned that each inhabited continent was represented here on campus—chatted amiably with one another as they awaited the start of the conference. The gathered community reflected the diversity of the global church, and there was no shortage of perspectives and insights as each person shared her or his unique encounters with the Seraphic Doctor. I was especially pleased to see a wide range of ages represented as well. Established scholars who have been reading Saint Bonaventure for longer than they may care to admit, young students such as myself only just beginning their careers in academia, and all ages in between could be found learning from one another in breakout sessions and casual conversation. Indeed, some of the most meaningful and memorable conversations I enjoyed across these few days were with master's students getting ready to apply for Ph.D. programs and doctoral students finishing up their dissertations. This is an encouraging sign for Bonaventure—an scholarship, that a thirteenth-century Franciscan can continue to capture the interest of young people in the twenty-first century.

As I continued to meet the many presenters and participants, however, I discovered the diversity of the conference went beyond the visible differences of race, country of origin, age, or gender. An ecumenical collection of persons in various stations and positions in their respective church communities had come together for a weekend celebrating and continuing Saint Bonaventure's profound legacy. While Saint Bonaventure was himself Roman Catholic and articulated his views and positions out of a Roman Catholic tradition, his appeal does not fail to reach beyond his own Catholic location. Nor does Saint Bonaventure only interest his fellow Franciscans. Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Christians; religious and laypeople; Friars Minor, Capuchins, and Conventuals; professional theologians and ministers; this was no exclusive affair, but a conference for the many members of the Body of Christ. There could be no doubt that the church is indeed universal! Such a diversity of perspectives brought out features of the Franciscan charism and Saint Bonaventure's life and thought that might have otherwise gone uncovered. And I would be remiss if I did not also mention that there was at least one member of the Jewish faith in attendance! Francis of Assisi, himself an early practitioner of interfaith dialogue, would have been proud to see how these many voices came together in one harmonious song of thanksgiving and praise for the God of Abraham.

Given the wonderful diversity of the conference participants, then, it was only natural that one should find represented

at this conference a similar diversity in approaches to and interests in Saint Bonaventure and his work. A quick look at the program, detailing the overwhelming superabundance of breakout sessions on a wide variety of topics and issues in Saint Bonaventure's life and thought, confirmed this. Some panels and presentations would touch on what Saint Bonaventure had to say as a theologian and a philosopher; others sought his insights for the spiritual life; still others would consider how Saint Bonaventure would advise his

*discipuli* on living morally. Everyone came with a different question about Saint Bonaventure; everyone came with some unique insight to share about this great medieval figure. For myself, I came eagerly anticipating discussions of scholasticism in Saint Bonaventure, of his intellectual relationship with Saint Thomas Aquinas, with his debt to the Victorines and the *Summa Halensis*; in these, I was not disappointed. What I did not expect was to learn about an office of the passion attributed to St. Bonaventure, to consider the reception of Saint Bonaventure in early modern thought, to reflect on leadership according to a Franciscan-Bonaventurean model. These were pleasant surprises, filling out the portrait of the saint whom I respect as a theologian and philosopher, but whom I may sometimes forget was also a friar, an ecclesial leader, and above all a man of prayer. The convergence of these voices spoke to the integral character of Saint Bonaventure's life and work; though our modern sensibilities may

ask us to compartmentalize Saint Bonaventure into neat and discrete roles—Saint Bonaventure the philosopher, the theologian, the friar, the cardinal, and so on—such division can only result in a fractured portrait, incapable of conveying the fullness of Saint Bonaventure and his work. Saint Bonaventure's theology and philosophy cannot be isolated from his spirituality, which cannot be considered apart from his attention to virtue, which cannot be understood without remembering his duties as a leader in his own religious order and in the Catholic Church. These many stations that Saint Bonaventure occupied during his life—*frater* and *magister*, *minister* and *episcopus*—were not individual responsibilities, but instead together constituted his vocation as a Christian. Even after my four years of study at the University named in his memory and committed to his legacy, I left campus with a renewed and deepened appreciation for many responsibilities Saint Bonaventure held and for his prayerful integration of them in one holy life.

It almost goes without saying, but I feel compelled to say it anyway: the quality of the scholarship and presentations cannot be overstated. In addition to Father Wayne Hellmann's keynote lecture on Saint Bonaventure and the sacraments, Emmanuel Falque delivered a second keynote entitled, "The Entrance of God into Theology or into Philosophy: The Sense of the Debate be-

tween Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas." Each thought-provoking lecture provided its hearers with plenty of material for rumination, a fact made evident by how frequently each lecture's topic and arguments reappeared in discussion during the rest of the weekend. Concurrent sessions filled out the rest of the weekend's schedule. Each session presented a panel of two or three papers centered on some theme or issue in Bonaventure's life and thought—Bonaventure and Virtue Ethics, for instance, or Bonaventure on Spirituality

and Scripture—which made possible a development of each topic or theme from several different perspectives. Each individual paper testified to the careful and erudite research of its presenter, drawing on eight hundred years of scholarship and commentary to offer fresh and compelling insights on this friar's life and works. Taken together, the individual papers of each panel made for a multi-faceted consideration of the topic at hand, providing an opportunity for connections and dialogue between presenters on a panel. My only complaint—one echoed by several other participants with whom I spoke—is that I could only attend so many concurrent sessions.

Perhaps even more exciting than the papers themselves, however, were the question-and-answer sessions following each panel. Some members of the audience offered comments with suggestions for further research; others asked for more details or clarification on the present-

er's argument; still others offered points of criticism or disagreement about the present's conclusions. I hasten to say that these critiques were always offered in a spirit of charity; these were not occasions for self-aggrandizement or intellectual bullying. It was rather out of a shared commitment to learning and truth, and a recognition of the communal nature of learning and truth-seeking, that criticism was made. Moreover, these conversations did not conclude when the time for the session expired; on the contrary, they continued over meals, during the breaks between sessions, and at the evening socials. This conference was an immersive experience; the conversations persisted long after the presentations had ended, and I suspect the conversations will continue even with the conclusion of the conference itself. One really felt one was at a medieval university, where ideas and propositions were explored through dialogue, discourse, disagreement, and dialectic. This is theology as Saint Bonaventure himself practiced it while a lecturer and Master at the University of Paris.

In addition to the diversity of the conference and the quality of its scholarship, there is at least one more dimension to the conference that cannot go unmentioned. Indeed, this dimension characterized and gave shape to the entire conference, from Fr. Hellmann's opening keynote lecture on Wednesday evening to



the round table discussion and summary on Saturday morning. I refer to the fraternal nature of this conference. It was Father Hellmann who suggested this word to us when a group of his own students and colleagues presented him with a Festschrift entitled *Ordo et Sanctitas: The Franciscan Spiritual Journey in Theology and Hagiography, Essays in Honor of J. A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv.* (eds. Michael F. Cusato, Timothy J. Johnson, and Steven J. McMichael; Brill, 2017). It was a deeply moving moment, as Fr. Hellmann, overwhelmed by gratitude, spoke eloquently of the fraternal community of Bonaventurian enthusiasts and Franciscan-minded people represented at this conference—a community to which he has had the great fortune of belonging for his entire academic career. Though we were a diverse group, we were nonetheless a fraternal one, in the spirit of Francis of Assisi and the movement he began. This fraternity, which, as Fr. Hellmann noted, need not be limited to the male gender but instead encompasses all persons who ardently pursue knowledge of God describes the shared bonds of unity that hold together the Bonaventure community of scholars, bonds that go so deep as to suggest a kinship, a familial connection. The community of Saint Bonaventure scholars, gathered at the University named in his memory, are bound together not merely by a shared interest or even a camaraderie; this community is indeed a family. While I, in some sense, have been a member of this family since 2011, when I matriculated as an undergraduate student in theology at St. Bonaventure University (“Once a Bonnie, always a Bonnie,” as we say), there was a special joy in being present amongst these wonderful people in celebration of eight centuries of Saint Bonaventure.

The legendary account of Saint Bonaventure’s name is well-known. This tale, dating to the fifteenth century, states that as an infant Saint Bonaventure—then just little Giovanni—was deathly ill. It was only by the intercession and healing hand of Francis of Assisi, who happened to be passing through Bagnoregio, that he was saved. Upon encountering and praying over the child, Francis is said to have prophetically exclaimed, “*O buona ventura!*” O good fortune! While most scholars would not accept the historicity of this account (Bonaventure does, however, attribute his miraculous recovery to Francis’s intercession), it is a compelling story that seems to have a note of truth to it, even if it did not actually happen. Whether Francis made this exclamation about young Giovanni, it cannot be denied that Saint Bonaventure was indeed a man of good fortune. As I packed my bags, preparing to depart from campus, I could not help but think of this story. What good fortune it was indeed, for each of us individually and for us as a community, to have gathered to celebrate and continue this man’s legacy into the twenty-first century. I am grateful to the Franciscan Institute for organizing this event, and if this weekend was any indication then the next eight centuries of Bonaventurian studies will be marked by good fortune indeed.



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# Framing a Transformative Franciscan Ethos: The Challenge of Excellence at St. Bonaventure University

By Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ

I am grateful to be invited to reflect with you today on the particular ethos of a Franciscan university. In light of Jesuit James Keenan's influential 2015 study, *University Ethics*, many private and faith-based institutions have been called to reflect more intentionally upon their own vision, their own comprehensive and coherent view of what it means to be a university in this new millennium. It is on the basis of this coherent vision, Keenan argues, that a university can become a more responsive and responsible institution today. For its ethics are imbedded in its identity.

What image or identity might St. Bonaventure University hold up for itself? What foundation is at the heart of this university community? What vision of yourselves might re-invigorate your work, beyond policies, practices and procedures? We see today in our culture two dominant models for higher education: the first is the liberal arts university whose origin can be traced back over 800 years, to the medieval universities in Oxford and Paris, where education meant more than career development and academic research. It meant the formation of 'understanding hearts', of persons of 'character and compassion' who can make a difference in the world: difference in the classroom, the hospital, the board room, in civic efforts.

The second model is that of the research institution whose inspiration is taken from the German universities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This model highlights research and discovery, the contribution of scholars to the global conversation and search for scientific knowledge and wisdom. As we survey the landscape of North American colleges and universities, we find both of these models. Indeed, a hybrid institution has emerged in our own day: the comprehensive model, where the liberal arts base serves as a transformative platform and includes professional schools. Like my own Loyola Marymount experience, St. Bonaventure University offers this type of rich hybrid experience for students.

However, today I would like to introduce an additional model for your consideration. This was a much smaller endeavor, we might even say insignificant by contemporary standards, but one which had a profound impact on its time in history and the centuries that would follow. I refer to the School of Toledo, Spain, that scholarly community of translators in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This intellectual group was composed of multicultural, multi-ethnic and interreligious scholars. It was a 'community of investigation and dialogue' within and among the various cultures who were, at that time, politically and militarily at odds on the larger global stage. But in Toledo they came together, in peace, to work together, to find and share the wisdom of every human culture. They built bridges of understanding. And together, these scholars changed the world and they changed history. What would it look like if St. Bonaventure explored this type of educational model?

First, we might ask ourselves who these scholars were? They were learned scholars who represented the intellectual legacy of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. They tirelessly translated the great works of ancient philosophy from Arabic into Latin. As we know, the texts that came from the libraries of Athens and Alexandria were preserved and transmitted from Greek to Arabic by Syrian Christians to Islamic scholars in Bagdad. In addition to these classical texts, we can add scientific, medical and mathematical texts coming from the East. From Baghdad these texts travelled across North Africa to Cordoba and to Toledo. From Toledo, the now Latin texts moved on to Paris, to Oxford, Bologna and to the great centers of learning in Germany.

Thanks to these anonymous scholars of the School of Toledo, the many great minds of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance had access to the classic texts of human history. These minds and these texts gave birth to our time, to our day.

Why is this such an important metaphor for me and perhaps for your own reflection today? I think that the image of investigators and translators, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, representatives of great religious and cultural traditions gives us an additional insight into the DNA, the task of St. Bonaventure University, to its vocation as it moves forward. With your center for Arab-Islamic Studies, and your efforts to recruit students more widely, coming from more diverse backgrounds and religious traditions, might this model offer you a compelling example of dialogue across groups, of civil discourse across differences, of mutuality and cooperation in a common educational endeavor?

We might fruitfully reflect upon the vocation, the DNA of St. Bonaventure, as an inheritor of the School of Toledo, that of the translator and the investigator, of the bridges and bridge builders between generations, between cultures, between nations. There is no better time for us to be engaged in such a task. But let us take a deeper look at our own day and its challenges.

## A deeper look

In his 2009 seminal study *Where is Knowing Going?* Jesuit John Haughey identified the greatest threat to education today in the "learn to earn" mentality. This contemporary mentality reduces education to a commodity to be bought and sold. It reduces rational inquiry to instrumentalism, and education to job-training, skill enhancement, resume building and ultimately, to post-graduate financial success. It reduces assessment to products or outcomes, and can seriously overlook the humanity and the dignity of the student. It is also, unfortunately, an expectation that many of our students have when they come to the university. Students too often ask: how does this class, this professor, this activity, enhance my resume?



St. Bonaventure's Catholic and Franciscan tradition views all learning as a *formative as well as transformative experience*. As a Franciscan university, St. Bonaventure belongs to a rich tradition that is inspired and informed by *spiritual* and *intellectual* intuitions; the ideal of learning is not reducible to career goals. For centuries, this tradition has given witness to an educational vision that is *eminently practical* without losing the conceptual dimension of solid intellectual formation, both analytic and synthetic. The *liberal arts* were seen to be critical tools, not only for the development of a profession and the advancement of one's career, but for personal liberation: they truly "liberate" the individual from the false fears and constraints of the everyday world. They develop those essential elements of character so needed today.

The Franciscan intellectual and educational tradition is intentionally transformative. This means that the human rational journey is not simply about learning how to think correctly, it is a matter of learning to feel correctly, to sense correctly, to notice and, most importantly, to act correctly.

The Catholic and Franciscan educational mission here is a call to be, first and foremost, formative and *transformative* of whole persons. This educational mission encourages each one to promote an experience of integration and synergy in all aspects of campus life: in the classroom, in campus ministry, in social and service activities. This educational project engages each one here in an ever-widening circle of meaning and relationship, mirroring the School of Toledo, in a growing and deepening awareness for the world beyond this particular location, beyond our time and our own ideas.

Perhaps some of you have had the privilege of visiting Assisi, the birthplace of Francis and Clare. Among the Giotto frescos in the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi are three images that recall important events from the saint's life. Each fresco captures an aspect of Francis's own transformation. The first is the well-known image showing him in ecstasy, at the moment he receives the stigmata. The second fresco recalls an event from Francis's early life recorded in the *Legenda Major*. In this scene, a young Francis, still dressed comfortably, encounters a poor knight and, without hesitation, removes his cloak and offers it to him. In a moment of spontaneous generosity, the legend recounts, the young man performs two acts of *pietas*: he gives away what he owns to someone who is impoverished and he affirms the dignity of one who has been humiliated by the events of life.

Between these two events, that of the spontaneous generosity of the young man and the ultimate transformation at the end of his life, we find a third fresco. This fresco captures Francis' encounter with the Sultan. While the saint had originally intended to convert the Sultan, he was himself converted and transformed by the encounter. He recognized the 'brotherhood' of all people of faith. This event marks the transformation from righteousness to compassion and solidarity with the other.

These frescos are beautiful. They are also set in a beautiful basilica: bathed in light, their colors fill the eye of the visitor. Their story surrounds the pilgrim, drawing his eyes higher to the vaulted ceilings, resplendent with visual beauty. Once again, the cumulative experience is overwhelming. No one who visits the basilica, who walks around to admire the frescos, can leave Assisi unaffected.

In the Giotto frescos, through the lens of beauty, we witness the human journey, Francis's own life, from the self-centeredness of youth to his conversion into solidarity and ultimate transformation into Christ. Together, the images serve as icons: they hold before our eyes the dynamic nature of the Franciscan vision of human perfection as growth into love. Like icons, they invite us to enter into the perspective, to engage with a personal transformation into beauty.

The Giotto frescos offer examples of a foundational Franciscan insight: that all life can be best understood according to a *via pulcritudinis*, a journey or way of beauty, a transformative experience. And this experience extends beyond the classroom. We have only to think of the power of your Quick Center for the Arts, a quality center that is striking here at a university of this size. But we should not marvel at its presence, nor at its important contribution to this particular locale, for the communities of New York and Pennsylvania. You are currently engaged in the outreach of beauty.

For the Franciscan tradition, the experience of beauty is central to the journey toward the fullness of our humanity. It is a journey that involves information, formation and transformation. Here is a journey in which every member of an academic community takes part: administrators, faculty, staff, counselors, coaches, everyone here at St. Bonaventure is a member of the formative team, whose goal is the personal transformation of each student.

Might we recast Franciscan education here to frame all of life's endeavors according to a transformative dynamic from self-centeredness through solidarity to communion with the divine, source of all that exists? This would include studying creation through scientific analysis, considering the human person in philosophy and psychology, looking at human action in the creative and performing arts, in the social sciences, and reflecting on divine life and love through the prisms of harmony and beauty.

When we do, we discover how the path of beauty opens the doorway to a type of wholistic pedagogy. It both uses language and transcends language. It is expressed in nature and in art, in science and in literature. Beauty is the foundational human experience that unites mind and heart, spirit and body, activity and passivity, embracing and transcending time, culture, and point of view. Creation of beauty in art, literature, poetry and music is a distinguishing characteristic of the human person and every human culture.

### Three stages of transformative education

As a Franciscan university, education here at St. Bonaventure differs from that of other institutions in the way that the Franciscan vision of wholistic pedagogy differs from a purely career-based education. Education forms a whole, not simply limited to the classroom, but to the residence halls, to the gym, to every moment of every day. And each person here: each staff person, faculty member, administrator, coach, public safety: everyone is involved in the Franciscan vision of education here at St. Bonaventure as a formative and transformative endeavor.

So how might we deepen, strengthen and broaden the case for the Franciscan pedagogical vision, and in particular, how might we make an even stronger case for St. Bonaventure's Franciscan educational vocation, centered on the values of discovery,



community and individual worth. Do these not remind us of the inspiration behind the scholars of the School of Toledo?

So, how might these key elements and inspiration help us sketch out a 'map' for the different stages of transformative education that belong to the Franciscan tradition? I have chosen three stages for this map, inspired by two Franciscan classic texts, Bonaventure's *Journey of the Mind to God* and Clare of Assisi's *Letters to Agnes of Prague*. I name them 'Behold! Consider! Respond!' Each member of the academic community at St. Bonaventure plays a key role in guiding students along this three-fold formative journey, ultimately a human journey into fullness of being and wisdom.

### 1) Behold!

The spiritual/intellectual journey surrounding beauty begins with a preliminary moment of *awareness* and *recognition*, the moment when we notice something beautiful in the world that is present to us. We also notice our experience, our feelings, thoughts and reactions, to it. This object of our attention delights us, and we rejoice in its beauty.

So, we might consider the following question:

How do the students at St. Bonaventure grow in their ability to discover the beauty of the world around them, to treat it with respect and to deepen their own integrity of character? Might these efforts be deepened and expanded?

How do administrators, faculty and staff members model an adult awareness of beauty, a reverence for creation and for per-

sons, a life of integrity of character?

Might the first year of studies have as its goal helping students to *learn to notice and discover beauty*? Students could be encouraged, in every class and at every turn, to *pay attention!* Could the first year of university education be that of *learning to see what is there?* Learning to notice the beautiful? Learning to attend with reverence and respect for the world around them?

Might each department, each major, each residence hall, each athletic program, each service program identify ways that they already promote the growth of students in this area? How could these efforts be intensified?

### 2) Consider!

Paying attention to the world around us is the first step; paying attention to our own internal world, to our attitudes, feelings, thoughts and reflections is the far more difficult second step. The path of understanding involves analysis, synthesis, critical reasoning, discovery and creative thinking. It is here that the academic disciplines play the central and essential role.

This second step or stage of the journey involves the *reflective unfolding*, a deeper consideration of the experience. Key to the journey, this moment involves a shift from what is going on around me to what is going on within me: this is the movement toward the *inner person*. Attention to subjective awareness opens to greater *interiority*: to an awareness of God's presence within

So once again, we might wonder:



Is the goal of St. Bonaventure education more than what our secular culture emphasizes: more than getting what we want, more than economic success, more than technological advancement?

Are the standards of excellence part of the everyday awareness of the students? Are they challenged to embrace excellence as a part of a life of integrity and character?

Do courses such as psychology, theology and philosophy work to assist students in the difficult tasks of introspection?

Does the educational experience here, in all its dimensions, offer opportunities for students to develop the skills of authentic self-awareness, self-analysis, self-consciousness that enhance their own sense of who they are and what they are doing, especially with their free time?

Do students find multiple opportunities, and good counselors, to deal with their own failures, whether in the classroom, on the athletic field, in relationships, in life?

### 3) Respond!

The third and final moment lies in the dynamic *transformative embrace* of Beauty and meaning, the ultimate communion with the source of all that is beautiful. This is not an end, but a new beginning. Here interiority and exteriority seem to collapse: the God within me becomes the God within whose embrace I am held and loved. Inner/outer, upper/lower, ascending/descending: now all the categories of the journey collapse into one another: there is only Love. From within this experience of communion, each person is transformed and called to respond.

Here the three values of individual worth, of actions that include and empower each person come together to pour outward into solidarity with those in need and to stewardship of all that exists. In right action and right loving, all the values become incarnate in each person, whether student, staff, faculty, administrator.

We might be tempted to think that such a journey is *linear*; that it is a passage from this world to the next, from *here* to *there* or from *now* to *then*, as from one point on a line to another. We might think of the values as an ascending staircase, with service and stewardship at the summit. We might consider graduation the end point toward which all efforts are directed, with the graduate as a sort of Franciscan “product”. This, too, might even make sense with the Franciscan tradition, especially when we look at its emphasis on love and on action for the poor.

However the examples from the Giotto frescoes show clearly how the journey of Franciscan pedagogy is not linear. Rather, it is expanding and inclusive, reaching across cultures and religious traditions, to touch into the deepest questions that arise within the human heart. It culminates in ongoing *praxis*: an ongoing transformation of mind and heart, in response to a world of beauty and to the beauty of each person, each being. As an actor bursting with enthusiasm, as a dancer bursting with energy, as an athlete bursting with the joy of excellent achievement, so the person at the fullness of the journey is filled to overflowing with a joy that can only come from a deep and internal experience of beauty and meaning, a spiritual encounter that is the fruit of any authentic educational experience.

So we might ask:

Do students here, at each step in their educational experience, and upon graduation fully incarnate a sense of service and responsibility, respect and reverence for all that God has done?

Are they joyful, faith-filled and faithful in their attitude toward life? Toward all persons?

Do they act with compassion and drive, creatively seeking solutions for some of our most urgent problems today? Have they developed informed minds, understanding hearts so as to live transformed lives?

### Conclusions

As I conclude my remarks, let us return to the scholars of the School of Toledo. Why did they do it? Why did these scholars spend so much time and energy on the writings of ‘dead’ men? What gave them inspiration to carry on? What confidence did they have in the human spirit, the human search for wisdom, the common human desire for meaning and integrity in every culture, in every age? Their job was that of the *translator*: the person who would convey the questions, discoveries, the truth and insights from one culture to another, from one generation to another. It can’t have been the goal of *usefulness*, for what could be more useless than reading someone who had been dead for over 1500 years? It can’t have been the desire to impress their colleagues, to improve their earning capacity, to make a better life for themselves. Here there was no utility involved.

It must have been the sheer *delight* of reading and learning what another human being thought about the world. It must have had something to do with a shared human joy in the activity of inquiry, the engagement of intellectual discourse, of creativity and of intellectual transcendence, in the recognition of a common human search beneath diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

And they must have faced challenges of understanding one another. They must have had to draw on all the patience, the spiritual generosity and imagination they could muster. How did they deal with their own differences of opinion? How did they get beyond the superficial questions to the deeper issues and values? We will never know. All we can know is what it takes for each of us, in the classroom and throughout the university to stay in the conversation despite our differences, to move forward despite our tendencies to distrust, to have confidence in the common human search for wisdom and understanding that reaches back to the earliest days of every culture.

Here at St. Bonaventure you take that common human search *one* human being, *one* student at a time. It involves the ongoing challenge to recognize and to promote the integration, the development and the dignity of each student, each person, as one of inestimable value given by God. Such intellectual activity is an end in itself because the one who is engaged in it is an end in himself, in herself. The intellect is a spiritual faculty, not finalized by any marketability, by any career advancement, by any measure of productivity outside itself.

This Franciscan vision so important, so complex, so rich

and so beautiful that no one class, no one experience, no one person can achieve it. As such it is an educational project that involves every person in this room: who you are, what you do, how you do it, and for whom you exist. St. Bonaventure is not simply an academic institution, it is an educational institution, drawing on the great tradition of scholars from the School of Toledo and to universities going all the way back to places like Oxford and Paris, where the great Franciscan masters studied, lived and taught.

What you are already doing may hold the seeds of a deeper, richer and more inclusive vision, based upon the university's mission. We might ask how deeply this Franciscan commitment to dialogue across cultures and differences, how deeply this commitment to creativity and beauty, how deeply the culture of welcome, inclusivity and community is able to go? With the Arab-Islamic Center, the Quick Center for the Arts and many other efforts taking place, a richer foundational model may be coming into view. This model will serve to ground an emergent set of values that are espoused and promoted by every member of this campus community. And your impact on future generations may be as great as the

impact of the scholars in the School of Toledo.

As they knew then, we know now: there can be no greater vocation than to be involved in the education and the formation of the young: these wonderful men and women who are the hope of tomorrow. May all your work be informed by the profound joy of knowing the value of what you do, and the values that inspire you.



**Mary Beth Ingham, CSJ**, is Professor of Philosophical Theology at the Franciscan School of Theology, affiliated with the University of San Diego. Her several monographs include *Scotus for Dunces: An Introduction to the Subtle Doctor*, *The Harmony of Goodness: Mutuality and Moral Living According to John Duns Scotus*, *Rejoicing in the Works of the Lord: Beauty in the Franciscan Tradition*, and *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus: An Introduction*.

## No Higher Power

by Kevin C.A. Elphick, OFS

“Do you have a higher power?” they ask.

I answer “I have none.”

“I have only the lowest vulnerability...

Only the deepest fragility.”

There is only the One who empties;

The Three who continually pour out.

Of these, one abandoned all power

Leapt from all that is higher

And arrived as a naked, crying child

Of whom no one could fear, but only pity.

Yet lower still he descended,

Emptying even more;

Lowest vulnerability

Deepest fragility

Descending into death, Sheol and hell.

Solidarity with the lowest

Communion with the powerless

No one left alone, even in hell

Silently, powerlessly

loving presence even there.



**Kevin C.A. Elphick, OFS**, is a lay associate with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities. His graduate degree in Religious Studies was completed through a cooperative studies initiative between Mundelein College and Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago, IL. He holds a Doctorate in Ministry from Graduate Theological Foundation. He currently works as a supervisor at a national Veterans suicide prevention hotline.

# This Day You Will Be with Me in Paradise:

## A Soteriology of Justice from the Gospel of Luke

By Fr. Earl Meyer, OFM Cap.

**Abstract** – *The soteriology of satisfaction developed by St. Anselm has never been completely satisfactory. The Gospel of Luke offers a soteriology of justice which is more resonant with divine goodness, human dignity and the Franciscan heritage. Luke suggests that Christ saved us by suffering an injustice so grave that it reveals the horror of all injustice, especially the injustices we have committed. Realizing this guilt the sinner turns to God who forgives the repentant.*

Christ died to save us from our sins. “Christ was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rm. 4:25) The New Testament teaches clearly, as an essential truth of our faith, that we are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, the traditional theology of the process by which his death reconciles us with God, the soteriology, has never been fully satisfactory.

### The Soteriology of Satisfaction

St. Anselm of Canterbury developed his theory of redemption by satisfaction in his classic work “Why God Became a Man” (**Cur Deus Homo**).<sup>1</sup> He proposed that human beings had sinned grievously and thus incurred a debt, a condition of injustice, from which they could not extricate themselves. God willed to release humanity from this power of sin and death in the mode of satisfaction, a free will offering for pardon, rather than a punishment of vengeance. Such satisfaction to God, for the debt of human sinfulness, could be offered properly only by a God-man.

It was for this reason that the Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ who endured his passion and death as a voluntary satisfaction for our sins. Thomas Aquinas held that it was not necessary but only fitting that Jesus became incarnate to serve as our mediator before God.<sup>1</sup> The Franciscan tradition, inspired by John Duns Scotus, holds that Christ would have become incarnate regardless of the fall, which allows for a different perspective on soteriology.<sup>2</sup> Anselm’s theory is not official Catholic doctrine, although it continues to influence theologians. The Reformers adopted it in a most severe form: that Christ died as our substitute in punishment for our sins.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequent theologians have offered a variety of explanations of how we are justified by the death and resurrection of Christ: through an act of total obedience to undo our disobedience; assuming the guilt and consequent punishment that all human

beings deserve; paying our debt as a ransom or as a scapegoat who carried our sins into oblivion.

These various explanations require, at least implicitly, the severity of Christ’s sacrifice as an adequate appeasement of divine outrage to reconcile humanity with the justice of God. This can imply aspects of God that are difficult to reconcile with divine goodness.

Such explanations of how Jesus saved us from our sins do not resonate well with faithful Christians today. The violent death of the innocent Christ as a payment for the debt of our sins is too redolent of a whipping boy. The wide variety of theories of redemption is, itself, evidence of an elusive concept which is fully satisfied by none, each offering only one facet of a greater truth.

### A Soteriology of Justice

A quite different approach to our redemption can be found in the gospel of Luke which suggests that Christ saved us by suffering an injustice so grave that it moves us to repentance. He died to save us in the sense that reflecting on his death, the contrast of the cruelty inflicted and the composure of the innocent victim, we realize the horror of all injustice, especially the injustices we commit in our own lives. Burdened by this guilt of our own offenses, we turn to God in repentance and God forgives the sins of the repentant. It is in this realm of justice that we are saved by the cross of Christ.

Bernard Lonergan understood satisfaction as “a willing acceptance of punishment so that pardon may be appropriately granted.”<sup>4</sup> This acceptance of suffering to affect pardon is not necessarily an immediate nexus. Our conversion, prompted by our realization of the horrible injustice, which Christ endured, may be the intermediate step to the granting of pardon.

The mercy of God is not a gratuitous forgiveness in the manner of cheap grace. Nor is the salvation enabled by the death of Christ automatic. It calls for a response in faith. We are not saved passively. The injustice of the death of Christ inspires us to be active in our own salvation by repenting and turning to God who forgives our sins. Christ died for us not vicariously, but paradigmatically. God, himself, confronted the evil of injustice on Calvary because humans were incapable of doing so adequately, and therein lies the depth of God’s mercy. The cross is God’s solution to the problem of evil. He exposed it.

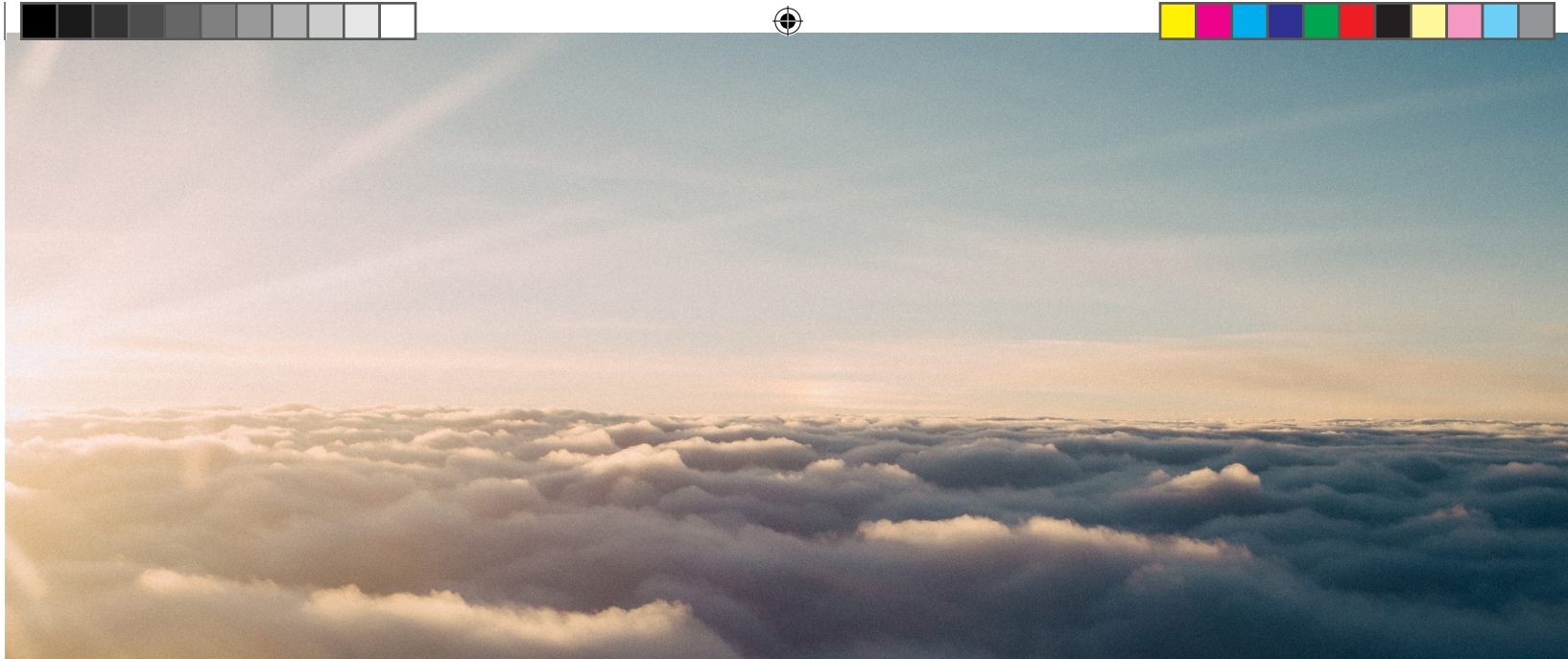
Many who witnessed the brutal injustice inflicted on slaves were so repulsed that they turned against slavery, personally,

1 *Summa Theologica* III, q.1, a. 2; R

2 Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation: Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, (Oxford University Press, 2002).

3 Richard McBrien, *Catholicism*, (Winston Press, 1970), 462.

4 Bernard Lonergan, *De Verbo Incarnata*, (Gregorian University Press, 1964), 508.



and socially. When we see the injustice in the death of the innocent Lamb of God, and the manner in which he bore that injustice, we turn against all injustice, all sin. Since the victim is the divine Son of God, this is an offense against God himself, and the injustice is not limited to that one specific wrong but to injustice itself so that the unjust death of Christ exposed the intrinsic evil of sin thus defeating it. This was the ultimate confrontation between good and evil, between Christ and Satan.

Violence is not eliminated in this view of redemption, but it is not a violence imposed on Christ as a punishment or a ransom as atonement for our sins. It's a violence willingly endured by Christ to expose the full evil of sin. Our sins are not forgiven immediately by the physical suffering of Christ, as a *quid pro quo*. Our sins are forgiven by the mercy of God which we implore when we repent of injustice as manifested by the unjust sufferings of Christ. Here, the goodness of God is not diminished by a divine wrath or vengeance. Rather, it is enhanced by God's benevolent desire to move his sinful people to repentance through a freely offered sacrifice to reveal the evil of injustice.

### The Soteriology of Justice in Luke

This soteriology of justice is based on the gospel of Luke which mentions the presence of Satan during the passion narrative, and not once, but three times (22:3, 31, 53). This focus on Satan emphasizes that the passion of Christ was not primarily accepting suffering as a satisfaction for sin, but that it was the fundamental struggle between good and evil, between justice and injustice.

Luke used Mark as a source, but the theology of Luke's gospel is quite different from Mark. Luke offers a gospel of compassion, reconciliation, and healing. Luke does not say that Jesus' death itself brings salvation or that Jesus "died for you." Where Mark makes such statements (Mk. 10:45, 15:39), Luke changes the wording. Mark wrote "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," (Mk. 10:45). Matthew (20:28) adopts that verse intact, but the parallel passage in Luke omits "to give his life as a ransom." It reads simply, "I am among you as one who serves," (Lk 22:27). Luke is looking at salvation through his lens of compassion, healing, and forgiveness. He is not focused on punishment or retribution or atonement but

on inviting sinners back to God when they have realized the horror of sin and injustice manifest in the death of Christ on the cross.

This perspective of Luke is especially evident in his passion narrative where Christ forgives his executioners and promises paradise to the repentant thief whose conversion was prompted by the injustice inflicted on Christ. "We have been condemned justly . . . but this man has done nothing wrong," (Lk. 23:41). This is further manifested by the response of the centurion to the death of Christ. In Mark and Matthew, the centurion says, "Truly this man was the Son of God," (Mt. 27:54, Mk. 15:39), but in Luke's gospel, the centurion says, "Certainly, this man was innocent," (Lk. 23:47). His death was such a grave injustice that it inspires repentance and, by the grace of God, affects salvation.

Luke continues this theme in the Acts of the Apostles, where references to the death of Christ lack any emphasis on atonement, such as the use of "for many" or "for sins." Jesus' death in Acts is never presented as an atoning sacrifice but as Christ's victory. (Acts 2:23-24; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39; 13:28-29) The allusion to Jesus as the suffering servant of second Isaiah (Acts 3:13) has the theme of vindication following suffering not of vicarious suffering. It was the obedience of the suffering servant bearing the sins of many (Is. 53:12) that exposed the radical evil of injustice. The reference (Acts 5:30) to "hanging him on a tree" (Deut. 21:22) highlights the shame of the cross with a motif of triumph following humiliation, not a sin offering.

### Francis of the Crucified

The tradition of the Church, manifested in saints such as St. John of the Cross, St. Paul of the Cross, and especially St. Francis of Assisi, is in harmony with this soteriology of justice derived from Luke. The prayer of St. Francis before the Crucifix of San Damiano does not speak of atonement for sin but of the strength and guidance offered by the crucified.<sup>5</sup> "The Office of the Passion," composed by St. Francis, a mosaic of scripture verses, does not focus on punishment or ransom for our sins but sees the suffering of the crucified in the context of salvation history with the promise of Easter joy.

Francis never displayed his stigmata and never implied

5 "Most high and glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me Lord a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect love, right sense, and correct knowledge to carry out your holy and true will!"

# NEW RELEASE



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## Bonaventure Revisited:

Companion to the

*Breviloquium*



Edited by Dominic V. Monti, OFM  
and Katherine Wrisley Shelby

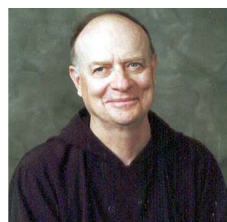
that his suffering was for the sins of others. While Francis suffered himself and wept over the bitter sufferings of the crucified, he did not relate that suffering to atonement for our sins but to the humility of Christ in enduring his passion. This is precisely the soteriology of justice: the humility of Christ enduring an injustice that awakens us to all injustice especially that of our own deeds, and which should evoke in us a humble dependence on God's mercy.

The defining moment in the life of St. Francis, the soul of his conversion, was his encounter with the leper. The suffering of the leper awakened him to a greater need for compassion, humility, and repentance. Francis' encounter with the leper parallels the conversion of the good thief who was moved by the unjust suffering of Christ to plead for God's mercy. St. Francis facing the leper is every Christian facing the unjust sufferings of Christ on the cross, realizing our need of God's mercy for our own unjust deeds.

Murillo's "Francis of the Crucified" depicts Christ bending down from the cross to embrace Francis who is reaching up to him. This may well summarize the soteriology of justice. We are not redeemed passively. We need to reach for Christ, crucified. When the injustice inflicted on Christ moves us to reject sin and humbly beg the mercy of God, we are active participants in our own salvation.

The sacrificial death of Christ is only one aspect of the Paschal Mystery, the source our salvation. The fullness of our salvation is revealed in the resurrection, which is God's glorification of Christ in a new dimension of human existence.<sup>6</sup> The resurrection is also the glory of justice where the evil of sin has been exposed and thus conquered by the death of Christ. Injustice did not have the last word. It did not prevail. This triumph of justice is

celebrated anew in each eucharistic remembrance of the death and resurrection of Christ. The good thief was the first to repent because of the injustice inflicted on Christ and he was the first to hear, "Today you will be with me in paradise," (Lk. 23:43). Thus are we invited to be justified by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and so share in his glory.



**Fr. Earl Meyer OFM Cap, M.S.**, is a member of the Capuchin Province of Mid-America. He has served as a teacher, pastor, and chaplain. He is the author of *Homilies of Father Earl Meyer*, *Seasons of Our Souls*, and a number of periodical articles. At present, he is retired at St. Fidelis Friary in Victoria, Kansas.

6 Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth II*, (Ignatius Press, 2011), 274.

# A Blazing Grace: The Power to Gather and Preserve God's Real Presence

By Anthony Zuba, OFM Cap.

*The following article is adapted from a talk addressed to the Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order at the Church of Saint John the Baptist, New York City, on March 5, 2017*

It is the year 2017, the Year of Grace. Following a year of jubilee like the Year of Mercy, in which reflections and meditations on mercy flowered like a forest, with some thoughts on grace is not easy to do. Mercy, after all, is the theme of Pope Francis' papacy.<sup>1</sup> The pope says the name of God is Mercy.<sup>2</sup> He has convicted us in the view that mercy is short in supply in the world today. On some days, it looks like human civilization is slouching toward suicide. If we the human family are to survive our daily fall into violence—the violence of poverty, the violence of war, the violence against creation itself—it will only be because we have chosen mercy over cruelty.

So, the pope does not take it for granted that mercy will arise from the human heart. We must put mercy in there. This is what the year of jubilee was about.

But now the jubilee is over. It is the year after, the year 2017. The Year of Grace. And I want to reflect on grace, because unlike mercy, which depends on us to make it real, grace never departs from this world. In fact, as Paul teaches us, “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Romans 5:20).<sup>3</sup> So, ironically, the worse things seem to get, the less merciful and the more violent we are, the more we fall to ruin on the wreckage of sin, the more grace is present to us. And in these times of uncertainty, these times of instability, as we fear the worst and despair for the good, we need to make space for the grace that is always here with us. We must wake up to the grace around us and that is, like the kingdom of God, in our midst (cf. Luke 17:21).

As with so many other spiritual pursuits, the saints are our help in this endeavor. Using one of his writings, I believe it is possible to explore Francis of Assisi's consciousness of grace. Francis can teach us what grace is, what grace does, and what grace demands.

In the last year of his life, he wrote a letter to all the brothers. It is known nowadays as *A Letter to the Entire Order*.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the letter (Verses 50-52) is a prayer:

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,  
give us miserable ones  
the grace to do for You alone  
what we know You want us to do  
and always to desire what pleases You.  
Inwardly cleansed,  
interiorly enlightened  
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
may we be able to follow  
in the footprints of Your beloved Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and, by Your grace alone,  
may we make our way to You,  
Most High,  
Who live and rule  
in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,  
and are glorified  
God almighty,  
forever and ever. Amen.

So, what is grace? First of all, it is a gift. Francis acknowledges this when he says, “Give us miserable ones the grace” (Verse 50). It is a gift of almighty God, whose power surpasses our power. It is a gift of the eternal God; grace transcends time, but it breaks into time. It is a gift of the just and merciful God. Grace comes from the source of righteousness and mercy itself. Grace is a real sign of divine power, divine justice, divine mercy breaking into our time and space. It cannot be taken; it can only be received as a gift, and so Francis appeals to God to show up in the gift of grace.

Francis invokes grace twice in his prayer. In between these invocations, he also cites the activity of the Holy Spirit, which he calls a fire (Verse 51). This is not a coincidence. This

1 *Miserando atque Eligendo* (“By having mercy, by choosing him”), the episcopal motto of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, has carried over into the pontificate of Francis.

2 Pope Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy: A Conversation With Andrea Tornielli* (New York: Random House, 2016).

3 All citations from Scripture from New American Bible Revised Edition.

4 In Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, 3 vols. (New York: New City Press, 1999-2002), 1:116-121.



is important. For Francis, naming the Holy Spirit is another way of naming grace in its dynamic mode. Grace is a blazing fire. It is a blazing spirit that sets us ablaze but does not destroy us. Here Francis links the fire of the Holy Spirit to the traditional threefold mystical path to God of purgation, illumination, and union. By the fire of the Holy Spirit, our soul, the inner aspect of our personhood, is purified. It burns away our sin. This fire lights our way with wisdom so we can walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. This fire fills us with divine energy, so that when we walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, we walk as Christ, being one with him. Grace is gift, and it is fire of the Spirit.

We are already on our way to describing what grace does. It guides us to God. In the end, it is the only guide to God. And grace does not only show us the way. Grace makes us able to go to God. This is why Francis prays that “by Your grace alone, may we make our way to you” (Verse 52). There is a twofold sense to *making* here. Grace is about finding direction and then going in that direction when we see it. So, let’s look at this a little more.

Go back to Francis’ first invocation of grace in Verse 50. He says, “give us miserable ones the grace to do for you alone what we know you want us to do and always to desire what pleases you.” First, grace gives us the power to act: “the grace to do.” We don’t need grace necessarily to know the difference between right and wrong acts. That is why Francis adds “what we know you want us to do.” He may be referring to natural law, to the power of reason unaided by revelation. Whatever he means, he seems certain we can discern by our own means what is right and wrong, what is good and evil. We Gentiles already get it (cf. Romans 2:14-15). But we need grace to act on what we know. We need grace to work by a way that is centered in God. We need grace to speak and act in God’s name, and for God’s purposes alone. Second, grace makes our desires right: “always to desire what pleases you.” We are human creatures with finite needs and infinite desires. God’s creation can satisfy all our needs because we are finite creatures. But only God can satisfy our desires because our desires, like God, are infinite. If we desire what God desires, then we will be fulfilled infinitely. If our desire departs from God, we will be frustrated infinitely. Without grace, we cannot “know” God’s desire. That is, we cannot be intimate with God. Without grace to stimulate us, we forget God’s pleasure. Without grace to make us wise, we forget God’s ways. And even if we did remember, without grace, we cannot choose for God’s desire. Grace orients us, and it gives us the get-up-and-go we need.

We do not know if Francis wrote this prayer with the letter. Many early manuscripts of Francis’ writings indicate it was written separately. But the version of the letter in the earliest anthology, Assisi Codex 338, concludes with this prayer.<sup>5</sup> We may infer that some friars believed they were meant to be heard together. So we should take a quick look at what Francis said to his brothers in this letter. This will lead us to the third point to sharpen here, and that is what grace demands of us.

What did the dying Francis want from his brothers and which led some of his followers to append this grace-filled prayer

5 Francis of Assisi: *Early Documents*, 1:120, Footnote b.

6 A synopsis of the Fourth Lateran Council, with suggested readings from early Franciscan documents for inquiries into the council’s influence on the mind of Francis, is found in William R. Hugo, *Studying the Life of Saint Francis of Assisi: A Beginner’s Workbook*, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park, N.Y.: 2011), 175-178, 198-202.

7 Francis of Assisi: *Early Documents*, 1:124-127.

to his letter? After a greeting to all the brothers of the order and its general minister, he calls on them to “obey the voice of the Son of God ... observe His commands with your whole heart and fulfill His counsels with a perfect mind” (Verses 6-7). Then comes the command to which Francis has been building up (Verses 12-13):

Kissing your feet, therefore, and with all that love of which I am capable, I implore all of you brothers to show all possible reverence and honor to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in Whom that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God.

Francis is, of course, speaking about the Eucharist. The Eucharist was on his mind a lot because it was on the mind of the Church during this age. The Fourth Lateran Council, which we believe Francis attended in 1215, established many reforms in the celebration of Eucharist. Among them were the prescription to receive communion at least once a year at Easter and to confess once a year. The council also called for reservation of consecrated bread in tabernacles and proper care of church buildings and sacramental items used in worship. Priests were to celebrate Eucharist regularly, with due reverence and devotion. Likewise, religious were to follow the rule of their community and pray the Divine Office with diligence. The canons of the Fourth Lateran Council were enforced by papal bulls published in the following years.

Francis was aware of these pronouncements. They affected thoroughly his understanding of God’s presence and activity in the world.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Francis believed that Eucharist was the only way to see Christ: as he writes in his *Testament*,<sup>7</sup> “I see nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except his most holy Body and Blood” (Verse 10). And in *A Letter to the Entire Order* he is more effusive (Verses 26-29):

Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest! O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread! Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him! Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!

Eucharist was clearly a powerful encounter with Christ, powerful because it reminded Francis of God’s humility, which first converted him in the encounter with the leper.

Seeing God in this way, in the poorest and most humble persons and simplest things of the earth, changed Francis’ life. The true nature of God is humility and poverty, and it calls forth from us a holy desire to identify with God’s humility and poverty. If

God is known to us by being broken and shared in ordinary bread, then we are to present ourselves likewise to God and “pour out your hearts” and “hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves” (Verse 29).

Faith leads us into practice. Francis’s faith in the Eucharist led him to insist on right practice of worship. Thus he admonishes the friars who were priests to “offer the true Sacrifice of the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ with purity and reverence....let all their will, *as much as grace helps*, be directed to God, desiring, thereby, to please only the Most High Lord Himself” (Verses 14–15, emphasis added). With an admonition not to profane the Eucharist through neglect of the liturgy or the improper care of sacramental items, especially the consecrated bread and Scripture, Francis warns the brothers, “How much greater and more severe will the punishment be of the one who tramples on the Son of God, and who treats the Blood of the Covenant in which he was sanctified as unclean *and who insults the Spirit of grace?*” (Verse 18, emphasis added). And here we come back to grace. Faith tells us the poor and humble Christ is present in our celebration of Eucharist. Grace makes us live what we believe. As Francis says, grace helps direct our whole will to God. It is our means. As to the extent that our will is totally given to God, grace is the measure. And more than a measure: grace is the rule. Grace forbids us to live contrary to what we believe. Faith indicates the presence of God among us. Grace shows us that God’s presence cannot be taken for granted. We sin against the Spirit of grace at our own peril. As Francis says, the one who insults the Spirit of grace will face retribution.

To recap so far: Grace abounds in our time. The Spirit of blazing grace is guiding us to God, found in the poor and humble Christ, really present in the Eucharist. In this grace-filled encounter, we become able to live as God wants us to live. We find salvation. We find peace and reconciliation. But we cannot take it for granted.

Since the Second Vatican Council, we have developed a more profound understanding of God’s presence among us in the Eucharist. This presence is not confined to the consecrated bread and wine. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), teaches that God in Christ is present in the Word of God proclaimed in the Eucharistic assembly; Christ is

8 “To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, ‘the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,’ but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matthew 18:20). *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, para. 7, accessed March 21, 2017, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html).

9 Dorothy Day, “On Pilgrimage,” *Catholic Worker*, April 1964.

present in the person of the priest who offers the sacrifice of the Mass; Christ is present in the congregation at worship.<sup>8</sup> But Francis knew this 750 years before the Second Vatican Council. This is why in his letter he prevailed on the brothers to “venerate, as best they can, the divine written words wherever they find them” (Verse 35); to respect even unworthy priests, because as he says in his *Testament*, “I discern the Son of God in them” (Verse 9); and to show mercy to lepers, because they, too, revealed the presence of Christ. This is Francis’ great contribution to theology: to show that God abides in the poor, and thus God requires us to receive them if we are to receive God. Or as Dorothy Day teaches us, “The mystery of the poor is this: That they are Jesus, and what you do for them you do for Him.”<sup>9</sup>



What a fearful grace, that where the sin and suffering of peoples abides, Christ abides all the more! Then what of Jesus’ withering rebuke to the disciples: “The poor you will always have with you; but you will not always have me” (Matthew 26:11)? Our “having” Jesus, which is to say, the life of God, depends on our conduct toward the poor. Our decision for or against mercy, and our choice to cooperate or not with grace, determines whether we will have Jesus or not. Being compassionate to the poor gives us access to Christ really present in the Eucharist. The work of grace in us vouchsafes our faith.

Francis believes the Eucharist is essential to our salvation.



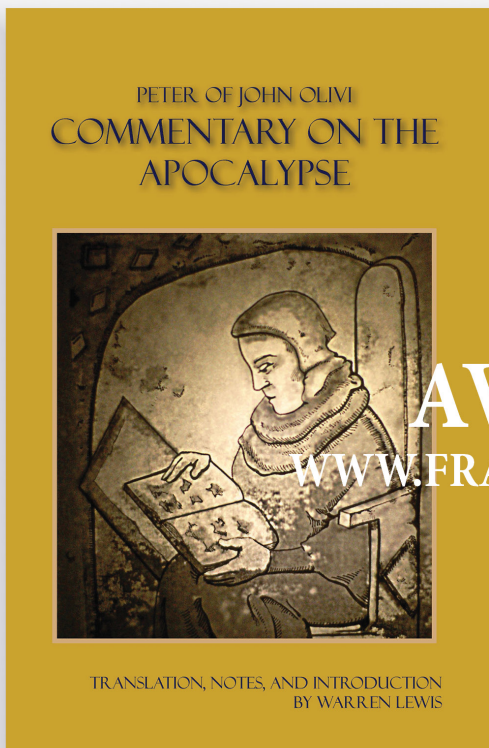
No wonder he is burning with fraternal concern in *A Letter to the Entire Order*. He is ablaze with grace! Let us be no different. Let us never be indifferent when we see our sisters and brothers hungry, or naked, or without shelter, or sick, or imprisoned by fear and persecution, who are victims of prejudice, racism, sexism, poverty, and violence against their bodies, their minds, and their spirits. God wills all people to belong to the Mystical Body of Christ. God wills all people to be one in the Eucharist. Let us look at the humility of God in the broken bread of our wounded neighbors, suffering from homelessness, incarceration, mental illness, and substance abuse. Let us not overlook the transgressions against the holy Body and Blood, desecrated daily in our world wherever people are suffering. The Lamb of God is being looked down upon in our Muslim neighbors who are bullied and harassed or denied entry to our land. The Lamb of God is defiled and trampled upon in our undocumented sisters and brothers who are being detained and deported to places where they face starvation, rape, and murder. Why were these people, each one made in the image of God and made to be an image of Christ, left to be carelessly thrown around like they did not matter, like they were not holy? Who will gather up all the fragments of our fractured humanity, these living words of God, and put them in becoming places? Even further, what about all the living creatures of the earth, who dwell in the sea, the sky, and the land; what about the air, the earth, and the water itself; what about the elements of life that God made good? That prepared an earthly home for the Son? The wheat fields and grapevines whose fruits give form to our Eucharist? Without creation, there is no Christ. Desecration of the earth, in whose fruits Christ makes his home, is desecration of the Eucharist.

With Francis, let us confess we have not observed his Rule and ours, the Gospel, as we have promised. With the blessed assurance of God's pardon and peace, let us also say with Francis (Verse 43, emphasis added), "I firmly promise to observe these things, *as God shall give me the grace*, and I pass them on to the brothers [and sisters] who are with me."



**Anthony Zuba, OFM Cap.**, is the animator for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation at the Parish of Holy Cross-Saint John the Baptist, New York City. With a background in community organizing, he is mobilizing members of the parish for direct action in faith-rooted campaigns for a living wage, immigration reform, and climate justice. He also provides material and spiritual support for the parish food pantries. He has a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University and a Master of Theology degree from Boston College.

Fortunately, sin does not rule, and death does not have the last word. For grace overflows, and God's life is always among us and within us, ready to be given, if we are ready to receive it and share it with others.



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# Democratized Mysticism

Presidential Address at the 52nd Annual Franciscan Conference

June 16, 2017

By Kathie Uhler, OSF

How to open a conference on St. Bonaventure's "Itinerarium," knowing that our speakers André Cirino, Josef Raischel and Joanne Schatzlein, will lead us carefully and even "sensibly" around and into deep theological and philosophical waters?

I recall entering a private Easter retreat at our Ritiro in Allegany many years ago, coming directly from a semester break at St. Bonaventure University, where I was teaching in the philosophy department. With gusto, I delved into my personal retreat text: "The Triple Way" of St. Bonaventure. But truly, by day three, I was on the brink of a physical and mental collapse. "The Triple Way" overwhelmed me; I couldn't get my head around it, nor did I even have the requisite physical energy to tackle this dense text with the deceptively simple name. It was hubris on my part to attempt such a thing, but I didn't know it then.

And so it is with hard-won humility that I sit at the feet of our keynoters and, with great respect, await their tutelage.

Perhaps what I can offer at the start of our journey are some reflections on a sort of obliquely related concept that is more within my comfort zone: the idea of a tool that can be used to a very helpful extent as we move through the weekend. The tool is democratized mysticism. Or democratic mysticism, without any political spin. This is a term I distilled from a book by Dorothee Soelle titled, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*.

Why this tool? Because of the mystical nature of Bonaventure's message. To appreciate best what he has to say through our speakers, one should be a mystic. But, can we will ourselves

to be mystics? Isn't there a special grace for that?

One day, a hundred years ago when I was a postulant, I worked up my courage to share a secret about myself with the postulant mistress, Sr. Regina Catherine. I said to her, "I think I'm a mystic." She replied, "Everyone is a mystic." I was taken aback in a way since being a mystic was no longer something special, if

indeed what she said was true. She didn't explain, but today I would say that Regina was democratizing mysticism. She saw it as inherent in each human being, more or less actualized. And she led me then to experience the "humility of equals."

What are the signs that we are tuned in mystically? For many of us, I would dare say, the call to religious life was a mystical sign and experience. For some, the call came in third grade or during a retreat as a sophomore in high school; for some, the call was muted and more like a push into the life that became clearer over time. But the Blessed Assurance was always there, somehow, entrancing us. Some have claimed to have had only one mystical experience in their lives, but this was enough to hold them to the end.

Here are three other signs, among many others, of the mysticism of everydayness, banal but dynamic:

- Buddhist attentiveness or mindfulness that enables engagement in the pure now without distraction.

- Then, being alert, in the now, to mystery: to the unexplained power engulfing us that a word or fragrance, or a déjà vu, may conjure up in us. Have you ever thought, "When I caught the scent of her perfume, I was transported back to a time long ago and I started to cry." Recently in my own life I remarked to several people, "I have heard Second Corinthians [9: 6-15] many times but never did it strike me as it did in this Golden Jubilee celebration." In the mystical way, a veil is dropped revealing a truth and a world that was always there.

- Being alert to contradictions is the third sign. Contradictions are not all bad. Engaged observers "get" that many are one, that everything is connected, that the loss of a species of animal is the loss of a presence of God in creation. That, as in Psalms 84, God is our sun and shield, both at the same time. Mystically alert, we can understand how a good and its opposite can fuse or synthesize into something else, into a new creation on a higher plane: the Hegelian dialectic. I think we know this synthesis from the Paschal Mystery as a template of our Christian faith: life, death, and resurrection.

Democratized mysticism is a tool whereby we can live the humility of equality. We can let go of the need for affirmation of the ego and, as Thomas Merton said to a young Jim Forest, "... become more open to the power that will work through us without our knowing it."

And this brings me to the sub-text of our keynote presentations: inspiration for the 21st century. Mysticism is not an end in itself. The blessed certitude of one's vocation leads, directs, and sustains the action and meaning for a lifetime. Spe-





cifically, allowing now for a political spin, if you will, the action includes the “No” of resistance to a culture of death and a “Yes” to a sense of what is justice and right charity. The emotion of this, in the sense self-righteous knowledge, is channeled into service and then true peace in rest.

I think the mystical approach can enable us to come to grips with the contradictions we hear in the evening news. This approach can give us the ability to encounter black and white thinking. This is not an easy dialogue. It is incremental in keeping with our goal, as Bonaventure calls it – the reconciliation of opposites. We are not just interdependent as dialogue partners but we are mutually dependent. And this is so like St. Francis’ Canticle that’s all about the fraternal equality of all creatures.

To conclude:

From the mystical knowing that everything is connected and in honor of the Octave of Trinity Sunday, we can sit in adoration of the One in Three, the Divine Love Triangle. This is the Triple Way for us to travel in the next three days.

Through the lens of democratized mysticism, like those glasses we’re given to view 3-D movies, let’s observe the wedding of contradictory notions in the beauty that is the Bonaventurian literary latticework. Expect illogic as we enter into the darkness with our presenters.

Relax! Let’s enjoy the trip!



**Kathie Uhler, OSF**, is a Franciscan Sister of Allegany, New York. She received a PhD in philosophy from Georgetown University and a BA in philosophy from St. Bonaventure University and served as faculty member at both institutions.

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# Blessed Solanus Casey, OFM Cap.

## A Neighborhood Saint

By Fr. David Couturier, OFM Cap.

Several years ago, Michael Crosby, OFM. Cap., sent me several boxes of old letters to read and comment on. They were the correspondences of the soon-to-be-Blessed Solanus Casey covering the years that he lived in Detroit, Michigan, Yonkers, New York, and the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I was being asked to read them theologically, looking for signs of holiness and or any lapses in kindness or compassion. These were letters in response to correspondence that had been sent to him, mostly requests from lay people for prayers and those in search of a miraculous cure and, truth be told, some of the letters were simple expressions of thanks and gratitude for blessings received.

It was clear from the correspondence that people considered Solanus a holy man, a “man of God.” They often referred to him that way. As I remember, he very rarely acknowledged any reference to his own saintliness. Any goodness in him was always a gift and a reflection of the graciousness of God.

There was nothing elegant about his writing. He was simple in the way he write, kind and direct. His letters acknowledged the hurts being expressed; they commented on the suffering people experienced; and they always ended with a spiritual word of encouragement. Solanus always believed things were going to be better. God was going to make them better, because Solanus believed that God was immensely good. There was nothing fancy or ostentatious about the way Solanus communicated with the people who wrote him. A simple man writing a simple letter about the profound experiences of love and suffering that people shared willingly with him.

Solanus was not trying to be a “cult of personality” He rarely talks about himself in those letters. He rarely goes on and on about any experiences that he has had. He rarely mentions sufferings he has had to endure, or anxieties about which he worries. There is very little self-centeredness in the way he writes back. His compact letters say only enough to encourage and remind the writer that the Lord is good and gracious and God is worthy of all our trust.

After reading stacks of his letters, I noticed something curious and something that disturbed me. Solanus Casey mentioned very rarely the World War going on. He simply does not speak of battles playing out in Germany or Japan or in Italy or off the coast of France. He doesn't speak of the dead. He doesn't condemn those who started the war or those who were responsible for its most outrageous cruelties. Clearly, Solanus was not oblivious to the trauma of war and how its sufferings impacted his people. But, why did he not bring up the war? Why does he not dwell on any of the other injustices of his time, i.e. racism?

These questions led me to ask further questions along these lines. Solanus Casey lived in Detroit during some its most difficult economic struggles. Hunger was rampant, unemployment was high, the numbers of families falling through the financial cracks of society were significant. And yet, in the writings that were handed to me, rarely was there a mention of structural sin or systemic injustice. Casey kept his letters above this train of thought. Was Solanus not aware of the injustice that made the lives of the



*Ryan Blute, who credits his cure from cancer to the intercession of Ven. Solanus “Barney” Casey. The high school junior keeps a relic of Solanus in his wallet when he goes for scans at the hospital and when he took the SAT. “When I need help, he’s always with me,” Blute said.*

poor enduringly difficult? Was Solanus oblivious of the crooks who cracked the heads of those who could not pay the “protection fees” required to keep local establishments from being torched?

Solanus Casey may disappoint some activists who might stumble upon his letters. He has a different take on evil in the neighborhood and injustice on the block. He doesn't spend a lot of time musing what “the city” should do or what Washington could do. Casey is always hands out, working on these streets, with these people and for their immediate good. That is why Solanus Casey remains for me the great “neighborhood saint” and the popular “local prophet.”

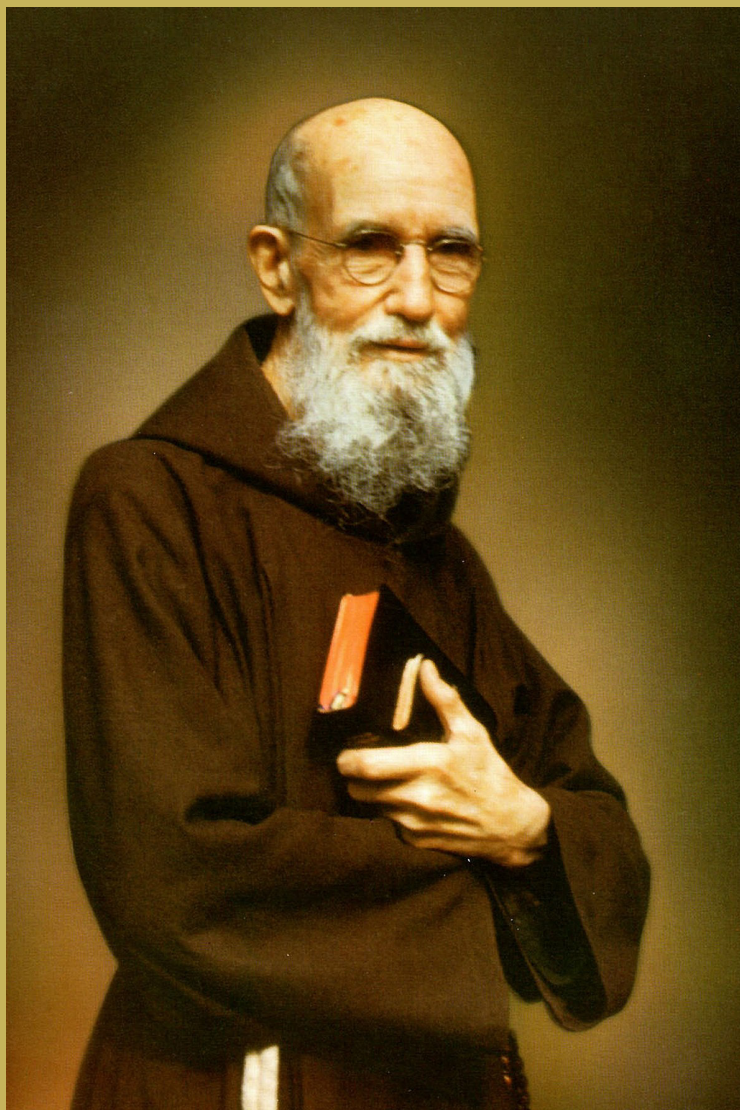
In an age of globalization, where we and our products are always crossing boundaries, time zones, customs, conventions, languages, and sensitivity, Solanus Casey largely stays home to take care of the poor on the block. He feeds the hunger in the neighbor next door. He wants to know the local gossip and the news of the elderly couple upstairs. He sees the work of God, the

dynamics of grace in the neighborhood. He sees it in the impulses of the kid playing handball on the factory wall. He identifies it in the elderly couple still holding hands to cross the street after fifty years together. He relishes it in the soup he just ladled out to the local drunk come in from the cold because the Capuchins promise a simple hot meal every night, without asking stupid questions about “finding the cure.”

The people loved him because he was simple and caring. He was not going anywhere and he was not climbing the ecclesiastical ladder. He had nowhere to go and nothing to prove, from the day his superiors told him he was too “ignorant” to learn Latin and too weak in his studies to preach a Sunday sermon. That humiliation, most likely unneeded and unfounded, turned him from the “higher” things in church life and directed his attention to the lowly. Therefore, he asked simple questions and offered simple advice, the kind that the rest of us miss in our hysteric pursuit for the complex and complicated.

I remember a story I was told about Solanus Casey when I was in novitiate many years ago. It was told by a crusty, but loving, elderly brother who cooked our meals every day. This man was not your average pious friar. He was Irish by birth and salty by temperament. He did not suffer fools well. He could cut a gullible novice to the quick by his rapier wit. I loved Br. Dan for his honesty, his spirit of hard work and his practical devotion to prayer. One day he told me a profound story about his time with Solanus Casey. Solanus was a priest in the friary where Br. Dan did his novitiate many many years before. And it was to Solanus that Br. Dan went on the day the doctor diagnosed a worrisome cancer of the jaw. Br. Dan was distraught. He was a young man and he was afraid of what cancer might mean for his future and, honestly for his looks. What would he look like if his doctors had to remove part of his jaw? He came home to the friary that afternoon depressed and worried. He told Solanus the whole story: about the cancer, the jaw, the X-ray that confirmed the diagnosis, and the impending surgery to remove his cancerous jaw. Fr. Solanus smiled, as Br. Dan remembered, and with a slight tap of Br. Dan’s cheek with his hand, Solanus advised Dan to trust in God and not be worried. Solanus assured Br. Dan that everything would be all right! Br. Dan went to the doctor the

next day and the doctor found no trace of the cancer they had all been worried about. The jaw was completely well. There was no evidence of cancer in the jaw. All signs of it had disappeared. And, for the rest of his life, Br. Dan was completely free of cancer.



In the end, I did indeed write a “theological analysis” of his correspondence. I am happy and relieved to know that my analysis apparently didn’t impede the process that led to his beatification. Of course, I used the sophisticated rubrics of theology to make my points (Solanus would not have approved or cared about what I wrote). I wrote the analysis in the high tones that theology required but, in the end, I was true to Solanus’ spirit. He emerged clearly as a “neighborhood saint” and a “local prophet,” the kind of good priest who falls in love with the local hairdresser and the butcher, with the mechanic and the plumber. He knows their stories and they look to him for the spiritual advice that only one who has been in their shoes can tell.

He is the saint on the corner. The mystic at the desk. The friar who fell in love with a humble God a long time ago, the One he is willing to introduce you to, if you would only just pull up that chair.

*The beatification Mass for Solanus Casey, OFM, Cap. will take place November 18, 2017, at Detroit’s downtown Ford Field, the home of the National Football League’s Detroit Lions, the Capuchin–Franciscans and Archdiocese of Detroit have announced. Solanus Casey, OFM Cap., served for many years in Detroit, Michigan, Yonkers, New York and the Lower East Side of Manhattan.*

# Theophany at Walmart®

by Kevin C.A. Elphick, OFS

The Trinity appeared at Walmart  
I was behind them in line.

Old man with a cane and two women,

One using the shopping cart in place of her walker,

Clearly bemused by their many purchases

The clerk struggling to keep pace with the items to be scanned.

Chortling, bubbling, happy conversations among them

No sense of urgency to speed through checkout

But nodding smiles to us behind them waiting in line.

A six-pack of marigolds, driveway sealer, bagged undergarments to be purchased;

The scanner cannot read a barcode and the purchase slows.

Even the magnetic strip on their credit card will not read correctly

Until they tamp down their radiant glory,

Shrugging shoulders and explaining to us waiting, "It is new..."

Turning next to the credit keypad to enter the mystical number sequence.

Receipt printed, but still another purchase

The youngest (Is she younger?) places four small boxed pies on the conveyer belt.

She announces, "I just love these" and her beaming face

Betrays the pleasure she takes.

I see them again in the parking lot

No fiery chariot, just a Merkava van in the handicapped space.

Exuberance as they transfer their purchases from shopping cart to van

And opening doors so each can get in

Heading home again, heaven now fully resupplied.



**Kevin C.A. Elphick, OFS**, is a lay associate with the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities. His graduate degree in Religious Studies was completed through a cooperative studies initiative between Mundelein College and Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago, IL. He holds a Doctorate in Ministry from Graduate Theological Foundation. He currently works as a supervisor at a national Veterans suicide prevention hotline.