

## The *Summa Alexandri* Vol. IV and the Development of the Franciscan Theology of Prayer

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This paper examines the development of the Franciscan theology of prayer found in the fourth volume of the *Summa Alexandri*.<sup>1</sup> The *Summa* of Alexander of Hales, as one author states, "...remarkably illustrates what may be called the spirit of the thirteenth century Franciscan school of theology at the University of Paris."<sup>2</sup> This unique theological enterprise, which drew praise from some and condemnation from others, can be considered "Franciscan" in as much as it was probably initially compiled by Alexander of Hales,<sup>3</sup> who himself took the habit of the friars minor during the academic year of 1236-1237, and other friars, who possibly collaborated with him. When Alexander died in 1245 his *Summa* remained incomplete and Pope Alexander IV, in the papal bull, *De fontibus paradisi*, of 1255, commanded the friars minor to complete Alexander's project under the direction of William of Melitona. William worked with other friars to compile the fourth volume of the *Summa*. Consequently, the *Summa* is considered "Franciscan" also because it contains the combined thought of several Franciscan theologians at the University of Paris. Their intent, among others, was to reflect upon and elucidate the theological significance and ramifications of the religious experience of Francis of Assisi.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Alexandri Alensis Universae Theologiae summa in quattuor partes ab ipsomet autore distributa*, Vol. 4 (Cologne: 1622). This volume was not included in the Quaracchi edition of the *Summa Alexandri*; see: Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica* (Quaracchi: 1924-1948).

<sup>2</sup> A. Emmen, "Alexander of Hales", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1967 ed., 297.

<sup>3</sup> Victorin Doucet, "The History of the Problem of the Summa," *Franciscan Studies* 7 (1947): 311.

<sup>4</sup> Zachary Hayes, intro., *St. Bonaventure's Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity*, intro. and trans. Zachary Hayes (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan University, 1979) 32-33. On the

As a theological work, the *Summa Alexandri* is noteworthy because its origins lie in the first systematic reading of the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard at the University of Paris. Alexander's utilization of the *Sentences* as a basic element of the theological curriculum set the parameters of theological study for centuries to come.<sup>5</sup> This innovation drew sharp criticism from a fellow English Franciscan, Roger Bacon, who lamented the substitution of Sacred Scripture, which comes from God, by the *Sentences*, which in his opinion were nothing other than the summation of a particular theologian's thought.<sup>6</sup> Despite Bacon's criticism of Alexander's efforts and their consequences, Alexander's theological work won praise from other friars as recorded by the Franciscan chronicler Salimbene de Adam. In fact, Alexander's prestige was so high among the friars and others that a verse in a popular song of the day described him as a man, "In the forefront of all men, A wonder in our times...."<sup>7</sup>

Given the importance of Alexander's theological enterprise to the earlier friars, evident in their use as well as completion of his *Summa*, this work should serve as a privileged object of study in the ongoing attempt by Franciscans and others to rediscover and define the nature and content of Franciscan theology. One area of current interest in Franciscan studies is prayer. As one would expect, the major focus of researchers looking into the question of prayer in Franciscan spirituality is traditionally on the writings and early biographies of Francis of Assisi and the works of major theologians such as Bonaventure. As the field of research expands to include other sources, however, the *Summa Alexandri* emerges as a new avenue by which researchers can arrive at a deeper understanding of Franciscan prayer. Those who study the *Summa* will find, in particular, that the question entitled *De oratione*,<sup>8</sup> is a rich, albeit ignored, source for the study of the nascent Franciscan theology of prayer. This *quaestio* offers readers a unique insight into the sources and themes which make up the Franciscan approach to God in prayer.

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theological method of the *Summa Alexandri*, see: Inos Biffi, *Figure medievali della teologia* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1992) 25-73 and Hans Kraml, *Die Rede von Gott sprachkritisch rekonstruiert aus Sentenzenkommentaren* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1985) 103-107.

<sup>5</sup> Francesco Corvino, *Bonaventura da Bagnoregio: francescano e pensatore* (Bari: Dedaldo, 1980) 114.

<sup>6</sup> Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La teologia come scienza nel XII secolo*, trans. Marta Spranzi and Marco Vigeveno (Milan: Jaca Book, 1985) 43-44, especially n. 15 for the text from Bacon.

<sup>7</sup> Salimbene de Adam, *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, Joseph Baird, Giuseppe Baglivi, and John Kane (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1986) 17.

<sup>8</sup> *De oratione, satisfactionis parte* in Vol. 4 of *Alexandri Alensis Universae Theologiae*, 667b-737a.



### The Question of Sources and Authorship

*De oratione* is question twenty-six and is found in the fourth volume of the *Summa Alexandri*. The origins of this question are problematic precisely because it is found in volume four. Many scholars believe that William of Melitona compiled the fourth volume of the *Summa Alexandri* before his death (sometime between 1257-1259).<sup>9</sup> Where William drew his material and which friars worked with him is not entirely clear. A detailed examination of the text of *De oratione* reveals that the compiler or compilers depend on at least two distinguishable sources. The first is the *Commentary on the Sentences* by Bonaventure, and the second is the *Quaestiones de oratione* found in codex *Vatic. Palat. lat. 612*.<sup>10</sup> Victorin Doucet examined the latter manuscript in the Vatican Library, which contains several questions attributed to Bonaventure.<sup>11</sup> In his study, Doucet declines to make a final judgment as to the authorship of the *Quaestiones de oratione*.

The question concerning the author of the *Quaestiones de oratione* is important because it could influence any debate regarding the authorship of *De oratione*. In his study *Bonaventurae Scripta*, Baldinus Distlebrink claims the *Quaestiones de oratione* are from Bonaventure because they are ascribed to "bo" [naventurae?] and are found in *Vatic. Palat. lat. 612* along with authentic questions such as *De scientiae Christi* and *De mysterio Trinitatis*.<sup>12</sup> Given that Distlebrink considers Bonaventure the author of the *Quaestiones*, and that *De oratione* contains material found in the *Quaestiones de oratione* and Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences*, one could claim Bonaventure compiled and/or wrote major sections of, if not the entire text, of *De oratione*. Yet, any claim to authenticity based on the the abbreviation "bo" is weak since another series of

<sup>9</sup>Victorin Doucet, "The History of the Problem of the *Summa*" 295-296; 311. On the year of William's death; see: Willibrod van Dijk, "Guillaume de Middleton." *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 6 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1967) 1222.

<sup>10</sup>*De oratione*, MS Codex Vatic. Palat. Lat., Rome: Vatican Library, fol. 43va-46va. This series of questions on prayer will be referred to in this study as the *Quaestiones de oratione* to distinguish it from the text in the *Summa Alexandri* which also is know as *De oratione*. I am grateful to Jacques Bougerol who gave me a transcribed copy of the *Quaestiones* and Basil Heiser who offered some helpful insights into the translation of the Latin texts. Translations from *De oratione* and the *Quaestiones de oratione* are by the author.

<sup>11</sup>Victorinus Doucet, "De quaestionibus S. Bonaventurae adscriptis in Cod. Vaticano Palatino Lat. 612," *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 26 (1933): 490-491.

<sup>12</sup>Balduinus Distelbrink, *Bonaventurae scripta, authentica dubia vel spuria critice recensita* (Roma: Instituto Storico Cappuccini, 1975) 14.

questions in the *Vatic. Palat. lat.* 612, the *Quaestiones de ieiunio*, is ascribed also to "bo" [naventurae?].<sup>13</sup> Ignatius Brady, and Doucet before him, doubts that Bonaventure wrote them. Whereas Doucet is noncommittal as to the authorship of the *Quaestiones de oratione*, Brady does not believe that Bonaventure wrote them and, instead, posits John of La Rochelle as the possible author. Furthermore, he states that it was no accident that the ascription "bo" is difficult to read as it represents the attempt to erase it from the codex. If the *Quaestiones de oratione* are not from Bonaventure's hand as Brady holds, any attempt to attribute major sections of *De oratione* to him becomes untenable since *De oratione* reveals no notable influence of Bonaventure other than several texts from the Third and Fourth Book of the *Commentary on the Sentences*. Instead of Bonaventure, it appears far more likely that William of Melitona compiled *De oratione* with previously existing material from friars such as John of La Rochelle<sup>14</sup> as well as with selections taken from Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences*.

A study of *De oratione* reveals at least two instances where the text shows a close similarity, if not an identical word for word correspondence, to sections of Book Three of Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences*. The first instance concerns the question as to whether it was proper for one of the divine persons, and in particular Christ, to pray. Both the author of *De oratione* and Bonaventure argue that it was most fitting for Christ to pray for four reasons:

*De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 4, s. 1, res.,  
695a-b

*Ad aliud, quod obijcitur Christo, quod oravit. Dicendum quod hoc semper intelligendum est secundum naturam assumptam, et secundum ipsam optime congruebat Christo oraret, tum propter meritum, tum propter exemplum virtutis, tum propter veritatis humanae argumentum, tum propter officium assumptum exequendum....*

*III Sent*, d. 17, a. 2, q. 1, concl. (III,  
371a-b)

*Dicendum, quod absque dubio decens fuit, Christum orare, maxime in diebus carnis suae. Ratio autem huius condecencie potest quadruplex assignari, videlicet propter meritum, propter virtutis exemplum, propter veritatis argumentum et propter officium explendum....*

<sup>13</sup>Ignatius Brady, "The Opera Omnia of St. Bonaventure Revisited," *Proceedings of the Seventh Centenary of the Death of Saint Bonaventure*, ed. Paschal F. Foley (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1975) 56.

<sup>14</sup>Doucet notes that the writings of John of La Rochelle are among the principal sources used in the compilation of the first three volumes of the *Summa Alexandri*; see: Victorin Doucet, "The History of the Problem of the *Summa*", 305-307; 310. Given the apparent influence of John of La Rochelle on earlier sections of the *Summa*, it is certainly plausible that a possible work of his such as the *Quaestiones de oratione* would appear also in the fourth volume. If the *Quaestiones* come from John, who died in 1245, they present the elements of a very early Franciscan theology of prayer.



[As to the objection that Christ prayed, it must be said this always needs to be understood according to the nature assumed. According to that [human nature] it was most appropriate that Christ prayed to gain merit, to offer an example of virtue, as evidence of [his] true humanity, and because the office assumed needed to be carried out.]

[It must be said that it was fitting, without a doubt, that Christ prayed, and most of all, *when he was in the flesh*. Indeed the reason of this condescension can be attributed to four [reasons]; namely, to gain *merit*, as an *example of virtue*, as *evidence of the truth*, and because of the *office which had to be fulfilled*.]

The second instance of textual correspondence indicates that both works treat the question of the nature and efficacy of Christ's prayer. They distinguish between those prayers offered by Christ, which originated in reason, and those which originated in piety and the flesh:

*De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 4, s. 1, res., 695b<sup>15</sup>

*Dicendum ad hoc... triplex fuit oratio in Christo, procedens a triplici voluntate, una procedens a voluntate rationis, alia voluntate pietatis, tertia a voluntate carnis....*

[To this it must be said that... there was a threefold manner of prayer in Christ which proceeded from [his] threefold will; one from the rational will, another from the pious will, and the third from the will of the flesh....]

*III Sent*, d. 17, a. 2, q. 2, concl. (III, 373b-37a)

*Dicendum, quod cum oratio sit petitio procedens ex voluntate et desiderio; secundum quod voluntas humana fuit in Christo secundum triplicem differentiam, sic et oratio. Nam quaedam oratio fuit exprimens sive procedens a voluntate rationis, quaedam a voluntate pietatis, quaedam a voluntate carnis....*

[It must be said that since prayer is a petition proceeding from the will and from desire, the human will of Christ had a threefold distinction, and so also [his] prayer. A particular prayer was expressed or proceeded from the rational will, another from the pious will and yet another from the will of the flesh....]

A close reading of *De oratione* and Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences* reveals at least three examples where William of Melitona also employs texts practically *ad litteram* from Book Four of the *Commentary* in order to complete various sections of *De oratione*. The first example concerns the proper definition of prayer:

*De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 2, s. 2, res., 676b

*IV Sent*, d. 14, p. 2, a. 1, q. 4, concl (IV, 368a)

<sup>15</sup>See also: *De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 1, res., 671a.

*Potest dici, quod oratio sumitur proprie, et communiter, et communissime: proprie ut est ascensus animae ad Deum aliquid degustandum, vel impetrandum, vel exolvendum....*

[It can be said that prayer is considered in a strict, ordinary and most general [sense]: strictly speaking, it is the ascent of the soul to God in order to enjoy, obtain, or to unbind...]

*Dicendum, quod oratio... accipitur proprie, communiter et communissime. Proprie oratio est ascensus in Deum ad aliquid degustandum, vel impetrandum, vel exolvendum....*

[It must be said that *prayer*... is understood in a *strict, ordinary and most general* [sense]. *Strictly speaking*, prayer is the ascent of the soul into God in order to enjoy, obtain, or to unbind...]

The second example appears in those sections where the author of *De oratione* and Bonaventure inquire into the utility of vocal prayer. They agree that vocal prayer is useful for several reasons, among which is the inflammation of human affections:

*De oratione*, m. 3, a. 2, s. 1, res., 685b

*...multiplex tamen est ratio, quare voce est orandum. Una est affectus nostri accensio: unde Beda super illud. Pater noster....*

[...nevertheless there are numerous reasons why the voice must be used in prayer. One is the enkindling of our affections. Hence Bede [says with regard to] that text: *Our Father*...]

*IV Sent*, d. 15, p. 2, a. 2, q. 3, concl. (IV, 374b-375a).

*Unde notandum, quod triplex est ratio, quare vocalis oratio est instituta. Prima et potissima est ad affectus accensionem Unde Beda super illud Matthaei sexto: Pater noster....*

[Hence it must be noted that there is a threefold reason why vocal prayer was instituted. The first and foremost is that it might foster the *enkindling of the affections*. Hence Bede [says with regard to] that [text] from the sixth chapter of Matthew: *Our Father*...]

The question of the superiority of mental prayer and its relationship to vocal prayer is the third example of how *De oratione* depends directly on Book Four of the *Commentary*:

*De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 2, s. 6, res., 690a

*Ad hoc potest dici, quod oratio vocalis ordinatur ad mentalem, et non e converso. Secundum hoc ergo intelligendum est: quod aliqua oratio pure mentalis est; aliqua pure vocalis: aliqua media sive mixta....*

*IV Sent*, d. 15, p. 2, a. 2, q. 3, concl. (IV, 374a-b)

*Dicendum, quod vocalis oratio ordinatur ad mentalem, et non e converso. Secundum hoc intelligendum, quod quaedam oratio est pure mentalis, quaedam pure vocalis, quaedam media;...*

[In response to this it can be said that vocal prayer is ordered to mental prayer and not vice versa. According to this it must be understood, therefore, that one form of prayer is entirely mental, another is entirely vocal, while yet another is a combined or mixed...]

[It must be said that vocal prayer is ordered to mental [prayer] and not vice versa. According to this it must be understood that a particular prayer is *entirely mental*, another is *entirely vocal*, another is a *combined*....]

Whereas the dependence of *De oratione* on Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences* appears to be limited to texts no longer than several paragraphs, a comparison of *De oratione* with the *Quaestiones de oratione* reveals a more extensive use of the *Quaestiones* in *De oratione*. At least three places in *De oratione* illustrate where the compiler inserts nearly an entire question from the *Quaestiones* into the text. The first example of this is in the section concerning the necessity of prayer, in general, and of mental prayer, in particular. The extremely close similarity between the two questions appears from the point where both quote from Seneca:<sup>16</sup>

*De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 5, s. 2, 704b-705b

*Contra, nihil carius emitur, quam quod precibus comparatur; sicut ait Seneca...*

[On the contrary, as Seneca says, nothing dearer is purchased than what is obtained with prayersN...]

*Q. de oratione*, q. 1, f. 43va-43vb

*Contra. Seneca: Nihil carius emitur quam quod precibus comparatur,...*

[On the contrary, Seneca [says]: Nothing dearer is purchased than what is obtained with prayers...]

*De oratione* utilizes another text from the *Quaestiones* in the discussion on the proper roles of the intellect and affections in prayer:

*De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 5, s. 2, 707a-708b

*Consequenter quaeritur, utrum altius eleuetur, in oratione intellectus ad Deum, an affectus? Et quod intellectus, patet per Augustinus qui dicit: Aliquando praevolat intellectus,...*

*Q. de oratione*, q. 8, f. 46ra-46va

*Hic ultimo queritur cum oratio sit ascensus intellectus in Deum, utrum in oratione altius eleuetur intellectus quam affectus. Et quod altius eleuetur intellectus patet. Augustinus: Aliquando praevolat intellectus,...*

<sup>16</sup>Seneca's thoughts continue to be a point of departure in contemporary discussion concerning prayer; see: Hans Schaller, "Asking and Thanking-A Meaningful Unity" in *Asking and Thanking*, ed. Christian Duquoc and Casiano Florestan, *Concilium*, 3 (1990): 1-6. Schaller does not use the same text from Seneca as was suggested in the original version of this study.

[Consequently it is asked whether the intellect or the affections may be raised higher to God in prayer. And it appears that it is the intellect according to Augustine, who says: "Sometimes the intellect proceeds rapidly...."]

[Finally, here it is asked whether prayer is the ascent of the intellect into God [and] whether the intellect or the affections may be raised higher in prayer. And it is evident that the intellect is raised higher. Augustine [says]: *Sometimes the intellect proceeds rapidly...*]

A question from the *Quaestiones* which asks if rational prayer is efficacious also can be found in *De oratione*:

*De oratione*, mem. 5, a. 2, 724a-725a

*Consequenter quaeritur: Utrum oratio rationabilis sit efficax ad impetrandum? Quid sic, videtur: Omnis qui petit accipit....*

[Consequently it is asked whether rational prayer can be effective in receiving. That it is, is seen [in the text] *Everyone who asks receives...*]

*Q. de oratione*, q. 6, f. 45rb-45vb

*Consequenter queritur utrum oratio rationabilis sit impetrativa. Et videtur quod sic. Matth. 7: Omnis qui petit accipit.*

[Consequently it is asked whether rational prayer can be capable of obtaining. And that it is, is seen in the seventh chapter of Matthew: *Everyone who asks receives.*]

Finally, the seventh question from the *Quaestiones*, whether prayer is useful for the satisfaction of sin, is used toward the conclusion of *De oratione*:

*De oratione*, mem. 5, a. 4, 733b-734b

*Quaeritur ergo: utrum oratio sit satisfactoria. Et videtur, quod sic. Hoc genus daemoniorum non ejicitur...*

[Therefore it is asked whether prayer may offer satisfaction. And that it does is seen [from the text]: *This type of demon is not cast out...*]

*Q. de oratione*, q. 7, f. 45vb-46rb

*Deinde queritur utrum oratio sit satisfactoria. Et quod sic videtur. Matth. 16, ubi dicitur: Hoc genus demoniorum non eicitur...*

[Hence it is asked whether prayer can offer satisfaction. And that it does is seen in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew where it says: *This type of demon is not cast out...*]

### Themes in the Franciscan Approach to God

Even a brief glance at *De oratione* shows that it offers any number of insights into themes proper to the Franciscan approach to God. Some of these are: the usefulness of mental and vocal prayer, the role of the theological virtues in prayer, the ascent of the intellect and affections into God, the desire for the good, asking for temporal goods, the necessity of prayer, and the dialectic of misery and mercy. While these themes are by no means exclusive to Franciscans, they do appear repeatedly in Franciscan theology. This paper will examine only the first two themes: first, the usefulness of mental and vocal prayer and second, the role of the theological virtues in prayer.



A reading of *De oratione* indicates that one special area of interest for the early Franciscan theologians in Paris was that of *oratio mentalis* or mental prayer. According to Friedrich Wulf, the Franciscan David of Augsburg is the first writer to use the term in his *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione*.<sup>17</sup> David, who may have been educated in Marburg, directed novices in both Regensburg and Augsburg. He is believed to have died in 1272 but the final composition date of *De hominis compositione* is difficult to determine.<sup>18</sup> When the question of where the term *oratio mentalis* originated is examined in light of *De oratione* and its various sources, David's preeminent role in creating this new description of prayer is questionable at best. The above comparison of texts from *De oratione*, the *Commentary on the Sentences*, and *Quaestiones de oratione* indicates that the term *oratio mentalis* can be traced back through *De oratione* to Book IV of Bonaventure's *Commentary* all the way to the *Quaestiones de oratione*. If the *Quaestiones* are from the hand of John of La Rochelle, and dated before his death in 1245, then it is far more likely that the Franciscan school in Paris was the first to introduce the term *oratio mentalis* into the medieval vocabulary of prayer. Even if the *Quaestiones* were not written by John, the same could be said since Book IV of the *Commentary* is dated around 1250-1252 and *De oratione*, before William of Melitona's death, between 1257-1259.

*Oratio mentalis* has a specific meaning in the Franciscan school in Paris which distinguishes it from the later complex, if not mechanical, understanding of mental prayer as a rigid, rational, form of prayer. Following Bonaventure's teaching,<sup>19</sup> *De oratione* speaks of mental prayer in contrast to vocal and mixed prayer and asks which expression is most useful.<sup>20</sup> In pure form, *oratio mentalis* takes place when the heart speaks directly to God without the verbalization of what is said. Pure *oratio vocalis* or vocal prayer involves words said without any understanding of their literal meaning or spiritual intent. In a comparison between the two, mental prayer is more useful than vocal prayer; in fact, prayer where there is no understanding, is nothing more

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Wulf, "Das innere Gebet (*oratio mentalis*) und die Betrachtung (*meditatio*)" *Geist und Leben* 25 (1952): 385. For David of Augsburg's presentation on *oratio mentalis*, see: David of Augsburg, *De exterioris et interioris hominis compositione*, ed. PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1899) 319-324.

<sup>18</sup> John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977) 216-225.

<sup>19</sup> *IV Sent*, d. 15, p. 2, a. 2, q. 3, concl. (IV, 374a-b)

<sup>20</sup> *De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 2, s. 6, res., 690a.

than a waste of time. *Oratio mixta* or mixed prayer, which is the combination of the heart and voice in prayer, is useful to the degree that the words employed inflame the affections and raise the heart to God. *Oratio mixta* is especially useful in the case of those not particularly sensitive to spiritual realities. If the words of prayer impede the inflammation of the affections, however, they are useless and should be abandoned.

Vocal prayer is ordered clearly to mental prayer, but that does not in anyway reduce or negate its significance in the writings of the friars in Paris. *De oratione*, for example, emphasizes the validity and usefulness of vocal prayer in public prayer.<sup>21</sup> Mental prayer often suffices for private prayer, but vocal prayer is the obligatory medium of public liturgical prayer. The importance of *oratio vocalis* in liturgical services is not to be overlooked because it concerns the common good of the community. Genuine vocal prayer in a liturgical setting does require the interior devotion proper to mental prayer if it is to foster exterior efficacy. The priest must pray audibly and devoutly in the midst of the people so that the words he pronounces might move those who hear them to seek God. If he is a man of little or no devotion, his prayer is strengthened, nevertheless, by the devotion of the rest of the community. According to the statutes of the Church, all sacramental forms of prayer such as the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, should be recited out loud for all to hear. In the case of the psalms, the community sings them; this brings about the satisfaction of sin, removal of apathy, and the inflammation of the devotion among those present.

Another area of particular interest for the Franciscan school in Paris was the question concerning the nature of prayer and its relationship to virtue. *De oratione* alone has one entire article with three sections dedicated to this theme.<sup>22</sup> For the sake of a better understanding of the nuances of the Franciscan position, it would be helpful at first to examine the approach adopted by the Dominican school in Paris to the same question. According to the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas,<sup>23</sup> the relationship between prayer and virtue comes to light when prayer is understood as a religious action. Thomas sees

<sup>21</sup> *De oratione*, mem. 3, a. 2, s. 6, res., 690b.

<sup>22</sup> *De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 2, s. 1-3, 675a-678a.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas of Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, q. 83, a. 3, 54-57 in: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Latin text and English translation, introductions, notes, appendices, and glossaries (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). On Thomas and prayer, see: Joseph Lécuyer, "Réflexions sur la théologie du culte selon Saint Thomas." *Revue Thomiste* 55 (1955): 339-362 and Lawrence Dewan, "St. Thomas and the Anthology of Prayer." *Divus Thomas* 77 (1974): 392-402; especially 395 in regard to prayer as an act of virtue.

the essence or specificity of prayer to be in the act of asking something from God. To ask something from God is a manifestation of honor and reverence toward God because there is an evident subjecting of the one who prays to God. The one who asks something in prayer believes that God alone is capable of answering the request. As an act of reverence, prayer belongs to the category of religious activity, and since religion is a virtue, prayer is a virtuous act. Prayer as a virtuous religious act by which the mind is subjected reverently to God is the fulfillment of the precept of Matthew 7:7, "Ask and you shall receive." Furthermore, since the human mind is the most perfect dimension of the human being, prayer is more perfect than any other act of religion.

Like their fellow mendicants in Paris, the early Franciscan school considered prayer to be an act of virtue; however, they taught that prayer is rooted in the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. *De oratione* acknowledges various other opinions as to the question of prayer and virtue.<sup>24</sup> One opinion sees prayer as a cardinal virtue, a form of justice, because the dynamic between God and those who pray reflects the just behavior between one who is a superior and one who is a subject. On the part of the subject, there is the desire to fulfill the command of the superior, while on the part of the superior there is the corresponding desire to answer the subject's request. The obedience of the subject is similar to the obedience of those who carry out the divine command to pray. This opinion, which seems to echo the Dominican view<sup>25</sup> to a certain degree, is unacceptable because it makes prayer into an act of obedience and, thus, implies that it is a debt owed to God. Furthermore, obedience as a form of justice requires an external manifestation toward those

<sup>24</sup>*De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 2, s. 3, 677a-b.

<sup>25</sup>A comparison of the language of *De oratione* and the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas shows a great deal of similarity regarding the relationship between God and those who pray:

*De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 2, s. 3, 677a  
*Quidam enim dicunt, quod oratio est virtutis cardinalis, et species iustitiae. Et ratio eorum est, quod sicut in habitudine superioris ad inferius est una virtus, quae est voluntatis implendi praeceptum, quia praeceptum est, et ista est obedientia, quae est in genere virtutis cardinalis, sic in ordine inferioris ad superius est oratio, quae exprimit voluntatem boni impetrandi, vel mali amovendi beneficio superioris, quae et pari ratione poni debet in genere virtutis Cardinalis.*

*Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 83, a. 3, 54.  
*Per orationem autem deo reverentiam exhibet, in quantum scilicet ei se subijcit, et profitetur orando se deo indigere sicut auctore suorum bonorum.*

*Summa Theologiae*, 2a 2ae, q. 83, a. 10, 76  
*Dicendum quod, sicut ex supradictis patet, oratio est actus rationis per quem aliquis superiorem deprecatur; sicut imperium est actus rationis quo inferior ad aliquid ordinatur. Illi ergo proprie competit oratio cui convenit rationem habere et superiorem quem deprecari possit*



in positions of authority — be they human or divine. This manifestation of obedience, which is indeed a debt due to those in authority and proper to the cardinal virtues, is not proper to prayer understood as an interior dialogue of the heart with God. *De oratione* rejects as untenable the view of prayer as an expression of a cardinal virtue such as justice because of the importance of mental prayer and, apparently, the growing, concomitant Franciscan insistence on the priority of interior spiritual experience.<sup>26</sup>

*De oratione* also rejects the attempt to classify prayer as an expression of the cardinal virtues because such virtues by definition aim toward moderation and have created beings as their objects.<sup>27</sup> The theological virtues, like prayer, know of no such limits of moderation and are directed toward an uncreated object. Clearly, the terms of moderation and ecstasy are as mutually exclusive in the context of the theological virtues and prayer as they are in any other context. Just as the soul can never possess an excess of faith, hope, and love, so too, the soul can never ascend by prayer too deeply into the mystery of God. Since only the theological virtues have God as their uncreated object, and God is the uncreated object of prayer, the act of prayer must be linked to the theological virtues. Prayer, then, is considered a special act directed towards God which flows from the practice of the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love. This view of prayer follows the teaching of Hugh of St. Victor, who described prayer as an act of turning into God by means of humble, pious affection.<sup>28</sup> The affective conversion of soul, which is born in the humble consideration of human misery and the pious recognition of divine mercy, rests on faith in divine power, hope in divine mercy, and love of divine protection. Rooted in faith, strengthened by hope, and fulfilled in love, prayer is capable of moving the soul securely along the path of upright behavior into contemplation.<sup>29</sup>

### Conclusion

The *Summa Alexandri*, and in particular the question, *De oratione*, offers a unique opportunity to investigate the early development of the Franciscan theology of prayer at the University of Paris. As this paper has shown, the text

<sup>26</sup>On the decided difference between the early Franciscan school and the Dominican school as to role and importance of interior spiritual experience; see: Johann Auer, *Die Entwicklung der Gnadenlehre in der Hochscholastik. Das Wesen der Gnade* (Freiburg, Herder, 1942) 347.

<sup>27</sup>*De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 2, s. 3, 677a-678a.

<sup>28</sup>*De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 1, 669b.

<sup>29</sup>*De oratione*, mem. 1, a. 2, s. 1, 675b.

of *De oratione* reveals the contributions of several friars whose works were utilized in the completion of the *Summa Alexandri* after Alexander's death in 1245. These friar theologians, such as Bonaventure, approached prayer from many different aspects; they examined the proper place and practice of mental and vocal prayer, the link between the theological virtues and prayer, and many other dimensions of prayer which were only briefly mentioned in this paper. These various dimensions, when studied, would give researchers an even clearer insight into the nature of Franciscan prayer in the thirteenth century. Further attempts to delineate the Franciscan approach to God in prayer could follow up on this study by attempting to compare the content and concerns of *De oratione* with those found in the writings and early biographies of Francis of Assisi. In addition, the writings of early Franciscans such as Clare, Giles of Assisi, and Angela of Foligno could also be examined in light of *De oratione*. Moving forward from the thirteenth century, researchers could attempt to compare the teachings of *De oratione* with that of later Franciscans who have written on the same subject. Some possible authors would be Francisco de Osuna, Pope Sixtus V and Leonardo Boff.

The results of this present study have implications for at least two areas of spirituality: the praxis of mental prayer and the significance of vocal prayer. First, the early Franciscan school in Paris understood *oratio mentalis* as an interior, freely chosen attempt to enter into dialogue with God which distinguishes it from later concepts and practices of mental prayer both within and outside the Franciscan tradition. As a result of either an evident misunderstanding, or ignorance of the original understanding of mental prayer, this previously free and spontaneous expression of the heart became a rigid, cerebral form of rational meditation. In time, this new, distorted expression of mental prayer was legislated by Franciscan as well as other religious communities and imposed indiscriminately on their members. The understanding of mental prayer offered by *De oratione* stands as a critique of any attempt to legislate or formalize personal, private prayer. Mental prayer is not the obedient response of the subject to the divine command of a superior, but, rather, an individual, unique expression of the theological virtues. In prayer those who have encountered the divine initiative at work within them seek to respond with a prayer of the heart rooted in faith, encouraged by hope, and inflamed by love. Thus, at best, times of prayer can be mandated but the form of prayer, as long as it is to remain mental prayer in the Franciscan sense of a free, interior dialogue of the heart with God, should never be manipulated or forced upon an individual or group.

Second, in the view of the early Franciscans, vocal prayer is a barometer of the relationship between those who pray and the God who is the object of

prayer. Vocal prayer is also seen as a major factor in the attempt of any community to pray well. *De oratione* serves as a reminder to those who pray that the words they use, and how they use them, are of crucial importance for themselves and others. According to the early friars, authentic vocal prayer is comprehensible to those who pronounce the words and to those who hear the words pronounced. If the words utilized in prayer are not understood by those who pray and there is no accompanying sense of devotion, the effort of these people is nothing more than a waste of time. In this light, the status of the relationship between God and those who offer meaningless prayers becomes questionable since there is no authentic desire to enter into a meaningful dialogue with God. The unauthentic practice of vocal prayer also has serious implications for liturgical prayer and the relationship of the worshiping community to God. The community suffers when prayers are neither understood nor expressed with devotion by those who preside. If the words employed in prayer are pronounced halfheartedly and with no understanding of their meaning, the community senses this and has a more difficult time entering into prayer.