

Francis's Marian Prayers

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Francisco alaba a María: Las oraciones marianas de Francisco

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In the *Office of the Passion*, which Francis composed as a meditation on the Easter mystery, he refers to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, in one of the psalms (OffPass 15:3) and especially in the antiphon to be said before all the psalms. We intend, first, to study this antiphon more closely and then go on to examine that other Marian prayer by Francis, the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. (Translator's Note: The version of the *Antiphon* and the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* used here is taken from R. J. Armstrong & I. C. Brady: *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, Paulist Press, N.Y., 1982, pp.82; 149f, with minor variations.)

I. The Antiphon

Holy Virgin Mary,
among women, there is no one like you born into the world;
the daughter and the servant of the most high and supreme King and
Father of heaven,
the mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ,
the spouse of the Holy Spirit.
Pray for us
with Saint Michael the Archangel
and all the powers of the heavens and all the saints,
to your most holy beloved Son,
the Lord and Master.
Glory be to the Father.... As it was in the beginning....

Relationship to Older Prayers

Unlike our examination of Francis's *Office of the Passion*,¹ this study has the greater part of the text in *italics*, a device we are using again to show which are Francis's own words and, here, to distinguish them from those of an older prayer which the saint adopts as his own. For two or three centuries before Francis's time, this older prayer formed part of the liturgy with which the monks celebrated the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven. In Peter Damian's transcription, it reads:

"Virgin Mary,
among women, there is no one like you born into the world,
beauteous as a rose, fragrant as a lily,
pray for us before your Son."²

While the parallels between the two texts are not very extensive, they are undeniably there, especially in Francis's word-for-word reproduction of the first part of the older antiphon. It is enlightening to see how he re-shapes the older prayer and adapts it to his own cast of thought. He, who was renowned for his love of nature, omits the floral similes and speaks, instead, of much more important matters:

- a) He calls Mary "*Holy Virgin*."
- b) He describes her relationship with the Holy Trinity: she is the *daughter and servant* of the Father, the *mother* of the Son and the *spouse* of the Holy Spirit. Mary's relationships with the Triune God are, without doubt, the most important and most valuable additions from an ecumenical point of view.
- c) He finishes his prayer to Mary with a supplication to all the angels and saints.
- d) He expands the last part of the prayer in accordance with the way he sees Christ: he qualifies the word "Son" with attributes

¹See L. Lehmann, "Meditaciones salmicas sobre el misterio pascual" (El Oficio de la Pasión del Señor), in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* n.63 (1992) 381-401, 385. Trans. P. Barrett, "Franciscan 'Office of the Passion.'" *Greyfriars Review* 12 (1998) 143-168.

²PL 151, 9, 720; cf. L. Lehmann, *Tiefe und Weite*, 100-102.

that are sublime but, at the same time, intimate and personal—*most holy, beloved, Lord and Master*.

Here, then, we have another example of the way Francis was influenced and sustained by tradition. For him, tradition was the soil in which new growth sprang up and flourished. His Marian *Antiphon* was derived from an older prayer, which he enriched with the fruits of his meditation and made completely new and personal. Now it bears the mark of his own hand and resounds with the tone and timbre of his unmistakable voice. Of course, Francis's *Antiphon* also has echoes of other Marian prayers that had come from the traditional devotion to our Lady. Invocations such as *Holy Virgin, daughter and servant or handmaid* and especially *mother*, have their roots deep in Holy Scripture and frequently appear in the liturgy, from which they passed into private devotions.

Structure and Commentary

Like its older counterpart, Francis's *Antiphon* is made up of two parts: first, a series of acclamations; and second, a prayer of supplication.

a) Acclamations

First come veneration and homage. Mary is acclaimed with a series of titles which proclaim her dignity and her union with the Triune God. The fact that this series of greetings is longer than the prayer is, in itself, a clear "statistical" sign that veneration takes priority over supplication.

Holy Virgin Mary: The *Antiphon* begins with this acclamation because Francis is acutely conscious of the distance between him and Mary. He usually calls God "most holy Father" and Mary "holy Mary" or, as here, "holy Virgin." Following the Creed, which declares that Christ was born "from the Virgin Mary," Francis affirms his belief in the virginity of the Mother of God. This affirmation is followed by the only declarative clause in the *Antiphon*: no woman like Mary has been born into the world. In the same vein as Elizabeth's greeting: "Blessed are you among women" (Lk 1:42), Francis emphasizes the privilege of grace which Mary has been given, her being chosen to be God's Mother. He does not describe what Mary did but gives her titles which express what God did in her. Her exaltation above all other human beings, her unique position among all women, is not due to her own merits but is a gift of God. That is why she is also a *servant or handmaid*. She is not a goddess standing beside and on a par with the One God. On the contrary, her privileged situation must be referred back to Him

who has clothed her in such dignity. The word *daughter* immediately evokes the Father so that it is a title which indicates dependence as well as the close relationship and dignity of being the child of such a Father.

Daughter and servant: This is how Francis describes Mary—in two simple words, a combination of ideas that is both beautiful and meaningful. It would be hard to express more accurately and more concisely Mary's being chosen, the dignity of her position, her self-surrender and readiness to serve. She is both servant and daughter. She became the daughter of the Father when she expressed her willingness to be "the handmaid," the servant, of the Lord: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). Yet, far from being slavish or groveling, this "servitude" is ennobling, since Mary is the handmaid, the servant, "of the most high and supreme King." It is typical of Francis that he confines himself to calling Mary *daughter and servant*, without adding any adjective to embellish the phrase, whereas, in contrast, he calls the Father "the most high and supreme King." This he does because, even in the matter of terminology, the Father is owed primacy, praise and homage beyond and above that due to Mary.

When we venerate Mary, we can well do what Francis does, that is, see her as the daughter and servant specially chosen by the Father and obediently responsive to Him, totally dependent on Him and completely and freely devoted to His service. This will ensure that our devotion to her will be solidly based and well-balanced.

Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ: Having received the Angel Gabriel's message, Mary became the mother of Christ. Once again, the noun which Francis uses to describe our Lady, in this case "mother," appears alone and without the adjectives "beloved" or "holy." The word "mother" says it all: the Mother of God, *mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ*. The Son is greater than the Mother, and therefore He is called *most holy* and *Lord*. And not only is He Mary's Lord, He is ours, too. From the very moment Mary became His Mother, Christ has belonged to everyone and is the Lord of all.

Spouse of the Holy Spirit: After looking at Mary's relationship with the Father and the Son, Francis contemplates her in relation to the Holy Spirit. He uses the word "spouse" as he did the term "mother," that is, by itself and without any additions or qualifiers, such as "pure" or similar terms. In contrast, the name of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, "Spirit," appears with the adjective *Holy*.

This, then, seems to be Francis's train of thought: God alone is worthy of adoration; He is sublime; He is holy, whereas Mary simply shares in His holiness.

But the most important point is that, in these acclamations, Francis is contemplating Mary in her relationship with the Trinity as the masterpiece of the Triune God. We venerate her, but we adore God alone. We contemplate her in the framework of the history of salvation, in her personal relationship with the Three Divine Persons. In describing Mary, the *Antiphon* does not use images inspired by objects, as does the Litany of Loreto, for example, which calls her "House of gold, Ark of the covenant," etc. Instead, the *Antiphon* employs terms which are derived from human relationships and which are normally used to refer to family life—daughter, mother, spouse, servant. These titles specifically express family relationships, since there can be no daughter without a father, no mother without a child, and one spouse postulates another. So it is that the titles which Francis uses to describe Mary always refer to one or other of the Three Divine Persons, since it is only through the goodness of God that Mary is what she is.

b) Supplication

After a short litany giving the essential, distinctive signs which Mary received from God, Francis adds a petition:

Pray for us with Saint Michael the Archangel and all the powers of the heavens and all the saints....

Francis was familiar with the prayer, "Pray for us," from the Litany of the Saints. What is striking here is that he extends the short impetratory response of the Litany and does not appeal to Mary alone but to all the angels and saints as well. He expressly mentions St. Michael, to whom he had special devotion, as we have already seen when we commented on his *Exhortation to the Praise of God*.³ Among the powers of heaven are the cherubim and seraphim, the archangels and angels, so that Mary is seen as joining in with the whole choir of angels. Francis was impressed and influenced in this matter by ancient and contemporary Church art. In the

³See L. Lehmann, "Invitación gráfica a la alabanza. La Exhortación a la alabanza de Dios," in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* n.61 (1992), 65-76,73-74. Trans. P. Barrett, "Graphic Invitation to Praise: 'The Exhortation to the Praise of God,'" in *Greyfriars Review* 12 (1998) 1-13.

apses of the churches in those days, there were many paintings and mosaics depicting Mary surrounded by angels, so that the *Antiphon* was conditioned by the circumstances of the times. While the *Antiphon* was, in a way, a reflection of the contemporary veneration of the saints, it also expressed Francis's own personal attitude to the Mother of God. According to the oldest biographies, the Poverello had a very special devotion to the church of St. Mary of the Angels of the Portiuncula. It was there he heard the words of the Gospel that inspired his mission and shaped his life (1Cel 22). The Portiuncula was the cradle of the Order, and Francis wished all the friars of all times to regard and cherish it as their mother church (1Cel 106); and it was there that he passed from this world (1Cel 109).

These and other details lead us to believe that the Marian *Antiphon*—and perhaps the whole Office of the Passion—was composed at St. Mary of the Angels. Since this, the Portiuncula, was the mother church, it is quite likely that it already had a well-established community life even so early in the history of the Order. At all events, the *Antiphon*, invoking as it does Mary and the angels and saints, is redolent of the atmosphere of that little chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels.

Not content with mentioning the angels and saints, Francis continues:

... to your most holy beloved Son, the Lord and Master.

The Marian *Antiphon* is focused on Christ: it is christocentric. While the symbolism in the main part of the *Antiphon* is quite varied, the last words in the prayer refer to Christ, the Lord and Master. He is the One who is important when His Mother is being venerated. He is our sole Mediator. It is to Him that we direct our invocations of Mary as intercessor; and we praise Him with various epithets, something we do not do for Mary. He is called *the most holy, beloved Son*. Several times in his psalms, Francis also adds the words "beloved Son" (cf. OffPass 7:3; 9:2; 15:3). And in the Rule of 1221, he reminds his friars that no one is to be master among them except Christ, as the Gospel tells us: "You have one master, the Christ" (Mt 23:10), or, as we read in St. John: "You call me Master and Lord; and you are right, for so I am" (cf. Jn 13:13; RegNB 22:35). Perhaps these passages from the Gospel served as a model for the Marian *Antiphon*, in which Christ is also called "Master." The Poverello saw Christ as the *most holy Lord, the Lord and Master*, full of majesty, sublime, sovereign and our only teacher; but he also knew that Christ is the *beloved Son* of Mary and therefore close to us

humans, inspiring and bestowing love, whom he could easily picture in Mary's arms or very close to her.

The main focus of the *Antiphon* is on Christ, with whom Mary must intercede for us. At the beginning, the *Antiphon* is completely trinitarian, but at the end it concentrates on the Son. Yet, in the conclusion, *Glory be to the Father....*, this concentration broadens out into praise for the Three Persons. So from this point of view, the Marian *Antiphon* as a whole is a hymn of praise to the Triune God.

c) *Spouse of the Holy Spirit*

The acclamation, *Spouse of the Holy Spirit*, deserves special attention, for it is a title which is rarely found in manuscripts before Francis's time. It appears in the works of the Latin poet Prudentius (died after 405) and, four centuries later, in an Eastern writer called Cosmas Vestitor. In a sermon on our Lady's parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, Cosmas states that Joachim "begot the spouse of the Holy Spirit." In the twelfth century, the phrase occurs fairly frequently in the West, especially in the Low Countries. A preacher named Tanchelm (died 1115) said that, because Christians have received the Holy Spirit in baptism, they can all take Mary as spouse. Tanchelm himself publicly "married" Mary by placing his hand in the hand of a statue of the Mother of God. St. Norbert (died 1134) had to intervene to correct such abuses. St. Francis kept aloof from ideas of this kind. Yet it is possible that he knew about the teaching of the famous Cistercian abbot, Joachim of Fiore (died 1202), who held that Mary is completely and intimately united to the Holy Spirit. According to Joachim's theory of the three great periods of history, Mary is to be the mother of the future spiritual Church: she is both the mother of God and the mother of the pure and holy Church. Although, in his theory, Joachim stressed the fact that the Paraclete will appoint Mary the Spouse as the mother of the spiritual Church, he did not expressly use the title "Spouse of the Holy Spirit." Therefore,

in regard to this last title, *Spouse of the Holy Spirit*, it does not seem exaggerated to say that Francis was the first to apply it to Mary in an explicit form in his prayer. All his predecessors had used equivalent expressions, but not the direct, precise invocation in exactly these words.⁴

⁴Cf. I. Pyfferoen and O. Van Asseldonk, "María Santísima y el Espíritu Santo en S. Francisco de Asís" in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* n. 47 (1987) 187-215.

It is important to note that Francis used this title in the context of his devotion to our Lady, a devotion which was solidly based on Sacred Scripture and sound trinitarian theology and which did not degenerate into subjective fanaticism or exaggerated mysticism.

If we remember that the invocation *Spouse of the Holy Spirit* was recited fourteen times a day in community, since the *Antiphon* was used before and after the psalm in each of the hours of the *Office of the Passion*, we can see the great influence it had on the life of the Friars Minor. In fact, Francis very soon came to apply this title to the Poor Clares and to all the faithful.

d) *We, too, can be what Mary was*

When we look through Francis's writings for texts that are parallel to the *Antiphon*, we find that he applied to others the concept of the espousal between the Holy Spirit and Mary. These others include those who live spiritual lives, who act according to the spirit of Christ and who welcome the Holy Spirit into their hearts. Clare, Francis's "little plant," and her daughters were the first to whom he applied the title of *Spouse of the Holy Spirit*, with which he praises Mary in the *Antiphon*. In the short *Form of Life* which he gave the Poor Clares in 1212/1213, he promised to "have... loving care" for them and gave the reason for this promise:

Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as (I have) for them (FormViv).

So it is that Francis applies to Clare and her sisters the same terms of family relationship which he uses in the *Antiphon* to indicate the close bonds between Mary and the Holy Trinity. "Since by divine inspiration," the sisters had chosen "to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel," they had become "*daughters and servants* of the most high King, the heavenly Father," and had "taken the Holy Spirit as (their) *spouse*." That is the basis for his analogy between the sisters and Mary.

Clare welcomed enthusiastically the triple title "daughter-servant-spouse" and added even more depth to it by applying it to the special charism of the Second Order. Thus, in one of her letters to Agnes of

Prague, she greets Agnes as “the *daughter* of the King of Kings, the *servant* of the Lord of Lords, the most worthy *Spouse* of Jesus Christ” (2LAg 1). And in another letter, she tells Agnes that she is “the *spouse* and the *mother* and the *sister* of my Lord Jesus Christ” (1LAg 12). Agnes was canonized on Dec.12, 1989.

For Clare, the vow of chastity was the nucleus of the religious life. As a woman, she saw this more vividly than Francis did, and she described the life of her sisters as a mystical espousal to Christ: “Clare associated the idea of following Christ with her ideal of mystical espousal” (E. Grau).

Not only the Poor Clares but all the faithful, too, can enjoy this familial relationship with God. Anyone who strives to live the Gospel, “to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy manner of working” (RegB 10:8), is united with God by these family bonds. Therefore, Francis could write to all the faithful who do penance:

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, since the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (cf. Is 11:2) and He will make His home and dwelling among them (cf. Jn 14:23). They are children of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45) whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50). We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined to our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven (Mt 12:50). (We are) mothers when we carry Him in our hearts and bodies (cf. 1Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and (when) we give birth to Him through good works, which should shine before others as an example (cf. Mt 5:16). Oh, how glorious it is, how holy and great, to have a Father in heaven! Oh, how holy, consoling, beautiful and wondrous it is to have such a Spouse! Oh, how holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable above all things to have such a Brother and such a Son: our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up His life for His sheep (cf. Jn 10:15) and who prayed to the Father saying: O Holy Father, protect those in your name (Jn 17:11) whom you have given to me in the world; they were yours and you have given them to me (Jn 17:6). And the words which you gave to me, I have given to them, and they have accepted them and have believed truly that I have come from you and they have known that you have sent me (Jn 17:8) [1EpFid 1:5-15].

These words show with how much emotion Francis contemplated the familial relationship that unites us with God. Meditating on the indwelling of the Holy Trinity in our hearts, he bursts into a threefold

acclamation of joy inspired by our Lord's words: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12:50).

Reflecting on Mary's virginal motherhood and analyzing passages from the Bible, such as the one we have just quoted, the Fathers of the Church write in depth and in detail about the birth of God within us. For example, St. John Chrysostom says that: "We are the temple, Christ is the One who lives in it: He is the First-born, we are His brothers and sisters.... He is the Bridegroom, we are the bride." St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great express thoughts similar to those which we find in Francis of Assisi. These great theologians discuss whether or not we can remain as open to the Triune God as Mary did. Those who open themselves to the Spirit of God become capable of begetting Christ and of giving birth to Him, like the Virgin Mary, certainly not as she did in Bethlehem, but by living an exemplary life, by doing good works, by preaching.... For example, Innocent III says: "By love, *per affectum*, we beget Christ in our hearts, and we really give birth to Him, *per effectum*, by means of good works." And St. Gregory the Great writes: "We should know that whoever is a brother or sister of the Lord through faith, becomes His mother through preaching; in fact, in a certain way, he brings the Lord into the world and becomes His mother by means of the word, which he pours into the ears of the hearer so that thereby the love of God is born in the neighbor's heart."⁵

Francis also has this mystical view of the Triune God within us. That is why he contemplates Mary, not in isolation, but as linked with the Blessed Trinity and as our model. She is the expression and most sublime example of the intimate union which God establishes with us humans, the crown of creation. Francis believed that, even in her motherhood, Mary is the model of what every Christian ought to be. Her self-surrender to God and her bond with Him are the deepest expression of that identification with God which takes place in every Christian. That is why Francis applied to all men and women who do penance the same titles of honor due to Mary as Mother of God.

Undoubtedly, saying that we can "have Christ as a Son" is hyperbole and must be understood in a mystical sense. Shortly after Francis's death, this phrase was misinterpreted and was deemed to be

⁵See documents and quotations on this theme in H. Rahner, "Die Gottesgeburt. Die Lehre der Kirchenväter von der Geburt Christi aus dem Herzen der Kirche und der Gläubigen," in *Symbole der Kirche*, Salzburg, 1964, 11-87.

heretical, so that it was omitted from the text of the Second Letter to the Faithful in editions of Francis's writings (cf. 2EpFid 56).⁶ For Francis, the thought of giving birth to Christ and of having Him as a Son was so inexpressible a joy that he burst forth into his jubilant triple acclamation; but this thought was also a stimulus to action, a task to be performed. All the faithful can be mothers of Christ but only under certain conditions. We are mothers of Christ:

... when we carry Him in our hearts and bodies (cf. 1Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and (when) we give birth to Him through good works which should shine before others as an example (cf. Mt 5:16)[1EpFid 1:10].

This description illustrates the vision and missionary meaning of Francis's devotion to Mary, holding her up as a model of faith and action for all the faithful and reminding them of their sublime vocation to be sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, even mothers of Christ. Francis praises Mary because she has already fulfilled this vocation, and he urges the Poor Clares and us and all the faithful to imitate her in this. That is why he exhorts us to do penance and to persevere therein until death. Mary is our model: she shows us what we can be if we discover and awaken the "Mary" that lies within each of us. That "Mary" is our "virginal dimension," the "virgin" inside us, in the depths of our souls, as the mystics were to put it in later years. She is that nucleus which lies at the foundation of our being and which is capable of welcoming and giving birth to God. She is "my deepest self."⁷

Those who contemplate Mary in this light learn how to look at themselves and to get a positive image of themselves, of their possibilities and their aptitudes. How often do we think that we are useless, undervalue ourselves and fail to see any good in ourselves! But we must remember that

⁶See K. Esser, *Die Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi*, New critical edition, Grottoferatta 1976, 211, n. 104; L. Lehmann, "Exultatio et Exhortatio de Poenitentia. Zu Form und Inhalt der "Epistola ad Fideles I," in *Laurentianum* 29 (1988) 564-608. Trans. T. Gottschalk, "Exultation and Exhortation to Penance: A Study of the Form and Content of the 'First Version of the Letter to the Faithful,'" in *Greyfriars Review* 4:2 (1990)1-33.

⁷E. Jungclausen, *Die Fülle erfahren. Tage der Stille mit Franz von Assisi*, Fribourg 1978, 44-54.

God Himself has spoken to us and called us, that we have within us a nucleus of goodness, that we can welcome God within us, that we can do good....

By contemplating Mary, we learn really to see others, to discover God and the goodness within them. And we learn also to see God as Mary did, as coming out to meet us, speaking to us, choosing us and saying: "Hail, full of grace, blessed art thou among men/women!" Looking at Mary, we realize that this greeting was extended to us, too, encouraging us to follow, as she did, our own lowly path, since "the Lord has regarded the lowliness of his servant" (cf. Lk 1:48).

Contemplating Mary! How many have done this down through the centuries! How many do so now! There are countless statues and pictures and mosaics of the Mother of God, so many that no art gallery or museum could hold them all. As we shall see in the next section, Francis's second Marian prayer, the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, sets before us another series of images of our Lady.

II. The Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

- A. 1. Hail, O Lady,
 holy Queen,
 Mary, holy Mother of God:
 You are the virgin made church
2. and the one chosen by the most holy Father in heaven
 whom He consecrated
 with His most holy beloved Son
 and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,
3. in whom there was and is
 all the fullness of grace and every good.
- B. 4. Hail, His Palace!
 Hail, His Tabernacle!
 Hail, His Home!
5. Hail, His Robe!
 Hail, His Servant!
 Hail, His Mother!
- C. 6. And all you holy virtues
 which through the grace and light of the Holy Spirit

are poured into the hearts of the faithful
 so that from their faithless state
 you may make them faithful to God.

1. Structure

The *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* does not consist of acclamations and a prayer, as the *Antiphon* does, but is a series of seven greetings or salutations ("Hail:" *Ave*) to our Lady in the form of a litany. The first and last greetings are quite lengthy, while the others are simply individual graphic images. The seven greetings can be divided into three parts, with the middle one subdivided into two sections, each of which contains three "Hails." The second, third and fourth "Hails" present images in space and time, while the fifth, sixth and seventh use personal pictures. The opening greets Mary as one who was chosen by the Holy Trinity, while the conclusion focuses attention on the action of the Holy Spirit.

Like the *Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*, the *Salutation* shows Francis's devotion to the Trinity,⁸ and is made up of three stanzas, each of which can be subdivided into three. Stanza A has three acclamations and three accompanying prayers, B has two parts, each subdivided into three "Hails," each of which, in turn, consists of three words; C, too, has a threefold structure, made up of a greeting, an appropriate prayer and a final prayer. Thus the *Salutation* is constructed according to a three-by-three plan. The central stanza, B, is shorter than the other two, but it makes up for its brevity by its two-part structure, each part containing three short series. Its more numerous greetings are the counterparts of the attributes which appear as subordinate prayers in stanzas A and C.

2. Commentary

a) *Mary, formed by the Triune God*

The literary structure of this short work reflects its theological teaching, namely, that veneration of Mary must take place in the context of the Holy Trinity. All the praises in the *Salutation* are directed at Mary's divine motherhood, which they express and describe in striking images.

⁸L. Lehmann, "Preparación para la celebración de la liturgia de las horas. Las "Alabanzas que se han de decir a todas las horas," in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* n.62 (1992) 163-176.

According to the *Salutation*—and the *Antiphon*, also—Mary's divine motherhood is the work of the Triune God. She was chosen by the Father, who consecrated her with His holy Son through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is quoted at the end of the *Salutation* as the force which turns nonbelievers into believers. So, in this short work, there is a unity between the literary form and its theological basis.

Stanza A greets Mary, chosen by the Father and consecrated by the Spirit as Mother of Christ. Mary's womb was, as it were, the first Church.

The first part of Stanza B develops the thought of God's dwelling in Mary. The first three "Hails" paint a picture of dwelling places—palace, tabernacle, home. The other three—robe, servant and mother—turn our thoughts to Mary herself.

The order in which these last three words appear is no chance occurrence: Mary was created by God, she was clothed in human flesh and, before being made Mother of God, declared that she was the servant of the Lord.

Stanza C contemplates the virtues and powers with which the Holy Spirit endowed Mary and which, through the same Spirit, can act also in other people.

b) "*The virgin made church*"

Like the phrase "Spouse of the Holy Spirit" in the *Antiphon*, the expression "The virgin made church," *virgo ecclesia facta*, in v.1 of the *Salutation* needs special comment. These words quickly proved to be obscure or were so misunderstood that copyists changed them to read *virgo perpetua*, "perpetual virgin"; and that is how they appeared in all the editions of Francis's writings before 1980. But, eventually, the group of manuscripts which had the wording, "The virgin made church," were proved to pre-date those which had "perpetual virgin," so that, even though "The virgin made church" was the more difficult reading, it had to be preferred as the definitive version. Moreover, this phrase has deep roots in patristic theology and in the theology of the high Middle Ages, as well as in the liturgy. The concepts of the Church as a virgin and mother and of Mary as the prototype of that virgin and mother Church appear frequently in those ancient sources. Thus, for example, we find it in St. Irenaeus, St. Hippolytus, St. Augustine, Origen and, later, in the theologians of the school of St. Victor. This was the tradition Francis followed rather than the scholasticism of the

later Middle Ages, which placed greater emphasis on Mary's perpetual virginity.

The terms "palace," "tabernacle" and "home," which appear after the phrase "virgin made church" in v.4, have more bearing on "church" than on "perpetual" and so are a development of the idea of Mary, "the virgin-church."

The discovery of the original text sheds much light on Francis's Marian and ecclesial piety, which are inextricably intertwined, the one with the other. For Francis, Mary is also "church," the first church consecrated by the Holy Trinity. The chapel of the Portiuncula, to which the *Salutation* contains clear references, had been consecrated. And, in an even deeper sense, Mary, too, had been consecrated by the Father, who had made her the virgin mother of His Son and the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Mary is the virgin made church; Francis contemplates her through the actual Church on earth, and he contemplates the Church through her because she, the virgin and Mother of God, is the prototype of the virgin mother Church.

c) *The universal Church*

The *Salutation* has its own internal dynamic. The first "Hail" presents the person of Mary and the incarnation of God. Immediately, the vision of the historical fact of the Incarnation opens out onto the present time: "in whom there *was* and *is* all the fullness of grace." Then the circle of persons, too, is enlarged. What God did in Mary as a prototype, He can also achieve in another form through His Spirit. It is very significant that the word *virgin* in the first "Hail" is replaced by the word *mother* in the last "Hail." The "virgin-church" has become the "mother-church": the "one-person" church has broadened out to embrace all those who, from being unbelievers, become believers in God.

Francis also uses the word *infideles*, nonbelievers, in the chapter of his Rule in which he speaks about the brothers "who go among the Saracens and other nonbelievers" (RegNB 16:3; RegB 12:1).⁹ He had gone on

⁹L. Lehmann, "Rasgos esenciales del concepto franciscano de misión RegNB 16," in *Selecciones de Franciscanismo* n. 45 (1986) 428-444; Idem, "Prinzipien franziskanischer Mission nach den frühen Quellen," in *Laurentianum* 26 (1985) 311-360 [Trans. I. McCormick, "Principles of Franciscan Mission," in *Greyfriars Review* 6 (1992) 1-35]; Idem, "Ansätze für eine christlich-islamische Ökumene im Loben Gottes," in *Franz Stud* 69 (1987) 3-3.

missionary journeys and, in 1219, even had an audience with the Sultan of Egypt himself. So, in his *Salutation*, he includes the non-Christians who, "through the grace and light of the Holy Spirit," can become believers, faithful to the living and true God. The indwelling of the fullness of God in Mary and in the Church is repeated, in a way, each time God's action in baptism turns nonbelievers into believers and, through the infusion of the virtues, enlightens them and keeps them faithful to Him. From contemplating Mary, "in whom there was and is all the fullness of grace and every good," our gaze is turned towards all people of all times. The Son and Lord, whom the Virgin Mary conceived and to whom she gave birth, is conceived and brought forth by the Virgin-Mother-Church every time anyone receives the grace of baptism. Francis did not stop at contemplating Mary. Starting from the fullness of Mary's interior life, his eyes turn to that fullness of grace in which everyone can participate. In a word, Francis's *Salutation* is missionary in outlook.

d) *Meditation on the Hail Mary*

The more closely we study the *Salutation*, the more we see its affinity with the Hail Mary. In the West, from the seventh and eighth centuries on, the combination of the Angel Gabriel's greeting (Lk 1:28) and that of Elizabeth (Lk 1:42) was so commonly used that it became one of the principal Marian prayers in the Church. About 1210, the synods began to direct that, in addition to the Our Father and the Creed, all the faithful were to learn by heart the Hail Mary, to which St. Bernardine later added: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners...." The spread of this prayer from 1200 onwards leads us to conclude that Francis must have been influenced by it. Indeed, the linguistic similarities between the Hail Mary and the *Salutation* are obvious, especially in the original Latin. In the first place, the greeting *Ave*, "Hail," is repeated seven times in the *Salutation*. Then there is the name "Mary," to which Francis adds three titles of honor. The words "full of grace," *gratia plena*, are paraphrased in the *Salutation* as "in whom there was and is all the fullness of grace." Francis enlarges on the statement: "The Lord is with thee," *Dominus tecum*, that is, the Holy Trinity is with her, for she is "the one chosen by the most holy Father in heaven, whom He consecrated with His most holy beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete." The words, "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb," do not appear literally in the *Salutation*, but the same thought is there. Instead of "womb," Francis speaks of "tabernacle, home, robe." Hence, the concept that God made Mary His dwelling-place and

blessed her because she was worthy to be blessed is found in both the Hail Mary and the *Salutation*.

It would seem, then, that Francis broadened out the Hail Mary into a kind of litany of seven "Hails" or *Aves*. He had meditated long on the basic ideas in the Gospel text and then had greeted Mary by applying to her these same ideas expressed in a series of specific images.

3. Practical Suggestions

a) Pray and meditate on the Hail Mary, and then recite the *Salutation* slowly.

b) Say the Angelus every day, if possible in community. "This prayer provides us with an excellent text for meditation" (Eugen Walter). The Angelus has an even stronger trinitarian rhythm than the *Salutation*. In 1269, the General Chapter of the Order, presided over by St. Bonaventure, decided "that, in honor of the glorious Virgin, all the brothers shall teach the people to greet the Blessed Virgin when the bell for Compline rings."¹⁰ This practice led to the rapid spread of the custom of saying the Angelus three times a day when the bells were rung. The Franciscans played an essential part in popularizing this devotion. Theodor Schnitzler regards the Angelus as "one of the most sublime forms of prayer" and calls it "the very abbreviated breviary of the people" since it recalls the Lord's Incarnation, Crucifixion and Ascension at the hours of Lauds, Sext and Vespers.

c) Before saying the canonical hours, we can recite the Marian *Antiphon* as a means of consciously uniting ourselves with the Church Triumphant and asking them to intercede for us, the people of God who are still pilgrims on earth.

d) Praying the *Salutation* slowly while looking at a picture or statue of Mary.

e) Repeating the *Salutation* slowly and stopping after the first four acclamations to meditate on *why* God took up His abode in Mary, making her

--- the palace of God-made-man;

¹⁰See *Selecciones de Franciscismo* n. 52 (1989) 12, for a short note on El rezo del Ángelus.

--- the tabernacle of Him who said: "I am the bread of life" (Jn 6:48);

--- the tent in which God's eternal Word became flesh and "dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14);

--- the home that God prepared for Himself.

I, too, am God's house, a "living stone (to be) built into a spiritual house" (cf. 1Pet 2:5), "a temple of the Holy Spirit" (1Cor 6:19). How can I prepare a home for the Lord? (cf. Jn 14:23).

"Go and repair my house," that house which is myself. Is God telling me to do this as He once told Francis?

f) The following greetings have *the theme of "servant and mother"*:

--- "Blessed are you who have believed" (cf. Lk 1:45);

--- "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38);

--- Blessed are all who, through the action of God, achieve faith and grow in faith and fidelity.

How do these statements affect me? How can I be at once a servant and a mother? How can I be both a virgin-church and a mother? How can I conceive and give birth to the Word of God?

g) Pope John XXIII ended his Christmas, 1962, address with the following prayer: "Eternal Word of the Father, Son of God and Son of Mary, perform once more in the secret depths of souls the miracle of your birth."

These theology-filled words sum up *the traditional teaching on the threefold birth of God*. In his invocation to the Son of God, the Eternal Word of the Father, the Pope was referring to *the birth of the Word in eternity*; in invoking the Son of Mary, he was referring to *the birth of Christ in Bethlehem*; and thirdly, he was asking the Lord to perform this miracle once again in everyone's heart. Can I repeat this prayer and make it my own?

The following quotations may help us towards a deeper understanding of the birth of God:

--- "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20);

--- "What good is it to me that Christ was born of the most holy Virgin, if He is not born in my soul?" (Origen);

--- "Even if Christ had been born a thousand times in Bethlehem, I shall be lost forever if He is not born in me" (Ángel Silesio);

h) Contemplate Mary in order to be able to look with her eyes

--- at God

--- at myself

--- at others

--- at the world.

i) Say the *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55); apply to myself the verses in the first person singular, with which Mary magnifies the Lord: Mary magnifies in me (I magnify) the Lord... "for he has regarded the low estate of his servant ..., for he who is mighty has done great things for me."