

Custodians of the Tradition

*Reclaiming the Franciscan
Intellectual Tradition*



Those like ourselves who are immediate heirs of the tradition inspired by the spirituality of Francis [and Clare] might better see ourselves as responsible stewards of a treasure that has much to offer for the healing of humanity and of the world at large.

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The Franciscan Moral Vision: Responding to God's Love

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CHAPTER ONE

The Center of the Spiritual Vision of Francis and Clare: The Profound Relationship between God and Creation

Moral living was a response to a God
of beauty, love, justice, and peace.

The goal of this chapter is to describe the *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare*. The foundation of their spiritual vision centers on three issues:

1. the Triune God,
2. the created world, and
3. the profound relationship between the Triune God and creation. It was through this relational approach between God and creature that Francis and Clare viewed the incarnation of the Logos in Jesus, the presence of the Spirit of God throughout all of creation, the blessing of the church, and the morally correct way of Christian living.

The *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare* became the seedbed of the Franciscan intellectual tradition. Their spiritual insight into the relationship of created reality and the beauty of God gave rise to the Franciscan tradition which Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, and John Duns Scotus began to develop in a scholarly way.

The faith of Francis and Clare had been nourished in the ordinary medieval and European traditions of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their form of religious life and their understanding of God brought forth a powerful spiritual movement as well as a distinctive theological approach to Christian life and thought.

Francis and Clare were both literate and had read the Gospels and to some degree other spiritual writings. In their view a monastic or clerical vocation was no longer the only way to develop spiritual insight and a spiritual life. The *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare* was shaped largely by the theological, economic, and political changes of their age.

I. The Triune God

In almost all of Francis' writings he mentions God, often using descriptive adjectives and phrases. This helps us see the ways in which Francis understood God. However, it took a lifetime of many high and low points for Francis to reach an understanding of God.

Looking at his writings chronologically we see the development of his understanding of both God and creation. In 1205, Francis perceived God as "Most High and glorious God." In 1206, Francis gave up his family relationship and began a life of gospel-poverty. In 1209, he wrote an exhortation about God in a familial and inclusive way (Francis of Assisi, Early Documents 1,41-42). In the *Rule of 1221*, Chapter 23, he uses a series of words in which he depicts God as a loving and generous parent. In the *Praises of God* written in 1224, this familial and parental God is a God of unbelievable height, depth, length, and breadth.

In these descriptions Francis tells us that God is someone who is far above creation. We may experience someone who is mighty, holy, good, but God is all-mighty, all-holy, all-good and the highest good. God is beyond anything that we can understand. God is “the totally Other.” So how can humans have any notion of God at all? Francis answered this question by rediscovering the reality of creation.

God’s love was now more clearly seen as the *birthplace of creation.*

All creation depends on God’s loving will, for God freely willed to create the world. In the *Praises of God*, Francis saw aspects of God from which he glimpsed a deep, loving, and familial relationality of God — “You are love, charity; You are beauty; You are our hope; You are justice; . . .”

In 1225, Francis wrote the *Canticle of Creatures* which evidences a deep and mature appreciation of God and God’s presence in creation. The Canticle also implicitly evidences an autobiographical aspect of Francis’ own journey to God.

In Eloi Leclerc’s study on Francis’ *Canticle of Brother Sun*,¹ he comments that Francis always uses the adjective “all” to describe God, which he uses twice in the opening words. Francis immediately adds an important caveat — “No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.” Leclerc says that this phrase expresses a basic attitude of innermost poverty.

No human, not even Francis, has a direct, immediate, infused, knowledge of God. Only God who relationally creates, nourishes, and is present in our world reveals divinity to us. Consequently, in order to know anything about God, one must contemplate creation in a deep and intensive manner.

Francis’ love for creatures was real, deep, and religious. In his eyes, each of them in its own way and by its very being was a manifestation of the power or the beauty or the goodness of the Most High . . . The titles “brother” and “sister” have a cosmic significance, for they express the openness and a fraternal presence to the world, as well as an affective communion with all creatures . . . Francis undeniably experienced the sacred in the cosmos. What we must realize, is how deep the experience went, for it is not to be separated from the exploration of the sacred within his own soul.



Eloi Leclerc OFM *The Canticle of Creatures: Symbols of Union*. FHP. (1977). Pp..xii, 15, 61.

In the next line of the Canticle, “Praise be to you my Lord, with all your creatures.” Francis directs our thoughts, will, and vision to the created world, which we can see and whose creatures we can love. Francis’ answer to the question, “Does God exist?” is “Contemplate creation.” If God’s love, power, goodness, praise, beauty, honor, and blessing are the birthplace of creation, then all creation reflects, in a limited way, God’s love, power, goodness, praise, beauty, honor, and blessing.

Francis did not view creatures such as the sun, moon, stars, wind, air, fire, and



earth simply as useful tools to praise God, but sees them as already praising God simply by their own existence. In this praise we are able to catch a brief glimpse of the beauty, majesty, and love which describe who God truly is.

In sermons, theological essays, and scholarly volumes Franciscan theologians, such as Anthony of Padua, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Peter John Olivi, and John Duns Scotus, deliberately made the *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare* regarding God and creatures a major and centralizing element of their scholarly synthesis.

For these scholars knowledge of God’s existence is based on the profound interconnection of God to the created world in which we live. The very presence of God can be found in each and every aspect of creation. The presence of a creator God shapes and colors every other aspect of Franciscan theology — ecclesiology, sacraments, creation, human life, the reality of sin, the theology of moral behavior.

An interrelationship of one's theology of God to all other aspects of theological thought, including ethics, is profoundly present in the Franciscan tradition. In this tradition, Franciscan moral theologians based their theology of God in large measure on the spiritual vision of God as expressed by Francis and Clare.

II. The Three Books of Created Life: creation, gospel and one's inner life

While a deep reflection on creation is key to the *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare*, there is a second wellspring for this spiritual vision — the Holy Gospels. In the Rule of 1223, Francis' opening words are "The rule and life of a Franciscan is this, namely to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Wayne Hellman states:

"The Gospel shaped the project, the propositum, of his (Francis) life and so therefore his life's work was to live, do, and proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel was his mission. It was there Francis could find "the teaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ" and "retrace his footsteps."

Both the *book of creation and the book of the Gospels* are necessary components of the spiritual vision of Francis and Clare. By reading these two books Francis was gradually enabled to describe his spiritual vision concerning who and what God is, and this provided the base for all subsequent Franciscan theology. Without an understanding of the spiritual vision of Francis based on these two books, the development of Franciscan theology makes no sense whatsoever. These two books are a major foundation for an understanding of Franciscan moral teaching.



There is yet a third book, *the book of each individual's internal life*. This book is written by the Holy Spirit in the heart of each person. Both Francis and Clare refer to this interior book in which they discover God's plan for their lives. Francis states on many occasions — "the Lord led me . . . , "the Lord called me." Clare speaks about the intimacy she has with her lover, Jesus. In this book both Francis and Clare realized the closeness of God in determining what they should do and how they should ethically lead their lives.

However, the book of one's internal life cannot be seen alone. It has to be seen in the trilogy of books: the book of creation, the book of the Gospels, and the book of one's internal life. Through creation and through the gospels, the Holy Spirit speaks directly to Francis and Clare. God speaks to all of us internally when we contemplate the book of creation, the book of Holy Scripture, and the book of one's internal life.



"The Canticle of the Sun"

From the above description of the *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare*, we can derive **TWO** major characteristics of the Franciscan tradition in its intellectual and moral aspects. Both are strongly based on Francis' understanding of creatures and their relationship to God.

A. Franciscan Spirituality and Franciscan Theology are Relational and Familial

All creation is bonded together in a brother-sister relationship. This familial trait is echoed through the over-arching presence of "relationality" abundantly in the aforementioned Franciscan theologians. To understand the meaning of "relationality" one must first study the familial relationship of all creation which undergirds the spiritual vision of Francis. Francis said that God was the heavenly Father, and all of us were brothers, sisters, spouses, and mothers.

B. The Entire Created Universe with No Exceptions Forms the Family of God

In the Franciscan view of the universe, no creature is left out of this familial relationship. For medieval Europeans,

the world was basically Christian. At the same time, there were other dimensions of the world which were not Christians. There was a growing Islamic presence within the European worldview. Christians and non-Christians interacted during the crusades in the field of trade and through the crossover of ideas among Christian, Arabic, and Jewish scholars.

For Francis of Assisi, the phrase “all creation” included non-Christian areas and the people within them. Creation also included the physical or natural areas of human life: sun, moon, stars, etc.

God’s love was the birthplace for the totality of creation, whether Christian or not, whether human or non-human. The universality of creation is a central part of Francis’ spiritual vision of God, and through this spiritual vision the universality of creation became a major component of the Franciscan intellectual tradition.

Francis’ spiritual vision is an inclusive vision not an exclusive one. God is universally inclusive. One must first experience the “good” in each and every creature before one even begins to see the “limitations” or even the “bad” in a creature. For Francis, this is true since every creature has been initially made in the image and likeness of God.

The two basic dimensions of the Franciscan approach, the relational/familial character of all creation and the inclusivity of creation, have **major implications for today’s renewal of moral theology**. Brother and sister do not include only beautiful

things, such as Brother Sun and Sister Moon. Included are Brother Leper and Brother Robber. The term brother and sister include creatures that are struggling and imperfect. No creature is so ungainly or so sinful that he or she is no longer our brother and sister. For Francis the church is a familial church, including the good and the perfect as well as the sinner and the imperfect and all members are brothers and sisters to one another.

The universality of God’s creation moves *beyond church boundaries*. A familial and inclusive universal approach to creation moves the contemporary ecumenical movement of Christian churches into dialogue with other religions and into a spiritual dimension of prayer and good works not motivated by Christian principles.

For Francis, brothers and sisters exist beyond church walls, as in Brother Leper and Sister Prostitute. When one’s focus includes the entire human world, then the terms, Christian and non-Christian, Catholic and non-Catholic, the familial and all-inclusive characteristics of Francis’ spiritual vision moves to a deeper level of relationship.



“Clothed in Splendor”



Francis’ view of creation was broadened by his religious experience on Mount La Verna. The entire world is relationally united in a familial way because

God’s internal love is the birthplace of all creation.

for Francis, the crucifixion of Jesus was a moment of love, calling us to love in return a holy God who loves each one of us unto the end.

Although Clare was deeply influenced by Francis, she also developed her own characteristics for a spiritual vision of God. Clare uses descriptive phrases of marital love for one’s love of God indicating the familial and intimate nature of the Franciscan vision. Clare’s symbolic use of human love to describe divine love evidences the intensity of God’s love. She too understood that God’s love is the *birthplace of creation*.

Many citations in Clare’s writings² indicate that she remained constant in her belief that the Lord had revealed a way of life for which she asked for papal

approval again and again. She was sure that God had spoken to her in the book of the inner life, and this life conformed to the Gospels. Both books confirmed her position. She was determined to convince the pope that this was God's will.

We speak today of "women's intuition." Clare indicates that it is actually God who works deep with a human person and these instances are a part of **the book of inner life**. Neither Clare's nor Agnes of Prague's intuition about the spiritual life was accepted by church or aristocratic authority. Nonetheless, these women held to their deep conviction that a higher authority had called them to this way of life and this way of life reflected the Gospel of Jesus. In the end, both the church and the aristocratic authority removed their resistance.

After the death of Francis there were decades where the Friars and the Poor Ladies had to defend their way of life. The Franciscan spiritual vision was not a new vision, but it was not the ordinary vision of the medieval tradition.

III. The Profound Relationship Between the Triune God and Creation

The Franciscan spiritual vision was rooted in the New Testament, in the book of creation, and in the book of the inner life. Francis and Clare gradually developed their spiritual vision and their insights produced a major spiritual and theological movement in the Catholic Church.

On the basis of this vision of God, Francis and Clare began to understand the meaning of the Incarnation, the presence of the Holy Spirit throughout creation, the beauty of the church, and the moral way in which Christian life should be led.

The relational God-Creation which centers the *spiritual vision of Francis and Clare* overflows into their understanding of the Incarnation of the Logos in the human nature of



ERIC DOYLE OFM

"The Most High Lord — Our Brother"

A man, tired,
in a boat
snatching a sleep
that brings no rest or peace;
a tear trickling from the corner of an eye,
while a widow slumps beside the coffin of her son.
A man, broken,
on the ground
crawling through the dark
in a circle of despair;
a soldier's spittle sticking to a puffy cheek,
and blood congealing at the mouth.
A body, naked,
Cold and limp
lying across a woman's lap
as desolation settles like dust over everything;
the woman's eyes fixed and wide in ashen velvet,
stare downwards seeing nothing.
A God who has no eyes,
but uses ours;
who has no words,
just one Word, our brother.
A hidden God,
Seen everywhere in pairs of eyes;
a silent God,
heard only in our words.

*Eric Doyle OFM. St. Francis and the Song of Brotherhood.
(New York, NY. The Seabury Press, 1980), 58-59.*



Jesus. The birthplace of the human and created aspects of the incarnation was also God's love. For Francis, Jesus was the gift of God that most clearly mirrored who and what God is.

What captured Francis in a special way was the humility of the Incarnation.

The motive of the **Incarnation** was God's love for men and women which finds its reflection in the humility of the Logos-made-flesh.

Clare, in so many of her writings, portrays Jesus as the one who loves. In the *Fourth Letter* to Agnes, Clare speaks of human love for Jesus, mirroring divine love. For Clare to love Jesus and to have Jesus be the lover is described in words of human love which give a small echo of divine love. Jesus mirrors the love of God. Clare, similar to Francis, celebrates the humility of the Incarnation.

Francis and Clare treasured the presence of the Holy Spirit who spoke to them in the depths of their soul. They both honored a divine inspiration deep within themselves as the presence of the Holy Spirit. During their lifetimes, each of them continually read three books: the book of creation, the book of Scripture, and the book of the inner life. In their day-to-day contact with these three books, God spoke to them.

The spiritual vision of Francis and Clare begins with the action of God in their lives through their meditations in and through creation, in and through the Word of God, and in and through the deep experiences in their soul. God's presence to them through all of these areas is primary. Their response was secondary.

In God's self-revelation to them, they began to understand God in a very special way. The world which came from God's womb of love was a world of immense beauty. Through the world, Francis and Clare encountered a God of profound love, for

it was God's profound love that became the birthplace of creation.

Confronted by such love and beauty, the response of Francis and Clare was one of amazement and humility. Francis saw in the crucified Jesus a love that was not loved in return. Clare's meditations on Jesus centered on the love of God which one finds in all that Jesus does, and she used the sexual love between a woman and a man to describe the height and depth, the length and breadth of God's love. Both of them cherished the presence of the Spirit of God in the three books which they contemplated each day.

On the basis of God's primary action in the lives of Francis and Clare, and on the basis of their reaction to this God of love, beauty, familial presence, and all-inclusive care they chose to live in poverty and humility. For Francis and Clare, the poverty and humility of their lives make no sense unless one considers the special way in which they responded to the presence of God. The deepest focus of their spiritual life was on their relation to a God who is love and beauty, familial and all-inclusive. ***Moral living was a response to a God of beauty, love, justice, and peace.***

Footnotes

¹ Eloi Leclerc, *The Canticle of the Creatures: Symbols of Union* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald press, 1977) 29.

² *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*, ed. and trans. Regis Armstrong (New York: New City Press, 2006)

CHAPTER TWO

The Development of the Spiritual Vision of Francis and Clare into a Major Spiritual and Theological Tradition



The Franciscan moral vision affirms that on a human level there is a mirroring of the free and self-giving exchange of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that calls people to life in free and self-giving relationships of mutuality.



Unless one understands this vision of a relational, loving, infinite, absolutely free, and diffusively good God, one will never quite comprehend what the *Franciscan moral vision is about*. The *Franciscan* theology of God, creation, Incarnation, and the sending of the Spirit affect and color a *Franciscan* understanding of moral theology — a *response to a relational Trinitarian God*.

Franciscans, from the last years of Francis' life down to the early years of the 14th century, developed a uniquely Franciscan theological tradition based on Franciscan spirituality. During these years Franciscan spirituality and Franciscan theology not only grew in importance; they mutually shaped each other in an intense way. From its beginning, Franciscan spirituality and Franciscan theology have codetermined each other. Franciscan theology has never been simply a science. It has always been both a science and spiritual wisdom.

Three considerations:

1. the importance of **Trinitarian theology** in the writing of the early Franciscan scholars;
2. **the centrality of creation, Incarnation, and the sending of the Holy Spirit** in the writings of the early Franciscan scholars; and
3. **its implications for Franciscan moral theology**.

Johannes Freyer OFM, contemporary Franciscan scholar, put together a detailed study in which he indicated how the **Trinitarian God** as understood by Francis and Clare forms the *spiritual center* of all Franciscan theological thought. Freyer's description of the Trinitarian God emphasizes relationality.

- In God's inner life, there is a dynamic interrelationship of love flowing through God's triune nature.
- In God's external actions of creation, Incarnation, and sending the Spirit, God is again described as relational, since God shares God's own goodness and love with every creature.
- God does something far more than cause creation. God *loves* creation into existence.

God's love is both the core of life within God, and it is also the dynamism which loves us into existence.

The spiritual vision of Francis and Clare, the writings of the New Testament, and the works of **John Damascene** and **Dionysius** provided **Bonaventure** with a unique understanding of God, and his understanding of the Triune God colored and shaped his entire theological vision. If one does not understand Bonaventure's theology of the Triune God, one cannot appropriately understand his positions on creation, Incarnation, the sending of the Holy Spirit, the sacramental life of the church, and the moral dimensions of human life.

Bonaventure, following Alexander of Hales, focused his theology of God on three terms: *being, love, and diffusive goodness*. This is the third western theological approach to the Trinity. John Duns Scotus also focused his theology of God on three words: *being, love, and freedom*. Both of these men added the important aspect of *infinite*. The addition of *infinite* presents us with a relational God of incredible dimensions. Bonaventure is saying that in God, being is love, and in God, love is being.

A. BEING

In the Franciscan tradition the key words relating to "being" are goodness, love, freedom, and infinity

All western Christian theologians believe that God's being and created being are different, but they describe this difference in ways which are both philosophically and theologically distinct.

In his Commentary on the Four Books of Sentences, Bonaventure provide four reasons why a plurality of persons should be predicated of God.

1. **Simplicity:** the divine essence is communicable and can exist in multiplicity.
2. **Primacy:** in virtue of firstness, a person is born to produce another from one's self. This firstness he calls fontal fullness.
3. **Perfection:** in virtue of perfection, plurality is both apt and at hand.
4. **Blessedness and Love:** in virtue of blessedness and love, plurality is voluntary.

All four of these realities are based on the very nature of God. All form the basis for a plurality of persons in God and have a profound relational characteristic. God is first and basically "relationable". Only on this basis of "relationality" can one speak of God as triune.

Our theology of creation begins with the conviction that our very being is a pure gift from a loving, creative God. . . . We first receive the gift of being without having been consulted. . . . The being which we receive, and the potential with which it is laden, awaken us to an active response. What we make of ourselves and of our world is crucial for the final, transforming self-gift of God by which God brings creation to its completion.

Zachary Hayes OFM. *The Gift of Being, A Theology of Creation*. P. 123



B. GOOD

The relationship of two realities, God and goodness, is especially central for Bonaventure's understanding of God.

For Bonaventure, God is goodness.

Bonaventure came to this insight because of the spirituality of Francis and Clare, and the diffusive goodness of God became a major position in Bonaventure's theological understanding of the Trinitarian God. The goodness found in creation comes from God as a gift to all of creation. Created goodness comes from the divine nature. The world is the recipient of God's goodness.

For Bonaventure, God is **being** and God is **also good**. Therefore, in God's own being there is the reality of God diffusing God's own self. Through the word *being*, Bonaventure states that God

is and exists. Through the word *good*, Bonaventure tells us *how* God exists. God exists by giving. God's inner goodness is relational and a gift. Before creation, *to whom* does God give? Bonaventure answers: to God's own self. Within this diffusive and relational nature of God, dynamic "good-being" provide the basis for what Christians call Trinity.

Only because God in God's own self is self-diffusive, can there be a diffusion of God's goodness to something which is not God. *This is evident in creation, in the Incarnation, and in the sending of the Spirit.* God's actions are both internal as a sharing of goodness and external as a sharing of goodness with a creature.

In the writings of **Scotus**, God's own infinite goodness and love permeate his theology, but he emphasizes perhaps more than Bonaventure *the infinity and freedom of God*. God, in God's own self, is infinitely and freely loving and good. Nothing outside of God is the basis why God is infinite, loving, and free.

God's own goodness is *self-moving*. God is not ultimately moved because of the "goodness" seen in a creature. What does self-moving involve?

Self-moving requires some sort of relational dimension. Theoretically, God is first of all a relational being; only secondarily can God be called Trinitarian. Only on the basis that God's very nature is relational can we arrive at Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God does not need a creature to be diffusively good, loving, free, and infinite.

Franciscan scholars unite immutable being with relational goodness by viewing God as a relational God in God's own being. Adding the terms goodness, love, freedom, and infinity the understanding of "being" cannot help but be relational. The term *infinity* is the key. When *infinity* is applied to the terms being, love, self-moving, self-diffusive goodness and freedom, then these terms become **interrelational**.

C. LOVE

In John's Gospel we read: "God is love." **Scotus** took this very seriously and concludes: God's being is "being in love." If God is Being Itself, then God is Love Itself. The "being" of God cannot be understood unless it is simultaneously seen as the "love" of God. For Scotus, God's dynamism is love-being, and God's love-being is relational.

In Scotus,

- God's very being is intrinsically and infinitely **love**, just as

in Bonaventure

- God's very being is intrinsically diffusive **goodness**.

In John's Gospel, from chapters 13-21, the term love dominates the message of the author.

Scotus continually stresses that God's being and God's love are one and the same. This union of being and love is a central part of the Franciscan theology of a Trinitarian God.



Mary Beth Ingham stresses that mutuality, ". . . *the dynamic state of relatedness existing between two or more individuals . . .*",

which includes love, pervades Scotus' entire presentation on the one God and on the Triune God. She states that "*the centrality of relatedness and mutuality appear in an exemplary manner in Scotus' discussion of the Trinity*". Scotus moves from the traditional approach that relationality was the primary basis for the three person Trinity to a position that **each** Trinitarian person is understood in an "absolute" way and only then is there a "relational interplay" among the three persons. One can place relationality itself at the very core of divine life which is *being, love, goodness, freedom, and infinity*. From this foundational reality, one arrives at the **distinction** of the three persons in the Trinity.

D. FREEDOM

God's freedom was also part of the spiritual vision of St. Francis. For Francis, all creation is a free gift of God. Creation exists because God freely loved creation into existence.

There is a major interplay between the intellect and the will. **Scotus** does not attempt to liberate freedom from reason. He integrates the two in a way which maintains the basic freedom of the will. The will operates on the basis of its pre-operational "rational nature". In this sense, the will is rational not irrational.

Scotus sees in the free will of a human being the highest image of God. Even though humans are limited in their freedom, one's finite free will images the very center of God at least in a limited way.

For Scotus, the absolute freedom of God is highly emphasized and rooted in the spirituality of Francis and Clare. Francis surrendered his free will to the wishes of God. Francis let God love him in and through his surrendering of himself to God. In God's gifting, God *lets* men and women be free. God's *letting* is a freely given gift.

In the Franciscan theological approach to God, God is

- infinitely relational;
- infinitely diffusive goodness and
- infinitely loving freedom.

Francis and Clare caught a glimpse of this as they contemplated the world around them (the book of creation). When Francis and Clare read about Jesus (the book of Scriptures), they saw in the human Jesus God's diffusive love and God's loving freedom. When they turned into the depths of their own being (the book of the interior life), they listened to the same God who is diffusive love and loving freedom.

God appears as an artist whose signature is a beauty that is both tender and awesome. God the Creator is the divine Artist who brings forth a world that is fit to open the human spirit to beauty, goodness, and love; And for the eye of faith, the world which God is even now fashioning is truly a window to the divine.

Zachary Hayes OFM. *A Window to the Divine*. 95



The Centrality of Creation, Incarnation and the Sending of The Holy Spirit in the Writings of the Early Franciscan Scholars

A. The Standard Christian Approach to Redemption

Almost all of the Christian churches have presented the view that God created the world and it was a time of grace and goodness. Adam and Eve rejected this grace and goodness. When that happened God provided a second chance for holiness and redemption. This second chance was the sending of Jesus who died for our sins and the Holy Spirit is re-sent.

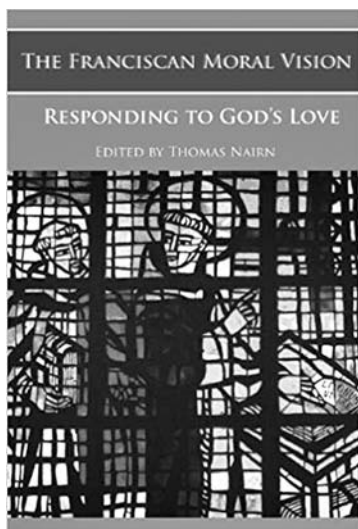
B. The Franciscan Approach to Redemption

Franciscan theology **did not accept** this theological view of redemption and based its approach on the New Testament and the early Fathers of the Church. Franciscan soteriology is based on

- the Trinitarian God who is *bonum sui diffusivum* (**Bonaventure**) and on
- the infinite free and loving will of a Trinitarian God (**Scotus**).
- Such a foundation precludes any possibility of a creature, including the human Jesus, necessitating God in any way at all.

Scotus' position is that God's creative act, God's salvific act, and God's action of risen life for all are all presented as gratuitous acts of a loving and compassionate God. **His point of departure is consistently based on the absolute freedom and love of God's will.**

The cosmic view of Bonaventure in which everything is a vestige, image, and a similitude helps us today to see God's love and compassion in a globalized and multi-cultural world. Add to this is the need to unite creation, the mission and manifestation of the Logos, and the mission and manifestation of the Spirit.



This interconnection is a *central part* of the Franciscan tradition and a *major foundation* of Franciscan moral theology.

Bonaventure unites creation itself to the Incarnation, for God, from the very beginning, included in the creative act of the Incarnation of the Logos in the human nature of Jesus, and God also included in the creative act the sending of the Holy Spirit. **Scotus** is even more insistent on this interconnection, of creation-incarnation-sending of the Spirit.

Implications for Franciscan Moral Theology

Francis, Clare, and the other Franciscans came to see that the most high, relational God has related all creatures in a wondrous, beautiful, overarching way. From the very beginning of time, human beings in a special way have been loved into existence by our relational God.

Moral behavior was a “re-action” to God's relational “ad extra” magnificence. Moral attitude was first and foremost a reaction of wonder and thanksgiving.

In reaction to the infinite, loving, self-giving, and absolutely free God, the Franciscans acknowledged the beauty of God and they wanted to love God above all else — **the first commandment, which is the basis of all morality.**

Unless one understands this vision of a relational, loving, infinite, absolutely free, and diffusively good God, one will never quite comprehend what Franciscan moral tradition is about.

The *Franciscan* theology of God, creation, Incarnation, and the sending of the Spirit affect and color a Franciscan understanding of moral theology — a response to a relational **Trinitarian God**.

Bonaventure carefully presents the triadic relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Creation takes place because the **Triune God** is a diffusive reality, not only *ad intra* but also *ad extra*. We do not *read into* creation the presence of God; rather, God's own self *reads out* of creation. It is our task to listen and understand God's voice in all creation.

The conjunction of the free sending of the Incarnate Logos and the Holy Spirit into creation makes every human being a moral or ethical person. Every human being is faced with this overwhelming gift of God — creation itself, the sending of the Logos into the human nature of Jesus and the sending of the Holy Spirit into the entirety of creation. Faced with such profound gifting, persons are meant to respond to the



giver. This response to God the Giver is the foundation of Franciscan ethics. The very giving of these three gifts, together with the human response to the God-giving of these gifts, is the ultimate basis of Franciscan moral theology. The gospel message is a message of love calling for a response of love.

Scotus maintains that the human soul is not simply a space in which the Holy Spirit loves God and through its free will, loves God and does so freely.

Franciscan scholars present the center for moral theology — human free will — which is a gift. God has gifted human life and human beings respond to this gifting by a freely returning love and thanksgiving. It is on this basis the Franciscans build their vision of moral theology.

The basis of Franciscan ethics is not natural law, not in the Ten Commandments, not utilitarian ethics, nor rational ethics. The basis is God's gracious gifting of creation together with the gifting of the Incarnation and the gifting of the mission of the Holy Spirit. Franciscan theology teaches that each human being is gifted with freedom and is called on to respond morally to the overwhelming generosity of God in a free and personal way.

The Franciscan Moral Vision: Responding to God's Love

Edited by Thomas A. Nairn OFM

Chapter One: *The Center of the Spiritual Vision of Francis and Clare: The Profound Relationship between God and Creation*

Chapter Two: *The Development of the Spiritual Vision of Francis and Clare into a Major Spiritual and Theological Tradition*

By Kenan B. Osborne OFM

Kenan B. Osborne OFM — Friar of the Province of Saint Barbara, CA, is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology and founding President of the *Franciscan School of Theology*, Berkeley, CA, where he taught for forty-three years. FST is now in Oceanside, CA. He is currently retired at Old Mission Santa Barbara where he continues his research and writing.

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Kenan, who speaks seven languages, is especially known for his teaching in China and Korea. Among his distinguished awards are the John Courtney Murray Award and the Franciscan Institute Medal of Honor.

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