

'THE COINCIDENCE OF OPPOSITES' WITH REGARD TO  
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI AS A THEOLOGIAN

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STATEMENT:

This research was undertaken under the auspices of the University of Wales: Trinity Saint David and was submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of a Degree of MPhil, PhD, DMin by Research (or by Published Works if applicable) in the School of Theology, Religious Studies and Islamic Studies of the University of Wales.

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## Abstract

The consideration of St. Francis of Assisi as a theologian has gained popularity in the latter half of the twentieth century, emerging from new scholarly interest in his writings.<sup>i</sup> However, this view of the saint still lacks a general acceptance in Franciscan studies. Historically, certain factors have discouraged scholars from describing Francis as a theologian. Perhaps the greatest of these obstacles were his basic level of education and the 'fragmentary' nature of his body of writings.<sup>ii</sup> These last two issues will be addressed in the present study. Francis was not trained as a scholar and did not set out his ideas systematically, or in an academic style. His authentic works consist of around thirty relatively brief texts in various genres. They were composed in response to diverse situations he encountered in the course of his religious life. These characteristics of his writings have made it difficult to construct a complete picture of his theology. To do this, as Thaddée Matura has observed, it is necessary to find a 'key' which links and unifies the thought in these diverse texts.<sup>iii</sup> The present research employs the idea of 'the coincidence of opposites' as a tool for this task. This term, which first emerged in connection with Nicholas of Cusa's philosophy, was developed by Ewert Cousins, who applied it to the works of St. Bonaventure.<sup>iv</sup> This mode of thought was intrinsic to Francis' outlook, as the present study will show. It can be used to reconnect the fragments of theology in his writings, and reveal the comprehensive vision which inspired them. By doing this, the present research will confirm Francis as a theologian, not in the professional sense, but in the wider sense of one who communicated, in words, a vision of all things in relation to God.<sup>v</sup>

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- i Matura, T., 'Francis of Assisi - Theologian?' in: A. Cirino, and J. Raischl, eds., *A Pilgrimage Through the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition* (Canterbury, England, Franciscan International Study Centre, 2008) pp. 20-21. / Armstrong, R.J., Hellman, J.A.W. and Short, W.J., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (FA:ED)*, vol. 1, *The Saint* (NY, New City Press, 1999) p. 35.
- ii Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, N., *The Teacher of His Heart: Jesus Christ in the Thought and Writings of St. Francis*, E. Hagman, trans. (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1994) p. 14. / Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' p. 21.
- iii Matura, T., *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings*, P. Barrett, trans., R.A. McKelvie and D. Mitchell, eds. (St. Bonaventure, NY, St. Bonaventure University, 1997, 2004) pp. 27-8.
- iv Cousins, E.H., *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites: The Theology of Bonaventure* (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1978)
- v Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' p. 14.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Edward and Marie Knowles,  
and to my grandparents: Frank and Mary Knowles, Ronnie and Joan Bentley,  
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<sup>vi</sup> Francis of Assisi, *The Earlier Rule* XVII, 17, in: *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 76

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## Abbreviations<sup>vii</sup>

### Writings of Saint Francis

Adm	The Admonitions
CtC	The Canticle of the Creatures
CtExh	The Canticle of Exhortation
1LtCl	The First Letter to the Clergy (Earlier Edition)
2LtCl	The Second Letter to the Clergy (Later Edition)
1LtCus	The First Letter to the Custodians
2LtCus	The Second Letter to the Custodians
1LtF	The First Letter to the Faithful
2LtF	The Second Letter to the Faithful
LtL	A Letter to Brother Leo
LtMin	A Letter to a Minister
LtOrd	A Letter to the Entire Order
LtR	A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples
ExhP	Exhortation to the Praise of God
PrOF	A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father
PrsG	The Praises of God
OfP	The Office of the Passion
PrCr	The Prayer before the Crucifix
ER	The Earlier Rule
LR	The Later Rule
RH	A Rule for Hermitages
SalBVM	A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
SalV	A Salutation of the Virtues
Test	The Testament
TPJ	True and Perfect Joy
PrH	The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours

### Sources for the Life of Saints Francis and Clare

2C	The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul
2MP	The Mirror of Perfection (The Sabatier Edition)
L3C	The Legend of the Three Companions
LMj	The Major Legend by Bonaventure
AC	The Assisi Compilation
FA:ED	Francis of Assisi: Early Documents
CA:ED	Clare of Assisi: Early Documents

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vii Taken from *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 32, with the addition of 'PrH'.



## Introduction

### Thesis and aims

St. Francis of Assisi (1191/2-1226) was a theologian, since his writings drew upon a comprehensive, coherent and consistent theological vision. A key to understanding this vision is a thought structure known today as the 'coincidence of opposites'. These propositions will be demonstrated through a study of the writings of Francis. By way of a general introduction, there will first be an explanation of what is meant by the terms 'theologian' and 'theological vision'. The term 'coincidence of opposites' will then be introduced, with a review of some authors' use of the concept. This will be followed by an introduction to Francis' body of written works, and the overall structure of the study will then be explained.

### St. Francis of Assisi the theologian

It must be acknowledged at the outset that Francis did not see himself as a theologian. In his *Testament*, he instructed the brothers of his Order: '...we must honour all theologians and those who minister the most holy divine words and respect them as those who minister to us spirit and life.'<sup>1</sup> Francis described himself to the entire Order as '*ignorans et idiota*', which has been translated as 'ignorant and stupid.'<sup>2</sup> However, in the Middle Ages, this description had nothing to do with one's mental ability but translated as 'unlearned'.<sup>3</sup> This self-assessment sprang from the fact that Francis' education was very basic. He had a rudimentary knowledge of Latin from his schooling in Assisi and could read and write, but not well.<sup>4</sup> Unlike most Christian writers of the medieval period, he did not have a clerical education and was never ordained as a priest.<sup>5</sup> Hence, he did not count himself among the learned of his day and those who had studied theology, such as Brother Anthony of Padua, to whom Francis gave permission to teach the brothers theology.<sup>6</sup> In spite of Francis' modest self-image, he was renowned for

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- 1 St. Francis of Assisi, *The Testament (Test)*, in: R.J. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellman, and W.J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, (hereafter, *FA:ED*) vol. 1, *The Saint*, (NY: New City Press, 1999) p. 125. All English translations of Francis' writings will be taken from this volume.
  - 2 *A Letter to the Entire Order (LtOrd)* 39, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 119.
  - 3 Matura, T., *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings*, P. Barrett, trans., R.A. McKelvie and D. Mitchell, eds. (St. Bonaventure, NY, St. Bonaventure University, 1997; 2004) p. 7.
  - 4 Fortini, A., *Francis of Assisi*, H. Moak, trans. (NY, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985) pp. 94, 109. / Armstrong, R.J., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings for a Gospel Life*, Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series (Slough, UK and Maynooth, Co. Kildare, Ireland: St. Pauls, 1994) p. 14.
  - 5 Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 7.
  - 6 *A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 107.

Christian wisdom during his lifetime, according to Thomas of Celano, who wrote his second biography of Francis around 1247. Celano recounted that, while Francis was in Siena, he was approached by 'a Doctor of Sacred Theology' belonging to the Order of Preachers. In the course of a lengthy conversation about the word of God, the Dominican Doctor asked Francis how he could rightly interpret a passage from Ezekiel (Ez 3:18-20; 33:7-9). Having heard Francis' understanding of the passage, the Doctor was 'greatly edified' and commented to Francis' companions, "'My brothers, the theology of this man, held aloft by purity and contemplation, is a soaring eagle, while our learning crawls on its belly on the ground.'"<sup>7</sup>

An increasing number of scholars of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries concur with Celano insofar as they claim for Francis the description, 'theologian'. This is usually on the basis of the content of his writings, especially considering their original use of scripture and penetrating insights into the message of the Gospel. In speaking about Francis, these writers employ descriptions and definitions of 'theologian' which do not necessitate a scholarly level of education.

One such definition was proposed by Thaddée Matura, by which he judged Francis to be a theologian:

'From the Greek etymology of the term, *theos* and *logos*, theology is a word, a discourse that related to God. ... theology is - beginning with the mystery of God who gives himself -, a vision of all reality, with the human being at the centre. The one will be called a theologian who, discovering this vision by the experience of faith, takes the word and develops a discourse, the object of which could be all that exists, on the condition that all is brought back to the mysterious presence of God, whose glory - Love - fills the universe.'<sup>8</sup>

The above definition of a theologian will be adopted for the purpose of the present study. According to this description, to designate someone a theologian would depend on that person's writing or speaking about a vision they have discovered which relates all things to God. That Francis wrote about God is beyond any doubt. With his insistence on returning all good in praise to God, it is clear that Francis fulfils the condition of communicating his vision in words that relate all things to God.<sup>9</sup> Francis' transmission of his insight was also rooted in the Old and New Testament scriptures. A

<sup>7</sup> Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul (2C)* 103, in: R.J. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellman, and W.J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, *The Founder* (NY, New City Press, 2000) p. 315.

<sup>8</sup> Matura, T., 'Francis of Assisi - Theologian?' in: A. Cirino, and J. Raischl, eds., *A Pilgrimage Through the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition* (Canterbury, England, Franciscan International Study Centre, 2008) p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the following writings, in *FA:ED*, vol. 1: *The Canticle of Brother Sun (CtC)*, pp. 113-4; *The Earlier Rule (ER)* XVII, 17-18, p. 76; *The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours (PrH)* 11, p. 162.

large proportion of his writing is made up of quotations from scripture.<sup>10</sup> Many phrases are also rearrangements or adaptations of biblical texts. Therefore, his writing is certainly theology in the literal sense of a word relating to God. What is not so self-evident is that these words about God expressed a panology: a vision of all reality. Francis' compositions, around thirty in number, are mostly brief and written in a variety of genres. They transmit his responses to various situations he encountered in his religious life. If one assumes that these communications were all sourced in a panology which Francis discovered, then, because he did not study theology and did not see himself as a professional theologian, he did not deliberately set down his vision in a systematic way. It would have been communicated in fragments of theology to be found throughout his writings, in no logical order. The challenge to be undertaken in this study, then, is to recover all the elements of Francis' thought system from his diverse writings and re-assemble them as a unified vision which, has universal scope. Thus, although there are many facets to Francis, such as the friar, the poet, the founder and the 'Patron Saint of the Environment',<sup>11</sup> it will be demonstrated that to regard Francis as a theologian on the terms defined above is a reasonable and useful viewpoint. It is not a novel viewpoint, however. There are other writers, especially in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have taken this position. Taking account of Francis' basic education, they have described him as a 'vernacular', 'intuitive' or 'existential', rather than technical or professional theologian.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, a problem remains, which has prevented general acceptance of Francis' writings as theology. The problem is the lack of a clear synopsis of his theological vision. While many people might agree that Francis was a theologian, when asked to summarise his theology from his writings, it proves very difficult. One could identify main features of his thought and describe them, as Matura and Nguyễn-Van-Khanh have done,<sup>13</sup> but a clear synopsis from his writings, which accounts for all the main elements of his thought and how they fit together and relate to each other, has not

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10 Francis used 156 quotations from the Old Testament and 280 from the New Testament (Matura, T., *Francis: The Message*, p. 15).

11 John Paul II, *Inter Sanctos* (1979) in: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 71 (Vatican City State: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1979) pp. 1509-1510.

12 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, N., *The Teacher of His Heart: Jesus Christ in the Thought and Writings of St. Francis*, E. Hagman, trans. (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1994) pp. 5-6 / McGinn, B., 'Was Francis of Assisi a Mystic?' in: *Doors of Understanding: Conversations in Global Spirituality*, S.L. Chase, ed. (Quincy IL, Franciscan Press, 1997) p. 148 / Delio, I., *Franciscan Prayer* (Cincinnati, Ohio, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2004) p. 7.

13 Matura, *Francis: The Message* / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*.

yet been successfully produced. To do so, it is necessary to find a 'unifying idea', as Matura explained, which would connect the diverse fragments of Francis' theology into a coherent structure.<sup>14</sup> The concept of 'the coincidence of opposites' will be employed as such a key to reading Francis' theology.

### **The coincidence of opposites**

The 'coincidence of opposites' describes a mode of thought which views opposite ideas in a harmonious union, rather than being contradictory and mutually exclusive, as conventional logic would have it. The origins of the term '*coincidentia oppositorum*' can be traced back to the fifteenth-century work of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), a Christian theologian from Germany. Cusa employed coincident logic as a conscious philosophical tool. He used it to develop a language for discourse about the infinite God, who is beyond all human language, images and concepts and yet is revealed in a human creature; Jesus Christ. Cusa was influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, a Christian Neo-Platonist who wrote in the fifth-sixth century and proposed an approach to knowing God through both affirmation and negation.<sup>15</sup> Cusa introduced a coincidence of affirmative and negative epistemology which he called 'Learned Ignorance'.<sup>16</sup> The title of his treatise of 1440, *De docta ignorantia: On Learned Ignorance*, exemplifies his use of the coincidence of opposites. H.L. Bond, in his introduction to his English translation of Cusa's writings, saw it as the underlying logic of this treatise. He summarised the coincidence of opposites as '(1) the method of logically setting opposites into harmony and (2) the principle of viewing opposites as reconciled'.<sup>17</sup> *De Docta Ignorantia* demonstrates how, in the infinite, 'the minimum coincides with the maximum',<sup>18</sup> and reasons: 'God is the enfolding of all things, even of contradictories'.<sup>19</sup> In Cusa's later work, *De visione Dei* (1453), Bond saw three categories of coincidence: 1) between creatures, 2) between creatures and God and 3) 'within God as triune...'.<sup>20</sup> The present study will also find these classes of coincidence of opposites in Francis' vision.

14 Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 26.

15 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* 7, 3, in: C. Luibheid, trans., *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Great Britain, SPCK, 1987) p. 108.

16 Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, 1440, Bk 1, 89, in: H.L. Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa Selected Spiritual Writings* (NY, The Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1997) pp. 126-7.

17 Bond, *Cusa, Spiritual Writings*, p. 22.

18 Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, Bk 1, 11, in: Bond, *Cusa Spiritual Writings*, p. 91.

19 Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*, Bk 1, 67, in: Bond, *Cusa Spiritual Writings*, p. 118.

20 Bond, *Cusa, Spiritual Writings*, p. 45.

The idea of the coincidence of opposites as a key to Francis' theology was prompted by Ewert Cousins' 1978 book, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites*.<sup>21</sup> Bonaventure and Cusa, in Cousin's view, belonged to a common tradition of coincident thought in Christian Neo-Platonism, which descended from the Greek Fathers through Pseudo-Dionysius, Anselm, the Victorines and Alexander of Hales, to Bonaventure.<sup>22</sup> Cousins, therefore, projected the philosophical term, 'coincidence of opposites' back in time, and used it to analyse the works of Bonaventure. In his introduction to Cousin's book, Guy Bougerol explained that the coincidence of opposites did not appear as a formal logic in Bonaventure's work, as it did in Cusa's, but it did underlie his work.<sup>23</sup> Cousins argued that this union of opposites was the key to understanding all Bonaventure's thought, grounding and uniting his metaphysics and theology.<sup>24</sup> Chapters five to seven of the *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, in which the *coincidentia oppositorum* was most obvious, were a microcosm of Bonaventure's entire theological vision, according to Cousins.<sup>25</sup> He claimed that Bonaventure's successors in this way of thought included Nicholas of Cusa, then, in modern times, Hegel, Marx, Jung and Altizer.<sup>26</sup>

Cousins did not situate Francis of Assisi in this thought tradition. Nevertheless, he pointed to Francis as a main influence on Bonaventure's theology, along with scripture and the scholastic tradition.<sup>27</sup> He identified Bonaventure's Christocentrism as a Franciscan element of his synthesis.<sup>28</sup> Cousins suggested that other Franciscan elements in Bonaventure's vision were love of nature and the material world, 'and a sense of the coincidence of opposites.'<sup>29</sup> The author did not enlarge on the latter element. However, the idea that the roots of the coincidence of opposites might be found in Francis' writings was a formative influence on this research. Cousins saw Bonaventure inheriting the coincidence of opposites from the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition via Augustine, Pseudo Dionysius and the Victorines.<sup>30</sup> These were undoubtedly influences on the Seraphic Doctor's own work. However, Francis himself, though not a trained

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21 Cousins, E.H., *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites: The Theology of Bonaventure* (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1978).

22 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 209.

23 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. xv.

24 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 9.

25 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 71.

26 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 15.

27 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. xvi.

28 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 49.

29 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 164.

30 Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 3-4.



scholar, thought and wrote in a milieu suffused with Christian Neo-Platonism through the influence of the Greek Fathers. He was also firmly rooted in the Gospels and quoted substantially from John's Gospel, the Christology of which makes such deliberate and dramatic use of paradox. Bonaventure was inspired and profoundly influenced by the spirituality of Francis. Therefore, it seemed plausible that the roots of the coincidence of opposites which features particularly in chapters five to seven of the *Itinerarium* might be detected in Francis' writings. With this in mind, the work of Bonaventure's founding father was investigated in the light of this mode of thinking. As a result of this investigation, the coincidence of opposites was found to be intrinsic to Francis' thought.

Cousins defined three possible types of coincidence of opposites: 1) unity, 2) difference and 3) unity-and-difference.<sup>31</sup> He claimed that Bonaventure's thought conformed consistently to the third type, which was the indigenous logic of the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition.<sup>32</sup> The first type of coincidence is defined as follows: '...unity swallows up difference; opposites coincide to such an extent that they become one, in a unity where they no longer exist as opposites. This is a monistic view, in which opposites are judged either to be an illusion or to be transcended in an undifferentiated unity.'<sup>33</sup> In the second type, there is no real coincidence, only opposition. This is common in dualistic spiritualities, where opposites are juxtaposed but never achieve unity. The third type happens when opposites coincide and remain opposites in a real union.<sup>34</sup> Cousins called this type a 'coincidence of mutually-affirming complementarity; for the opposites complement each other, and through their union mutually intensify their individuality as opposites.'<sup>35</sup>

The description, 'unity and difference' applies to the coincidences that occur in Francis' thought. However, Francis' style of coincidence of opposites differs subtly from Cousin's description of this third type in Bonaventure. In the type three, according to Cousins, the opposites coincide but remain opposites, and in their union, they complement each other and thus enhance their opposition.<sup>36</sup> In Francis' type of 'unity and difference', however, there is a 'falling together' of opposites, in the literal sense of '*coincidentia*', into a harmonious union, in which elements retain their distinctiveness, but are no longer perceived as opposites. The elements do not, therefore, fall into

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31 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 18.

32 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 22.

33 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 18.

34 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 18.

35 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 20.

36 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 20.

undifferentiated unity, as in Cousins' monistic type one coincidence, but into a union which contains difference, but without opposition. Drawing on descriptions of the coincidence of opposites from Cousins and from Bond's reading of Cusa, this type could be described as 'unity and difference in convergence'.<sup>37</sup> Perceived opposites converge in a union which embraces both 'unity and difference', in which 'they no longer exist as opposites', yet both elements retain their integrity.

The application of Cousins' type three coincidence of opposites to the Trinity needs to be understood very accurately, in order to be compatible with Christian doctrine. According to the traditional doctrinal definitions of the Trinity, the divine essence, which the three Persons share equally, is an undivided and undifferentiated unity. There is, therefore, a need for caution in introducing the idea of opposition within the Trinity. Richard Martignetti tried to address this issue with Cousin's application to the Trinity of type three, in which opposites remain opposites. He observed that, though the divine essence was undifferentiated, Bonaventure saw aspects of the Trinity in which a legitimate distinction could be made: firstly, in the unique relationship of each divine Person to the other two and secondly, in their distinct missions in relation to creation. Regarding the latter, the Father is not sent, but sends on mission, the Son is sent by the Father and the Holy Spirit is sent by Father and Son. The same pattern of distinction applies to the origins of the Persons. The Father is unbegotten. The Son is begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit is spirated by both Father and Son. Therefore, if the Father's only producing, and the Holy Spirit's only being produced may be regarded as opposites, the Son's, both being produced and producing may be regarded as the middle term.<sup>38</sup> Cousins' type three opposites, as Martignetti explained, all concerned these origins, relations or roles in mission, not the divine essence. With this clarification, he accepted Cousin's reading of the coincidence of opposites in Bonaventure's thought as type three in every class of his theological vision, though he reduced Cousins' five classes to four.

Nevertheless, the way Cousins presented the Son as middle term between the Father and Spirit could be open to misinterpretation. 'The Father, as the person who produces, is seen as the opposite pole of the Spirit, who is produced but does not produce ... Within this dynamic archetype the Son is the center, for in and through him

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<sup>37</sup> Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 18 / Bond, *Cusa, Spiritual Writings*, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> Martignetti, R.S., *Saint Bonaventure's Tree of Life: Theology of the Mystical Journey* (Rome, Frati Editori di Quaracchi, 2004) pp. 151-2.

the maximum coincidence of opposites is realized.<sup>39</sup> If understood too literally, this could appear as if two divine Persons, the Father and the Spirit, were opposites, since Cousins specified that in type three, of which this was an example, the opposites intensified in coincidence. This, then, could appear too much like God in opposition to God. However, Cousins only intended to present the type-three coincidence as a metaphor in Bonaventure's vision, for conceptualising differences between the origins, relations and missions of the Persons as two poles and a middle term. He did not intend to propose that the divine Persons themselves could be opposites. That would be incompatible with traditional doctrine, which explains that the divine essence in the Trinity is common to all three and cannot be divided.<sup>40</sup>

While referring to the types of coincidence of opposites defined by Cousins, this study will show that, in Francis' thought, it differs subtly from these types. It does not appear to fall exactly into types one, two or three but in between types one and three. In Francis' Trinitarian theology, the opposition between ideas exists only in human perception, not in revealed truth. In application to the Trinity, the concepts converge into a union which retains distinction but not opposition. Thus, 'unity and difference' applies as a general description of this coincidence of opposites. Difference in the Trinity relates only to the Persons' origins, relations or ways of working in creation. No distinctions are applied to the divine essence. The differences neither collapse into unity, as in type one, nor remain as opposites, as in type three. As the first chapter will show, Francis' Trinitarian theology actually emphasises the unity of the divine nature. Christ is not presented as centre within the Trinity in Francis' thought, only between God and creation. Hence, the issues described above, connected with visualising the Father and Spirit as opposite poles in the Trinity, do not apply in this case.

Cousins' also asserted that Bonaventure presented 'Christ as a coincidence of opposites' and that the opposition was of a type that intensified in coincidence.<sup>41</sup> He stated, 'Christ embodies an extraordinary coincidence of opposites.'<sup>42</sup> As with his Trinitarian theology, this should not be understood too literally and superficially, or it could appear that Bonaventure saw real opposition within the Person of the Word Incarnate, rather than a contrasting complementarity of ideas associated with the Christ

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39 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 112.

40 Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 804 / Council of Toledo XI (675): DS 528, in: Chapman, G., ed., *Catechism of the Catholic Church (Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994)* p. 60.

41 Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 20-21, 84, 91-2.

42 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 91.

event. Cousins' presentation of opposites in Christ needs to be precisely understood, with the awareness that Bonaventure did not present Christ's human and divine natures, in themselves, as opposites. This would be at odds with the doctrine of the hypostatic union.<sup>43</sup>

With Francis' vision, this potential for misunderstanding does not arise, because of the different type of coincidence of opposites that occurs. In the second class of coincidence of opposites in Francis' theology, the hypostatic union is the pattern for the state of unity and difference into which perceived opposites coincide, or 'fall together', in Christ. In Francis' outlook, faith in divine revelation has primacy over human reason. Following from this, if experience-based perception tells him that two concepts are opposites, yet revelation tells him that they exist in a harmonious union in Christ, Francis will let go of the dictates of reason, and the opposite concepts will fall together into union and difference in his faith vision. Therefore, there can be no question, in Francis' theology, of perceiving real opposites in Christ, even of Cousin's 'complementary' kind.<sup>44</sup> This variation between the coincidence in Cousin's reading of Bonaventure and that found in Francis' work could raise questions about the possible continuity of the coincidence of opposites from Francis to Bonaventure. This sort of comparative research, however, lies outside the scope of the present study, which concerns itself with Francis' particular use of the coincidence of opposites. This must be demonstrated from his writings before it may be considered how it relates to other authors' use of the same term.

Unlike Cusa, Francis does not apply the coincidence of opposites in a philosophical way, nor does he use it consciously and deliberately. The coincidence of opposites presents itself in Francis' work as a grammatical tool. It is a way of using language to draw together opposite ideas in the mysteries of his Christian faith, and to depict them as reconciled. The extensive use of coincidences of opposites throughout his work indicates that it was a habitual thought structure for Francis. However, Francis used this way of thinking and communicating intuitively, without bringing it to self-reflective focus. Nevertheless, it can serve as a key to the underlying connectedness of the theology in his writings. The present study limits itself to the mode of thought as it

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43 The sixth ecumenical council in 681 (DS 556-559) clarified that both human and divine wills and natural operations co-operated in Christ. The human will of Christ in relation to the divine 'does not resist or oppose but rather submits to his divine and almighty will.' (Council of Constantinople III: DS 556) in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 107.

44 Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 20.

is found in Francis' writings. Therefore, the debates about Cusa's sources for the coincidence of opposites will not be entered into. Likewise, the philosophical questions concerning what precisely Cusa meant by it and how he wanted it to be applied will not be addressed.<sup>45</sup> Neither will this study involve itself in the discussions surrounding the validity of Cousins's use of the coincidence of opposites in interpreting Bonaventure's work.<sup>46</sup>

Richard Martignetti's 2004 study of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* built significantly on the work of Cousins. Unlike Cousins, he asserted the importance of the coincidence of opposites in the spirituality of Francis and its likely influence on Bonaventure.<sup>47</sup> His analysis of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* employs four theological tools, one of which is the coincidence of opposites. Martignetti located the basis of the coincidence of opposites in the systematic presentation of apophatic-cataphatic theology by Pseudo-Dionysius. Richard of St. Victor (d.1173) according to Martignetti, employed both apophatic and cataphatic theology in a coincident way of thinking about God, represented by the two cherubim above the ark in Exodus chapter twenty-five.<sup>48</sup> Bonaventure also advocated holding together both cataphatic and apophatic approaches as equally valuable.<sup>49</sup> Martignetti then traced this trend back to Francis, who, in his *Earlier Rule*, chapter twenty-three, combined both apophatic and cataphatic terms in praising God.<sup>50</sup> This is a significant point in relation to the present research, as it is unusual for scholars to identify the coincidence of opposites as a feature of Francis' thought. Importantly, Martignetti also argued for the coincident style of the San Damiano Crucifix and the influence of this on the thought of Francis.<sup>51</sup> The icon depicts a Johannine image of Christ as both human and divine, a coincidence of opposites

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45 Bond, *Cusa, Spiritual Writings*, p. 20 / Hopkins, J., *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations* (Minneapolis, Minnesota, The Arthur Banning Press, 2000) pp. 88-91.

46 Marcil, G., 'Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites: The Theology of Bonaventure. By Ewert H. Cousins', *The Cord*, vol. 29, no. 5, May 1979, pp. 156-7 / McEvoy, J., 'Book Review: Ewert H. Cousins. Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites. Introduction by J.G. Bougerol O.F.M., Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1978, 316 pp.', *Irish Theological Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 308-9 / Hayes, Z., 'Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1978) review by Zachary Hayes, *Journal of Religion*, vol. 60, 1980, p. 351 / Tavad, G., 'The Coincidence of Opposites: A Recent Interpretation of Bonaventure', *Theological Studies*, vol. 41, 1980, pp. 576-84 / Cousins, E.H., 'Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites: A Response to Critics', *Theological Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1981, pp. 277-290.

47 Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, pp. 143, 145.

48 Richard of St. Victor, 'The Mystical Ark', in: G.A. Zinn, trans. and intro., *Richard of St. Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, Book Three of The Trinity* (NY, Paulist Press, 1979) pp. 259-71, cited in: Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, p. 138.

49 Bonaventure, *De Triplicia Via*, III, 13.

50 *ER* XXIII, 11 / Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, pp. 143-4.

51 Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, pp. 145-7.

described by Bonaventure in chapter six of the *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*.<sup>52</sup>

Speculation about the possible influences on Francis that could have led him into a coincident style of thought can be attempted. Although he would not have had direct access to their writings, the thought of Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and other Christian Neo-Platonists would have pervaded the ecclesiastical culture of Francis' day and could well have filtered down into sermons that came to his ears. In this way, Francis may have been influenced by the combination of cataphatic and apophatic theology that characterised the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition. However, Francis' particular blend of negative and affirmative theology appears to have a stronger cataphatic emphasis. Martignetti identified the roots of the coincidence of opposites in the writings of Augustine (354-430), who highlighted the paradoxical nature of trying to speak about a God who was ineffable.<sup>53</sup> Gregory of Nyssa (c.332-395) used the metaphor of 'luminous darkness' to propose a way of knowing God by a negation of human comprehension of God.<sup>54</sup> Francis, also seeking knowledge of God, asked the 'Most High' to 'enlighten the darkness' of his heart, which has a more positive emphasis.<sup>55</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius presented two ways of speaking about God by affirmation and negation, saying that God, '...is known through knowledge and through unknowing.'<sup>56</sup> The Dionysian ascent to God proceeds by negation of one's affirmations, until it transcends the mind itself in a union with 'inscrutable' divine Wisdom.<sup>57</sup> Martignetti observed a possible sign of the influence of the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition in Francis' deluge of words about God at the end of chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*. This torrent of ecstatic praise puts together both cataphatic and apophatic language, giving the impression of an attempt to say everything that can possibly be said about God, including what cannot be said, and ends on a cataphatic note.<sup>58</sup>

The Gospels were undoubtedly a major influence on Francis' thinking in a coincident mode. In fact, while the term 'coincidence of opposites' can be traced back to

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52 Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, VI, 5.

53 Augustine, 'On Christian Doctrine', in: D.W. Robertson, trans., Library of Liberal Arts, ed., St. Augustine: On Christian Doctrine (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) pp. 10-11, in: Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, p. 132.

54 Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 163, in: R.J. Payne, et al., eds., A.J. Malherbe and E. Ferguson, trans. and intro., *Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses*, The Classics of Western Spirituality Series (New York, Ramsey, Toronto, Paulist Press, 1978) p. 95.

55 *The Prayer before the Crucifix, FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 40.

56 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, VII, 3, in: Luibheid, *Complete Works*, pp. 108-9 / Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 162-169, Payne, et al., pp. 94-97.

57 Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, VII, 3, in: Luibheid, *Complete Works*, p. 109.

58 Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, p. 143-4.

Cusa in the 1400s, the concept itself is as old as Christianity, and much older, as Cousins observed.<sup>59</sup> All the major mysteries of the Christian faith require the acceptance in faith of a union of concepts which normal logic would judge irreconcilable. In the Incarnation is a union of the the infinite and finite, caused and uncaused. This happened by means of a virgin mother, another paradox. In the doctrine of the Trinity as three Persons in one God, the concepts of unity and plurality coincide.

This gives rise to fundamental questions: if paradox is intrinsic to the Christian faith, does it follow that any sound Christian theology will feature the coincidence of opposites? What, then, is special about the theology of Francis, that he should be singled out for his use of coincident thought? It is true that the coincidence of opposites is intrinsic to the mysteries of the Christian faith. However, the Franciscan movement, with its Christocentric focus, gave particular emphasis to coincidences of opposites.

Reasons for this may be found in the wider context of the Christological developments of their era. As Thomas Herbst has explained, Francis, Clare and Bonaventure lived on the cusp of a period of transition in Western spirituality from 1100 to 1300. During this period, the specific type of high Christology which had developed following the collapse of the Roman Empire was gradually giving way to a low Christology, conditioned by diverse characteristics found in the high medieval period. Various Christian influences in the blend of this period, as in any period, tended to emphasise one or the other extreme of the divinity or humanity of Christ. In a unique way, the spirituality of the Franciscans managed to hold both poles together in unity.<sup>60</sup>

The high Christology of the early medieval period pictured Christ as an awesome, eschatological judge, the Lord of the universe. This image was also influenced by the Church Fathers, who addressed their prayers to Christ as Eternal Word.<sup>61</sup> So, in the early Middle Ages, Christ Pantocrator, cosmic Lord, was the dominant Christian image. This reflected the highest authority figure of the feudal system, the warrior king.<sup>62</sup> With the decline of the feudal system, a new low Christology began to emerge which emphasised the immanent, incarnate God, the human Jesus. This devotional focus was propagated especially by St. Bernard.<sup>63</sup> From the widespread interest in the Holy Land as a focus for crusade and pilgrimage

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<sup>59</sup> Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> Herbst, T., 'Francis of Assisi: A Man of His Times', Lecture 5, *Franciscan Christology* (Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, January-March, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> Nguyen-Van-Khan, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 24.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

developed an incarnational spirituality of following in the footsteps of Jesus in the Gospels.<sup>64</sup> This physical world was recognised as the home of 'Immanuel' (Is 7: 13-16) 'God with us',<sup>65</sup> and the setting for the historical events of salvation.<sup>66</sup> In what Marie-Dominique Chenu described as an 'evangelical awakening', texts from the Bible began to be more widely disseminated, and even translated into the vernacular. The scriptures were approached and preached more literally, in order to direct the '*vita apostolica*' of the Christian people.<sup>67</sup> These developments led to a greater awareness of the 'active presence' of God's word in people's lives.<sup>68</sup> From a more direct focus on the Word Incarnate in the Gospels came the recognition that God shared human experience: emotions, sufferings, limitations and death. This gave rise to an affective and personal spirituality.<sup>69</sup> Hence, the Franciscans took from the Gospels the image of Christ as poor, suffering servant, immanent and tangible especially in the Eucharist.<sup>70</sup>

The Crucifix of San Damiano, a focus of prayer and likely inspiration for both Francis and Clare, could be seen as an illustration of how Franciscan thought unified the low and high Christology. The raised hands and serene face of Christ suggest a victorious king. Yet, the bent arms and the copious bleeding represent the human, suffering Christ.<sup>71</sup> Here is symbolised a coincidence of opposites, as Martignetti has highlighted.<sup>72</sup> Christ, naked and dying, in semi-regal stance, has the Cross for his royal crown, pictured within his golden halo. Thus opposites are unified in Christ. His poverty is kingly riches and his abjection is his glory. This was the image which inspired Francis' mission, according to Celano.<sup>73</sup> Paradoxically, Francis experienced 'perfect joy' as a mendicant pilgrim in the footsteps of this poor Christ, who was depicted stripped and dispossessed of everything, yet serene in suffering, appearing to

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64 Mico, J., 'The spirituality of St. Francis', *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1993, p. 6.

65 Scriptural quotations throughout from *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, eds. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, 1995).

66 Cirino, A., 'The Assisi Experience: Introduction', in: A. Cirino, *et al.*, eds., *Pilgrim's Companion to Franciscan Places* (Assisi, Editrice Minerva, 2006) p. 9.

67 Chenu, M.-D., *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, J. Taylor and L.K. Little, eds. and trans., preface by E. Gilson (Toronto, Buffalo, London, University of Toronto Press and Medieval Academy of America, 1997) pp. 248-9.

68 Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society*, p. 269.

69 As Chenu observed, '...the power of the gospel to move' was 'rediscovered both in the apostolic life of the church and in its theological reflection.' (Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society*, p. 255).

70 Herbst, 'Francis, A Man of His Times'.

71 Herbst, T., 'Franciscan Christology in the Development of the Iconography of the Passion,' *The Cord*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2009 pp. 306-7.

72 Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, p. 146.

73 2C 10, in: *FA:ED*, vol. 2, p. 249.



ascend to the Father, even as he died.<sup>74</sup> This same Crucifix remained in the monastery of San Damiano, in the chapel where Clare and her sisters prayed daily. It may have served as the 'mirror' mentioned in Clare's *Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague*, in which she often looked to see herself and saw Christ. By contemplating the image of Christ, she strove to be transformed inwardly into his image.<sup>75</sup> In the *First Letter*, Clare explained that Christ had come to experience human poverty and degradation so that humanity could share his glory.<sup>76</sup> In union with him and by means of the coincidence of opposites in Christ, poverty was understood as glory and riches.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, the Franciscans endeavoured to follow the human Christ in poverty and minority. They wedded this incarnational focus to the concept of God as transcendent other. The resultant spirituality inverted the ideological structure of the feudal hierarchy, so that Christ, their supreme king and cosmic Lord, was to be found in the lowest place in creation, even in death on a Cross.<sup>78</sup> Francis and Clare often prayed:

'Let the whole earth tremble before His face  
tell among the nations that the Lord has ruled from a tree.'<sup>79</sup>

Thus, for the Franciscans, the heights of the divine and depths of the human realms were brought into unity in the Incarnate Word, who was the centre of their spirituality. This produced an outlook characterised by the coincidence of opposites.

The coincidence of opposites in theology requires thinking subjects to let go of the reasoning towards comprehension that they have learned through the senses, and to accept the revealed mystery in a faith and love which impels them towards God. In this vein, Cousins wrote of Bonaventure's theology that Christ as coincidence of opposites was the means of our transition 'from intellectual to affective contemplation', or to 'mystical ecstasy'.<sup>80</sup> This response of surrender and *ecstasis* to coincidences of opposites in God is also implied in Francis' writings, and will be discussed in chapter five.

Cousins divided the type three coincidences in Bonaventure's system into various classes and it could, likewise, be divided in Francis' work. Five classes were designated by Cousins in Bonaventure's use of type-three 'unity and difference'

<sup>74</sup> *True and Perfect Joy (TPJ)*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp.166-7.

<sup>75</sup> Clare of Assisi, *The Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague*, 1253, in: R.J. Armstrong, ed. and trans., *The Lady: Clare of Assisi: Early Documents (CA:ED)* (NY, London, Manila, New City Press, 2006) p. 55.

<sup>76</sup> Clare, *The First Letter to Agnes of Prague*, 19-20, *CA:ED*, p. 45.

<sup>77</sup> Clare, *The First Letter to Agnes of Prague*, *CA:ED*, p. 45.

<sup>78</sup> Herbst, 'Francis, A Man of His Times'.

<sup>79</sup> *The Office of the Passion (OFP)*, Ps VII, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>80</sup> Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 92-3.

coincidence of opposites.<sup>81</sup> The first class occurred in the Trinity. The second class concerned the coincidence of God and creation in the exemplarism centred on the eternal logos and in the act of creation through the logos. In the third class, God and creation coincided in the incarnate logos. The fourth type was the coincidence of good and evil in Bonaventure's soteriology. The fifth type concerned creation returned and reunited to the Creator.

**Cousins' five classes of coincidence of opposites:**

- 1) in the Trinity
- 2) God and creation (in its emanation from the Trinity)
- 3) in Christ
- 4) good and evil
- 5) God and creation (in its return to the Trinity)<sup>82</sup>

For the purpose of his analysis of the coincidence of opposites in the *Lignum Vitae*, Martignetti reduced Cousins' five classes of coincidence to four:

**Martignetti's four classes:**

- 1) in the Trinity
- 2) in Christ
- 3) good and evil
- 4) God and creation.<sup>83</sup>

In doing so, he eliminated Cousin's own distinction between God and creation in its emanation from God and in its return to God.

In Francis' writings, three classes of coincidence could be identified.

**Three classes in Francis' vision:**

- 1) in the Trinity (unity and plurality/diversity, co-equality and order, Alpha and Omega)
- 2) in Christ (Creator and creature, incl. hidden and manifest, glory and abjection)
- 3) between creatures (friend and enemy, unity and plurality/diversity)

These categories are not always rigidly distinct in Francis' vision, rather, their boundaries should be treated as permeable. For example, the coincidence of the hidden and the manifest is centred on Christ, but applicable to the whole Trinity, and the coincidences which occur between creatures can also be seen as occurring in Christ, as

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81 Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 200-206.

82 Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 200-5.

83 Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, pp. 161-2.

will become apparent in the course of this study.

The union of opposite ideas applying to God and creation occurs in Christ, according to a human faith-vision, which renders the fourth class of Martignetti superfluous for the purpose of this study. The logos exemplarism developed by Bonaventure, which gave rise to Cousin's second class of coincidence, is not a concept expressed in Francis' work. There are aspects of Christological exemplarism in Francis' theology which will be highlighted in the course of the study. One could argue for a separation in time between Martignetti's second and fourth classes, with Incarnation at a point in the past, and full restoration in the future. However, there is a sense in which Francis spoke of a cosmos already in union with God in Christ, '...in Whom that which is in heaven and on earth *has been* brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God'.<sup>84</sup> It must also be acknowledged that a difference in scale between classes two and four may be perceived because the Incarnation is a union of God with one particular creature and the restoration entails all creation united to God. Nevertheless, both belong essentially to the same class of coincidence, that is between Creator and creation, and both occur in the Christ event. Therefore, although they are different coincidences of opposites, they can be conceptualised as one class in Francis' vision of reality.

This class of coincidence could be represented visually by a vertical continuum with the Triune Creator at the top, whom Francis called, 'Most High',<sup>85</sup> creation at the bottom, and Christ in the centre. For Francis, the dynamic virtue that brings Creator and creature together in the Incarnation is humility. In Martignetti's class two coincidence, applied to Francis' thought, God comes to meet creation in Christ, moving, by humility, from a position of true superiority to assume the condition of the lowest creature. It is important to note that, in Francis' vision, the Cross completes the movement of humility begun in the Incarnation.<sup>86</sup> The appropriate response of human beings, according to Francis, is also humility, in imitation of Christ, by which a person moves from the false superiority of pride into union with the poor suffering Christ in creation's lowest place, and thus, back to God.<sup>87</sup> This corresponds to Martignetti's class four coincidence. However, both coincidences can be represented by one set of opposites; Creator and creature, united in Christ. Therefore, Martignetti's two and four will be reduced to a single class of coincidence for Francis' vision. Since the union of

<sup>84</sup> *LtOrd* 13, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 117 (my italics).

<sup>85</sup> *PrCr*; *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 40 / *CtC* 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 113.

<sup>86</sup> *ER* XXIII, 3 / *The Second Letter to the Faithful (2LtF)* 4-13.

<sup>87</sup> *LtOrd* 26-29.

the 'Most High' and the furthest depths of humility in creation is exemplified in Christ Crucified, the coincidence of God and Creation in Christ within our second class could be visualised as the vertical dimension of the Cross: 'For the Most Holy Father of heaven, our King before all ages sent His beloved Son from on high and has brought salvation in the midst of the earth.'<sup>88</sup>

This coincidence of Creator and creature functions as a general category of coincidences of opposite ideas occurring in and depending on the dogma of the Incarnation of the Second Person, as will be detailed in chapter two. Because of the hypostatic union in Christ, pairs of concepts which are attributable to God and to creatures and which would normally be viewed as opposites coincide in a unity and difference relationship in his Person. These opposites are entailed in what Francis portrays as an ontological gap between humans and God which, without Christ, would be an obstacle to humans' seeing or knowing God. Without using technical language, Francis communicates this gap by drawing a contrast between the attributes of spiritual and sense-perceptible, omnipotent and weak/dependant, applying to Creator and creatures respectively.<sup>89</sup> He sees this gap bridged by Christ, who reveals God in creation as a human creature.<sup>90</sup> However, his theology communicates an understanding that, although God is manifest as a human creature in Christ, he cannot be physically seen or known in his divinity through empirical reason, but only by means of faith.<sup>91</sup> Hence, Francis saw a coincidence of the hidden and the manifest in human perception of God which was centred on Christ and depended on the Incarnation. He also understood a gap in holiness or worthiness between God and people. Without Christ, this would set the divine and human in opposition, from a human viewpoint. This perceived opposition consists in human sin; that humans do the opposite of what God does. The divine Persons share themselves, as is evident chiefly in Francis' Trinitarian theology, whereas humans appropriate to themselves, as evident in Francis' admonitions against appropriation.<sup>92</sup> Christ resolves this disunity by being the exemplar for true humanity. He shows that true humanity is not opposed to the divine but obeys God's will by doing what God does and is in union with the Creator. From this, one can infer that he shows a sinning nature to be inhuman. To sin, in Francis' view, is to depart from

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<sup>88</sup> *OfP* Ps VII, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>89</sup> *Admonition (Adm) I*, 3 / *ER* XXIII, 1, 8 / *LtOrd* 3, 9.

<sup>90</sup> *Adm I*.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>92</sup> Francis' Trinitarian theology will be explored in chapter one and his teaching against appropriation mainly in chapter four.

the excellence of one's created nature.<sup>93</sup> Thus, in the union of divine and human natures in the Person of Christ, Francis saw the coincidence of Creator and creature. The resolution of their estrangement lay in self alignment with his example of true humanity.

A coincidence in the Passion of Christ, identified by Cousins and Martignetti in Bonaventure's theology as good with evil, is viewed differently in Francis' work. Cousins said that good and evil was not a type three coincidence like the others in Bonaventure's system but a combination of his types one, two and three. Francis' theology however, sees a coincidence of opposites in the Passion of Christ which, like his others, is of the unity and difference in convergence type, since it depends for its convergence on the hypostatic union. For Francis, in the Cross of Christ, abjection coincides with glory.<sup>94</sup> This convergence arises from a truly coincident view of the Incarnation, which never loses sight of Jesus' divinity even in his Passion and death.<sup>95</sup> In fact, divinity is revealed in his kenosis as the glory of his Father.<sup>96</sup> This also means a share in God's riches and glory for those who are united with Christ in accepting poverty, suffering and death for the love of God.<sup>97</sup>

A third class of coincidence of opposites in Francis' vision arises from Christ's teaching and his example in the Gospel account of his Passion. Francis' soteriology emphasised the Gospel teaching: 'love your enemies' (Mt 5:44). He highlighted Christ's example in praying for those who crucified him and calling his enemy, Judas, 'friend' (Mt 26:50).<sup>98</sup> This points to a coincidence of friend and enemy in Francis' theology which will be examined in chapter four. It is a coincidence of opposites in his thought because the enemy is not objectively transformed into a friend, rather, he/she is regarded as a friend by the one whom he/she is attacking. As represented in Francis' writings, the Incarnation of the Word also entails this coincidence. *Admonition Five* teaches that among all creatures, the human race makes itself the enemy of God by sinning.<sup>99</sup> As other writings show, it is this fallen race of sinners that God's love embraces in the Incarnation and goes on to redeem by the Passion and continues to do good for them, even though their sins crucified him and continue to do so.<sup>100</sup>

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93 *Adm V*, 1

94 *2LtF* 61-2 / *Adm V*, 8 / *OfP VII*, 9.

95 *PrH 3* / *OfP Ps VI*, 11-14 / *Exhortation to the Praise of God (ExhP)* 15.

96 Jn 12:28; 17:1, in: *ER XXII*, 41.

97 *Adms V*, 8 ; *VI / OfP Ps XV*, 12-13; *Ps VII*, 7-9 / *LR VI*, 2-5 / *ER XXII*, 55; *XVI*, 10-21; *IX* 1-6.

98 *ER XXII*, 1-4 / *Adm IX*.

99 *Adm V*, 2-3.

100 *ER XXIII*, 2-3,5,8 / *2LtF 4 / Adm V*, 3.

Thus, in Francis' thought, the coincidences of Creator and creation, friend and enemy coincide in the life of Christ and are exemplified in the Cross. This thought structure could be represented graphically by picturing the coincidence of friend and enemy as the horizontal dimension of the Cross. This is because this class of coincidence can apply to a union of equals: estranged brother and sister creatures, yet, at its source in the example of Christ, it also coincides with the 'vertical' union of God and creation. Hence, according to Francis' theology, Christ Crucified may be conceptualised as the centre in whom many pairs of opposites coincide *in medias res*, as this study will demonstrate.

Thus far, it is already apparent that Francis' theological vision will differ significantly from that of Bonaventure. Francis' vision, unlike Bonaventure's, does not allow a conceptual distinction of pre-existent and incarnate logos. It follows that there will be no logos exemplarism in his theology, which reduces it to a simpler structure. For Francis, wherever Christ is, the 'Most High' Triune God is understood to be present and this Christ is the Son through whom the Father created all things.<sup>101</sup> Thus, Francis presents a coincident understanding of God, who is at once immanent and transcendent.

The contributions to the present thesis of studies involving the coincidence of opposites can now be summarised. This concept, which will be used as a key to Francis' theology, originated in the work of Nicholas of Cusa. Bond, in his introduction to Cusa's writings, gave a helpful general definition of the coincidence of opposites. To this basis, Cousins added definitions of three possible types of this coincidence. These definitions have been helpful in identifying the type of coincidence of opposites found in Francis' work. Cousins developed this key with regard to Bonaventure's work, and also pointed out its roots in Francis' thought. The significance of Martignetti's study for the present research is that it identifies the coincidence of opposites in Francis' thought. Martignetti's work also draws attention to the coincidence of opposites represented in the San Damiano Crucifix, which will play an important part in the sixth chapter of this study. All in all, the idea of using the coincidence of opposites to read Francis' theology grew out of Cousin's interpretation of Bonaventure's work. This thesis will demonstrate how the thought structure of coincidence of opposites could be as useful a key to the vision of Francis as Cousins has argued it is to the vision of Bonaventure.

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101ER XXIII, 3.

### The writings of St. Francis of Assisi

Most of the writings of Francis which have survived came from two main manuscript sources. The Assisi Codex MS 338, which was originally stored in the *Sacro Convento* library in Assisi, is thought to date back to the 1240s-1260s and another group of manuscripts, the Ognissanti MS Codex, found in Florence, is from around 1370. The former, the Assisi 338 Codex, contains the following writings: *The Later Rule*, *The Testament*, *The Admonitions*, *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, *A Letter to the Entire Order*, *The Second Letter to the Clergy*, *A Salutation of the Virtues*, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, *The Office of the Passion* and *A Rule for Hermitages*. The second source, the Ognissanti Codex, records: *The Earlier Rule*, *The Testament*, *A Letter to a Minister*, *The Second Letter to the Clergy*, *The Admonitions*, *The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*, *The Praises of God*, *A Salutation of the Virtues*, *A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, *A Letter to the Entire Order*, *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, *A Rule for Hermitages* and *A Blessing for Brother Leo*.<sup>102</sup> *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father* from the Assisi Codex was designated of dubious authenticity in the Quaracchi edition and the *English Omnibus* but was incorporated into the authentic writings in the edition of Kajetan Esser and that of Armstrong, Hellmann and Short: *Francis of Assisi Early Documents (FA:ED)* which is the main source for English translations in this study.

The writings considered authentic in modern editions number around thirty texts. There is no firm number of texts because editions vary slightly as to which writings they include. There are up to eight 'dictated writings' recorded in early sources for the life of Francis, which were included in Esser's 1976 edition.<sup>103</sup> Of these, only *True and Perfect Joy* found its way into the 1999 collection of writings in *FA:ED*, volume one. For the purpose of this study, all the writings included in that volume will be treated as authentic.

This synthesis of Francis' theology will also take into account two short texts which claim Francis as their author and are recorded in chapter six of *The Form of Life of Clare of Assisi* (1253); namely, *The Form of Life Given to Saint Clare and Her Sisters* and *The Last Will Written for Saint Clare and her Sisters*. These will be referred

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102Habig, M.A., ed., *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, B. Fahy, trans., P. Hermann, intro. and notes (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1973) pp. 9-11.

103Esser K., ed., *Die Opuscula des Hl. Franziskus von Assisi Neue textkritische Edition* (Grottaferrata, Rome, Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1976).

to in the English translation of *The Form of Life of Clare of Assisi*, in Regis Armstrong's 2006 edition, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*.<sup>104</sup> These two pieces, which have appeared in previous editions of Francis' writings, such as the *English Omnibus of Sources*, will be included here for two main reasons. Firstly, both texts contain conformities of expression with other writings in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, volume one. *The Form of Life* describes the Sisters as 'daughters and handmaids of the most High, most Exalted King, the heavenly Father' and adds that they 'have taken the Holy Spirit' as their 'spouse'.<sup>105</sup> This appears to echo the way in which Francis described the Virgin Mary in the Antiphon to his *Office of the Passion*: 'Daughter and servant of the most high and supreme King and of the Father in heaven.' He also called her 'Spouse of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>106</sup> *The Last Will* exhorts the Sisters to '...persevere in this until the end...'.<sup>107</sup> The exhortation to persevere 'until the end', conforming to texts from Matthew's and/or John's Gospels (Mt 10:21/24:13, Jn 13:1), appears three times in Francis' writings. He used this phrase, '*usque in finem*' in *The Earlier Rule*, chapter sixteen, in *The Office of the Passion* and in his *Testament*.<sup>108</sup> This evidence indicates that the two writings directed to Clare and her Sisters came from the same mind as the authentic writings of Francis to which they have conformities. Secondly, these texts appear within *The Form of Life of Clare of Assisi*, which is considered to be an authentic writing of St. Clare. She knew Francis personally, and he was her community's founder and inspiration. This writing of Clare dates from 1253, from around the same period as the earliest manuscript collection of Francis' writings, the Assisi 338 Codex.<sup>109</sup> For these reasons, it seems fitting that *The Form of Life* and *The Last Will* be considered in the present study together with the other writings of Francis reproduced in the edition of Armstrong *et al.* All of the written works of Francis to which this study will refer as authentic are listed in Appendix one.

Regarding the sources for Francis' compositions, the influence of scripture, as mentioned above, cannot be over-emphasised and would certainly be his main source. Matura has researched the statistics of Francis' citations of scripture and found a total of four hundred and thirty six. He also identified five different ways in which Francis used

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104 *The Form of Life of St. Clare*, chapter six, 3-4, 7-9, *CA:ED*, p. 118.

105 *CA:ED*, p. 118.

106 *OfP* Antiphon, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 141.

107 *CA:ED*, p. 118.

108 *ER* XVI, 21 / *OfP* Ps VII, 8 / *Test* 39.

109 Habig, *English Omnibus*, p. 10.



scripture in his writing.<sup>110</sup> Van-Khan analysed Francis' use of each of the four Gospels and found a theological preference for John's writing.<sup>111</sup> Another main source for Francis was the liturgy of the Church, especially the Book of Psalms, which he would have prayed frequently as part of the Liturgy of the Hours. The prayer recorded in his *Testament* is adapted from the liturgy for Good Friday and the feast of The Exaltation of the Cross.<sup>112</sup> He drew heavily upon the Psalms for his *Office of the Passion*. The Canon of the Mass was also a source, as will be shown in the course of this study. Some of Francis' writings have elements in common with the texts of other religious movements of his day, such as the *propositum* of the Humiliati<sup>113</sup> and the Rule of St. Benedict,<sup>114</sup> so these movements had a degree of influence on his writing. In a lesser way, Francis drew on the teachings of the Church Fathers: St. Gregory the Great, St. Jerome and St. Anselm.<sup>115</sup> Also mentioned above was the possibility of an indirect influence from the Neo-Platonic tradition.

Classification of Francis' work according to genre is never quite satisfactory, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh observed: 'The soul of the Poverello defies rigorous classifications.'<sup>116</sup> In his writings are found letters, rules, admonitions, exhortations, prayers and hymns of praise and sermons. Some writings such as *The Earlier Rule*, contain changes of genres and so would fall into several categories.<sup>117</sup> Most of the writings can be at least approximately dated. A few cannot be dated with any certainty, hence eight writings in *FA:ED* volume one remain undated. The dated writings span a period of about twenty years. The earliest is *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* (c.1206) and the latest is Francis' *Testament* (1226). The majority were written in the last six years of his life. However, all have a discernible underlying unity, which will be demonstrated in this study. Apart from the likelihood that Caesar of Speyer embellished *The Earlier Rule* with quotations from scripture and that Francis needed the help of a canonist in composing *The Later Rule*, the writings we have, as far as we know, are Francis' own work.<sup>118</sup> A convincing study by Carlo Paolazzi has proved it unlikely that Francis dictated in Umbrian and so scribes could have made changes and errors in

110Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 15-20.

111Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 219-224.

112Test 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 125, fn. a.

113ER XV, 1-2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 73, fn. c.

114ER VII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 69, fn. c / ER IV, 4-5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 66, fn. d.

115ER VII, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 69, fn. b / ER X, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 72, fn. a.

116Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 14.

117Exhortation and praise in ER XXI and XXIII, admonition in XXII.

118Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 15.

translation and even more unlikely that Francis allowed secretaries to phrase his ideas. Therefore, Francis' original authorship shines through his use of the scriptural and spiritual traditions already mentioned. Paolazzi's own study of the writings found in them '...an extraordinarily unified and coherent view of reality and life, always rooted in the Word of God, but also anxious to express itself with correctness and precision.'<sup>119</sup>

### **Structure**

The structure of this thesis will combine two approaches; one being detailed examination of the theology in particular writings of Francis and the other being the study of particular aspects of theology as found throughout his writings. It will begin by focusing across the writings on each major feature of Francis' thought system in turn, with reference to the writings in which they are expressed. The first chapter will be devoted to the Trinity, which often appears to be the starting point for Francis' thought in his writings. The second chapter will consider Christ as universal Mediator and reconciler. Chapter three will also concentrate on Christ but in terms of the human person's relationship to the Incarnate Word. In the course of this exploration, it will examine the portrayal of the Virgin Mary as the model for the human person in union with Christ, which will involve analysis of the full text of the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. The next chapter will look at Francis' approach to peacemaking. This will include an examination of *True and Perfect Joy*, as an illustration of the coincidence of enemy and friend in Francis' thought. Chapter five will consider the style of Francis' theology and the role of affectivity. As part of this consideration of his theology, it will examine *The Praises of God* in detail. The whole of chapters six and seven will be given to detailed examination of the theology in two writings: *The Prayer Before The Crucifix* (1205-1206) and *The Canticle of Brother Sun* (1225) respectively, showing how they express Francis' vision in the light of previous chapters. Having set out the major aspects of his theological vision in chapters one to four, chapter six will show that his earliest recorded and shortest writing belongs in the context of his overall vision. Notwithstanding its brevity and its situation within an early legend of Francis' life, the pointers to key themes in his overall theology will be indicated in this piece, showing the consistency of the *Prayer* with the other writings. Its special connection with the

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<sup>119</sup>Paolazzi, C., *Lettura degli Scritti di Francesco d'Assisi* (Milan, Edizione O.R., 1992) p. 11, in: C. Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes: A Puzzle to be Solved,' *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2004, p. 327.

San Damiano Crucifix will also be considered in this light. The examination of *The Canticle* in chapter seven will show that this hymn contains all the major elements of Francis' theology set out in chapters one to four and, moreover, that it encapsulates, in poetic and symbolic form, his entire panology. In selecting these two writings for detailed study, the aim is to demonstrate the consistency of Francis' theological vision as expressed in compositions throughout his life of penance, from the early stages of his conversion in 1205/6 to his final illness in 1225, the year before his death. This study will show how significant correspondences of theological ideas between the writings point to their origin in a coherent overall vision of God and creation. In this way, it will demonstrate that the writings are to be most fully understood not in isolation but in reference to each other in the context of an underlying panology.

## Literature review

### Origins: four obstacles to the study of Francis' writings as theology

The consideration of Francis as a theologian has gained popularity in the late twentieth to twenty-first centuries. Surprisingly, little attention was paid to Francis' own writings until the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>120</sup> The Second Vatican Council, which asked religious institutes to rediscover their founding charisms, probably added impetus to scholarly interest in the authentic works of the founder of the Franciscan Order. Much of the study of Francis' own works as theology grew out of this new attention to his writings. Many scholars in the past have not ventured to describe Francis as a theologian due to four main factors which, historically, have militated against the study of theology in Francis' writings, and still limit the acceptance of this approach today.

**1) The 'personality cult' of St. Francis:** The first of these factors could be called the 'personality cult' of St. Francis of Assisi, which has been highlighted by Matura and by Armstrong, Hellmann and Short.<sup>121</sup> Francis is not only a saint of the Catholic Church, but also a colourful, charismatic figure with a dramatic life story and attractive alternative approach to life, which has been transmitted through various early legends. Hence, he has had universal appeal from the thirteenth century, when he lived, down to the present day.<sup>122</sup> Because Francis had such a fascinating life story and personality, scholarship has tended to concentrate on historical and psychological approaches to finding the authentic 'person' of Francis and aiming for a historically-accurate reconstruction of his life.<sup>123</sup> On the whole, this problem has been approached using the early biographies rather than his own writings. In the light of these legends and the style of his writings, many scholars have viewed Francis as a mystic or poet, but not as a theologian. Eric Doyle stated, 'Francis was no theologian. But he was a mystic.'<sup>124</sup> Paul Rout described him as '...the Romantic, the poet, and, at his deepest level, the mystic.'<sup>125</sup> Dawn Nothweher also described Francis as '...an ontological poet and nature mystic....'<sup>126</sup>

120Interest in Francis' writings began to grow from the 1950s, according to Matura, or from the late 1970s, according to Armstrong, Hellmann and Short (Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' p. 20. / Matura, T., *A Dwelling Place for the Most High*, P. Lachance, trans. (Quincy IL, Franciscan Press, 1999) p. x / *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 35.

121Matura, T., 'Francis: Theologian?' pp. 21-2 / Matura, T., *A Dwelling Place for the Most High* (Quincy IL, Franciscan Press, 1999) p. x / *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 13.

122Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 3 / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 6.

123Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 1.

124Doyle, E., *Franciscan Spirituality*, unpublished, typed ms., s.a., p. 43.

125Rout, P., *Francis and Bonaventure* (London, HarperCollins, 1996) p. 10.

126Nothwehr, D.M., 'Saint Francis and Saint Clare: Foundations' in: D.M. Nothwehr, ed., *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader* (Quincy IL, Franciscan Press, 2002) pp. 99-

**2) The theology of St. Bonaventure:** A second factor, which could be identified as contributing to the neglect of Francis' thought as theology, is the work of St. Bonaventure. Francis' seventh successor as Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor was Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217-1274). In 1243, he entered the Franciscan Order and began his studies in theology at the Franciscan School of the University of Paris under Alexander of Hales. From 1253, he was teaching as a Master in the Franciscan School of Theology. While at Paris, Bonaventure wrote many academic works on scripture, including commentaries on the sentences of Peter Lombard, on the Book of Ecclesiastes and the Gospels of Luke and John and on disputed theological questions.<sup>127</sup> He summarised his theology from these Paris studies in the *Breviloquium*.<sup>128</sup> In 1257, he was elected Minister General of his Order. He then went to Assisi and spent time on Mount La Verna. This period saw him write a number of works of theology, influenced by his Franciscanism and directed to the spiritual needs of the Order. They include, *The Journey of the Mind into God*, *The Tree of Life*, *The Triple Way* and the *Major Life of St. Francis*.<sup>129</sup> The 1266 General Chapter of Paris accepted this last as the definitive life of Francis for the whole Order, ordering the destruction of all previous legends. Later in life, when controversies dogged the Franciscans at Paris, he wrote a *Defence of the Mendicants*.<sup>130</sup> He also wrote *Collations on the Ten Commandments*, on the *Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* and the *Six days of Creation*.<sup>131</sup> The works of this later period synthesise the academic theology of his Paris studies and the spirituality of Francis, which shaped his inspirational works. In Bonaventure's work, therefore, is a body of theology of the highest medieval scholarship, which has

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127Bonaventure, *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia S. Bonaventurae*, 10 vols. (Quarrachi, *Ad Claras Aquas*, 1882-1902) vols. I-IV / *Commentarius in Evangelium Lucae*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII, pp. 1-604 / *Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 237-532 / *Commentarius in Librum Ecclesiastes*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. VI, pp. 1-103 / *Quaestiones Disputatae de Scientia Christi*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 1-44 / *Quaestiones Disputatae de Mysterio Trinitatis*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 45-115 / *Quaestiones Disputatae de Perfectione Evangelica*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 117-198.

128Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, J. de Vinck, trans., *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. II (Paterson, NJ, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1963).

129Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, P. Boehner, and Z. Hayes, eds., *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. II (St. Bonaventure, NY, Saint Bonaventure University, Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002) / *The Tree of Life: A Meditation on the Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ*, and *The Triple Way, or Love Enkindled*, in: J. de Vinck, trans., *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. I, (Paterson, N.J., St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960) / *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, pp. 525-645.

130Bonaventure, *Defense of the Mendicants*, J. de Vinck, trans., *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. IV, (Paterson, NJ, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1966).

131Bonaventure, *Collationes de Donis Spiritus Sancti*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 457-503. / *Collations on the Six Days*, J. de Vinck, trans., *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. V (Paterson, NJ, St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970) / *Collationes de Decem Praeceptis*, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. V, pp. 505-532.

among its main influences the spiritual vision of St. Francis, his founder. Because of the degree of commonality between the vision and values expressed in Francis' writings and those of Bonaventure, scholars looking for a Franciscan theology have tended to turn to Bonaventure's highly developed synthesis rather than to Francis' own writings.<sup>132</sup> Bonaventure came to be seen as the scholar who theologised the charism of his founder, as Eric Doyle taught.<sup>133</sup> Cousins also wrote of Bonaventure, '...the distinctive quality of his Christology arose out of the much more recent tradition of Francis. In Bonaventure's time it had not yet been shaped into a synthetic vision and formulated as an intellectual position. In this Bonaventure himself was a pioneer.'<sup>134</sup> Zachary Hayes shared this view: 'Francis is pre-eminently a man of deep religious experience, and in a privileged sense Bonaventure is the theologian of that experience.'<sup>135</sup> This perception of Francis has been strengthened by a further factor, namely, his lack of clerical education.

**3) Francis' basic level of education:** A third reason that the writings were passed over as theology was that Francis was not trained as a theologian, as Matura has observed.<sup>136</sup> He had little formal education except in Assisi's cathedral school up to the age of about fourteen, where he probably learned to read and write and acquired rudimentary Latin.<sup>137</sup> He was in the habit of dictating writings to brothers who were more able scribes.<sup>138</sup> *The Praises of God* and *Letter to Brother Leo*, Francis wrote in his own handwriting in Latin.<sup>139</sup> In Kajetan Esser's 1976 edition of Francis' works, the Latin in his handwritten texts appears to be laced with vernacular dialect and errors.<sup>140</sup> However, Attilio Bartoli Langeli's 1994 re-reading of the manuscripts has eliminated the worst errors as probable misreadings.<sup>141</sup> Paolazzi inferred from this that Francis' Latin was probably better than scholars had previously assumed.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, Bartoli

132Paul Rout's 1996 book, *Francis and Bonaventure*, highlighted the commonality of thought between the two authors.

133Doyle, E., 'Franciscan Spirituality', *Religious Life Review*, 21, Sept-Oct 1982, pp. 250-259, in: *My Heart's Quest: Collected Writings of Eric Doyle, Friar Minor, Theologian* (Canterbury, FISC, 2005) pp. 76-7 / *The Disciple and the Master: St. Bonaventure's Sermons on St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1983) p. 2.

134Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 65.

135Hayes, Z., Foreword, *The Disciple and the Master*, 1983, p. x.

136Matura, 'Francis: Theologian?' p. 21.

137Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, pp. 94, 109.

138Rout, *Francis and Bonaventure*, p. 10. For dictation, see (*Test 15, TPJ, 2C 163, The Assisi Compilation (AC) 83, The Mirror of Perfection, The Sabatier Edition, (2MP) 87*). The fact that Leo specially noted that *The Praises of God* and *The Blessing* were written in Francis' own hand suggests that this was a rare occurrence.

139Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 8.

140Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes' p. 325.

141Bartoli Langeli, A., 'Gli scritti da Francesco. L'autografia di un illiteratus,' *Frate Francesco d'Assisi (Atti del XXI Convegno Internazionale, Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo)*, 1994, 1, pp. 135-148, cited in: Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes,' p. 328.

142*Ibid.*

Langeli had concluded from his study of Francis' autographs that he was unaccustomed to writing and was only semi-literate.<sup>143</sup>

Since he was not a professionally-trained theologian, Francis did not set out to compose a *Summa*, or even to present Christian doctrine in a systematic way. His writings are responses to particular situations and inspirations in the course of his spiritual journey and mission.<sup>144</sup> However, studies of his works have indicated that several were composed with great care and over a period of time. While Esser had maintained that *The Testament* was written entirely on one occasion, Miccoli argued that its careful composition was a deliberate process over the final days or weeks of Francis' life.<sup>145</sup> Laurent Gallant and André Cirino have shed light on the intricate creative composition of *The Office of the Passion*, which they believe was in progress over ten to twelve years of Francis' life.<sup>146</sup> The study of *The Earlier Rule* by Flood and Matura argued for its having been composed in stages from 1209/10 to 1221.<sup>147</sup>

Notwithstanding that his works were composed with deliberation and care, some over a period of days, weeks or years, their differing genres and intended uses and readership mean that most of the texts do not appear to be consciously or formally related to each other, nor are they ordered in any sequence as a complete body of work. This is a main reason why most scholars looking for a Franciscan theology have turned to Bonaventure's systematic synthesis. Francis' writings cover a variety of literary genres: poetry, prayer, letters, legislation, exhortation and instruction. Some writings mix and traverse genres.<sup>148</sup> Another discouraging factor, therefore, is that his writing never appears in the technical language of theology but often in the style of personal prayer, exhortation or poetry. Most of the writers of the Medieval Church, apart from some of the women mystics, had a clerical education.<sup>149</sup> Francis' lack of such education meant that he often used scribes. He also needed to collaborate with others in writing *The Later Rule* which required the formal, legal style of an official Church document.<sup>150</sup>

143Bartoli Langeli, 'Gli scritti da Francesco', p. 122, n. 4., cited in: *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 123, fn b.

144Nguyen-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 14.

145Miccoli, G., 'Francis of Assisi's Christian Proposal' (*La proposta cristiana di Francesco d' Assisi*, *Studi Medievali*, 24, 1983, pp. 17-76) E. Hagman, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, August 1989, pp. 127-172.

146Cirino, A. and Gallant, L., *The Geste of the Great King: Office of the Passion of Francis of Assisi* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 2001) p. 199.

147Flood, D. and Matura, T., *The Birth of a Movement: A Study of the First Rule of St. Francis*, P. Schwartz and P. Lachance, trans. (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1975).

148*The Earlier Rule*, for example, is a legislative document which also contains exhortation (*ER* XVII, 17-19, XXI, 2-9) and prayer (XXIII). *The Letter to the Entire Order* ends with a prayer (*LtOrd* 50-52).

149Matura: *Francis: The Message*, p. 7.

150The legal style of *The Later Rule* indicates that Francis had help from canonists in its composition (Armstrong *et al.*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, introductory note, p. 99).

Francis' habit of dictation has raised questions of the authentic transmission and originality of his written works. Esser concluded that mistakes in the Latin writings were due to hasty translation, as Francis dictated in the vernacular. Furthermore, he surmised that Francis used various scribes. This would explain differences in style between the writings, since he may have dictated 'only the ideas' leaving the scribes to express them more fully.<sup>151</sup> A number of scholars such as Stanislao da Campagnola, Fidel Aizpurúa and Schmucki were influenced by Esser's views.<sup>152</sup> Matura agreed that Francis may have dictated in Umbrian dialect, which was then translated by a scribe.<sup>153</sup>

Carlo Paolazzi set out to test Esser's theories about Francis' dictating. Paolazzi extracted from two of the early sources, *The Mirror of Perfection* and *The Assisi Compilation*, the attestation that Francis would not use certain titles for people (2MP 122 /AC 100),<sup>154</sup> since Jesus taught that one should call no one on earth 'Father' or 'Master' (Mt 23: 9-10).<sup>155</sup> The author then compared this discipline to the writings, to test the authenticity of their being directly dictated and worded by Francis. He found no violation of this '*usus loquendi*' in the writings. Citing Francis' refusal to call a material thing his own in *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* by Celano (2C 59) and *The Mirror of Perfection* (2MP 9),<sup>156</sup> Paolazzi also applied this rule to Francis' writings and again, found no violations. Regarding the theory that Francis dictated in Umbrian dialect, Paolazzi observed that remnants of the vernacular found in the Latin text would have been translated by the scribes had they not been part of Francis' own dictated Latin. Regarding differences in style between texts, Paolazzi's study demonstrated that, regardless of their differing genres, all the writings conformed to a use of language inspired by Gospel teachings.<sup>157</sup> Francis' biographers, on the other hand, did not observe

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151Esser, K., *Gli Scritti di S. Francesco d'Assisi. Nuova edizione critica e versione italiana* (Padua: Messagero, 1982) p. 75, cited in: Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes', p. 325. / *Die Opuscula des hl. Franziskus von Assisi, Neue textkritische Edition* (Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, Grottaferrata-Rome, 1976) cited from the restored 1989 ed. of E. Grau, in: Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes', p. 325.

152da Campagnola, S., intro., Menestò, E., et al., eds., *Fontes Franciscani* (Assisi, Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995) pp. 5-6, in: Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes', p. 327 / Other scholars supporting Esser's views: Aizpurúa, F., 'Following Francis: A Catechism of Franciscan Spirituality: Part Two; Writings', *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 17, Supplement, 2003, p. 44 / Schmucki, O., 'The Mysticism of St. Francis in the Light of His Writings' (*Zur Mystik des Hl. Franziskus von Assisi im Lichte seiner "Schriften"*, *Abendlandische Mystik im Mittelalter Stuttgart*, 1986, pp. 241-68) I. McCormick, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1989, p. 247.

153Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 10-11.

1542MP 122, in: R.J. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellman and W.J. Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 3, *The Prophet* (NY: New City Press, 2001) pp. 370 / AC 100, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, pp. 203-4.

155Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes', p. 329.

1562C 59, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, pp. 286-7 / 2MP 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 3, pp. 261-2.

157Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes', p. 339.



such lexical rules.<sup>158</sup> Paolazzi concluded from this evidence that Francis did not dictate general ideas in Umbrian and leave the phrasing to scribes. Rather, he dictated directly in Latin, wording his own ideas. This convincing study removes the problems of having to account for various scribes being co-authors with Francis and for possible errors in translation to Latin from Francis' vernacular. On the whole, close studies of his writings are increasingly showing that, although he lacked a clerical education and skill in writing, Francis' assessment of himself as '*simplex et idiota*' did not take into account his intellectual and creative ability.<sup>159</sup> Matura concluded that '...he had an above-average intelligence and an especially retentive memory.'<sup>160</sup>

**4) The 'fragmentary quality' of the writings:** The fourth, and perhaps the greatest obstacle to reading the writings as theology, is their 'fragmentary quality', identified by Nguyễn-Van-Khanh and Matura.<sup>161</sup> Working on the hypothesis that Francis discovered a universal vision of God and creation, that vision would have been communicated in pieces of writing over years, in response to diverse concrete situations. The challenge for one who considers Francis a theologian is to order and reassemble from these fragments the total theological vision that inspired them. The difficulty of this task could explain why so few attempts have been made to date. It may be compared to attempting a complex jigsaw puzzle without having the box to show how the finished picture should look.

Bonaventure's synthesis is easy to picture as a whole through visual symbols. Cousins has likened the structure of his theology to a mandala, of which the centre represents Christ.<sup>162</sup> Bonaventure himself symbolised his Christocentric concept of reality as a circle, the centre of which was located by means of a cross.<sup>163</sup> His *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum* has been called a microcosm of Bonaventure's entire theological system.<sup>164</sup> The visual structure for this work is the Crucified Christ, who was reported to have appeared to Francis as a six-winged seraph.<sup>165</sup> All these visual symbols show that the whole edifice of Bonaventure's thought was Christocentric.

When one tries similarly to grasp the structure of Francis' thought, it proves

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<sup>158</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>159</sup>TPJ 11, in: Menestò, *et al.*, *Fontes Franciscani*, p. 242.

<sup>160</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 8.

<sup>161</sup>Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 14 / Matura, *Francis - Theologian?* p. 21.

<sup>162</sup>Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 178-197.

<sup>163</sup>Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, de Vinck, trans., p. 13.

<sup>164</sup>Rout, *Francis and Bonaventure*, p. 7.

<sup>165</sup>Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, ProL., 2-3, in: A. Cirino, and J Raischl, *The Journey Into God: A Forty Day Retreat with Bonaventure, Francis and Clare* (Cincinnati, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2002) pp. 345-6.

much more problematic. In this case, there is no consensus of opinion among scholars as to what is at the centre of Francis' theology or how his vision is constructed. Recent studies of the writings of Francis have highlighted the Trinitarian focus of his thought and, within this, the primacy of the Father.<sup>166</sup> This does not appear to agree with the emphatically Christocentric picture of Francis' spirituality portrayed in the biographies.<sup>167</sup> Bernard McGinn noted: 'What is most striking is the distance between Francis the writer and Francis the saint as portrayed by the hagiographers. Some aspects of the hagiographical picture of the saint, such as his role as perfect *imitatio Christi* ... are not found in any explicit way in his own writings.'<sup>168</sup> Thus, some scholars maintain that Christ occupied the central place in Francis' religious vision, while others challenge this view from the evidence of his own writings.

Among those who held that Francis' thought was Christocentric was Eric Doyle.<sup>169</sup> Accounting for the Trinitarian aspect of his vision, Doyle and Damian McElrath wrote that Christ was, 'the Revealer of the Trinity.'<sup>170</sup> Keith Douglass Warner commented that 'Christocentrism has been a defining characteristic of Franciscan theology since Francis himself.'<sup>171</sup> In a similar vein, Kenan Osborne stated: 'It is the humility of the incarnation that is central to Francis' vision.'<sup>172</sup> Octavian Schmucki also remarked that the imitation of Christ was central in Francis' life.<sup>173</sup>

Other scholars challenged this traditional perspective on Francis' thought. As Nguyễn-Van-Khanh argued, 'It is often said that the spirituality of Francis is Christocentric. This is true. But it is not pan-Christic.'..Francis' thought is more Trinitarian than one might think. In the history of salvation, it is the entire Trinity who work in common. To insist in a one-sided manner on Francis' Christocentrism, by

166Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 54, 168 / Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' pp. 19, 22.

167Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 60, 75. / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, Foreword, R.J. Armstrong, parag. 3 / Delio, I., *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy, IL, Franciscan Press, 1998) p. 5.

168McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi a Mystic?', pp. 148-9.

169Doyle, E., 'Reflections of the Franciscan Charism', *Review for Religious*, 36, June 1977, pp. 12-35, in: A. Cirino, and J. Raischl, eds., *My Heart's Quest: Collected Writings of Eric Doyle, Friar Minor, Theologian* (Canterbury, FISC, 2005) p. 97 / 'St. Francis and Theology', *The Cord*, 32, 4, 1982, pp. 108-111, in: *My Heart's Quest*, p. 135.

170Doyle, E. and McElrath, D., 'St. Francis of Assisi and the Christocentric Character of Franciscan Life and Doctrine', in: D. McElrath, ed., *Franciscan Christology* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1980) p. 5.

171Warner, K.D., 'Get Him out of the birdbath', in: D.M. Nothwehr, ed., *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader* (Quincy IL, Franciscan Press, 2002) p. 364.

172Osborne, K.B., *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components* (St. Bonaventure NY, The Franciscan Institute, 2003) p. 36.

173Schmucki, O., 'The Mysticism of St. Francis in the Light of His Writings' ('Zur Mystik des Hl. Franziskus von Assisi im Lichte seiner "Schriften"', *Abendlandische Mystik im Mittelalter Stuttgart*, 1986) I. McCormick, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1989, p. 255.

reason of his overflowing love for Christ, would be inexact.<sup>174</sup> Ilia Delio added, 'Despite the fact that he is remembered historically as a second Christ (*alter Christus*) he shows almost no personal relationship to Christ in his writings. However, he does refer to the father personally as, "my holy Father", or "Holy Father".<sup>175</sup> Matura observed, 'The passages that speak explicitly about the Son are much fewer than those concerning the Father'.<sup>176</sup> Schmucki made the same point.<sup>177</sup> Matura also contended: 'Authors are continually writing about his apparent preoccupation with the humanity of Christ and making it the centre of his spirituality to the exclusion of everything else. But his writings demonstrate that his teaching is actually centred on the Father, who holds the primacy in everything.'<sup>178</sup> ... 'We must emphasize the fact that, when Francis speaks at any length about Christ, he always does so in the context of his Father or the Trinity.'<sup>179</sup>

Some writers have tried to articulate the crucial place of the Trinity and, particularly, of God the Father, in Francis' thought in relation to Christ. Nguyễn-Van-Khanh observed, 'Christ is never considered apart from the Father and the Spirit.'<sup>180</sup> Armstrong commented, 'Through Nguyen-Nguyễn-Van-Khanh's thorough study, the profound Trinitarian foundations of Francis' relentless pursuit of identifying with Christ became clear in a way that was unfamiliar.'<sup>181</sup> In a study with Brady, he suggested, 'Traditionally, Franciscan spiritual writers have identified the approach of Saint Francis as Christocentric. ... What is unique in his writings, however, is his intuition of the penetrating character of the Trinitarian life in the daily living of Christian faith.'<sup>182</sup> Matura concluded from Francis' writings that God the Father occupied the central place in Francis' vision; so, too, did the Trinity and also the human person.<sup>183</sup> Sebastián López, on the other hand, saw the Holy Spirit as the centre of Francis' theology.<sup>184</sup>

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174Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 243, 80.

175Delio, I., *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy, IL, Franciscan Press, 1998) p. 10.

176Francis: *The Message*, p. 60.

177Schmucki, O., 'Fundamental Characteristics of the Franciscan "Form of Life"' (*Linee fondamentali della "forma vitae" nell'esperienza di san Francesco*), *Lettura biblico-teologica delle Fonti Francescane*, Roma: Ed. Antonianum, 1979) E. Hagman, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1992, p. 334.

178Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 83.

179*Ibid.*, p. 60.

180Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 224.

181Armstrong, R.J., Foreword, Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. xiii.

182Armstrong, R.J. and Brady, I.C., trans. and intro, J. Vaughn, Preface, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality Series (Ramsey, NJ, Paulist Press, 1982) pp. 12-13.

183Matura, T. *Dwelling Place*, p. xii / *Francis: The Message*, pp. 30, 35, 54 / 'Francis: Theologian?' p. 19.

184López, S., 'La Regla de los Hermanos Menores, Pacto de Eterna Alianza,' *Selecciones de Franciscanismo*, 4, 1976, pp. 47-49, cited in: Delio, *Crucified Love*, p. 10.

Other writers, such as Bernard McGinn and Ilia Delio opted for a combined Christological and Trinitarian focus in which the Holy Spirit was central.<sup>185</sup>

The above overview shows a general confusion of opinions on the structure of Francis' thought. As McGinn commented: 'Despite the considerable body of original research that has been produced in recent years on Francis' writings, it is still exceedingly difficult to present any single synoptic view of his theology.'<sup>186</sup> Armstrong went further in saying, 'Anyone who has had the experience of trying to open up Francis' vision through his writings alone will know how futile the attempt is without referring to his life.'<sup>187</sup> The problem of clearly establishing the structure of Francis' theology in a way which accounts for all the elements of his thought must be overcome if it is to become widely accepted, studied and applied in the Church. It is mainly this fourth problem that the present thesis will address, although an answer to the third issue will also be proposed in chapter five. This study of Francis' writings will test the hypothesis that the concept of the coincidence of opposites is a key to the interconnectedness of the various elements of theology expressed in them and, using this tool, one can reconstruct the panology underlying them all. By demonstrating the validity of this assertion, the present thesis will advance the argument for regarding Francis as a theologian. Matura asserted that a reason Francis was a theologian was that some of his writings have a cosmic theological scope.<sup>188</sup> The present study will strengthen this case by showing, through consideration of his writings as a whole body of thought, that Francis had a coherent and consistent vision, relating all things to God.

Any study of the theology in Francis' writings rests on a body of prior research, which has established his authentic writings, examined their historical background and produced critical editions of the texts. An overview of this foundational scholarship will be followed by a review of some previous attempts to summarise his vision from his written works. Then there will be some references to the work of other authors whose ideas have influenced the present thesis, apart from those studies involving the coincidence of opposites, which have already been reviewed in the Introduction.

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185McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi a Mystic?' pp. 149-50 / Delio, *Crucified Love*, p. 10.

186McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi a Mystic?' p. 148.

187Armstrong, R.J., *Writings for a Gospel Life*, p. 14.

188Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' 2008, p. 14.

### Foundational research on the writings of Francis

Following his death in 1226, manuscripts of Francis' writings began to be collected in various places. The earliest of these, the Assisi codex, MS. 338, dates from between the 1240s to 1260s.<sup>189</sup> *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* and *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, as well as *The Canticle of Exhortation* are preserved in Francis' own tongue. All the others are in Latin. Matura and Hermann assume that apart from *The Praises of God with A Blessing for Brother Leo* and *A Letter to Brother Leo*, he always dictated to a scribe.<sup>190</sup>

The earliest printed collection of his writings we have comes from Venice and was made in 1504.<sup>191</sup> More collections followed; in 1509 in Rouen,<sup>192</sup> and in 1511 in Salamanca.<sup>193</sup> Luke Wadding's early collection was produced in 1623 at Antwerp, and this remained the main reference for Francis' writings until the twentieth century.<sup>194</sup> In 1904, a first critical edition of Francis' writings, edited by Leonard Lemmens, was produced by the *Collegio di San Bonaventura* in Quaracchi, near Florence.<sup>195</sup> A selection of works from those in Latin were included. Another critical edition, by Heinrich Boehmer, appeared in the same year.<sup>196</sup> In 1964, Benen Fahy made an English translation of the Quaracchi edition, with introduction and notes by Placid Hermann, including the vernacular *Canticle of Sir Brother Sun*.<sup>197</sup> This edition, however, questioned the authenticity of *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, *A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua* and *Absorbeat*.

The *English Omnibus of Sources*, based on the Quaracchi edition, was published in 1973 and retained *The Canticle of Brother Sun* among other writings of Francis. It reproduced *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father* and *Absorbeat*, while listing them as doubtful regarding their authenticity. Early hagiography of Francis was also included.<sup>198</sup>

189For a detailed treatment of the manuscript tradition, see Pellegrini, L., 'The Transmission of the Writings of Brother Francis: On the Trail of the Manuscript Tradition', in: M.W. Blastic, J.M. Hammond and J.A.W. Hellmann, eds., *Studies in Early Franciscan Sources*, vol. 1, *The Writings of Francis of Assisi: Letters and Prayers* (St. Bonaventure, NY, Franciscan Institute Publications, 2011) pp. 21-50.

190Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 10-11 / Hermann, P., Introduction, *English Omnibus*, p. 18.

191*Speculum B. Francisci et Sociorum Eius* (Venice, 1504, Metz, 1509) cited in: Habig, ed., *English Omnibus*, p. 11.

192*Speculum Minorum* (Rouen, 1509) cited in: Habig, ed., *English Omnibus*, p. 11.

193*Monumenta Ordinis Minorum* (Salamanca, 1511) cited in: Habig, ed., *English Omnibus*, p. 11.

194Wadding, L., ed., *Beati Francisci Assisiatis Opuscula* (Antwerp, 1623) cited in: Habig, ed., *English Omnibus*, p. 12.

195Lemmens, L., *Opuscula Sancti Patris Francisci Assisiensis, Secundum Codices mss. emendata et denuo edita a PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae* (Quaracchi, College of St. Bonaventure, 1904).

196Boehmer, H., ed., *Analekten zur Geschichte des Franciscus von Assisi*. (Tübingen-Leipzig, J.C.B. Mohr, 1904) revised by F. Wiegand (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1930).

197Fahy, B., trans., *The Writings of St. Francis*, P. Hermann, intro. and notes (London and FHP, Chicago, Burns and Oats, 1963).

198Habig, M.A., ed., *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, B. Fahy, trans., P. Hermann intro. and notes (Chicago, Franciscan Herald

Kajetan Esser's 1976 influential critical edition in German included the writings in Latin and Italian.<sup>199</sup> Esser's edition excluded *Absorbeat* from the authentic writings but retained *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father* and *A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua*. This publication also included five more writings which were rejected from the Quarrachi and Fahy editions: *The Second Letter to the Custodians*, *The First Letter to the Faithful*, the *Exhortation to the Praise of God*, a *Fragment of Rule* text pre-dating the 1221 *Rule* and *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*. In addition, it contains summaries of eight dictated writings reported in early sources: in the chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston - *De Adventu Fratrum Minorum in Anglia*, *The Mirror of Perfection*, *The Deeds of Saint Francis and His Companions*, and in some of St. Clare's writings.

An English translation of the writings of Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi by Ignatius Brady and Regis Armstrong was published in 1982 in *The Classics of Western Spirituality* series.<sup>200</sup> It includes the following writings not found in the English Omnibus: *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*, *The First Letter to the Faithful*, *The Second Letter to the Custodians*, *The Canticle of Exhortation* and the *Exhortation to the Praise of God*. It also includes *The Form of Life* and *Last Will for St. Clare*, plus seven 'dictated writings' which are inserted or referred to in early sources. The *Absorbeat* is excluded. This edition has footnotes and an introduction to each text.

In 1995, *Fontes Franciscani*, a new critical edition of the writings of Sts. Francis and Clare and early sources for the life of Francis, was published in Assisi. The writings are reproduced in their original Latin or Umbrian dialect in the cases of *The Canticle of Exhortation* and *The Canticle of Brother Sun*.<sup>201</sup>

A new critical edition in English of Francis' writings and the early sources for his life with footnotes and introductions to each work was published in three volumes from 1999-2001, edited by William Short, Wayne Hellmann and Regis Armstrong. Volume one reproduces thirty-one pieces of writing.<sup>202</sup> Most are presented in chronological order and approximately dated. Eight of these remain undated. Like the editions of Esser and Armstrong, this collection excludes the *Absorbeat*. Among the 'dictated writings', only *True and Perfect Joy* was included in this volume. Francis' *Form of Life*

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Press, 1973).

199Esser K., ed., *Die Opuscula des Hl. Franziskus von Assisi Neue textkritische Edition* (Grottaferrata, Rome, Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae *Ad Claras Aquas*, 1976).

200 Armstrong, R.J. and Brady, I.C., trans. and intro, J. Vaughn, Preface, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality Series (Ramsey, NJ, Paulist Press, 1982).

201Menestò, E., ed., *Fontes Franciscani* (Assisi, Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995).

202Armstrong, R.J., Hellman, J.A.W. and Short, W.J., eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint* (NY: New City Press, 1999).

and *Last Will for St. Clare*, which are reported in *St. Clare's Rule* and included in the English Omnibus, are not in this edition. Of the two writings in Francis' own hand, two differing editions of each piece are offered. Of *The Praises of God* and *A Blessing for Brother Leo*, and of *A Letter to Brother Leo*, the editions of Duane Lapsanski and Kajetan Esser, plus the more recent editions of Attilio Bartoli Langeli are presented.<sup>203</sup> Additions to this volume, which are not found in the Omnibus, are as follows: the *Exhortation to the Praise of God*, *The Canticle of Exhortation*, *The Second Letter to the Custodians*, *The First Letter to the Faithful* and *The Prayer Before The Crucifix*, *Fragments* from three sources, which are a manuscript discovered in Worcester Cathedral, sayings of Francis added to the *Exposition of the Rule of the Friars Minor* by Hugh of Digne and from Thomas of Celano's *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*.

This three-volume collection of primary sources has been supplemented by a set of studies on the historical background to these texts.<sup>204</sup> This collection of essays on the writings of Francis provides a background of scholarship on the texts in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, volume one. The essays cover the aspects of historical and hagiographical background to the writings, the manuscript tradition, recent studies on the text, what the writing reveals about Francis and his spirituality and how it relates to other writings of Francis. A bibliography is given for each piece.

The research outlined above, which has produced critical editions of the writings of Francis in their original Latin or Italian and in English translation, has facilitated much new scholarship on the writings during the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Considering the volume of painstaking and sound research that has gone into producing the most recent critical editions of Francis writings, this study will accept as authentic all the writings collected in volume one of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. It will utilise the English translations provided in this volume, except where it seems more useful to refer to an alternative translation, or to the original Latin or Umbrian dialect of the texts. For the reasons mentioned earlier, this study will also refer to two additional writings of Francis contained in *The Form of Life of Clare of Assisi*, chapter six, which are: *The Form of Life Given to Saint Clare and Her Sisters* and *The Last Will Written for Saint Clare and her Sisters*.<sup>205</sup>

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203Lapsanski, D., 'The Autographs of the "Chartula" of St. Francis of Assisi', *AFH*, vol. 67, 1967, pp. 18-37, cited in: *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 108 / Bartoli Langeli, A., 'Gli scritti da Francesco. L'autografia di un illiteratus,' *Frate Francesco d'Assisi (Atti del XXI Convegno Internazionale, Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo)* 1994, 1, pp. 101-159, cited in: *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 123.

204Blastic, M.W., Hammond, J.M. and Hellmann, J.A.W., eds., *The Writings of Francis of Assisi*, vols. 1 and 2 (NY, St. Bonaventure, Franciscan Institute Publications, 2011).

205Titles from: Armstrong and Brady, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, pp. 44, 46. English

**Significance for this research:** In summary, the foundational research surveyed above has helped to move forward Franciscan scholarship to a point where it could produce the modern collections of the writings of Francis now considered authentic. Among these collections is the critical edition upon which this study will rely, in the main, for English translations of each writing, namely, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, volume one (1999). Thorough studies of the historical background to the writings have also been undertaken for this volume, which are presented in a General Introduction, in introductions to each writing and footnotes. The three-volume collection of studies which was later published to accompany *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* presents the state of current research and the historical context of each writing. The editors of these volumes intended them to provide a historical and critical basis for 'solid theological reflection'.<sup>206</sup> Because of the foundational research into the writings of Francis which has already been done, the present study can concentrate on the theological dimension of Francis' work, bearing in mind its historical context. Therefore, questions of authenticity or translation will not be addressed, as this has already been done thoroughly by many scholars. However, where a question of this kind connected with a text could have a bearing on the arguments presented, this will be acknowledged.

### **Growing interest in Francis' writings and theology**

Lazáro Iriarte in 1974 and a succession of later authors came to recommend these texts as touchstones of authenticity regarding the thought and intentions of their author, by which one could assess the pictures created by the early hagiography.<sup>207</sup> Armstrong *et al.* wrote in 1999, 'It would seem appropriate for Francis' own writings to be the most valuable source for discovering him. This is certainly true at the close of the twentieth century for no generation has had the same access to his writings as the present.' Doyle and McElrath in 1980 drew attention to the importance of the writings in determining Francis' authentic Christology: 'In his writings we discover Francis' own concepts before they were defined and systematized by professional theologians.'<sup>208</sup> Schmucki made a similar point in 1992: 'Francis never isolated one of the Christological mysteries. Therefore, to speak of the Poverello's "passion-centrism" is to admit to having never

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translation from *CA:ED*, p. 118.

<sup>206</sup>*The Writings of Francis of Assisi: Letters and Prayers*, p. viii.

<sup>207</sup>Iriarte de Aspuz, L., *The Franciscan Calling*, C.M. Kelly, trans. (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1974) p. 221.

<sup>208</sup>Doyle and McElrath, 'Francis and the Christocentric', p. 4.



read his writings'.<sup>209</sup> The work of Giovanni Miccoli has been especially influential in establishing a scholarly practice of judging the accuracy of early accounts of Francis' life and spirituality on the basis of his own writings. In 1983, he emphasised that the various early biographies of Francis arose from particular historical needs in the Order at the time of their composition, which affected their pictures of Francis. These early sources were also influenced by cultural paradigms and stereotypes. Therefore, the sources do not present the original religious experience of Francis, but rather his biographers' interpretations of it.<sup>210</sup> McGinn added that the early biographies '...must be used with caution, especially when it comes to interpreting Francis' own teaching.'<sup>211</sup> In 2003, Miccoli studied the writings in order to draw conclusions about the Franciscan Order's beginnings.<sup>212</sup> Schmucki proposed to examine Francis' mysticism in his writings rather than looking for it in the early accounts of his life, which could be affected by the authors' biases.<sup>213</sup> Jay Hammond was of the same opinion in his study of Francis' mysticism. He nevertheless examined Francis' prayers in the context of early hagiographical sources.<sup>214</sup> Jacques Dalarun commented in 2006: 'Surely the writings reveal the naked truth about Francis, whereas the biographies can only represent a hazy memory. It is reality versus the memory of an experience.'<sup>215</sup>

The view that there is a 'theology' embedded in Francis' writings is gaining ground among scholars, in spite of the drawbacks mentioned above. Among those authors who have described his thought and writings as 'theological' were Iriarte, Miccoli and Aizpurúa.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, all these writers used the word 'deep' or 'deeply' of the theological nature of his thought. McGinn also referred to his 'profound theology'.<sup>217</sup> This would suggest that the theologian is an aspect of Francis which is too important to be overlooked. Schmucki only ventured to say, 'Francis proposes a kind of

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209Schmucki, 'Fundamental Characteristics', p. 336.

210Miccoli, G., 'Francis of Assisi's Christian Proposal' (*La proposta cristiana di Francesco d' Assisi*, *Studi Medievali*, 24, 1983, 17-76) E. Hagman, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, August 1989, pp. 127-172.

211McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi as Mystic?' p. 147.

212Miccoli, G., 'The Writings of Francis as Sources for the History of Franciscan Origins' (*Gli scritti di Francesco come fonti per la storia delle origini minoritiche*, *Verba Domini mei*, Rome, 2003, pp. 149-171) E. Hagman, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1-21.

213Schmucki, 'Mysticism of St. Francis'.

214Hammond, J.M., 'Saint Francis' Doxological Mysticism in Light of His Prayers', in: J.M. Hammond, ed., *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (London, NY, NCP, 2004) pp. 105, 112.

215Dalarun, J., *Francis of Assisi and the Feminine* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 2006) p. 95.

216Iriarte, *The Franciscan Calling*, pp. 32-3 / Miccoli, 'Writings of Francis as Sources', pp. 1-2 / Aizpurúa, 'Following Francis', p. 69.

217McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi as Mystic?' pp. 151-2.

theology'.<sup>218</sup> Robert Karris wrote that Francis, 'adapted the spiritual traditions of his day' in 'his theological workshop'.<sup>219</sup> Short and Nguyễn-Van-Khanh simply stated that Francis was a theologian, while Matura maintained that his message was theological.<sup>220</sup> This opinion raises the question of what kind of theologian Francis was, considering his non-academic background. He has been designated a 'vernacular theologian' by McGinn, Chinnici and Delio.<sup>221</sup> Nguyễn-Van-Khanh commented: We could speak in terms of an intuitive theology.<sup>222</sup>

**Significance for this research:** Authors who stressed the importance of serious attention to Francis' own compositions paved the way for detailed studies of his thought, in individual writings and in his works in general. Renewed interest in Francis' writings has opened the door to a perception of his message and its significance within the Franciscan tradition and the Church. Hence, the present thesis is built upon the work of such scholars as mentioned above, who raised awareness of the value of studying Francis' writings and those who perceived their theological depth. However, despite the growing academic interest in this area, the problems highlighted above still prevent a general acceptance of Francis as a theologian. This is clearly demonstrated by Kenan Osborne's, *History of Franciscan Theology*, which, excluding Francis, begins chronologically from Alexander of Hales.<sup>223</sup> While the historical concentration on Francis' life and personality is a scholarly trend which is changing with time, and his thought system may yet be brought out of the shadow of Bonaventure, this cannot be fully accomplished until a clear theological vision can be pieced together from the fragments communicated in his writings. This is the problem the present thesis will address. There follows a review of some attempts which have already been made to present a synthesis of Francis' theology from his writings.

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218Schmucki, 'Fundamental Characteristics', p. 340.

219Karris, R.J., *The Admonitions of St. Francis: Sources and Meanings* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1999) p. x.

220Short, W., *The Franciscans* (Delaware, Michael Glazier, 1989) p. 104 / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 5 / Matura, *Dwelling Place*, p. xii.

221McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi as Mystic?' p. 148 / Chinnici, J.P., Introduction, Osborne, K.B., *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 2003) p. x / Delio, *Franciscan Prayer*, p. 7.

222Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 6.

223Osborne, K.B., ed., *The History of Franciscan Theology* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 1994).

### Previous attempts to reassemble the vision

In 1974, Lazáro Iriarte de Aspurz published, *The Franciscan Calling*.<sup>224</sup> In this book, the author made a study of the writings of Francis, also calling on the early sources for his life. From the texts of the writings, he extrapolated certain spiritual themes, such as the imitation of Christ, poverty and humility which made up his overall synthesis of the Franciscan charism. This study was undertaken in response to the Second Vatican Council's call to religious institutes to return to their founding charisms. However, this is a summary of Francis' charism rather than his theology and does not advance understanding of his theological vision. Iriarte's considerable use of the early biographies also leaves his picture of Francis' thought open to the distortions of hagiographical bias.

In 2001, Edith van den Goorbergh and Theodore Zweerman published *Respectfully Yours: Signed and Sealed, Francis of Assisi: Aspects of his Authorship and Focuses of His Spirituality*.<sup>225</sup> The authors presented their reading of selected texts from Francis' writings. Using these texts, they aimed to demonstrate a biblical pattern to Francis' spirituality, founded on the idea of the Trinity. They analysed the following writings: *The Testament*, chapter twenty-one of *The Earlier Rule*, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, *The Admonitions*, *A Salutation of the Virtues*, *The Later Rule* chapters five and six, which they interpreted as a summary of Francis' spirituality, and *The Praises of God*. They interpreted *The Praises of God* and *Admonition Twenty-Seven* in the light of the description of Francis' reception of the stigmata by Thomas of Celano. The disadvantage of reading Francis according to the picture of him given in the hagiography has already been mentioned above.

A drawback to the structure of this study is that it neglects several writings which present important parts of Francis' theological vision: *The Letter to the Entire Order*, the *First and Second Letters to the Faithful*, and especially chapters twenty-two and twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*. Matura had even presented the *Second Letter to the Faithful* and chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* as key to Francis' theological vision. Hence, it appears that this study does not look at the writings as a whole, to see what vision underlies and unifies them, but runs the risk of tailoring the material examined to the authors' interpretation.

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<sup>224</sup>Iriarte de Aspurz, L., *The Franciscan Calling*, C.M. Kelly, trans (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1974).

<sup>225</sup>van den Goorbergh, E. and Zweerman, T., *Respectfully Yours: Signed and Sealed, Francis of Assisi: Aspects of His Authorship and Focuses of His Spirituality* (St. Bonaventure, NY, The Franciscan Institute, 2001).

The authors viewed Francis as a mystic<sup>226</sup> rather than a theologian. They attributed a hidden structure and numeric symbolism to several of his writings.<sup>227</sup> This is not always convincing. For example, to identify the words, 'this is the sublime height of most exalted poverty' (*LR VI 4*), as the centre of *The Later Rule* is a reasonable assertion, but to interpret them as an allusion to God the Father does not seem compatible with their obviously referring back to the poverty of Jesus in the world (*LR VI 3*).<sup>228</sup> Additionally, the fine crafting needed to deliberately compose a symbolic number of admonitions,<sup>229</sup> does not seem to fit with Francis' basic education, with his habit of dictation and with the practical, evangelical style of his admonitions. The authors acknowledged the factor of Francis' 'simplicity' in their introduction and dismissed it with the argument that he could not be accurately categorised in the opposite extreme, 'among freely associating writers and ecstatic poets'.<sup>230</sup> They asserted that some texts showed evidence of careful composition, which is true, with regard to the *Rules*, *The Canticle of Brother Sun* and *The Office of the Passion*, for example. However, their study takes the case for fine-tuned authorship to what seems an improbable extreme. It would be hard to imagine Francis himself arranging a Christogramme in the structure of a text, when his little education and increasingly poor vision caused him to dictate his thoughts.<sup>231</sup> Such sophistication in written composition would surely require a more sedentary lifestyle and scholarly background than Francis enjoyed, unless scribes or learned collaborators significantly altered his work later on. Van den Goorbergh and Zweerman's study seems to lack an adequate treatment of this problem.

Regarding the structure of his vision, the authors also suggested in their conclusion, that Francis' spirituality was based on three responses, namely: vulnerability, dependency and frailty in opposition to the temptations of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke 4:1-13.<sup>232</sup> Francis' writings contain ample evidence that his thinking was steeped in the four Gospels. For instance, he quoted at length from chapter seventeen of John's Gospel in three writings.<sup>233</sup> Francis also quoted Christ's teaching to love enemies (Mt 5:44) three times (*ER XXII*, 1; *LR X*,10; *2LtF* 38) and referred to it

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226van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, p. 7.

227van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, pp. 84-86, 320-324.

228van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, p. 191.

229van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, p. 86.

230van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, p. 9.

231van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, pp. 79-80, 151, 253-4, 302, 317. / Francis' poor eyesight is mentioned in several early sources, including *AC* 83 and *2C* 34.

232van den Goorbergh and Zweerman, *Respectfully Yours*, p. 386.

233*The First Letter to the Faithful (1LtF)* I, 14-19 / cf. *2LtF* 56-60 / *ER XXII*, 41-55.

twice (*PrOF* 8; *Adm IX*).<sup>234</sup> However, since none of his writings contains a citation of, a conformity, or even a reference to the temptation story in Luke's Gospel, one wonders if it could have been as influential on Francis' spirituality as this book proposes. Nevertheless, the contribution of this study to the subject of Francis' theology is that it challenges common assumptions about his limitations as a writer and stimulates continuing research into his thought and style of authorship.

Thaddée Matura's, *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings*, which is one of the few modern studies of the theology in Francis' writings, has been the most influential on the present thesis.<sup>235</sup> Matura set out to present a summary of Francis' theological vision using only his writings. He perceived the necessity of finding a unifying factor for this vision, 'derived from the texts themselves and not imposed from outside.'<sup>236</sup> The author settled on two texts from the writings which, he believed would offer 'a key to a complete overview of their message': chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* and *The Second Letter to the Faithful*.<sup>237</sup> He claimed that the former summarised Francis' vision,<sup>238</sup> and the latter additionally developed his Christology.<sup>239</sup>

Matura saw the human person at the centre of Francis' theology. He summarised the anthropology in Francis' writings as follows. The human heart is the battleground of good and evil and the centre of the human person.<sup>240</sup> The root of all evil is appropriation but 'nothing belongs to us except our vices and sins' (*ER* XVII, 7). Therefore, Francis exhorted his followers, 'hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves' (*LtOrd* 29).<sup>241</sup> Matura's study also identified Mary as the model of the Christian in her intimacy with the Trinity (*OfP*, Ant.): 'Since this mystery of relationship with the Trinity was fully realized in Mary, it extends also to all the faithful.'<sup>242</sup> Regarding the structure of Francis' theology, Matura found that it closely followed the Gospel,<sup>243</sup> and the Creed, with extra emphasis on the Father and unusual prominence given to the human person, as he highlighted in *The Earlier Rule*, chapter twenty-three.<sup>244</sup>

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234Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 122-3.

235Matura, T., *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings*, P. Barrett, trans., R.A. McKelvie and D. Mitchell, eds. (St. Bonaventure, NY, St. Bonaventure University, 1997; 2004).

236Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. xii.

237Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 28.

238Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 37.

239Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 38.

240Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 96.

241Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 123.

242Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 107.

243Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 172.

244Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 170.

Matura uncovered some important aspects of Francis' Christology, which will also be highlighted in the course of this study. Christ is understood as the revealer of the Father, and, in particular, of the humility of God, by means of the Incarnation and the Eucharist.<sup>245</sup> Francis stressed his function as Mediator, as shown by his extensive quoting from John's Gospel chapter seventeen.<sup>246</sup> Referring to *Admonition One*, Matura extrapolated the idea of Christ as 'the way' to the Father: 'It is He, through His divine and human natures, who will show us the face of the invisible Father.'<sup>247</sup> It can be seen, in this insightful statement by Matura, that it is by means of a union of 'divine and human', previously considered as opposites, that Christ is the Mediator between God and humankind, a path to union with the Trinity. Matura's study also indicates why Francis, known from his biographers as Christ-centered, should address all his prayers to the Father. The supposition is that he prays to the Father in close imitation of Christ.<sup>248</sup> Chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, Matura argued, was painstakingly composed and had cosmic theological scope: 'It refers to the Trinity, to Christ, and to the universe, and its vision is dynamic, historical, and ecclesial.'<sup>249</sup> The author concluded from his study of all the writings that Francis' theology covered the full extent of the Christian vision.<sup>250</sup>

Matura wrote: 'Despite the diversity of Francis' writings and their fragmentary nature, I came to the conclusion that they all stemmed from a unified, structured vision. ...we must find, in the body of the writings themselves, a key, a parameter, a unifying idea that links together and explains their scattered elements.'<sup>251</sup> Although Matura settled on two of the writings as his 'parameter', there is another 'key' to be found within the texts which may be applied throughout the writings. This is the 'coincidence of opposites'. Although its author did not recognise this as a key, Matura's synthesis referred to most of the main elements of Francis' theology, which were held together in a coincidence of opposites, and will, therefore, also feature in the present study.

Matura observed that in Francis' vision, the Trinity was presented as the Alpha and Omega of creation.<sup>252</sup> The Godhead was also both hidden and manifest with regard to human understanding, as Matura implied: 'It has often been said that Francis made

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245Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 70.

246Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 71-2.

247Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 73.

248Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 57-8.

249Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 33.

250Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 29.

251Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 27-8.

252Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 36, 58.

accessible and human the majestic God of the cathedrals. Perhaps; but he did so without lifting the veil off the divine mystery.<sup>1253</sup> His insights also bring to light the coincidence of unity with plurality/diversity in the Triune Godhead. He observed that 'Perfect Trinity and Simple Unity' was used five times, while evocation of the Trinity as, 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit', a total of twenty-five times. The former was 'a kind of liturgical refrain'. Matura wrote that this formula showed Francis' '...deep insight into the "otherness" which characterizes the relationships between the Divine Persons but which does not impinge in any way on their "simple unity".' He concluded regarding Francis' understanding of the Trinity: 'In the Trinity, there is perfect Diversity within the total Unity.'<sup>1254</sup> The author also touched on a coincidence of equality with hierarchy in the Trinity: 'We should also note Francis's, "...hierarchy of Persons." ...the Father ... holds the primacy in everything. Within the mystery of the Trinity there is an order of relationships ... which he grasped and wrote about without using technical theological terminology.'<sup>1255</sup> ...'The primacy or "monarchy" of the Father in Francis's writings does not suppress or diminish in the slightest the Son's divinity or humanity or the Paraclete's presence and "manner of working". Instead, Francis saw that the relationships of the Trinity make for harmony and balance.'<sup>1256</sup>

Matura's treatment of Francis' Christology illuminated the latter's emphatically coincident vision of Christ as God and creature, or human and divine. Of Francis' view of Christ, he wrote, '...he never views Christ's humanity either in itself or as separate from His preexistence in heaven or from His risen glory.'<sup>1257</sup> He also commented: 'Francis's christology, while insisting on the divinity of the Word, "the Most High, the Lord, the God of the universe," also emphasizes the humility and poverty which Christ showed in His Incarnation, His Passion and Resurrection, and His Second Coming.'<sup>1258</sup> This theology, Matura said, was Johannine in character. His analysis of Psalm Six (10-11) of *The Office of the Passion* also touched on the related Johannine coincidence of abjection and glory exemplified in Christ.<sup>1259</sup>

Matura observed the importance of Jesus' command to love one's enemies (Mt 5:44) in Francis' theology, a command which Francis quoted three times (*ER XXII*, 1; *LR X*, 10 and *2LtF*, 38) referred to twice (*PrOF 8*, *Adm IX*) and recommended the spirit

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253Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 54.

254Ibid.

255Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 83.

256Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 83-4.

257Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 61.

258Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 168.

259Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 64.

of, in a further piece of his writings (*LtMin*).<sup>260</sup> However, Matura's synthesis does not take into account the crucial significance for Francis of reconciliation, by giving it a suitably prominent place in his theological vision. The synopsis presented in the present thesis will show the importance of this dimension of Francis' thought, illuminated through the coincidence of enemy and friend. This 'horizontal' aspect of his vision will also explain an apparently complex strain of Francis' thought, which appears in the *Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-two (1-8), about which Matura commented: 'Strangely enough, Francis connects this duty of hating our bodies with that of loving our enemies.'<sup>261</sup> Whereas Matura explained Francis' emphasis on patient endurance of suffering and death as an element of his understanding of poverty, the present study will demonstrate its connection with the love of enemies.<sup>262</sup>

In the first chapter of his study, Matura made the surprising assertion that Francis did not use imagery and his writings were not poetic.<sup>263</sup> This statement does not account for Francis' use of imagery of light throughout the writings,<sup>264</sup> his personification of the Virtues as sisters,<sup>265</sup> and his evocation of the Virgin Mary as the 'robe' and 'tabernacle' of Christ.<sup>266</sup> However, in an apparent contradiction to his earlier statement, Matura wrote about chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, 'It is amazing to find such passion and poetry, such richness and yet such balance in this type of *Credo*.'<sup>267</sup> He also stated that chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* was 'poetic'.<sup>268</sup> Nevertheless, Matura's comment about the absence of imagery in Francis' writing still stands. Hence, his study leaves the aspect of symbolism in Francis' thought to be revealed and developed. To date, any clear visual summary of Francis' theology has been lacking. Matura's book is a thorough and accurate examination of Francis' theology in the writings, and yet leaves an unclear picture of the overall structure of his vision. As mentioned above, the author claims that the Father is at the centre of his theology, and so is the Trinity, and also the human person. The place of the Word Incarnate remains ambiguous. Since Matura observed that Christ was the exemplar for the human person, he should also be at the centre. This is not explicitly stated, however; perhaps as his study challenged the traditional view of Francis' Christocentrism. The

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260Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 122-3.

261Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 44.

262Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 127-132.

263Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 11.

264PrCr / 1LtF II, 7 / LtOrd 51 / PrOF 2.

265SalV.

266SalBVM 4-5.

267Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 32.

268Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 38.



resulting synthesis is hard to visualise as a whole, since it lacks a distinct virtual shape. However, by attention to Francis' imagery, the present study will show that he did leave, indirectly, a symbolic summary of his theological vision in his *Cantic of Brother Sun*. This vision is centred on the theological symbol of 'Sir Brother Sun' as Christ.

**Significance for this research:** The early study by Iriarte shows that a synthesis of Francis' thought is both possible and desirable in the light of the post-conciliar movement to return to the founding charisms of religious Orders. However, it brings to light the need for a *theological* synthesis that would focus only on Francis' message, as he himself expressed it in his writings. The synthesis proposed by van den Goorbergh and Zweerman challenges us to take more seriously Francis' high intelligence, and the care with which he composed his writings, some over periods of time. On the other hand, by over-emphasising a cerebral and erudite reading of his work, it suggests a need to factor in Francis' basic level of education, the immediacy of his response to theological insights and the evangelical urgency of his writings. Furthermore, the simple faith and affective involvement with which Francis presented his theology needs to be taken into account, together with the intellectual aspect. The limitations of methodology in this study highlight the need to look at his message across all of the writings rather than a selection, and not to rely on the hagiographical accounts. As mentioned above, many of the elements of Francis' theology detailed in Matura's study will also feature in this present synthesis, which cannot, therefore, lay claim to them. Several of the coincidences of opposites in these elements are also presented by Matura, although he does not identify them as such. The difference between the present study and Matura's lies in the way the elements have been reassembled, and in the idea used to connect them. Matura's study identified the need to find a 'key' to unify the fragments of theology in Francis' writings, and used two of the writings for this purpose. However, the author hoped that future research would build upon and refine his work.<sup>269</sup> The main aspect of Matura's synthesis which is open to further development is the clarity of structure of Francis' theological vision. By employing a different 'key' to connect his theological fragments, namely, the coincidence of opposites, this study endeavours to construct a clearer picture of the structure of Francis' theology. Thus, in previous attempts to synthesise Francis' theology, both ideas to be retained and worked upon on and also deficiencies to be addressed in the present thesis have been found.

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<sup>269</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 173.

### Other relevant studies

The aspects of previous authors' work which are to follow will also feature later in the present study, from the perspective of the coincidence of opposites. Francis' emphatically-coincident presentation of Christ as 'Most High' God and most humbled creature was highlighted by Optatus Van Asseldonk, Norbert Nguyễn-Van-Khanh and by Eric Doyle with Damian McElrath, who wrote: 'Francis never lost sight of the two-fold vision of Christ, God and Man, Lord and Servant.'<sup>270</sup> McGinn also described Francis' portrayal of Christ: 'Christ is both Lord and Servant, exalted and abject, in his life on earth.'<sup>271</sup> Nguyễn-Van-Khanh placed this portrayal in the wider context of the theological currents of the twelfth to thirteenth centuries.<sup>272</sup> Thomas Herbst, in a lecture on Francis' Christology, also described the opposing currents of high and low Christology, which informed spirituality in this period. These influences shaped the coincident vision of Christ which appears throughout Francis' writings.<sup>273</sup>

With close attention to the Christology in the writings, Nguyễn-Van-Khanh noted that Francis often referred to Christ as God and made frequent reference to his Second Coming in glory. He showed that, in *Admonition One* and the *Letter to the Entire Order (LtOrd 21-2)*, Francis viewed the humble form of the Eucharist together with Christ's divinity and glory.<sup>274</sup> Nguyễn-Van-Khanh also drew attention to the juxtaposition of abjection and glory in reference to the Passion (*2LtF 61-2* and *OfP VII, 7-9*), but without specifying a coincidence of opposites.<sup>275</sup> He pointed out the dipolar Christology of Francis' exhortation to the friars to beg for alms, in imitation of 'the Son of the all-powerful living God'.<sup>276</sup> The author also drew attention to the Christological image of the Lamb in Francis' thought, and the coincidence of opposites inherent in this image (*PrH 3*).<sup>277</sup> Nguyễn-Van-Khanh noted Francis' description of Christ as, '...true God and true man', in *The Earlier Rule (ER XXIII, 2-3)*, which summed up his understanding of the Word Incarnate.<sup>278</sup> Therefore, Nguyễn-Van-Khanh concluded, 'Christ is both God and man, Lord and servant. Francis never lost sight of either of these two aspects.'<sup>279</sup> An important aspect of Francis' Christology to the present thesis

270Doyle and McElrath, 'St. Francis and the Christocentric', p. 6 / Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', pp. 115, 149.

271McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi a Mystic?', p. 149.

272Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 20-31.

273Herbst, T., 'Francis of Assisi: A Man of His Times'.

274Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 38-9.

275Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 46.

276Nguyễn-Van-Khanh *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 47.

277Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 51-2.

278Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 42.

279Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 56.

sees Christ as the revealer of the Trinity, and particularly, of the Father, to humankind, in his virtue of humility. Nguyễn-Van-Khanh described this dimension.<sup>280</sup> He also noticed the key function of Christ as intercessor in Francis' thought.<sup>281</sup>

The study by Nguyễn-Van-Khanh makes a crucial reconciliation between Francis as Christocentric imitator of Christ, according to his hagiography, yet focused on the Father, as evident in his writings, 'To follow Christ means to be united with Him in prayer to the Father and to pray to the Father like Him, using His actual prayer.'<sup>282</sup> Hence, Francis assimilated the words of Christ and shared his prayer, as Leonhard Lehmann's study of *The First Letter to the Faithful* and Nguyễn-Van-Khanh pointed out.<sup>283</sup> The Person and words of Christ are closely linked in Francis' thought in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh observed.<sup>284</sup> Therefore, to keep the word of Jesus, for Francis, was to identify oneself with him and to carry out his words.<sup>285</sup> This identification with Christ was Francis' constant aim and is the goal of his theology, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh also mentioned.<sup>286</sup> In his *Office of the Passion*, Francis' selection of scriptural verses reflected his vision for the Order, including the imitation of Christ in the Gospel life and an intense reverence for the Church as mother. Furthermore, it reflected some of the conflicts and struggles that personally afflicted Francis on his journey of conversion. Through his *Office*, Francis connected his sufferings with those of Christ, his hero.<sup>287</sup>

The combined insights into his Christology mentioned above support the view explained in the current thesis, that the human person united to Christ is the centre of Francis' theological vision. As Hammond summarised: 'By standing in the center, the center seems to disappear because Francis, altogether penetrated by Christ, now looks out ... through Christ and...he responds by praising God through Christ.'<sup>288</sup> Crucial to understanding Francis' anthropology is the insight that most of his references to the 'body' do not mean the physical body, but the egocentric tendencies in human beings, including physical desires. This was pointed out by Nguyễn-Van-Khanh.<sup>289</sup> Another

280 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 107, 235.

281 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 149.

282 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 146.

283 Lehmann, L., 'Exultation and Exhortation to Penance: A Study of the Form and Content of the *First Version of the Letter to the Faithful*,' *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1990, pp. 8, 19, 22 / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 7.

284 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 91.

285 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 197, 213-4.

286 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 235, 243.

287 Knowles, C.B., 'Reading *The Office of The Passion* as a Testament of Francis', *The Cord*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2009, pp. 208-9.

288 Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 148.

289 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 119.

key aspect of Francis' anthropology is his emphasis on the heart as the centre of the human person, and the battle ground for good and evil, as Armstrong has noted.<sup>290</sup>

Robert Stewart's study of the origins of the *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* includes a detailed analysis of *The First* and *Second Letters to the Faithful*.<sup>291</sup> Stewart made an important point when he identified the goal of *The First Letter* in the quotation from John chapter seventeen in the final verse (Jn 17:19) of its first chapter. That goal is 'being with the Father together with Jesus'.<sup>292</sup> This quotation also concludes the corresponding passage in *The Second Letter* (2LtF 60) before Francis breaks into his own ecstatic hymn of praise (2LtF 61-62). Stewart usefully drew attention to the fact that the same quotation concludes chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*, in which it also appears to be the goal of the teaching which precedes it. In all three writings, this is preceded by Jesus' prayer in John chapter seventeen (Jn 17:11), "...that they may be one as we are." Van Asseldonk also pointed out a significant change Francis made in his quotation of John chapter seventeen. Whereas in the original, Jesus prays for his followers to be sanctified in truth (Jn 17:19), in Francis' *Second Letter to the Faithful* (2LtF 59), the desire is that they be sanctified, "...in being one as we are one".<sup>293</sup> This alteration accentuates the goal of Francis' theology as a union between persons, which reflects that of the Triune Creator. As the present thesis will discuss, this significant placing of a Gospel text in three writings reveals the goal of all Francis' theology as a dual movement into union of two opposite entities: firstly, brothers at enmity with each other, 'that they may be one as we are' and secondly, this reconciled fraternity with its Triune Creator, 'that where I am, they may be with me' (Jn 17:24).

Nguyễn-Van-Khanh noted the signs of Francis' communication of unity among the Persons of the Trinity. He recognised that 'Creation is a work common to the Trinity' and so is redemption and salvation.<sup>294</sup> Citing *The Earlier Rule* (ER XXIII, 1), he noticed that the Persons shared one work, but had diverse roles in that work. He also observed that the Father was the source of the activity of the Trinity, and that, he was given the roles normally attributed to the other two Persons (*PrOF* 1). Additionally, Nguyễn-Van-Khanh noticed that Christ was referred to as Creator. He also pointed out, 'The titles

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290Armstrong, R.J., "If My Words Remain in You..."Foundations of the Evangelical Life', in: J.M.

Hammond, ed., *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (London, NY, NCP, 2004) p. 75.

291Stewart, R.M., '*De illis qui faciunt penitentiam*': *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Rome, Instituto Storico Dei Cappucini, 1991).

292Stewart, *Rule of the SFO*, p. 171.

293Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 140.

294Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 66, 79.

"Redeemer" and "Saviour" are not reserved to Christ.<sup>295</sup> In his analysis of *The Second Letter to the Faithful* (2LtF 4-13), Nguyễn-Van-Khanh actually identified a coincidence of opposites in Francis' view of Christ, without naming it as such:

'Many times in his writings, Francis delights in using a very short phrase or a simple shift of thought to recall the divine and human condition of the Son of God: His glory and majesty, on the one hand, and on the other, His free choice of a life of human poverty. In blending these two opposite aspects of Christ into a single vision, he felt a certain sense of confusion at the love shown us by the Father in His Son.'<sup>296</sup>

The author also highlighted this coincident Christology in *Admonition One* (*Adm I* 16-18).<sup>297</sup> Furthermore, he pointed out the similar coincident vision of Christ in St. Clare's *First Letter to Agnes of Prague*.<sup>298</sup>

Van Asseldonk's article has the aim of bringing out the role of the Holy Spirit in Francis' theology. However, because of Francis' strong focus on the Triune nature of God, it is not possible to exclude the roles of the other two Persons when writing about the Spirit. Therefore, the author provides an invaluable summary of the distinctive roles of all three divine Persons in Francis' writings. He also accentuates Francis' equal stress on the coincident unity and diversity of the Trinity.<sup>299</sup>

There have been many scholarly studies of *The Canticle of Sir Brother Sun*, which will receive a detailed analysis in the present thesis. Hammond's paper rightly identified stanzas one and two of *The Canticle* as 'theological'. His observation pointed to the coincidence of the hidden and the manifest in God, when he said that these stanzas introduced '...a tension between the praise of God and an apophatic qualification directed at humans.'<sup>300</sup> Nguyễn-Van-Khanh drew attention to Francis' use of imagery of light in his writings, sometimes symbolising, Christ and, at other times, the Holy Spirit.<sup>301</sup> The same study also noted that, in *The Office of The Passion* (*OfP XV* 4, 6-9) Francis represented Christ as the 'firstborn of all creation' (Col 1:15).<sup>302</sup> These last two insights give support to this study's interpretation of 'Sir Brother Sun', through whom God gives us light, and who bears the image of the Most High, as a symbol of '...the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation'. That Sir Brother Sun of

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295 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 67, 79.

296 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 104-5. This idea of the coincidence of opposites causing '...a certain sense of confusion', will be discussed in chapter five.

297 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 106.

298 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, fn 37, citing: *St. Clare's First Letter to Agnes of Prague* 17-21.

299 Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 148.

300 Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', pp. 137-8.

301 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 121, 128-9.

302 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 77-8.

Francis' *Canticle* is a Christological symbol has already been proposed by Delio and Mulholland.<sup>303</sup> It was further interpreted as a Eucharistic symbol in another study.<sup>304</sup>

According to Edoardo Fumagalli's argument, Francis composed *The Canticle* in its entirety at one time.<sup>305</sup> He claimed that two early sources, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (2C 213, 217) and *The Major Legend* of Bonaventure (LMj IX, 1) supported this theory.<sup>306</sup> Accounts found in two other sources, *The Assisi Compilation* (AC 83) and *The Mirror of Perfection* (2MP 119-120,123) of its composition in three stages, in response to differing circumstances, were a later embellishment of the reality, he argued.<sup>307</sup> Leo Spitzer, on the other hand, pointed out the difference in tone between stanzas one to nine and ten to thirteen, which seemed to suggest a time lag or change of circumstances from one part to the next.<sup>308</sup> However, Fumagalli saw a unity of tone in the whole *Canticle*. Likewise, a study of this writing by Giovanni Pozzi implied that the hymn, in its entirety, reflected all the elements of the cosmos in its structure.<sup>309</sup> The present study's reading of this text as a summary of Francis' theology will also imply its careful composition as an entire piece.

Pozzi's analysis of *The Canticle* highlights Francis' unusual employment of the passive construction, 'Praised be...'. Considering that stanza two proclaimed human beings as unworthy to praise God, Pozzi concluded that it was God who praised Godself through creatures in *The Canticle*.<sup>310</sup> This theory is consonant with the present study's interpretation of *The Canticle*, in which all creatures praise God in Christ. This idea was also proposed by Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, not in relation to *The Canticle*, but to *Admonition Five* (*Adm V* 2-3) and *The Second Letter to the Faithful* (2LtF 61). He stated, 'Christ is the One in whom all creatures pay homage to God... .' He also added that the Psalms

303Delio, I., *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 2003) p. 18 / Mulholland, S., *Duns Scotus and the Canticle*, paper presented at the Franciscan International Study Centre (Canterbury, England, Dec 2005) p. 12.

304Knowles, C.B., *An Exploration of the Eucharistic Foundation for a Franciscan Theology of the Environment*, unpublished MA dissertation (Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, 2008) pp. 16-18.

305Fumagalli, E., 'Saint Francis, The Canticle, The Our Father' (*San Francesco, Il Cantico, Il Pater Noster*, Editoriale, Jaca book, Milan, 2002) E. Hagman, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 19, Supplement, 2005.

3062C 213, 217, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, pp. 384-5, 387-8 / *The Major Legend* by Bonaventure (LM) IX, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, p. 596-7.

307AC 83, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, pp. 184-7 / 2MP 119-120, 123, *FA:ED*, vol. 3, pp. 367-8, 370-1.

308Spitzer, L., 'Nuove considerazioni sul "Cantico di Frate Sole"', *Studi Italiani*, C. Scarpato, ed., (Milan, Vita e Pensiero, 1976) Letteratura e cultura dell'Italia unita, 4, pp. 43-70, cited in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis, The Canticle,' pp. 66-7.

309Pozzi, G., 'Canticle of Brother Sun: From Grammar to Prayer' (*Sul Cantico di frate Sole: di grammatica in preghiera Bigorio: Convento di Santa Maria*, 1985, pp. 1-16) E. Hagman, trans., pp. 1-21.

310Pozzi, 'From Grammar to Prayer', pp. 11-14.

and the Gospel of John had influenced Francis in this thinking, 'They provide Francis with the image of Christ as universal Intercessor.'<sup>311</sup>

The intended meaning of the word '*per*' in *The Canticle* has been the subject of much debate, since it affects the reader's view of who exactly is praising God in this hymn. Luigi Foscolo Benedetto interpreted '*per*' as 'by', while Antonino Pagliaro translated it as 'through'.<sup>312</sup> Eloi Leclerc was of the opinion that, for Francis, '*per*' encompassed both of these meanings, a theory that was advanced previously by Théophile Desbonnets and Damien Vorreux.<sup>313</sup> Fumagalli read *The Canticle* as Francis' praise to the Creator for having answered his petitions in the Our Father, through creatures. Therefore, he interpreted '*per*' to mean 'because of'. According to the present study, '*per*' means 'through'. Since it will be argued that creatures praise God in Christ, it could be understood that creatures are like channels through which God praises Godself. As Christ is the universal intercessor, creatures 'in him' join in his priestly function of giving glory to the Creator. Because creatures are 'in' Christ, God, to whom, alone, all praise is due, is legitimately praised '*cun*' or 'with' creatures, as stanza two proclaims. Furthermore, because creatures praise God 'in' Christ, it is God, that is, Christ in his cosmic dimension, who praises Godself, as Pozzi rightly proposed. Hence, '*per*' means that God is praised 'through' creatures, '*cun*', that God is praised 'with' them and, since all praise belongs only to the Creator, we are also meant to understand that the creatures are praised 'in' Christ and thus, God is glorified. This interpretation follows the theology of the opening of the doxology of the Mass, a point which will be elaborated in chapter seven.

Francis did not write about any mystical experiences, as he believed the secrets God revealed to a person should be kept hidden in their heart.<sup>314</sup> However, Schmucki has argued that Francis' writings unconsciously betrayed his religious experience, through such themes as 'the divine indwelling', filiation, espousal, and 'tasting divine sweetness'. Hammond also claimed that Francis' writings enabled one to judge the effects of mystical experience upon their author.<sup>315</sup> The present study is not concerned

311Nguyen-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 230.

312Benedetto, L.F., *Il Cantico di frate Sole* (Florence, Sansoni, 1941) p. 31, cited in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis, The Canticle,' p. 52 / Pagliaro, A., '*Il Cantico di frate sole*,' *Quaderni di Roma*, vol. 1, 1947, pp. 218-35, cited in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis, The Canticle,' p. 52.

313Leclerc, E., *Le Cantique des Créatures. Une lecture de Saint François D'Assise* (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1988) pp. 7, 16 n.4 and 21, cited in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis, The Canticle,' p. 55 / Desbonnets, T. and Vorreux, D. *Saint François d'Assise - Documents, écrits et premières biographies* (Paris, Editions Franciscaines, 1968<sup>2</sup>) p. 196, n. 3., cited in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis, The Canticle,' p. 55.

314*Adm XXVIII*.

315Schmucki, 'Mysticism of St. Francis', p. 247. / Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 112.

with Francis as a mystic. Nevertheless, Schmucki's research has highlighted Francis' emotional tone in some of his writings.<sup>316</sup> This suggests that any summary of his theology would be incomplete without taking the emotional aspect of his work into consideration, which will be explored in chapter five. Hammond believed that Francis' praise of God led 'to a transformation of consciousness'.<sup>317</sup> There are some indications of this in his writings, which will be discussed in chapter five, although Hammond rightly pointed out that mysticism, defined as direct awareness of God's presence, could not be determined from Francis' writings alone.<sup>318</sup> Mysticism, Hammond argued, could not be separated from its historical context without rendering it a meaningless abstraction. For this reason, he relied upon the early accounts of events in Francis' life which surrounded the writings to verify his designation of Francis as a mystic. A person's theology, on the other hand, should have value when considered apart from his/her life story, as Matura pointed out.<sup>319</sup> Hence, the present study of Francis' theological vision will limit itself to his writings. In the texts themselves, one can find evidence of emotional engagement with and ecstatic response to the theological intuitions they communicate. The discussion of this in chapter five will help to describe the kind of theology Francis communicated.

**Significance for this research:** As described above, there are some elements of Francis' theology identified by other authors, which also occur in the present synthesis, and so are not original ideas. Some of these elements are shown to have been presented as coincidences of opposites, but are not acknowledged in these terms. Other authors have also supplied information on the historical theological influences on Francis' thought. Previous studies have reconciled Francis' Christocentric focus, according to the sources for his life, with the predominant focus on the Father in his writings. It is their conclusion that will be exported to this thesis, namely, that Francis prayed to the Father from the viewpoint of Christ. Nguyễn-Van-Khanh's observation that Francis' references to the body were not equivalent to the physical body will be used in the consideration of the imitation of Christ in chapter three. It will also be important in reference to the enemy-friend coincidence in chapter four, together with the observation of Armstrong, that Francis saw the heart as the centre of the human person and of the contest between good and evil. Stewart's perception of the message of John 17:19 being the goal of *The First Letter to the Faithful* will be enlarged in the third chapter, so that it

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316Schmucki, 'Mysticism of St. Francis', p. 250. / 'Divine Praise and Meditation', p. 69.

317Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 108.

318Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 149.

319Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 4.



points to the goal of all Francis' theology. Van Asseldonk's article on the Holy Spirit in Francis' writings has supplied this research with a helpful summary of the distinctive aspects of the Persons of the Trinity in his theology. Regarding the analysis of *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, in chapter seven of the present study, the interpretation of the Christological symbolism of Sir Brother Sun builds on that of Delio and Mulholland, as detailed above, and adds a Eucharistic dimension. This study's reading of *The Canticle* would suggest that it was composed as a complete piece, rather than having sections added on after completion. Fumagalli's article and Pozzi's interpretation make convincing cases for *The Canticle's* having been composed as one piece, which gives some validity to such a reading of the hymn. The view of this study that all creatures in *The Canticle* praise God in Christ is in harmony with Pozzi's conclusion that God praises Godself through creatures. It also agrees with Nguyễn-Van-Khanh's observation, based on two other writings of Francis, that creatures praise God in Christ. There has been extensive scholarly debate about the precise meaning of 'per' in *The Canticle*. It is necessary, since the present research engages in a detailed examination of the hymn, to be aware of the debate. This study will take the position that 'per' means 'through'. The consideration of the character of Francis' theology in chapter five has some overlap with the debates on the Christian mystical tradition and where Francis might fit into this. Therefore, some of the observations of Schmucki and Hammond on characteristics of mysticism in Francis' writings will be helpful in describing Francis' style of theology.

### **Methodology**

This thesis will examine only the writings of Francis, rather than the early sources for his life. This is because the subject area is Francis' thought and message, rather than his life and person, which have already received attention from so many authors. In order to examine his thought uncontaminated by the various agendas of the early hagiographers, this research will concentrate on Francis' own direct communications of his ideas and experience. The study will refer mainly to the English translations of his writings in the 1999 comprehensive critical edition by Armstrong, Hellman and Short, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, volume one. From this volume, it will also adopt the abbreviations for the writings and for the early sources for the life of Francis. given on page thirty two.

In a single exception to the policy of examining the writings only, the San Damiano Crucifix will be studied in connection with Francis' *Prayer Before the Crucifix*. No other writing has such a close relationship with an early source and, for this reason, the inclusion of this icon, which inspired it, is necessary for a full understanding of the *Prayer*. In his study of the prayers of Francis, Leonhard Lehmann also took this icon from San Damiano into account as the meditative object of Francis' *Prayer Before the Crucifix*.<sup>320</sup> Martignetti too, in his study of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae*, has drawn attention to the *Crucifix* as an inspiration for the coincident character of Francis' theology, as mentioned earlier.

Like the studies by Matura and Cousins, the present work will combine two approaches: of detailed analysis of individual writings, and of a general view of theology across the writings. This will give the advantages of both a particular and a general perspective. The most thorough approach would be to make a detailed examination of each writing, as well as a general study of the theology across the writings, even though this would entail some repetition. However, due to constraints of length, the latter aspect is judged to be most essential, considering the aim of the thesis. To this end, only certain writings have been selected for individual attention.

There are three main reasons for choosing *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* and *The Canticle of Brother Sun* for detailed examination. Firstly, both pieces involve imagery. In *The Canticle*, there are vivid descriptions of creatures, which also carry a theological meaning. In the case of *The Prayer*, a visual focus on the San Damiano Crucifix is the accepted context for its composition. Since imagery has been identified as an aspect of Francis' theology which Matura's synthesis left unexplored, and the lack of a visual summary of Francis' theology has also been noted, these two writings hold particular interest for the present research. Secondly, these writings come from opposite ends of the chronology of Francis' works. *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* is his earliest composition, dated around 1209, when Francis was discerning his vocation, while *The Canticle* was written around 1225, the year before Francis' death. Therefore, if it were found that these two pieces expressed a common theology, it would indicate the consistency of Francis' vision over the period of his writing. A comparison of the two texts might also reveal a progression over time in the development of Francis' theology. A third reason for focusing on these two texts is their differences in length and style. Although both could be classed as prayers, *The Canticle* was written as a hymn to be

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<sup>320</sup>Lehmann, L., *Francis Master of Prayer*, P. Van Halderen, trans. (Delhi, Media House, 1999).

sung, and takes the form of poetry. *The Prayer* is much shorter and its style is more stark and simple. If two writings of varied length and different styles were found to have significant theological content in common, this too would support any finding from the general survey of his theology that one vision underlies Francis' diverse writings.

Although the focus of this thesis is not on the historical background to Francis' writings, nor their translation, dating or authenticity, it will maintain an awareness of any issues of this kind, which might be relevant to the present topic, and have an effect on the argument presented. There are some writings for which various titles have been offered. *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, as it is called in *The Mirror of Perfection* (2MP 119) is also popularly known as *The Canticle of the Creatures*. This study will refer to it by the former title, because it better reflects what will be shown to be the Christocentric character of this hymn, which is expressed through the symbol of Sir Brother Sun.<sup>321</sup>

There has also been much debate about the most appropriate titles for the writings which will be referred to as *The First* and *Second Letters to the Faithful*. The disagreement surrounding their accurate dating is connected with this problem. Margaret Carney and Leonhard Lehmann have summarised the history of scholarship on *The First Letter to the Faithful*, including the debate about whether it should be dated before the *Second Letter*, according to Esser and Matura, or after it, according to Flood and Lemmens.<sup>322</sup> The difficulty of entitling this document, which has been known under fourteen different names, is also discussed in Carney's study. It is commonly known as a letter because *The Second Letter* is introduced as such, in the greeting which begins it. However, Pazzelli drew attention to the title of the writing in the Volterra Codex 225, '*verba vitae et salutis*'.<sup>323</sup> Both the naming and dating of this document remain controversial. Taking all this into account, this study will use the titles, *The First* and *Second Letters to the Faithful* which are given in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* as alternative titles, and correspond better to the abbreviations used in that volume. The editors of the volume call them *The First* and *Second Versions* of the *Letter*, which

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321In *The Mirror of Perfection* (2MP 119) in which *The Canticle* is entitled '*The Canticle of Brother Sun*', Francis is reported as explaining that he sees the sun as the most beautiful of creatures because it symbolises for him the Lord, who is referred to in scripture as 'the sun of justice' (*FA:ED*, vol. 3, p. 367).

322Carney, M., 'The "Letter" of Fourteen Names: Reading "The Exhortation"', in: J.M. Hammond, ed., *Francis of Assisi: History, Hagiography and Hermeneutics in the Early Documents* (London, NY, NCP, 2004) pp. 90-104 / Lehmann, 'Exultation', pp. 1-33 / Matura: *Francis: The Message*, p. 38.

323Pazzelli, R., '*Il titolo della "Prima rescensione della lettera ai Fedeli"*'. *Precisazioni sul Codice 225 di Volterra (cod Vo)*, *Anal TOR* 19 (1987) p. 233-40. English trans., *Idem.*, pp. 241-48, cited in: Lehmann, 'Exultation', p. 31.

accommodates the contrary opinions as to the order in which they were written. In this case, they will be referred to as *The First* and *Second Letters to the Faithful*, simply because there is no scholarly agreement as to their most appropriate titles. However, they have been widely known under these titles in Franciscan circles. They are entitled as such, with the understanding that they are the first and second versions of a work by Francis, and that what is called '*Second*' may well have been written before the '*First*'. Bearing this difficulty in mind, this study will avoid the pitfall of assuming a progression or development from *The First* to *The Second Letters*. Thus, controversies over names and chronology should not affect the overall argument. It is also needful to consider that there is a significant portion of material common to both *Letters*. All the content of *The First* appears in *The Second*, which has a large amount of additional material not included in *The First*. Therefore, as a general working rule, if the material referred to appears in both documents, *The First Letter* will be cited, with the understanding that it also occurs in the *Second*. When referring to material which only appears in *The Second Letter*, this text will be cited as the reference.

### **Contribution of the present research to its academic field**

The present study of Francis' theology is a beginning and a work in progress, which should provide a way in for future comments, additions and revisions in this field of research. The coincidence of opposites is only one of many possible ways into Francis' thought. However, this study will prove the eminent usefulness of this tool, both in understanding Francis' theology and reconnecting its fragments into a comprehensive vision. By introducing a key to Francis' thought which reveals the panology behind his writings, and enables the formation of a clear and simple synopsis, this thesis should help to remove a major obstacle to viewing Francis as a theologian. Thus, it could facilitate much further study of his writings as theology. The purpose of this research is to contribute to the case for establishing Francis as a theologian in his own right, which would give the Franciscan tradition a theology directly from the mind of its founder. In this way, Franciscan theology would not have to rely on systems developed by Francis' spiritual descendants, especially Bonaventure.

On the foundation of this work, additional research could be made into the sources of Francis' theology, especially in the liturgy, since the influence of the doxology of the Roman Canon will be revealed, in addition to that of the Divine Office and the Our Father. Further study could also be made of the development of his

theological vision over time, from the earliest to latest writings, in connection with the changing events of Francis' life. Teachings and sayings of Francis reported in the early legends could be compared with the theology which inspired his writings, so as to judge the authenticity of the thought of Francis according to his biographers. This research could also open up the way for comparative studies of Francis' theology with that of Bonaventure, which would help to illuminate the influence of the former on the latter. Out of the present thesis will arise questions of how the coincidence of opposites in Francis' thought compares with that identified by some authors in the writings of Bonaventure, of Nicholas of Cusa and their possible antecedents in the coincidence of opposites tradition. These questions could form the subject of much new research. Future studies could focus in more depth on certain branches of Francis' theology: his theology of prayer, of creation, of the Eucharist, his Mariology or anthropology. These could then be applied to issues of present-day concern. In summary, this thesis could help to open doors to numerous possibilities for future research in the field of Franciscan studies, and specifically, the thought of Francis of Assisi.

## 1. The coincidence of opposites in the Trinity

This study of Francis' message in his writings begins with the Trinity, which is the starting point of his theology. Matura rightly concluded from Francis' writings that, in his thought and prayer, God was always understood as Trinity.<sup>324</sup> Francis' writings do reveal that the beginning and end point of his theology was the mystery of the Triune God, as this chapter will show.

According to Christian dogma, as defined by Church councils, the Trinity is '... one God in three Persons', who are 'consubstantial.'<sup>325</sup> Before attending to Francis' own texts, it will be necessary to specify what is meant by a coincidence of opposites in his thought about the Trinity, in the light of the traditional doctrine which would have formed his faith vision. As the Council of Toledo decreed, 'While they are called three persons in view of their relations, we believe in one nature or substance.'<sup>326</sup> It would not make sense in the context of the unity of the divine nature to speak of opposition within God. However, the Fourth Lateran Council named certain distinctions between the divine Persons regarding their origins: "'It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds.'<sup>327</sup> Rooted in these differences are distinctions in the relations between the Persons who, nevertheless, have one divine nature. The mission of the Trinity in relation to creation is common to the three Persons, with differences in their ways of working, as defined by the Council of Constantinople: 'The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation but one principle. However, each divine Person performs the common work according to his unique personal property.'<sup>328</sup>

What follows from these definitions is that both unity and diversity can apply to the Trinity in the sense of one divine substance and three divine Persons, who differ in their origins and relations to each other, and in their ways of working in the divine mission. From the traditional formulations, one could also say that a unity of essence and a plurality of hypostases describe the Trinity. However, this does not mean a tripartite or threefold deity, in which each Person has a third share of the divine nature, rather, each of the divine hypostases is the entirety of God. 'In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) "Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine

<sup>324</sup>Matura, *Francis, The Message*, p. 51.

<sup>325</sup>Lateran Council IV (1215): DS 804, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 60.

<sup>326</sup>Council of Toledo XI (675): DS 528, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 60.

<sup>327</sup>Lateran Council IV: DS 804, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 60.

<sup>328</sup>Council of Constantinople II (553): DS 421, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, pp. 61-2.

substance, essence or nature."<sup>329</sup> Therefore, the characteristics of unity with plurality and also with diversity can be said to describe the Trinity, although diversity can only apply to the relations between the Persons or their ways of working in the divine mission *ad extra*. There can be no distinctions in the unity of the divine essence.

Since distinction has to be qualified so carefully, the topic of opposites in the Trinity would require similar consideration in the light of the Christian doctrinal formulations. However, the idea of real opposition in the Trinity, between unity and plurality, for example, does not actually arise in Francis' thought. It is generally true that, from the point of view of an ordinary human being trying to assimilate the doctrine of the Trinity, a problem of reconciling unity and plurality inevitably arises. Human empirical knowledge and logic dictate that the same entity cannot be described as undivided singular and plural at the same time. In human experience and knowledge of this world, such unity and plurality are mutually exclusive opposites. Francis dealt with this problem by leaving behind the constraints of conventional logic and empirical knowledge, in order to present a *coincidence* of opposites in the Trinity. This means that unity and plurality converge or 'fall together' in the literal sense of '*coincidentia*', so that while remaining two different ideas, which both describe his understanding of the Trinity, they cease to be understood as opposites in their application to God. What remains is differing concepts in a harmonious union.

Similarly, on the level of human experience, unity and diversity are often treated as contrasting grammatical opposites. Perhaps this is because, in the human world, diversity is so often connected with disunity. Francis' theology, however, presents a coincident understanding of unity and diversity in God. In his descriptions of the Trinity, unity and difference coexist in harmony, with difference applied only to the relations between the Persons and their ways of working with regard to creation. When referring to the distinctive aspects of a divine Person, Francis makes sure that one hypostasis does not become isolated in his readers' understanding. He finds ways to remind his readers of that Person's unity with the undivided divine essence. He almost never speaks of the Incarnate Word in isolation from the Father, the Holy Spirit, or both. Since he understands the Trinity as 'ineffable'<sup>330</sup> and yet revealed to humans through the Incarnate Word, the opposite concepts of hidden and manifest coincide in God, as will be shown presently.

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<sup>329</sup>Lateran Council IV: DS 804, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 60.

<sup>330</sup>*ER* XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 86.

### Unity-plurality/diversity

Two coincidences of opposites which Francis conceptualised in the Trinity were unity with plurality and with diversity. Where Francis referred to God as 'Three and One' or 'Trinity and Unity', he was conveying a coincidence of the concepts of unity and plurality.<sup>331</sup> One way in which Francis expressed this coincidence was by never using the word, 'Trinity' without attaching 'and Unity'. Elsewhere, as will be seen presently, he described the distinctiveness of the Persons together with their unity, conveying the related unity-diversity coincidence.<sup>332</sup> In the doctrine of the Trinity, he saw both of these coincidences together, and so he would sometimes juxtapose, 'Trinity and Unity' with, 'Father Son and Holy Spirit'.<sup>333</sup> He would express one or both facets of this understanding at various points in his compositions. The inseparability of Christ from the Trinity in Francis' theology has the interesting effect that the Trinitarian coincidence of unity and plurality can be expressed, through Christ, in creation, as one God, present in multiple creatures. Writing to the entire Order about the sacramental Presence of Christ filling each of the brothers who attended Mass together, Francis taught: 'Although He may seem to be present in many places, nevertheless, He remains, undivided and knows no loss; but One everywhere, He acts as He pleases, with the Lord God the Father and the Holy Spirit the Paraclete for ever and ever. Amen.'<sup>334</sup> The phrase 'Perfect Trinity and Simple Unity'<sup>335</sup> appears to encapsulate as a formula the coincident understanding of God as Triune, which Francis expressed throughout his writings. These reveal that that he conceptualised the three Persons, not as an undifferentiated divine unity, nor as three separate deities, but, with deep understanding of the orthodox Christian dogmatic position, as 'perfect Diversity within the total Unity'.<sup>336</sup> Regarding this coincidence, as Matura rightly observed, Francis '...paid special attention to the nature and role of each Person of the Trinity...'.<sup>337</sup> Francis' communication of the distinctive qualities of each divine Person will now be examined, beginning with The Father.

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331Bonaventure's theology would later describe a coincidence of '*consubstantialitatem cum pluralitate*' in the Trinity (Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, VI, 6, in: Boehner, and Hayes, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, p. 130).

332Consonant with this, Bonaventure described a coincidence in the Trinity of '*configurabilitatem cum personalitate*' (*Ibid.*).

333ER XXI, 2; XXIII, 11.

334LtOrd 33, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 119.

335LtOrd 52. Matura called this 'a kind of liturgical refrain' (Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 54).

336Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 54.

337Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 83.



**Diversity:** God the Father appears to have a certain primacy in Francis' concept of the Trinity. He is the source of all the action of the Trinity, the origin and end of all creation.<sup>338</sup> Almost all of Francis' texts about God are directed to the Father, of whom he speaks much more often than the Son.<sup>339</sup> Since the Father is primary in these respects in Francis' vision of the Godhead, this means there is a type of order within the diversity of Persons, although all three Persons are presented as equal.<sup>340</sup> In *Admonition One*, when referring to the Father who is 'inaccessible' and whom 'no one has ever seen', Francis prevents his reader from inferring that this makes the Father superior to the Son, by adding, 'But because he is equal to the Father, the Son is not seen by anyone other than the Father or other than the Holy Spirit.'<sup>341</sup> Their equality is also apparent in Francis' presentation of unity with diversity, which will be explored in due course. As Matura observed, 'The primacy or "monarchy" of the Father in Francis's writings does not suppress or diminish in the slightest the Son's divinity or humanity or the Paraclete's presence and "manner of working". Instead, Francis saw that the relationships of the Trinity make for harmony and balance.'<sup>342</sup> In human experience, order or hierarchy is incompatible with equality, but Francis' vision of the Trinity offers these two concepts, not as opposites, but in a coincident relationship of unity and difference. This coincidence of equality with order is a specific aspect of the more general coincidence of unity with diversity. The order is derived from the diversity of roles in the Trinity's mission to creation, since the Father initiates all the action and everything is destined to return to him. It is noticeable that Francis does not see the order in the Persons as derived from their processions. He does not engage in philosophising about the Trinitarian processions, but is concerned with the action of the Persons towards creation, salvation and restoration, which have such important implications for himself as a human creature. The co-equality is derived from the unity of the divine nature, which all three Persons equally possess.<sup>343</sup> The distinctive idea of the First Person in Francis' writings could be described as follows: he is Father in relation to the beloved

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338Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 56, 58.

339Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 54, 60.

340Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 83.

341*Adm I*, 5-7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128. From this conclusion, it follows, in Francis' thought, that the divinity of the Son can only be seen by humans in the Spirit with the extra-sensory vision of faith.

342Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 83.

343Bonaventure also described a coincidence of '*coequalitatem cum ordine*.' *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, VI, 6, in: Boehner and Hayes, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. II, p. 130.

Son.<sup>344</sup> He is source of all divine activity.<sup>345</sup> He is the source and end of all good.<sup>346</sup> Therefore, he is the addressee of prayers, to whom Francis directs the praise and thanksgiving owed by all creatures.<sup>347</sup> The Father is ineffable, invisible, accessible only through the Son.<sup>348</sup>

The differentiated aspects of the Second Person in Francis' vision may be described as follows: the Son is viewed in relation to the First Person, as the beloved Son of the Father and the one sent by the Father, who reveals him.<sup>349</sup> Unlike Bonaventure's theology, the vision of Francis does not suggest a pre-existent logos in the Trinity, who could be conceptually distinguished from the historical Jesus Christ. For Francis, Jesus was envisioned as God, incarnate in his humanity and risen in glory, who was the eternal Son in the 'Most High' Trinity.<sup>350</sup> Francis never separated Christ's humanity from his eternal Trinitarian existence. Where Francis saw Jesus Christ, he also understood the Trinity to be present. His Christology was rooted in the Trinity and he addressed Christ as God.<sup>351</sup> Rather than concentrating on the Person of Christ, Francis dealt with his teaching at great length. He realised the Johannine metaphor of the Word with the result that Christ was closely associated with the written word of God in the Gospels.<sup>352</sup> Francis often spoke of Christ in terms of his continuing presence to humanity in the words of Christian scripture and liturgy and in the Sacrament of the

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3442LtF 4 / ER XXIII, 3 / *A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father (PrOF)* 6-7 / *OfP* XV, 3 / *A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (SalBVM)* 2.

345ER XXIII, 1, 3/ *PrOF* 1.

346*PrOF* 2/ *OfP Prayer, FA:ED* vol. 1, pp. 141 / *PrH* 11.

347ER XXIII, 1-6. The obvious primacy of the Father in Francis' writings in general has generated problems in Franciscan studies. Before scholarship turned attention to the writings as theology in the 1990s, ideas of Francis' spirituality were based on the picture of him painted in the early biographies (Van Asseldonk, *The Spirit of the Lord*, pp. 105-158). These portrayed him as emphatically Christocentric and exclusively focused on the human person of Jesus Christ. Analysis of the writings of Francis reveals what might seem a different picture. Francis' relatively infrequent concentrations on Jesus Christ always see him in relation to the Father or in the context of the Trinity (Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 60). The Father in the Trinity seems to be his primary focus. Therefore, it would appear from his writings that Francis' spirituality is rather Trinitarian in the Greek style than Christocentric. This might seem to negate the traditional picture of Francis' Christocentrism. However, it would not be right to conclude that the early hagiographers and centuries of scholars who followed them were mistaken. This study will show that Francis' theology was both Trinitarian and Christocentric in structure. These two features do not contradict each other but fit together in Francis total theological vision of reality. In this chapter, the Trinitarian basis of his thought will be explored and in the next chapter, the Christocentric aspect will be explained. It will be demonstrated how Francis conceptualised and connected both mysteries by means of the coincidence of opposites.

348*Adm I*, 1-7.

349*LtOrd* 51 / *2LtF* 4, 11 / *ER* XXII, 41, 51-54 / *ER* XXIII, 3.

350*Adm I*, 7-10 / *OfP* Ps XV, 3-4; Ps XI, 6; Ps VII, 3.

351*LtOrd* 4, 26-27.

3522LtF 2-4, 34 / *The First Letter to the Clergy* (Earlier Edition) (*1LtCl*) 1-3, 11-12 / *The First Letter to the Custodians* (*1LtCus*) 2-5 / *ER* XXII, 41 / *LtOrd* 5-7, 34-36 / *Test* 6-13.

Eucharist.<sup>353</sup> Christ was the one who interceded for humankind.<sup>354</sup> He was also the teacher to whom one must cling closely in order to imitate him.<sup>355</sup> Francis' Christology focused mainly on the Incarnation and the Passion, made present in the Sacrament of what Francis called 'the Body and Blood of the Lord'. These three mysteries were closely linked together by the virtue of humility.<sup>356</sup> God's taking on the human condition in the Incarnation was a movement of humility, from wealth to poverty.<sup>357</sup> The Passion of Christ continued that kenotic movement into the depths of the human condition to its furthest extreme in death.<sup>358</sup> Francis' descriptions of the Passion concentrate not on graphic suffering but on close identification with the self-sacrificial love offered by Christ to his Father and for the human race.<sup>359</sup> This is why he favoured the image of Christ the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep.<sup>360</sup> In his writing, the risen glory of Christ is never far away from references to the Passion. Furthermore, Francis often anticipated Christ's Second Coming.<sup>361</sup> In summary, the Son, as incarnate image of the Father, makes the Godhead immanent in the words of scripture and the Eucharist. He is the beloved Son sent by the Father. By his Incarnation and Passion, he enters the poverty and misery of human existence without losing his divine identity.<sup>362</sup> Thus, he transforms human misery into glory, leaving people an example for imitation which is the way back to the Father.<sup>363</sup>

The Holy Spirit, although distinctive, is linked with Christ, who is closely associated with the divine Word of God and the words of scripture and liturgy. The Spirit is the Spirit of life of the word of God.<sup>364</sup> He gives to Christian believers the spiritual vision with which to recognise Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>365</sup> He is also the Spirit of divine love.<sup>366</sup> The Spirit is invisible except for the discernible effects of his 'holy activity'.<sup>367</sup> Therefore, Francis always viewed him according to his action, usually in the human soul. He inspires and directs the action of the faithful.<sup>368</sup> Where Francis often

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353 *Adm I*, 22 / *LtOrd* 26-29, 32-3 / *2LtF* 11-14; 33-34.

354 *ER XXII*, 41-55 / *2LtF* 56-60.

355 *ER XXII*, 1-2, 35, 41 / *LtOrd* 5-9.

356 *Adm I*, 16-18 / Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 69.

357 *2LtF* 4-5.

358 *2LtF* 6-13.

359 *Ibid.* / *OfP* Pss V, 7, 9; VI, 10-13.

360 *Adm VI*, 1 / *ER XXII* 32 / *2LtF* 56.

361 *OfP* Pss VI, VII, 9-11, XI, 6 / *ER XXIII*, 4.

362 *ER XXIII*, 3 / *LtOrd* 21-27.

363 *LtOrd* 28-9, 50-52 / *2LtF* 13 / *ER XXII* 40-41.

364 *2LtF* 3 / *ER XXII* 39 / *Adm VII*, 3-4.

365 *Adm I*.

366 *ER XVII*, 16.

367 *1LtF* I, 10 / *LR X*, 8.

368 *LtOrd* 50-52.

exhorted the faithful to act 'spiritually', he meant they were to act in the Holy Spirit.<sup>369</sup> The Spirit is the source of divine illumination and of all virtues in the soul.<sup>370</sup> He is opposed to the 'spirit of the flesh' which he kills in the soul with the virtues of peace, patience and humility.<sup>371</sup> He inspires the 'obedience of the Spirit', which leads the faithful to serve and obey, enabling them to follow in the footprints of Christ.<sup>372</sup> The Holy Spirit enables Christian believers to pray with pure hearts and to confess the Lordship of Jesus.<sup>373</sup> The Holy Spirit is the agent who effects the indwelling of the whole Trinity in the soul.<sup>374</sup> Similarly, as the spouse of Mary, he effects the Incarnation of Christ in her womb.<sup>375</sup> He does the same spiritually in the souls of Jesus' followers, who can then give birth to Christ by good example in the world.<sup>376</sup> In this way, the Spirit leads them, through humility, patience and love of enemies,<sup>377</sup> to share in the divine unity of the Trinity and brings them, and all good, back to the Father through the Son.<sup>378</sup>

Thus, it is apparent that the three Persons of the Trinity in the thought of Francis are diverse and distinct. As Van Asseldonk observed, in *The Earlier Rule*, Francis gave each Person a distinctive spiritual gift for humanity: 'the divine fear and the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>379</sup> In his *Letter to the Faithful*, Francis gave those who lived in penance a particular relationship with each Person of the Trinity.<sup>380</sup> Van Asseldonk summarised the diversity of the Persons as follows: 'The Father is always the principle and end of the action; the Son is always mediator, sanctifier, life-giver; the Holy Spirit is always the invisible agent of the Father and the Son, being sent by them.'<sup>381</sup>

**Unity:** As obvious as the diversity of the Trinity in Francis' theology is its perfect unity in that diversity. Francis' writing shows that, although the Persons work in distinct ways, they always act as one:

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369ER II, 4; IV, 2; V, 8; VII, 15; XVI, 5.

370SalBVM 6.

371ER XVII, 9-15 / Adm XII

372A *Salutation of the Virtues (SalV)* 14 / LtOrd 50-51

3732LtF 19-21 / Adm VIII 1.

3742LtF 48-51

375OfP Ant. 2

3762LtF 53

377ER XVI, 3, 5.

378ER XXII, 26-31

379ER XVII, 16, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 76. / Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 128.

3802LtF 48-53 / Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 137.

381Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 148.

'Father ... through Your holy will ... and through Your holy Son ... with the Holy Spirit you have created everything...'

'as through Your Son You created us, so through Your holy love ... You brought about His birth ... and You willed to redeem us captives through His cross...'<sup>1382</sup>

'...the Virgin made Church,  
chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven  
whom he consecrated with His most holy beloved Son  
and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, ...'<sup>1383</sup>

All of these texts show the primacy of the Father as the source and origin of God's work. The Father works *through* or *with* the Son and *with* the Holy Spirit, who typically acts in tandem with the Son. Notwithstanding this difference in the roles of the Persons, it is clear that the whole divine project of creation, Incarnation and redemption involves the whole Trinity, and that the primacy of the Father in God's mission does not affect the full and equal involvement of the other two Persons.

'...the Lord God Almighty in Trinity and Unity,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
the Creator of all.'<sup>1384</sup>

Van Asseldonk summarised Francis' Trinitarian dynamic as follows: '...in the Trinity the single divine action *ad extra* (as efficient cause) is always common to the Three ... But this common action is always Trinitarian without taking away the distinction of the Persons, since they act in a personal manner.'<sup>1385</sup> From their shared nature, it follows in Francis' thought that properties usually attributed to one particular divine Person in mission are shared by all:

'...the Most High and Supreme Eternal God  
Trinity and Unity  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
Creator of all  
Saviour of all...'<sup>1386</sup>

'O, Our Father most holy:  
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler and Savior'<sup>1387</sup>

As evident in the texts above, although the roles of Redeemer and Saviour are usually attributed to the Son, Francis describes all three Persons as 'Saviour' and, though the role of 'Consoler' is usually attributed to the Holy Spirit, Francis addresses the Father with the titles of 'Redeemer, Consoler and Savior'. Francis' *Praises of God* are also

<sup>1382</sup>ER XXIII, 1,3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.

<sup>1383</sup>*SalBVM* 1-2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 163.

<sup>1384</sup>ER XXI, 2.

<sup>1385</sup>Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 148.

<sup>1386</sup>ER XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 85-6.

<sup>1387</sup>*PrOF* 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 158.

addressed to the Father, yet he ends by calling him 'Savior'.<sup>388</sup> In this way, Francis' descriptions prevent his readers from separating the Persons in their understanding by means of their ways of working from the unity of the divine essence which all three share, so that: 'The Father is that which the Son is, the Son is that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e. by nature one God.'<sup>389</sup> Thus, Francis' Trinitarian vision resonates with that of Augustine, who wrote: 'In the highest Trinity ... one is as much as three together, and two are not more than one. And they are infinite in themselves.'<sup>390</sup> Francis' idea of the divine was the incomprehensible mystery of a Triune Godhead. Nevertheless, he managed to approach conceptualisation of this mystery in his verbal descriptions of a coincidence of perfect intimacy and distinction applying to the Trinity. His depictions of this Trinitarian communion convey an impression that each divine Person appears to be emptied out into all. Thus, they illustrate Augustine's words: 'And so each is in each, all are in each, each is in all, all are in all, and all are one.'<sup>391</sup>

The unity of the Godhead was holy according to Francis, who wrote, 'In the name of the most high Trinity and holy Unity: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'<sup>392</sup> The works of the Trinity brought created beings into this holy unity :

'Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, give us miserable ones the grace ... Inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, ...to follow in the footprints of Your beloved Son ... and, by Your grace alone, may we make our way to you, Most High, Who live and Rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity...'<sup>393</sup>

Francis quoted extensively from the priestly prayer of Jesus in John, chapter seventeen. In *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, he adapted the original prayer in John's Gospel (Jn 17:19) '...that they also may be sanctified in truth,' to read, 'that they may be sanctified in being one as we are one'.<sup>394</sup> This text is also quoted in *The Earlier Rule*, chapter twenty-three, where Jesus prays to to the Father, '...that they may be one as We are' and 'that they may be brought to perfection as one'.<sup>395</sup> The implication is that human beings are brought to holiness by sharing in the perfect unity of the life of the Trinity.

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388*The Praises of God (PrsG)* 2, 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109.

389Council of Toledo XI (675): DS 421, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 60.

390Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, in: C. Dollen, ed., S. McKenna, trans., *St. Augustine: The Trinity* (Boston, St. Paul Editions, 1965) p. 123.

391Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VI, in: Dollen, *St. Augustine: The Trinity*, p. 123. Bonaventure's term, 'circuminessio', or 'mutual indwelling', would later transmit a similar idea (Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, VI, 2, in: Boehner and Hayes, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. II, p. 130).

392*LtOrd* 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 116.

393*LtOrd* 50-52, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 120-121.

394*LtF* 59.

395*ER* XXII, 45, 53, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

### 'The highest good'

The intertextual reading of Francis' view of the Trinity examined above, together with a reference in his *Praises of God*, suggests that he conceptualised in the Triune God a coincidence of plurality/diversity with perfect unity in a kenotic mutuality, and he saw this as 'the highest good'.<sup>396</sup> Thus, in the Trinity, Francis found an archetype for goodness, which should be reflected back to the Creator in the perfection of creation, as will be seen in later chapters. Francis' references to the Trinity deliberately confound any attempts to attach personal properties to particular hypostases, except for their relations of origin. One example mentioned previously is the opening address of Francis' *Second Letter to the Faithful*, in which it is impossible to identify one exclusive owner of the words Francis is sending: '...I decided to offer you in this letter and message the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father, and the words of the Holy Spirit, which are spirit and life.'<sup>397</sup> Francis' conveyance of the impression of a *sine proprio* communion within the Godhead, through the coincidences of unity with plurality/diversity, reveals a key intuition in his theology.<sup>398</sup> In the course of the present study, reflections of this archetype for goodness will be seen throughout his vision.

### Alpha and Omega

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev 22:13)' In the Book of Revelation, these are the words of Christ relating to himself, as the beginning and end of creation. In the structure of Francis' theology, the Trinity, and particularly the Father, is presented as the Alpha and the Omega of creation in another coincidence of opposites.<sup>399</sup> Everything comes from and returns to the Father in the Trinity. The good that is creation is returned to the Trinity through the praise and thanks of humans in unity with all creation.<sup>400</sup> His *Admonitions* show Francis' concern that the good was not perfectly returned through humans, because of their tendencies to

<sup>396</sup>*PrsG* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>397</sup>*LtF* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 45. And so, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh also observed, in Francis' theology '... the holy Words are those of the entire Trinity...' (Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 204).

<sup>398</sup>*sine proprio*'='without anything of one's own':

*'Regula et vita istorum fratrum haec est, scilicet vivere in obedientia, in castitate et sine proprio, et Domini nostri Jesu Christi doctrinam et vestigia sequi, ...'* (*ER* 1, 1 [*Fontes Franciscani*, p. 185]).

'The rule and life of these brothers is this, namely: "to live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own," and to follow the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...' (*FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 63-4).

<sup>399</sup>*LtOrd* 1 and 52 / *ER* XXI, 2; XXIII, 1, 11; XXIV, 1, 5 / *2LtF* 1-2, 86-7 / *PrOF* 1, 10. Matura also highlighted this coincidence of Alpha and Omega in *The ER* XXIII (Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 36).

<sup>400</sup>*CtC*, / *ER* XVII, 17-18 / *ExpP* / *PrH* 11.

appropriate it to themselves.<sup>401</sup> His theological reflections are often structured to represent the beginning and end of all things in the Father in the unity of the Trinity, and feature exhortations to return all good to God.<sup>402</sup>

*The Second Letter to the Faithful* begins with a double acknowledgement of the Trinity as the source of Francis' words and they are traced back to the Father as primal source: '...the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father...'.<sup>403</sup> The main body of the *Letter* begins with a description of the Father sending the Son to be incarnate,<sup>404</sup> and so the starting point of Francis' theology is also the starting point of salvation history, the Father in the Trinity. The next section concerns the life of Jesus, which leaves an example of perfect expropriation in the poverty of his life and Passion.<sup>405</sup> To conform themselves to Christ, the brothers and sisters of penance must receive him as the Virgin Mary did, with a pure heart.<sup>406</sup> Then they must bring the Word to birth in their lives by charity, obedience, mercy, humility and self-denial, after the example of Christ.<sup>407</sup> What follows is the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul, by which they enjoy the blessed union of the Trinitarian life in the Father's kingdom, which was Christ's prayer for them.<sup>408</sup> In this cyclic structure, the Word is sent from the Father in the Trinity, into creation. He sets the example of kenotic love on earth. By receiving him and following his footsteps, in a spiritual incarnation of the Word, his followers are made one with Christ and so brought with him into the blessed union of the Trinity. Thus, sent by the Father into creation, the Son, as both almighty God and suffering creature, reunites creation to the Father. This is celebrated in the *Letter*.<sup>409</sup> After the next section, warning of the fate of the unrepentant, the letter ends as it began, with a double Trinitarian reference. In this way, the words of Francis originate and end in the Trinity.<sup>410</sup>

A similar cyclic arrangement can be seen in *The Earlier Rule*. Chapter twenty-three begins with thanks to the Father as the source of creation with the Trinity.<sup>411</sup> Next, the Fall is mentioned and then, the Father sending the Son to be born of the Virgin Mary

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401 *Adm VII*, 4 / *Adm VIII*, 3.

402 *PrH* 11.

403 *LtF* 1, 3.

404 *LtF* 4.

405 *LtF* 5-13.

406 *LtF* 14-24.

407 *LtF* 25-47.

408 *LtF* 48-60.

409 *LtF* 61-2.

410 *LtF* 86-88.

411 *ER XXIII*, 1.



and to redeem humanity by his Passion and death.<sup>412</sup> The Second Coming is next anticipated with the Last Judgement and Jesus inviting the faithful into the Father's kingdom.<sup>413</sup> In the rest of this prayer, Francis returns praise to the Father through the mediation of Christ with the Holy Spirit, through Mary and the saints, and together with the whole human race, involving all its diverse categories of peoples. Francis exhorts them to return all good to the Trinity, the source of creation and redemption, in their praise and thanksgiving.<sup>414</sup>

The cyclic structure is a feature of the *Letter to the Entire Order*, which begins, 'In the name of the most high Trinity and holy Unity: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.' The main text of the *Letter* entirely concerns the fitting human response to the sacrifice of the 'Son of the Most High', made present for believers in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The humility of God in the Sacrament is an example for imitation, which invites a response of humility and reverence. The final prayer makes clear that God gives human beings the grace to follow in the footprints of Jesus Christ, and so to journey to the Most High, 'in perfect Trinity and simple Unity'. The Trinitarian formula at the end reflects that of the beginning and completes the cycle. The Son of God is sent from the Trinity in a movement of humility. By receiving him and imitating his example of humility, believers are brought into union with the Son of God in his humanity and 'exalted by Him', in his divinity. In him they come back into union with the Trinity, their Creator.

Francis saw the Father in the Trinity as the one from whom all the good of creation and salvation proceeded, and to whom all good in creation was to return. Humans were made able to return good to the Father in praise and thanksgiving by receiving the Son whom he sent, and living after his example, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the work of the Trinity brought an alienated humanity back to God, to share in the unity of the divine life.

In conventional logic, the ideas of end and beginning are opposites, since they occur at opposite ends of a linear time-scale. Francis brought the ideas of the beginning and end of created things to coincide in the Father by using a cyclic structure in his theology, so that the point of creation's origin was also the point of its consummation. Although the opposite ideas of the Alpha and Omega of creation coincide, their difference does not disappear altogether in Francis' thought. This is because he sees the

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412ER XXIII, 2-3.

413ER XXIII, 4.

414ER XXIII, 5-11.

Father from the point of view of creation involved in a dynamic temporal process. In his theology there is a two-fold sense of creation's issuing from the Father through the Son, and returning to him through the Son. The two movements are distinct in his thought, so that the ideas of the origin of all things and their end still feel different, although they coincide in the same point.

### **The 'Most High': hidden and manifest**

From a human viewpoint, the coincidence of hidden and manifest is centred on Christ. He is the revealed aspect of the Trinity in creation, who remains beyond human comprehension in his transcendent divinity. Since this coincidence of opposites depends on the Incarnation of the Word, it really belongs to the second class of coincidence. However, the union of hidden and manifest applies to the Trinity in Francis' thought, since the image of the 'inaccessible' Father is revealed through the Son in the faith vision of the Holy Spirit.<sup>415</sup> Since it applies to the Trinity, the coincidence will be explored in this chapter.

The title, '*Altissimus*' is a name for God characteristically shared by the whole Trinity in Francis' thought. Judging by the contexts in which the term is used, it appears to refer at some times to the Trinity,<sup>416</sup> more often to the Father specifically,<sup>417</sup> sometimes to the Son,<sup>418</sup> or to God, without clear specification.<sup>419</sup> To designate the title as referring to the Trinity encompasses all Francis' uses for it. It is interesting that Francis so often used this title for God, considering that he has become popularly known for emphasising the humanity of Christ. What Francis' writings show is that he related to God as a coincidence of immanent and transcendent attributes. His focus on the Incarnate Word presented him with a Lord of the universe who, out of divine kenotic love, plumbed the depths of creaturely suffering and loss in his human nature, without losing his divine nature. Thus, a coincidence of glory and abjection is created. This coincidence is captured in Francis' phrase, 'The Lord has ruled from a tree.'<sup>420</sup> '*Altissimus*' reflects the transcendent pole of God's nature, which seemingly exceeded the furthest limits of Francis' imagination, so that often, he either struggled to find enough names to describe God, or resorted to apophatic terms.<sup>421</sup> The title may be

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415 *Adm I*.

416 *ER XXIII*, 11 / *LtOrd* 1.

417 *2LtF* 4 / *PrsG* 2 / *OfP* Pss III, 3; VII, 3.

418 *1LtCl* 3 / *Adm I*, 10.

419 *PrCr* / *ER XVII*, 17 / *Test* 14 / *Adm VII*, 4 / *Adm XXVIII*, 2.

420 *OfP* PsVII, 9.

421 *ER XXIII* 9, 11 / *PrsG* / *1LtF I* 11-13.

influenced by Anselm's definition that God is 'something than which nothing greater can be thought'.<sup>422</sup> Francis' writing on God implies that the 'Most High' is too great even to be captured by any human concept or name, though it does not stop him trying.<sup>423</sup> His epistemology is paradoxical. In Jesus Christ, God is revealed in complete familiarity with the human and physical world, which is tangible and comprehensible. He remains, however, an ineffable mystery in his transcendent divinity. Thus, Francis' theology combines the apophatic and cataphatic approaches to God. Within Francis' concept of the Godhead, therefore, is another coincidence of opposite qualities, of the manifest and the hidden, as Cousins also identified in Bonaventure's theology.<sup>424</sup> This coincidence appears to Francis in the Father, who is ineffable but made known in the Incarnate Son of God, who is 'the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15)' in creation.<sup>425</sup> A feature of his writing is a great desire to see and to know God,<sup>426</sup> which can only be partly fulfilled in this world, but perfectly in the Father's kingdom through Jesus Christ.<sup>427</sup>

In *The Earlier Rule*, Francis wrote that the Son made the Father's name known.<sup>428</sup> On the other hand, a number of passages indicate that Francis considered the name of God to be beyond human grasp. In *The Earlier Rule*, he prayed for the mediation of the Son and Holy Spirit to give thanks worthily to the Father, 'Because all of us, wretches and sinners, are not worthy to pronounce Your name'.<sup>429</sup> The implication is that God is fully known to God alone. Likewise, Francis wrote in his *Canticle of Sir Brother Sun*, '...no human is worthy to mention Your name.'<sup>430</sup> *The Prayer Inspired by The Our Father* links God's name with knowledge of God, and suggests that the dimensions of God are beyond human knowledge:

'Holy be your Name:  
 May knowledge of You become clearer in us  
 that we may know  
 the breadth of Your blessings,  
 the length of Your promises,  
 the height of Your majesty,  
 the depth of Your judgements.'<sup>431</sup>

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422Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, ch. 2., in: J. Hopkins, and H. Richardson, ed. and trans., *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. 1 (London, SCM Press Ltd., 1974) p. 93.

423PrOF 2.

424Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 200.

425This idea appears to be in the reasoning behind *Admonition I*, as explained below.

426PrCr / Adm I / Test 10 / PrOF 4 / LtOrd 22-28 / 2LtF 60.

427PrOF 4.

428ER XXII, 41.

429ER XXIII, 5, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 82.

430CtC 2, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 113.

431PrOF 3, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 158.

This passage's conformity with Ephesians 3:18 links it with Francis' coincident idea of a knowledge of God which surpasses knowledge. His meditation on the Our Father also calls God's mercy 'ineffable'.<sup>432</sup> Paradoxically, Francis does try to name and describe God, as in *The Praises of God*, but when he does, the result is often a torrent of descriptive words tumbling on top of one another, with the cumulative implication that no amount of human words can capture the infinity of God's nature.<sup>433</sup> The end of chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* clearly shows the combination of positive and negative theology in Francis' approach to God. After citing the Trinity, he lists seven apophatic terms describing what God is not:

'without beginning and end  
 ...unchangeable, invisible,  
 indescribable, ineffable,  
 incomprehensible, unfathomable,<sup>434</sup>

After these come 'blessed, praiseworthy', followed by four cataphatic terms describing God's transcendence: 'glorious, exalted, sublime, most high'. He ends the series with four immanent, tangible attributes of God: 'gentle, lovable, delightful, and totally desirable.' It is as if Francis is creating a verbal picture of the coincidence of hidden and manifest in God's nature, beginning with the transcendent, ineffable pole and progressing to the opposite, incarnate and immanent aspect. This coincident impression of God's immanence and transcendence is sometimes implicit in the terms with which he addresses God at the start of his prayers. He begins with attributes of the transcendent, and then adds relational qualities which describe God's movement toward creation, such as 'good' or 'merciful':

Almighty, most holy most high and supreme God,  
 all good, supreme good, totally good, You Who alone are good (*PrH* 11)<sup>435</sup>,  
 Most High, all-powerful, good Lord (*CtC* 1)<sup>436</sup>,  
 Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God (*LtOrd* 50)<sup>437</sup>

Francis' theology emphasises that God the Father is revealed through the Son while also remaining, in some ways, hidden from creatures. *The Letter to the Clergy* and *The Testament* stress that the 'Body and Blood' of Christ and the written words of God are the only tangible revelation of the Most High in this world.<sup>438</sup> Here and elsewhere, due to the immense value he placed upon seeing and hearing the Lord,

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432*PrOF* 7.

433*ER* XXIII, 9, 11 / *PrsG* / *ILtF* I, 11-13.

434*ER* XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 85-6.

435Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*, p. 217 (my italics).

436*FA:ED* vol. 1, p. 113 (my italics).

437*FA:ED* vol. 1, p. 120 (my italics).

438*Test* 10 / *The Second Letter to the Clergy*, Later Edition, (*2LtCl*) 3.

Francis exhorted his readers to treat these mysteries with the reverence due to God. *Admonition One* quotes from John, chapter fourteen, in which Philip desires to see the Father and Jesus teaches that he is himself the image of the Father, and the only way to him.<sup>439</sup> Francis' meditation on the meaning of these words, in the light of his scriptural knowledge begins, 'The Father dwells in inaccessible light, and God is spirit, and no one has ever seen God.'<sup>440</sup> Francis concludes that only God can see God and therefore human beings can only see God in the Holy Spirit.<sup>441</sup> The rest of this teaching on the Eucharist implies that, to see the Father in this world, it is necessary to see the Son in the Holy Spirit, with 'spiritual eyes'. Thus, the whole Trinity is involved in God's self-revelation to humankind. To see 'in the Spirit' is to see beyond the physical forms, the humanity of Jesus or the bread and wine, and believe in the divinity of what one is seeing. This is the necessary disposition for receiving God sacramentally in the Eucharist. Therefore, as Francis understood it, because seeing and knowing God were beyond human capability, it must be the Holy Spirit dwelling in the human person who both saw and received the Son of God in the Eucharist.<sup>442</sup> This follows from Francis' conviction that all virtues, including that of faith, were gifts of the Holy Spirit:

'And hail all you holy virtues  
which are poured into the hearts of the faithful  
through the grace and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit,  
that from being unbelievers,  
You may make them faithful to God.'<sup>443</sup>

Francis' writings imply that knowledge of God is impossible for created beings, except by divine enlightenment bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Francis considered that even the angels and saints in heaven were enlightened to know the Father.<sup>444</sup> Therefore, he asked God to 'enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith ... and knowledge, Lord...'.<sup>445</sup> In the Father's kingdom, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, there is 'clear vision' of God, as Francis wrote.<sup>446</sup> This kingdom is accessible only through the Son, as the way to the Father. So to see the Father, it is necessary to be where the Son is, as Francis taught by quoting the priestly prayer of Jesus in *The Earlier Rule*.<sup>447</sup> This crucial point concerning the mediatory role of the Son will be examined in chapter three.

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439 *Adm I*, 1-4.

440 *Adm I*, 5.

441 *Adm I*, 6-7.

442 *Adm I*, 12.

443 *SalBVM* 6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 163.

444 *PrOF* 2.

445 *PrCr*; *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 40.

446 *PrOF* 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 158.

447 *ER* XXII, 55.

The examples from Francis' works given above show that the Trinity, in his theology, has the coincident attributes of hidden and manifest, transcendent and immanent. This means that his theology combines apophatic and cataphatic approaches to God. God is hidden from natural human intellect and senses, but revealed through Christ by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The manifest aspect of God's nature is in Christ. As well as the life and teaching of Jesus in the New Testament, Francis similarly valued the Old Testament as divine revelation. He understood the latter as also pointing to Christ. It was a tradition in western Christianity, handed down from Augustine of Hippo, to interpret the whole of the Old Testament in retrospect as signifying the mystery of Christ. That Francis took this view of the Old Testament is indicated most clearly by his use of the Book of Psalms in composing his *Office of the Passion* to tell the story of the Incarnation, Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as demonstrated by André Cirino and Laurent Gallant.<sup>448</sup> Therefore, the tangible revelation of God for Francis was concentrated in the word of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, which were direct ways of seeing and hearing God Incarnate, in order to know him by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

In the wider picture of Francis' entire vision, it is apparent that the coincidence of manifest and hidden applies to the Trinity. The Father transcends human knowledge, but is also revealed in the Son by the Holy Spirit. However, from Francis' point of view, this coincidence is centred in the Word Incarnate, the centre between God and human beings. He is the only way to the Father by which humans can approach and come to know the ineffable God, as *Admonition One* explains. Human beings can know God in this world only in sensible forms. As infinite Creator, Christ is transcendent, but as creature he is also manifest, immanent and familiar with creation and humanity. Thus, this coincidence is centred on the hypostatic union. Without Christ, the infinite divinity, which was utterly transcendent and ineffable, might appear irreconcilable with what is revealed in creation and sense perceptible. In the Incarnate Word, Francis' theology sees a coincidence of God's transcendence and immanence. Though distinct, these qualities are no longer opposites. Rather, they are put together in harmony, as is suggested linguistically in Francis' groupings of cataphatic next to apophatic titles in the texts examined above. Like the divine and human natures, God's hiddenness and manifestness are mysteriously united in the one Person of Christ. Since Christ is never separated in Francis' thought from the Trinity, this coincidence is applied to the Trinity.

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448Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*.

## Conclusion

The endeavour of this study to reconstruct Francis' panology from his writings has begun with the element of the Trinity. The key positioning of the Trinity in Francis' writings as the Alpha and Omega point of his theology, and the number of references to the Trinity, make clear that this is a main focus in his overall vision. It is, therefore, reasonable to describe Francis' theology as Trinitarian in character. This exploration has also shown how the coincidence of opposites can provide a key to Francis' thinking regarding the Trinity. It does not entail opposites in Francis' understanding of the Trinity, but a coincidence or 'falling together' of opposites as they might be perceived from a human viewpoint. Hence, the coincidence does not introduce opposites into the Trinity, but rather resolves the perception of them.

It is noticeable that Francis' theology never suggests that the personal distinctions of relationship in the Trinity are shared in the divine essence. It does not for example, suggest that all three Persons are Father or Son. This would be inaccurate according to the defined dogma.<sup>449</sup> Nor do the relations coincide with each other in Francis' thought. As seen above, Francis' words do express the coincidence with the divine unity of the diversity of personal roles in God's action *ad extra*, so that all three Persons might be addressed as 'Saviour', for example.

His writing about the Trinity might give a superficial impression that Francis, in his simplicity, confused the roles of the divine Persons. However, a close reading shows that he used words very carefully and precisely, as Paolazzi rightly observed.<sup>450</sup> Francis employed coincident language in a way that illustrated and reinforced the traditional definitions of the Trinity. In references to the Trinity, he used language carefully, to emphasise the 'Undivided Unity' of the divine essence, together with the plurality of hypostases, and the unity with diversity in the Persons' roles relative to creation.<sup>451</sup>

Francis' references to the Trinity show that he conceptualised, in the Triune God, a coincidence of plurality/diversity with perfect unity. He believed this 'Three and One' to be 'the highest good'.<sup>452</sup> Thus, in the Trinity, Francis found an archetype for goodness, which would be reflected back to the Creator in the perfection of creation, as will be seen in later chapters. In the diversity of the Trinitarian Persons he depicted a certain order, in which the Father had primacy as source and end of all God's action *ad*

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449Council of Toledo (675): DS 530:25, in Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 60.

450Paolazzi, '*Scritti di Francesco d'Assisi*', p. 11, cited in: Paolazzi, 'Francis and His Use of Scribes', p. 327.

451*ExhP* 16, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 138.

452*PrsG* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109.

*extra*. Yet all three Persons shared full involvement in the divine mission to creation. Francis also perceived the Trinity, through the incarnate Son, as both hidden and manifest. He acknowledged the ineffable transcendence of God, while placing great importance on seeing, hearing and knowing God in the Incarnate Word, which was possible by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. From all the above it may be concluded that the thought structure of the coincidence of opposites was intrinsic to Francis' understanding of God as Trinity. Furthermore, the Trinity was an essential and foundational feature of his theology. In terms of the structure of Francis' vision, the Triune Creator was the Alpha and Omega point, the beginning and end of creation.



## 2. Jesus Christ the Mediator: universal centre

### A coincidence of Creator and creature

This chapter will show, from Francis' writings, how Christ is understood as the universal mediating centre of his theology, by means of this coincidence of opposites. The next chapter will discuss the significance of this coincidence for the human person striving to follow Christ. Most spiritualities emphasise one of the two natures in Christ more than the other. Francis' Christology holds in equal balance the transcendent divinity and creaturely poverty in Christ. This chapter and the next will focus on a coincidence of opposites, of Creator and creature, in Francis' vision of Christ. It does not occur within the Godhead as does the first class of coincidence but between God and creation, and fits into the centre of Francis' entire vision. It also falls into a second class of coincidences of opposites, which are centred on Christ. Before focusing on the evidence in the writings, it will be necessary to explain what exactly is meant in the present study by a coincidence of Creator and creature in Christ.

Without using the technical terminology, Francis understood Christ according to the dogma of the Incarnation, that the divine Word became flesh.<sup>453</sup> Francis' vision features a coincidence of Creator and creature, centred on Christ, which is faithful to this understanding of the hypostatic union. The terms 'Creator' and 'creature' are not strictly opposites, nor are they used by Francis in a coincident way. However, for the purpose of this study, they will represent a general category of opposing ideas applying to God and to creation, which Francis' faith vision of the Incarnation brought together. Francis' theology sees Christ bridging a twofold gap between humankind and God. In relation to God, human beings are deficient ontologically, and also in holiness, since they have fallen into sin.<sup>454</sup> The coincidence of Creator and creature bridges this two-fold gap, in reconciling opposite ideas which concern either what God and creatures are by nature, or what they do. However, some of his references to the unworthiness of humans in relation to God could be understood to encompass both aspects of their perceived opposition.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>453</sup>*LtF* 4.

<sup>454</sup>*ER* XXIII, 2; XXII, 6-8.

<sup>455</sup>*ER* XXIII, 5 / *LtOrd* 47.

### The ontological deficiency

Christ functions as Creator-creature Mediator in bridging the gap of perceived incompatibility between ontological properties of creatures and God.<sup>456</sup> While the terms 'Creator' and 'creation' are not opposites, there are certain attributes of God and creation that would appear irreconcilable according to conventional logic: infinite and finite, eternal and temporal, uncaused being and caused being. The title '*Altissimus*' which Francis commonly used for God, emphasises the distance of the divinity above and beyond human creatures. Francis did not use technical language to express this ontological opposition. He wrote of God as the Creator and giver of everything that was good, while human beings had nothing of their own and were radically dependant on God for everything.<sup>457</sup> He saw another opposition in terms of the spiritual versus the sense-perceptible applying to God and creatures respectively: 'God is spirit and no one has ever seen God.'<sup>458</sup> Writing to the entire Order, Francis referred to himself as, 'a ... weak man' and of God, he said, '...there is no one who is all-powerful except Him.'<sup>459</sup> Francis believed these attributes of Creator and creature to be united in the Incarnate Word in the union of divine and human natures. As Francis wrote, Christ was 'true God and true man'.<sup>460</sup> This means that, in Jesus Christ, the infinite and finite properties of God and creatures coincide. This union enables a mediation between finite human creatures and the infinite Creator. The mediation is communicated in Francis' writings chiefly through the coincidence of hidden and manifest regarding humans' knowledge of God, as discussed in the previous chapter. Christ, as Creator and creature, is the only medium in which limited creatures can see and know something of God, who is utterly transcendent and infinite. The ontological mediation is made clear in *Admonition One*, in which Francis teaches that only God can see God. Human beings cannot, of themselves, see God because God is spirit and cannot be seen with bodily eyes.<sup>461</sup> However, humans can see the Father in Christ. The Son reveals the Father by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit, who brings the 'spiritual sight' of faith.<sup>462</sup>

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456Nguyen-Van-Khanh pointed out Christ's particular role as Mediator in Francis' writings (Nguyen-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 68).

457ER XXIII, 1, 8.

458Adm I, 5, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 128.

459LtOrd 3, 9, FA:ED, vol. 1, pp. 116-7.

460ER XXIII, 3 / Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 103.

461Adm I, 5-7.

462Adm I, 9-10, 19-21.

### **The holiness deficiency**

Francis also sees Creator and creature as opposites in a very particular and subjective sense. Apart from Christ, he perceives human beings, including himself, to be opposed to all good and, consequently, opposed to God, who alone is good.<sup>463</sup> Humans are opposed to God not ontologically, but insofar as they do the opposite of what God does. Francis' archetype for goodness is the Trinity which he called 'the highest good'. His perception of what God does is linked with his concept of the Trinity.<sup>464</sup> This is presented in his vision as a communion of Persons in perfect unity, distinct in some respects, who share themselves completely with one another. Implicit in Francis' theology, therefore, is the idea that goodness shares itself or, as Pseudo-Dionysius wrote, the Good is self-diffusive.<sup>465</sup> What humans do, 'by delighting in vices and sins', is self-serving appropriation, which is the opposite of self-sharing goodness.<sup>466</sup> Appropriation encompasses almost every sin in Francis' understanding.<sup>467</sup> As for the non-human creatures, surprisingly, Francis does not understand them to be opposed to God, but to be doing God's will better than humans.<sup>468</sup> This point will be expanded in chapter seven. Francis' writings imply that it was Christ who revealed to humanity the nature of God's self-sharing inner life, by the kenosis which characterised his life on earth.<sup>469</sup> Francis saw it as unfitting that the action of humans should oppose that of God. Of all creation, men and women alone were made in God's image and likeness, yet humanity was in full flight from God-likeness in its habit of appropriation. Francis saw the vocation of human beings as returning, with all creation, thanks, praise and glory to the Creator.<sup>470</sup> Humans failed in this task, however, preferring to appropriate good to themselves, whereas in truth, all good belonged to God and, apart from God, humans owned nothing except their sins.<sup>471</sup> The gap in holiness which Francis perceived between human beings and God is revealed in his great prayer of thanksgiving in chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*. Because he considered that human beings were not worthy to make an adequate

463ER XXII, 6-8 / ER XXIII, 9 / PrOF 2 / PrH 11 / Adm VII, 4 / Adm VIII / LtOrd 47 / ER XVII, 17 / 2LtF 62.

464PrsG 3.

465Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, IV, 1.

466Adm V, 3, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 131 / *A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples (LtR)* 4-5 / 2LtF 77-85.

467Adm II.

468Adm V, 2.

469ER XXII, 41.

470LtOrd 8 / ER XVII, 19.

471Adms V, 7; VIII, 2 / ER XVII, 5-7; XXIII, 9 / PrOF 2 / PrH 11.

act of thanksgiving to God, he asked the Son, who pleased the Father in everything, to return thanks and praise on their behalf.<sup>472</sup> Francis quoted at length from chapter seventeen of John's Gospel, which sees Jesus praying to the Father and interceding on behalf of humankind for its salvation.<sup>473</sup> Francis showed the bridging of the two-fold gap between God and humans through a coincidence of Creator and creature in Christ.

### **'True God and true man'<sup>474</sup>**

Regarding humanity's perceived deficiency in holiness, Francis saw the perfection of human nature in Christ. Christ was a human creature who obeyed God's will and made the Father known by giving himself completely, as God did.<sup>475</sup> Ignoring problems of time and history that did not apply to God, Francis held that it was in the image and likeness of the beloved Son that human nature was created, and therein lay its 'excellence'.<sup>476</sup> In Christ, the opposition of Creator and creature, which human experience of sin showed him, fell into a harmonious union. He saw that this was how human nature was created to be. Christ was the ideal to which humanity must return from the effects of the Fall, in order to be in union with the Creator.<sup>477</sup> Consequently, Francis' theology presents contradictory views of human beings, opposed to God insofar as they sin and yet, excellent insofar as they are conformed to their exemplar in Christ. His theology presents human nature itself as created in the image and likeness of the beloved Son.<sup>478</sup> It could not, therefore, be opposed to God. Sin is a result of being deceived so that one loses sight of Christ, and thus departs from the truth of one's own humanity.<sup>479</sup> When Francis wrote of humans being opposed to God, it was always in reference to what they did, that is, their tendency to sin. That human nature itself was opposed to God was a false perception. And so this perceived opposition fell into a 'union in difference' relationship in Christ. He is the exemplar of human nature, in union with divinity.

This coincidence of opposites in the Person of Jesus is between the Creator, who is uncreated, infinite, perfect, transcendent, and creature, who is dependant,

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<sup>472</sup>*ER* XXIII, 5.

<sup>473</sup>*ILtF* I, 14-19 / *ER* XXII, 41-55.

<sup>474</sup>*ER* XXIII, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.

<sup>475</sup>*ER* XXII, 41 / *2LtF* 8-11 / *LtOrd* 46.

<sup>476</sup>*Adm V*, 1.

<sup>477</sup>*ER* XXIII, 1-2.

<sup>478</sup>*Adm V*, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

<sup>479</sup>*ILtF* II, 7-10.

mortal, physical, weak and limited. Francis' theology always views Christ in a coincident way, with both extremes in view, but united in his Person.<sup>480</sup> As Van Asseldonk rightly observed: 'Francis never speaks of Christ abstracting from His divine Person, His being God-Man, the incarnate Son of the Father ... Therefore, it is just as wrong to call Francis the man of the humanity of Christ as it is to call him the man of the divinity of Christ.'<sup>481</sup> An early example of how Francis expressed this coincidence of opposites is in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*. This teaches that the Word of 'the most high Father ... so worthy, so holy and glorious ... received the flesh of our humanity and frailty. Though He was rich, He wished ... to choose poverty in the world beyond all else.'<sup>482</sup> The terms, 'worthy, holy and glorious', contrast with 'flesh, humanity and frailty' and yet Francis deliberately puts them together in a single description of the Incarnate Word. The opposites of riches and poverty also coincide in this description of the Incarnation. Francis teaches that, though rich with divine plenitude in his nature as God, the Son took on all aspects of the poverty of the human state, including the aspect of material poverty. It is significant that Francis described the Word as 'worthy' and 'holy'. Thus, Christ is seen to bridge in his Person the gap in holiness between God and erring humans. Again in *The Earlier Rule*, Francis wrote,

'We thank You  
for as through Your Son you created us,  
so through Your holy love...  
You brought about His birth  
as true God and true man...  
and You willed to redeem us captives  
through His cross and blood and death.'<sup>483</sup>

This passage views, in Christ, the coincidence of the Creator with a mortal creature, who is born, suffers and dies. As the centre uniting these two extremes, Jesus is 'true God and true man.'<sup>484</sup> Another part of *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, states:

'Let every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths,  
give praise, glory, honor and blessing  
To him Who suffered so much  
Who has given and will give in the future every good,  
for He is our power and strength,

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480As Matura noted, '...he never views Christ's humanity either in itself or as separate from His preexistence in heaven or from His risen glory' (Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 61).

481Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 149.

482*LtF* 4-5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

483*ER* XXIII, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.

484*Ibid.*

Who alone is good,  
 Who alone is almighty,  
 Who alone is omnipotent, wonderful, glorious  
 and Who alone is holy,  
 worthy of praise and blessing  
 through endless ages.  
 Amen.<sup>485</sup>

This passage presents contrasting ideas brought together on account of the hypostatic union. The one 'who suffered so much' conveys the existential poverty of the creaturely state, which reaches its furthest extreme in the Cross. The same one who suffered is also 'omnipotent' and 'glorious', as the Creator, to be honoured by all creation. It is apparent from the quotation above how this coincidence of opposites supplies for human deficiency, bridging the two-fold gap to the divine: 'He is *our* power and strength (ontological), *Who alone is good* (holiness).'

### **A coincident vision of Christ**

Francis' writings present Christ as the Creator-creature Mediator, in relation to both the Trinity and humanity, facing, as it were, in two directions. Firstly, to consider the 'God-facing' direction, which stresses the divinity of Christ, he is always in inseparable relationship with the Father and Spirit in the Trinity.<sup>486</sup> Francis often emphasised that Christ was the Son, in relation to the Father, by calling him, 'the Beloved Son'.<sup>487</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, the titles or roles which Francis gave to Christ were often those which were generally attributed to the Father and to God, such as, 'Most High', 'Creator' and 'Lord'.<sup>488</sup> Francis' most common title for Christ is, '*Dominus Jesus Christus*', never only 'Jesus'. Nguyễn-Van-Khanh has highlighted two examples of Christ seen as Creator. In the *Letter to the Entire Order*, Francis urged the brothers to reverence 'the most holy Body and Blood of *our Lord Jesus Christ*', and extend respect to 'the vessels and other liturgical objects that contain His holy words in order to impress on ourselves the sublimity of *our Creator*'.<sup>489</sup> In *Admonition Five*, Francis wrote: 'All creatures under heaven serve, know and obey their *Creator* ... better than you. Even the demons did not *crucify Him*'.<sup>490</sup> Francis also

485 *LtF* 61-2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 49-50.

486 Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 61.

487 *OfP* Ps VII, 3; IX, 2; XV, 3 / *LtOrd* 51 / *ER* XXIII, 5 / *Adm V*, 1.

488 *Adm I*, 10 / *Test 10* / *LtOrd* 15-16.

489 *LtOrd* 34, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 119 (my italics) / Van Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 33-4.

490 *Adm V*, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131 (my italics) / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 34.

called Christ the Word and the 'Wisdom' of the Father.<sup>491</sup> The beloved Son is known in terms of the Father, as the expression or outpouring of the Father. Conversely, the Father is made known through the Son. The earthly life and death of Christ are understood in the context of the Son's desire to do the will of the Father and return glory to him.<sup>492</sup> Francis referred to Christ 'with the Holy Spirit'.<sup>493</sup> In Francis' thought, the action of Christ goes together with that of the Spirit. Human beings can only see and know Christ in the Spirit.<sup>494</sup> Francis associated Christ, the Word of God, with the literal words of God, as will be explained later. He taught the necessity of following the word of God according to the Spirit, which gives life, rather than the dead letter. This meant the word had to be put into practice, thereby giving glory back to God.<sup>495</sup> The words of God in the *Rule* had to be observed 'spiritually', that is, in the Spirit.<sup>496</sup> Francis further explained in the same text how the Spirit enabled a person to carry out the words of God: 'to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity' meant to pray constantly, 'with a pure heart', to have patience and humility in trials and to love enemies.<sup>497</sup> In this way, a person gave birth to the Word in the Spirit by 'a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.'<sup>498</sup> Therefore, Christ, in Francis' thought, does not act alone, but his action for the salvation of humankind is shared with the Trinity.<sup>499</sup> It has now been shown how Francis' writings communicate Christ's being and mission in relation to the Father and together with the Spirit. From this, it may be concluded that Francis' Christology presents Christ's Person and his action as part of the mutually inter-penetrating unity of the three divine Persons, which was discussed in chapter one.

Turning to view Christ in the world-facing direction, three interweaving strands are identifiable in the Son's relation to humans: one strand is that of redemption, salvation and judgement, a second is of teaching or revelation and a third is of presence, as God-with-us, in solidarity with humankind at its poorest. To consider the first broad category, Francis saw Christ as Redeemer and Saviour, titles

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491 *LtF* 3, 4, 67.

492 *LtF* 8-13 / *OfP* Ps III, 8-12; Ps V, 9; Ps VI, 11-13.

493 *ER* XXIII, 1, 5-6 / *SalBVM* 2 / *Test* 40.

494 *Adm* I, 5-6.

495 *Adm* VII, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh also observed ( Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 197).

496 *The Later Rule (LR)* X, 4.

497 *LR* X, 8-10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105.

498 *LtF* I, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42.

499 *LtOrd* 30-33, 50-52 / *LtF* 48-50 / *ER* XXII, 27-32.

which originated in the Father's saving will and action.<sup>500</sup> The role of Redeemer was associated with the Cross.<sup>501</sup> In a similar vein, Francis liked to focus on the image of Christ as the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep.<sup>502</sup> When Francis considered this soteriological mission, he often completed it with a picture of the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgement.<sup>503</sup> Francis looked forward to eternal life through Christ at this final judgement in his use of the title 'Saviour', as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh has demonstrated.<sup>504</sup>

In the second of the three strands, Francis' Christology presents the Son as the source of divine truth, the one who reveals the Father, according to the Johannine titles of 'the way the truth and the life'.<sup>505</sup> This was Francis' way of expressing his coincident idea of God as hidden and manifest. The point of *Admonition One* is that the Father is 'inaccessible', except through the Son (Jn 14:6-9).<sup>506</sup> This is because of the transcendence of God as 'Spirit' and 'Divinity'.<sup>507</sup> Those who see Jesus are seeing the image of the Father in creation.<sup>508</sup> Yet Jesus, as well as being a creature, is divine and 'equal to the Father'.<sup>509</sup> Therefore, he retains an aspect of hiddenness, in that his divinity can only be seen in the Spirit, that is, with the Spirit's gift of faith.<sup>510</sup> In this second strand, Christ is viewed as the light, which also draws on Johannine Christology.<sup>511</sup> Francis liked to view Christ as the supreme teacher of humanity.<sup>512</sup> He presented him as a teacher, both by his words and the example of his life, death and Resurrection. In the next chapter, this study will explore the important idea of Christ as an exemplar for imitation by humanity.

A third strand of relationship between Christ and humanity views him as 'God-with-us' under various forms. His relation to humankind as brother depends on his revelation of the universal Father of all. Christ as brother intercedes for the human

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500 *LtF* 4-13 / *ER* XXIII, 3 / *OfP* Ps VII, 3; IX, 1-3.

501 *Test* 5 / *ER* XXIII, 3 / *LtOrd* 3.

502 *Adm* VI, 1 / *ER* XXII, 32 / *LtF* I, 13.

503 *OfP* Ps VI; Ps VII, 9-11; Ps XI, 6 / *ER* XXIII, 4.

504 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 80-85.

505 *Adm* I, 1 / *ER* XXII, 40.

506 *Adm* I, 1-5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128.

507 *Adm* I, 8, *Ibid.*

508 *Adm* I, 4.

509 *Adm* I, 7.

510 *Adm* I, 6-7.

511 *LtF* 14-16, 51-53, 66 / Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 118-130.

512 *OfP*, Antiphon, 3 / *ER* XXII, 1, 35 / *LtOrd* 5-7.



race with the Father, that it may share with him in the joy of unity in the Trinity.<sup>513</sup> Francis understood the written and spoken words of God as a living presence of the divine Word that was 'spirit and life.'<sup>514</sup> Therefore, in his written words and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, Francis wanted Christ honoured as the presence of God.<sup>515</sup> He wrote of the Eucharistic presence: 'And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He Himself says: "Behold I am with you until the end of the age."' <sup>516</sup>

Francis' balanced emphasis on both natures in Christ may have been influenced by two contrasting theological currents of his time. As mentioned in the Introduction, the thirteenth-century Franciscans lived at a time of transition between high and low Christology. The high Christology inherited from the early Medieval period was supported by the remaining hierarchical structures of feudal society with the figure of the warrior king at its apex. This emphasis on the divine, omnipotent Christ had been strengthened by the Church's struggle against the Arian heresy, which challenged Christ's divinity.<sup>517</sup> Consonant with this traditional current, one can recognise Francis' images of Christ as *Altissimus*, as Creator, Lord and God and eschatological judge. At the opposite theological extreme, the Church of Francis' time was fighting the Albigensian heresy, which challenged the humanity of Christ, regarded all matter as evil, and therefore wished to dispense with the Church's Sacraments. The reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council responded to this threat of heresy in their promotion of preaching, education of the clergy,<sup>518</sup> reception of the Sacraments,<sup>519</sup> and belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.<sup>520</sup> Francis too, emphasised the Real Presence in his writing.<sup>521</sup> As if refuting the heresy of the Cathars, Francis generally emphasised the flesh-and-blood human reality of Christ's embracing human poverty and weakness, and his abiding with the faithful physically in the Sacraments of the Church.<sup>522</sup>

<sup>513</sup>ER XXII, 33-4, 42-46 / 2*LtF* 54-60.

<sup>514</sup>*Test* 13 / ER XXII, 39.

<sup>515</sup>*LtOrd* 12, 34-36 / *Test* 10-13 / *ILtCus* 2-5, 7 / *2LtCl* 1-12. Nguyễn-Van-Khanh identified this link between the sacramental presences of the written words of scripture and the Word Incarnate in the Eucharist (Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 192-3).

<sup>516</sup>*Adm I*, 22.

<sup>517</sup>Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 24-27.

<sup>518</sup>The Fourth Lateran Council, const. 11, in: N.P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1 (London, Sheed and Ward Ltd. and Georgetown University Press, 1990) p. 240.

<sup>519</sup>*Ibid.*, const. 21, p. 245.

<sup>520</sup>Lat. IV, constit. 1, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, p. 230.

<sup>521</sup>*Adm I*, 8-13.

<sup>522</sup>Esser K, 'Franziskus und die Katharer seiner Zeit,' *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 51, 1958,

### **Divine kenosis**

The way in which Francis viewed a coincidence of Creator and creature in Christ has been demonstrated and Francis' concentration on the mystery of the Incarnation will now be explored. Nguyễn-Van-Khanh has observed that Francis focused on Christ, not in the details of his earthly life, but in the salvific mystery of the Incarnation itself.<sup>523</sup> The idea of God's humility revealed in the life and death of Christ was of key importance in his meditations on this mystery.

Francis viewed Christ's life and death in terms of a movement of humility shown in the mysteries of his birth, his Passion and the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. These mysteries are closely linked in Francis' thought, precisely because they were all manifestations of the humility of God. To him, all were facets of the mystery of the Incarnation, which was the gift of Godself in human flesh and blood. Francis always referred to the Eucharist as the 'Body and Blood' of the Lord, rather than the 'Eucharist', the 'Sacrament' or any abstract title. This made a clear connection from the Eucharist to his references to the Nativity and Passion of Christ. In each case it was the same God in human flesh who was given for humankind. In *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, Francis' meditation flows seamlessly from the Incarnation to the Passion and the Eucharist. He begins with the Word of the Father, revealed in flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, 'from whose womb he received the *flesh* of our humanity and frailty', thereby choosing to embrace poverty in the world.<sup>524</sup> The narrative then jumps to the Last Supper and Christ's words, '*This is My Body ... This is My Blood* which will be poured out for you.' The next scene is Gethsemane, where Christ prays to the Father to take the cup of suffering away if it is possible:

'And His sweat became as drops of *blood* falling on the ground. Nevertheless, He placed His will in the will of His Father, saying: Father, let Your will be done; not as I will but as You will. His Father's will was such that His blessed and glorious Son, Whom He gave to us and Who was born for us, should offer himself through *His own blood* as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross. ...<sup>525</sup>

Francis' narrative continues with a reference to Christ in the Eucharist: 'And He wishes all of us to be saved through Him and receive him with our heart pure and our

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p. 251, cited in: Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 43.  
 523 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 104-107.  
 524 *LtF* 4-5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46 (my italics).  
 525 *LtF* 6-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46 (my italics).

body chaste.<sup>526</sup> Here, there is a verbal thread connecting the flesh and blood of the Incarnation, of the Last Supper and of the Passion, continued into the Eucharist. The Cross is also linked verbally with the *altar* of the Eucharistic sacrifice, which Francis elsewhere calls, the 'Body and Blood' of the Lord.<sup>527</sup> In Francis' theology, God's movement of humility into human flesh, frailty and poverty is completed in the Cross. In his Passion, Christ embraces death, which is the effect of sin, and that aspect of humanity and creaturehood at the furthest extreme from God, who is life. As Francis saw it, this same sacrifice of God's incarnate self in love and humility was made present in the Eucharist for the salvation of those who received him. To this effect, in *Admonition One*, Francis linked the Son's movement of incarnation 'from the royal throne into the Virgin's womb' with his daily-renewed self-giving in humility, 'down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest'.<sup>528</sup>

One can observe in the above-quoted passage from *The Second Letter to the Faithful* that Francis emphasised the Father's will in the mysteries of salvation and, likewise, the Son's obedience to the Father for the sake of humankind. The obedient suffering of the Son was understood as orientated to the glory of the Father, since his Passion revealed the infinite love of the Father towards the human race. *The Office of the Passion* makes this association of giving glory to God with Christ's obedience to death, which Francis exhorts all to imitate:

'Give to the Lord, you families of nations,  
give to the Lord glory and praise,  
give to the Lord the glory due His name.  
Take up your bodies and carry His holy cross  
And follow His most holy commands even to the end.'<sup>529</sup>

The glory of the Father belongs also to the Son, according to Francis' concept of the Trinity. Another coincidence entailed in the Creator's embracing creaturehood, of glory and abjection, is most manifest in the Passion.<sup>530</sup> The state of abjection in the Passion arises from Christ's human experience of humiliation, suffering and death. However, through this experience shines his divine glory according to the Johannine Christology which influenced Francis. It is when his kenosis reaches its lowest place

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<sup>526</sup>*LtF* 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>527</sup>*LtCl* 1 / *2LtCl* 1 / *LtOrd*, 12, 14 / *Test* 10 / *Adm I*, 9-10, 12, 21.

<sup>528</sup>*Adm I*, 16, 18.

<sup>529</sup>*OfP* Ps XV, 12-13.

<sup>530</sup>Nguyên-Van-Khanh observed the link between suffering and glory in Francis' theology, but without naming it as a coincidence of opposites (Nguyên-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 44-5).

in the Cross that the *sine-proprio* self giving of the inner life of God is reflected most intensely into creation. Here, the Son reveals, as fully as possible in a creature, the extent of Father's love for the world and his own for the Father.<sup>531</sup> It is the influence of this Johannine idea of the Passion as the glorification of Christ that causes the coincidence, or 'falling together' of the opposite concepts in Francis' thought.

The coincidence of glory with abjection is evident in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, where the glory of the Son collides with the picture of immolation and bloodshed on the cross: 'His Father's will was such that His *blessed and glorious* Son, Whom He gave to us and Who was born for us, should offer himself through *His own blood* as a *sacrifice* and oblation on the altar of the cross...'.<sup>532</sup> Francis' writing elsewhere suggests that the abjection of Christ is his glory, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh commented, '...if Christ is to be exalted as Lord of the universe, it is because His love for us drove Him to death on the cross.'<sup>533</sup> Francis returned to this coincidence later in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*:

'Let every creature  
in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths,  
give praise, *glory*, honor and blessing  
To Him Who *suffered so much*,...'<sup>534</sup>

In his *Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*, Francis presented this coincidence in a quotation from Revelation: 'The Lamb Who was *slain* is worthy to receive ... honor and *glory* and blessing.'<sup>535</sup> The concept shows the influence of Johannine Christology in which Christ's Passion or his 'hour' is inseparable from his glory, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son so that the Son may glorify You (Jn 17:1)'.<sup>536</sup> Francis quoted this text in chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*, linking the Passion of Christ with making the Father's name known: 'Let us, therefore, hold onto the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel of Him Who humbled Himself to beg His Father for us and to make His name known saying: "Father, glorify Your name and glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You."'<sup>537</sup> Francis attached, "'Father, glorify

<sup>531</sup>Jn 17:1, 12:28, in: *ER* XXII, 41.

<sup>532</sup>*LtF* 11 (my italics).

<sup>533</sup>Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 42.

<sup>534</sup>*LtF* 61, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 49 (my italics).

<sup>535</sup>*PrH* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 161 (my italics). Nguyễn-Van-Khanh drew attention to the coincidence of opposites inherent in this Christological image ( Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 51-2).

<sup>536</sup>Nguyễn-Van-Khanh has demonstrated the extensive influence of Johannine Christology in Francis' writings (Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 219-224).

<sup>537</sup>*ER* XXII, 41, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

Your name" from John 12:28 to this quotation. This addition results in a double reference to the Father's name attached to a Johannine reference to the Passion as his glory. This textual arrangement suggests that the Father's glorification of his name and his Son is one and the same action. It implies that the invisible God is made known as kenotic love through the Passion of Christ. It appears that Francis understood that, in emptying himself to assume the poverty and suffering of the human state, the Son was giving glory to the Father. Christ, who came to reveal the Father, revealed in his life the true nature of God as self-emptying love. This love, manifested in humility to the extent of laying down his life, is no less than God's glory.

Without an understanding of this Johannine coincidence of opposites in Francis' thought, it might appear as if the Resurrection were missing from his theological vision. This is because he did not write about it as an event separated from the death of Christ. On the Cross, the Son gave glory to the Father by revealing to the world the nature of God as kenotic love.<sup>538</sup> In this way, the eternal life of the Trinity was most fully manifest in creation in the death of Christ. Thus, the death and Resurrection of Christ are not presented as separate and opposite movements, as are kenosis and appropriation. They are viewed as the giving and receiving of glory, as two aspects of the same mystery. Hence, in the sixth Psalm of Francis' *Office of the Passion*, his only explicit reference to Christ's Resurrection follows on almost instantaneously from his death:

'They led me into the dust of death  
and added sorrow to my wounds.  
I have slept and risen  
and my most holy Father has received me with glory.'<sup>539</sup>

Francis' theology undoubtedly proclaims a promise of *future* glory in heaven for those who follow Christ to the Cross. Nevertheless, it also conveys the coincident idea that they manifest God's glory *in* suffering and emptying themselves. It is apparent, therefore, that divine glory or favour coincides with abjection only in the world, but promises to continue untouched by suffering in eternal life. This is illustrated in extracts from the Beatitudes, which are often quoted or adapted in Francis' writings:

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<sup>538</sup>ER XXII, 41

<sup>539</sup>*OfP* Ps VI, 10-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 146.

Blessed *are* they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven. Blessed *are* you when people hate you, speak evil of you, persecute, expel, and abuse you, denounce your name as evil and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad *on that day* because your reward *is* great *in heaven*.<sup>540</sup>

The coincidence of glory and abjection also affects the outlook of those who imitate Christ's example. For them, the two ideas are no longer poles apart, but like two sides of the same coin, so that those who follow Christ into his degradation can be aware of giving glory to God by their self-emptying, and be confident of receiving glory from God.<sup>541</sup> This is how the coincided ideas of glory and abjection often appear to be inextricably interwoven in Francis' thought. By uniting themselves to Christ in abjection, humans are united with the 'Most High' Creator. This coincidence of abjection and glory arises from the completion of God's movement of humility, by which the 'Most High' assumed the greatest poverty of the human creaturely state.<sup>542</sup> Therefore, it may be understood as contained within the coincidence of Creator and creature.

### **The Mediator**

The Creator-creature coincidence effects a mediation between God and the world. This mediation of Christ operates in both directions. Firstly, in the God-to-world direction, Christ effects a coincidence of transcendence and immanence in his revelation of God to the created world. This coincidence depends on a union of ontological opposites such as infinite and finite, applying to God and creation respectively, in the Person of the Incarnate Word. Francis expressed these ideas through a presentation of Christ as the image and Word of the Father, who came to make him known. In this way the Father could be seen in creation, in the human person of the Son, by the light of the Holy Spirit. Francis adopted the Johannine metaphor of Christ as the Word of the Father (Jn 1:14) to present the Son as the Father's self-revelation, 'The most high Father made known from heaven ... this Word of the Father-... in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary...'.<sup>543</sup> Francis' introduction to *The Second Letter to the Faithful* offers his readers, 'the words of our

<sup>540</sup>*ER* XVI, 12-16, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 74-5 (my italics) cf. *LR* X, 11. Further examples: *Adms* XI, 4; *XVII*, 1; *XVIII*, 2; *XIX*, 1, 4; *XXII*; *XXIII*, 1-2; *XXIV*.

<sup>541</sup>*Adms* V, 8; *VI* / *OfP* Ps XV, 12-13; Ps VII, 7-9 / *LR* VI, 2-5 / *ER* XXII, 55; XVI, 10-21; IX 1-6.

<sup>542</sup>*LtF* 4-13 / *ER* XXIII, 3.

<sup>543</sup>*LtF* 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father.<sup>544</sup> Perhaps because 'the Word was made flesh (Jn 1:14)' in the Incarnation, which was of central importance to Francis, he also associated the literal words of God with the 'Body and Blood' of Christ. To Francis, the transcendent God was immanently present in his words, as in his 'Body and Blood'. He therefore wanted the words of scripture and of the liturgy to be given the same honour as the Sacrament.<sup>545</sup> Christ, who revealed the Father, was the living presence of God among people, in both his words and his 'Body and Blood'. The words of Jesus were inseparable from his Person in Francis' thought. In chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*, Francis made this connection clear by juxtaposing two quotations, 'The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. I am the Way the *Truth* and the Life.' Further on he adds, 'Your word is *truth*', quoting Jesus' prayer to the Father.<sup>546</sup>

Christ, as seen in *Admonition One*, functions as the image of the Father in creation. The admonition begins with Jesus' words, 'If you knew me, you would also know my Father; and from now on, you do know Him and have seen Him ... whoever see me sees my Father as well (Jn 14:7,9).'<sup>547</sup> Francis applied these words to seeing Christ in the Eucharist and believing in the flesh and blood presence of 'God-with-us'. Christ in the Sacrament comes daily to reveal the Father in a visible, tangible form, 'As He revealed Himself to the holy apostles in true flesh, so He reveals Himself to us now in the sacred bread.'<sup>548</sup> This also evokes the coincident idea of Christ as 'the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15)'. Christ, because he is God and also a physical creature, makes the Father, who is spirit and ineffable, sense perceptible and intelligible to physical and limited humans.

The ideas of Christ as Word and image of the Father are associated with the salvific activity of the Holy Spirit. Francis wrote that the words of God were 'spirit and life'.<sup>549</sup> The words alone could be a temptation to be puffed up with pride, by means of learning appropriated to oneself. Therefore, the words of God must be received in the Spirit of God, who, by the gift of humility, enables people put them

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5442*LtF* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 45.

545*LtOrd* 12, 34-36 / *Test* 10-13 / *ILtCus* 2-5, 7 / *2LtCl* 1-12.

546*ER* XXII, 39-40, 50, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81 (my italics).

547*Adm I*, 2, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128.

548*Adm I*, 19, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 129.

549*ER* XXII, 39 / *2LtF* 3.

into practice, and return all the glory to God.<sup>550</sup> *Admonition One* teaches that God, who is spirit, can only be seen and known through Christ, in the Spirit. The Spirit brings the gift of faith, by the light of which believers can recognise the divinity, in the humble forms assumed by Christ, of flesh and blood, and of bread. The indwelling Spirit gives 'spiritual eyes' to see with faith and enables the faithful to perceive, receive and know God in Jesus Christ. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit, therefore, who enables human beings to receive the Word and image of the Father mediated through Christ.<sup>551</sup>

The mediation of Christ also operates in the world-to-God direction. *Admonition One* begins with Francis quoting a teaching of Jesus: 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6).'<sup>552</sup> This sets the theme of the whole admonition.<sup>553</sup> Jesus is the way to the Father because he mediates his image. In the whole body of Francis' thought, the Son is, likewise, the medium for the return of humankind to the Father. 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life' is also inserted in *The Earlier Rule*, following, 'The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.'<sup>554</sup> Here again, Jesus is shown as mediating the words of the Father with the involvement of the Spirit. This means, for Francis, Christ is the way to the Father. In chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, Francis thanks the Father that, '...through Your only Son with the Holy Spirit You have created everything spiritual and corporal ...Your Son Himself will come again in the glory of His majesty ... and say to all those who have known You, adored you and served You in penance: "Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."<sup>555</sup> In Francis' thinking, human beings sin, and so are unworthy to address God directly. Christ is the one who, on behalf of the human race, is able, fully and fittingly, to give back praise, thanks and glory to the Father. He is the 'beloved Son', 'Who always satisfies' the Father, 'in everything'.<sup>556</sup> Following the same idea, Francis often presented Christ praying to the Father for the salvation of human beings, quoting extensively from the 'priestly prayer' of Jesus in John chapter seventeen.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>550</sup>*Adm VII*.

<sup>551</sup>*Adm I*, 12, 20-21.

<sup>552</sup>*Adm I*, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>553</sup>Nguy n-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 160-3.

<sup>554</sup>*ER XXII*, 39-40, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>555</sup>*ER XXIII*, 1, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.

<sup>556</sup>*ER XXIII*, 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 82-3.

<sup>557</sup>*ER XXII*, 41-55 / *2LtF* 56-60.



As well as being the Mediator for humanity, Francis understood Christ as the universal Mediator for all creation. In the God-world direction, the Son is the one, 'through Whom all things were made', who mediates 'all pardon, all grace, all glory' to the faithful.<sup>558</sup> In the world-God direction, he 'Who alone is good,' is worthy to receive the praise of all creatures.<sup>559</sup> Therefore, the Creator-creature coincidence in Christ is the centre of Francis' theological vision. All the good of creation must return to God through the Son, with the praise and thanksgiving of human beings. This is why Francis often invited all creatures to join him in praise of God in and through the Son.<sup>560</sup> The coincidences of divine and creaturely properties in Christ enable creation to fulfil what is, in Francis' thought, a crucial obligation, that it should return praise to its Creator. In this way, his theology implies, creation can participate in the perfect sharing of the 'good' that characterises the Triune God.<sup>561</sup>

The word 'doxological' has been used in connection with Francis' writings because of the amount of prayer in praise of God that they contain.<sup>562</sup> This word could aptly describe, in a more specific way, some parts of his work which appear to follow the linguistic pattern of the 'doxology' of the traditional Mass liturgy. These passages emphasise the central role in his vision of Christ's mediation in returning glory to God. One such text is Francis' prayer of thanksgiving to God through Christ in chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*. The whole of this chapter is like a trope on the doxology, where Francis has interpolated extra phrases to extend the given form:<sup>563</sup>

Doxology	<i>The Earlier Rule XXIII</i>
<i>PER ipsum</i>	<i>PER unicum Filium tuum (1)</i> <i>PER Filium tuum (3)</i> <i>PER crucem et sanguinem et mortem ipsius (3)</i> <i>PER QUEM nobis tanta fecisti (5)</i>
<i>et CUM ipso</i>	<i>CUM Filio tuo (6)</i>
<i>ET IN ipso</i>	<i>Dominus noster Jesus Christus Filius tuus dilectus IN QUO tibi bene complacuit (5)</i>

<sup>558</sup>2LtF 12, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 46 / ER XXIII, 9, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 85.

<sup>559</sup>2LtF 61-2, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 49 / PrH 3.

<sup>560</sup>PrH 7-8; OfP Ps XIV, 6 / ExhP.

<sup>561</sup>PrsG 3 / PrH 11.

<sup>562</sup>Flood and Matura, *The Birth of a Movement*, p. 49 / Matura, *Dwelling Place*, p. xiii / Hammond,

'Doxological Mysticism', pp. 105-151.

<sup>563</sup>ER XXIII, 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 11.

<i>est tibi DEO PATRI OMNIPOTENTI</i>	<i>OMNIPOTENS, sanctissime, altissime, et summe DEUS, PATER sancta et iuste, Domine rex caeli et terrae (1)</i> <i>ALTISSIMO et summo DEO aeterno, trinitate et unitate, PATRI et Filio et Spiritui Sancto, creatori omnium et salvatori omnium (11)</i>
<i>OMNIS honor et GLORIA</i>	<i>OMNIS venia, OMNIS gratia, OMNIS GLORIA (9)</i> <i>credamus veraciter et humiliter et in corde teneamus et amemus, HONOREMUS, adoremus, serviamus, laudemus et benedicamus, GLORIFICEMUS et superexaltemus, magnificemus et gratias agamus. (11)</i>
<i>per omnia SAECULA SAECULORUM. AMEN.</i> <sup>564</sup>	<i>in SAECULA SAECULORUM. AMEN. Alleluia. (6)</i> <i>in SAECULA. AMEN. (11)</i> <sup>565</sup>

The content of the doxology of the Roman Canon, which concludes the Eucharistic Prayer by offering all the praise of creation to the Father through Christ, is unchanged since the seventh century and would have been included in the Latin Mass of Francis' time.<sup>566</sup> Since he recommended frequent Mass attendance, one can assume that Francis heard this liturgical text frequently.<sup>567</sup> It is possible that its theology shaped Francis' understanding of Christ's mediatory role. The concepts of God-world mediation *through, with and in* Christ are clearly present in this chapter of *The Earlier Rule*, as in the doxology of the Mass. Furthermore, a text in this chapter referring to, '*Creator et Redemptor et Salvator noster*', ... *a quo et per quem et in quo...*(9), echoes the key doxology text, '*per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso*'. From the evidence in Francis' writings examined so far, it may be concluded that his theology views Christ as the universal Mediator between God and the world. Creator and creation can commune, *Through, with and in* him, '*...in Whom* that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God.'<sup>568</sup>

<sup>564</sup>The Catholic Liturgical Library, *Mass of the 1962 Missal* [Internet] (CO, USA: The Catholic Liturgical Library, 1998-2007). Available from: <<http://www.catholicliturgy.com/index.cfm>> [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2007] (my capitalisation).

<sup>565</sup>ER XXIII, *Fontes Franciscani*, pp. 209-211 (my capitalisation).

<sup>566</sup>Herbermann, C.G., et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (London, Caxton, 1908) p. 256.

<sup>567</sup>LtOrd 30 / 2LtF 14-15, 33.

<sup>568</sup>LtOrd 13 (my italics).

## Conclusion

Francis' theology views the two-way mediatory function of Christ in terms of the Creator-creature coincidences of opposites in his Person. In the God-to-world direction, he is the image and Word of the Father, who reveals the Father in creation, by the light of the Holy Spirit. In the world-to-God direction, he is the way to the Father. Only through him can all the good of creation be perfectly returned to the Father, with human praise and thanksgiving, because he is human flesh and blood and 'because He is equal to the Father'.<sup>569</sup> Therefore, Francis envisioned Christ offering up prayer, thanksgiving and petition to the Father unceasingly on behalf of humankind. His theology presents Christ as a coincidence of the furthest extremes of humanity and divinity and as the one who revealed the Father and the nature of God. The central focus, in his thought, on the mystery of the Incarnation, gives rise to a paradoxical view of God, as both manifest and hidden, immanent and transcendent, resulting in a cataphatic-apophatic blend of theology.

The coincidence of Creator and creature in Francis' writings is not of a type in which the divine and human are opposites in Christ. In this second class of coincidences, which occur in Christ, the hypostatic union determines the kind of union of opposites found within it. So, what would humanly be regarded as opposite ideas, applying to God and to creation, fall into unity and difference in his Person. The *difference* in the two natures is made very clear in the extremes of 'Most High' in glory and most low in abjection that Francis juxtaposed in his references to Christ.<sup>570</sup> In this way, his Christology shows what the Council of Chalcedon defined: 'The distinction between the natures was never abolished by their union, but rather the character proper to each of the two natures was preserved as they came together in one person (prosopon) and one hypostasis.'<sup>571</sup> Regarding the *unity* of these elements, it may also be inferred from Francis' Christology that Jesus' human and divine natures are not opposed. Christ is presented as the revealer of the Father in his human flesh and blood. The implication of this is that Jesus' divine nature communicates to his human, so that the example of his human life reveals the inner life of God. 'In his soul as in his body, Christ thus expresses humanly the divine ways of the Trinity.'<sup>572</sup> His human

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<sup>569</sup>*Adm I*, 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128.

<sup>570</sup>*OfP* Ps VII, 3, 9 / *2LtF* 4-5, 61-2.

<sup>571</sup>Council of Chalcedon (451) DS 302, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 105.

<sup>572</sup>cf. Jn 14:9-10, in: Chapman, *Catechism*, p. 106.

will also co-operates with the divine will so that he does, in his human, finite, temporal body, as God does within the Trinity; he gives himself totally.<sup>573</sup> Furthermore, in Francis' vision, there is much communication in the two-way traffic between God and creation through the Incarnate Word. As the Creator gives through Christ to creation the image, the wisdom and the presence of God, so, through him, creation returns glory to the Creator as thanks, praise and service. Such communication and mediation would seem to be impossible if the human and divine in Christ remained as opposites.

In chapter one, the place of the Trinity in Francis' vision is identified as the beginning and end of all creation in eternity. In this second chapter, the centre of Francis' vision has been located in Christ, and it can now be affirmed that his theology is Christocentric as well as Trinitarian in character. Francis presented a theological picture of Christ uniting the 'Most High' Creator with the depths of abjection and poverty in creaturehood. These extremes coincide in the Person of Jesus so that he functions as the centre of union between God and the world and the universal Mediator of their communication. In a picture of the overall structure of Francis' theology, the Creator-creature coincidence could, therefore, be represented as a vertical continuum connecting the 'Most High' divinity with what is most low in creation. This could also be visualised as the vertical dimension of the Cross, at the centre of which is Christ. According to Francis' teachings, the implication of this coincidence on a personal level was that erring humans could find themselves reconciled to intimacy with the Creator by being conformed to Christ. This idea will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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<sup>573</sup>*LtF* 8-13.

### 3. Jesus Christ the Mediator: personal centre

This chapter also concerns Jesus Christ, the Creator-creature Mediator at the centre of Francis' theological vision. It will explore how Francis saw other humans in relation to Christ. In the previous chapter, it was explained how the Word made flesh in Christ provided the exemplar of human creaturehood in union with the Creator. The Person and example of Christ caused a coincidence in the human view of opposition between God and humanity. This view of opposition was based on the contrast between ontological properties of Creator and creature, and between human appropriation versus God's expropriation. The former was resolved in the hypostatic union in the Person of Christ, who functioned as Creator-creature Mediator. The latter opposition was reconciled in his Person and example. As a human creature, Christ was in union with the Creator and did what God did; he gave himself totally. Francis therefore regarded the true exemplar of human creaturehood in the 'beloved Son'.<sup>574</sup> He was the centre of a coincidence of opposites, of Creator and human creature, in Francis' vision. In him, the opposition of these two concepts fell into union and difference.

The consequence of this theological insight was that Francis saw the human journey to union with God as a process of becoming a true human creature in the image and likeness of Christ. To become conformed to Christ, as Francis taught, is to give oneself completely back to God in praise and through service of one's neighbour.<sup>575</sup> Conversely, his theology implied, to appropriate goodness to oneself was to depart both from union with God and the excellence of created humanity.<sup>576</sup> Consequently, Francis' writings teach a process by which a person converts from a false self, based on appropriation, to a true self, in the image and likeness of Christ, given wholly to God. This process, which Francis called 'penance'<sup>577</sup> is the focus of the current chapter. The way in which he presented it will now be explored in detail.

In Francis' thought, as will be shown in the course of this chapter, those persons conformed to Christ enter into an intimate union with him. Thus, they are in union with both his human and divine natures. It follows that they, as creatures, are

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<sup>574</sup>*Adm V*, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

<sup>575</sup>*LtF* 18, 4-13 / *Adms VI, IV, III* / *ER XI*, 5-6.

<sup>576</sup>*Adms II, VIII*.

<sup>577</sup>*LtF I*, 3; *II*, 1 / *ER XXI*, 3; *XXIII*, 4 / *Test 1*.

then in union with the Creator in Christ. In this way, their perception moves, from a position of opposition to God in sin, to a relationship of unity in difference with the Creator in Christ. Therefore, the Creator-creature coincidence in each Christiform human person coincidences with the Creator-creature coincidence in the hypostatic union in Christ.<sup>578</sup> This is not to say that there is a hypostatic union of divine and human in each believer. The Incarnation of the Second Person is held in Christianity to be a unique act of God. It entailed a divine Person assuming a human nature and occurred without a human father and without contraction of original sin. Francis' descriptive terms reveal the key to the relationship between the archetypal coincidence in the Incarnation and the coincidence in Christ of each believer with the Creator. Francis' fifth *Admonition* says that the true human person bears the 'image' and 'likeness' of the Beloved Son.<sup>579</sup> This evokes the creation account in Genesis in which man and woman were created in the 'image and likeness' of God (1 Gn 1:26). In Genesis, these terms imply the highest degree of similitude or closest reflection of God, in creation. It does not mean that man and woman are God. Similarly, as Francis' terms imply, the Christiform human creature, in union with God in Christ, reflects the Incarnate Word to the highest degree in creation, but is not identical or equal to Christ. The human person's union with Christ is itself a union in difference. Francis' writings present the process of the human person's coincidence, or falling into union, with the Creator in Christ, which will now be explored.

The idea of 'imitation' of Christ was crucial to the spirituality of Francis. As explained in the previous chapter, Christ, as exemplar of humanity, showed the way of return to God.<sup>580</sup> Therefore, salvation was worked out by a process of *imitatio Christi*.<sup>581</sup> However, Francis' writings show that his way of following Jesus towards union went further and deeper than the word 'imitation' adequately describes. It involved a personal union with Christ the Mediator. Francis wrote to the brothers and

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578As H.L. Bond also explained from Nicholas of Cusa's thought: 'Union with God through Christ by faith is itself a coincidence and is also an effect of the coincidence both in Christ's person and in his ministry. The unity of the faithful with Christ, moreover, results from and coincides with the union of the divine and human natures in Christ.' (Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 26).

579*Adm V*, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

580*Adm V*, 1.

581'Imitation' of Christ is also a key feature of Bonaventure's spirituality (Bonaventure, *Lignum Vitae*, 26 / *LM*, 14, 1). Bonaventure wrote: 'The height of Christian perfection consists in the universal imitation of the acts of Christ.' (*Apologia pauperum*, 2, 13, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. 8 (1898) p. 243 [my translation]). This process tends towards union with God as its end, as will also be seen in Francis' vision (Bonaventure, *Lignum Vitae*, 9).

sisters of penance, 'And He wishes all of us to be saved through Him and receive Him with our heart pure and our body chaste.'<sup>582</sup> The spiritual and physical aspects of union with Christ are clear in these words. On a personal level, as in his universal vision, the Incarnate Word was the centre of union between Creator and creature. Rather than imitation, the process by which Francis received the mediation of Christ might be better described as a personal incarnation of the Word made flesh, or 'putting on Christ' (cf. Gal 3:27), as will be substantiated from his writings. Francis called it 'doing penance'.<sup>583</sup> The elements in this incarnational process can be identified from Francis' writings. They do not occur in any particular order but are virtually concurrent. However, each element will now be dealt with separately. The process outlined in *The First and Second Letters to the Faithful* will be expanded upon in the context of Francis' other writings. The aspects to be examined are: wholehearted desire for God and love for neighbour, putting off self after the example of Christ's humility and obedience, receiving the Word in the Spirit, living the Gospel, and union with God in Christ.

**'All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbours as themselves, ...'**<sup>584</sup>

Francis taught that the starting point, or necessary precondition for the Gospel life was an all-consuming love for God and one's neighbour. This was taken directly from Jesus teaching that the first and second greatest commandments of God were: 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Mk 12: 29-31). As well as being the greatest commandment according to Christ, the essential nature of this teaching, for Francis, is suggested by its frequent appearance. With this teaching, Francis opened his *First Letter to the Faithful*.<sup>585</sup> He extended it as a commentary on 'Thy will be done' in his paraphrase of The Lord's Prayer.<sup>586</sup> An elaborated version of the text is also included in chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, after Francis has exhorted every person in the Catholic Church 'to persevere in

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<sup>582</sup>*LtF* 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>583</sup>*Test*, 1.

<sup>584</sup>*LtF*, I, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41 (my italics).

<sup>585</sup>*Ibid*.

<sup>586</sup>*PrOF*, 5.

the true faith and in penance'.<sup>587</sup> He followed this text with an emphatic triple exhortation to desire nothing except God.<sup>588</sup> To adore the Lord is the first instruction in the preaching exhortation he taught the brothers in *The Earlier Rule*.<sup>589</sup> In order to adore the Lord with a pure or undivided heart, it is necessary to turn one's desire away from worldly attractions and preoccupations, as Francis taught in *Admonition Sixteen* and chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*.<sup>590</sup> This follows the example of Christ, whom Francis 'hears' addressing the Father in his *Office of the Passion*, 'For what is there in heaven for me and what do I want on earth beside You?'<sup>591</sup> For Francis, life itself consisted in following Christ,<sup>592</sup> so, in his *Testament*, he called those who began to do penance, 'those who came to receive life' and added, 'we desired nothing more'.<sup>593</sup> So it was that, according to Gospel teaching, Francis saw wholehearted desire for God as the necessary basis for following Christ.<sup>594</sup>

**'...who hate their bodies with their vices and sins,...'**<sup>595</sup>

In order to attain union with God in Christ, Francis deemed it necessary to empty oneself of pride. This emptying of self was an imitative response to the humility of God, which Francis pondered in the Incarnate Word, as Van- Khan wrote: '...humility on our part would be the gift of ourselves to God in response to the initiative of divine love.'<sup>596</sup> The penitent's response to God's kenotic love is to be emptied of self-serving desires, in humility. In his *First Letter to the Faithful*, Francis followed his first instruction, to love God and neighbour, with a second, to hate one's 'body' with its 'vices and sins'. This could appear somewhat dualistic, taken out of the context of the rest of Francis' writings. However, examination of Francis' other references to the body and the flesh reveals that he did not understand the physical body itself to be opposed to God. In *Admonition Five*, he reminded all human beings that their bodies

<sup>587</sup>ER XXIII, 7-8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 84.

<sup>588</sup>ER XXIII, 9.

<sup>589</sup>ER XXI, 2.

<sup>590</sup>ER XXII, 19-26.

<sup>591</sup>*OfP* PsVI, 13, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 146.

<sup>592</sup>LR 1.

<sup>593</sup>*Test* 16-17, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>594</sup>In the same spirit, Bonaventure saw it was necessary to be, 'a person of desires' to make the journey towards union with God. It was crucial to keep one's mind and heart focused on God in prayer and contemplation, 'by which the mind turns most directly and intently to the rays of light'

(Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum.*, Prol., 3, Boehner and Hayes, eds., p. 39).

<sup>595</sup>*ILtF*, I, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41 (my italics).

<sup>596</sup>Nguyen-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 108.



were created in the image of the beloved Son of God.<sup>597</sup> 'The body', then, represented something essentially non-physical; something in the human heart that constituted an obstacle to the love of God. In *The Earlier Rule*, he expanded on the teaching, 'and let us hate our body with its vices and sins', adding that, 'by living according to the flesh, the devil wishes to take away from us the love of Jesus Christ and eternal life...'<sup>598</sup> but the brothers were to adore the Lord, '...after overcoming every impediment and putting aside every care and anxiety.'<sup>599</sup> This suggests that the body, or the flesh, often signified the dynamic opposite to the kenotic love of God. The idea encompassed anything appropriated to oneself, whether physical possessions or the accretions, through pride, of what today is popularly known as the 'ego'. It included what Francis called 'the wisdom of the body', which meant the motivation of greed and self-serving desire. This was associated with 'the wisdom of the world', that is, worldly ambition and all the cares and anxieties that accompanied it.<sup>600</sup> *The Later Rule* warns the brothers 'to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy and greed, of care and solicitude for the things of this world, of detraction and murmuring.'<sup>601</sup> Francis saw that all these things hindered wholehearted love for God, so they had to go. He wrote:

'... let us desire nothing else,  
let us want nothing else,  
let nothing else please and cause us delight  
except our Creator, Redeemer and Saviour,  
...let nothing hinder us,  
nothing separate us,  
nothing come between us.'<sup>602</sup>

Francis wrote that those who were not living in penance were people who 'serve the world with their bodies' by following 'wicked desires' and the ambitions of the world.<sup>603</sup> However, it is also possible to serve *God* with one's body, as Francis taught in *The Earlier Rule*, where he referred to the body literally. 'Wherever they may be, let all my brothers remember that they have given themselves and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>604</sup> More often though, Francis used the word 'body' to signify more abstract evils. For example, *Admonition Seven* teaches that those who

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<sup>597</sup>*Adm V*, 1.

<sup>598</sup>*ER XXII*, 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.

<sup>599</sup>*ER XXII*, 26, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 80.

<sup>600</sup>*SalV*, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 165.

<sup>601</sup>*LR X*, 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105.

<sup>602</sup>*ER XXIII*, 9-10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 85.

<sup>603</sup>*LtF* 64-65, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 50.

<sup>604</sup>*ER XVI*, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 74.

follow God's word in the Spirit are those 'who do not attribute every letter they know or wish to know to the body', but return the word to its divine source by praising God in word and deed.<sup>605</sup> Here, Francis used 'body' to mean 'ego', or what will be referred to as 'the appropriated self'. This is a false self in Francis' thought. It is not the true self because he taught that human beings could call nothing their own, since all good belonged to God. So what Francis called the body or flesh, generally signified a false sense of self, built on material and psychological accretions and the desires to appropriate more. *Admonition Twelve* states that, in one who has the Spirit of the Lord, the 'flesh' does not 'exalt itself' when the Lord works some good through that person.<sup>606</sup> Here, the exaltation of the 'flesh' refers to pride in the appropriated self. In *Admonition Fourteen*, the physical body is what can be afflicted with punishments for the purpose of vainglory, but the appropriated self remains unaffected. It is the proud or acquisitive part of the self that fears to have something taken away from it. This is why Francis taught in *Admonition Three*, 'that person who offers himself totally to obedience in the hands of his prelate leaves all that he possesses and loses his *body*.'<sup>607</sup> What is lost in total obedience is anything appropriated to the self, whether physically or mentally. The 'body' which is lost in obedience is this appropriated self. Francis understood this loss of things appropriated as a kind of death to self or to sin. Hence, he coupled Jesus' teaching about losing one's life to save it with that concerning renunciation of one's possessions for discipleship.<sup>608</sup> He also claimed that no-one could possess any virtue without first dying (to self).<sup>609</sup> Francis' concepts of the body and of dying to sin accord with teaching in the Letter to the Romans, 'We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed ... For whoever has died is free from sin (Rom 6: 6-7).'

Francis' self-emptying endeavours were an imitative response to the humility and obedience of God that he perceived in the Incarnate Word. He admonished those brothers in authority to humble themselves in service after the example of Christ, who washed his disciples' feet and said, 'I did not come to be served but to serve'.<sup>610</sup> This

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<sup>605</sup>*Adm VII*, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 132.

<sup>606</sup>*Adm XII*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 133.

<sup>607</sup>*Adm III*, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 130 (my italic).

<sup>608</sup>*Adm III*, 1-2.

<sup>609</sup>*SalV*, 5.

<sup>610</sup>*Adm IV*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 130 / *ER IV*, 6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 66.

was why none of them was to have the title of 'Prior'.<sup>611</sup> Francis taught the brothers to 'serve and obey one another' and added, 'this is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>612</sup> Therefore, the movement in humility of the Creator from true divinity into assumed creaturehood finds a mirror image in Francis' human response. The human person is to move correspondingly from a position of false superiority or self-idolatry in the appropriated self, into the dependant emptiness of his true creaturehood. The furthest extreme of the divine action of humility is in the Cross. Correspondingly, Francis understood the divesting of self in humility as a form of death to sin. In this expropriation, one could participate with Christ in the meeting of life and death in the Cross - that loss of life which is also gain of life. It becomes apparent that this self-emptying was essential to Francis' spirituality, when one considers the logic of the coincidence of opposites in his theology. The Creator-creature coincidence, exemplified in Christ in extremes of majestic glory and abject poverty, cannot find its reflection in a person's own union with God if that one is in denial of his/her own creaturely dependence and weakness. If pride makes a person become a false God in his/her own life, then a union of opposites with the Creator cannot occur. Therefore, the Incarnation of God demonstrates how to be a fully-human creature so as to be fully united with the divine. The greatest extreme of poverty and submission to the Father in creaturehood is where the believer meets and unites with Christ. The shedding of self in imitation of Christ's humility and obedience is, as Van Khanh observed, '...the act by which we divest ourselves so as to offer ourselves to God's love.'<sup>613</sup> This imitative response of self-offering can be seen in Francis' *Letter to the Entire Order* when he contemplates the Body of Christ.<sup>614</sup>

**'...who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... .'<sup>615</sup>**

Francis reinforced this exhortation in his *Second Letter*, adding that, although the Son wished all to receive and be saved by him, there were few who wanted to receive him.<sup>616</sup> This *Second Letter* shows the possible influence of the Fourth Lateran

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611ER VI, 3-4.

612ER V, 13-15, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 67-8.

613Nguyên-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 108.

614*LtOrd* 28-29.

615*LtF* I, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41 (my italics).

616*LtF* 14-17.

Council, which Francis may have attended.<sup>617</sup> The Council sought to address the decline in reception of Communion by the faithful by making it compulsory at least once a year.<sup>618</sup> Francis may have taken up this aspect of more frequent Communion in the Council's reforming agenda. In Francis' vision, this imperative was based on an understanding that one should receive the Word of God in order to be in receipt of the salvific mediation of Christ. 'The Body and Blood of the Lord' was one form in which Francis received the Word Incarnate. He urged his brothers to receive the Lord with an attitude of humility after having confessed and been emptied of self, as noted above in the previous stage.<sup>619</sup> Another form in which Francis received the Word was 'the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel' of Jesus Christ, which Francis urged his brothers to 'hold onto'.<sup>620</sup> This twenty-second chapter of *The Earlier Rule* teaches that, having turned from the cares of the world to make God the focus of their lives, the brothers must make themselves the 'rich soil' of the parable in which to receive the word of God and bear its fruit.<sup>621</sup> To receive the word in this way, they must 'pay attention to what the Lord says'. As eager students, they must be open to hear the word and to put it into practice, following the 'footprints' of Christ.<sup>622</sup> It was shown in the previous chapter how closely Francis associated the words of Christ with his Person and with his Sacramental presence in the Eucharist. Therefore it is not surprising that he did not separate the words and the 'Body and Blood of the Lord' as ways of receiving the life of Christ, the Word of the Father.

The word of God must, however, be received in the Spirit, as a living word, otherwise it remains a dead letter. In *The Earlier Rule*, Francis taught:

'...the spirit of the flesh very much desires and strives to have the words but cares little for the activity ... The Spirit of the Lord, however, wants the flesh to be mortified and looked down upon, considered of little worth and rejected. It strives for humility and patience, the pure, simple and true peace of the spirit. Above all, it desires the divine fear, the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'<sup>623</sup>

As explained previously, Francis understood that the wisdom of the world wanted to attribute the words of God to the appropriated self, or 'flesh', for the sake of appearing

<sup>617</sup>Nguyên-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 153.

<sup>618</sup>The Fourth Lateran Council, const. 21, in: Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 1, p. 245.

<sup>619</sup>ER XX, 5.

<sup>620</sup>ER XXII, 41, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

<sup>621</sup>ER XXII, 9-17.

<sup>622</sup>ER XXII, 1-2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.

<sup>623</sup>ER XVII, 11, 14-16, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 75-6.

learned and advancing in status. In order to receive the word of God in the Spirit, one must be emptied of self, that is humble and pure in heart, desiring only to love and serve the Lord. In this state, the word can grow in the heart so that it is put into action, thereby giving the glory back to God.<sup>624</sup> Francis probably adapted this teaching about receiving God's word in the Spirit from the Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 3:3-6). Its author teaches that the covenant according to the letter, written in stone, brings death. The new covenant is written by the Spirit on human hearts. Therefore, Francis reasoned, receiving the word in the Spirit gives life, enabling a person to share the word by living it. If the word is received without living it, this is following only the letter, not the Spirit, and it is a dead letter.<sup>625</sup>

**'...and who produce worthy fruits of penance.'**<sup>626</sup>

Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, speaks about fruits as those things that reveal the inner condition of the tree, which symbolises the human heart. And so the fruits Jesus speaks of in this Gospel are a person's words and actions, which are external signs to others of that person's inner condition. Jesus gives his teaching on how fruits reveal good or bad trees (Mt 7:15-20). This is immediately followed by a teaching on the importance of listening to Jesus' words and putting them into practice (Mt 7:21-27). In John's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, 'I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last (Jn 15:16).' The fruit that Jesus commands them to bear is no less than to love each other, even to the extent of laying down their lives for the other (Jn 15:12-13, 17). This bearing of fruit in love is dependant on being connected to Jesus, 'the vine', and remaining in him with his words remaining in one's heart (Jn 15:4). For Francis, the metaphor of fruit and fruitfulness was loaded with all this Gospel meaning. So, for Francis, if someone did penance, which meant to divest the self of ego and receive the Word of God, then the 'fruits of penance' would be those external words and deeds which revealed that inner state of penance, the state of having a heart full of the Word of God. The fruit of penance, then, was to show forth, in the example of one's life, the Christ to whom one was intimately connected. Crucially, this meant loving as he loved, to the extent of laying down one's life for another. Thus, Francis' way of life demanded much more than being able to study and

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<sup>624</sup>*ER XVII*, 17-19.

<sup>625</sup>*Adm VII*.

<sup>626</sup>*ILtF 4, FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41 (my italics).

interpret the words of Scripture. It was profoundly incarnational, involving a process of inward and outward transformation into the image of the Word that one received. Fidelity to this process would find its inevitable culmination in the Cross, realised in one's own life. So Francis' writings were not intellectual puzzles. They had a practical orientation towards returning glory to the Creator by assimilating the Gospel and living according to it.

It is evident that 'the fruits of penance' carried this wealth of meaning for Francis when one observes in his writings that to 'do penance' means to follow in the footprints of Jesus by living as he lived, according to the Gospels. In *The Testament*, Francis wrote that the Lord gifted him to begin doing penance by showing mercy to the lepers, whom he found loathsome. This was clearly both an inward spiritual and outward physical journey for Francis, in which he followed the example of Jesus, because he wrote, 'the Lord Himself led me among them.'<sup>627</sup> In *The Testament*, Francis also added, '...the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.'<sup>628</sup> Francis urged the living out of this Gospel pattern by loving one's enemies in *The Earlier Rule*, 'for our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose footprints we must follow, called his betrayer a friend and willingly offered Himself to His executioners.'<sup>629</sup> These words show that, for Francis, the following of Christ leads to its ultimate expression in the Cross, reproduced in the loving surrender of one's own life, as mentioned above. As in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 12:5), Francis applied the pattern of the Cross to each friar's life journey: 'But we can boast in our weaknesses and in carrying each day the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>630</sup> Similarly, in *Admonition Six*, Francis made three clear points: Jesus the Good Shepherd endured the Cross 'to save His sheep', those who followed Jesus must similarly endure their own sufferings, therefore, it was not enough to talk or think about those who had followed Christ. He must be followed in one's own life, even to the Cross.<sup>631</sup> This is what Francis meant by bearing 'worthy fruits of penance'.<sup>632</sup> These external 'fruits' in lived reality revealed the true condition of the heart. The *Letter to the Entire Order* highlights the inward and spiritual journey of

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<sup>627</sup>*Test* 1-2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 124.

<sup>628</sup>*Test* 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>629</sup>*ER* XXII, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.

<sup>630</sup>*Adm* V, 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

<sup>631</sup>*Adm* VI, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

<sup>632</sup>*LtF*, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41.

transformation that accompanies the external following of Christ's example:

'Inwardly cleansed,  
interiorly enlightened  
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
may we be able to follow  
in the footprints of Your beloved Son,  
our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>633</sup>

These words point to the interior dimension of living the Gospel. The word of God must be received in the Spirit, allowing it to fill and transform the heart. That the Gospel was also to be lived concretely in the lives of the brothers is clear from the opening of *The Later Rule*: 'The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one's own, and in chastity.'<sup>634</sup> These words demonstrate the incarnational emphasis of Francis' spirituality, when one considers that the Gospel was the *Rule* and also the *Life* of the brothers. Their observance of poverty, chastity and obedience was an observance of this Gospel: the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Bearing in mind the obvious emphasis on adherence to the pattern of Christ's life in one's own life, which has just been examined in Francis' writings, there would seem to be no conflict here with the hagiographical accounts that stressed Francis' imitation of Christ.<sup>635</sup> Indeed, Francis' writings show that his spirituality was concerned with the process of becoming wholly conformed to Christ, both inwardly and in the external pattern of his life.

Francis' spirituality also focused on the motherhood of Mary as a model which conveyed the ideas of being filled with Christ inwardly and showing him outwardly, and of being spiritually fruitful in Christ. This symbolism is apparent in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*: 'The most high Father made known from heaven through His holy angel Gabriel this *Word* of the Father - so worthy, so holy and glorious - in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, from whose womb He received the flesh of our humanity and frailty.'<sup>636</sup> The Johannine language of the Incarnation: 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us (Jn 1:14)', is an influence on Francis' theology

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<sup>633</sup>*LtOrd* 51, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 120-121.

<sup>634</sup>*LR* 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 100.

<sup>635</sup>Delio commented on this conflict that the imitation of Christ, so prominent in the hagiography was '...not found in any explicit way in his own writings.' (Delio, *Crucified Love*, p. 3). However, the present study finds the imitation of Christ to be a prominent and central idea throughout Francis' writings.

<sup>636</sup>*LtF* 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46 (my italics).

here. Furthermore, when one factors in Francis' habitual association of the Person of Jesus with the words of God, it is recognisable that Francis presented the Virgin Mary as the ideal of the person who gave flesh to the word of God, making it live in his/her own life. He added later in the same *Letter* that 'those who do penance' are 'spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ' ... 'We are ... mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; and give him birth through a holy activity, which must shine before others by example.'<sup>637</sup> This teaches clearly that Christ is to fill the inner and outer person, the heart, the body and the external actions. This amounts to what could be described as a personal incarnation of the Word of God in one's whole being. The aim of becoming a bearer of God is echoed in *The Earlier Rule*, chapter twenty-two. After an exhortation to empty the heart of worldly preoccupations in order to give it wholly to the love of God, Francis added, 'Let us always make a home and dwelling place there for Him Who is the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'.<sup>638</sup> In Francis' thought, as mentioned previously, Christ is never present without the whole Trinity. Therefore, when the Word of God resides in a person's heart, it is the whole Trinity that lives there. The idea of being God's dwelling links the above exhortation to Mary, who is the model bearer of the divine Word, as presented in the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*:

<sup>1</sup>Hail, O Lady,  
 Holy Queen,  
 Mary, holy Mother of God,  
 Who are the virgin made Church,  
<sup>2</sup>chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven  
 whom he consecrated with His most holy beloved Son  
 and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,  
<sup>3</sup>in whom there was and is  
 all fullness of grace and every good.  
<sup>4</sup>Hail His Palace!  
 Hail His Tabernacle!  
 Hail His Dwelling!  
<sup>5</sup>Hail His Robe!  
 Hail His Servant!  
 Hail His Mother!  
<sup>6</sup>And hail all You holy virtues  
 which are poured into the hearts of the faithful  
 through the grace and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>637</sup>*LtF* 49-53, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 49.

<sup>638</sup>*ER* XXII, 27, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 80.



that from being unbelievers,  
you may make them faithful to God.<sup>639</sup>

In this prayer, Mary is twice named as Mother of the 'beloved Son'. The Incarnation which occurs in Mary is a process; she is 'made Church'. This process involves the whole Trinity. She is chosen by the Father and consecrated with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The prayer also abounds in images of Mary as the dwelling of Christ: 'His Palace, His Tabernacle, His Dwelling, His Robe'. She is compared to the Church, the consecrated dwelling of God. The 'fullness of grace' which she possesses is the Holy Spirit, as stanza six indicates. The 'every good' which is in her is one of Francis' favourite names for God in his other writings.<sup>640</sup> It is hard to see how Francis could have placed more emphasis on the concept of Mary as *theotokos* than he did in this prayer. Having presented her as the model in stanzas one to five, stanza six relates her example to the process of the Christian believer's becoming the bearer of God. The believer is similarly filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. It may be inferred that this leads, as in Mary (Luke 1:35), to the indwelling and enfleshing of God's word in that person's life.<sup>641</sup> This enfleshing of the word of God in one's own words and action is what Francis meant by bearing 'worthy fruits of penance.'<sup>642</sup> *The Second Letter to the Faithful* makes this explicit in relation to 'those who do penance'.<sup>643</sup>

Francis' spirituality views Mary as the model for a process of incarnation of the Word, which is to happen in every person who disposes him/herself for it by doing penance. She epitomises a union with Christ, which is both interior, by carrying him, and manifest exteriorly, by giving birth to him. In the process explored above, Francis' writings imply that both the spiritual and physical, interior and exterior dimensions of a person's life are filled by God's Word and brought into union. Thus,

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639 *SalBVM, FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 163.

640 *PrH* 11 / *PrsG*, 3 / *ER* XXIII, 9 / *CtC* 1.

641 Bonaventure, meditating on this insight of his founder, extended the metaphor of the believer's bringing Christ to birth after the example of Mary. The resulting work, *Five Feasts of the Child Jesus*, relates Mary's involvement as mother in the childhood of Jesus to the relationship of the Son of God with 'a soul dedicated to God':

'...it arose mysteriously in my mind that by the grace of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High, a soul dedicated to God could spiritually conceive the holy Word of God and only-begotten Son of the Father, give birth to Him, name Him, seek and adore Him with the Magi and finally, according to the law of Moses, joyfully present him in the Temple to God the Father.'

(Bonaventure, *Five Feasts of the Child Jesus*, Prol., E. Doyle trans. (Oxford, SLG Press, 1984) p. 2.

642 *LtF*, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41.

643 *LtF*, 48-53, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 48-9.

the human person is restored to the bodily image and spiritual likeness of the beloved Son, which God created and placed in Eden.<sup>644</sup> In terms of the overall structure of Francis' theology, Mary represents the ideal of how one is to be in receipt of the mediation of Christ, in whom the creature and the Creator are united. The personal process of incarnation which has been explored, results in a perfect union with Christ. In Christ the Mediator, the human creature who has been conformed to him is also united with the divine Creator, so that a coincidence of opposites in the Incarnate Word is reflected in the lives of Christ's individual followers. This union with Christ will be discussed in the next section.

**'We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ.'**<sup>645</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Delio wrote: 'To be a spouse is to be joined to Christ in such an intimate way that one's whole life becomes an imitation of Christ.'<sup>646</sup> This is the experience of intimacy with Christ that Francis' writings attempted to communicate. As stated previously, the union with Christ that Francis wrote about went deeper than imitation, in the sense of simply copying someone's actions. Delio was right to claim that for Francis, living the Gospel stemmed from deep intimacy with Christ. The external patterning of a person's life according to the life of Christ in the Gospels was the result of being personally centred on the Word Incarnate, through the process of 'doing penance' described above. Francis identified himself closely with Christ in his physical body and action, in his words and in his prayer, as will now be shown from examination of his writings.

Francis' physical union with Christ involved him with his 'spouse' in a mutual surrender of physical bodies. Francis received the 'Body and Blood' of the Lord. His writings show the importance of this reception for Francis and his followers. His literal way of referring to this Sacrament shows how physically real the communion with Christ was for him. His response to Christ was just as concrete. It meant ultimately sacrificing his own physical body, as Christ did on the Cross, in return. Francis made this point in chapter sixteen of *The Earlier Rule*, which teaches: 'Wherever they may be, let all my brothers remember that they have given themselves

<sup>644</sup>*Adm V / ER XXIII*, 1-2.

<sup>645</sup>*ILtF 8, FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42 (my italics).

<sup>646</sup>Delio, *Crucified Love*, p. 20.

and abandoned their bodies to the Lord Jesus Christ. For love of Him, they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies...<sup>647</sup> In the rest of this chapter, Francis reinforced the implications of such a surrender using the words of Jesus in the Gospels. This will result in being persecuted, hated, slandered, expelled, attacked and killed for the sake of Christ, but the brothers are not to fear these things, for they receive eternal life in return.<sup>648</sup>

Francis ends this passage with the words, 'whoever perseveres to the end will be saved (Mt 10:21/24:13).'<sup>649</sup> The words 'to the end' meant for Francis, 'all the way to the Cross in the footsteps of Christ.' This is made clear in his use of the same words, '*usque in finem*' in *The Office of the Passion*.<sup>650</sup> This meaning of '*usque in finem*' is also found in John's Gospel. In the introduction to the Last Supper narrative, leading into the Passion, it is written of Jesus: 'Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them *to the end* (Jn 13:1).' At the end of his *Testament*, Francis repeated the same words: 'But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity *until the end*.'<sup>651</sup> Likewise, in his *Last Will Written for Saint Clare and Her Sisters*, he wrote: 'I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our Most High Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother and to persevere in this *until the end*.'<sup>652</sup> Francis' repetition of these words and the meaning he attached to them shows how vital it was to him to follow Christ all the way to the martyrdom of the Cross. For him, intimate communion with Christ, his spouse, would be incomplete unless he were willing to surrender his own body to Christ in return. His union with the Word Incarnate had to be in body as well as in spirit, which meant loving all the way to the Cross, as Christ did. Thus, meditating on the Eucharist, Francis wrote:

'Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,  
that He Who gives Himself totally to you  
may receive you totally!'<sup>653</sup>

Therefore, although the stigmata emphasised in Celano and Bonaventure's lives of

<sup>647</sup>ER XVI, 10-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 74.

<sup>648</sup>ER XVI, 12-21.

<sup>649</sup>*Ibid.*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 74-5.

<sup>650</sup>Esser, K., ed. (Latin text) in: Desbonnets *et al.*, eds., *Françoise D'Assise: Écrits*, p. 210.

<sup>651</sup>*Test* 39, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 127 (my italics).

<sup>652</sup>*Last Will Written for Saint Clare and Her Sisters*, in: *The Form of Life of Saint Clare*, VI, 7, *CA:ED*, p. 118 (my italics).

<sup>653</sup>*LtOrd* 29, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

Francis are not mentioned in his own works, there is certainly harmony, and no conflict between this aspect of the sources and the writings because Francis' writings do stress a bodily union with Christ Crucified.

Another sign in Francis' writings of the intimate union between Francis and Christ is the apparent identification of Francis' words with the words of God and of the Word Incarnate. Francis introduced his *Second Letter to the Faithful* with an interesting claim: 'I decided to offer you in this letter and message the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father, and the words of the Holy Spirit, which are spirit and life.'<sup>654</sup> This *Letter* does contain quotations from the words of Jesus in the Gospels. It also includes what Francis would have seen as the inspired word of God from other parts of the Old and New Testaments, such as *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (1Cor 11:29),<sup>655</sup> *The Letter of St. James* (Jas 2:13)<sup>656</sup> and *The Book of Tobit* (Tb 4:10-11).<sup>657</sup> However, the bulk of this writing is Francis' own teaching and exhortation, amongst which some short scriptural texts are presented. At the end of *The Testament*, Francis wrote, '...the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words...'<sup>658</sup> In this sense, it appears that Francis considered his own words to be the inspired words of God. In his *Letter to the Entire Order*, Francis, apparently speaking out of a sense of union with Christ, sent '...his greetings in Him Who has redeemed and washed us in His most precious blood.'<sup>659</sup> He also wrote:

'I, Brother Francis, a useless man and an unworthy creature of the Lord God speak through the Lord Jesus Christ to Brother H., the General Minister of our entire Order and to all the general ministers who will come after him, and to the other custodians and guardians of the brothers, who are and who will be, that they might keep this writing with them, put it into practice and eagerly preserve it.'<sup>660</sup>

Significantly, Francis speaks both in and through Christ in this *Letter*, which again raises doxological echoes of Christ's mediation. Francis' writing habitually flows from his own words into quotations from the teachings of Jesus and *vice versa*. His spirituality involved receiving the word of God and allowing it to fill his heart, his whole person and life, manifesting it through his own words and actions, as detailed

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<sup>654</sup>2LtF 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>655</sup>2LtF 24.

<sup>656</sup>2LtF 29.

<sup>657</sup>2LtF 30.

<sup>658</sup>Test 39, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 127.

<sup>659</sup>LtOrd 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 116 (my italics).

<sup>660</sup>LtOrd 47, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 120 (my italics).

previously. Francis' writings indicate that he was wholly centred on the word of God. As Van-Khan, observed: 'He has so assimilated the Scriptures that he no longer needs to cite them explicitly. Every sentence of his is a direct reference to Scripture.'<sup>661</sup> As well as frequently introducing quotations with 'the Lord says,'<sup>662</sup> Francis also adapted the words of Jesus and presented them as his own teaching. Examples can be seen in his adaptation of the Beatitudes in the *Admonitions*. Francis added to his reflections on Gospel Beatitudes several of his own, often beginning with, 'Blessed is the servant who...'<sup>663</sup>

*The Office of the Passion* is another example of Francis' arranging and adapting scriptural texts. Francis took lines from various places in scripture, primarily the book of Psalms, to create fifteen pseudo-psalms. His psalms recreate scenes in the life and Passion of Jesus from the viewpoint of Christ's inner life. In these prayers, Christ may be 'heard' addressing the Father in words taken from the biblical Psalms. What can be seen in this *Office*, therefore, is Francis praying to the Father in the persona of Christ in words from scripture, which he had adapted and arranged. Francis composed this prayer over the years 1215-1224. It was unique and personal to him and he prayed its Hours seven times daily.<sup>664</sup> The study of his writings above suggests that in his words, and especially in his prayer, Francis experienced a deep union with Christ to the extent that he prayed from the viewpoint of Christ. His own words merged into the words of Jesus in the Gospels and into the inspired word of God in the rest of scripture.

A problem posed by recent study of Francis' theology is the apparent discrepancy between his focus on the Father in his writings, and the impression given by early hagiography, that he was wholly centred on Jesus. Delio commented: 'Despite the fact that he is remembered historically as a second Christ, he shows almost no personal relationship to Christ in his writings.'<sup>665</sup> The present examination of Francis' writings has shown the opposite to be the case. It leads to the conclusion that Francis' relationship to Christ was so intimate a union that he did not relate *to* Christ as an object of his prayer, but rather, related to the Father *through, with and in* Christ, who was also his Mediator on a personal level. As Leonard Lehmann rightly

<sup>661</sup>Nguyên-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 163.

<sup>662</sup>*ER* XXII, 1, 6, 10, 18, 19.

<sup>663</sup>*Adms XVII-XXVI, XXVIII*.

<sup>664</sup>*OfP*, Intro., *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 139.

<sup>665</sup>Delio, *Crucified Love*, p. 5.

observed, '...Francis did not meditate on Jesus in any detached manner, but with deep feeling and a sense of participation ... Jesus' concerns become his own.'<sup>666</sup> Matura's study of the writings also notes that, in contrast to popular medieval piety, Francis did not focus on any of the details of Christ's human life and suffering: 'Instead, he concentrates on revealing what was happening in the depths of Christ's heart.'<sup>667</sup> Francis made participation in the prayer and viewpoint of Christ his personal habit, and it would not make sense for Christ to pray to himself. Hence, Francis' prayers are habitually addressed to the Father. This is, no doubt, why Francis gave such importance to the Our Father, prescribing its recitation seventy-six times a day for those brothers who could not read the Divine Office, recommending it in his *Second Letter to the Faithful* and writing his own extended meditation on this prayer.<sup>668</sup> As Nguyễn-Van-Khanh rightly concluded concerning Francis' spirituality in the writings: 'To follow Christ means to be united with Him in prayer to the Father and to pray to the Father like Him, using His actual prayer.'<sup>669</sup> Therefore, if one accepted Brother Leo's account of the writing of *The Praises of God* after Francis' receiving the stigmata on La Verna, it would not be surprising that Francis addressed this prayer, not to Christ Crucified, but to the Father.<sup>670</sup> Judging from his written spirituality, if Francis was indeed so united with Christ in his physical body, it would follow that he would also be united with Christ in spirit, in prayer to the Father.

**'...the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make Its home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.'**<sup>671</sup>

As observed in the previous chapter, Francis' theology always views Jesus Christ as the Son of the Father in the context of the Trinity. For example, in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, Christ is presented as the Word of the Father together with the Holy Spirit. His very human agony and bloody sweat in Gethsemane and death on the Cross are viewed in terms of his submission to the Father's will for human salvation.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>666</sup>Lehmann, 'Exultation', p. 19.

<sup>667</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>668</sup>LR III, 3 / 2LtF 21 / PrOF.

<sup>669</sup>Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 146.

<sup>670</sup>Introduction to *The Praises of God and the Blessing*, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 108.

<sup>671</sup>1LtF 6-7, FA:ED, vol. 1, pp. 41-2 (my italics).

<sup>672</sup>2LtF 6-11.

In chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, the Son of the Father, who was born of Mary, is the same Son through whom the Father created all things, who will return in glory as judge of all people, and who mediates the return to the Trinity of all the good in creation.<sup>673</sup> Since Francis' Christology was rooted in the Trinity, he would have believed that his personal union with Christ also brought him into union with the Triune God.

Francis described this relationship in *The First Letter to the Faithful*. The Spirit dwelling in 'those who do penance' unites them to Jesus Christ, in a relationship so deep it encompasses that of spouse, brother and mother. They therefore share the Son's relationship to the Father as children.<sup>674</sup> Flowing from this description, Francis highlighted the mediatory role of Jesus in this union by quoting his prayer to the Father for his followers from John, chapter seventeen.<sup>675</sup> The extracts Francis selected from this 'priestly prayer' of Christ deserve attention. They teach that the penitents have received in faith the words of Jesus, which are the words of the Father, as in the process of following Christ explored above.<sup>676</sup> Jesus prays that by his mediation, they will participate in the Trinity's relationship of unity in diversity.<sup>677</sup>

Francis ended this collection of extracts from the priestly prayer of Christ with these words: 'I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory in your kingdom (Jn 17:24).'<sup>678</sup> Seen in the light of Francis' close identification with Christ, the words 'where I am they may be with me' have crucial significance. These words seem to represent the goal of Francis' endeavour to follow Christ by living the Gospel. His whole aim in 'doing penance' was to be where Christ was - that is, to be so filled with the Word of God that he would see as Christ saw, pray as he prayed, speak and act as he did. According to the priestly prayer in John's Gospel (Jn17:24), by thus being where Christ was, those who followed Christ would see his glory in the Father's kingdom. In the context of Francis' thought, this means that they would experience Christ's intimate relationship to the Father and to the Spirit, as Francis had attempted to describe just beforehand.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>673</sup>ER XXIII, 1-5.

<sup>674</sup>ILtF I, 11.

<sup>675</sup>ILtF I, 14-19.

<sup>676</sup>ILtF I, 15.

<sup>677</sup>ILtF I, 18.

<sup>678</sup>ILtF I, 19, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 49.

<sup>679</sup>ILtF I, 11-13.

The importance for him of being where Christ was, is highlighted by his repetition of the same points, using Jesus' words from John, chapter seventeen, in *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-two. Francis introduced this section by summarising his idea of following Christ, 'Let us therefore, hold onto the words, the life, the teaching and the Holy Gospel of Him Who humbled Himself to beg His Father for us and to make His name known...'.<sup>680</sup> Jesus' mediation with the Father in prayer is presented here. Jesus observes that those for whom he prayed have accepted the word of God in faith (Jn 17:8).<sup>681</sup> He prays 'that they may be one as We are', and 'that they may be brought to perfection as one,' that is, that they may share in the perfect unity of the Trinity (Jn 17:11, cf 17-20).<sup>682</sup> To enjoy this intimacy with the Trinity, Francis saw that it was necessary to be where Christ the Mediator was; to be centred on him and see from his viewpoint, and so he added again at the end of this passage the words from John quoted above (Jn 17:24).<sup>683</sup> So, as Nguyễn-Van-Khanh perceived in Francis' writings, 'The incarnate Son is a living Person, in and through whom we meet the Father.'<sup>684</sup>

The Marian *Antiphon* from *The Office of the Passion* proclaims that Mary, Francis' model for union with the Incarnate Word, enjoyed intimacy with the Trinity in this way. It shows that the Incarnation of the Word that happened in Mary related her to the Trinity as daughter of the Father, Mother of the Son and Spouse of the Holy Spirit.<sup>685</sup> Francis applied the same relationships with the Father and Spirit to Saint Clare and her Sisters, because they had chosen to live according to the Gospel.<sup>686</sup> In the *Antiphon*, Mary gives the example of praying 'together with' her Son, the Mediator, and in union with the Holy Spirit.<sup>687</sup> She is likewise regarded as the human model for offering prayer 'with' Christ the Mediator and the Holy Spirit in *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-three.<sup>688</sup>

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680ER XXII 41, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

681ER XXII, 42.

682ER XXII, 45, 53, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

683ER XXII, 55. Stewart drew attention to this repetition of the Johannine text in *The First Letter to the Faithful* and in *The Earlier Rule*. He observed that 'being with the Father together with Jesus' was the goal of the teaching which preceded it (Stewart, *Rule of the SFO*, p. 171).

684Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 226.

685*OfP, Antiphon*, Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*, p. 219.

686*The Form of Life Given to Saint Clare and her Sisters*, in: *The Form of Life of Saint Clare*, VI, 3, *CA:ED*, p. 118.

687*OfP, Antiphon*, Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*, p. 220.

688ER XXIII, 6.



It has been possible to conclude, from Francis' writings, that the kenotic love shown in the life and death of Christ revealed the nature of God to Francis. This is also suggested by Francis' attention to 'the humility of God', as revealed by Christ in the Eucharist (not the humility of the Son only).<sup>689</sup>

'Brothers, look at the humility of God,  
and pour out your hearts before Him!  
Humble yourselves  
that you may be exalted by Him!'<sup>690</sup>

Francis saw that, in pouring himself out for humanity, Christ, as a creature, revealed the *sine proprio* life of the Triune Creator. Hence, Christ's humility was also sublimity, as of 'The Lord of the universe'. Yet Christ was, to Francis, 'true man' as well as 'true God', and the model for all humanity.<sup>691</sup> Therefore, Francis' aim was to follow in Christ's footprints in his greatest poverty and vulnerability to become the 'true man', a perfect human creature in a state of total self-surrender to the Father:

'Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,  
that He Who gives Himself totally to you  
may receive you totally!'<sup>692</sup>

This pouring out of self in love was, to Francis, exaltation because, as well as being a fully human, creaturely response it was also, in Christ, the eternal life of God, in which the three divine Persons communed as one.

## Conclusion

In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated from the writings that Francis' theology was centred on Christ as universal Mediator between the Creator and creation. Francis' Christology did not consider Jesus' humanity or divinity separately, but held the two together in one coincident vision of Creator and creature. For Francis, Christ, through his perfect human nature, revealed the image and nature of God. This chapter has shown that Francis' agenda for life, reflected in his written teaching, was also personally centred on Christ as his Mediator, whose Person and example brought human creatures into union with the Triune Creator.<sup>693</sup>

<sup>689</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 70. As Nguyễn-Van-Khanh also commented: 'Humility is simply another name for the divine love for us ... This love is called humility, for Francis does not perceive the love of the Father except in the descent of the Son among us, that is, in the incarnation'

(Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 107).

<sup>690</sup>*LtOrd* 28, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118 (my italics).

<sup>691</sup>*ER* XXIII, 3 / *Adm V*, 1.

<sup>692</sup>*LtOrd* 29, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>693</sup>*LtOrd* 50-52.

The first chapter demonstrated how the character of Francis' theology, expressed through his writings, was Trinitarian, and that the Trinity was the beginning and end point of his theological vision. In this and the previous chapter, it has been shown that this theology was also Christocentric. It was clarified that these two features are not mutually exclusive, but fit together in Francis' panology. This chapter has also revealed how human beings fit into this theological picture. Francis saw each human person as called to union with the Trinity through Christ, the Mediator. Each one could access the salvific mediation of Christ by loving God above all, putting off self and, in the Spirit, assimilating the Word made flesh in scripture and Sacrament.<sup>694</sup> Thus, filled with the Incarnate Word, an individual could manifest his image exteriorly, by living according to Christ's teaching and example in the Gospels. With the inner and outer person so wholly conformed to Christ, a person experienced relationship to the Father and the Spirit, through with and in him. Thus, the coincidence of Creator and creature in Christ both brings about and coincides with the coincidence of other humans with the Creator in him. For humans, this coincidence comes about by means of the penitential process of conforming and uniting themselves to the Word Incarnate. According to Matura's description of a theological vision, quoted in the Introduction, the human person must be at the centre of such a vision. The second and third chapters have shown this in a double sense to be the case with Francis' theology. Firstly, Christ, as universal Creator-creature Mediator, is at the centre of Francis' panology, and he is the exemplar for the human person, as Francis' fifth *Admonition* teaches.<sup>695</sup> Secondly, Francis taught that because of Christ's mediation, other human beings could be conformed to his example of human creaturehood, to such a degree that their lives would be centred on him. Through, with and in him, they could then return their created goodness in prayer and service to the Creator and enjoy relationship with the Trinity.<sup>696</sup> And so, at the centre of Francis' vision is Christ, the exemplar of the human creature. Also at the centre are all other humans who are conformed to this exemplar, in answer to the prayer of Jesus, which Francis quoted in three writings: "I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory in your kingdom. Amen."<sup>697</sup>

<sup>694</sup>As Nguyễn-Van-Khanh commented, 'Such a following of Christ requires a constant effort to identify ourselves with Him' (Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 243).

<sup>695</sup>*Adm V*, 1.

<sup>696</sup>*1LtF I*, 5-13

<sup>697</sup>*1LtF I*, 19, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42, cf. *2LtF 60 / ER XXII*, 55.

#### 4. The coincidence of enemy and friend

This chapter moves into a third class of coincidence which, occurs for Francis, in the relationship between creatures. This is a coincidence of enemy and friend. It is an essential component of Francis' theological vision because it is based on the Gospel teaching, 'Love your enemies' (Mt 5:44) which was overwhelmingly important to Francis. As Matura has pointed out, Francis quoted this teaching of Jesus three times and referred to it twice in his writings.<sup>698</sup> The examination in this chapter of its influence upon his thought will show that it affected his entire view of relationships between creatures. Since the coincidence occurs between ontological equals, it could usefully be visualised as the horizontal line of the Cross, at the centre of which is Christ, who is the centre of Francis' vision. In this coincidence, as in the Cross, there is an area of intersection with the vertical, which will be dealt with later. The core of this coincidence is to be found in the beginning of chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*, and its implications extend throughout Francis' panology:

'All my brothers: let us pay attention to what the Lord says: Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you for our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose footprints we must follow, called His betrayer a friend and willingly offered Himself to His executioners. Our friends, therefore, are all those who unjustly inflict upon us distress and anguish, shame and injury, sorrow and punishment, martyrdom and death. We must love them greatly for we shall possess eternal life because of what they bring us.'<sup>699</sup>

How the coincidence works will first be considered, and then how it is communicated through Francis' writings. This coincidence of enemy and friend occurs in the context of a struggle between two opposing modes of perception: according to the instincts of appropriation and conversely, of kenosis. Francis referred to these as the body (or flesh/world/devil) and the spirit.<sup>700</sup> This coincidence of opposites also rests on certain general definitions of friend and enemy, based on how another treats a subject, and how that subject treats the same other.<sup>701</sup> It can be inferred from Francis' ideas of enemy and friend that these were adapted from the

<sup>698</sup>ER XXII, 1 / LR X, 10 / 2LtF 38 / PrOF 8 / Adm IX / Matura, *Francis: The Message* pp. 122-3.

<sup>699</sup>ER XXII, 1-4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.

<sup>700</sup>ER XXII, 5, 9, 19-20, 31-2, 39 / ILtF II, 11, 15-17, 19, 21 / 2LtF 37-8, 45-48, 63-6, 69-70, 82-4 / LtR 3-5 / ER V, 1-5, 7-8, 13-15; VII, 15; VIII, 1-2, 3-4; X, 4; XVI, 5-6; XVII, 10-19 / LR VI, 8; X, 7-12 / LtOrd 51 / Adms I 5-22; III, 3; VII; X; XII; XIV / SalV 14.

<sup>701</sup>The word 'other' rather than 'person' has been used in the general definitions of friend and enemy because these categories can apply to non-human entities or impersonal concepts in Francis' thought as well as to persons, as will be seen later.

following definitions, assumed to be normal and generally applied. An 'enemy' is an other who opposes the self and is, therefore, opposed or avoided. A 'friend' is another who helps oneself and is, therefore, the recipient of one's self giving. The coincidence occurs when the vision of the spirit prevails in the treatment as a *friend* of an other who *opposes* the self, by the giving of self to that other. This is to love one's enemies according to the teaching of Jesus (Mt 5:44). The model for this coincidence is Christ in the example of his Passion who, as Francis pointed out, called Judas 'friend' and 'willingly offered himself to his executioners'.<sup>702</sup> Thus, Christ is at the centre of the coincidence.

The collision of body and spirit visions, and the process of conversion to the example of Christ, form the wider context for the coincidence. Working on the general assumptions about friend and enemy described above, the vision of the body understands the self as the appropriated self and categorises as enemy the other, whether person, circumstance or state of being, that threatens, attacks or hinders this self. It follows that the body classes as 'friend' the other person, circumstance or state of being that serves the appropriated self. The vision of the spirit, on the other hand, tries to conform, associate and identify the self with Christ, the exemplar of human nature. The true self, like the self of Christ, is a self given for others. Therefore, the vision of the spirit categorises as enemy the appropriated self and all its desires and things which serve it. Attached to the general definition of friend, in this spiritual way of thinking, is every human, every creature and, on a more abstract level, all virtues. As Francis pointed out, even those others who persecute the self, help it towards kenosis in union with Christ, according to the spirit's way of seeing. This connects oneself with the eternal life of God's perpetual self-giving.<sup>703</sup> Thus, the idea of an enemy, as another who attacks oneself, converges with the idea of a friend, as another who helps oneself.

The coincidence of enemy and friend occurs in the process of human conversion, when the vision of the spirit overlays that of the body, so that oneself is given to another, who is attacking it, as one would give to a friend. However, the process of conversion to the true self in Christ entails the eventual loss of the appropriated false self and its vision. The body's perception of an enemy depends on

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<sup>702</sup>ER XXII, 1-3.

<sup>703</sup>*Ibid.*

the awareness of a self, which can be attacked or taken from. The ideal of Christ whom penitents were pursuing, was without an appropriated false self. Therefore, Francis saw that, although Christ was physically attacked, murdered as well as betrayed, his self was totally given for the other, in obedience to the vision of the spirit. This left no room for the body's vision of an enemy as someone who threatened his sense of self. According to the vision of the spirit, the only remaining sense of an enemy is the objective awareness of some other's destructive action towards oneself. In conformity to Christ, one might view and treat such another as a friend, but the aggressive act and its effect, that one is maligned, beaten or killed, is objectively undeniable. Therefore, in the desired end of total conversion to Christ, the opposites 'friend' and 'enemy' fall into unity and difference. There is no longer any room in the heart or will for an enemy, because there is no appropriated self, either to oppose the true self or to feel threatened. Whereas, in conformity with Christ, a person would regard and treat every creature as a friend (unity), there is also an awareness that only *some* of these friends, and not others, could be those who helped one indirectly (to give oneself in union with Christ) by acting destructively towards oneself (unity and difference). And so, the aspect of difference within a universal perception of friend is maintained in the objective awareness of another's negative action towards oneself, which is the residual part of the normal definition of an enemy.

This coincidence of opposites presents as a unity-and-difference-in-convergence type. The opposite concepts of friend and enemy coincide in one perceiving subject's view of the same object, according to simultaneous visions of body and spirit. Thus far, it would seem to resemble a Cousins' type three unity-in-difference.<sup>704</sup> However, the concepts further converge in Francis' idea that an enemy who acts destructively towards oneself helps one, as a friend would (although indirectly and perhaps unintentionally). Francis also presents the ultimate ideal of a human creature in perfect union with God. This is Christ, who treats even those who attack him as friends, because he is totally self-giving and appropriates neither his body nor anything else. In this way, his self, according to the body, cannot feel threatened, and he is understood to be without the enemy of the spirit, which is sin, in his own heart and actions. Yet the perception of all others as friends, in the vision of the spirit, falls short of swallowing up the idea of enemy altogether, in a monistic

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<sup>704</sup>Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 18.

coincidence.<sup>705</sup> The remaining sense of enemy, in the universal vision of friend, is in the destructive intent and/or action of a friend towards oneself. This vision of the spirit would allow, in theory, for two different possibilities of friend: one whose actions towards oneself are directly benevolent or destructive. In the latter type of friend lies the final state of the opposites friend and enemy, converged in unity and difference in the vision of a human subject conformed to Christ. This coincidence will now be examined as it is expressed through Francis writings.

### **An inversion of vision**

Francis taught that a person in the process of conversion to Christ would experience the coincidence of friend and enemy, through an inversion in his/her way of seeing the world. The focus of one's personal battle would change from what threatened the appropriated self to what threatened the spirit, in the inner struggles of conversion. Francis came to see that the only true enemy of the human person was sin. *Admonition Ten* insists that the 'body', rather than one's neighbour, is the real threat that needs to be restrained and controlled.<sup>706</sup> Another human can never be an enemy, even if they should physically attack one. Moreover, these apparent 'enemies' are means of grace, as Francis proposes in his *Letter to a Minister*.<sup>707</sup> He echoes Jesus' teaching to love one's enemies in his advice to the Minister, whom he commands three times to love the brother who impedes him.<sup>708</sup> It is significant that Francis put the words, 'true obedience' three times in the same sentence.<sup>709</sup> This construct highlights a virtue by which the Minister will be able to love his brother, who sinned. That the enemies, according to the body, are to be befriended by means of the virtues, is a frequent motif throughout Francis' writings. The virtues are gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>710</sup> They empower a person to love his/her enemies, as Francis taught in *The Earlier Rule*, chapter sixteen. Those who go among the Saracens do so 'spiritually', 'by divine inspiration' and love those who persecute them by the virtue of patience, a gift of the Spirit.<sup>711</sup> In befriending the enemies of the body by means of the virtues, sin, the

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<sup>705</sup>*Ibid.* This would be a type one according to Cousins.

<sup>706</sup>*Adm X.*

<sup>707</sup>*A Letter to a Minister (LtMin) 2.*

<sup>708</sup>*LtMin 5, 7, 11.*

<sup>709</sup>*LtMin 4.*

<sup>710</sup>*SalBVM 6.*

<sup>711</sup>*ER XVI, 2, 5, 20. / ER XVII, 14-15.*

enemy of the spirit, is driven out of one's heart, because possessing any of the virtues involves dying to one's appropriated self.<sup>712</sup> Thus it is that another may be simultaneously an enemy (of the body) and a friend (of the spirit). It is in the heart of a human in the process of conversion from the vision of the body to that of the spirit that these opposite visions concerning friend and foe overlap.

The conversion, or inversion of vision, which brings about the coincidence of enemy and friend, was influenced by the kind of flesh-spirit dichotomy that features in the Letter to the Romans (Rom 8:1-14). Francis taught that there were two kinds of vision available to a person: bodily and spiritual, and that these opposed each other.<sup>713</sup> Spiritual vision was of God, and judged and chose according to God's priorities. Bodily vision was of the world, and judged according to self-centred values.<sup>714</sup> This bodily way of seeing was actually blindness to the truth, a deception by the enemies of the spirit: 'the flesh, the world and the devil.'<sup>715</sup> God's call to penance involved a change from a bodily to a spiritual outlook. This meant an inversion of priorities: what was once seen as an enemy was now considered a friend. Francis described this in his *Testament* as the once 'bitter' sight of lepers turning into 'sweetness', when the Lord led him to treat them as friends.<sup>716</sup> 'Afterwards', he wrote, 'I delayed a little and left the world.'<sup>717</sup> He describes here a gradual conversion from a worldly way of seeing and living to a spiritual vision and life, which desired and sought God above all else. The metaphor of sweetness for spiritual desire appears again in *The Praises of God*, 'You are all our sweetness',<sup>718</sup> and in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*: 'Those who do not wish to taste how sweet the Lord is' are those, 'who love the darkness more than the light.' This *Letter* further states that those 'who serve the world with their bodies, the desires of the flesh, the cares and anxieties of this world, and the preoccupations of this life are deceived by the devil ... They are blind because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>719</sup> Thus, Francis taught that the devil tried to blind the human heart to the values of Christ by means of worldly desires.<sup>720</sup>

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712 *SalV* 5, 8 / *Adm XXVII*.

713 Francis quoted Romans 8:4 on this subject in *ER V*, 4.

714 *The Second Letter to the Custodians (2LtCus)* 2-3 / *ILtCl* 7.

715 *LtF* 69, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 50.

716 *Test* 1-4.

717 *Test* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 124.

718 *PrsG* 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109 (my italics).

719 *LtF* 65-6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 50.

720 *ER VIII*, 4; *XXII*, 19-20.

Just as one's sight guided the steps and path one took, so Francis understood that whichever vision prevailed in a person would determine his/her life's path. Choosing to see spiritually led to 'following in the footprints' of Christ, and living according to his priorities.<sup>721</sup> It meant following his teaching and example, embracing poverty and the Cross which opposed the body, while rejecting worldly treasure. This path would lead to eternal life.<sup>722</sup> Conversely, the option for bodily vision led to living according to the world's values: 'walking according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit.'<sup>723</sup>

The Letter to the Romans (Rom 7:14-25) describes a conflict between flesh and spirit in the human person: 'For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members (Rom 7:22-3).' Francis apparently drew on this thinking, as he too described the desires of 'body' and of 'spirit' warring in the heart. He insisted that the spirit must prevail in the human vision, so that the body remained subject to the spirit's desires, and not *vice versa*.<sup>724</sup> Hence, as *Admonition Twelve* teaches, the pride that belongs to the appropriated self must be overcome by the humility belonging to the Spirit. It follows that, in a person who does penance, the vision of the spirit prevails to the extent that it directs the will, or the heart, and the decisions and actions that flow from it. Therefore, the penitent sees the enemies of the spirit as enemies, and the friends of the spirit as friends, and lives accordingly. However, the friends, according to the spirit can be enemies of the body insofar as they threaten the appropriated self. Similarly sins, the enemies of the spirit, can be friends of the body insofar as they promise it ease and comfort '...for it is sweet to the body to commit sin and bitter to serve God.'<sup>725</sup> It follows that coincidence of the opposites of friend and enemy is experienced when the dimension of spiritual sight opens up to a person in the course of a conversion to Christ. The vision of the spirit is then superimposed, as it were, upon the opposite vision of the body, so that both coincide, while the spiritual view increasingly dominates, as one comes closer in conformity to Christ.

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7212*LtF* 13 / *ER* I, 1 / *A Letter to Brother Leo (LtL)* 12 (Bartoli Langeli ed.).

7222*LtF* 6-13 / *ER* XXII, 1-4; I, 1-3, 5.

723*ER* V, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 67, quoting Romans 8:4 / 2*LtF* 63-4.

724*Adm* X, 1-3 / *SalV* 14 / 2*LtF* 40.

7252*LtF* 69.



Francis saw the salvation of the physical body in its subjection to the spirit. When this hierarchisation was achieved in a person, then the physical body, directed by kenotic love, would be wholly surrendered to God by being totally given for others. It would be at the mercy of its enemies, which it would welcome as friends.<sup>726</sup> So it was that, for Francis, the physical body was good to the extent that it reflected the Eucharistic Body of Christ, offered in love to God for the sake of others.<sup>727</sup> In the human person thus hierarchised, body and spirit would be conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. In presenting this ideal of conformity to Christ, Francis used the word 'excellence' of both spirit *and* body, meaning the physical body.<sup>728</sup> The body surrendered to God in the hands of others manifested God's glory in the kenotic love that was essential to the divine nature.<sup>729</sup>

### **Jesus as the exemplar of loving enemies**

For Francis, Christ was the supreme example of loving one's enemies in two ways: firstly, in befriending humanity, while embracing those aspects of the created state that humans would regard as enemies, and secondly, in loving his personal enemies. The first instance is implicit in Francis' understanding of the mystery of salvation. He taught that that humanity acted as the enemy of God both in the past and present. In his fifth *Admonition*, humankind is the enemy that crucified, and still crucifies Christ.<sup>730</sup> Nevertheless, through Christ, God created, redeemed and is saving the race that wilfully turned away from God<sup>731</sup> In the Incarnation, God came among the human race and 'was born for us', choosing to take to himself 'the flesh of our humanity and frailty' and the poverty of creaturehood, that found its furthest extreme on 'the altar of the Cross'.<sup>732</sup> Furthermore, the consequences of the Fall, in suffering, diminishment and death, which humanity would naturally try to avoid as 'enemies' opposed to the body, were freely accepted by Christ. It followed that his body and blood were poured out as a gift of love to the Father and for humanity.<sup>733</sup> By this concept of pouring out self, Francis joined the Passion to the Eucharist, a link

<sup>726</sup>*SalV* 14 / *ER* XIV, 4-6, VII, 14.

<sup>727</sup>*LtOrd* 29 / *ER* XVI, 10-21.

<sup>728</sup>*Adm V*, 1.

<sup>729</sup>*ER* XVI, 10-21 / *Adm III*, 3.#.

<sup>730</sup>*Adm V*, 2.

<sup>731</sup>*ER* XXIII, 2-3, 8.

<sup>732</sup>*LtF*, 4-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>733</sup>*Ibid.*

noticeable above in his juxtaposition of 'altar' and 'Cross'.<sup>734</sup> Thus, in what Francis understood as a process of Incarnation culminating in the Passion, Christ reconciled humanity both to God and to itself in the existential poverty of its own condition. While remaining fully divine, he showed humankind how to fully inhabit its humanity. As Francis saw it, it was in the place of complete kenosis in love that the human person met Christ Crucified in a communion of mutual self-surrender.<sup>735</sup>

Flowing from the example of the Passion, in Francis' thought, was the rehabilitation of creation's greatest enemy: death. Following this example, the most feared event could be understood as the gift of one's body to the 'Lord Jesus', and the way to eternal life.<sup>736</sup> Since Christ had taken away the fear of this greatest enemy of the body, whom Francis would come to call 'Sister',<sup>737</sup> there was no basis for fear of any enemy which might arise from a need to protect one's body.<sup>738</sup> Therefore, there were no enemies in humanity or the human condition; the only enemy was sin in one's heart, a *lack* of humanity, which endangered the soul.<sup>739</sup> So, as Francis understood it, following Christ's descent in humility to embrace death brought one into the horizontal coincidence of befriending human enemies. This common ground between vertical and horizontal coincidences of opposites could be visualised as an area of intersection at the centre of a cruciform theological structure.

The second way in which Christ was a model for loving enemies was in his attitude towards those particular persons who set themselves against him. In *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-two, Francis highlighted two examples associated with the Passion: Jesus called the apostle who was betraying him 'friend' and freely offered himself to those who crucified him. Both cases exemplify a non-violent and loving response to enemies, by which Francis taught the brothers to follow Christ closely.<sup>740</sup>

The ways in which Christ was Francis' model of love for enemies reveal that the coincidence of enemy and friend could occur in two dimensions of a cruciform theological structure. One way mentioned above concerns the following of Jesus' teaching and example in loving fellow creatures who oppose or attack oneself. This

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<sup>734</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>735</sup>*LtOrd* 29.

<sup>736</sup>*ER* XVI, 10-21.

<sup>737</sup>*CtC* 12-13.

<sup>738</sup>*ER* XVI, 17.

<sup>739</sup>*LtF* 69 / *ER* V, 7.

<sup>740</sup>*ER* XXII, 2.

may be imagined in the horizontal dimension, since these enemies share a created, and contingent nature. This coincidence also applies in the vertical dimension. God's descent, in Incarnation, to embrace the estranged human race by assuming its nature, and continuing into the depths of human and creaturely poverty on the Cross, falls within the Creator-creature coincidence. Anyone following this aspect of Christ's example in loving enemies would strive, by humility, to welcome states of being which were enemies to their desires of appropriation. In doing so, they would accept the existential poverty of the human and creaturely condition. They would meet Christ in his human poverty, which showed forth the glory of the divine life in kenosis. At the common point of intersection between the vertical and horizontal is Christ, whose Passion demonstrates befriending both of personal enemies and of those abstract enemies of the appropriated self: suffering, loss and death, which were accepted at the Incarnation.

Francis' theology views Christ as the exemplar of the friend-enemy coincidence in his Person, teaching, life and death. This coincidence illuminates Christ at the centre of several pairs of opposites: enemy and friend, abjection and glory, Creator and Creature. It shows how the Cross of Christ in Francis' theology effects a reconciliation between human creatures and their own radical poverty,<sup>741</sup> between creatures estranged from each other,<sup>742</sup> and between the human race and God.<sup>743</sup> The Cross can be visualised as the centre of his panology. Francis wrote of '... the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in Whom that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God.'<sup>744</sup> That he had the Cross in mind, as well as the Eucharist, is revealed in the conformity of this text with the Letter to the Colossians (Col 1:20), which concludes: '...through the blood of his cross.'<sup>745</sup> Francis' words here indicate two distinct movements of reconciliation: of bringing to peace and of uniting to God. The context of Francis' thought explored so far indicates what possible forms of reconciliation these words could encompass.

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<sup>741</sup>*LtF* 4-5.

<sup>742</sup>*ER* XXII, 1-2, 52-3 / *2LtF* 59.

<sup>743</sup>*ER* XXIII, 1-3 / *LtOrd* 12-13.

<sup>744</sup>*LtOrd* 12-13.

<sup>745</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 69.

**'Brought to peace':** Francis and the brothers, as they preached repentance throughout the world, used these words as a greeting: 'May the Lord give you peace'.<sup>746</sup> Being brought to peace could mean a process of reconciliation between persons in conflict. The wish of peace could also apply on a personal level. As already noted, in Francis' thought, people are brought to peace with themselves by being reconciled to the truth of their own creaturely dependence on God. They no longer live in fear of what threatens the appropriated self.<sup>747</sup> It is Christ who gives this peace through his Incarnation and Passion, by embracing the poverty of the human condition in selfless love.<sup>748</sup> People receive this peace by following Christ's example of humility, leading to communion with him, as explained in chapter two.

**'And reconciled to almighty God':** As also shown in chapter two, the latter dynamic of reconciliation to God is brought about in the Incarnation. It unites the created being of earth to the Creator in heaven in one Person, human and divine. It has been explained how Francis' soteriology sees the Passion, death and Resurrection of Christ saving the human race from selfishness, and opening up death to eternal life with God. In summary, being 'brought to peace and reconciled to God' could include a 'horizontal' movement towards peace with neighbour. It could also encompass a 'vertical' reconciliation with God. This entails reconciliation with one's own reality in the kenotic movement of humility that leads to union with Christ, and exaltation according to the Creator-creature coincidence. Both these movements, which feature in Francis' Christological exemplarism, were symbolised for Francis by the Cross, in which the alienated human race was reconciled to itself, among its members and to God in the peace of Christ.<sup>749</sup> Hence, Francis prayed, '...by Your holy cross you have redeemed the world.'<sup>750</sup>

### **Enemies: visible and invisible**

In chapter sixteen of *The Earlier Rule*, Francis wrote, '...they must make themselves vulnerable to their enemies, both visible and invisible'.<sup>751</sup> He was speaking of enemies of the appropriated body, since he had just exhorted the brothers to abandon their

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<sup>746</sup>*Test* 23.

<sup>747</sup>*ER* XVI, 11-21.

<sup>748</sup>*LtF* 4-13 / *ER* XXII, 1-2.

<sup>749</sup>*LtOrd* 12-13.

<sup>750</sup>*Test* 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>751</sup>*ER* XVI, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 74.

bodies to Jesus Christ, mindful of the possibility of martyrdom.<sup>752</sup> In *Admonition Ten*, Francis spoke of the body as the enemy which a person had in his/her power. This enemy, the appropriated self, the impulses of which are opposed to those of the spirit, must be held captive, subordinated to the spirit. Francis taught that the person who did this, 'no other enemy visible or invisible' could harm.<sup>753</sup> These two texts emphasise that the ideas of friend and enemy in Francis' thought extend to enemies both visible and invisible. A survey of the writings reveals a very broad context to the coincidence of friend and enemy, which affected Francis' whole outlook on the world and the spirituality he taught. The collided visions of body and spirit encompass enemies of the body, both visible and invisible, although these two categories might be more accurately labelled 'concrete' and 'abstract'. These same two categories can be found in the enemies of the spirit. 'Visible' enemies of the body, in Francis' writings, can include persons or categories of people who threaten or oppose one's physical or mental appropriations. These are the same people the spirit would treat as friends. 'Invisible' body enemies are abstract states of being that oppose the desires of the appropriated self. The spirit would embrace such conditions. Similarly, invisible enemies of the spirit, which Francis saw as true enemies, are not persons but vices and sins, and states in the heart which lead to them. The visible or concrete enemies of the spirit are material things or actions, insofar as they lead to or involve a person in vice and sin. The body naturally delights in all these enemies of the spirit. In this, it is deceived and prompted by one whom Francis names, 'the enemy'.

Enemies according to the spirit would lose their power or disappear along with the shedding of the appropriated self. At the same time, the heart would become filled in the process of conversion with the virtues of Christ instead. This is implied in the *Salutation of the Virtues* and *Admonition Twenty-Seven*. To summarise these ideas, some examples from Francis' writings have been arranged in the form of a chart and an explanation of their functioning in his thought follows. In the context described below, Jesus' command to 'love your enemies' would apply only to enemies according to the body. The expropriation this entailed would rid the self of enemies according to the spirit.

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<sup>752</sup>ER XVI, 10.

<sup>753</sup>Adm X, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 132.

Body Enemies: Visible/Concrete	Body Enemies: Invisible/Abstract	Spirit Enemies: Visible/Concrete	Spirit Enemies: Invisible/Abstract
the sick / lepers ( <i>ER IX</i> , 2; <i>X</i> , 1; <i>VIII</i> , 8-10 / <i>Adm XXIV</i> / <i>Test</i> 1-3)	sickness and trials ( <i>ER XVII</i> , 8; <i>X</i> , 3-4; <i>XXII</i> , 14 / <i>CtExh</i> 5 / <i>Adm VI</i> , 1-2)	money ( <i>ER VIII</i> / <i>LR IV</i> ; <i>V</i> , 3)	'the enemy'/Satan/evil ( <i>ILtF II</i> , 6, 11, 15 / <i>ER XXII</i> , 5, 19-20, 48; <i>XIII</i> , 1; <i>X</i> , 4 / <i>Adm X</i> , 1 / <i>SalV</i> , 9 / <i>LR VII</i> , 1)
the poor & powerless ( <i>ER IX</i> , 2-6 <i>Adm XVIII</i> , 1)	suffering and death ( <i>2LtF</i> 6-13 / <i>ER XXIII</i> , 3 / <i>Adm XV</i> )	possessions ( <i>Adms XVIII</i> , 2; <i>III</i> , 1-3 <i>ER I</i> ; <i>XXII</i> , 16; <i>VII</i> , 13)	status/ambition ( <i>ER XXII</i> , 19-20 <i>LR X</i> , 7 / <i>Adm XXI</i> / <i>TPJ</i> 4-6)
robbers/thiefs ( <i>ER VII</i> , 14; <i>XIV</i> , 5)	correction ( <i>Adms XIV</i> , <i>XXII</i> , <i>XXIII</i> , 2-3)	rich dwellings/clothes ( <i>Test</i> 24 / <i>ER II</i> , 14-15)	power ( <i>ER VI</i> , 3; <i>VII</i> , 1-2; <i>V</i> , 9-12 / <i>Adm IV</i> , <i>2LtF</i> 47)
sinning brothers ( <i>2LtF</i> 44 / <i>ER V</i> , 7-8 / <i>LtMin</i> / <i>Adms IX</i> , <i>XI</i> )	powerlessness and weakness ( <i>Adms XIX</i> , 4; <i>V</i> , 8; <i>VI</i> , 1-2)	carousing, drunkenness ( <i>ER IX</i> , 14)	anger ( <i>ER V</i> , 7; <i>X</i> , 4; <i>XI</i> , 3 <i>LR VII</i> , 3 / <i>2LtF</i> 44 / <i>Adms XI</i> , 1-3; <i>XXVII</i> , 2)
Saracens and people of other religions or none ( <i>ER XVI</i> )	persecution ( <i>Test</i> 25 / <i>ER XVI</i> , 15-21; <i>XXII</i> , 14-15, 17)	fornication ( <i>ER XXII</i> , 5-8; <i>XII</i> , 5-6; <i>XIII</i> )	idleness ( <i>ER VII</i> , 10-12 / <i>LR V</i> , 1-2 / <i>Adm XX</i> , 3 / <i>Test</i> 21)
clergy who oppose the brothers or their way of life ( <i>2LtF</i> 33 / <i>LR IX</i> , 1 / <i>Test</i> 6-9 / <i>Adm XXVI</i> )	slander/abuse ( <i>ER XVI</i> 15-16; <i>IX</i> , 6; <i>XIV</i> , 4 / <i>TPJ</i> 11, 15)	detraction, murmuring ( <i>ER XI</i> , 7-12 / <i>LR X</i> , 7 / <i>Adm XXV</i> )	pride and vainglory ( <i>Adms XVIII</i> ; <i>XIX</i> , 1-2; <i>XII</i> ; <i>VII</i> ; <i>V</i> , 4-7; <i>XXI</i> / <i>ER XVII</i> , 5-13)
	poverty ( <i>2LtF</i> 5 / <i>ER IX</i> , 1, 3-5 / <i>LR VI</i> , 1-6)		greed / appropriation ( <i>Adm XXVII</i> , 3 / <i>ER VIII</i> , 1; <i>XXII</i> , 7-8 / <i>2LtF</i> 71, 83-4)
	The Virtues ( <i>SalV</i> / <i>Adm XXVII</i> / <i>ER XVII</i> , 14)		envy ( <i>Adm VIII</i> / <i>LR X</i> , 7 / <i>ER XXII</i> , 7-8)

**Visible enemies of the body:** The Gospel key to Francis' concept of the coincidence of opposites in this context can be found at the start of chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*. In this text, one can almost see Francis absorb the Gospel message and make it his own, in the process of personal incarnation of God's word that was described in the previous chapter. He starts by quoting Jesus' teaching, 'love your enemies'. Then, he reflects on how Jesus put this into practice: he called Judas, 'friend' even as Judas was betraying him, and freely gave himself to those who killed him. The latter conclusion is implied in the Gospel accounts by Jesus' acceptance of his immanent suffering in Gethsemane, in obedience the Father's will, which Francis described in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*.<sup>754</sup> It is also implied by the obvious absence in the Passion narratives of any resistance or attempts to escape on Jesus' part. However, Francis' interpretation of the Cross goes further than the acceptance of suffering. He views Jesus' Passion as an *action* of self-offering to his executioners. This interpretation is surely derived from the strong connection Francis made between the Passion and the Eucharist. In both mysteries, he understood 'the Body and Blood' of Christ to be offered for all humankind.<sup>755</sup> *Admonition Five* shows that Francis identified the whole human race, because of its sin, with those enemies who crucified Jesus.<sup>756</sup> It was to these 'enemies', as Francis understood it, that Jesus offered his 'Body and Blood'.<sup>757</sup> Francis made this poignant observation in his *Letter to the Entire Order*: 'The Lord God offers Himself to us as to His children.'<sup>758</sup> And so, Francis received a powerful impression from the Gospels that Jesus actively offered himself to his enemies as one might entrust oneself completely to a dear friend. Having assimilated this example, Francis made a conclusion which would profoundly affect his theological vision: '*Our friends*, therefore, are all those who unjustly inflict upon us distress and anguish, shame and injury, sorrow and punishment, martyrdom and death. We must love them greatly for we shall possess eternal life because of what they bring us.'<sup>759</sup> 'What they bring', as Francis saw it, is union with Christ, in a kenosis which participates in the eternal self-giving relationships of the Trinity.<sup>760</sup> In the

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<sup>754</sup>*LtF* 8-10.

<sup>755</sup>*LtF* 6-11.

<sup>756</sup>*AdmV*, 2-3.

<sup>757</sup>*LtF* 11-12

<sup>758</sup>*LtOrd* 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 117.

<sup>759</sup>*ER* XXII, 3-4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79 (my italics).

<sup>760</sup>*LtF* 48-60 / *LtOrd* 26-9, 50-52.

desire for martyrdom, the physical body and the entire self are expropriated, and death becomes the entrance to eternal life.<sup>761</sup> So it is that the enemies of the body are friends of the immortal spirit.

For Francis, one implication of this Gospel lesson was that forgiveness and love for enemies was a proactive step. It did not simply entail granting pardon to those who asked for it. In imitation of Jesus, friendship was to be offered, even as an enemy was attacking. This practice is manifest in Francis' advice to a Minister concerning a sinning brother: 'And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand time before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord.'<sup>762</sup> This advice showed the Minister that loving enemies meant moving out from one's self-centredness in a gesture of self-offering to those who threatened or attacked the appropriated self. The purpose of this action was to draw the enemy to God, by means of love. Francis prayed that the Father's will be done on earth as in heaven 'That we may love You ... and we may love our neighbour as ourselves by drawing them all to Your love with our whole strength.'<sup>763</sup> He meditated on forgiveness in a similar way in the Our Father. To forgive completely those who sinned against oneself was to love them, and this meant to pray for them and also to try to help them.<sup>764</sup>

To move out of one's fortress of self protection in friendship to the other is to risk committing oneself to be defenceless among those the body views as enemies.<sup>765</sup> Therefore, Francis' reflections show an understanding that it was God's commitment to be without defences among enemies that led Jesus both to the Cross and to his vulnerable Presence in the Eucharist.<sup>766</sup> This theme of 'being among' occurs several times when Francis writes about the approach to enemies of the appropriated self:

'...when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me *among* them and I showed mercy to them.'<sup>767</sup>

'...they can live spiritually *among* the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways.'<sup>768</sup>

'Let those brothers who wish by divine inspiration to go *among* the Saracens or

<sup>761</sup>ER XVI, 11; XVII, 8 / *Adm VI*, 2 / *OfP*, Ps VI, 10-11.

<sup>762</sup>*LtMin*, 9-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>763</sup>*PrOF* 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 158-9.

<sup>764</sup>*PrOF* 8.

<sup>765</sup>ER XVI, 10-11.

<sup>766</sup>*Adm I*, 22.

<sup>767</sup>*Test* 1-2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 124 (my italics).

<sup>768</sup>ER XVI, 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 74 (my italics).



other non-believers ask permission from their provincial ministers.<sup>769</sup>

'They must rejoice when they live *among* people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers and the beggars by the wayside.'<sup>770</sup>

**'Invisible' enemies of the body:** Becoming vulnerable among visible 'enemies' forces one to embrace the invisible or non-personal enemies of the body, which prompt the fear of such persons. For example, according to Francis' teaching, being among the poor entails an embrace of poverty.<sup>771</sup> Being among the sick, one can become exhausted in ministering to them.<sup>772</sup> Being among people of another religion, one has to be willing to face possible persecution.<sup>773</sup> Therefore, Francis saw that the real enemy to be overcome was the fear in one's own heart. In *The Testament*, he described this gradual struggle to overcome his fear of lepers.<sup>774</sup> In *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-two, he warned that the heart was the battleground which the devil sought to occupy with cares and anxieties, expelling God.<sup>775</sup> Francis understood the parable of the sower in this context. The devil, by introducing a variety of obstacles, tried to prevent the word of God being implanted and growing in the ground, which was the human heart. Fear of trial and persecution prevented the word taking root, while 'the anxiety and worries of this world' and the desires of the body prevented the word bearing fruit.<sup>776</sup> A person's defence was to remain aware of the devil's deceptions and to keep their heart filled with God by constant prayer: prayer for strength and prayer of adoration.<sup>777</sup> Such prayer was a gift of the Spirit.<sup>778</sup> People whose hearts were rich soil for the word of God, as Francis explained, were those who assimilated the word, desiring to keep it and ponder it in their hearts, so as to bear fruit, by putting it into practice. This required patience, a virtue that Francis often stressed as being essential for the love of enemies.<sup>779</sup> Offering oneself without defence among the human enemies of the body also brought a person into intimacy with impersonal 'enemies', or conditions which the body would avoid. In order to love

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<sup>769</sup>LR XII, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 106 (my italics).

<sup>770</sup>ER IX, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 70 (my italics).

<sup>771</sup>ER IX.

<sup>772</sup>*The Canticle of Exhortation (CtExh)*.

<sup>773</sup>ER XVI.

<sup>774</sup>*Test* 1-3.

<sup>775</sup>ER XXII, 19-32.

<sup>776</sup>ER XXII, 10-17.

<sup>777</sup>ER XXII, 27-9.

<sup>778</sup>ER XXII, 30.

<sup>779</sup>ER XXII, 17.

such enemies, it was necessary to have patience and endurance, so as to suffer whatever the other may do to the body, while preserving inner peace. Francis often highlighted in his writings the importance of patient endurance in humility for peacemaking:

'and do not fear those who kill the body ... for by your *patience* you will possess your souls.'<sup>780</sup>

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ...when those who should make him content do the opposite, he has as much *patience and humility* as he has at that time and no more.'<sup>781</sup>

'Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of spirit and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>782</sup>

'Blessed is the servant who endures discipline, accusation and reprimand from another as *patiently* as he would from himself.'<sup>783</sup>

'Those weighed down by sickness and the others wearied because of them, all of you: *bear it in peace*.'<sup>784</sup>

'...have *humility and patience* in persecution and infirmity, and to love those who persecute, rebuke and find fault with us, because the Lord says: "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you."<sup>785</sup>

'Let him not become angry at the fault of a brother, but, with all *patience and humility*, let him admonish and support him.'<sup>786</sup>

The model of patient endurance whom Francis imitated was, 'Him Who suffered so much,<sup>787</sup> the Crucified Christ who revealed the nature of the Father, to whom he prayed, 'You are *humility*, You are *patience*.'<sup>788</sup>

**Enemies of the spirit:** To Francis, enemies of the spirit, his true enemies, were never other people. Evil and sin in the heart, and those things that led to them occupying it, were the true enemies of the human spirit.<sup>789</sup> Having identified the enemies of the body as friends in chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*,<sup>790</sup> he proceeded to identify those things which were true enemies according to the spirit:

<sup>780</sup>ER XVI, 18, 20, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 74 (my italics).

<sup>781</sup>Adm XIII, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 133 (my italics).

<sup>782</sup>Adm XV, 2, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 134 (my italics).

<sup>783</sup>Adm XXII, 1, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 135 (my italics).

<sup>784</sup>CtExh 5, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 115 (my italics).

<sup>785</sup>LR X, 9-10, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 105 (my italics).

<sup>786</sup>LtF, 44, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 48 (my italics).

<sup>787</sup>LtF, 61, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 49.

<sup>788</sup>PrsG, 4, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 109 (my italics).

<sup>789</sup>Adm XI, 1.

<sup>790</sup>ER XXII, 1-4.

the body's desires, vices and sins, and the devil, who occupied the heart with such evils. Likewise, in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, Francis coupled an instruction to love enemies (of the body) with another to 'hate our bodies with their vices and sins' (true enemies of the spirit).<sup>791</sup> The inversion of vision from body to spirit enemies examined above explains Francis' connection of the command to love one's enemies with the exhortation to hate one's body.<sup>792</sup> Since, in his Incarnation and Passion, Jesus befriended the entire humanity whose sin crucified him, Francis concluded that no human being was an enemy - all were friends. It followed that he had to develop a coincident vision in order to view as friends those people who behaved as enemies towards him. His strategy for coping with this contradiction was to separate the sin from the person, always viewing the sinner with compassion while loving him/her as oneself, and trying to help his fellow human.

At the same time, Francis was concerned to protect the hearts of those exposed to the sin of another from the potentially destructive spiritual effects of that sin, as well as to prevent the return of evil for evil, which perpetuates enmity. For this reason, he insisted many times in his writings that no one must become disturbed or angry because of the sin of another, even if one endured suffering because of it.<sup>793</sup> The prodigal love and mercy of Jesus were Francis' Gospel model for response to sinners, as Francis showed in the *Letter to A Minister* by quoting, "those who are well do not need a physician but the sick do" (Mt 9:12; Mk 2:17; Lk 5:31) and, "Go and sin no more"(Jn 8:11).<sup>794</sup> In chapter ten of *The Earlier Rule*, Francis warned :

'If anyone is disturbed or angry at either God or his brothers, or perhaps anxiously and forcefully seeks medicine with too much of a desire to free the flesh that is soon to die and is an enemy of the soul: this comes to him from the Evil One and is carnal. He does not seem to be one of the brothers because he loves his body more than his soul.'<sup>795</sup>

The juxtaposition of two warnings: against anger towards God and brothers, and a demanding sort of hypochondria, could appear to be random at first sight. However, it makes sense in the context already set out, of the coincidence of enemy and friend in Francis' writings. Anger at God or another person presumably arises from something

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<sup>791</sup>*LtF*, 37-8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 48.

<sup>792</sup>*ER* XXII, 1-8 / This was a link which Matura highlighted as 'strange' (Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 44).

<sup>793</sup>*LtF* 44 / *ER* V, 7-8; XI, 4 / *LtMin* / *Adm XI* / *TPJ* 15.

<sup>794</sup>*LtMin* 15, 20.

<sup>795</sup>*ER* X, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 72.

the other person does, or something that happens to threaten the appropriated self and is ascribed to God. Sickness or physical suffering is also something that happens to oppose the body's self-protective instincts. Therefore, this pair of warnings criticises antipathy towards enemies of the body, both personal and impersonal. A hostile response to enemies would be triggered by anxieties to protect the body, which would overrule the vision and concerns of the spirit.

Francis was implying that the vision of the spirit must be followed. In obedience to God, a brother who followed the spirit would welcome both persons and conditions that opposed the body, while protecting his heart from the true enemies: fear, anger and appropriation of his own life. The heart was defended from these things by prayer, as noted above. This was why Francis considered the inner dimension of praying for personal enemies to be as necessary as the external movement to help them. He prayed to the Father:

'that we may truly love our enemies because of You  
and we may *fervently intercede* for them before You,  
returning no one evil for evil  
and we may *strive to help* everyone in You.'<sup>796</sup>

Francis taught that people who sinned were to be treated as friends and not judged along with their sin. He said: 'Nothing should displease a servant of God except sin.'<sup>797</sup> Furthermore, he taught that nothing should disturb a person except his/her own sin, not even the sins of others.<sup>798</sup> The true enemy, therefore was not an external one but the selfish instincts in one's own heart. The warnings against anger at another's sin were intended to protect a person's heart against such an enemy.

Francis' responded in a similar way to members of the clergy who opposed the friars. However, his response to this category of body enemies had a distinctive extra dimension. Francis treated the clergy who opposed him and, indeed, all priests, with special reverence, not just because they were humans but particularly because, through their ministry, the saving Presence of Christ himself, in Word and Sacrament, was brought to humanity. On account of their ministry, the priests themselves embodied the Presence of Christ in a special way.<sup>799</sup> It was this Presence of Christ that Francis honoured in the clergy rather than the men themselves, whom he

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<sup>796</sup>*PrOF* 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 159 (my italics).

<sup>797</sup>*Adm XI*, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 133.

<sup>798</sup>*ER XI*, 10-12 / *Adm XI*, 2-3.

<sup>799</sup>*LtF* 33-5 / *LR IX*, 1 / *Test* 6-13 / *Adm XXVI*.

acknowledged, could be sinners, but he insisted, '... I do not want to consider any sin in them because I discern the Son of God in them and they are my Lords.'<sup>800</sup>

Francis taught that true enemies were not to be fought physically outside oneself but inwardly, in the process of conversion to the universal compassion of Christ. Thus, as Delio rightly observed, he showed that individual hearts must be first disarmed before peace could be brought to the world.<sup>801</sup> Francis named the true enemies in the heart, the enemies of the spirit, as 'the flesh, the world and the devil', saying that these enemies deceived people.

**The world:** He used the term, 'the world' to represent the bodily vision, which sought the comfort of the appropriated self, according to worldly values, and aimed to protect it from discomfort. Francis described his early sightings of lepers as bitter, no doubt because the sight of them discomfited his senses and put him in fear of death through dread of their contagious terminal disease. His antipathy towards lepers was, therefore, based on fear and revulsion, springing from the concerns of his own body. Francis recounted in *The Testament* how he went among lepers and then '*left the world*'. This leaving the world follows an inversion of vision, from the above-mentioned worldly or bodily values, to a spiritual outlook, in which '...what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness...'.<sup>802</sup> In his conversion to Christ, which he called 'doing penance',<sup>803</sup> Francis overcame his fear. He risked his bodily comfort and safety by going among the lepers, thus befriending the enemies of the body, sickness and death. In chapter twenty-two of *The Earlier Rule*, Francis named the true enemies of the spirit as vices and sins proceeding from one's heart, instigated by the devil and associated with the body.<sup>804</sup> He followed this immediately with: 'Now that we have *left the world*, however, we have nothing else to do but to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him.'<sup>805</sup> The context in which he mentions the world here implies that it means the opposite to following God's will. The passage that precedes it, about living according to the flesh, suggests that to be in the world is to act according to self-centred values.

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<sup>800</sup>*Test* 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 125.

<sup>801</sup>Delio, I., 'The Franciscan Path to Peace', *The Cord*, vol. 54, no. 6, 2004, p. 285.

<sup>802</sup>*Test* 1-3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 124.

<sup>803</sup>*Test* 1.

<sup>804</sup>*ER* XXII, 5-8.

<sup>805</sup>*ER* XXII, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79 (my italics).

As these texts show, what Francis meant by *the world* that he left was not the world of creation but the self-serving values of his society, associated with the appropriated self and its priorities. Thus, 'the world' was an enemy according to the spirit, while remaining a friend according to the body. Francis understood the latter perspective as a deception of the devil, since he wrote that the devil aimed to 'blind' the heart, 'through *worldly affairs and concerns...*'.<sup>806</sup> In *The Later Rule*, Francis also warned against '*...care and solicitude for the things of this world...*'.<sup>807</sup> Similarly, Francis sometimes named the fleshly vision as the wisdom of the world: 'Let us guard ourselves from the *wisdom of this world* and the prudence of the flesh.'<sup>808</sup> The preceding passage associates the wisdom of the world with 'pride and vainglory', namely, the appropriations of the ego.<sup>809</sup> Likewise, in his *Salutation of the Virtues*, Francis coupled 'the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of the body', claiming that both were overcome by 'Simplicity'.<sup>810</sup> 'Simplicity' conveys a lack of appropriation by both the physical body and the ego.

**Reward/assistance:** Other terms Francis used in connection with enemies of the spirit were 'guise of reward' and 'assistance'. These terms stood for impersonal false friends of the body, which the devil used as bait to ensnare the heart:

'And let us beware of the malice and craftiness of Satan, who does not want anyone to turn his mind and heart to God. And prowling around he wants to ensnare a person's heart under the guise of some reward or assistance, to choke out the word and precepts of the Lord from our memory...'.<sup>811</sup>

The word 'guise' indicates that the apparent 'friend' offered to the body is a deceptive one. In his *Admonitions*, Francis taught: 'Blessed is that servant who, when he speaks, does not disclose everything about himself under the guise of a reward.'<sup>812</sup> Francis explained this statement as warning against the temptation to talk about the good things the Lord has revealed to oneself in the hope of receiving some reward of esteem from an audience.<sup>813</sup> Therefore, this 'reward' could be identified with worldly status or vainglory, sought by the desires of pride and ambition, all of which have been identified as enemies of the spirit. Francis ended this admonition by referring to

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806ER XXII, 20, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 80 (my italics).

807LR X, 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105 (my italics).

808ER XVII, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 75 (my italics).

809ER XVII, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 75.

810*SalV*, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 165.

811ER XXII, 19-20, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 80

812*Adm XXI*, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 135.

813*Adm XXI*, 2.

the scriptural source of his thinking about a person who seeks worldly esteem: 'He receives his reward and his listeners carry away little fruit.'<sup>814</sup> In the Gospels, Jesus used the words, 'they have received their reward', to criticise those who liked to make an outward show of holiness to gain people's admiration (Mt 6:2). Francis also highlighted these words of Jesus in chapter seventeen of *The Earlier Rule* to warn against a desire for worldly glory.<sup>815</sup> Jesus taught here that seeking such earthly reward forfeits the reward given by God the Father (Mt 6:1, 6, 16-18). True reward from the Lord was merited by brothers who begged for alms and those who gave in charity.<sup>816</sup> However, when Francis mentioned 'reward' coupled with 'guise', he was referring to a false reward, rather than the Father's gift. He was warning against a reward appropriated by the body and opposed to the spirit.<sup>817</sup> This reward was fleeting and led a person to forfeit both physical body and spirit in pursuit of it.<sup>818</sup>

**Appropriation:** 'The guise of a reward', as a false friend of the body, does not bear fruit in good works, as Francis noted in the admonition above. This is because appropriation to self is the opposite movement to the divine kenotic goodness. It does not lead a person to go out in friendship among enemies. Rather, the appropriation of one's physical body or life gives rise to a fearful self-defensiveness that isolates a person from others and perpetuates hostility. Francis taught that such appropriation prevented a person from following Christ in his self-offering love.<sup>819</sup> It follows that most of the named elements in Francis' writings identified above as enemies of the spirit are concerned with appropriation to the body/ego. Pride and vainglory are associated with appropriation of ministry and of the good that God works through human service.<sup>820</sup> Francis believed that 'The Enemy', or the devil, tempted Adam to appropriation of his will and of knowledge, resulting in the evil of disobedience to God.<sup>821</sup> Francis even associated anger with the appropriation of one's body/ego.<sup>822</sup> He also linked it with the appropriation of power and control over others.<sup>823</sup> Francis

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814*Adm XXI*, 3.

815*ER XVII*, 9-13.

816*ER IX*, 9.

817*Adm XXVIII*.

818*LtF*, 83-5.

819*Adm III*, 1-2.

820*ER XVII*, 4-13.

821*Adm II*.

822*Adm XI*, 3; *XIV*.

823*ER V*, 7-10.

presented the appropriation of power as a form of avarice.<sup>824</sup> He viewed envy as a desire to appropriate to self the good that belongs to God alone,<sup>825</sup> or to appropriate knowledge and 'the things of this world'.<sup>826</sup> He connected envy to detraction, as a wish to take away from another.<sup>827</sup> Money, possessions and luxurious garments were things that the world tempted a person to appropriate, but Francis counselled his brothers to avoid them as contrary to the following of the Gospel.<sup>828</sup> These were visible enemies of the spirit, in his thinking. Drunkenness and fornication were obviously vices that resulted from the body grasping at pleasure for itself. Such vices occupied the heart and body with self-concern, preventing God from dwelling there.<sup>829</sup> It may be seen from the references above why Francis' spirituality emphasised poverty as a true friend and every form of appropriation as an enemy of the spirit, and contrary to the following of Christ. Therefore he wrote: 'Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither greed nor avarice.'<sup>830</sup>

### **Friends of the spirit**

The vision of the spirit, according to Francis, regarded every member of the human race as a friend. In addition, the virtues were the 'friends' Francis desired to cultivate, especially obedience and humility, since they led to conformity with Christ and unity with God. Although the virtues of Christ were qualities he desired to possess, they were, paradoxically, desirable because they enabled and maintained expropriation.

**Obedience:** Francis counselled obedience and humility for prevention of enmity between persons: 'Let him not become angry at the fault of a brother but, with all patience and *humility*, let him admonish and support him.'<sup>831</sup> Obedience and humility meant for him that one entrusted with authority must act as the least and the servant of all, so there would be no contention for power between the brothers and sisters.<sup>832</sup> Moreover, obedience to God required of each individual submission in service to all other humans.<sup>833</sup> Similarly, in *The Earlier Rule*, Francis followed a

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824 *Adm IV*, 2-3.

825 *Adm VIII*.

826 *LR X*, 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105.

827 *Ibid.*

828 *ER VIII / Adm XVIII*, 2; *III*, 1-2 / *ER I*; *XXII*, 16 / *ER II*, 14-15.

829 *ER IX*, 14 / *ER XXII*, 5-8; *XII*, 5-6.

830 *Adm XXVII*, 3, *FA:ED*, vol 1, p. 137.

831 *LtF 44*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 48 (my italics).

832 *LtF 42*.

833 *LtF 47*.



teaching to show mercy, not anger to a brother who sinned, with these words: 'Likewise, let all the brothers not have power or control in this instance, especially among themselves...'.<sup>834</sup> Their leaders must be servants.<sup>835</sup> They were to avoid hostility between brothers.<sup>836</sup> The preventative state was mutual obedience: 'on the contrary, through the charity of the Spirit, let them serve and *obey* one another.'<sup>837</sup> This was written into the structure of Francis' *Rule for Hermitages*. The brothers assuming the role of 'sons' submitted to those in the role of 'mother' by begging from them for their needs.<sup>838</sup> Conversely, the 'mothers' would serve the 'sons'. Periodically, the brothers in the hermitage would exchange roles.<sup>839</sup> In this way, they would 'serve and obey one another'.<sup>840</sup>

In this unitive obedience, Christ was the exemplar, as Francis indicated.<sup>841</sup> In the supreme obedience of his Passion, Christ was the one '...Who *humbled* Himself to beg His Father for us and to make His name known saying: Father, glorify Your name and glorify Your Son that Your Son may glorify You'.<sup>842</sup> As mentioned previously, the glorification of the Son refers to his Passion, in obedience to the Father's will, which reflects most fully the nature of Father and Son as kenotic love. This text shows the Trinity in mutual obedience, in that the Father and Son glorify each other in their kenosis. Mutual obedience, as Francis also wrote, is 'through the charity of the Spirit'.<sup>843</sup> The sanctification of the Son in his sacrificial death reveals the Father's love in the returned love of the Son.<sup>844</sup> Christ's revelation of the Father created fraternal union between human believers.<sup>845</sup> This was protected by humility, since no-one among them was to have power over others.<sup>846</sup> Christ himself was the centre that bound them together.<sup>847</sup> Hence, in Francis' writing, Christ the Mediator is heard to intercede with the Father that his self-sacrifice may bring God's children into the

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834ER V, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 66.

835ER V, 10-12.

836ER V, 13.

837ER V, 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 67 (my italics).

838A *Rule for Hermitages (RH)* 4-5.

839RH 10.

840ER V, 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 67.

841ER V, 15.

842ER XXII, 41 (my italics).

843ER V, 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 67.

844ER XXII, 52, 54.

845ER XXII, 33-4.

846ER XXII, 34-5.

847ER XXII, 37.

perfect unity of the Trinity.<sup>848</sup> In summary, this theology of Francis shows that the mutual obedience of the Trinity, revealed through the Passion of the Son, was the exemplar for unity through mutual obedience among human beings. In the sacrifice of the 'Body and Blood' of Christ, human beings on earth were 'brought to peace' and, being restored to the Trinitarian image of unity in diversity in which they were created, were reunited with God.<sup>849</sup>

*Admonition Three* presents obedience as the opposite of appropriation of one's life.<sup>850</sup> As obedience creates unity in Francis' theology, correspondingly, disobedience, the appropriation of one's own will, causes disunity. This diabolical dynamic is the antithesis of the reconciling power of the Cross of Christ. This was why Francis had harsh words for the disobedient, calling them 'murderers'.<sup>851</sup>

Francis saw his vocation as following Christ in obedience all the way to the Cross.<sup>852</sup> This desire is signalled by his use of the words, '*usque in finem*'. Because the coincidence of friend-enemy was centred on the Cross, his desire for martyrdom impelled Francis to go out in friendship to enemies. And so he ended the chapter of the *Rule* about going among Saracens with the words: 'whoever perseveres *to the end* will be saved.'<sup>853</sup> For Francis, Christ Crucified was the exemplar of love for enemies, and the brothers were to follow in his footsteps.<sup>854</sup>

**The virtues:** Francis' writings express a belief that to go out in friendship among enemies of the body and overcome the enemies of the spirit requires supernatural strength, which comes from the gifts of the Holy Spirit. His teachings state that the Spirit moves people to overcome the desires of the body. It leads them to *humility*, which reconciles enemies, as noted above, *patience*, which enables them to suffer intimacy with the enemies of the body, and ultimately, to '*true peace*' in the Holy Trinity.<sup>855</sup> That all virtues are gifts of the Holy Spirit is highlighted in the *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*:

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848ER XXII, 45, 53.

849*LiOrd*, 12-13.

850*Adm III*, 1-3.

851*Adm III*, 10-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 130.

852ER I, 1, 3 / *Adm V*, 8.

853ER XVI, 21, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 75 (my italics).

854ER XXII, 1-2.

855ER XVII, 14-16.

'And hail all you holy virtues  
 which are poured into the hearts of the faithful  
 through the grace and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit,'<sup>856</sup>

The gifts of the Holy Spirit in the heart also defeat sin, because sin cannot exist where these virtues are present. The whole of *Admonition Twenty-Seven* illustrates this. Here, Francis encourages people to receive and cultivate spiritual gifts in the heart as protection from sin because 'Where there is fear of the Lord to guard an entrance, there the enemy cannot have a place to enter.'<sup>857</sup> The *Salutation of the Virtues* also develops the idea that '...each one confounds vice and sin'.<sup>858</sup> The true wisdom of the Spirit is associated with simplicity, as both wisdom and simplicity are opposed to cunning. True wisdom defeats the wisdom of the world, or of the body, with which Satan deceives people.<sup>859</sup>

Poverty and humility are also linked as virtues which defeat the world's ambitions to appropriate to the body/ego.<sup>860</sup> Jesus Christ is the Gospel example for these virtues.<sup>861</sup> As Francis saw it, it was humility that led God to become flesh and to choose a life of poverty on earth.<sup>862</sup> It followed that to imitate Christ in poverty and humility made a person, 'exalted in virtue'.<sup>863</sup>

Charity, which defeated fear, and obedience, which defeated the desires of the body, were linked through the Cross, since other writings present the Cross as the perfect expression of both love and obedience.<sup>864</sup> Christ's embrace of the Cross, in love and obedience to the Father, removed the ultimate fear of death and thus, the 'carnal fear' of body enemies, which impeded kenotic love in humanity.<sup>865</sup> In imitation of the obedience of Christ Crucified, a body bound in obedience to the spirit offered itself to enemies, without defence.<sup>866</sup> Thus, obedience to God was expressed through loving submission to one's fellow creatures.<sup>867</sup> The scripture reference which explains this in the *Salutation* shows that Francis' point of departure was the Passion because

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<sup>856</sup>*SalBVM*, 6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 163.

<sup>857</sup>*Adm XXVII*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 137.

<sup>858</sup>*SalV* 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 164.

<sup>859</sup>*SalV* 1, 9-10.

<sup>860</sup>*SalV* 2, 11-12.

<sup>861</sup>*ER*, IX, 1.

<sup>862</sup>*LtF*, 4-5 / *ER* IX, 4-5.

<sup>863</sup>*LR* VI, 1-4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 103.

<sup>864</sup>*PrCr* / *2LtF*, 8-13 / *ER* XXII, 1-2; XIII, 3 / *LtOrd* 3, 5-7, 11, 46 / *Adm III*, 2-3.

<sup>865</sup>*ER* XVI, 10-21 / *SalV* 13.

<sup>866</sup>*Adm III*, 2-3.

<sup>867</sup>*LtF* 47.

he understood, as Jesus claimed in submitting to Pilate, that all power and authority on earth was God-given.<sup>868</sup> This submission extended even to those others who represented a threat to the body.<sup>869</sup> The *Salutation* shows that the Spirit leads the physical body to treat all fellow creatures as friends. For Francis, his outreach of friendship to enemies of the body further extended to non-human creatures.<sup>870</sup> Those whose physical bodies were obedient to the spirit could see that the only enemy to be feared was sin, and this enemy of the spirit in the heart was defeated through the virtue of obedience.<sup>871</sup>

It is interesting to notice how Francis personified the virtues. Poverty, for example, could easily be understood in purely negative terms as non-appropriation. Francis, however, viewed poverty not only as a virtue but as a holy lady who was positively to be desired.<sup>872</sup> His positive emphasis on poverty as expropriation is understandable if, as his writings imply, Francis regarded God's nature as kenotic love. Francis' presentation of the abstract virtues as holy ladies and sisters made them more personal and accessible to him as friends of the spirit, allies in his battle with sin. However, they remained enemies of the body, because no-one could possess them without first dying, that is, to the appropriated self.<sup>873</sup> These abstract friends of the spirit, given by the Holy Spirit, empowered people to befriend those personal 'enemies' from which the body naturally shrank. The wisdom of the Spirit, opposed to the wisdom of the body,<sup>874</sup> enlightened and guided the body to view those others as friends, '...so that it is subject and submissive to everyone in the world...'.<sup>875</sup> Francis held that patience and peace were virtues necessary for the embrace of body enemies, as explained earlier. He recognised these virtues too as gifts of the Holy Spirit and friends of the human spirit.<sup>876</sup>

The virtues as configured in the *Salutation* are striking for their depiction of unity in diversity. Their unity is expressed in their proceeding from the one Lord, in their common attribute of holiness, in their familial relationship as Sisters and in their

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<sup>868</sup>*SalV* 14, '...insofar as it has been given to them from above by the Lord.' *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 165.

<sup>869</sup>*Adm III*, 8-9.

<sup>870</sup>*SalV*, 14.

<sup>871</sup>*Adm X*.

<sup>872</sup>*SalV* 2 / *LR* VI, 5-6.

<sup>873</sup>*SalV* 5.

<sup>874</sup>*SalV* 9.

<sup>875</sup>*SalV* 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 165.

<sup>876</sup>*ER* XVII, 14-15.

common quality of defeating evil.<sup>877</sup> Their diversity is communicated in what they do, each one defeating a different aspect of evil.<sup>878</sup> As demonstrated in chapter one, Francis' theology presents this coincidence of unity and diversity in the Trinity. It appears that, since Francis saw the virtues proceeding from God, when he personified them in the *Salutation*, he pictured them existing in a relationship which reflected their source in the Trinity. Furthermore, the virtues in this piece reflect the interpenetration of the Trinitarian Persons, as described in chapter one, in that the properties of one belong to all. They are so inseparable and interdependent that to lose one virtue is to lose all.<sup>879</sup>

Why did Francis portray the virtues in this way? It seems that, since he saw the Trinity as 'the highest good', the relationships of the Trinity represented for him the archetype of all relationship.<sup>880</sup> It follows that creatures who proceeded from the Trinity should reflect the divine image in their relationships with each other. However, sin distorted the divine image in humanity.<sup>881</sup> Since the *Salutation* is clearly meant to present an ideal for human imitation, it seems likely that Francis portrayed his personifications of the virtues in this way to show the perfection of divine relationship into which people are brought by these gifts of the Holy Spirit. As described in *The Earlier Rule*: 'The Spirit of the Lord ... strives for humility and patience, the pure, simple and true peace of the spirit. Above all, it desires the divine fear, the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'<sup>882</sup> People could enter this ideal world of divine unity only by dying to the diabolical world of vice and sin through the obedient love of Christ Crucified.<sup>883</sup>

### ***True and Perfect Joy***

The story, '*True and Perfect Joy*' can be viewed in the light of the coincidence of enemy and friend in Francis' theology. In the first section, Francis sets out examples of what is not true joy. The most learned and wealthy people have joined the Order. The brothers have converted many to Christianity and Francis himself has

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<sup>877</sup>*SalV* 4.

<sup>878</sup>*SalV* 9-14.

<sup>879</sup>*SalV* 6.

<sup>880</sup>*PrsG* 3.

<sup>881</sup>*Adm V*, 1-3.

<sup>882</sup>*ER* XVII, 14-16.

<sup>883</sup>*SalV* 5, 14.

miraculously healed many sick people.<sup>884</sup> What these success stories have in common is that, although they are good things in themselves, they would confer the praise and renown of the world on Francis. They could, therefore, tempt him to appropriate vainglory to his ego. This vainglory is what other writings of Francis called, 'the guise of a reward.'<sup>885</sup> Francis understood this as a deception of the devil which was fleeting and, if someone sought it from the world, that person would forfeit the true, eternal reward from God. This was because appropriation to the body was diametrically opposed to the kenotic love of Christ. Hence, it was an obstacle to sharing in the love of God, which was Francis' idea of true joy. His lesson on true joy teaches that pride and renown are not *true* joy, which implies they must be a false or deceptive joy. This kind of vainglory is a friend of the appropriated self, as explained previously. It must, therefore, be an enemy of the spirit. Francis was teaching Leo to see with the eyes of the spirit that this kind of deceptive joy, which the world ran after, was opposed to the spirit and not to be desired.

In the next section, Francis set out a story packed with unpleasant experiences. It encompasses: physical suffering, the poverty of homelessness, rejection, powerlessness, humiliation and insults.<sup>886</sup> He then asserts that to maintain patience and inner peace in such circumstances would be, 'true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of my soul.'<sup>887</sup> This story contains both visible and invisible enemies of the body. The visible enemy is the brother who rejects and insults Francis. The invisible enemies are all the painful experiences, summarised above, that Francis suffers in his attempts to reach the brother.

The moral of the story is that all these enemies of the body are to be loved as friends according to the spirit. The reason is that they lead Francis to share in the self-sacrificing love of Christ in the obedience of the Spirit, to the Father; which is 'true joy'. In this union with Christ Crucified, death to selfish concerns is 'salvation', that is, the entry to eternal life. Such manifestation of love in suffering is true glory, rather than the vainglory which the world would value in Francis' former 'success stories'. Sharing in the divine love of the Trinity is the true reward that is eternal life.

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884TPJ 4-6.

885ER XXII, 19-20 / *Adm XXI*, 1.

886TPJ 8-14.

887TPJ 15, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 167.

The model of love for enemies in Christ's Passion is implicit in this story. Francis has blood flowing from wounds in his body. The one who rejects him is a brother, one of his own group, just as Judas was one of Jesus' apostles and yet betrayed him. Nevertheless, Francis calls the man a 'brother' and identifies himself to the man as 'Brother Francis'. He offers the man 'the love of God' in his request for shelter. In other words, Francis treats this enemy as a friend, just as Jesus called his betrayer, 'friend'.<sup>888</sup>

The importance of the virtue of patience, in empowering someone to love an enemy, can be seen here, as in other works of Francis. Patience leads Francis to endure all kinds of hostile conditions, as well as insults and rejection, in order to reach out to his brother with the love of God. This is a 'true virtue', Francis stresses, as opposed to the appearance of virtue in the sight of the world, which was offered by his 'success stories'.

Regarding his enemy as a friend, with the vision of the spirit, prevents Francis' heart from being occupied by anger. His return of love for hostility tends towards reconciliation and fraternity rather than division. By showing him the love of God, Francis aims to draw his hostile brother to himself and to the Lord.<sup>889</sup> The love of Christ Crucified empowers Francis to embrace every enemy, visible and invisible, in a state of inner peace which is free from any fear for himself. As the story of *True and Perfect Joy* illustrates, Francis understood this state of imperturbable peace as fundamental to his mission as a bearer of peace and universal reconciliation.

### **Conclusion**

In the coincidence of enemy and friend, which Francis derived from the example of Christ, he found a way of resolving the struggles in the human heart between the self-giving impulses of the spirit and the self-serving impulses of the body. Francis had the insight that he responded to those persons who opposed him as enemies only insofar as they threatened his appropriated self. In an alternative mode of perception - the vision of the spirit, freed from fear of bodily death by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ, he could view these and all humans as his friends. The suffering they brought him in the loss of his appropriated self was a means of union with Christ in

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<sup>888</sup>ER XXII, 1-2.

<sup>889</sup>LtMin 11.

the kenotic love of his Passion, leading to a share in his eternal life. So it is that, through the coincidence of friend and enemy, the story *True and Perfect Joy* taught his followers Francis' own way of dealing with brothers who opposed him. The story shows how such rejection and suffering inflicted by brothers could end in perfect joy in union with Christ Crucified. What was required were the virtues of patience and peace in the Holy Spirit, enabling him to endure attacks on his body/ego without fear, so as to reach out to an enemy with the love of God.

The coincidence of enemy and friend in Francis' theology is a result of the process of a person's conversion from a self-centred viewpoint to Christ's outlook on the world, the process described in the previous chapter. The coincidence occurs in the context of an overlap in two different ways of seeing the world. Francis referred to these contrasting visions in terms of the wisdom of the body and of the spirit. The self-centred values associated with the body shape the vision of fallen humanity, and create conflict and division where there should be unity among different people. In one who strives to live according to the Gospel, the Holy Spirit opens up Christ's way of seeing the other, which inverts the body's judgement of an enemy. This spiritual vision reveals everything in creation to be a friend, whether a creature relates to oneself in a destructive or benevolent way. Even if a creature's effects on one's physical body are destructive, Francis perceives an indirect benefit, in that the attack of another can lead a person into kenosis, in union with Christ in his Passion. This kenosis is the eternal life of God which Christ revealed. The spirit's vision also illuminates the true enemy of the human person as his/her appropriated self and its desires. This false self and its vision must be shed in the process of conversion, so that a person can discover his/her true humanity in union with Christ, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Francis' presentation of the spiritual vision of Christ as the ideal shows the human penitent what it means to identify with his viewpoint. There are no longer any enemies, since there is no appropriated self, and no accompanying perception of threat to that self. There is also no desire for appropriation of worldly things, so these temptations are neutralised. Francis illustrated this point in his dismissal of worldly rewards as false virtues and imperfect joys.<sup>890</sup> The only sense of 'enemy' which remains in the vision of the spirit is an objective awareness of a friend's intent towards

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<sup>890</sup>TPJ 4-6.



or effect upon oneself as destructive, such as the brother in the parable *True and Perfect Joy*, who insults and beats Francis. In this case, the friends' action is perceived as indirectly, rather than directly and intentionally, beneficial. So there is a conversion in the normal perception of other people according to opposite ideas - as friends or enemies. In conformity to Christ, one sees friends who are benevolently/neutrally disposed towards oneself or friends who oppose/attack oneself. In this way, the body's view of opposition between the ideas of friend and enemy converges, in the vision of the spirit, into unity in difference. This is how Francis' theology interprets Jesus' teaching and example of loving one's enemies in the Gospels.

The coincidence of enemy and friend in Francis' thought, derived from the teaching and example of Christ, can only exist in the human world. It has been shown how it leads divided persons through a process of conversion in their vision, towards an ideal of unity with the other, which reflects that of the Trinity. This inner life of God is *sine proprio* and entirely without enmity. Therefore, the coincidence of friend and enemy in Francis' theology is purely salvific. It is an effect of Christ's mission to free the world from selfishness. By loving enemies, returning good for evil, the alienated other is called back to peace and reconciled with oneself. Francis prayed that the will of God be done on earth as in heaven, through a wholehearted love of neighbour that would draw all people to the love of God.<sup>891</sup> He also wrote that the 'all good' which alone describes the Trinity, has been given and will be given in the future to all creation by 'Him Who suffered so much'.<sup>892</sup> Francis' writings convey a sense that the suffering and injustice in the world, which required one to deal with enemies, was temporary and would be eventually overcome through the sacrifice of the Cross, in a definitive coming of Christ's reign on earth. The many eschatological references to the Second Coming of Christ look forward to the removal from creation of all enmity and of the human injustice that brought Christ to the Cross.<sup>893</sup>

'We know that He is coming  
that He will come to judge justice.'<sup>894</sup>

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891 *PrOF* 5.

892 *2LtF* 61, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 49.

893 *OfP* Ps X, 10; Ps VI, 16 / *ER* XXIII, 4 / 1, *2LtCl* 14 / *LtR*, 8 / *ER* IV, 6 / *ER* IX, 6-7, 14.

894 *OfP* Ps VII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 148.

The coincidence of enemy and friend, which Francis derived from the example of Christ and applied to his whole outlook on life, carries a distinctive and profound insight. This insight is that peace on earth cannot be made through violence or hostility between persons - by one overpowering another, or by appropriating defences to keep others out. Such violence and appropriation only occupy the human heart, blocking out the love of God, which unites people, and so it perpetuates division. Peacemaking on earth has to begin in individual hearts. This peace can only be achieved by the fearless kenotic love of Christ Crucified overcoming the self-protecting instincts of the appropriated self, which judges other people as enemies. Hence, Christ Crucified is at the centre of the horizontal coincidence in Francis' vision, just as the previous two chapters revealed him at centre of the vertical coincidence of Creator and creature. Christ's revelation of divine kenotic love creates out of human division a fraternity around himself, drawing enemies back into unity in their diversity, and thus reconciling them to God.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>895</sup>*LtOrd* 13.

## 5. What kind of theology?

This study aims to demonstrate that Francis was a theologian, meaning one who had a distinctive, all-encompassing theological vision, which he communicated to the world.<sup>896</sup> To this end, an examination of his writings through the lens of the coincidence of opposites will attempt to re-assemble the total vision from the insights communicated through his diverse compositions. However, any writer who claims that Francis was a theologian has also to consider his relatively low level of education. It is well known that he had no scholarly training and little formal education.<sup>897</sup> Therefore, it would not be reasonable to claim that he was a theologian in the commonly understood sense of the word, that is to say, he was not a scholar formally trained in theology by some institute of higher education. Unlike such renowned Masters as Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, he did not deliberately set out his theological system in writing. This lack of scholarly background was identified at the beginning of the study as the third obstacle to reading Francis' writings as theology. Taking this historical factor into account, if Francis were a theologian but not of the professional kind, what sort of theologian was he, and what sort of theology is his written legacy? To answer this question from his writings, it will be necessary to inquire what kind of knowledge of God these works reveal.

### **The question of mysticism and religious experience**

This consideration of the character of Francis' theology will take into account the signs of affectivity in his writing and the prominent part emotion appears to play in his meditations on God.<sup>898</sup> Francis' style of writing resembles that of the women mystics of the thirteenth century more than that of the scholars. This could give rise to the opinion that Francis was a mystic rather than a theologian. Matura held that Francis was both mystic and theologian: 'Unlike other mystics, his teachings always have a

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<sup>896</sup>Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' p. 14.

<sup>897</sup>Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, pp. 94, 109.

<sup>898</sup>Octavian Schmucki's study of Francis' habits of meditation noted an 'affective tone' to his mental prayer. He observed: 'Without bothering about logical sequence or niceties of style ... Francis employed an endless series of adjectives to praise God... .' Schmucki identified in Francis' writings the affective traits of 'reverent adoration, ecstatic praise and deeply felt gratitude' (Schmucki, O., 'Divine Praise and Meditation according to the Teaching and Example of St. Francis of Assisi', I. McCormick, trans., *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1990, p. 69).

theological basis.<sup>899</sup> However, if one takes the definition of mysticism from McGinn as 'an immediate consciousness of the presence of God,' then Francis' writings contain no evidence for this.<sup>900</sup> He does not describe any personal encounters with God, as Schmucki pointed out.<sup>901</sup> What his writings present is his meditation on Christian revelation and his response to what he has come to know of God. Nevertheless, there are authors who have argued that Francis' writings show the effects of mystical experience.<sup>902</sup> Hammond proposed that his written transmission of the meditations which led him into ecstatic praise constituted a taught mysticism.<sup>903</sup> The term 'experiential', which will be used with regard to Francis' theology, has become associated with debates concerning mysticism, and how one can speak of it with reference to the medieval spiritual writers. Denys Turner has argued that the medieval mystics, in continuity with the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition, practised negation of subjective experience of God, and yet, exclusive personal experience of God, without such negation, was used in retrospect to characterise medieval mysticism after this period.<sup>904</sup> From this point of view, Francis' insistence on keeping silence about personal encounters with God would not preclude him from being called a mystic, if there were another way of demonstrating 'immediate consciousness of God' from his writings, or another way of defining 'mystic'.<sup>905</sup> In response to Turner's argument, McGinn made the point that what could be meant by 'experience' in relation to the medieval mystics was still to be adequately defined.<sup>906</sup> It could be asserted that a meditative process which, from a human viewpoint, leads towards God, can be called experience of God. If one accepted this position, then this would be the only kind of evidence of religious experience in Francis' writings. In these texts, the reader is simply presented with his thoughts about God, and their effect on him can only be surmised from his words. There is no record in his writings of what may have happened to Francis in relation to God in extraordinary states of consciousness.

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899Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 171.

900McGinn, 'Was Francis of Assisi a Mystic?' p. 147.

901Schmucki, 'Mysticism of St. Francis', p. 246.

902Schmucki, 'Mysticism of St. Francis', p. 247 / Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 112.

903Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 108.

904Turner, D., *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1995) pp. 4, 7, 264, 266.

905Adms *XXVIII, XXI*.

906McGinn, B., 'The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism by Denys Turner', *Journal of Religion*, vol. 2, 1997, p. 311.

Therefore, the term 'experiential' will be used here, not in the sense of an elite, extra-sensory, mystical encounter with God, but in describing the holistic reflection style of a person seeking to know God, as revealed through Francis' written words. The present discussion will leave open the question of what is a mystic, and whether Francis could be called one. Likewise, it will not address philosophical debates concerning 'experientialism', because they are not directly relevant to this study. The aim of this investigation is to gauge from the evidence in his writings how best one might describe Francis' brand of theology. To this end, particular features of his style of communication will first be examined and then, their significance will be considered.

### **The 'ecstatic' tone**

In some passages a set of linguistic features occur, which together produce a distinctive tone, and this tone distinguishes them from the bulk of Francis' writing. Sometimes, this tone occurs within a piece of writing, so that there is a noticeable change from the background style. There are also entire pieces of writing which adopt this style. For the purpose of this study, this distinctive tone will be labelled 'ecstatic', and its features will be identified. It will be shown how this style of composition indicates a degree of emotional involvement on the part of the author in his subject matter, rather than simply detached and rational observation. It will also become apparent that such a style tends to be found in association with Francis' dwelling on the coincidence of opposites. This tone of communication is not confined to prayers, but can be found in writings of various genres, including letters and rules, as will be shown in the examples to follow. Firstly, it is necessary to specify in what sense the term 'ecstatic' will be used.

An 'ecstatic' tone, for the purpose of this study, signals a surge of emotion, such as joy, love or gratitude, in the author, in which he moves beyond the limits of habitual mental distinctions towards a sense of union with what was formerly perceived as 'other'. This subjective shift will here be described as a form of *ecstasis*. Francis' writings show that he believed himself, and all human beings, to have access to union with God in Christ, as explained in previous chapters. His perception of this involved him and his fellow human beings in a coincidence of Creator and creature in union with Christ. The acceptance of such a coincidence of opposites in one's

subjective reality would entail a movement from a perception of division and polarisation to an experience of union with the 'other', which would transcend one's habitual thinking. This could explain why certain passages of Francis' writings contain indications of a movement from self towards God, from an experience of opposition to one of union. A signal of this *ecstasis* in the writings is a shift in approach from the intellectual and logical to the affective – a movement from head to heart. Divisions normally accepted by the mind are left behind as emotion takes prominence in the subjective experience. In this sense, the author moves out of himself. However, it must be noted that these moments could not be described as 'ecstasy' in the sense of an out-of-body experience, of the kind mentioned in the Second Letter to the Corinthians (2Cor 12:2-4), which might leave the subject insensible to external stimuli. Clearly, this could not have been the case with Francis, who was composing a text at that time. He was conscious enough to be using language and would probably have been aware of a scribe or an audience as the object of his words. One could only understand his *ecstasis* as a psychological movement out of the self in the sense suggested previously, but not out of the body or the consciousness. The terms 'ecstasy' or 'ecstatic' will be used in this way, unless otherwise specified.

Certain features in Francis' language collectively create what will be designated an 'ecstatic' tone. The most prominent indicators are sudden exclamations: 'O!' in the *Letter to the Entire Order* and in both *Letters to the Faithful*,<sup>907</sup> 'Alleluia!' in *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-three.<sup>908</sup> Similarly noticeable is a composition which begins with such an exclamation, *The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*. Another signpost in Francis' language, which denotes a shift toward affectivity is what will be described as 'torrential verbalisation', generally consisting of four or more descriptive words in succession.<sup>909</sup> Two instances of this occur very close to exclamations already identified, namely, in *The Letters to the Faithful*.<sup>910</sup> There are other occurrences in *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-three and another part of *The Second Letter to the Faithful*.<sup>911</sup> The whole of *The Praises of God* is written in this torrential style. In

907*LtOrd* 27 / *ILtF* 5, 11-13 / *2LtF* 54-6.

908*ER* XXIII, 5,6.

909Hammond called this feature 'hyper-linguistic doxology' (Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 148).

910*ILtF* 12-13 / *2LtF* 54-6.

911*ER* XXIII, 8,9,11 / *2LtF* 62.

these places, and elsewhere in the writings, as Matura noticed: 'We get the impression that, every time Francis speaks about God, we are being allowed to catch a glimpse, a very fleeting glimpse, of the divine beauty (cf. Ex 33:23), which he tries but fails to convey by accumulating words.'<sup>912</sup> This torrential verbalisation implies the inadequacy of normal language, or indeed, of any language, to communicate Francis' experience of God. Such passages are often packed with words which indicate totality: 'whole', 'all', 'every'.

The impression given by this tone of writing is that the author is struggling to find words expansive or powerful enough to express what he thinks and feels in relation to God. Titles for God such as 'Supreme' or 'Most High' suggest the same kind of effort. Likewise, there is a frequent use of words which transmit a sense of uncomprehending awe, such as 'wonderful' or 'sublime'. Hammond saw Francis 'exasperated' and straining at 'the limits of language' in an effort to describe what he had come to know of God'<sup>913</sup> In an ecstatic passage, deliberate and measured selection of words can give way to a more spontaneous outpouring of associated words which convey emotional excitement. As Hammond commented, Francis' encounter with the divine '...does not lead him to apophatic silence; rather, he erupts into a hyper-cataphatic doxology.'<sup>914</sup>

Related to this feature of torrential verbalisation is Francis' repetition of words or patterns of words. It must be acknowledged that this was sometimes a conscious device. For example in his *Office of the Passion*, composed over several years, there is a triple 'Amen' at the end of *The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*, echoing a triple 'Holy' at the start of the prayer.<sup>915</sup> There are also link words in adjacent verses, which would have helped Francis to recall the prayers from memory.<sup>916</sup> Works which were intended as songs or poems, such as *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, would also be likely to contain consciously stylised patterns of repetition. Nevertheless, there are several occasions where repetition occurs together with, or close to, exclamations or torrential verbalisation: in *The Earlier Rule* chapter twenty-three, in the *Letter to the Entire Order* and in *The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*.<sup>917</sup> In these cases,

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<sup>912</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 52.

<sup>913</sup>Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 135.

<sup>914</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>915</sup>Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*, p. 217.

<sup>916</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 232, 234-5.

<sup>917</sup>ER XXIII, 8-11 / LtOrd 26-9 / PrOF 2,3,5.

repetition is more likely to be a signal of the same affective movement indicated by the other two linguistic features. It can imply mounting excitement and a weakening of rational powers of description. In *The Earlier Rule* passages, there is repetition of the word, 'whole' and, in two places, 'every'.<sup>918</sup> The passage from the *Letter to the Entire Order* involves repetition of 'O!' *The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, which begins with this exclamation, is full of repetition of the words, 'You' and 'Your', addressing God. The same may be observed of *The Praises of God*, which is a torrential outpouring of divine attributes, and also features repetition of the words 'You are'.

Torrents of associated words suggest a struggle with the limitations of language in describing God, since single names or adjectives feel insufficient. Similarly, repetition of a word such as 'every' or 'whole' attempts to add weight to a phrase which, although it communicates totality, still falls short of expressing Francis' experience in relation to God. Such absolute terms are often found together with words which evoke emotion. Texts which begin in a prose style sometimes adopt a poetic tone, with the repetition of patterns of words and phrases.<sup>919</sup> There are some instances in which Francis' words actually seem to describe a self-transcending movement of the heart. For example, an exclamation in a passage from the *Letter to the Entire Order* clearly expresses a dynamic of desire in Francis, leading away from himself and into God, in a form of *ecstasis*:

'Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,  
that He Who gives Himself totally to you  
may receive you totally!<sup>920</sup>

### **Analysis of texts**

Six passages in Francis' writings which contain the indicators of *ecstasis* identified above will now be analysed: *The First Letter to the Faithful* (1LtF I, 11-13),<sup>921</sup> *The Prayer Inspired by The Our Father* (PrOF 1-5), *The Praises of God*, chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* and the *Letter to the Entire Order* (LtOrd 26-29, 50-52).

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<sup>918</sup>ER XXIII, 8,11.

<sup>919</sup>The editors of *FA:ED* have helpfully indented and set out as poetry some of the passages of Francis' writings which occur within a longer prose piece but nevertheless assume a more poetic style, such as ER XXIII and LtOrd 26-29 and 50-52, which will be examined in detail.

<sup>920</sup>LtOrd 29, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>921</sup>cf 2LtF 54-56.



Although these texts do not exhaust all the instances of an ecstatic tone in Francis' writing, they are among the clearest examples.<sup>922</sup> The first excerpt is from *The First Letter to the Faithful*:

O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven! O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things, desirable: to have such a Brother and such a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who laid down His life for His sheep...!<sup>923</sup>

This passage is the culmination of what was described in chapter three as the process of personal incarnation of the Incarnate Word. The evidence presented for this suggests that Francis was writing out of his own experience of lived application of the word of God. From the beginning of his *Letter*, Francis had set out the required steps in conversion leading to union with Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit:

Wholehearted love for God and neighbour (*LtOrd* 1)  
 Putting off self (2)  
 Receiving the Word (3)  
 Living the Gospel (4).

Following the outline of these steps in sections one to four the first exclamation, which signals Francis' mounting joy erupts: 'O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them...'<sup>924</sup> Next, the *Letter* teaches that the Spirit effects a union of the soul with Christ, which is described in terms of three different human relationships: 'spouse', 'brother' and 'mother' (6-7). The effect of naming these multiple relationships is to suggest that human terms cannot adequately define such a relationship. It exceeds the human experiences of espousal, fraternity or motherhood. This union with Christ immediately brings the penitent to share his filial relationship with the Father (7). Furthermore, this is not a union which one enters into alone. Human brothers and sisters are brought into kinship by their common relationship with Christ, '...and *they* are *children* of the

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<sup>922</sup>The *ER XXI, 2* is another example of an ecstatic tone but shorter than the examples selected. The *LR VI, 4-6* and *2LtF 61-2* are other instances of this style. The *SalBVM* and the *CtC* could arguably be included in the same category, although they have fewer 'ecstatic' indicators. Certain parts of the *OfP* might also qualify as examples (*OfP VII, XV, PrH*). However, the focus will not be on these because the *Office* is made up almost entirely of scriptural passages and purposefully evokes the experience of Christ in his Passion (Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*, pp. 23-4). The additional dimensions of the viewpoint of the scripture writers and Francis' intention to recreate the story of Christ's mission would complicate the task of perceiving the spontaneous responses of Francis through this writing. Furthermore, it is believed to have been composed over ten to twelve years (*Ibid.* p. 199).

<sup>923</sup>*1LtF* 11-13, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42 (cf *2LtF* 54-56).

<sup>924</sup>*1LtF* 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 41.

heavenly Father Whose works they do, ...<sup>925</sup> In sections eight to ten, prior to the passage quoted above, an elaboration of this blessed state of union with Christ, in which a person incarnates the Gospel follows. Francis' joyous description then breaks out into a rapturous flow of exclamations and torrential adjectives (11-13).

This is a striking change of tone from the previous passage (8-10), which reasons: 'We are spouses when... .We are brothers ... when... .We are mothers when...<sup>926</sup> A rational state of mind seems to be overwhelmed in the next passage (11-13) by joy in a union which defies description. As Lehmann interpreted this passage: 'In his prayerful union with Christ, at the point where all human speech fails him, Francis breaks out now in stammering sounds or in joyful exclamations.'<sup>927</sup> The ecstatic tone conveys the emotional involvement of the author in what he is describing. It is not simply an *idea* about the human's relationship with God. Francis' words express amazed gratitude that intimacy with such divine Persons should be his: 'a holy and great Father ... such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse ... such a Brother and such a Son... '. The underlying implication is that he was struck by the contrast between himself and the Trinity, with whom he found himself united.

Evidence of Francis' perception of this contrast can be found elsewhere in his writings. In chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, he entreats Jesus Christ to mediate the thanks of humanity to the Father, 'Because all of us, wretches and sinners, are not worthy to pronounce your name...<sup>928</sup> In the same chapter, he exhorts all people to love God, 'Who did and does everything good for us, miserable and wretched, rotten and foul, ungrateful and evil ones.' In the *Letter to the Entire Order*, Francis describes himself as 'a useless man and unworthy creature of the Lord God.'<sup>929</sup>

Read in this context, sections eleven to thirteen of *The First Letter to the Faithful* can be understood as as a personal impression of the coincidence of opposites upon the author. He speaks of a union of Creator and creature, which he believes is made available to him in and through Christ. His words express his personal response to the coincidence of the Triune Creator with himself, a creature. It is made clear in the passage that follows (14-19) in which Francis hears Jesus praying to the Father for believers like himself, that this sense of union is understood to be mediated through

<sup>925</sup>*LtF* 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 41-2 (my italics).

<sup>926</sup>*LtF* 8-10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42.

<sup>927</sup>Lehmann, 'Exultation', p. 8.

<sup>928</sup>*ER* XXIII, 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.

<sup>929</sup>*LtOrd* 47, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 120.

Jesus Christ: '...that they might be sanctified in being one as we are (Jn 17).'<sup>930</sup> Since these words of Jesus were dictated by Francis, his readers can also 'hear' him praying in union with Christ that his brothers and sisters may be brought into the same indescribable intimacy with the Creator. His emotive words give the impression that, aware of the unworthiness of his appropriated self, he can scarcely understand how a creature so miserable could be intimately involved with the all-good, almighty Creator. Nevertheless, in such a union, he can also view himself, according to his created nature, as an infinitely blessed and privileged son of God. Francis viewed the human condition in general in similar contradictory terms - excellent in its Christ conformity, as made by God, and yet wretched in its sinful state, as his fifth *Admonition* proclaims.<sup>931</sup> The ecstatic tone of *The First Letter* (11-13) suggests a two-fold response by the author to the coincidence of opposites in Christ, upon which the rest of the *Letter* reflects. Firstly, it appears to surpass his mind's ability to describe, or to comprehend fully. Secondly, there appears an emotional surge of awe, gratitude and bliss as his controlled prose breaks out into ecstatic joy.

Francis' meditation on the Our Father is another writing which presents an ecstatic tone. The single, 'O' exclamation with which it begins might be taken in isolation for an adornment of style. However, the rest of the prayer is packed with repetition, with accumulation of God's attributes and with terms indicating totality. These features together create a tone of emotional excitement, especially in the first five stanzas. Additionally, almost every statement refers to God with the words, 'You' or 'Your'. This shows that the focus of the prayer tends entirely towards God, rather than the author himself, even in the latter parts of the Our Father, which express petitions.

Close inspection of the subjects of Francis' meditations in this prayer reveals that he is pondering coincidences of opposites. Stanza one begins with the exclamation, 'O' and a superlative, 'most holy'. Then it becomes clear that Francis is contemplating the Father as part of the mystery of the Triune God. He addresses the Father with titles usually attributed to the Son, 'Redeemer' and 'Saviour', and to the Holy Spirit, 'Consoler'. This reveals a focus on the coincidence of unity and diversity in God.<sup>932</sup>

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<sup>930</sup>*ILtF* 18, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42.

<sup>931</sup>*Adm V*, 1-3. / Matura, *Francis: The Message*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>932</sup>This coincidence of opposites was discussed in chapter one.

In stanza two, Francis meditates upon the coincidence of unity in plurality of God, in relation to creatures.<sup>933</sup> The one source of 'light' and 'love', addressed as 'You, Lord' is nevertheless living in multiple 'angels and saints'...'filling them with happiness'. Likewise, Francis pondered this coincidence of the unity of God filling many persons in a plurality of places in his *Letter to the Entire Order*.<sup>934</sup> In *The Praises of God*, he called this coincidence of unity and plurality in the Trinity, '...all good, the highest good'.<sup>935</sup> In his meditation on the Our Father, Francis also attempts to describe this mystery as goodness in a degree which surpasses description: 'Supreme Good', 'Eternal Good', 'all good'. Like Pseudo-Dionysius, Francis saw the good as self-diffusive.<sup>936</sup> And so, his prayer proclaims that the 'Supreme Good' is the One, '...from Whom all good comes'.<sup>937</sup>

Francis continues to meditate upon the Trinity in stanza three but he now turns to the coincidence of the hidden and the manifest.<sup>938</sup> From the idea of the Father's holy name, Francis' thought proceeds to the inadequacy of human knowledge of God. He then recalls a passage from the Letter to the Ephesians (3:18-19) which prays to the Father for Christians, '...to know the love of Christ that *surpasses knowledge*.' The Father is 'ineffable', as Francis mentions later in this *Prayer* and elaborates in *Admonition One*.<sup>939</sup> As the prayer in Ephesians explains, knowledge of the ineffable God is revealed through Christ the Mediator, when he lives in the hearts of believers (Eph 3:17). In this way, God empowers the saints to know him (Eph 3:18), as Francis mentioned previously in stanza two of his *Prayer*. Therefore, he prays for clearer knowledge of God, on the accepted basis of this coincidence of the hidden and the manifest in the Trinity. He piles up the words of Ephesians in a tribute to the Father's name which attempts, through repetition and torrential verbalisation, to suggest the infinite dimensions and riches of God. There is a shift of focus here. Francis has moved from contemplating God in 'them', that is the angels and saints. He is now focused on God 'in us', a more personal experience and of course, a coincidence of Creator and creature.

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933This was also described in chapter one.

934*LtOrd* 33, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 119.

935*PrsG*, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109.

936Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, IV, 1ff, Luibheid, *Dionysius: Complete Works*, p. 71.

937*PrOF* 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 158.

938See chapter one.

939*PrOF* 7 / *Adm I*, 1-7.

The paradoxical idea of knowing the ineffable God flows into stanza four, which prays for the coming of God's kingdom, in which there is 'clear vision' of the Father. This tantalising thought then gives way to a union with God described in terms of an experience of the heart: 'love', 'companionship' and 'enjoyment' in the fullest degree imaginable, hence, 'perfect' and 'eternal'. There is a change of emphasis at this point from attempting to grasp the Father with the mind to simply desiring and loving him with the affections. The desires expressed in the last four statements of the stanza all have God: 'You', as their end.

This sense of a movement straining out of the self towards God continues into a long and tumbling sentence in stanza five. 'You' is repeated a further four times as the desired end. Then 'Your glory' and twice, 'Your love' are the stated goals of all the subject's 'love', energy and notably, 'affections'. The verbs used illustrate the dynamic out of self towards God: 'love' for God, 'thinking of' God, with 'thinking' described as an action of the heart, 'desiring', 'exerting ... energies in the service of', 'directing all ... intentions to,' 'seeking' and 'drawing to' God. There is also dense repetition of terms indicating totality. 'Whole', used three times in an allusion to Deuteronomy (Dt 6:5) and then repeated twice more, 'all' repeated three times, 'everything' and 'nothing else' in reference to desire for God, all indicate that Francis is struggling with the limits of language to articulate what is beyond understanding. These stylistic features in *The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, as in *The Letter to the Faithful*, are signposts of an ecstatic movement of the affections towards God, as Francis struggles to describe the coincidences of opposites in his perception of God in relation to humans.

Again, in Francis' *Praises of God*, there are linguistic patterns which suggest an ecstatic tone. There is dense repetition, particularly 'You', addressing God, who is the object of the whole writing and of every sentence. This denotes a focus entirely directed to God rather than self. Other repetitions are: 'good', three times in stanza three, and 'Lord God' twice, plus 'king' in stanza two. There are several terms of totality and superlatives: 'most high', 'almighty', 'all good', 'highest good', 'all our riches', 'all our sweetness', 'eternal' and again, 'Almighty'. The frequency of these terms seems to indicate an effort to express an experience beyond description. Torrential verbalisation is characteristic of this whole prayer, which consists of an attempt to describe God, using a multitude of attributes.

There is also evidence in *The Praises* of a focus on the coincidence of opposites in God. In stanza three God is mentioned as 'three and one', which is a coincidence of unity and plurality, considered as the source of goodness itself. Stanzas four and five attempt to articulate a multitude of aspects of God's goodness. As in his meditation on the Our Father, there is, in *The Praises*, a transition in Francis' focus, from contemplating God as an object of adoration to appreciation of divine gifts within himself. This shift is evident from the addition of the word 'our', and begins from the end of stanza four into stanza five:

'You are gladness and joy, You are *our* hope,  
You are justice, You are moderation, You are all *our* riches to sufficiency.'

'You are beauty, You are meekness, You are the protector,  
You are *our* custodian and defender,  
You are strength, you are refreshment.'<sup>940</sup>

With stanza six, this pattern of shifting from God as object to God in the subject settles entirely into the more personal focus:

'You are *our* hope, You are *our* faith, You are *our* charity,  
You are all *our* sweetness, You are *our* eternal life.'<sup>941</sup>

This meditation on possessing God's goodness in union with God increases in potency and scope and seems to gain emotional momentum. From considering 'our' possession of each theological virtue, Francis then claims that all the goodness he has is God and proceeds to know God as his entire life. The final line breaks out of the tight and measured 'You are' pattern into a torrential and emotional exclamation: 'Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Saviour.'<sup>942</sup> There is another hint here of the Trinity mentioned in stanza three, since God is named as 'Saviour', a title normally attributed to the Son, yet stanza two clearly announces that Francis is addressing the Father. This apparent sharing of divine personal attributes is Francis' characteristic way of expressing the mystery of the coincidence of unity and diversity in the Triune Godhead. This feature was noted above in his *Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, stanza one.

<sup>940</sup>*PrsG* 4-5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109 (my italics).

<sup>941</sup>*PrsG* 6, *Ibid* (my italics).

<sup>942</sup>This final verse is missing from the original writing in the *chartula* given to Brother Leo, and Bartoli Langeli did not include it in his own edition (*FA:ED*, fn, p. 111). Some scholars have proposed that it was written on the bottom portion of the manuscript, which broke away. It is found in some early written copies, however, and so was restored to the *Praises* in some editions, such as that of Duane Lapanski and Kajetan Esser (Godet-Calogeras, J.-F., 'The Autographs of Brother Francis', in: Blastic, *et al.*, eds., *The Writings of Francis of Assisi*, vol. 1, pp. 53-4).

*The Praises* also reflects the author's personal sense of involvement in a coincidence of Creator and creature. Importantly though, Francis' use of first person plural reveals that he did not believe himself to enjoy union with the divine in isolation from other creatures. This point will be revisited later. The shifts in the author's focus imply a progression towards union from contemplating the other as supreme goodness, to savouring its presence in himself. The word 'wonderful' in both the first and last lines suggests that what he attempts to describe surpasses his reason. The role of Christ as Mediator in the Creator-creature union is evoked by the divine attribute of 'Savior' which ends the prayer in Lapanski and Esser's edition. In *The Praises of God*, therefore, there is evidence of a similarity with the previous texts examined, namely, an affective, ecstatic style of language associated with a consideration of coincidences of opposites.

*The Earlier Rule*, chapter twenty-three, contains two exclamations of 'Alleluia!' at the end of sections five and six, which are signals of the ecstatic tone of this piece of writing.<sup>943</sup> Other familiar linguistic features of the same tone are identifiable. Torrential and superlative attributes of God are listed at the start of the chapter. As it proceeds, the ecstatic patterns of language appear to become increasingly concentrated, building up to a climax at the end of the chapter. 'We thank You for Yourself' indicates a sight set firmly on God.<sup>944</sup> 'You', that is 'God', remains the addressee until section seven, when Francis begins exhorting the rest of humanity to join his adoration of God. In sections one and three, there is repetition of 'through Your'. In section six, a torrent of God's attributes precedes invocation of the Trinity, and the exclamation, 'Alleluia!' Section eight features dense repetition, including terms of totality: the word 'whole' five times, followed by 'every' four times, and 'whole' three times. Section nine has a triple repetition of 'nothing else'. The affective character of the exhortation in section eight is striking:

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<sup>943</sup>The exclamations and the ecstatic features of language which accompany it suggest that this chapter of *The Earlier Rule* has retained much of the spontaneity of its moment of composition, even though scholarship has demonstrated that *The Earlier Rule* as a whole was composed over a number of years, from around 1209/10-1221 (David Flood, 'Die Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder', *Franziskanische Forschungen, Heft 19* [Werl i. W. 1967] cited in: intro. to *ER, FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 63 / Kajetan Esser, 'Textkritische Untersuchungen zur Regula non bullata der Minderbrüder', *Spicilegium Bonaventurianum*, 9 [Grottaferrata, 1974] cited in, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, fn a, p. 63). This could be because chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* is thought to have been composed as a prayer or hymn, which was copied together with the *Rule* text (Blastic, *et al.*, eds., *The Writings of Francis of Assisi*, vol. 2, p. 127).

<sup>944</sup>*ER* XXIII, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 81.

'...with every effort,  
 every *affection*,  
 every *feeling*  
 every *desire* and *wish*  
 let us all *love* the Lord God...'<sup>945</sup>

this emotional emphasis continues into section nine:

'...let us *desire* nothing else,  
 let us *want* nothing else,  
 let nothing else please us and cause us *delight*...'<sup>946</sup>

The rest of section nine is a torrential description of God, packed with absolute terms: 'only true God', 'fullness of good, all good, every good ... supreme good.' 'Who alone...' is repeated three times, then 'all' is repeated five times. This is followed in section ten by a triple absolute: 'nothing', regarding what is not God. Section eleven begins with a quadruple repetition of 'every', concerning what humanity owes to God. It also features the affective phrase, 'hold in our heart and love...', and the verb 'adore'.<sup>947</sup> This is part of a torrential outpouring of verbs concerning what humanity owes to God. It culminates in invocation of the Trinity in connection with the totality of creation: 'Creator of *all*, Savior of *all*...'.<sup>948</sup> Emotive verbs are used in relation to God: 'hope in Him ... love Him...'. There follows a final torrent of attributes of God featuring the affective adjectives, 'loveable, delightful...desirable.' This also features absolute descriptives: 'most high ... totally desirable above all else for ever.'

Theological coincidences of opposites are prominent in Francis' thoughts in this chapter. Francis starts with the Father in the Trinity, as usual. Thanking him for the act of creation, Francis sees the initiative as having come from the Father. Creation is, nevertheless, a single, united act of the Trinity, accomplished *through* the Son and *with* the Holy Spirit. In this way, Francis' prayer transmits the idea that the three Persons act as one, but in diverse roles. Therefore, his first focus in chapter twenty-three is on the coincidence of unity and diversity in the Trinity. In section three, Francis considers the Incarnation as an act of the Triune God, accomplished by the Father, through the Holy Spirit, in the Son. Thus, Francis meditates upon a coincidence of Creator and creature, as an action of God in unity and diversity.<sup>949</sup>

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<sup>945</sup>ER XXIII, 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 84 (my italics).

<sup>946</sup>ER XXIII, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 85 (my italics).

<sup>947</sup>ER XXIII, 11, *Ibid*.

<sup>948</sup>ER XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 86 (my italics).

<sup>949</sup>ER XXIII 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.



Section five concerns the Creator-creature coincidence from the perspective of Francis. Through Christ, he recognises humanity has already received much good from the Creator. This part of his prayer shows awareness of the contrast between God's supreme perfection and erring humanity, which makes human-divine communication impossible. At the same time, there is appreciation that in the God-Man, Jesus Christ, the Father was 'well pleased' (Mt 17:5) and that in and through him, with the Holy Spirit, it is possible for humans to return glory to the Creator. It is this impossible communion with the 'Most High', made available in Christ, to which Francis surrenders in joyful amazement, and exclaims, 'Alleluia!' both here and at the end of section six.

With desire to share this good, and conscious of his own unworthiness, Francis invites the Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints to join with him in giving thanks to the Trinity, addressed torrentially and joyfully at the end of section six. He continues in the same vein in section seven, with an exhaustive list, inviting every category of people on earth to join in creation's return of thanks to God, which he leads in section eight. This section illustrates the fact that Francis does not see himself as alone in a coincidence with the Creator, rather he considers the divine relationship to belong to every human, in and through Christ. Francis desired that every person return praise through Christ as part of a united fraternity, as shown by his invitations to every category of people to join him in prayer. At the end of section eight, he again dwells on the contrast between the Creator and sinning human creature.

The unity in diversity coincidence in the Trinity is evoked by the functions of Creator, Redeemer and Saviour, also mentioned in *The Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*.<sup>950</sup> God's activity is described as 'good' and its eternity is alluded to by the use of past, present and future tenses. In contrast is the torrential critique of humanity in its weakness and sin. Francis turns back again in section nine to contemplate the Trinity as supreme goodness, pouring out a stream of virtues in an attempt to describe the effect upon him of this goodness. The end of this section brings the opposites together in his vision. '...From Whom, through Whom and in Whom' echoes the doxology of the Mass, evoking the mediation of Christ, by which erring humans

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<sup>950</sup>*PrOF* 1.

receive pardon and share God's glory, celebrating it as one in heaven.<sup>951</sup> The next short section suggests a movement of *ecstasis*, out of the limitations of self and into union with God. Section eleven stacks up adjectives of totality and affective verbs in an attempt to articulate the worship humanity owes the Trinity. Finally, a coincidence of opposites in Francis' perception of the Creator is again contemplated as 'Trinity and Unity'. He further perceives in the Trinity diverse Persons who share their roles completely and act as one:

'Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Creator of all,  
Saviour of all...'.<sup>952</sup>

Contemplation of this coincidence of opposites leads into a final extensive outpouring of God's attributes. Both apophatic and cataphatic language are used, implying an attempt to describe what is essentially indescribable; evoking the God who is both hidden and manifest. These attributes end in a series of affective terms, and a final term which is both affective and absolute. Therefore, in chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule*, can be found evidence of a trait observed in the previous texts examined, namely, an ecstatic, affective tone of language, associated with the author's focus on coincidences of opposites.

The final two passages to be examined are from the *Letter to the Entire Order* (26-29, 50-52).<sup>953</sup> The first of these is striking for its poetic style, and the fact that it consists of a series of exclamations - features which make it stand out from the prose of the rest of the *Letter*. Many of the indicators associated with an ecstatic tone are clustered in this passage. It begins with an emphatic exclamation, marked by a triple repetition of 'let...!'. Terms indicating totality, 'everyone' and 'whole world' are also used here. After the introduction of God as the object of praise, another three exclamations follow, each beginning with, 'O...!' The descriptive words imply an experience almost beyond the mind's grasp: 'wonderful loftiness', 'stupendous', 'sublime'. The humility of God clearly plays a key role in his meditation, since the word 'humble(s)' or 'humility' is repeated five times in this short passage. The exhortation to '...pour out your hearts before Him!' then suggests an act of self surrender, a movement driven by emotion that pushes one beyond the bounds of self

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<sup>951</sup>*ER* XXIII, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1 p. 85.

<sup>952</sup>*ER* XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1 pp. 85-6.

<sup>953</sup>*LtOrd* 26-29, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

towards God. The final exhortation continues this movement of the subject beyond the limits of the appropriated self and into God. The totality of the union is suggested by 'Hold back nothing' and the repetition of 'totally'.

The subject matter of Francis' contemplation is the coincidence of opposites in the Incarnate Word. Here, it takes the particular form of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, which was a key feature of Francis' Catholic faith. His commentary draws an immediate contrast between the divine nature of Christ as Son of God, and his incarnate presence in a simple and vulnerable form. Therefore, Christ appears as both 'Most High' Creator and most humble creature. Francis summarises this coincidence of the 'Most High' with the most low in his exclamations:

'O sublime humility!  
O humble sublimity!'

The humble and the sublime being opposite terms, it appears that Francis' mind is searching for ways to hold them together.

Generally, he saw this coincidence of Most High Creator with most humbled creature in the Incarnation. Francis dwelt on this process of incarnation in greatest detail in his *Second Letter to the Faithful*. It began with the conception of the divine Word, continued in Jesus' self-emptying in a life of poverty, then in the gift of his Body and Blood 'poured out' at the Last Supper and offered to the Father for the human race in his death on the Cross.<sup>954</sup> It was by means of this self-emptying process that the Creator embraced the furthest depths of creaturely poverty. Likewise, in the *Letter to the Entire Order*, the two extremes of 'the Lord of the universe' and 'an ordinary piece of bread' coincide, because God 'so humbles Himself...'.<sup>955</sup>

There is another dimension to Francis' meditation here, which concerns how the same coincidence relates to himself as a human creature. He considers how the Son of God makes himself totally available in a simple, created form to humans 'in the hands of a priest'. He appreciates that this mediation between Creator and creature is '...for our salvation...' in order that all humans, like Christ, may enjoy union with the divine. Therefore there is a change in focus at the end of this passage.<sup>956</sup> It is an apparent shift from pondering the wonder of the extremes coinciding in Christ to an irresistible desire to be united with him, and thus participate personally in a

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<sup>954</sup>*LtF* 4-13, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>955</sup>*LtOrd* 27, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>956</sup>*LtOrd* 28-9.

coincidence with the Creator. Francis' previous contemplation of the Creator-creature opposition shows awareness of the impossibility of unworthy humans uniting with the 'Lord of the universe'. His final exhortations recognise that only because of the incarnational coincidence, by virtue of divine humility, can humans now unite with God in his creaturely poverty.

Therefore, Francis' reflection on the mystery gives way to self-surrender in love and gratitude before 'the humility of God'. There is also evidence of an affective response to the coincidence in the Eucharist in his *Letters to the Clergy*. In both *Letters*, he asks: 'Are we not *moved by piety* at these things when the pious Lord puts Himself into our hands and we touch Him and receive Him daily with our mouth?'<sup>957</sup> It may be concluded that meditation on Christ as a salvific coincidence of opposites elicits an emotional response in Francis. At the end of the above passage from the *Letter to the Entire Order*, in response to Christ's coming to meet him in his human poverty, Francis' desire rushes to meet Christ, beyond his ego's appropriations, in the depths of his own poverty. There he will be 'exalted', that is, united with the 'Most High' Creator in Christ.<sup>958</sup>

The *Letter to the Entire Order* (50-52) takes the form of a prayer:

'Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,  
 give us miserable ones  
 the grace to do for You alone  
 what we know you want us to do  
 and always to desire what pleases You.  
 Inwardly cleansed,  
 interiorly enlightened  
 and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
 may we be able to follow  
 in the footprints of Your beloved Son,  
 our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 and, by Your grace alone,  
 may we make our way to You,  
 Most High,  
 Who live and rule  
 in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,  
 and are glorified  
 God almighty,  
 forever and ever.  
 Amen.<sup>959</sup>

<sup>957</sup>1+2*LtCl* 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 53-4 (my italics).

<sup>958</sup>*LtOrd* 28-9.

<sup>959</sup>*LtOrd* 50-52, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 120-121.

Although there are no exclamations here, some of the usual features of an ecstatic tone can be identified in this short passage. The first line employs torrential verbalisation in invoking God. Similarly, there is a torrential invocation of God at the end. There are emotive verbs, 'to desire' and 'inflamed'. Descriptive absolutes appear throughout: 'almighty', 'Most High', 'eternal' and 'forever and ever', 'You alone' and 'Your grace alone', 'always', 'perfect'. The words 'almighty' and 'grace' are repeated. There is also a description of a movement towards the Trinity, with and in Jesus.

This passage is addressed to the Triune God, who is invoked at the end. The Trinity is the main focus throughout this prayer, referred to four times by 'You' and 'Your'. The first two lines draw an immediate contrast between two opposites: the all-good Creator and the 'miserable' human creature. The coincidence of these opposites is worked out in humanity in the course of the prayer. 'Grace', that is, the goodness of God, is operative within the human person and bestowed by the Holy Spirit. Gifted with the indwelling of this Spirit, humans can walk in the steps of Christ and join, with him, in a union of Creator and creature in creation. Through and in Christ they attain communion with the Trinity. In the Creator, a coincidence of unity and plurality is perceived. The Alpha and Omega of creation in the Trinity is also evoked, since the prayer begins and ends with the 'Almighty' in eternity, and alludes to the Incarnation and salvation worked out in time. In general it may be said that the focus of this passage is on coincidences of opposites in the vertical dimension. Nevertheless, it is significant that Francis refers to himself along with his fellow human beings as 'we', thereby also expressing his desire for fraternal union in the horizontal dimension. And so, a familiar pattern is apparent in this piece, of an ecstatic tone of language and movement towards God, associated with a focus on theological coincidences of opposites.

To summarise the findings from this chapter, six passages of Francis' writings were singled out as having an 'ecstatic' tone, based on certain linguistic features. These were: *The First Letter to the Faithful* (ILtF I, 11-13)<sup>960</sup>, *The Prayer Inspired by Our Father* (PrOF 1-5), *The Praises of God*, chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* and the *Letter to the Entire Order* (LtOrd 26-29 and 50-52). In the first place, four of these passages were remarkable for exclamations: 'O' or 'Alleluia'.<sup>961</sup> In the

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<sup>960</sup>cf 2LtF 54-56.

<sup>961</sup>ILtF 11-13 / PrOF 1-5 / ER XXIII / LtOrd 26-9.

case of *The Praises of God*, the last line of this prayer has the style of an exclamation. The feature which has been called 'torrential verbalisation' occurs in all six passages. The whole of *The Praises of God* has this characteristic. Repetition is a feature of all six texts. In all six, there are clusters of absolute terms and/or descriptives which convey awe. Affective words, often clustered together, occur in each. All these characteristics of language have the combined effect of conveying a sense of awe, which confounds reason, and of excited emotion which overflows beyond the self towards God, the object of the author's meditation. Four of the passages actually seem to contain descriptions of such a movement.<sup>962</sup> In two of the texts, shifts in focus suggest a progression from an experience of contemplation to one of union.<sup>963</sup> Five of the six texts focus on coincidences of opposites in God.<sup>964</sup> Five of the texts convey a sense of participation in these coincidences.<sup>965</sup> All six texts suggest some form of active engagement on the part of the author with their theological object, not least by the emotional excitement conveyed through the tone of writing. From the examination of these passages, it may be inferred that Francis' way of thinking about God was more intuitive and affective than analytical. His reflections on divine coincidences of opposites reveal a holistic psychological experience, involving both intellectual and emotional responses. It can also be observed in the above texts that his engagement with the coincidences of opposites in God tended to be connected with a form of affective *ecstasis*. Plausible reasons why coincidences of opposites may have evoked such a response in Francis could be suggested.

### **The effect of the coincidence of opposites**

The coincidence of opposites lies outside the rules of conventional logic. The laws of reason based on empirical evidence gleaned through the senses do not admit the possibility of opposite properties being true of the same entity at the same time. This is why Francis taught, concerning the Eucharist, that to see and accept the divinity of Christ in the humble form of bread required more than the evidence of the senses. It could only be seen with the eyes of faith. He argued that the same applied to those who had seen Jesus in his lifetime. Based on the evidence of physical sight, reason

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<sup>962</sup>*PrOF* 1-5 / *ER* XXIII, 8-11 / *LtOrd* 28-9 and 50-52.

<sup>963</sup>*PrOF* 1-2; 3-4 / *PrsG* 2-3; 4-5.

<sup>964</sup>*PrOF* 1-2 / *PrsG* 2,3,5 / *ER* XXIII, 1-3 / *LtOrd* 26-7, 50-52.

<sup>965</sup>*LtF* 11-13 / *PrOF* 3-4 / *PrsG* 4-5 / *ER* XXII,I 5,8,9 / *LtOrd* 50-52.

showed them a man. To see and believe in him as also God required that they transcend the evidence of the senses. Francis called this seeing with 'spiritual eyes'.<sup>966</sup> There are signs in his writing, as seen above, that such was his own dependence when his mind applied itself in meditation to coincidences of opposites in God. Schooled by the senses, his mind apparently struggled to find adequate words to describe the paradoxes his faith accepted. This struggle of reason and definition in the face of the coincidence of opposites is manifest in the effects observed in Francis' writings: torrential verbalisation, repetition, clusters of superlatives, absolutes and terms of awe. As Hammond observed, 'He paradoxically desires to transcend the threshold of his consciousness and all its linguistic limitations with doxology...'.<sup>967</sup> The acceptance in faith of what transcended conventional logic in relation to God would have necessitated a partial suspension of the familiar boundaries of reason, which defined one thing against another and separated opposites. In the case of accepting a personal union with God in Christ, as did Francis, this would entail the established limits which separated the self from the other's giving way. Unregulated by these norms of reason, his will could move towards union with what had seemed its opposite.<sup>968</sup> So it is that in the sort of *ecstasis* suggested through Francis' writings, the will appears to overtake the intellect. The impression conveyed through such passages is that, as his reason surrenders to the seemingly impossible concept of a union of opposites, he is overcome by emotions of joy, love, and gratitude, which overflow towards the object of his meditation, carrying his subjective consciousness with them.<sup>969</sup>

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966 *Adm I*.

967 Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 150.

968 Interestingly, as Andrew Sims observed of the state of ecstasy in a psychiatric context, 'There is an alteration of the boundaries of self so that the person may feel "at one with the universe"... . In ecstasy, the abrogation of self is experienced as being voluntary.' (Sims, A., *Symptoms In The Mind: An introduction to descriptive psychopathology*, London, Bailliere, 1988, p. 228).

969 It is clear from Francis' writings that he dwelt considerably on coincidences of opposites presented by his faith vision. One might wonder whether Francis' mind deliberately courted coincidences of opposites in order to disable his reason and proceed beyond it to a more intuitive knowledge of God. In a study based on early hagiography, John Ryan Haule approached this idea from a Jungian viewpoint. He argued that Francis' had a habit of 'holding the tension' between opposite concepts so that an irrational solution might emerge from the unconscious by means of what Jung called the 'transcendent function' (Haule, J.R., *The Ecstasies of St. Francis* [MA, Lindisfarne Books, 2004] pp. 38-9, citing Jung, C.G., 'On Psychic Energy', 1928/48, in *CW* 8, pp. 3-66). If such were the case, the coincidences of opposites would function for Francis in a similar way to some types of Zen *koan* exercise. A well-known example of this is: "What is the sound of one hand?" ...Questions like these are to be puzzled over until the flash of insight comes; then one pierces through words and futilities of mere reason to a direct perception of reality.' (Graham, A., *Zen Catholicism* [New York, Crossroad, 1994] pp. 132-3). However, in Francis' writings there is not enough evidence of clear stages of progression to indicate a meditative technique. In these texts, the elements of coincidences of opposites, affectivity and *ecstasis* often appear concurrent and intertwined.

Considering Francis' propensity to seek fraternal union with all other creatures, Michael Blastic has described Francis' vision as 'horizontally ecstatic'.<sup>970</sup> This raises the question of whether the affective *ecstasis* observed in relation to these vertical coincidences also applies to the horizontal enemy-friend coincidence. In Francis' teaching, based on his own experience, there is an observable pattern that union with an 'enemy' or opposite in creation is accompanied by a sense of joy. In *The Earlier Rule*, he wrote: 'They must *rejoice* when they live among people considered of little value and looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.'<sup>971</sup> Speaking of impersonal 'enemies', he also taught: 'We must *rejoice* ... when we fall into various trials and, in this world, suffer every kind of anguish or distress of soul and body for the sake of eternal life.'<sup>972</sup> Perhaps the word 'must' could suggest that such emotion was lacking in the lived reality. However, Francis' narrations from his own experiences indicate that such was the reality, at least for him, which he was seeking to impart by urging the brothers to accept their own enemies. The reading of the story *True and Perfect Joy* in the previous chapter noted Francis' decision to accept many adverse physical conditions with patience, to relate to a hostile friar as his brother and speak to him of 'the love of God'. Such acceptance of enemies with patience and love is '*true joy*' according to Francis.<sup>973</sup> In *The Testament*, Francis recalled that, having been among and ministered to the lepers, whose sickness had repelled him, he experienced '*sweetness* of soul and body.'<sup>974</sup> 'Sweetness' was a word commonly used in medieval mystical writing to describe a feeling of spiritual joy.<sup>975</sup>

The evidence above is insufficient to imply that *ecstasis* was characteristic of Francis' engagement with the *horizontal* coincidences of opposites. Nevertheless, it is clear that affective experience played an important role in his descriptions of union with his creaturely opposites, as with his communications regarding the vertical coincidences. It is also significant that, in reflecting on the vertical coincidence of

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Therefore, while it is possible that he used coincidences of opposites in the way Haule has suggested, this study cannot establish any such conscious method on the part of Francis.

970Blastic, M. W., 'Contemplation and Compassion: A Franciscan Ministerial Spirituality', *Spirit and Life: A Journal of Contemporary Franciscanism*, vol. 7, 1997, St. Bonaventure, NY, p. 168.

971ER IX, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 70 (my italics).

972ER XVII, 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 75 (my italics).

973TPJ 12-15, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 166-7 (my italics).

974Test 1-3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 124 (my italics).

975Powell, R. A., 'Margery Kemp: An Exemplar of Late-Medieval Piety', *Catholic Historical Review*, January 2003, vol. 89, no. 1, pp. 8, 11.



Creator-creature and the coincidences in the Trinity, Francis rarely spoke of himself in the singular, but used the first person plural, including all humanity in his terms of self-reference.<sup>976</sup> Moreover, he often involved the rest of creation in his joyful self-surrender to the Father.<sup>977</sup> This implies that his sense of union with the other was two dimensional. Based on the texts themselves, it may only be concluded that, consonant with his focus on the vertical coincidences, Francis' engagement with the friend-enemy coincidence was, at times, characterised by exultant emotion.

Faith and affectivity were essential elements in Francis' acceptance of coincidences of opposites. His writings reveal that, in attempting to grasp such paradoxes of his faith which defied conventional logic, the emotions tended to overtake the constraints of the intellect. This is revealed through certain patterns and changes in the the tone of his writings. Several passages, which dwell on the coincidences of opposites, feature an emotional tone, which conveys a surge of ecstatic joy, love, desire or gratitude. The same passages also show the faculties of reason stupefied with awe, struggling to understand and articulate the mysteries in which Francis felt himself to be involved. As the present thesis is illustrating, his writings show a propensity to dwell on the union of opposite concepts in his perception of God and creation. The coincidences of opposites nevertheless seem to have presented to Francis limits beyond which his human reason could not progress in the approach to God. From his descriptions of these divine coincidences, it may be inferred that, while such paradoxes caused reason to stumble, he would step over the constraints of logic, proceeding by means of faith and love, to immerse himself in these mysteries. This is what has been termed *ecstasis* in relation to Francis' meditative process as conveyed through his writings.

### **Conclusion**

The object of this chapter was to enquire what knowledge of divine things was evident in Francis' writings that would designate him as a theologian, given his lack of theological training. This investigation into the style of Francis' theology suggests that he habitually pondered divine coincidences in a way that took him beyond rationality. His emotional response to the object of his meditations drove him to seek

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<sup>976</sup>As seen in the passages examined earlier: *ILtF* 11-13 / *2LtF* 54-6 / *PrsG* / *PrOF* 1-5 / *LtOrd* 26-29, 50-52.

<sup>977</sup>*2LtF* 61-2 / *CtC* / *LtOrd* 26 / *ExhP* / *PrH*.

a greater union with God. This leads back to the question: what kind of knowledge of God relies, ultimately, neither upon schooling nor rational comprehension, but upon a love for God which rises spontaneously in the subject, and seeks or celebrates oneness with the divine?

Thomas Aquinas proposed a way of knowing God other than by reason, which he called '*cognitio experimentalis*', or '*cognitio affectiva*'. Taki Suto has translated this as 'affective' or 'experiential' cognition.<sup>978</sup> According to Aquinas, this gift of wisdom from the Holy Spirit empowers a person to judge the things of God rightly not by rational inquiry but '...by a kind of connaturality.'<sup>979</sup> 'Connaturality' could be understood as a form of union with God, which resembles an 'attunement' of the intellect and will to the goodness of God's will, as Arthur Snell has suggested.<sup>980</sup> Aquinas gave, as an example of judgement by *cognitio experimentalis*, people who had the habit of practising chastity, and could therefore judge rightly in matters of chastity by connaturality, as a result of the love which united them to God, without having had instruction in moral theology.<sup>981</sup> The practical dimension of this connaturality, which assumes habits of living according to God's will, would seem to correlate with Francis' insistence on the lived application of God's word in one's own incarnate reality, as discussed in chapter three. Thus, the term 'experiential' could be applied to Francis' knowledge of divine things, not in the sense of elite mystical experiences, but of the everyday reality of God's word in practice. Using these terms from Aquinas, the source of Francis' theological insights could be explained as follows: Francis had a connaturality in his life with the goodness of God's will through the Christ of the Gospels. This attunement to God's will came about by a divine gift of love, which gave him a right knowledge of God through experiential cognition. It follows from this that it would not be necessary for him to have received a scholarly education in the universities and to have a reasoned comprehension of dogma in order to be gifted with a unique knowledge of God and to disseminate it in

978 Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2, Forzani and Sodales, eds., vol. 3, (Rome, *Librarii Italici Senatus*, 1886) p. 693, cf., Suto, T., 'Virtue and Knowledge: Connatural Knowledge According to Thomas Aquinas', *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 58 (September 2004) p. 62.

979 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 45, a. 2, [Internet] (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition, 1920) K. Knight, online edition, 2008. Available from: <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3045.htm#article2>> [Accessed 27th September, 2012] cf. Suto, 'Connatural Knowledge', p. 61.

980 Snell, R.J., 'Connaturality in Aquinas: The Ground of Wisdom', *Quodlibet Journal*, vol. 5, no. 4, October 2003 p. 6.

981 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2, Forzani and Sodales, eds., p. 346.

words. 'Experiential' also aptly describes the character of Francis' meditations on the coincidence of opposites in the mysteries of his faith, which, judging from the words he dictated, exercised to the utmost both his powers of the intellect and, especially, of the will. From what his writings reveal, it could be inferred that his knowledge of God was deepened in a holistic process, not of detached speculation, but involving the whole of his psyche and also the Gospel-directed actions of his body. An important point is that Francis' habitual use of the first person plural draws his readers into his experiential approach to theology, so that this approach does not apply only to Francis as a personal meditation style, but is inseparable from his message.

Since Francis did not write about any personal encounters with God, no conclusions can be drawn about these from his works. Even conclusions about Francis' psychological experience in describing and praising God must remain speculative, based only on his use of words in the writings. Nevertheless, this exploration has found a significant amount of evidence in these texts, which points to a pattern of emotional, even more than intellectual engagement with his theological focus. This investigation so far supports a broad conclusion that Francis' brand of theology was experiential in the particular ways specified above. His unique panology seems to have been formed through what could be described as a process of *cognitio experimentalis*, from knowledge informed more by love of God and living the Gospel message than by erudition.

The texts examined here further signify a God who is beyond coincidences of opposites. They reveal that Francis, in grappling with theological paradoxes, struggled with a sense of the inadequacy of his concepts, to speak about the infinite. And so, he urged his readers to love and be united with the God who surpassed all his powers of description. The prayers and instructions analysed in this chapter point towards the intuition of a God who dwells beyond the confines of the mind, who can only be known by surrendering all attempts at comprehension, and by immersing oneself, through ecstatic love, in the ineffable divine reality.

## 6. Enlightened darkness: *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* (1205/6)

Most High,  
 glorious God,  
 enlighten the darkness of my heart  
 and give me  
 true faith,  
 certain hope,  
 and perfect charity,  
 sense and knowledge,  
 Lord,  
 that I may carry out  
 Your holy and true command.<sup>982</sup>

*The Prayer before the Crucifix* is Francis' earliest recorded prayer. It is found in the two oldest manuscripts of *The Legend of the Three Companions (L3C)*<sup>983</sup>. This material claims to come from Francis' companions: Leo, Angelo and Rufino.<sup>984</sup> According to the *Legend*, Francis made this *Prayer* as he knelt before the Crucifix in the ruined church of San Damiano, trying to discern God's will for his life. The short *Prayer* will be read in the larger context of Francis' thought, expressed throughout the writings. This larger frame of reference has the potential to reveal a greater depth of meaning to the ideas and imagery in the *Prayer*. Significant compatibility of ideas in the *Prayer* with the rest of his writings would help to confirm the consistency of Francis' thought system throughout his religious life. Since, according to the *Legend*, this text is also specially related to the painted Crucifix of San Damiano, the twelfth-century icon which Francis contemplated as he voiced his *Prayer* could provide insight into his thought at the time and the meaning of his words. Lehmann's analysis of the *Prayer* took the icon into account as its meditative object.<sup>985</sup> Therefore, the writing will be examined in relation to the Crucifix, showing the correlation of the image with aspects of Francis' theology. In addition, the question of the addressee of this *Prayer* will be considered. The analysis of this writing, in relation to other writings and the icon, will reveal a probable connection between the *Prayer's* theological language and imagery of light and darkness with some of the coincidences

982Francis, *The Prayer Before The Crucifix* (1205/6) in: Armstrong, R.J., Hellman, J.A.W. and Short, W.J. (eds.) *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint*, (NY: New City Press, 1999) p. 40.

983The *Prayer* is found in the Manuscripts of Barcelona (1405) and Fribourg (1406) according to Armstrong, Hellman and Short, introductory note, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 40 / fn. a, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, p. 76.

984Armstrong, Hellman and Short, Introduction to *The Legend of the Three Companions (L3C)*, p. 62, vol. 2, *FA:ED*.

985Lehmann, *Francis Master of Prayer*, pp. 38-9.

of opposites examined in previous chapters. The consistency of its theological focus with that of other writings will also become apparent.

### 'enlighten the darkness'

The imagery above evokes the idea of light meeting darkness. In order to speculate as to what Francis could have meant by this metaphor, it would be revealing to examine how he uses images of light and darkness in the rest of his writings.

**Light:** Examination of Francis' use of light imagery throughout his writings discloses that the idea of enlightenment represents knowledge of God. In the *Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, Francis said that the presence of the Father was in the angels and saints, '*enlightening them to know, for You, Lord, are light.*'<sup>986</sup> The same prayer later requests that '*Knowledge of You* become clearer in us,' and expresses an aspiration for '*clear vision of You,*' in heaven.<sup>987</sup> In *Admonition One*, Francis taught: '*The Father dwells in inaccessible light, and God is spirit, and no one has ever seen God. Therefore He cannot be seen except in the Spirit... .*'<sup>988</sup> These quotations suggest that the light of knowledge of God is God. This explains the role of the Holy Spirit, envisaged as light, in Francis' writings. In a sharing of Personal attributes typical of his Trinitarian theology, Francis also associated the symbol of light as knowledge of God with Jesus Christ: '*...the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ ... the Son of God, the true wisdom of the Father.*'<sup>989</sup> Based on the two extracts above, the petitions for enlightenment and for 'knowledge' in the *Prayer* may be connected.

Another feature of enlightenment in the writings is that Francis presents the light, which is God, as something essentially connected to the human person's carrying out God's will in his/her life. In the *Letter to the Entire Order*, Francis prayed: '*...interiorly enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit, may we be able to follow in the footprints of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,*'<sup>990</sup> He also wrote in *The First Letter to the Faithful* that when Jesus was in a person's heart, his/her '*holy activity*' would '*shine* as an example.'<sup>991</sup> In *The Second Letter*, he taught that those '*...who love the darkness more than the light*' are those who do not want 'to

986PrOF 1-2, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 158 (all italics in quotations are mine, throughout this chapter).

987PrOF 3-4, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 158.

988Adm I, 5, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 128.

989ILtF II, 7-8, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 43.

990LtOrd 51-2, FA:ED, vol. 1, pp. 120-1.

991ILtF I, 10, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 42.

*fulfil God's commands*.<sup>992</sup> The association of light with the Holy Spirit was shown earlier, and Francis wrote in *The Later Rule*: '...they must desire above all else: to have the *Spirit* of the Lord and Its *holy activity*.'<sup>993</sup> From these examples, it is clear that the connection of light with knowledge and with carrying out God's commands, as seen in *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*, extends to Francis' theology throughout the writings.

**Darkness:** While light is associated with seeing and knowing God, and doing God's will, darkness represents blindness or ignorance in relation to God, and not doing God's will. In an early *Letter*, Francis teaches concerning those who did not 'live in penance': 'They are *blind* because they *do not see* the true *light*, our Lord Jesus Christ.' Such 'blind' persons have no knowledge of God: 'They *do not possess spiritual wisdom*'. Francis describes them as 'cursed' because they 'turn away' from God's 'commands' and do works of evil.<sup>994</sup> In another *Letter*, Francis writes: 'all those who ... *turn away from His commandments* are cursed and will be left *in oblivion*...'.<sup>995</sup> While the light is described as 'true' in *The First Letter to the Faithful*, by contrast, darkness or blindness is linked with the deceptions of evil. In *The Earlier Rule*, Francis warns that 'Satan ...desiring a person's heart [he wants] to *blind* it through worldly affairs and concerns and to live there...'.<sup>996</sup> In his *First Letter to the Faithful*, he also calls those who did not live in penance, '*...blind ones, deceived by your enemies, the flesh, the world and the devil*...'.<sup>997</sup> The evil deception with which a person is blinded is a false wisdom, opposed to the 'spiritual wisdom', which is the 'true light' of Christ.<sup>998</sup> Francis calls the former, the wisdom of the flesh<sup>999</sup>. It is a form of blindness to the light, and so '*...the carnal person does not perceive* the things of God.'<sup>1000</sup> This false wisdom focuses on appropriating worldly vanities to the body/ego. But when the body dies, this deceptive wisdom and all that it amassed in life disappears with it.<sup>1001</sup> In opposition to this false wisdom, which blinds and deceives, 'Holy Wisdom confounds Satan and all his cunning.'<sup>1002</sup>

992*LtF* 16, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

993*LR* X, 8, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105.

994*LtF* II, 1, 6-9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 43.

995*LtR* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 58.

996*ER* XXII, 19-20, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 80.

997*LtF* II, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 43.

998*LtF* II, 7-8.

999*LtF* 45.

1000*LtCl* 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 53 (cf. *2LtCl* 7).

1001*LtF* II, 14, 16-18 / *LtR* 4-5.

1002*SalV* 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 165.

## The heart

Francis prayed before the Crucifix of San Damiano for enlightenment in the darkness of his heart. It is clear throughout Francis' writings that the heart is the battleground for which light and darkness, and all they represent, contend. As Armstrong observed:

'The image of the heart appears fifty-five times in his writings, one of the most frequently-used words by Francis... In most instances, he uses it in the biblical sense as the symbol of the depths of the human person, the centre of one's being that can become hardened, capricious, vulnerable, and, paradoxically, one's greatest strength.'<sup>1003</sup>

Francis wrote that all virtues, through the *enlightenment* of the Holy Spirit, were *poured into the hearts* of the faithful.<sup>1004</sup> Likewise in the *Prayer*, Francis asked God to enlighten his heart with the virtues of faith, hope and charity. In several other writings, the virtues of humility, love and patience, in purity of heart, are set in opposition to the wisdom of the flesh:

'...beware of all pride, *vainglory*, envy and greed, of care and *solicitude for the things of this world*, of detraction and murmuring ... but let them pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have *the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity*, to pray always to him with *a pure heart*, to have *humility* and *patience* in persecution and infirmity, and to love those who persecute, rebuke and find fault with us, because the Lord says: *Love your enemies*.'<sup>1005</sup>

'...beware of all pride and *vainglory*. Let us guard ourselves from the *wisdom of the world and the prudence of the flesh*. ...*The Spirit of the Lord* wants the flesh to be mortified ... It strives for *humility* and *patience*, the *pure*, simple and true peace of *the spirit*.'<sup>1006</sup>

'We must not be *wise* and prudent *according to the flesh*, but, instead we must be *simple*, *humble* and *pure* ... we must never *desire to be above others* but, instead, we must be *servants and subject* to every human creature for God's sake.'<sup>1007</sup>

'...by *living according to the flesh*, the devil wishes to take away from us the *love of Jesus Christ*.'<sup>1008</sup>

Francis highlighted the Gospel teaching that vices and sins, which defiled people, came from the heart,<sup>1009</sup> while charity and humility cleansed the soul of sin. Unlike the false possessions of the body's wisdom, these endured to the next world.<sup>1010</sup>

<sup>1003</sup>Armstrong, "If My Words Remain in You...", p. 75.

<sup>1004</sup>*SalBVM* 6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 163.

<sup>1005</sup>*LR X* 7-10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105.

<sup>1006</sup>*ER XVII* 9-10,14-15.

<sup>1007</sup>*LtF* 45, 47, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 48.

<sup>1008</sup>*ER XXII* 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.

<sup>1009</sup>*LtF* II 12 / *ER XXII* 7-8.

<sup>1010</sup>*LtF* 30-31.

Francis' theology sees the struggle between light and darkness in the heart as a struggle between God and evil. Evil seeks to blind the heart to God and to occupy it with earthly vanities.<sup>1011</sup> But when the 'true light', prevails, 'when we carry *Him in our heart* and body,' this example will be the light 'which *must shine*' for others.<sup>1012</sup>

### Summary

Francis' writings indicate that he understood the light to be Christ, pouring out virtue through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of humans. His *Praises* recognises God as the source of the virtues he had requested in *The Prayer before the Crucifix*: 'You are our hope, You are our faith, You are our charity...'.<sup>1013</sup> Light and darkness in Francis' writings have a set of parallel and opposing associations:

<b>DARKNESS</b> <sup>1014</sup>	<b>LIGHT</b> <sup>1015</sup>
Blindness to God <sup>1016</sup>	Vision of God in the Holy Spirit <sup>1017</sup>
Cares of the world <sup>1018</sup>	Holy activity of the Spirit <sup>1019</sup>
Evil in the heart <sup>1020</sup>	Jesus in the heart <sup>1021</sup>
Vice in the heart <sup>1022</sup>	Virtue in the heart <sup>1023</sup>
Wisdom of the flesh: <sup>1024</sup>	Wisdom/knowledge of the Father <sup>1025</sup>
Desire for status <sup>1026</sup>	Serving <sup>1027</sup>
Doing works of evil <sup>1028</sup>	Doing God's will <sup>1029</sup>
Accretions to ego <sup>1030</sup>	Humility/patience <sup>1031</sup>
Material possessions <sup>1032</sup>	Love/charity <sup>1033</sup>

1011ER XXII, 19-20.

1012ILtF II, 7 / ILtF I, 8-10, FA:ED, vol. 1, pp. 42-43.

1013PrsG 3, 4, 6, FA:ED. vol. 1, p. 109.

1014PrCr / 2LtF 16.

1015PrCr / 2LtF 16 / ILtF II, 1,7 / PrOF 2 / Adm I, 5 / SalBVM 6.

1016ILtF II, 7,11 / 2LtF 16 / 1+2LtCl 7 / ER VIII, 3-4; XXII, 19-20.

1017ILtF II, 1,7,11 / Adm I / PrOF 2-4.

1018ER XXII, 19-20 / LR X, 7 / LtR 3 / ER VIII, 2.

1019ILtF I, 10 / LR X, 8.

1020ILtF II, 11-12 / 2LtF 37 / ER XXII, 5-8.

1021ILtF 10.

1022Ibid.

1023SalBVM 6 / LR X 8-10.

10242LtF 45 / ILtF II, 3,11,16 / ER XXII, 5; XVII, 9-10.

1025ILtF II, 1,7-8 / PrOF 2-4 / Adm I / ER XVII, 14-16.

10262LtF 47.

10272LtF 47.

1028ILtF II, 1,3,6,10.

10292LtF 16 / LtOrd 51 / ILtF 1-7 / ER XXII, 9.

1030LR X, 7 / ILtF II, 14,16 / 2LtF 83 / LtR 4-5 / ER XVII, 9-12.

10312LtF 30, 44-5 / LR X, 8-9 / ER XVII, 14-15.

1032LtR 4 / 2LtF 84 / ILtF II, 17 / ER VIII, 3-4.



### **The visions of body and spirit**

The symbolism of light and darkness summarised above is clearly related to the colliding visions of body and spirit in the human penitent, which were examined in chapter four. The connotations of light and darkness correspond significantly to the values identified with the spiritual and bodily ways of seeing in that chapter. According to Francis' teaching, two ways of seeing the world coexist in the human person engaged in a process of conversion to Christ. A person enlightened by God can choose to see and act according to the body/'flesh' or according to the enlightened vision of the spirit. The penitent, having an awareness of both visions, can choose to treat what is an enemy according to the body as a friend, according to the vision of the spirit. This is the beginning of a coincidence of enemy and friend in one who seeks to follow Jesus' teaching to love one's enemies, as Francis interpreted it. Since Francis' theology points to Jesus himself as the source of the light, which enlightens people's hearts to do God's will, Christ's example of love for enemies is the 'light' which challenges each person to a conversion to the spirit's values. The vision of the spirit showed a person that to follow in Christ's footsteps meant accepting in peace all conditions opposed to one's appropriated self, in order to love all persons who attacked it. The only true enemy was the fear in one's heart, strengthened by worldly/bodily values, which prevented this love for others. Christ even accepted death as an aspect of the post-lapsarian condition of creatures, making it the perfect expression in creation of the kenotic love which was the eternal life of the Trinity.<sup>1034</sup> The example of Christ's Passion creates in Francis' theology a coincidence of abjection and glory, which extends to those who follow this example, as shown in chapter two. By accepting diminishment out of love for God and neighbour, they can share in the glory of the divine kenosis. The darkness of human suffering and death thus coincides with the light of divine life and glory.

*The Prayer Before the Crucifix* can be interpreted in the context of light-darkness theological symbolism in Francis' writings. The *Prayer* acknowledges the darkness that seeks to occupy his heart, which generally represents the lure of the false wisdom of the world. The 'cares of the world' are based on fear and concern for self, and its 'wisdom' advocates the pursuit of comfort and security for the appropriated

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10332*LtF* 18-19, 30, 38 / *LR X*, 8-10 / *PrOF* 2.  
1034*ER XXII*, 1-9.

self. Yet these false 'friends' of the body that demand all the heart's desire, cut a person off from concern for other people and blind him/her to the love of God. Selfish desires take a person away from the spiritual vocation to union with Christ, which Francis sees as the purpose and nature of human life itself. Blindness to these things of the spirit leads only to death and destruction of body and soul. Therefore, Francis petitions God in this *Prayer* for his heart to be enlightened and empowered by the Spirit's gifts of the virtues of faith, hope and charity. In this way, he would be able to follow the example of Jesus Christ in doing God's will, particularly in love for enemies. This meant pouring out his life in love for all fellow creatures, unhampered by any concerns for his self.

The petition '...enlighten the darkness', is for conversion of heart from the bodily to the spiritual way of seeing. The will cannot choose to judge and act according to both sets of opposing values at once. However, a heart full of the light of Christ would always direct a person to live according to God's 'holy and true command'. In other words, the physical body and its desires would be submitted to the direction of the spirit. In a state of complete conformity to Christ, body and spirit would be united in following one law – of selfless love, and so selfish desires in opposition to the spirit would no longer be experienced. This holy integrity, or purity of heart, is the state to which Francis' *Prayer* aspires. The Letter to the Romans describes the simultaneous awareness of two opposing forces in the author's person: 'So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin (Rom 7:25).' The fact that Francis' *Prayer* in San Damiano shows awareness of both ways of seeing, of both light and darkness in his heart, but desires to live according to the light, suggests that he too was engaged in a human spiritual struggle or process of conversion. In the passage from the Letter to the Romans, a similar struggle is articulated: 'For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do (Rom 7:19).' Finding himself unable to escape the selfish desires opposed to the law of the Spirit, the author exclaims: 'Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 7:24-5).' Francis too recognised in human nature the state of captivity to darkness which he called, 'misery'.<sup>1035</sup> He believed that only the Holy Spirit's gift of

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1035ER XXII, 6-8; XXIII, 2 // *LtF* II, 11-12.

grace could give him the strength and wisdom to live by the light of Christ.<sup>1036</sup> This is why, at the beginning of his conversion, he prays before the Crucifix for divine enlightenment and also for 'sense and knowledge'. Francis acknowledges here that without divine enlightenment, he is unable to recognise the good, in order to choose it over evil. As his writings make clear, darkness in the human heart masquerades as light, the temporal as the eternal, destruction as wisdom, and death as life. Hence, the default 'wisdom' of the human 'world' is blind to God.<sup>1037</sup>

### **The hidden-manifest and Creator-creature coincidences**

The metaphor of darkness seeking light as a quest for knowledge of God and God's will relates not only to the horizontal enemy-friend coincidence, but also intersects with the vertical coincidence of the hidden and the manifest in the human vision of God. The union of these two opposites depends on the coincidence of Creator and creature. The image of light is associated with knowledge of God throughout the writings as well as in this *Prayer*. In human experience, the Trinity is both hidden and manifest, as explained in chapter one. The Father, whose vision, name and nature are far beyond any creature's grasp, is nonetheless revealed to humanity in the Son, who is both Creator and human creature. The light of the Holy Spirit is the divine gift that enables the human heart to see, believe in and know God, through Jesus Christ. This divine light in the heart empowers a person to become united with Jesus, by following his example. This leads to the coincidence of Creator and creature's occurring in the follower of Christ, joined to the entire Trinity, through union with Jesus the Mediator.

These coincidences of opposites: hidden and manifest in the Trinity, Creator and creature in Christ, correspond with Francis' metaphor of darkness and light. His first *Admonition* teaches: 'The Father dwells in *inaccessible light*, and God is *spirit*, and no one has ever seen God. Therefore He *cannot be seen except in the Spirit* because it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer.'<sup>1038</sup> The term, 'inaccessible light' suggests a coincidence of obscurity and clarity, of the hidden and yet manifest nature of God. Darkness in the heart could therefore symbolise the human being's 'unknowing' with regard to God, and the mind or ways of God. A

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<sup>1036</sup>*LtOrd* 50-52 / *SalBVM* 6.

<sup>1037</sup>*LtF* II, 1-13, 16 / *2LtF* 45 / *1+2 LtCl* 7 / *LtR* 3-5 / *ER* VIII, 3-6; XVII, 10-12; XXII, 19-25 / *SalV* 1, 9-10.

<sup>1038</sup>*Adm I*, 5-6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128.

coincidence of the symbol of darkness with that of light was used by Christian Neo-Platonic writers to suggest a way of approaching knowledge of God through a blend of apophatic and cataphatic theology.<sup>1039</sup> The metaphors of darkness and light also appear to be closely interlinked in Francis' epistemology. Darkness, or blindness, suggests the limitations of human knowledge with regard to God, and light represents God's self-revelation to humanity. For Francis, knowledge of God depended not on human intellect or learning, but on a person's faith and love for God, and on God's self-revelation in Christ to that person. God could not be recognised, even in Christ, with the worldly vision of human self-interest. The divine could only be seen with its own vision, the vision of the Spirit, but this vision, or 'enlightenment', was a divine gift to humans.<sup>1040</sup> In *The Prayer*, Francis addresses God as '*Altissimo*', that is, far beyond human minds and senses.<sup>1041</sup> This *Prayer* of Francis assumes that the God, who is 'Most High', is revealed, nevertheless, by God's own gift of enlightenment to those who desire to know him. In this way, it points to a coincidence of the darkness, or ineffable quality of God and the light, or revealed divine knowledge of the Creator.

This coincidence is in the person of Jesus Christ, whose image, 'the image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), Francis is said to have contemplated in the icon of San Damiano. This explains the strong connection of this *Prayer* with the Creator-creature coincidence. In the Word Incarnate, the 'inaccessible' God is visible, tangible and effable. Therefore, for Francis, God is both manifesting and non-manifesting, as discussed in chapter one. This coincidence of opposites is centred in Christ, as the self-revelation of the 'Most High' in creation. It is reflected in the heart of the subject of this *Prayer*, who consequently, can know the ineffable God, a coincidence symbolised by the meeting of light and darkness.

Francis' approach to knowledge of God combined apophatic with cataphatic theology, as discussed in chapter one. Knowledge of the ineffable God was possible, but only by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to those who desired truly and surrendered themselves humbly to God. Francis understood that Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to make him known.<sup>1042</sup> However, divine knowledge was the property of God alone: 'The Father dwells in inaccessible light, and God is spirit, and no one has ever

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<sup>1039</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, I, 1 / Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, p. 163.

<sup>1040</sup>*Adm I*, 1-13, 19-22 / *PrOF* 2.

<sup>1041</sup>Lehmann, *Francis Master of Prayer*, p. 35.

<sup>1042</sup>*LtF* 4 / *ER* XXII, 41-2.

seen God ... But because He is equal to the Father, the Son is not seen by anyone other than the Father or other than the Holy Spirit.<sup>1043</sup> 'Therefore He cannot be seen except in the Spirit'.<sup>1044</sup> Francis stressed that knowledge of God was never to be appropriated to the self as proof of one's own worthiness for, as *Admonition Five* points out, demons know more about God than human beings do. The only thing that belongs to humans is their sin.<sup>1045</sup> Francis referred to the Spirit's gift of divine knowledge as 'enlightenment', as explained in chapter one. He was anxious to avoid any desire for knowledge apart from the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, which enabled a person to act on God's word by praying with a pure heart and loving enemies.<sup>1046</sup>

### **Christ as centre**

In this way, symbolism of light and darkness in *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* can be understood in the context of Francis' epistemology, revealed throughout his writings. It relates to the hidden-manifest nature of the Trinity, and is centred on the Creator-creature coincidence in Jesus Christ. Viewed from another angle, the opposition of light and dark can represent the spiritual, as opposed to the egocentric way of seeing the world, in Francis' thought. Therefore, the metaphor of enlightenment can also be viewed in these terms. In both cases, the focus of hope, the source of 'light' in the darkness of the human subject is Christ. That this *Prayer*, without mentioning Christ, is focused on him is supported by the hagiographical setting of this text, which points to the painted Crucifix of San Damiano as its inspiration and focus. This icon itself shows a dramatic juxtaposition of light and darkness, linked to coincidences of Creator and creature, abjection and glory.

### **The San Damiano Crucifix**

The Crucifix is reproduced in Appendix two. The darkness in this icon is in the black area of the cross behind Christ's arms and feet. Black in the iconography of that time would symbolise death or evil.<sup>1047</sup> The black area could also have been meant to

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<sup>1043</sup>*Adm I*, 5,7.

<sup>1044</sup>*Adm I*, 6.

<sup>1045</sup>*Adm V*, 6

<sup>1046</sup>*LR X*, 7-9.

<sup>1047</sup>Bałdyga, S.M., *The San Damiano Cross*, G. Cavazos-Gluz, trans. (Assisi, *Edizioni Porziuncola*, 1<sup>st</sup>

represent the tomb. The two figures looking into it at the end of Christ's hands could be depictions of the two angels seen in the empty tomb (Jn 20:12) or the two women who visited the tomb and found it empty (Mk 16:1).<sup>1048</sup> Centred on the darkness of the cross/tomb/death, the dominant, central figure of Christ appears as the light source. His body is luminous with a gold colour that would have symbolised divinity and eternity.<sup>1049</sup> The artistic contrast of light and darkness relates to the theological coincidence of abjection and glory. Light in this icon represents the eternal life of God, manifest in glory through Christ. Darkness represents all that opposes the human person: evil, suffering and death.

The symbol of the Cross created by the dark area is repeated within Christ's halo of light. In this way, the Cross becomes the crown of Christ, a sign of his divine majestic glory.<sup>1050</sup> The face of Christ is depicted at the centre of this coincidence of light and darkness. This effect is reproduced in the depiction of the Risen Christ at the top of the Cross, who has a dark Cross in his golden halo, and carries a royal sceptre topped by a golden Cross. The representation of a coincidence of abjection and glory extends to the figure of Christ. His arms are slightly bent to indicate a suffering humanity, and blood pours from wounds in his hands, feet and side. Yet Christ does not appear to be dead. His eyes are open and his expression, serene.<sup>1051</sup> His loincloth is styled as a priestly *perizoma*, in what appears to be gold-edged linen.<sup>1052</sup> The upturned position of his hands suggests Ascension. The overall effect conveys a Christ who is life triumphant in death, or light in darkness, whose suffering is his glory, consonant with Johannine Christology.<sup>1053</sup> This depiction resonates with Francis' portrayal of the Passion of Christ throughout his writings, in which the

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ed., 2005) p. 11.

1048Goonan M., *The Crucifix that Spoke to St. Francis*, (London, St. Pauls, 2000) p. 10.

1049Bałdyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 11.

1050Picard, M., *The Icon of the Christ of San Damiano* (Assisi, Casa Editrice Francescana, 1989), pp. 15-16.

1051Bałdyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 13

1052Bałdyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 14.

1053Picard, *The Icon of the Christ of San Damiano*, p. 14. For example, in John's account of the Last Supper, after Judas has gone out to betray Jesus, Jesus says to his disciples: "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer (Jn 13: 31-33)". Jesus is crucified as a king in John's Gospel. He is dressed in a crown of thorns and a purple robe and, carrying his own Cross, he goes to his death wearing these ironic royal symbols (Jn 19:2ff). Before handing Jesus over, Pilate says, "Here is your King!" and "Shall I crucify your King?(Jn 19:14-15)". Written on the Cross are the words, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews (Jn 19:19)'.

coincidence of Creator and creature gives rise to a coincidence of abjection and glory. Francis spoke of Jesus as both human and divine, poor and weak as a human creature, while glorious in union with the eternal Godhead, as shown in chapter two. Likewise, this Crucifix depicts a coincidence of both these aspects in Christ.

In its coincident depiction of divine glory with suffering humanity, this icon's imagery corresponds significantly to Francis' overall vision. As explained in chapter four, following the example of Christ in loving one's enemies touches both the horizontal and vertical coincidences in Francis' thought. Christ Crucified exemplifies a movement of humility to embrace states of being which oppose the body's comfort, the most extreme of which is death. In the Passion of Christ, the Creator thus meets the furthest extreme of creaturely poverty, in order to love human beings who have made themselves his enemies. For those who follow Christ in this humility, it removes the fear for self, which would make an enemy of a fellow creature, and enables an active love of neighbour, in which nothing is held back. This self-emptying for the other is the very life of God. In this way, the glory of God is most fully manifest in the kenotic love of the Crucified Christ. For those who strive to imitate him, abjection and glory, enemy and friend also coincide. A shadow covers the face of Christ in a circular area, which corresponds to the halo of light behind his head.<sup>1054</sup> This shadow could represent the face of Christ overshadowed by suffering and yet manifesting God's glory. It could also symbolise the glory of God remaining veiled in some way from human sight, as the shining face of Moses was veiled after speaking with God face to face (Ex 34:29-35). This would correspond with the coincidence of the hidden and the manifest in Francis' vision of God. Analysis of the symbolism of the San Damiano Crucifix suggests a compatibility with the theological meaning contained within *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*. Therefore, it is a very plausible focus for the *Prayer*, as *The Legend of the Three Companions* asserts it to be. It seems likely, then, that the connection between *Prayer* and icon is authentic.

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<sup>1054</sup>Picard, *The Icon of the Christ of San Damiano*, pp. 18-20.

### Trinitarian/Christocentric?

Matura claimed that Francis addressed this *Prayer*, not to Christ because of the titles, 'Most High' and 'glorious', but to the Father, like his other prayers.<sup>1055</sup> Although Francis does at times refer to the Son as 'Most High', it is quite likely that this *Prayer* was addressed to the Father in the presence of the whole Trinity, as is consistent with his approach to God.<sup>1056</sup> It is, nonetheless, Christocentric, as the word 'enlighten' indicates, since Christ is associated with light in Francis' writings, and is called 'the wisdom of the Father'. It appears that Francis seeks knowledge of the Father in *The Prayer* through the medium of the Word Incarnate, with the vision of the Spirit. Wherever Francis saw Christ or the Father, he understood the Trinity to be present and 'Most High' was a title applied to the Trinity, as well as to the Father and the Son. This title referred to the transcendent aspect of the divinity which was beyond human knowledge. Notwithstanding God's transcendence, Francis prayed before the Crucifix for enlightenment, true faith and knowledge of God. Enlightenment also correspondst to the gift of the Holy Spirit, by which it is possible for humans to see and know God in Christ. The presence of the Trinity in revelation is apparent in *Admonition One*. Here, Francis stresses that to see the Father, it is necessary to see the Son, in the Spirit. In this case, the Son is in the visible forms of the Eucharistic bread and wine. Similarly in Francis' thought, the Trinity is present and active when the faithful receive 'the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Word of the Father.'<sup>1057</sup>

In this *Prayer Before the Crucifix*, while the image would not be a bodily presence of Christ, it is quite possible that Francis saw the icon as a visible representation of Christ, the 'image of the invisible God', through whom Francis sought to see and know the 'Most High'. As Hammond commented, '...only by considering the immediate context of where Francis utters this prayer before the crucifix of San Damiano, does a Christological dimension emerge. ..It is through, by and in the mediation of the cross that Francis offers his prayer to God.'<sup>1058</sup> The idea of Christ as Mediator between Creator and creature is reinforced by the depiction of his garment. The *perizoma* was worn by priests in the Old Testament when they came

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<sup>1055</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 75.

<sup>1056</sup>ER XXIII 1, 5. / *LtOrd* 50-52.

<sup>1057</sup>*LtF* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 45.

<sup>1058</sup>Hammond, 'Doxological Mysticism', p. 117.



before God to intercede for the people.<sup>1059</sup> The garment of Christ in the Crucifix appears to match the description of the *perizoma* given in Exodus: '...anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh; they shall reach from the hips to the thighs. (Ex 28: 41-2)'.

While Christ is central and most visible in this icon, with the suggestion of a mediatory role, nevertheless, the whole Trinity is depicted. At the top of the Cross, the hand of the Father is extended in blessing over the death and Resurrection of his Son. The extended index finger of this hand evokes the Holy Spirit as '*digitus paternae dexterae*', as in the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, common in the Church's liturgy from the ninth century.<sup>1060</sup> The lines of Christ's forehead are also interpreted by some as the figure of a dove, symbolising the Holy Spirit.<sup>1061</sup> Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Francis' writings connect the light of God with the Holy Spirit, often in association with Christ.<sup>1062</sup> This light of divinity clearly emanates from Christ in the icon. For Francis this light may well have signified the Spirit's role in the paschal mystery. These points lead to the conclusion that this *Prayer* is *both* Trinitarian *and* Christocentric in focus, consistent with the overall structure of Francis' theology presented in previous chapters.

## Conclusion

Most High, glorious God,

enlighten the darkness of my heart  
and give me ...

God is transcendent, inscrutable

but the Holy Spirit brings knowledge of God through Christ to those who seek it in humility. The light of Christ's example, especially in his Passion, reveals self-centred worldly values as deceptions of evil, leading to destruction of the human being. The Cross reveals kenosis in love of enemies as the light of divine glory in the darkness of suffering.

<sup>1059</sup>Baldyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 14.

<sup>1060</sup>Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, p. 12. / Martin, M.W., *Veni Creator Spiritus*, in, *Thesaurus Precum Latinarum* [internet source] 1998-2010, Available at: <<http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/VeniCreator.html>> [Accessed 01/12/10].

<sup>1061</sup>Baldyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 13 / Picard, *The Icon of the Christ of San Damiano*, p. 18.

<sup>1062</sup>ER XXIII, 1, 5-6 / *Test* 40 / *SalBVM* 2, 6 / *LtOrd* 51.

true faith,  
certain hope,  
and perfect charity,

Through this 'grace and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit', virtues are poured into the heart as gifts of God which combat vice and sin.<sup>1063</sup>

Sense and knowledge,  
Lord,

They enable a person to see as Christ sees

That I may carry out  
Your holy and true command.

and be united to him, body and soul, in active love for their enemies.

The ideas explored in this inter-textual interpretation of the Prayer are summarised above. *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* was examined in relation to the overall theology of the writings. Significant correlation was found between the symbolism and ideas contained in this *Prayer* and those found in other writings. For instance, there is the association of light or enlightenment with God, and more particularly, with knowledge of God and with doing God's will. This symbol, combined with the darkness of unknowing, points to the mystery of God as hidden, yet manifest. There is the focus on the human heart as the battleground for good and evil, in which the virtues, through enlightenment, conquer the deceptions that blind a person to God. This has been found to be intrinsically connected to the collision of body and spirit visions in Francis' theology. This evidence suggests that the *Prayer* is theologically consistent with Francis' other writings and that this text and later writings are expressions of a common theological vision.

Additionally, the San Damiano Crucifix, which is said to have been a visual stimulus for this *Prayer*, represents artistically some of the ideas which were found in the *Prayer*, in the light of Francis' overall theology. In keeping with Johannine imagery of Jesus as the light of the world, there is a juxtaposition of light and darkness, in the luminous body of Christ and the dark Cross or tomb area behind him. This imagery is a strong link between the icon and Francis' *Prayer* for enlightenment in darkness. The symbolic use of light and darkness in the icon connects it to the coincidence of abjection and glory, which is related to two Christocentric coincidences of opposites: of Creator-creature and of enemy-friend. An abjection-glory coincidence is conveyed through the icon by its depiction of both the human suffering and divine triumphant aspects of Christ Crucified. Consistent with Francis'

<sup>1063</sup>*SalBVM* 6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 163.

overall theology in his writings, the icon portrays Christ at the centre of a comprehensive theological vision. It includes: the Trinity, heaven, humanity, the Passion and Ascension in glory of Christ. In this image of Christ Crucified is depicted the meeting point of death and life, light and darkness, suffering and glory, human and divine. Christ, with his priestly garment, is also represented as the Mediator between God and humanity. This is a strong aspect of Francis' Christology by virtue of the Creator-creature coincidence in the Incarnation.

Significant correspondences have been found between the imagery and concepts in *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* and in Francis' theology as conveyed throughout his writings. This appears to confirm the *Prayer* as an authentic composition of Francis, even though it is reported within a hagiographical account. It also suggests that at least the foundations of Francis' theological vision were present from very early in his converted life and that this vision, shown through his writings, remained basically consistent over time. The study of *The Canticle of Brother Sun* (1225) in the next chapter will confirm this view. It has been shown that this *Prayer* is probably both Trinitarian and Christocentric in its focus, being directed to the Father through the mediation of the Son in the light, or vision, of the Holy Spirit. This is in keeping with Francis' characteristic approach to God in his writings. The Trinitarian-Christocentric focus is also confirmed by the style of the icon, in which the image of Christ is central, but the presence of the whole Trinity is symbolised. Correspondences between the theological imagery in the icon of San Damiano, the *Prayer* and Francis' overall vision, indicate that the Crucifix and *Prayer* may be strongly connected in Francis' thought. In this way, the icon reinforces the relationship between the *Prayer* and Francis' general theology in his writings. Furthermore, given the coincident character and Trinitarian-Christocentric focus of the icon, it is plausible that this image could even have been a formative influence on Francis' theological vision at the early stage of his converted life, when it is said to have been composed. It appears, therefore, that the icon of San Damiano is worthy of study in connection with the *Prayer*, and in the context of all Francis' writings.

## ***7. The Canticle of Brother Sun***

If Francis' writings all draw on a coherent and comprehensive theological vision, then *The Canticle of Brother Sun*,<sup>1064</sup> should also express this vision, although in the literary form of a hymn/poem. The ideas it contains should harmonise with the theology underlying all the other writings. Although composed towards the end of Francis' life, this hymn's theological concepts should correlate with those of even the earliest writings, and those written in other forms: letters, exhortations and admonitions, rules and prayers. *The Canticle* could also be expected to encompass Francis' entire panology, chiefly because of the cosmic theological scope of its subject matter. It addresses God the Creator and it also includes the four ancient, constituent elements of creation: earth, air, fire and water, together with human and non-human creatures inhabiting the earth and the heavens, living things and death, night and day. The grand theological scope of this work spans everything that exists. According to *The Assisi Compilation*,<sup>1065</sup> Francis composed *The Canticle* in his final illness.<sup>1066</sup> Therefore, it would be natural for this hymn to represent a flowering of Francis' whole life's experience, as he looked back on all God had given and revealed to him, and attempted to encapsulate it for his spiritual posterity. For all these reasons, *The Canticle* could be expected to express Francis' panology, if such a thing exists. Detailed examination of this work has therefore been left until last, to test the thesis that a consistent panology underlies all Francis' writings. To this end, *The Canticle* will now be examined in the light of the coincident theology found in Francis' other writings so far. The purpose is to demonstrate how the symbolic language of this hymn communicates and encapsulates the same theological vision expressed through his other writings. *The Canticle* text is given below, in the original Umbrian dialect and in English translation.

*1 Altissimo, onnipotente, bon Signore,  
tue so le laude, la gloria e l'onore e onne benedizione.  
2 A te solo, Altissimo, se confano e nullo omo è digno te mentovare.  
3 Laudato sie, mi Signore, cun tutte le tue creature,  
spezialmente messer lo frate Sole, lo qual è iorno, e allumini noi per  
lui.*

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1064 *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, also known as *The Canticle of the Creatures*, composed around 1225. Hereafter, abbreviated to, '*The Canticle*'.

1065 An early source for the life of Francis, written around 1244-1260.

1066 AC 7.

- 4 *Ed ello e bello e radiante cun grande splendore:  
de te Altissimo, porta significazione.*
- 5 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora Luna e le Stelle:  
in cielo l'hai formate clarite e preziosc e belle.*
- 6 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate Vento,  
e per Aere e Nubilo e Sereno e onne tempo  
per lo qual a le tue creature dai sustentamento.*
- 7 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per sor Aqua,  
la quale e molto utile e umile e preziosa e casta.*
- 8 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per frate Foco,  
per lo quale enn' allumini la nocte:  
ed ello è bello e iocundo e robusto e forte.*
- 9 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora nostra matre Terra.  
lo quale ne sustenta e governa,  
e produce diversi fructi con coloriti flori ed erba.*
- 10 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per quelli che perdonano per lo tuo amore  
e sostengo infirmitate e tribulazione.*
- 11 *Beati quelli che'l sosterrano in pace,  
ca de te, Altissimo, sirano incornati.*
- 12 *Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora nostra Morte corporale,  
de la quale nullo omo vivente po' scampare.*
- 13 *Guai a quelli che morrano ne le peccata mortali!  
Beati quelli che trovarà ne le tue sanctissime voluntati.  
ca la morte seconda no li farrà male.*
- 14 *Laudate e benedicite mi Signore,  
e ringraziare e serviteli cun grande umilitate.*<sup>1067</sup>

- <sup>1</sup>Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
- <sup>2</sup>To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.
- <sup>3</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
- <sup>4</sup>And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;  
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
- <sup>5</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,  
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
- <sup>6</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,  
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
- <sup>7</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
- <sup>8</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom You light the night,  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
- <sup>9</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,

<sup>1067</sup>Francis, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, Italian text from: Branca, V., *Il Cantico di Frate Sole. Studio delle fonti a testo critico, Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, vol. 41 (1948) pp. 82-87.

who sustains and governs us,  
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

<sup>10</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,  
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

<sup>11</sup>Blessed are those who endure in peace  
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

<sup>12</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,  
from whom no one living can escape.

<sup>13</sup>Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,  
for the second death shall do them no harm.

<sup>14</sup>Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks  
and serve Him with great humility.<sup>1068</sup>

### **'Most High' = the Trinity**

This hymn, is addressed to the 'Most High', who is the Creator God from whom all the creatures have existence, and to whom *The Canticle* returns the praise of all creation. The title 'Most High' is shared by the whole Trinity in Francis' writings, as noted in chapter one. This attribution does not contradict the instances in which the term refers specifically to the Father<sup>1069</sup> or to the Son,<sup>1070</sup> since the Trinity, as Francis presents it, shares particular titles among all three Persons.<sup>1071</sup> The name 'Most High' may be correctly attributed to the Trinity in general, because no divine Person is specified, and Francis' writings often refer to the Trinity as 'Most High'.<sup>1072</sup> Furthermore, this hymn is addressed to the Creator, and Francis refers to the Trinity as Creator in two writings other than *The Canticle*.<sup>1073</sup>

### **Hidden-manifest / Creator-creature**

Stanzas one to four will now be examined in the light of two coincidences of opposites already found in Francis' theology: of the hidden and manifest in the Trinity and of the Creator and creature in Christ. First, it is necessary to show how 'Sir Brother Sun' of *The Canticle* is a symbol for Jesus Christ, as Ilia Delio has observed.<sup>1074</sup>

<sup>1068</sup>Francis, *The Canticle of the Creatures*, FA:ED, vol, 1, pp. 113-4.

<sup>1069</sup>*LtF* 4 / *PrsG* 2 / *OfP* Ps III, 3; Ps VII, 3.

<sup>1070</sup>*ILtCl* 3 / *Adm* I, 10.

<sup>1071</sup>*PrOF* 1 / *ER* XXIII, 11.

<sup>1072</sup>*ER* XXIII, 11; XVII, 16-17 / *PrsG* 2-3 / *LtOrd* 1, 52.

<sup>1073</sup>*ER* XXI, 2; XXXIII, 11.

<sup>1074</sup>Delio, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, p. 18.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,  
 especially Sir Brother Sun,  
 Who is the day and through whom You give us light.  
<sup>4</sup>And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;  
 and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Brother Sun's status as first among the creatures is indicated by the title, 'Sir', which he alone is given, as Séamus Mulholland has explained.<sup>1075</sup> As the one who, 'bears a likeness' of the 'Most High', in radiance and splendour, he symbolises Christ, 'the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15)'. Likewise, *The Earlier Rule* presents Jesus as 'the Way, the Truth and the Life', whose teaching reveals the Father.<sup>1076</sup> Francis was strongly influenced by Johannine Christological imagery, as Van-Khan has pointed out.<sup>1077</sup> As the one through whom God gives light, Brother Sun can be identified with Jesus, the truth that enlightens all minds (Jn 14:6), the light of the world (Jn 1:3-5, 9; Jn 8:12; Jn 9:5; Jn 12:46), and '...the Son of Man ... his face was like the sun shining with full force (Rev 1:16)'. Francis' earliest recorded prayer, focusing on an image of Christ Crucified, was for enlightenment. In *The Prayer Before the Crucifix*, as in *The Canticle*, the symbol of light is connected with the idea of knowing God. The San Damiano Crucifix, which was the medium for its inspiration, depicts Christ in a Johannine way, using the image of light, as noted in the previous chapter. Likewise, as Francis taught in one of his early writings, Jesus Christ is 'the true light'<sup>1078</sup> and those who do not wish to receive Christ are those, '...who love the darkness more than the light.'<sup>1079</sup> The light of Christ is also associated with the Holy Spirit in Francis' thought, just as Christ is often evoked together with with the Holy Spirit in communication between earth and heaven.<sup>1080</sup> Francis wrote that the Virgin Mary was consecrated with the Son 'and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete', who enlightened the hearts of believers with all the virtues.<sup>1081</sup> Similarly, the *Letter to the Entire Order* ends with a prayer for inner enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, in order to follow Jesus.<sup>1082</sup> *Admonition One* also suggests that God can only be seen by human beings in Christ, only in the Holy Spirit, the inaccessible light in which God dwells, and with

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1075 Mulholland, *Duns Scotus and the Canticle*, p. 12.

1076 *ER* XXII, 33-40, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 80-81.

1077 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 118-132.

1078 *LtF* 66, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 50.

1079 *LtF* 14-16, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

1080 *ER* XXIII, 1, 5-6 / *Test* 40.

1081 *SalBVM* 2, 6.

1082 *LtOrd* 51.

spiritual eyes.<sup>1083</sup> The person who thus sees Jesus in the Spirit, believing he is the Son of God, sees the Father. Here, as in *The Canticle*, Christ is presented as the one who reveals the invisible God. God the Father enlightens the angels and saints to know him, Francis reflected, and prayed for such knowledge.<sup>1084</sup> He also said that Christ was, 'spiritual wisdom ... the true wisdom of the Father.'<sup>1085</sup> He saw Wisdom as Queen among the virtues bestowed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>1086</sup> All these associations in the writings of the imagery Francis connects with Sir Brother Sun collectively point to Christ's role as Creator-creature Mediator. As Creator and creature, Christ reveals the image of the Father in creation and imparts the wisdom and knowledge of the Father to humankind, by the light of the Holy Spirit.

'Most High, all-powerful, good Lord ... no human is worthy to mention Your name.'

However, these words of Francis also present a God who remains beyond creation, beyond humanity in its sinfulness and beyond the limits of human knowledge. This resonates with the transcendent dimension of God represented throughout the writings. God, '...dwells in inaccessible light'.<sup>1087</sup> God's mercy is 'ineffable'.<sup>1088</sup> Francis used terms for God which suggested a transcendence beyond the grasp of limited human beings.

'without beginning and end  
...unchangeable, invisible,  
indescribable, ineffable,  
incomprehensible, unfathomable, ...'<sup>1089</sup>

*The Earlier Rule*, like *The Canticle*, states that humans are unworthy to name God.<sup>1090</sup> Ironically, Francis does name God, but his attempts to do so often entail such a torrential piling of attributes that the overall effect is to reinforce the idea that no words can define God.<sup>1091</sup> Despite his stress on the ineffable transcendence of God, his writings communicate a great desire to see and to know God.<sup>1092</sup> They also express the conviction that God is revealed to humankind in the teaching, life, death and

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1083 *Adm I*, 5, 6, 20.

1084 *PrOF*, 2-3.

1085 *LtF* 67, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 50.

1086 *SalV*, 1.

1087 *Adm I*, 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 128.

1088 *PrOF*, 7, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 159.

1089 *ER* XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 85-6.

1090 *ER* XXIII, 5.

1091 *ER* XXIII, 9, 11 / *PrsG* / *PrOF*, 2 / *ILtF* 11-13.

1092 *PrCr* / *Adm I* / *Test* 10 / *PrOF* 4 / *LtOrd* 22-28 / *2LtF* 60.



Resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the words of the Gospels.<sup>1093</sup> Francis' theology actually expresses a coincident vision of God as both hidden and manifest, transcendent and immanent. The Trinity, whom Francis called 'sublime' and 'most high' is, in the same sentence, '...gentle, lovable, delightful,...'.<sup>1094</sup> God is 'almighty, eternal,' but also 'merciful'.<sup>1095</sup> This coincidence is centred on Jesus Christ as Mediator because, while the Godhead is essentially transcendent, almighty, beyond human grasp, God is nonetheless fully revealed in Jesus as a human creature in material creation. As Francis saw it, the words of the Gospels and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, perceived and received in the Holy Spirit's light of faith, partially satisfy the human desire to see, touch, taste and know the ineffable God.

'...in this world, I *see* nothing corporally of the most high Son of God except His most holy Body and Blood...'.<sup>1096</sup>

'And he wishes all of us to be saved through Him and receive Him ... to *taste* how sweet the Lord is ... And let all of us know for certain that no-one can be saved except through the holy words and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ'<sup>1097</sup>

'For we have and *see* nothing corporally of the Most High in this world except His Body and Blood, His names and words through which we have been made and redeemed from death to life.'<sup>1098</sup>

Francis' theology considers that in this mediation of God, through Christ with the Holy Spirit, lies the salvation of humanity, as the above quotation indicates. Christ bridges the gap of unworthiness and ontological deficiency from human creature to Creator, as explained in chapter two. This mediation enables 'us miserable ones' when, 'interiorly enlightened and fired with the flame of the Holy Spirit,' to 'make our way' to the 'Most High' Trinity.<sup>1099</sup> Therefore, Francis understood that people could aspire to the 'clear vision' of God in a perfect union with the Father.<sup>1100</sup> According to an early source, Francis was inspired by an icon of Christ Crucified to pray for knowledge of God, by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1101</sup> In the *Prayer Inspired by the Our Father*, his language evokes the paradox described in Ephesians, of a

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1093ER XXII, 41.

1094ER XXIII, 11, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 86.

1095LiOrd 50, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 120.

1096Test 10, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 125 (all italics in quotations is mine throughout this chapter).

1097LiF 14-16, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 46.

1098ILiCl, 3, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 52.

1099LiOrd 50-52, FA:ED, vol. 1, pp. 120-121.

1100PrOF 4, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 158.

1101PrCr.

knowledge of God '...that surpasses knowledge (Eph 3:18)'.<sup>1102</sup> The first four stanzas of *The Canticle* show, in a striking way, this coincidence of the hidden and the manifest in God.

The evidence above shows how the theology and imagery in stanzas one to four of *The Canticle* correspond to the major coincidences of hidden and manifest in the Trinity, and Creator and creature in Christ. These coincidences of opposites underlie the theology contained in the rest of Francis' writings, as demonstrated in chapters one to three. The theology contained in *The Canticle* can be explained more fully against this background. 'The Most High' omnipotent Trinity, whom no human person can name, is revealed, paradoxically, in 'Sir Brother Sun', representing Christ the Mediator. Sir Brother Sun is a symbol for the one who mediates the image of the Most High to creation and also mediates the knowledge of God, by the 'light' of the Holy Spirit, with which he himself is 'radiant'.

### **Unity-plurality**

Chapter one noted the coincidence of unity and plurality that Francis saw in the Trinity: 'You are *three and one*, the Lord God of gods'<sup>1103</sup> 'God Who is All-powerful, *Three and One*'.<sup>1104</sup> There is also evidence in the writings that in Francis' thinking, the oneness of God forms the same coincidence with the multiplicity of God's creative action *ad extra*. In the *Letter to the Entire Order* is an intriguing passage about the presence of Jesus Christ in creation: 'Although He may seem to be present in *many* places, nevertheless, He remains, *undivided* and knows no loss; but *One* everywhere, He acts as He pleases, with the Lord God the Father and the Holy Spirit the Paraclete for ever and ever. Amen.'<sup>1105</sup> Francis is teaching here that the presence of the Trinity is one, although in multiple parts of creation. Similarly, in *The Earlier Rule*, he links the panoply of creation to its one source in the Trinity:

'...the Lord God Almighty *in Trinity and in Unity*,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
the *Creator of all*.'<sup>1106</sup>

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<sup>1102</sup>*PrOF* 2-3.

<sup>1103</sup>*PrsG* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>1104</sup>*ER* XXIV, 2.

<sup>1105</sup>*LtOrd* 33, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 119.

<sup>1106</sup>*ER* XXI, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 78.

'...Trinity and Unity,  
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
 Creator of all,'<sup>1107</sup>

In stanzas one to four of *The Canticle*, the Trinity, 'te solo, Altissimo'<sup>1108</sup> is the one source of 'tutte ... le creature'<sup>1109</sup> and the one end of 'onne benedizione'.<sup>1110</sup> That the opposites of many and one not only contrast with and complement each other, but actually coincide, is suggested in the text of *The Canticle* itself. Stanzas one to two proclaim that 'the praises' belong to God alone, and yet in stanza three, God is to be praised, 'with all Your creatures'. If all God's creatures, therefore, have a share in the praise due to God alone, it follows that they must be in union with God, their one source.

### **Unity-diversity**

*The Canticle*, therefore, presents an ideal vision of creation in union with the Creator. This union is based on the coincidence of unity and plurality and also of unity and diversity. For, as it was demonstrated in chapter one that Francis' theology views the Trinity as a unity in diversity, so also the cosmos of *The Canticle* is presented as a unity in diversity that reflects and points back to its Triune Creator. Firstly to consider *diversity*, the distinctive qualities of the three divine Persons in Francis' writings were collated in chapter one. The Father is always source and end, the Son is the Incarnate Mediator while the invisible Spirit, working alongside Christ, imparts virtue and the enlightenment of divine wisdom.<sup>1111</sup> In terms of diversity, each of the creatures of *The Canticle* also has its own distinctive quality: Sister Moon and the stars are 'clear', Sister water is 'useful and humble', Brother Fire is 'playful, robust and strong', Mother Earth is productive. The rich diversity of creation is celebrated in stanzas three to nine, and is specially highlighted in the, '*diversi fructi con coloriti flori ed erba*'<sup>1112</sup> of Mother Earth. In its celebration of creation's diversity, *The Canticle* echoes Genesis 1:11-25, which repeatedly states that God made living things, 'of every kind' and 'saw that it was good'.

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1107ER XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 85-6.

1108'You alone, Most High'.

1109'All the creatures'.

1110'all blessings'.

1111Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 148.

1112*CtC* 9, 'various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.'

To consider *unity* in diversity, chapter one, demonstrated how Francis conveyed this coincidence of opposites in the Trinity in two ways. One way was by portraying the work of the Trinity as involving all three Persons together, although each acted in a distinctive way.<sup>1113</sup> Correspondingly, in stanzas three to nine of *The Canticle*, the creatures all have distinctive roles and qualities, yet all are united in a single act of giving praise and glory to the Creator. This vision is made explicit in Francis' *Admonition Five*, in which he addresses all humanity: 'And *all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature better than you.*'<sup>1114</sup> The second way in which Francis communicated the unity-diversity coincidence in the Trinity was by instances where personal attributes and roles appeared to be shared by all three divine Persons.<sup>1115</sup> Among the creatures of *The Canticle*, a similar sharing of particular gifts for the good of all can be observed: Sir Brother Sun sheds the light of day on the whole vista of creation while Brother Fire lights the night, Brother Wind sustains all creatures, Sister Water in her humility is generally useful and available to all, Mother Earth sustains all living creatures and Sister Bodily Death eventually embraces them all. Thus, the diverse creatures form an interdependent unity. The unity of these creatures is further emphasised by Francis' referring each creature back to the one source of all: 'You, my Lord'.

As noted in chapter one, the unity-diversity coincidence in Francis' conceptualisation of the Trinity contains a sub-coincidence of equality with hierarchy.<sup>1116</sup> Although the Persons of the Trinity are co-equal, the Father is portrayed as having primacy in the Godhead as the source and end of all the Trinity's action *ad extra*. Correspondingly, in the cosmos of *The Canticle*, a 'co-equality with order' is apparent within the unity in diversity of the cosmos, reflecting the same coincidence of opposites in the Creator. The brother and sister creatures in stanzas three to nine and twelve share a fraternal relationship, which suggests both unity and equality. Nevertheless, only one creature, 'Brother Sun' is given the courtly title 'Sir'. He appears to have a special rank among the creatures, as the only one who 'bears a likeness' of the Most High and with whom the Creator is 'especially' praised. And so,

1113ER XXIII, 1, 3 / Van Asseldonk, 'The Spirit of the Lord', p. 148.

1114Adm V, 2, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 131 (my italics).

1115ER XXIII, 11 / PrOF 1

1116A coincidence of opposites in the Trinity which Bonaventure termed, '*coequalitatem cum ordine*' (Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum.*, VI, 6, in: Boehner and Hayes, eds., *Works of St. Bonaventure*, vol. II, p. 130).

in the fraternal equality of creation, Sir Brother Sun has a primacy suggestive of Christ as the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15), a Christological theme which will be explored later.<sup>1117</sup>

Therefore *The Canticum* represents creatures in their manifold diversity, related in a union which reflects the unity-in-diversity of their Triune Creator, thus reflecting back glory to God. That such an ideal could have been in Francis' mind is suggested by other writings. In both *Letters to the Faithful* and in *The Earlier Rule*, he quoted Jesus' prayer from John, chapter seventeen: 'that they might be sanctified in being one as we are.'<sup>1118</sup> This is a prayer that human beings, through belief in Jesus, might be brought into a holy unity with each other, which reflects the unity of the divine Persons. It is noticeable in this Gospel text that Jesus has a mediatory role, through his intercession with the Father, in obtaining sanctifying unity for human beings.

A closer reading in this context of a passage previously mentioned from the *Letter to the Entire Order* points to the same desire on the part of Francis.<sup>1119</sup> He requests that if there is more than one priest in a friary, the brothers should nevertheless celebrate only one Mass per day, with one priest celebrating and any other priests hearing the celebration.<sup>1120</sup> As Regis Armstrong has observed, this shows that Francis wished the fraternities to be centred on Christ in the daily Eucharist: 'In that act, he implies, we will find the source of our charity and unity, for we will find these in the very mystery itself.'<sup>1121</sup> Francis wanted the brothers to be united around Jesus at one table in the celebration of Mass, so that the Sacrament would be a means of their unity rather than division, which would result if each priest were to say a separate, solitary Mass. Therefore, Francis reassures the brethren that Jesus will fill with his Eucharistic presence all who are worthy, not only just the celebrant. Having made this point, Francis stresses the undivided oneness of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist, however many Masses might be celebrated in different places. He then extends this example of oneness of presence to the Trinity. What this instruction appears to imply is Francis' desire that the brothers themselves, though many and diverse, should be one through the unifying action of Jesus Christ in the Mass. Christ

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1117 Nguyễn-Van-Khanh identified this Christological theme in *The OfP* Ps XV, 4, 6-9 (Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, pp. 76-8).

1118 *LtF* 18, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42 / *2LtF* 59 / *ER* XXII 45.

1119 *LtOrd* 30-33.

1120 *LtOrd* 30-31.

1121 Armstrong, *St. Francis: Writings for a Gospel Life*, p. 220.

himself is held up to them as the example of perfect unity in a plurality of physical locations, acting in a perfect unity in diversity with the Persons of the Trinity. The brothers are to imitate this ideal, so as to be united in their own plurality and diversity through the mediating action of the Sacrament, thus mirroring the divine archetype.

In the prayer at the end of this *Letter*, the desire is expressed for the entire Order to follow the example of Jesus Christ, with the interior help of God's grace, so as to journey towards the perfect and simple unity in diversity of the Triune God.<sup>1122</sup> The opinion of scholars that this *Letter* was written either in the year of Francis' death or in the previous year, and the similarity of its themes with those of *The Testament*, indicate the *Letter's* value as a testamental text. Like *The Testament*, it could be assumed to contain the essential teaching that Francis most desired to leave to the Order.<sup>1123</sup> Since the *Letter* concludes with a prayer for human beings to come, through the example of Christ, to the 'Most High' who dwells in 'perfect Trinity and Simple Unity' this proves the overarching importance of this end in his vision. Taken with the texts mentioned above, which appear to express the same ideal, it shows both the importance and the persistence of Francis' dream that human beings should come together through Christ into the perfect unity of the Trinity.

### **Human conversion**

How does this ideal of human unity relate to *The Canticle*, in which all of creation is represented? It has been illustrated how stanzas three to nine of *The Canticle* depict diverse non-human creatures in a unity which mirrors that of the Trinity and gives back glory to the Creator. While stanzas one to nine and stanza fourteen form an integral vision of a cosmos in union with God, stanzas ten to thirteen show some dissonance with the rest of the hymn, as Spitzer observed.<sup>1124</sup> They break the 'Brother'

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<sup>1122</sup>*LtOrd* 50-52.

<sup>1123</sup>Armstrong *et al.* introductory note, *LtOrd, FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 116.

<sup>1124</sup>Spitzer, '*Nuove considerazione*', cited in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis, The Canticle,' pp. 66-7.

According to *The Assisi Compilation*, stanzas 10-11 were added as the result of a quarrel between the bishop and the *podesta* of Assisi so that *The Canticle*, containing this exhortation to reconciliation, could be sung to them. Stanzas 12-13 were said to have been written in response to Francis' impending death (*AC*, 83, 84, 7). Another source, *The Mirror of Perfection*, confirms this account of *The Canticle's* composition in stages (2MP 119-20). However, Edoardo Fumagalli argued that this hymn was written as an entire piece, and cited two other early sources in support of this, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (2C 213, 217) and the *Legenda Maior* of Bonaventure (*LM IX*, 1). The present reading of *The Canticle* accords with this view. It will be shown that every stanza has an important place in the overall design, and the difference in tone of the last four stanzas has a deliberate purpose within this design.

and 'Sister' pattern set in the previous stanzas, and introduce some darker themes: sin, suffering and death. These stanzas deal with the human component of creation. The only reference to humans in the first part of *The Canticum* is the dismissive assertion that none of them is worthy to mention God's name.<sup>1125</sup> When humans are eventually brought in, they are referred to as 'those', whereas the non-human creatures had been addressed as 'Brother' or 'Sister'. Why this apparent snub to humanity? Other writings can shed light on Francis' treatment of them here. In a text quoted earlier, Francis admonished the human race: 'And all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature better than you.'<sup>1126</sup> This comment shows that Francis saw other species, in contrast to humanity, doing the will of the Creator more perfectly, according to their God-given capacity. Francis viewed himself as 'a useless man and *an unworthy creature* of the Lord God'.<sup>1127</sup> In a Gospel text which inspired part of Francis' *Letters to the Faithful*, Jesus taught, '...whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother (Mt 12:50; Mk 3:35; Lk 8:21)'.<sup>1128</sup> Bearing in mind the influence of this text on Francis' thinking, it becomes clearer why non-human creatures in *The Canticum* who, according to him, do the will of God better than humans, are addressed as his 'Brother' and 'Sister' in Christ. Since Francis saw humans in general as not doing God's will, stanza fourteen, may have been his exhortation to them: 'Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.'<sup>1129</sup>

Therefore, *The Canticum* implies a dissonance of the human race with the harmony of the rest of creation. The reasoning behind this is that other creatures are praising God by being, as they should, an interdependent unity in their diversity, while human beings are not praising God as they should. The human habit of, 'delighting in vices and sins' separates people from God as well as their fellow creatures.<sup>1130</sup> Francis seems to have suggested in *The Canticum* that in comparison with other species, the human race as a whole does not merit the name of those who do God's will: 'Brother' and 'Sister'.

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1125 *CtC* 2.

1126 *Adm V*, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

1127 *LtOrd* 47, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 120.

1128 This teaching underlies *ILtF* 7-13 and *2LtF* 50-56.

1129 *CtC* 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 114.

1130 *Adm V*, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

### Enemy-friend

<sup>10</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,  
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

<sup>11</sup>Blessed are those who endure in peace  
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

The two stanzas above deal with another coincidence of opposites. The state of undergoing suffering coincides on earth with blessedness in giving glory to God, and the anticipation of receiving glory from God in eternal life. There is also a hint of a favourite Gospel theme of Francis, that of loving enemies, in the words 'give pardon for Your love.' In the context of the theology in other writings, these stanzas appear to be based on the coincidence of enemy and friend.

While the criticism of humanity in stanzas ten to eleven is implicit, the remedy proposed there is explicit: 'give pardon' and 'endure in peace'. Reconciliation in Francis' spirituality occurs in a conversion of values and outlook, from those of the body to those of the spirit, as demonstrated from the writings in chapter four. In the process of this conversion, a coincidence of friend and enemy is created, whereby an enemy according to the body is simultaneously a friend according to the spirit. The converted heart chooses to see according to the spirit, and treats any enemy of the body as a friend, after the example of Christ. The giving of pardon which results from this inner conversion is a radically demanding action rather than a response, according to Francis' teaching. The *Letter to a Minister* shows that his concept of peacemaking is more proactive than granting forgiveness to someone who asks for it, as the words 'give pardon' alone would suggest:

'I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours; that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned - however much he could have sinned - who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord...'<sup>1131</sup>

This advice implies that Francis' idea of giving pardon was an active love for enemies, modelled on that of Christ, who, '...willingly offered Himself to His executioners.'<sup>1132</sup> Rather than waiting for an enemy to show remorse, it meant treating that person as a friend while he/she was still threatening or even attacking one.

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<sup>1131</sup>*LtMin* 9-11, *FA:ED*, vol.1, p. 97.

<sup>1132</sup>*ER* XXII, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.



Moving out of the self and its defences to be among enemies, and bring them the love of God, subjects the appropriated self to adverse conditions. For example, Francis' going among the lepers, as recounted in his *Testament*, made him vulnerable to sickness and death, as well as the stench from which his body recoiled.<sup>1133</sup> Francis' writings alluded to these conditions as 'invisible enemies'. Stanzas ten to eleven of *The Canticle* can be understood in this theological context. The ideal of overcoming the body's impulse of fear, in order to embrace the deepest poverty of the human condition out of love, is condensed into the instruction: 'endure in peace'. 'Infirmity and tribulation' would be the impersonal enemies of the body to which one must surrender oneself in peace. This corresponds to Francis' teaching in *The Canticle of Exhortation* written in 1225, around the same time as *The Canticle of Brother Sun*: 'Those weighed down by *sickness* and the others wearied because of them, all of you: bear it in peace.'<sup>1134</sup> It is apparent in *The Later Rule*, as in stanzas ten to eleven of *The Canticle*, that love of enemies who persecute one is closely linked with the acceptance of sickness and trials: '...to have *humility* and patience in *persecution and infirmity*, and to love those who persecute, rebuke and find fault with us, because the Lord says: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you."<sup>1135</sup> It is significant that the virtue of humility is the recommended attitude for acceptance of human enemies, as well as other trials. This idea will be examined later. *Admonition Fifteen* also includes the endurance of sickness and suffering in the ideal of loving enemies. This admonition suggests that the love of enemies had such a wide application in Francis' vision that any cause of suffering whatsoever was to be accepted in peace.<sup>1136</sup> He saw all this patient endurance as following the example of Christ, especially in his virtue of humility. Christ's own humility was manifested in the Incarnation, in acceptance of the deepest poverty of the human condition, which culminated in the Cross.<sup>1137</sup> From this analysis, it may be concluded that stanzas ten to eleven are a condensed reference to a major theological structure developed throughout Francis' writings: the coincidence of enemy and friend.

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1133 *Test* 1-2.

1134 *CtExh* 5, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 115.

1135 *LR* X, 9-10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 105.

1136 *Adm* XV, 2.

1137 *LtF* 4-13.

*The Canticle's* communication of a coincidence of abjection and blessedness/glory points back to the basis of this coincidence and that of enemy-friend, in the exemplarism of Christ Crucified. Other writings of Francis express the coincidence of abjection and glory and similarly, death and life brought about in and through the Cross of Christ. In *The Earlier Rule*, this coincidence of abjection and glory, refers explicitly to Christ.<sup>1138</sup> Francis' writings present Christ as the supreme model for the acceptance of suffering and, who is, therefore, to receive all glory from creation.<sup>1139</sup> His theology views suffering and death through the enemy-friend coincidence, as explained in the chapter four. Enemies are to be treated as friends, according to Christ's example, by means of the virtues of humility and patience, virtues which Francis understood to fill the heart through divine enlightenment.<sup>1140</sup> The source of this enlightenment, as his writings show, is the Incarnate Word, the exemplar of humility. In Francis' Christology, he is 'the true light', who humbles himself to reveal the Father through kenotic love on the altar of the Cross.<sup>1141</sup> Through the Incarnate Son's revelation of the Father, the theology in Francis' writings links Christ Crucified as exemplar of humility with Christ as 'the true light' and 'wisdom of the Father'. *The Canticle* represents this Christology symbolically by the light of Sir Brother Sun. Francis' Christology also views the coincidence of abjection and glory in terms of the 'vertical' Creator-creature coincidence, the descent of the divine Word, by humility, into creaturely mortality and death.<sup>1142</sup> Those united with Christ in humility experience in him the coincidence of a creature with uncreated divinity.<sup>1143</sup> In this union, suffering and death in the kenosis of a creature also mean glory and eternal life.

And so, in Francis' theology, the two major Christocentric coincidences of enemy-friend and Creator-creature coincide in the mystery of the Cross and through the virtue of humility. Humility is thus a key virtue in Francis' entire theological vision. In *The Canticle*, both vertical and horizontal coincidences converge in the teaching that those who 'endure in peace' are blessed and will be crowned by the Most

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1138ER XVI, 11-21; XXII, 1-4.

11392LtF 61-2 / ExhP, 15 / PrH 3.

1140SalBVM 6.

11412LtF 4-13, 66-7 / ER XXII, 41 / Adm I, 16-18.

11422LtF 4-13.

1143LtOrd 28.

High.<sup>1144</sup> Stanza three symbolises the exemplarism of Christ in the light of Sir Brother Sun. Interpreting this together with stanzas ten to eleven, *The Canticle* transmits the idea that in the light of Christ's Passion, the sufferings of his followers are also their glory. As *Admonition Five* states, quoting the Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 12:5): 'But we can boast in our weaknesses and in carrying each day the holy cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>1145</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,  
 from whom no one living can escape.  
<sup>13</sup>Woe to those who die in mortal sin.  
 Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,  
 for the second death shall do them no harm.

In accordance with the friend-enemy coincidence in Francis' theology, death, the greatest natural enemy of creation 'from whom no one living can escape', is treated as a friend, or 'our Sister'. However, *The Canticle* makes clear that the experience of this enemy as friend is dependant on the way in which one meets her. Here, Francis sets out a choice of two states in which a person can die: in obedience to God's will or in defiance of God's will. This teaching may be better understood in the context of the *Letters to the Faithful*, in which Francis describes the same choice in greater detail.<sup>1146</sup> 'Those who do penance' are people who become conformed to Christ by a process of personal incarnation of the Incarnate Word, as demonstrated in chapter three. This process is summarised in chapter one of *The First Letter to the Faithful*.<sup>1147</sup> The end of this process of following the footsteps of Christ is the state of union with Christ and through him, with the whole Trinity.<sup>1148</sup> In this *First Letter*, as in *The Canticle*, stanza thirteen, Francis describes the state of those who do God's will as 'blessed'.<sup>1149</sup> He contrasts this blessedness with the final condition of 'those who do not do penance'. These are people who choose to live according to the desires of the appropriated self, as explained in chapter four, and Francis observes of them: 'They are blind because they do not see *the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ*.'<sup>1150</sup> This symbolism connects with the light of Sir Brother Sun. Reading *The Canticle* in this context, if those who do not see the light of Christ meet death unrepentant, they suffer the eternal loss of all

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1144CrC 11.

1145Adm V, 8, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 131.

1146Francis also sets out this ultimate choice in ER XXI.

1147ILtF, 1, 1-4.

1148ILtF 1, 5-19.

1149ILtF 1, 5.

1150ILtF 2, 7, FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 43.

they had prized - the adopted 'friends' of their ego, and the physical body. *The Second Letter to the Faithful* describes this experience as 'anguish and distress',<sup>1151</sup> whereas stanza thirteen of *The Canticle* calls it 'woe' and 'the second death'. *The Canticle* defines the state of meeting death in blessedness as being 'in Your [God's] most holy will'. *The Second Letter to the Faithful* explains that to be 'in God's will' is to choose to follow Christ who '...placed His will in the will of His Father.' This obedience leads ultimately to union with Christ in his self-offering on the Cross and willing acceptance of death.<sup>1152</sup> Hence, the exhortation to 'endure in peace' in stanza eleven applies also to the ultimate 'tribulation' of death. Other writings further communicate that, in contrast to those who cling to the body and its comfort, those who follow Christ gladly surrender their bodies and lives out of love for him who, '...offers Himself to us as to His children.'<sup>1153</sup> Their imitative response is to '...hold back nothing' of themselves.<sup>1154</sup> Thus, their deaths would consummate their union with Christ. As *The Canticle* stanza thirteen teaches, death welcomed in union with Christ is not experienced as an enemy with power to harm the soul. Rather, 'Bodily Death' in union with Christ Crucified opens the way to eternal life in glory and happiness.<sup>1155</sup> All these examples illumine *The Canticle's* teaching that meeting Bodily Death as friend and Sister is conditional upon being in union with Christ, in his obedience to the Father in the radical poverty of the Cross. The state of disobedience results in the experience of death as one's enemy. Relating this to the convergence of the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' coincidences of Francis' theological structure leads to the conclusion that only in that place or state of obedience and humility, where Christ is in his Passion,<sup>1156</sup> can a person participate through and with him in the coincidences of friend and enemy/abjection and glory.

### **Christocentric humility/obedience**

So far, in *The Canticle*, Sir Brother Sun, shedding light on humanity, has been interpreted as a symbol for Jesus Christ. It has been shown how this hymn has the character of an admonition to humanity to do the will of God and give glory to the

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11512*LtF* 82.

11522*LtF* 8-13 / *ER* XXII, 1-2.

1153*LtOrd* 11.

1154*LtOrd* 29.

1155*ER* XVI, 10-21 / 2*LtF* 60 / *LtOrd* 50-52 / *OfP* PsVI, 10-14.

11562*LtF* 60.

Creator, in union with the rest of creation. The exhortations to 'give pardon' and 'endure in peace' have been explained in terms of Francis' approach to peacemaking through the enemy-friend coincidence, as seen throughout the writings. It has also been demonstrated how the same coincidence applies in *The Canticle* to death, the great enemy of living creatures. Death, who is an inescapable foe, is nonetheless presented as a Sister and a blessing to the person she finds doing God's will. Summarising the whole admonition is stanza fourteen with its instruction to praise and thank God, '...and serve Him with great humility', which could have been a refrain to each stanza. Humility is the key concept that connects all the above elements, as the next section will explain.

Firstly, it will be shown how *The Canticle's* exhortations to do God's will and serve God 'with great humility' are exhortations to imitate the example of Christ. Francis' writings depict Christ as the exemplar for obedience to the Father until death, leading into eternal life.<sup>1157</sup> Humility and obedience are intrinsically linked in Francis' thinking as aspects of kenotic love. The word of God is to be carried out '...with humility and love.'<sup>1158</sup> Humility is the virtue by which the divine Word became flesh, in order to reveal the Father to the world, as shown in chapter two.<sup>1159</sup> Continuing the divine *kenosis*, after the pattern of the Letter to the Philippians (Phil 2: 5-8), obedience is the virtue by which the Word Incarnate offered himself to death on the Cross, for the salvation of all people.<sup>1160</sup> Similarly, humility is the virtue by which Christ offers himself daily in the form of bread and wine.<sup>1161</sup> When Francis exhorts anyone to obedience or humility, it often appears as an imitative response to Christ's manifestation of these virtues. Having described the humble obedience of Christ to the Father in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, Francis added, '...leaving us an example that we might follow His footprints.'<sup>1162</sup> *The Earlier Rule* instructs: '...through the charity of the Spirit, let them serve and obey one another voluntarily. This is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>1163</sup> *The Later Rule* prescribes, '...serving the Lord in poverty and humility, let them go seeking alms ...

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1157*LtOrd* 46 / *2LtF* 8-13 / *ER* XVI, 10-20.

1158*2LtF* 87, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 51.

1159*2LtF* 4-5 / *ER* XXII, 41.

1160*2LtF* 6-12 / *LtOrd* 46.

1161*Adm I*, 16 / *LtOrd* 26-7.

1162*2LtF* 4-13, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 46.

1163*ER V*, 14-15, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 67-8.

and they should not be ashamed because, for our sakes, our Lord made himself poor in this world.<sup>1164</sup> In his *Letter to the Entire Order*, Francis taught: 'Persevere in discipline and holy obedience and, with a good and firm purpose, fulfil what you have promised Him. The Lord God offers Himself to us [in Christ] as to His children.'<sup>1165</sup> Later in the same *Letter*, he wrote, concerning the Eucharist:

'Brothers, look at the humility of God,  
and pour out your hearts before Him!  
Humble yourselves  
that you may be exalted by Him!'<sup>1166</sup>

It appears that Christ was always Francis' model regarding humility, and the one to whom he looked for guidance in doing God's will. In the earliest of his writings, Francis' petitioned God for *enlightenment* in order to do God's will, while contemplating the icon of *Christ Crucified*.<sup>1167</sup> In *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, Francis said of those who were not doing God's will, '...they do not see the true *light*, our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>1168</sup>

The evidence above shows the likelihood that *The Canticle's* exhortation to, 'serve Him with great humility' is made in response to the example of the humility and obedience of Christ, who is symbolised by Sir Brother Sun. In *The Canticle*, God gives light to the world through him. Elsewhere in the writings, light symbolises the enlightenment of divine truth, which enables human beings to do God's will.<sup>1169</sup> In Francis' thought, it is the supreme example of Christ's love for enemies, in his Passion and death, that enables people to 'give pardon' and 'endure in peace', that is, to be reconciled with each other and with their own physical mortality. By his example, they are freed to carry out God's will without fear of any enemy, even of death.<sup>1170</sup> The teaching and example of Christ are the basis for the friend-enemy coincidence in Francis' thought.<sup>1171</sup> This thinking is reflected in the symbolism of *The Canticle*, which has an underlying lesson: it is the divine light of truth given to humanity through Sir Brother Sun<sup>1172</sup> that reveals death, the enemy of creation, as friend and

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<sup>1164</sup>*LR*, VI, 2-3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 103.

<sup>1165</sup>*LtOrd* 10-11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 117 (my insertion in brackets).

<sup>1166</sup>*LtOrd* 28, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>1167</sup>*PrCr*.

<sup>1168</sup>*LtF* 63-6, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 50.

<sup>1169</sup>*SalBVM* 6 / *LtOrd* 51 / *PrCr*.

<sup>1170</sup>*ER* XVI, 10-20.

<sup>1171</sup>*ER* XXII, 1-4

<sup>1172</sup>*CtC* 3.

Sister. As *The Later Rule* teaches, humility is the virtue by which any person following Christ's example can also accept the poverty of suffering and death, in obedience to God's will.<sup>1173</sup> It may be objected that there appears to be nothing of humility in the symbol of Sir Brother Sun, '...beautiful and radiant with great splendour.' However, as discussed previously, poverty and humility coincide in Christ with glory and exaltation, in Francis' theology.<sup>1174</sup> The glory which is God's love is manifested in humility. Francis taught that Christ '...must *shine as an example*' through those who did God's will by living in penance.<sup>1175</sup> *The Earlier Rule* states that Christ 'humbled Himself' to make the Father's name known. In *Admonition One*, Christ, in the Eucharist, 'humbles Himself' daily to reveal the Father in visible form.<sup>1176</sup> Correspondingly in stanza four of *The Canticle*, Sir Brother Sun reveals the invisible God, mediating the 'likeness of You, Most High One.' Therefore, it is implied by the context of the Christology throughout Francis' writings that humility is essential to this visible revelation of God in Christ. It may be concluded that the Christocentric coincidence of enemy and friend in Francis' theology is represented through the relationship of the following elements of *The Canticle*: the unworthiness of human beings (stanza 2), 'Sir Brother Sun' as exemplar of humility (3-4), the exhortations to 'give pardon' and to bear sickness and trials in peace (10-11), to meet death as Sister according to God's will (12-13) and to serve God 'with great humility' (14).

In the *Letter to the Entire Order* a statement is made concerning the universal Creator-creature mediation of Christ in the Eucharist: '...the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ *in Whom* that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God.'<sup>1177</sup> This idea in the *Letter* of the Eucharistic Christ as universal Creator-creation Mediator also underlies the image of Sir Brother Sun in *The Canticle*, as will become clear. Delio wrote, 'The Canticle is like a cosmic liturgy in which Christ is the high priest'.<sup>1178</sup> The language of *The Canticle* suggests that Francis had the liturgy of the Eucharist in mind when he wrote about Brother Sun. To a significant degree, his wording corresponds with the

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1173LR X, 9.

1174*LtF* 4-5, 61 / *LR* VI, 2-5 / *LtOrd* 22, 26-28 / *OfP* Ps VI, 10-14; VII, 7-9.

1175*LtF* 1, 10, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42.

1176*Adm I*, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 128-9.

1177*LtOrd* 12-13.

1178Delio, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, p. 19.

doxology in the Roman Canon of the Mass, as was previously observed in *The Earlier Rule*, chapter twenty-three. This part of the liturgy would have been like the form of today's Roman Latin rite, which has remained unaltered since the seventh century:<sup>1179</sup> '*Per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso, est tibi Deo Patri omnipotenti, in unitate Spiritus Sancti, omnis honor et gloria per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen.*'<sup>1180</sup> When a selection of phrases from the doxology is rearranged and placed alongside stanzas three and one of *The Canticle*, the parallels become clear

<i>CUM IPSO</i>	<sup>3</sup> ... <i>CUN tute le tue creature, specialmente MESSER LO FRATE SOLE,</i>
<i>PER IPSUM</i>	<i>lo qual è iorno, e allumini noi PER LUI.</i>
<i>EST TIBI Deo Patri OMNIPOTENTI</i>	<sup>1</sup> <i>Altissimo, ONNIPOTENTE, bon Signore, TUE SO</i>
<i>OMNIS HONOR ET GLORIA</i> <sup>1181</sup>	<i>le laude, LA GLORIA E L'ONORE e ONNE benedizione.</i> <sup>1182</sup>
WITH HIM	<sup>3</sup> ...WITH all Your creatures, especially SIR BROTHER SUN,
THROUGH HIM,	Who is day and THROUGH WHOM You give us light.
O God, ALMIGHTY Father, ... IS YOURS,	<sup>1</sup> Most High, ALL-POWERFUL, good Lord, YOURS ARE
ALL GLORY AND HONOUR <sup>1183</sup>	the praise, the GLORY, AND the HONOUR, and ALL blessing. <sup>1184</sup>

During the doxology of today's Mass, the priest holds the Eucharist aloft. It has been the practice since the ninth century for the celebrant to lift up the host during the doxology with the words, '*omnis honor et gloria...*'<sup>1185</sup> Given the parallels shown

<sup>1179</sup>Herbermann, C.G., et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 3 (London: Caxton, 1908) p. 256.

<sup>1180</sup>The Catholic Liturgical Library, *Mass of the 1962 Missal* [Internet] (CO, USA: The Catholic Liturgical Library, 1998-2007). Available from: <<http://www.catholicliturgy.com/index.cfm>> [Accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, 2007].

<sup>1181</sup>The Catholic Liturgical Library, *Mass of the 1962 Missal* (my capitalisation).

<sup>1182</sup>Francis, *CtC*, vv. 1 and 3, Branca, *Il Cantico di Frate Sole*, *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, vol. 41, p. 83 (my capitalisation).

<sup>1183</sup>cf. The Order of Mass, The Roman Canon, excerpts from the English translation of *The Roman Missal* (International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation, 2010) in: The Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, ed., *A Simple Prayer Book* (London: CTS, 2010) p. 70 (my capitalisation).

<sup>1184</sup>*CtC*, 1-3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 113 (my capitalisation).

<sup>1185</sup>Herbermann, et al., eds., *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. 5 (1909) p. 380a.



above, and Francis' devotion to the Eucharist, it is not unreasonable to suppose a correspondence in his mind between the elevated host and the luminous disk of Brother Sun, raised over the world in a cosmic liturgy. To Francis, Christ in the Eucharist was the Mediator between the Creator and creation, as explained in chapter three. Stanza four of *The Canticle* describes Brother Sun as the image of the Father in creation. This Johannine idea is also found in reference to the Eucharist in *Admonition One*, in which the body of Christ, the image of the Father made visible in the world, is the way to him.<sup>1186</sup> This convergence of the symbols of the glorious sun and the humble host evokes the coincidence of Creator and creature in Christ, which Francis described as 'sublime humility' and 'humble sublimity'.<sup>1187</sup> And so, it seems characteristic of Francis' theology to view Christ as universal Mediator, the one 'from Whom, through Whom and in Whom' all good comes and returns to the Trinity.<sup>1188</sup> This linguistic pattern also resonates with the Letter to the Colossians: '...-all things have been created *through him* and *for him* (Col. 1:16). He himself is before all things, and *in him* all things hold together.'

In the light of Francis' view of the Eucharistic bread and wine as Christ, the supreme exemplar of humility, it is not difficult to identify stanza fourteen as a reference to the action of Jesus at the Last Supper. In accordance with the Catholic faith, Francis would have understood this action to be re-enacted and made present in the Mass.

<p>'On the day before he was to suffer, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands, and with eyes raised to heaven to you, <i>O God</i>, his almighty Father, <i>giving you thanks</i>, he said the blessing, ... In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took this precious chalice in his holy and venerable hands, and once more <i>giving you thanks</i>, he said the blessing</p>	<p><sup>14</sup><i>Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks...</i></p>
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<sup>1186</sup>The above paragraph is a modified quotation from an unpublished MA dissertation (Knowles, C., *An Exploration of the Eucharistic Foundation for a Franciscan Theology of the Environment* [Franciscan International Study Centre, Canterbury, 2008] pp. 16-18).

<sup>1187</sup>*LtOrd* 27, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>1188</sup>*ER* XXIII, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 85 / *LtF* 61-2.

<p>broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying:  “Take this, all of you, and eat of it: for this is my Body, which will be given up for you.”  ...  and gave the chalice to his disciples, saying:  “Take this, all of you, and drink from it,  for this is the chalice of my Blood,  ...which will be poured out for you and for many  for the forgiveness of sins.  Do this in memory of me.”<sup>1189</sup></p>	<p>...and serve Him with great humility.<sup>1190</sup></p>
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This comparison shows how stanza fourteen of *The Canticle* could be an exhortation to imitate in one's life the Eucharistic, self-diffusive action of Jesus. Many of Francis' writings express his belief that creation owes thanks and praise to its maker, as shown previously. The *Letter to the Entire Order* identifies the Eucharist as a sublime example of humility for humans to imitate.<sup>1191</sup> In *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, Francis also pointed to Christ's action in the Eucharist as an example to be followed.<sup>1192</sup> Therefore, it seems likely that Francis viewed the self-giving action of the Eucharist as the supreme example of humility in service. In order to 'do this in memory...'of Jesus, it was necessary to praise and thank God for all goodness received, including one's existence, and 'hold back nothing' of oneself in serving God through service to others.<sup>1193</sup>

This connection of Sir Brother Sun to the Eucharist confirms the idea that in *The Canticle*, stanzas one to four and ten to fourteen, as in the *Letter to the Entire Order* (27-29) one can find both the symbol of Christ as exemplar of humility and the exhortation to respond by imitating his humility. These two writings have been shown to be linked by the idea of Christ in the Eucharist as universal Mediator and reconciler. The theology of the *Letter to the Entire Order* (12-13) was clearly influenced by the Christological hymn in Colossians, which expresses the same idea

<sup>1189</sup>The Order of Mass, The Roman Canon, *A Simple Prayer Book*, p. 66.

<sup>1190</sup>*CtC* 14, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 113-4.

<sup>1191</sup>*LtOrd* 27.

<sup>1192</sup>*LtF* 6-13.

<sup>1193</sup>*LtOrd* 29 / *ER* XVI, 10-11; XI, 5-6; V, 13-14.

of Christ's universal mediation: '...for *in him* all things in heaven and earth were created ... and *in him* all things hold together ... and *through him* God was pleased to *reconcile* to himself *all things, whether on earth or in heaven*, by making peace *through* the blood of his *cross* (Col 1:15-20).'

Francis' adaptation to the Eucharist of the Scriptural text above, which refers to the Cross, also suggests that the Cross would have been for him a symbol of Christ as universal mediating centre, interchangeable with the symbols of the Eucharistic host and of Sir Brother Sun. This symbolism is also suggested in *The Office of the Passion*, which proclaims that Christ, '...brought *salvation* in the *midst* of the earth.'<sup>1194</sup> This evokes the image of the cross as the Tree of Life, in the centre of the new earth of Revelation (Rev 21:1).<sup>1195</sup> The reference is immediately followed in Francis' *Office* by: 'Let the *heavens* rejoice *and the earth* exult',<sup>1196</sup> showing the universal efficacy of the Cross of Christ as mediating centre. Like the image of the Eucharistic host united to Sir Brother Sun, Francis' prayer also envisioned Christ on the Cross raised up above the earth:

'Let the whole earth tremble before His face  
tell among the nations that the Lord has ruled from a tree.'<sup>1197</sup>

Another writing of Francis also points to the Cross of Christ as the focal point for all creation:

'Let every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths, give  
*praise, glory, honour and blessing*  
To Him Who suffered so much,'<sup>1198</sup>

There is a link between this text and stanza one of *The Canticle*, through the common reference to Revelation (Rev 4:9,11; 5:12-13). The praise of all creatures which is due to the one who suffered on the Cross, is here described here in the same terms as the praise of all creatures due to the Most High, especially with Sir Brother Sun.<sup>1199</sup> In this way, Francis' Christological imagery indicates a correspondence between the Cross, the Eucharistic host and Sir Brother Sun, all symbolising Christ, raised up above the earth as the universal Centre and focal point of all creation.

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<sup>1194</sup>*OfP* Ps 7, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>1195</sup>*Ibid.*, Commentary. Bonaventure also used this imagery of the Cross as centre, when he wrote of '...the mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who is like the tree of life in the middle of paradise (Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*. IV, 2, Boehner trans., p. 7)'.  
<sup>1196</sup>*OfP* Ps 7, 4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>1197</sup>*OfP* Ps 7, 9, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 147.

<sup>1198</sup>*LtF* 61, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 49.

<sup>1199</sup>*CtC* 1, 3.

Francis' thinking in the *Letter to the Entire Order* was influenced by the text from Colossians (Col 1:15-20), as shown earlier. It is also apparent that the Christology of this hymn underlies *The Canticle*. Stanzas one to four of *The Canticle* represent Sir Brother Sun as Christ, 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15). Sir Brother Sun is also marked out among the creatures as the 'head' or 'firstborn' of all creation (Col. 1:15) by the word 'especially' and the title 'Sir'. He is the first part of creation to be mentioned in *The Canticle*, just as light comes first in the first Genesis creation story and God calls it 'Day' (Gen1:3-5). Corresponding to this first creature in Genesis, Sir Brother Sun, in *The Canticle* 'is the day' and through him God gives light. His primacy in creation gives Sir Brother Sun a central, mediatory position between the Creator and creation, communicated in language resembling the doxology of the Mass as shown earlier. Light is given to creation '*through*' him and all praise from creation is returned especially '*with*' him to the Most High. It is also stated in Colossians that all things are created '*through him*' (Col 1:16) and all things are reconciled to God '*through him*' (Col 1:20). In Colossians, as in *The Canticle*, therefore, a two-way Creator-creature mediation is represented.

There is another aspect of relationship in both the doxology of the Mass and Colossians: '*in him* all things hold together (Col. 1:17)', and 'in the unity of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>1200</sup> A mediation *in* Christ is also detectable in *The Canticle*. This hymn represents Francis' thinking that the example of the humility of Christ enlightens human beings to be reconciled to their enemies, as explained earlier. In stanza three, this idea is described metaphorically in reference to Brother Sun, '...who is day and through whom You give us light.' The symbol of light also denotes the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the unity of the Spirit, according to the doxology, all creatures return glory to the Father. The recognition of other creatures as 'brother' and 'sister' rather than enemy presupposes the vision of the spirit, or 'the true light' of wisdom in which they are perceived, just as physical light must be prior to any bodily sight of creatures.<sup>1201</sup> The description of Brother Sun as 'day' could point to this metaphor of illumination through Christ, since it resembles St. Peter's depiction of Christ the Daystar, rising in the hearts of Christian believers (2Pet 1:19). Brother Sun is presented as the head and centre of the fraternity he reveals, as shown by his first

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<sup>1200</sup>*A Simple Prayer Book*, p. 70.  
<sup>1201</sup>*LtF* 66-7.

place among *The Canticle's* creatures. The light of wisdom mediated through Brother Sun as centre reveals that ...'everything is related to every other thing because everything is related to Christ who is "Brother Sun," the radiance of the Most High', as Delio observed.<sup>1202 1203</sup> Thus, *The Canticle's* symbolism implies that in the light of Christ as exemplar, people are reconciled with each other. This brings about the unity in diversity of the whole cosmos, according to the will of the Creator, so that all creatures return glory to the Father 'in the unity of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>1204</sup> This shows how, in *The Canticle*, the friend-enemy coincidence in the 'horizontal' dimension of Francis' theological structure is Christocentric. *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* also conveys Francis' belief that human beings needed the light of Christ in order to carry out God's will, as observed in the previous chapter.

The idea of cosmic mediation in Christ can provide further insight into *The Canticle*. The passage from the *Letter to the Entire Order* (*LtOrd* 12-13), like the Christological hymn in Colossians, points to the participation of all creation in the Creator-creature coincidence in Christ, understood in his cosmic dimension: 'for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created ... and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:16-17).' Examination of *The Canticle* in this light reveals the same understanding. While all praise belongs to God alone,<sup>1205</sup> nevertheless, all creatures are praised with God, and they are led in this privilege by Sir Brother Sun. He enjoys a special status among creatures, due to his 'likeness' to the Creator, and yet is brother to them all. This suggests that the creatures, headed by Sir Brother Sun, have some participation in the Creator. It is also significant that the Christological context discussed so far points to Christ as universal Mediator, and yet the Most High is praised through each of *The Canticle's* creatures.<sup>1206</sup> The proviso, 'in him' would resolve this apparent contradiction.<sup>1207</sup>

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1202Delio, *A Franciscan View of Creation*, p. 43.

1203Parag. above cf., Knowles, *An Exploration of the Eucharistic Foundation for a Franciscan Theology of the Environment*, pp. 16-18.

1204*LtOrd* 13.

1205*CtC* 1-2

1206Although there has been much scholarly debate about the translation of 'per' in *The Canticle*, the present reading favours, with Pagliaro, the translation 'through' (Pagliaro, A., 'Il cantico di frate sole', p. 218-35, in: Fumagalli, 'Saint Francis: The Canticle', pp. 52-7). This translation makes sense in terms of a reading of the creatures' return of goodness to God in Christ, and in imitation of his example, as will be explained later.

1207Nguyên-Van-Khanh has already proposed, with reference to other writings of Francis, that creatures praise God in Christ (Nguyên-Van-Khanh, *Teacher of His Heart*, p. 230).

The descriptive language of *The Canticle* suggests that creatures participate in the divine qualities of Sir Brother Sun. As the exemplar among creatures, he is described first. Then, 'Sister Moon and the stars', like him, are 'beautiful'. The word, '*clarite*' describes their shining, while Brother Sun is similarly '*radiante*'. Sister Water is 'humble' and it has been shown that Brother Sun represents Christ, as the exemplar of humility, whom humans are exhorted to imitate. As the creature who illumines the night,<sup>1208</sup> Brother Fire reflects Sir Brother Sun 'who is the day' and gives light to creatures.<sup>1209</sup> Added to this, the Creator-creature mediation is seen to operate through the creatures, as through Sir Brother Sun, in the God-to-world direction. While Sir Brother Sun is the creature *through* whom the Most High gives light to the world, similarly, *through* Brother Wind, God sustains all creatures<sup>1210</sup> and *through* Brother Fire God gives light in the night.<sup>1211</sup> Therefore, there is a way in which the creatures of *The Canticle* bear the image, not only of the Trinity, as explained earlier, but also of Christ. By being 'in him', the creatures coincide with the Creator-creature coincidence in Christ. They share in his role of mediating God's goodness to the world, and of returning glory to the Most High Trinity, since God is praised '*through*' each of them. Although all the creatures mediate aspects of the divine, Sir Brother Sun has primacy among them, on account of his special likeness to the Most High.<sup>1212</sup>

It can now be seen that, with its verbal links to the doxology, *The Canticle* represents the idea of the Eucharistic body of Christ in a cosmic setting. It has been explained how Sir Brother Sun is understood as 'the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15)'. This Christological hymn also presents Christ as 'the head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18)'. Correspondingly, *The Canticle's* Christology points to Sir Brother Sun's being conceptualised as the head of the *cosmic* body creation. Just as the body receives its direction from the head, so, in union with Christ, all creation follows his example, reflecting and sharing the goodness of the Creator. The extended metaphor of the mystical body of Christ, found in the First Letter to the Corinthians, sheds light on idea of the cosmic body in *The Canticle*. The author of this Letter explains that, though members of the body have diverse functions, they are interdependent parts of one body, so that the functioning of one

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1208*CtC* 8.

1209*CtC* 3.

1210*CtC* 6.

1211*CtC* 8.

1212*CtC* 4.

member benefits the whole (1 Cor 12-27). Likewise, as observed earlier, the creatures of *The Canticle* form a diverse but interdependent unity under Christ, who is the head and centre of their fraternity '... and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:17). ' This union of all creatures in Christ expresses a coincidence of Creator and creature, as does the Incarnation. If the Creator is praised through creatures in Christ, there is a sense in which God is praising Godself, as Pozzi proposed in his interpretation of the passive structure, 'be praised'.<sup>1213</sup> In this light, it is reasonable to translate '*per*' as 'through', since God praises Godself *through* the creatures in union with Christ. Since all give glory to God by serving creation as a whole, each creature both gives and receives God's goodness. The mutuality of the creatures thus reflects that of the Trinity.

This examination of *The Canticle's* Christology in the context of the Scriptural and liturgical texts cited above leads to the conclusion that the Christocentric coincidences of Creator-creature and enemy-friend are both represented in the theological imagery of *The Canticle*. This hymn, therefore, communicates an understanding of the mediation of Christ as universal centre drawing all creatures into union with each other (horizontal coincidence: enemy-friend) and with God (vertical coincidence: Creator-creature). The Eucharistic undertones of Christ's cosmic mediation in *The Canticle* have been observed. Christian doctrine understands union with Christ in the Eucharist as a two-way union, which could be visualised as vertical and horizontal: with God and with other human beings in one mystical body of Christ (1Cor 10:17).<sup>1214</sup> The *Letter to the Entire Order* points to this universal reconciliation in Christ '... in Whom that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God.'<sup>1215</sup>

The evidence examined above indicates that stanzas one to nine serve as an example to human beings of how to be in union with the Creator, in and through Christ. Francis claimed in *Admonition Five* that all other species did the will of God better than humans.<sup>1216</sup> In *The Canticle*, he seems to have envisioned these other creatures inviting divided and alienated human beings to join the cosmic fraternity, by reconciling with all creation through giving pardon and enduring in peace. *The*

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<sup>1213</sup>Pozzi, 'From Grammar to Prayer', p. 11-14.

<sup>1214</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14, (London, Catholic Truth Society, 2006) p. 17.

<sup>1215</sup>*LtOrd* 12-13.

<sup>1216</sup>*Adm V*, 2.

*Canticle* teaches that 'those' humans who do this participate with the other creatures in the Creator-creature coincidence in Christ, since God is also praised *through* them.<sup>1217</sup> Nevertheless, Francis could not yet speak of the human species as a *whole*, as 'Brother/Sister' to each other and to Christ. He felt the need to write an exhortation to 'all those men and women who are not living in penance'.<sup>1218</sup> *The Salutation of the Virtues* presents and celebrates ideals for human imitation and *The Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* sees the source of these ideals as the light of the Spirit.<sup>1219</sup> Likewise, the diverse reflections of Christ's light in *The Canticle's* creatures are celebrated as ideals for human God-conformity. As Bonaventure's theology esteems sense-perceptible creatures, so they are similarly valued in *The Canticle*: 'they are vestiges, images and spectacles proposed to us for the contemplation of God. They are divinely-given signs'.<sup>1220</sup> However, other creatures' reflection of qualities first named in Sir Brother Sun and the indicators of his creational primacy point to Christ himself as the supreme exemplar.

Among creatures, humans are called to an especially close conformity with Christ, as *Admonition Five* teaches. They are created in his *likeness* as well as in his image.<sup>1221</sup> Christ, as human exemplar, embodies the goal of the human journey, which is union with God.<sup>1222</sup> To follow in Christ's footsteps leads a person into perfect union with the Trinity.<sup>1223</sup> Hence, *The Canticle* encourages humans to look to the light of Sir Brother Sun, who bears the *likeness* of the Most High, and to take on this likeness by doing God's will<sup>1224</sup> 'with great humility'.<sup>1225</sup> A basic form of Christological exemplarism is, therefore, discernible in *The Canticle*, especially when it is studied in conjunction with *Admonition Five* and with the emphasis on the *imitatio Christi*, which pervades Francis' writings, as explored in chapter three.

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1217*CtC* 10.

1218*LtF* II, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 43.

1219*SalBVM* 6.

1220Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*. II, 11, Cirino and Raishl, eds., p. 369.

1221*Adm V*, 1.

1222As Bonaventure later wrote: '...we have already reached something perfect when we contemplate our humanity so remarkably exalted and so ineffably united in Christ, the Son of God, who is by nature the image of the invisible God... (Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum* VI, 7, Cirino and Raishl, eds., p. 397).

1223*LtOrd* 50-52 / *ER* XXII, 41-55 / *2LtF* 4-14, 51-60.

1224*CtC* 13

1225*CtC* 14.



### Alpha and Omega

Francis' writings contain ample evidence that he believed the role of the human person in the cosmos was to give back glory to the Creator, for all the good of creation.<sup>1226</sup> Francis saw creation as a good, which came into being from the Trinity, through Christ,<sup>1227</sup> and returned to the Trinity through the human person, together with all creation, in union with Christ. This is evident in *The Earlier Rule*, when Francis petitions Christ to return the thanks of all humanity and creation through him to the Father. The thanks comes through the prayer of Francis and the mediation of Christ.<sup>1228</sup> Thus it that the mediation of Christ brings creation back to its source, so that its beginning and end coincide in the eternal Trinity. *The Canticle* articulates this coincidence by stating that all good is of God<sup>1229</sup> and exhorting creation to return all praise and thanks to God.<sup>1230</sup> Here, as in *The Earlier Rule*, this dynamic of *egressus* and *regressus* is Christocentric. In the God-to-world direction, Sir Brother Sun is represented as 'the firstborn of creation' and 'image of the invisible God', Mediator of God's light to the world.<sup>1231</sup> Regarding *regressus*, all human praise for creation is returned to the Creator *especially with* Sir Brother Sun, on account of his mediatory position between Creator and creature, since he 'bears a likeness' of the 'Most High'.<sup>1232</sup>

The coincidence in Francis' theological vision, in which the Trinity is both beginning and end of all good in creation was discussed in chapter one. Consistent with this vision, *The Canticle* depicts the Most High as the source, to whom all creatures belong<sup>1233</sup> and the end, to whom all owe praise and thanks.<sup>1234</sup> This coincidence is reflected in the structure of *The Canticle*, which starts by affirming that all *praises, blessing and honour* belong to God alone and ends with the exhortation to '*Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks.*'<sup>1235</sup> It resembles the cyclic structure of other writings, for example, in this prayer from *The Office of the Passion*: 'All-powerful, most holy, most high, supreme God: all good, supreme good, totally good,

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<sup>1226</sup>ER XVII, 17-18 / *OfP*, 11 / *2LtF* 61-2 / *1LtCus* 6-8 / *LtR* / ER XXI, 1-2.

<sup>1227</sup>*2LtF* 12 / ER XXIII, 2-3.

<sup>1228</sup>ER XXIII.

<sup>1229</sup>*CtC* 1-2.

<sup>1230</sup>*CtC* 14.

<sup>1231</sup>*CtC* 3.

<sup>1232</sup>*CtC* 4.

<sup>1233</sup>*CtC* 3.

<sup>1234</sup>*CtC* 1, 14.

<sup>1235</sup>*CtC* 14.

You Who alone are good, may we give You all praise, all glory, all thanks, all honour, all blessing and all good. So be it! So be it! Amen.<sup>1236</sup>

Furthermore, *The Canticle's* structure is suggestive of the cycle of the whole of Christian creation and salvation history. Beginning with the transcendent Creator as origin of all good (stanzas 1-2), there follows the symbol of *light* in Sir Brother Sun (3-4). Light is God's first act of creation on the first day, in the first creation story of Genesis chapter one, and God calls the light 'Day' (Gen 1:3-5). Likewise, Sir Brother Sun, 'who is the Day' is the first creature named and celebrated in *The Canticle*. In Genesis, the light of Day is not identical with 'the greater light to rule the day' (Gen 1:16). God creates this latter, the sun, on the fourth day, along with the moon and stars. Genesis presents the light of Day as the primordial light in which God creates the heavens and earth. This light illumines and marks out the first three days of creation, even before the sun is created on the fourth day. This would suggest that 'Sir Brother Sun who is the Day' has greater creational primacy than the sun created on the fourth day, or other created lights such as Sister Moon and the stars or Brother Fire. This representation of the first light of creation in Genesis influenced the concept of the eternal Word in the Prologue to John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God (Jn 1:1).' 'The Word' in this Prologue is also identified with the symbol of light: 'The true light, which enlightens everyone was coming into the world (Jn 1:9).' This imagery corresponds to Sir Brother Sun, through whom God gives light to the world.<sup>1237</sup> In Genesis, the light of Day illumines each of the days of God's creative work. It is in this light that God's other creatures come into being. As John's Prologue states of the Word: 'All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people (Jn 1: 3-4).' The combined effect of these Scriptural associations with the symbol of Sir Brother Sun points to Christ as firstborn of creation, through this imagery of light.

Next after light in the Genesis creation story, God creates diverse non-human beings, animate and inanimate, on days two to six. Likewise, after Sir Brother Sun in *The Canticle*, the diverse elements of non-human creation are introduced and celebrated in stanzas five to nine. The final act of creation on the sixth day in the

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<sup>1236</sup>*PrH* 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 162.

<sup>1237</sup>*CtC* 3.

Genesis account is the creation of human beings. Similarly, at the end of *The Canticle* in stanzas ten to eleven, humans are brought in, after the other creatures in stanzas five to nine. Stanzas ten to eleven make clear that human beings are affected by suffering and sin, by exhorting them to 'give pardon', 'bear infirmity and tribulation', and 'endure in peace'. Similarly in the sequence of Genesis, sin comes into the world through man and woman in chapter three, when they disobey God. The consequence of this sin is death, which God decrees for them, '...you are dust and to dust you shall return (Gen 3:19).' Correspondingly in *The Canticle*, following the stanzas concerning sin-affected humanity, Francis introduces Sister Bodily Death in stanzas twelve to thirteen. She is the enemy of all life 'from whom no one living can escape'. Perhaps she is also 'Sister' because, like the creatures in stanzas five to nine, Francis understood her to be doing God's will in creation. To those human beings who also do God's will, her embrace is a blessing. This stanza assumes and proclaims the salvific effects of the Passion and Resurrection of Christ according to the Gospels and New Testament writings. As Francis believed, these were the events which made physical death a birth into eternal life for those who believed in Christ and followed his example. For Francis, as a Christian, the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, opening humankind's way of reconciliation to God, were the climax of creation and salvation history. Accordingly, these events are ushered in by implication at the end of *The Canticle*. The term, 'second death', taken from the Book of Revelation, also evokes the final victory of Christ in the end times. 'The second death' means everlasting death after the Last Judgement (Rev 2:10-11; 20:6,14).

As the light of Day illumines each of the days of God's creative work in Genesis, so the other creatures come into being in the light of Sir Brother Sun 'who is the Day'. This is implied by *The Canticle's* links to the imagery and structure of this creation account and its resonances with the Prologue to John's Gospel. It follows that it is by this most essential light, 'the true light which enlightens everyone' (Jn 1:9), that humans are able to 'give pardon' and 'endure in peace', and to meet Sister Bodily Death as a friend. Stanzas ten to thirteen, then, represent the salvation of humankind through Christ.

Pointing to a coincidence of the Alpha and the Omega in the Creator, the language of stanza fourteen echoes that of stanza one. To similar effect, the first stanza in praise of the Creator evokes the end times, echoing the heavenly worship

pictured in Revelation (Rev 4:9,11). Summarising *The Canticle's* message, stanza fourteen invites all creatures, including human ones, to return glory to God through praise, blessing, thanks and humble service. Thus the last stanza, like the first, strives for the unity of the whole cosmos in worship, as described in Revelation:

'Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing,  
 "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be *blessing* and *honour* and *glory* and *might* forever and ever!<sup>1238</sup>  
 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshipped. (Rev 5:13-14).'

To the same purpose, Francis wrote *The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*, which draws similarly on Revelation<sup>1239</sup> as a cosmic invitation to worship, as does a passage in *The Second Letter to the Faithful*<sup>1240</sup> and the *Exhortation to the Praise of God*.<sup>1241</sup> The prevalence of such texts indicates that this eschatological idea of a cosmos unified in praise of God was the desired end in Francis' theological vision.

It is now apparent that the sequence of themes in *The Canticle* follows the pattern of a condensed creation and salvation story, according to Christian Scriptures: the eternal Creator as source (*CtC* stanzas 1-2), the coming of light (3-4), the creation of heavens and earth and non human creatures (5-9), the human race – sin – suffering – death – the example of Christ and the salvation (10-13), with the Creator as end and all honour and blessing is to return to God (14). This reflected sequence, beginning and ending in eternity with God, is highly significant. It indicates that *The Canticle* encompasses an entire theological vision including the mysteries of creation, the Incarnation and salvation and therefore, that Francis had such a panology in mind. As Pozzi's study of *The Canticle* rightly pointed out, the whole piece is deliberately designed as a complete hymn to reflect the totality of creation in relation to God.<sup>1242</sup> It seems unlikely, then, that stanzas ten to fourteen were added as afterthoughts.

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1238 cf. *CtC* 1

1239*PrH* refrain cf. Rev 4:8, *PrH* 2 cf. Rev 4:11, *PrH* 3 cf. Rev 5:12, *PrH* 6 cf. Rev 19:5 *PrH* 8 cf. Rev 5:13, *PrH* 11 cf. Rev 5:12.

1240*LtF* 61 cf. Rev 5:13.

1241*ExhP* 1 cf. Rev 14:7, *ExhP* 15 cf. Rev 5:12.

1242Pozzi, 'From Grammar to Prayer'.

## Conclusion

It has been established that the 'Most High' represents Francis' concept of The Trinity as Creator of the cosmos. *The Canticle* also points to certain coincidences of opposites in the Trinity, which may be seen in other writings of Francis. In his perception of the Trinity is a coincidence of the hidden and the manifest. The Creator, to whom *The Canticle* is addressed, is hidden by being 'Most High', beyond the perception of erring humans and beyond the grasp of their language or understanding.<sup>1243</sup> Yet Francis' writings also show that the Trinity is manifest in creation, since God's nature is revealed to human beings in and through Christ. Francis' concept of Christ, in whom Creator and creature coincide, and who functions as universal Mediator, was explored in chapter two. Correspondingly, Christ is symbolised in *The Canticle* by Sir Brother Sun, occupying a position between Creator and creation, and appears as the Mediator, who reveals the image of the Creator. Christ is depicted symbolically as the primordial light of Day, who enlightens humankind with the knowledge of the ineffable God, through God's creatures.

The unity of the Triune Creator has been found to coincide in *The Canticle* with the multiplicity of creatures existing in union with God. These creatures, celebrated in stanzas three to nine, reflect the unity-diversity coincidence, which other writings reveal in Francis' concept of the Trinity. *The Canticle* depicts the whole cosmos giving back glory to God in this way. Moreover, God is praised through each individual creature, since each expresses God's goodness in particular qualities, which it shares for the benefit of the rest of the cosmos. This is how the creatures in stanzas three to nine do God's will, according to Francis, and merit the name 'Brother' or 'Sister'. Within this coincidence of unity and diversity in God's creatures, another coincidence which Francis' writings depict in the Trinity is also evident. This is the coincidence of co-equality with order. In Francis' view of the Trinity, the Father has primacy as the source and end of all God's action, although all three Persons are co-equal, as observed in chapter one. In *The Canticle*, the cosmos, which reflects its Triune Creator similarly depicts a co-equal fraternity of creation. In this fraternity, Sir Brother Sun, nevertheless, has primacy, as the head of the cosmic body, or 'firstborn' of creation. Non-human creation thus united to the Creator in Christ can also be seen as coinciding with the Creator-creature coincidence in him. The message of *The*

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<sup>1243</sup>*CtC* 1-2.

*Canticle* is that every human person is called to the same union with the Creator through reconciliation, in love of enemies. In this way the whole universe may become Christoform, reflecting the image and likeness of God.

The study of *The Canticle* in this chapter has highlighted the dissonance between the references to humanity and to non-human creatures. The latter are depicted as a harmonious cosmic fraternity, in a communion with their Creator, which centres on Sir Brother Sun. However, human beings are not worthy to mention God and are not called brother and sister. The implication is that, as a race, they do not do God's will. The other creatures become examples to them, reflecting Christ by their particular virtues, as do the Sisters in Francis' *Salutation of the Virtues*. *Admonition Five* also states that all other creatures do God's will better than humanity. Human beings' insertion into the cosmic fraternity is seen as dependent on their reconciliation to their enemies and to their own suffering, mortal nature. They have to do God's will by meeting Bodily Death as their friend and Sister, in imitation of Christ. Thus, they regain their created likeness to Christ, which shines out in Sir Brother Sun's example of humility. This is humanity's way back to eternal life in union with God. In Christ, their abjection coincides with glory, and their death opens the way to eternal life. This is clear since *The Canticle* proclaims that death will not harm people who follow Christ and these will be crowned by God in heaven. These ideas for human conversion and peacemaking in *The Canticle* have been shown to be consonant with the coincidence of enemy and friend in Christ, as expressed throughout Francis' writings.

Focusing more deeply on the Christological symbolism in *The Canticle*, this has been found to be linked to the Christology evident throughout Francis' writings. Attention was given to its resonances with the Christology of Colossians (Col. 1:15-20), the Prologue to John's Gospel and the doxology of the Mass. Considered in this context, the Christological symbolism of *The Canticle* points to an understanding of Christ as universal Mediator, by reason of the coincidence of Creator and creature in his Person. There is evidence that Christ is conceptualised as supreme exemplar for all creatures, and particularly for imitation by humans. His universal exemplarism is founded on his creational primacy, since *The Canticle* presents Sir Brother Sun as 'the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation.' He is the human exemplar by virtue of his being the perfect likeness of the Creator, a likeness humans

are created to express, according to *Admonition Five*. The salvific coincidences of friend and enemy and suffering and glory in stanzas ten to thirteen appear in the God-given illumination of humanity through Sir Brother Sun. He is the head and centre of the fraternity consisting of creatures who do God's will, and his light shows humans how to do the same. In particular, Francis holds up Christ's virtue of humility for imitation throughout the writings. This ideal applies also to *The Canticle*, as shown by stanza fourteen, and by the connection of *The Canticle* with the *Letter to the Entire Order* (*LtOrd* 27-29) through the Eucharist. Examination of *The Canticle's* Christology in the context of the doxology of the Mass, of the Letters to the Colossians (Col 1:15-20 and Corinthians (1Cor 12-27), has shown how this hymn depicts Christ using Eucharistic imagery, as the head of creation which is understood as his cosmic mystical body. Overall, Christ, symbolised by Sir Brother Sun, is portrayed as the universal centre and reconciler of all creatures, 'in Whom that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to Almighty God.'<sup>1244</sup> It has been shown how the themes of *The Canticle* follow the biblical sequence of creation and salvation history. The hymn begins with the Trinity, as origin of all created good, in stanzas one to two. It ends with the ideal of humans' return to eternal life and glory with God, through their imitation of Christ, and united with the cosmos in worship, in stanza fourteen.

In conclusion, this study of *The Canticle* has shown that its ideas harmonise with the theology expressed throughout Francis' writings, although this hymn tends to communicate its theology in an indirect, symbolic way. Its symbolic and implicit meanings are elucidated by comparison with Francis' theology in other writings. This is because there is a significant correlation between the themes and imagery communicated by *The Canticle* and those expressed in other writings of Francis. *The Canticle* embraces all the coincident structures, which have been shown to be key components of Francis' theological vision. It contains the coincidences in the Trinity of unity and plurality/diversity, the hidden and the manifest, co-equality and order, the coincidences centred on Jesus Christ, of Creator and creature. Between creatures, it contains the coincidence of friend and enemy, at the centre of which Christ functions as universal Mediator, reconciler and human exemplar. His mediation leads to human beings, in union with Christ, joining in creation's reflection of certain coincidences of

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<sup>1244</sup>*LtOrd* 12-13.

opposites in the Trinity: unity and plurality/diversity, co-equality and order. *The Canticle's* cyclic structure is similar to that found in other written texts of Francis, which start from the Triune Creator as source of all good, and end with the return of all good to its divine source, through the human person in union with Christ. This structure presents the Trinity as the Alpha and Omega of creation.

The theology expressed through *The Canticle*, written at the end of Francis' life, harmonises with that in writings produced much earlier in his converted life, and with texts written in different genres. For example, in common with *The Prayer Before the Crucifix* (1205-6) it was shown that *The Canticle* (1225) relates to God as both hidden and manifest, using the imagery of enlightenment. This broad consistency, however, does not lead to the assumption that Francis' theological vision was fully developed from the earliest stages of his conversion, and remained static for the rest of his life. While the seeds of major elements of his panology seem to have been present in the writing of *The Prayer*, there are indications of development in his vision between this and the time of his writing *The Canticle*. Regarding illumination, for example, there is a significant shift in perspective. In *The Prayer*, Francis, contemplating an image of Christ as the light, nevertheless feels himself to be interiorly in darkness, and petitions God for the light, which will enable him to know the Most High and the divine will. Contrastingly, Francis writes *The Canticle* from the perspective of one who has been given the interior illumination he once sought, although, as an early source reports, his physical sight is now in darkness.<sup>1245</sup> His hymn of praise and thanks to God is for the light of Christ in which he now prays and sees the world interiorly. In this light, he sees and knows God's will for creation. His *Canticle* seeks to share that light with all human beings. The *Prayer*, which Francis made for himself alone before the Crucifix became a *Canticle* of praise made in union with the whole cosmos and on behalf of all humanity. This suggests that his theological vision may have become more universal and all-encompassing as the years passed. To explore the temporal growth of Francis' theology in detail is beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to say, judging from the two representative writings explored, although his theological vision seems not to have altered over time in its essential features, his perspective could have shifted, and the scope of his vision expanded with his accumulated experience of following Christ.

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The theology of *The Canticle* has also been proved consistent with that found in Francis writings in other genres. Correspondences have been shown between the symbolic Christology of *The Canticle* and the Eucharistic theology expressed in two writings of different genres: *Admonition One* and the *Letter to the Entire Order*. It has been demonstrated that the language of both *The Canticle* and chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* resonates with that of the doxology of the Mass and with the Christology of the Letter to the Colossians (Col.1:16). It has been established that the theology of *The Canticle* is consistent with the theology communicated through Francis' writings in general. This study of *The Canticle* leads to a further conclusion, that it is a summary of Francis' theological vision. The hymn contains all the coincidences of opposites, recognizable throughout the writings, which give structure to Francis' theology. It is perhaps the clearest expression among the writings of his entire theological vision, although in a symbolic and poetic form. This is because *The Canticle* communicates a panology, spanning the mysteries of the eternal Creator, Jesus Christ, the whole of creation, human beings within that creation, salvation, death, eternal life and the end times. Because it represents all these topics in symbolic form, this work comes close to a summarised visualisation of Francis' complete theology.

*The Canticle* functions in this way when one considers the full meaning of its imagery in the context of the theology extrapolated from Francis' entire body of work. Francis was an imaginative, dramatic, artistic thinker, so it is highly likely that he thought in visual symbols. The vision he sets out in this poem can provide indications of the structure of his theology as a whole. The theological picture begins with the 'Most High', who is the Creator of all things, but is invisible and far beyond human grasp. Between creation and the Creator is Sir Brother Sun, representing Christ, who mediates the image and knowledge of the invisible and ineffable 'Most High'. He is understood metaphorically as 'the true light', which enlightens everyone, and which was coming into the world (Jn 1:9). This symbol of Christ is interchangeable with that of the Eucharistic host and of the Cross which, in other writings, are also raised up for the praise of all creation, as its centre.<sup>1246</sup> Sir Brother Sun shines above the panoply of creation. All creatures come into being in his light and are revealed in the truth of their uniqueness and relatedness. Sir Brother Sun is both Creator and a

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<sup>1246</sup>LtOrd 12-13, 21-29 / Adm I / 2LtF 61 / OfP VII, 3-4, 9 / Test 5.

creature, but he is first among the creatures. He is the perfect creature because of humility, by virtue of which he empties himself of power and assumes a lowly form, fully accepting the most abject poverty of created nature.<sup>1247</sup> His own kenosis reveals the nature of the Creator as kenotic love, and shines as an example for all creatures.<sup>1248</sup> This poverty is, therefore, his glory, and the glory of those humans who conform their lives to his.<sup>1249</sup>

The coincidence of Creator and creature is apparent in Sir Brother Sun, since he occupies a central place between the Most High and creation. United around this centre are all non-human creatures, in their rich diversity. They are perfectly and uniquely themselves, as God created them to be, yet they are united with all the other beings which differ from them, and they share their unique created goodness with the whole of creation.<sup>1250</sup> Their coincident unity in diversity/plurality and hierarchy in their co-equality, reflect that of their Creator, the eternal Trinity. The non-human creatures are brother and sister to each other, because they all do the will of God, and are thus brother or sister to Christ, who is the centre of the cosmic fraternity.<sup>1251</sup>

Humanity, *The Canticle* implies, is somewhat disjointed from the cosmic fraternity, since humans need to be reconciled with themselves, with each other and with God.<sup>1252</sup> Their divisions are not God's will, and so they are not integrated with the brother and sister creatures of the cosmos. However, their vision can be enlightened by Sir Brother Sun.<sup>1253</sup> In his light, humans can see the way to be reconciled to themselves, to God and to each other by entering into communion with Christ. Enlightened by him, people can accept their own mortal natures and meet death as sister, without fear or enmity, according to Christ's example of humility. Thus conformed to him, they enter into eternal life with him. The essence of accepting human creaturely nature in humility with all its suffering and trials, is captured in the words: 'endure in peace'... 'and bear infirmity and tribulation'.<sup>1254</sup> Through union with Christ in the depths of his humility, people also unite with him in his divinity. They enter into the coincidence of Creator and creature in him, which

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1247*LtF* 4-13, 61 / *ER* XXII, 32 / *Adm VI*, 1; *I*, 14-17.

1248*CtC* 2 / *ER* XXII, 41 / *Adm I*, 4, 19.

1249*CtC* 10-11 / *LtOrd* 28 / *CtExh* 5-6.

1250*CtC* 5-9 / *ER* XXIII, 1, 11; XXI, 2 / *PrOF* 1.

1251*Adm V*, 2 / *2LtF* 48-50.

1252*CtC* 2, 10.

1253*CtC* 3.

1254*CtC* 10-11.

this study visualised in the vertical dimension. In this union, they experience the coincidence of poverty and riches, abjection and glory.<sup>1255</sup> Hence: 'Blessed are those who endure in peace, for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned'<sup>1256</sup> In the light of Sir Brother Sun, humans also see the need to reconcile among themselves, by treating enemies as friends, according to Christ's example.<sup>1257</sup> This is captured in the words, 'Blessed are those who give pardon for love of You'.<sup>1258</sup> Here is the aspect designated throughout this study as the 'horizontal' coincidence of enemy-friend in Christ's example. Only by being reconciled 'vertically' with their own created nature, by virtue of humility, and 'horizontally' with their enemies, personal and impersonal, can human beings be brother and sister with Christ, and be in union with the Creator and the rest of creation.<sup>1259</sup> By doing this, enlightened by Christ's example, they share in his Creator-creature mediation in both directions: by revealing something of God's image and likeness to the world in a Christian life of service in humility, 'which must shine before others by example,'<sup>1260</sup> and in this way also giving back glory to God.<sup>1261</sup> This is why *The Canticle* proclaims that God is praised only by those humans who love their enemies and who bear suffering and accept death patiently.<sup>1262</sup> For this reason, the praise of God is linked in the same sentence with the service of God in humility.<sup>1263</sup> Francis' theology is experiential, as chapter five explained, so words of praise to God are dead words, unless they are lived in service.<sup>1264</sup>

It has been shown that *The Canticle*, understood in the context of all Francis' writings, places Christ as the universal centre, mediating between the 'Most High' Trinity and creation. This hymn also reveals the dynamism of Francis' vision, which could be summarised as follows: through Sir Brother Sun, God diffuses the light that is the likeness of the Creator in creation,<sup>1265</sup> through the fraternity of creatures and humans in union *with* Sir Brother Sun, the praise and thanks of creation returns to the Creator. Christ, as creation's exemplar or firstborn, holds all the non-human creatures

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1255 *Adm VI*, 1-2 / *LR VI*, 1-5.

1256 *CtC* 11.

1257 *LR X*, 10 / *ER XXII*, 1-4 / *2LtF* 38 / *Adm IX*.

1258 *CtC* 10.

1259 *2LtF* 48-50.

1260 *2LtF* 53, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 49.

1261 *CtC* 14.

1262 *CtC* 10-13.

1263 *CtC* 14.

1264 *Adm XXI*, 2-3; *XIV*, 2-3, *VII*.

1265 *CtC* 3-4 / *2LtF* 63-67 / *Adm I*, 4, 17-19.

together in fraternal union. The light of Christ, as human exemplar, draws humans to reconcile with each other by giving pardon.<sup>1266</sup> It leads them to accept all aspects of creation in the humility and obedience to God's will, to which the whole *Canticle* gives voice. It calls human beings into the fraternity of a creation that does God's will, reflecting the unity in diversity of the Trinity. And so, by an exemplarism entailing coincidences of opposites, Christ gathers 'all Your creatures'<sup>1267</sup> into union with each other and with God.<sup>1268</sup>

*The Canticle* presents an ideal of all creation involved in the mutual kenosis that characterises the relationship of the divine Persons. God pours out the divine light of the Spirit into creation through the Son (Brother Sun).<sup>1269</sup> As well as the act of creation itself, this symbolises the kenosis of God in the Incarnation, life and death of Christ: his blood poured out in the Eucharistic sacrifice, in Gethsemane and on the Cross.<sup>1270</sup> Following this exemplar of humility, each creature pours out its distinctive being for the benefit of all, reflecting and returning glory to God with Christ.<sup>1271</sup> In this way, the other creatures give humans an example of participation in divine kenosis. For sin-affected humans, this kenosis entails accepting suffering, loss and Sister Death as aspects of creation like themselves, rather than as enemies to be avoided.<sup>1272</sup>

*The Canticle* summarises a total theological vision that is essentially and profoundly both Trinitarian and Christocentric, with no conflict or contradiction between these two aspects. The integration of these two main elements, as presented through *The Canticle's* symbolism, may be described as follows. The hymn begins with the Most High Trinity as Creator, and depicts all creation in union with Christ, reflecting this mystery. Christ, symbolised by Sir Brother Sun, is depicted as a creature, yet one with the Creator, whose perfect likeness he expresses. He is, as portrayed throughout the writings, the universal Mediator between Creator and creation, by virtue of the coincidence of these opposites in his Person. Therefore, it is through him that God is revealed in creation. It is especially with him that the praise

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1266*CtC* 3, 10.

1267*CtC* 3.

1268*LtOrd* 13, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 117.

1269*CtC* 3.

1270*ER* XXIII, 1-3 / *2LtF* 4-13 / *Adm I*, 9-11, 16-22.

1271*CtC* 3, 14.

1272*CtC* 10-13.

of creation returns to the Creator. In *The Canticle*, he is depicted as first among the creatures, occupying a central place between creation and the transcendent Creator. His creational primacy is symbolised in a way which can be understood in terms of exemplarism and illumination. As the perfect creature, bearing the likeness of God, his self-diffusive goodness is the blueprint for all creatures. Stanzas ten to fourteen imply that, as the exemplar for humanity, Christ's profound humility and obedience to God's will, in kenotic love, draw human beings to follow his example. Thus, they join him in returning glory to God. Their kenosis is expressed as praise, thanks and service in humility. In this way, they reflect the Trinity in its unity in diversity and self-diffusive goodness. *The Canticle* begins with the transcendent Trinity as source of all goodness in creation. It ends with creation returning all praise to the Trinity, through human beings united to Christ, the supreme Mediator. Therefore, the panology of *The Canticle* is profoundly Christocentric and Trinitarian. This finding suggests that there is no discrepancy between Francis' devotional Christocentrism as portrayed in his early hagiography and the Trinitarian focus of his writings. Consistent with this study of Francis' theology in all the writings, *The Canticle* depicts a theological vision in which Christocentrism and Trinitarian focus are integrated and are both essential features.

It has been found that the symbolic theology of *The Canticle* both communicates and summarises the coincidences of opposites that have been highlighted throughout the writings of Francis. Overall, the evidence examined leads to several conclusions. Firstly, Francis had a coherent theological vision, encompassing everything that exists. Secondly, this vision can be understood in terms of certain coincidences of opposites already explained. Thirdly, Francis' theology is both Trinitarian and Christocentric in focus and fourthly, it is expressed consistently through Francis' writings in diverse genres, and at various times in his life.

## Conclusions

### Approach to the topic

The main focus of this study has been the message left by Francis, rather than his personality and life story. This research into his message has concentrated upon writings which, as is known with reasonable certainty, Francis himself penned or dictated. It has not relied upon accounts of his teaching and intentions in the early sources for his life. After Francis' death, developments in the Church and in the Order of Friars Minor gave rise to conflicting views among the brothers of Francis' intentions for their way of life. Therefore, the early accounts of Francis' life cannot be accepted indiscriminately as objective historical records. They could be affected by the various biases of their authors, who often had political interests in presenting Francis' message in a certain way. For this reason, as mentioned earlier, many writers have urged caution in extracting Francis' teaching from his early biographies, and recommended his own writings as more reliable. While Francis' writings have been the focus of this study, it has necessarily taken into account what is known of the historical background to their composition, where this is important for interpreting their meaning accurately.

This study has approached Francis' writings from the viewpoint of theology. The aim was to show that Francis could rightly be called a theologian, according to a wider interpretation of the word than its technical or professional sense, since Francis was not trained as a theologian. However, the challenge of summarising his theology has proved to be an obstacle in assuming this viewpoint. Adopting Matura's definition of one who discovers, and transmits in words, a vision that relates everything to God, this study set out to demonstrate that Francis' writings collectively expressed such a comprehensive theological vision.<sup>1273</sup> An inter-textual approach was taken to Francis' compositions. Almost every writing of Francis in volume one of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* has been referred to in the course of this study, and some have been analysed in detail. This study has shown that the individual texts may be understood more deeply in relation to each other. It has demonstrated how recurring themes and images across the writings gave them a certain unity, which showed that they emerged from a common theological vision. A clear summary of this vision was also presented, in order to substantiate the claim that Francis was a theologian.

<sup>1273</sup>Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' p. 14.

This study relies on a large body of previous research, which has led to modern critical editions of the authentic works of Francis. Previous studies have also researched into the historical background to the composition of the texts. The value of Francis' own writings as primary reference sources for his authentic life and thought has been established in previous research. Other authors have also identified a profound theological content within the writings of Francis. On the basis of all this research, as Matura stated, 'The way has now been cleared for discerning the comprehensive, global vision which is surely to be found, either explicitly or at least implicitly, in Francis' writings.'<sup>1274</sup> The most thorough attempt to summarise the theology of Francis, solely from his writings, was Matura's own synthesis. However, this author himself stated his hope that others would further develop and refine his work.<sup>1275</sup> The present study could add to previous theological summaries in three main ways.

One way is by identifying the imagery and symbolism in Francis' theology, and including its meaning in the overall synthesis. For instance, it has been demonstrated how Francis used imagery of light and darkness as part of a consistent theological language across his writings. The Christological symbolism attached to Sir Brother Sun in *The Canticle of Brother Sun* helps to reveal Christ as the centre of his panology, and the hymn as a symbolic representation of this vision. It has been shown how the symbols of the virtues in the *Salutation* and the creatures in *The Canticle* stand for the ideal of unity in diversity in human relationships.

A second additional aspect of this study is its reassembling the theological fragments in the writings into a vision which can be viewed in summary form, by means of a simple diagram. Understanding how all the elements of Francis' theology fit together as a whole vision removes the lack of structural clarity which has been an obstacle to the general acceptance of Francis as a theologian. In the course of this study, it has been found that Christ is the centre of Francis' theological vision. As the goodness of creation comes into being from the Trinity through the Son, so it returns as praise and service through, with and in the Son. Therefore, the Trinity is the Alpha and Omega of creation. Within the Trinity, the Father has primacy as the origin and end of the creation, salvation and restoration of all contingent beings. The goal in

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<sup>1274</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 26. p. 14.

<sup>1275</sup>Matura, *Francis: The Message*, p. 173.

Francis' theology is union for the human person: with other humans, with the rest of creation and with the Trinity. In each case, this unification comes about through union with Christ. Consequently, Francis' spirituality focuses upon what he calls 'following in the footprints' of Christ.<sup>1276</sup> As Francis saw it, to follow Christ in his self-emptying humility, and in loving enemies all the way to the Cross, involved a person in a coincidence of abjection and glory. In the Cross, God's kenotic love found its fullest manifestation. In this way the suffering and death of Christ are understood as his glory. For those who followed Christ in accepting suffering out of love, this became a personal reality. Their suffering in union with Christ was their exaltation in union with the 'Most High'.<sup>1277</sup>

### **The coincidence of opposites as a tool**

This leads on to a third additional development in the present summary, which is the use of the coincidence of opposites. This mode of thought was employed as a tool in the present study to unify and reassemble the theological fragments in the writings. Instances of the coincidence of opposites in Francis' theology have been described by Matura and other authors, although without using the actual term. This confirms that it is an intrinsic feature of Francis' thought.

As a unifying key, the coincidence of opposites has certain advantages. The three main classes of coincidences of opposites: in the Trinity, in Christ and between creatures, and the relationships between these classes, bring to light a structure within which his entire vision can be reassembled. The usual type of coincidence found in his writings involves a 'falling together' of two concepts from opposition to unity and difference. This can be understood in the wider context of Francis' spirituality as a conversion, from a vision limited by human experience to a faith vision of revealed divine truth. Francis' writings make clear that this conversion, or 'doing penance', as he calls it, has the goal of union with Christ. This necessarily involves sharing his vision and his prayer for human beings, "I wish, Father, that where I am, they also may be with me that they may see my glory in your kingdom."<sup>1278</sup> The prayer of Christ for other humans also envisions a perfect union between them all, which will

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<sup>1276</sup>*LtF* 13 / *ER* I, 1 / *LtL* 12 (Bartoli Langeli ed.)

<sup>1277</sup>*LtOrd* 51-2.

<sup>1278</sup>*LtF* I, 19, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42 / cf. *2LtF* 60 / *ER* XXII, 55.



reflect the unity of the Trinity, "...that they may be sanctified in being one as we are."<sup>1279</sup> Thus, the type of coincidence of opposites which has been extrapolated from Francis' writing is dynamic rather than static. It is bound up with the essential dynamism of his vision, which concerns human conversion and reconciliation.

Use of the coincidence of opposites in the present study built on the work of previous authors. Nicholas of Cusa's writings brought the *coincidentia oppositorum* into use as a philosophical tool. H.L. Bond, in the introduction to his English translation of Cusa's works, provided a succinct general definition of the tool: '(1) the method of logically setting opposites into harmony and (2) the principle of viewing opposites as reconciled.'<sup>1280</sup> Cousins' study of the works of Bonaventure argued that the coincidence of opposites was the key to his entire thought system. Cousins also commented that this trait in Bonaventure's thought could have been due to the influence of his founding father, Francis of Assisi.<sup>1281</sup> A study by Martignetti employed the coincidence of opposites in the analysis of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae*.<sup>1282</sup> Martignetti enlarged on Cousins' assumption that this thought structure was characteristic of Francis' work. He traced the influence of the coincidence of opposites in Francis' writing back to the Christian Neo-Platonic tradition, from Augustine of Hippo to Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of St. Victor.<sup>1283</sup> The present study built on the ideas of the authors mentioned above by testing the coincidence of opposites as a key to Francis' theological vision. In Cousin's study, three possible types of coincidence of opposites were described: 1) unity, 2) difference and 3) unity and difference. The third type was said to characterise Bonaventure's thought.

Using these descriptions as a frame of reference, this study identified the type in Francis' thought as 'unity-and-difference' in general, but not exactly as Cousins described this third type. For Francis, the opposites do not complement each other or intensify their opposition in coincidence. Rather than remaining opposites, they tend to 'fall together', as differing concepts reconciled in a harmonious union. While Cousins identified five classes of coincidence of opposites in Bonaventure's system, three have been designated in Francis' panology.

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<sup>1279</sup> *LtFI*, 18, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 42 / cf. *LtF* 59 / *ER* XXII, 53.

<sup>1280</sup> Bond, *Nicholas of Cusa*, p. 22.

<sup>1281</sup> Cousins, *Coincidence*, p. 164.

<sup>1282</sup> Martignetti, R.S., *Saint Bonaventure's Tree of Life: Theology of the Mystical Journey* (Rome, Frati Editori di Quaracchi, 2004).

<sup>1283</sup> Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, pp. 143-4.

From the perspective of the cosmic dimension of Christ, implicit in Francis' theology, the coincidences of opposites between creatures are completed in him. In Francis' thought, the category of coincidences between creatures and God typically occurs in the Incarnate Word, in whom the natures of God and creature coincide. In the Person of Christ is found the perfect union of God and creation, and so, coincidences of opposites between Creator and creature are fulfilled in him. Furthermore, for Francis, Christ is always understood and perceived in the context of the Trinity. Thus, there is a sense in which the three classes of coincidence of opposites can move up inside each other and be reduced to a single class - in the Trinity.

### **Originality in Francis' theology**

This research has found that Francis had an all-encompassing theological vision, which was communicated through his writings. In order to confirm him as a theologian, it is also necessary to identify some element of originality in his presentation of the Christian faith. There are a number of unique elements in his vision.

As shown in chapter one, Francis' language about the Trinity uses a careful discipline in its efforts to convey a balanced impression of the Creator's 'Undivided Unity' with the plurality and diversity of hypostases.<sup>1284</sup> The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are described as having distinct roles in relation to each other and to creation. Nevertheless, properties relating to their missions to creation are also presented as being shared by the Persons, in the unity of the divine essence. In this way, although Francis portrays the primacy of the Father as the initiator and end of the divine mission, the Persons are seen to share equally in the glory returned to God in the gratitude of creation. Francis never mentions the Trinity without adding 'and Unity'. The unity of the Creator is variously described as 'holy', 'simple' and 'undivided'. The diverse plurality of creation is always referred to its source in this divine unity.<sup>1285</sup> The perfect unity in plurality/diversity of the Trinity, which Francis called 'the highest good', is the starting point of Francis' theology, and seems to exemplify the unity into which all creatures are called. Overall, this study has found that, while appearing

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<sup>1284</sup>*ExhP* 16, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 138.

<sup>1285</sup>*PrH* 8 / *ExhP* 6, 11, 12 / *Adm V*, 2 / *CtC*.

simple on the surface, Francis' language about the Trinity communicates Christian doctrine with both theological precision and creativity.

Francis also taught his own unique approach to the following of Christ. To him, it was a process of transformation, which led a person into a unity of vision with Christ. In this union, Jesus' teaching and example would also be manifest through the person's life. Francis set out the steps required in 'doing penance' which would lead to this goal. These are summarised in his *Letters to the Faithful* as follows: 1) wholehearted love for God and neighbour, 2) casting off the appropriated self, 3) receiving the Word Incarnate in scripture and the Sacrament of the Eucharist, 4) putting the teaching and example of Christ into practice in one's own life and 5) union with Christ and, through him, intimacy with the Trinity. For Francis, sharing the viewpoint of Christ had two major effects. The first was an outlook of universal fraternity. All other human beings would be perceived and loved as friends and siblings, even those who attacked him. A second implication was that one would pray in union with Christ and from his perspective.

Francis' interpretation of Jesus' command to love one's enemies (Mt 5:44), which was detailed in chapter four, is one of the most singular aspects of his theology. From this teaching, he did not simply understand that he was to try to do good to persons he regarded as enemies. With added depth of reflection upon Jesus' example in calling his betrayer 'friend', Francis understood that he was not even to *regard* other human beings as enemies. He saw that this required a radical inversion of what he perceived as an enemy, from an other who threatened oneself, to the very self which felt threatened because it was appropriated. Francis' interpretation of the command to love enemies rested on his basic insight that love and appropriation were opposite dynamics. The true enemy was that which obstructed the ability to love. That enemy was the desire, which could take root in the heart, for the acquisition and defence of possessions.

Therefore, Francis presented the need for a conversion of vision in the wider context of two opposite ways of seeing. He distinguished and contrasted these two visions by associating them with the scriptural concepts of body and spirit at war in the human person (Rom 7:14-25). The vision of the body was associated with the instincts of appropriation, and the vision of the spirit, with the impulses of kenotic love. The conversion of outlook, which Francis counselled in order to love enemies,

reached beyond a person's attitude to other human beings. Its implications extended to the rest of creation and even to general concepts. For example, a human being with nothing to defend need not be afraid of what animals might do to him or her.<sup>1286</sup> It could be inferred, therefore, that in the course of a person's conversion of vision, a wild animal could change from a perceived threat or 'enemy' to a fellow creature, or 'friend'.

In Francis' thought, the strength needed to love another, who opposed or attacked the self, came from the virtues, which were gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1287</sup> Francis saw that to live according to the vision of the spirit, without any concern for defence of self, a person must be open to all enemies, 'visible' or 'invisible'.<sup>1288</sup> Therefore, he tended to associate with the love of human, or 'visible' enemies the acceptance of general conditions to which self-defensive instincts were opposed, which could be called immaterial or 'invisible' enemies. For instance, sickness, hardship and persecution were conditions which must often be accepted, in order to love human enemies of the body/ego.<sup>1289</sup>

Francis' theology recognised the greatest of these invisible enemies, according to the body, as death itself.<sup>1290</sup> In *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, death has been befriended and is addressed as 'Sister'.<sup>1291</sup> She has a place among all the creatures in the cosmic fraternity. Death is not portrayed as an enemy, but rather, a blessing to those who are living according to the vision of Christ.<sup>1292</sup> The implication is that this greatest of enemies was befriended by Christ, when he offered himself to death, together with his visible human enemies, in his Passion.<sup>1293</sup> From the fourth chapter's exploration of the coincidence of friend and enemy in Francis thought, it is clear that his interpretation and application of Christ's command to 'love your enemies' is highly original. His profound insight into this particular Gospel teaching has far reaching implications throughout his entire vision.

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1286*SalV* 14.

1287*SalV* / *SalBVM* 6 / *LR* X, 8-12 / *ER* XVII, 14-15.

1288*ER* XVI, 10-11 / *Adm* X.

1289*Adms* XXII; IX; VI; III, 7-9 / *Test* 1-3 / *TPJ*.

1290*ER* XVI, 15-21.

1291*CtC* 12.

1292*CtC* 13.

1293*ER* XXII, 1-2.

The second implication of sharing the viewpoint of Christ is praying in him, from his perspective. As discussed in the Literature Review, the habitual focus on the Father in the Trinity in Francis' prayer and theology has led some authors to question his Christocentrism. Others have rightly suggested that Francis was so personally centred on Christ that he almost never addressed him in prayer. He preferred to pray together with Christ, to the Father. The most strikingly original example of such prayer is his *Office of the Passion*. As explained by Cirino and Gallant, this prayer was compiled mainly from lines taken from the Book of Psalms. Using lines from various psalms, Francis created fifteen 'psalms' of his own. Most of these pseudo psalms imaginatively recreate scenes from the Passion of Christ, notably, from his viewpoint. Rather than the psalmist, the speaker of the prayers is imagined to be Christ himself and he is addressing the Father.<sup>1294</sup> Francis, when praying this psalm, could feel united with Christ, both in the act of praying and in his Passion. Likewise, his extensive quotations, in three writings, from chapter seventeen of John's Gospel, are a strong indication of his desire to share Christ's prayer. In this chapter, Jesus prays to the Father. Francis, dictating extracts from this prayer, created for himself and his readers an opportunity to pray in union with Christ, using Christ's words. Furthermore, it helped them to share the desires and priorities expressed in Jesus' prayer to the Father. The passage quoted from John chapter seventeen always includes two desired ends: that human beings might be one with each other, as Christ and the Father were united in the Trinity (Jn 17:22), and that they might be united with Christ and share his relationship with the Father (Jn 17:24). As detailed in chapter two, Francis often used the words of Christ in the Gospels to communicate his message. His writings show a preference for the Our Father, a prayer worded by Jesus.<sup>1295</sup> The evidence summarised above shows that the theme of following Christ and becoming united with him receives unique treatment in the works of Francis. It is taken to the extent of personally assuming Christ's vision, perspective, words and desires. This is especially evident in his creatively inventive *Office of the Passion*.

As well as being united with Christ in prayer, Francis liked to pray in union with all his fellow creatures. Instances of his praying alone are very few and he tended to use first person plural in his written prayers. He habitually included all human

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<sup>1294</sup>Cirino and Gallant, *Geste of the Great King*.

<sup>1295</sup>ER XXII, 28 / ER III, 5-6, 10 / LR III, 3 / PrOF.

beings and the rest of creation with him, or exhorted them to join him in his efforts to return praise and thanks to the Trinity. This gives much of his writing something of a liturgical style. His stance of offering praise to the Father, together with the Church and creation, echoes the prayer style of the Divine Office and the doxology of the Mass.

*The Canticle of Brother Sun* is a hymn of praise to God involving the whole cosmos. It is also a summary of Francis' theology, involving symbols. To create such a summary was not the conscious intention of the author, according to an early account of its composition.<sup>1296</sup> However, because it includes all the main elements of his faith: the Creator, the totality of creation, Christ and salvation, in an integral form, it offers an overview of Francis' theological vision. *The Canticle*, like certain other writings, such as chapter twenty-three of *The Earlier Rule* and *The Second Letter to the Faithful*, is remarkable for the breadth of its scope. It offers, on a cosmic scale, a view of all reality related to God, from the viewpoint of a person sharing the vision of Christ. The ideals of giving pardon, of viewing the enemy, death, as Sister, and of desiring the whole of humanity and creation to be united in returning praise and service to God, show, in the light of Francis' other writings, that the speaker of the hymn shares the vision of Christ. Thus, *The Canticle* alone shows its author to be a theologian, according to Matura's criteria.<sup>1297</sup> Nevertheless, its theological significance needs to be explored in the context of Francis' message across the writings, in order to appreciate this hymn fully as a representation of his panology. Chapter seven of the present study has done this. That it should have been summarised in such an accessible form now appears to mark out the individuality of Francis' theology. *The Canticle* was composed in the Umbrian dialect, the everyday spoken language of the region in which its author lived. Furthermore, it was intended to be sung and, according to some early accounts, Francis taught it to the friars so that they could sing it. Because its style is rhythmic, repetitive and simple, it would have been easy to memorise. A person would not have needed to be educated in reading and writing, in Latin or in any language, in order to learn it. Children could have learned it. Although it would take in-depth study of Francis' writings and of scripture to uncover the full depth of meaning in *The Canticle*, the description of Sir Brother Sun as the one who

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<sup>1296</sup>AC 83.

<sup>1297</sup>Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?', p. 14.

bears the image of the unseen God and gives light to the world would have triggered scriptural associations with Christ in the minds of many, even if unconsciously. Moreover, certain key goals of his theology would have been easily communicated to the singers and hearers of this hymn: reconciliation with one's personal enemies and acceptance of hardships in peace, losing one's fear of death by doing God's will, unity with the whole of creation in returning praise and thanks to the Creator. There is probably no other theologian who has managed to transmit the essential components and dynamics of his vision in such a simple and accessible form.

From the above overview of the distinctiveness of Francis' theology, it is clear that there are original elements in his interpretation and presentation of Christian doctrine. Collectively, these elements give his theological vision a character which is unique to Francis. It is not shared with Bonaventure or with any other scholar in the Franciscan tradition. Therefore, Francis was not only the founder who inspired Bonaventure's theology. It can justifiably be claimed that he was a theologian in his own right.

### **Structural summaries**

At the start of this research, the need was identified for a summary of the structure of Francis' theology which could be visualised. This could aid the understanding of his vision as a whole and facilitate the communication of his theology. Various representations of the structure of Bonaventure's thought system have long been available. Cousins illustrated it using the images of a gothic cathedral and of a mandala.<sup>1298</sup> Bonaventure himself presented all reality as a circle, the centre of which is located by means of a cross.<sup>1299</sup> Such a representation of the structure of Francis' vision seems to have been lacking in previous research. Chapter seven has already shown that *The Canticle of Brother Sun* can function as a summary of Francis' vision, which makes use of symbolism. However, some of the main elements of its author's theology are only communicated verbally; the reconciliation of enemies and redemption through the Cross are two examples. The Triune Creator is referred to by the title 'Most High, all-powerful, good Lord'. Apart from the hidden and the manifest, the main elements of Francis' Trinitarian theology are only implied by their reflections

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<sup>1298</sup>Cousins, *Coincidence*, pp. 43-51, 172-197.

<sup>1299</sup>Bonaventure, *Collations on the Six Days*, de Vinck, trans., p. 13.

in creation. Therefore, *The Canticle* has certain drawbacks as a visual representation of its structure. Two alternative suggestions will now be given for an image to represent a summary of Francis' panology. The first will be an image already common in the Franciscan tradition, which could be used in such a way. The second will be a simple diagram, which could easily be drawn.

### **i. The San Damiano Crucifix**

The San Damiano Crucifix, reproduced in Appendix two, dates from the twelfth century, and was painted by an unknown artist in Umbria.<sup>1300</sup> According to one hagiographical source for his life, it was a focus for Francis' meditation at an early stage of his conversion, and he composed a prayer before it.<sup>1301</sup> How much influence this Crucifix may have had on Francis' theology can only be speculated from a comparison of its imagery with the ideas in his writings. The compatibility of its theological imagery with some main aspects of Francis' thought has already been shown in chapter six. In addition, the symbols in this icon offer a spectrum of possible interpretations. This allows them the scope, with a little imagination, to represent the structure of Francis' theological vision.

At the very top of the picture, there is a depiction of the Trinity: Christ ascending to heaven, where the angels are gathered, the hand of the Father receiving him and the 'finger of God's right hand', symbolising the Holy Spirit.<sup>1302</sup> These Persons of the Trinity are enclosed in a circle and a semi-circle, since the circle represents perfection.<sup>1303</sup> The red colour within it symbolises love and divinity and unites these two areas.<sup>1304</sup> Corresponding to these visual features, Francis often referred to the Triune Creator as 'Most High'.<sup>1305</sup> He considered the total sharing in unity among the Persons to be 'the highest good', the archetype for goodness and the source and end of all created good.<sup>1306</sup> The Trinity occupied the highest place in his vision and was the beginning and end point of his theology.

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<sup>1300</sup>Baldyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 7.

<sup>1301</sup>As stated in chapter six, the *Prayer* is found in two manuscripts of *The Legend of The Three Companions*.

<sup>1302</sup>Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, p. 12.

<sup>1303</sup>Barret, C., et al., *The Crucifix of Saint Damian: A Way of Conversion*, V. Gill, trans., (Assisi, Fonteviva Editrice, 1988) p. 22.

<sup>1304</sup>Barret, C., et al., *The Crucifix of Saint Damian*, p. 20 / Baldyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 16.

<sup>1305</sup>ER XXIII, 11; XVII, 16-17 / *PrsG* 2-3 / *LtOrd* 1, 52.

<sup>1306</sup>*PrsG* 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 109.



The centre of this painting is, of course, the intersection of the vertical and horizontal lines of the Cross. The vertical can represent all that is implicit in the coincidence of the 'Most High' Creator with the most low, or the furthest extreme of humility in a creature.<sup>1307</sup> Thus, glory in heaven at the top and abjection at the lowest point, where there is a black area around Christ's feet, the colour black symbolising death.<sup>1308</sup> The vertical may also suggest the hidden and transcendent at its highest point, where the Father and Holy Spirit are represented, but the upper portion of the circle is out of sight, and the manifest or immanent at its lowest point.<sup>1309</sup> The horizontal line can correspond to the coincidences between creatures, which end in their reconciliation and unity: friend and enemy, unity and plurality/diversity. Christ is the centre of all these coincidences. He is both Creator and creature; 'true God and true man'.<sup>1310</sup> The coincidence of hidden and the manifest in God is centred on Christ, whom Francis' writings present as the image of the invisible God in creation (Col 1:15).<sup>1311</sup> In the painting, the aspect of hiddenness is suggested by the shadow veiling Christ's face.<sup>1312</sup> Glory and abjection coincide in his Passion, and both glory and suffering are depicted in the Crucified Christ of the icon, as also shown in chapter six. The coincidence of enemy and friend occurs in the vision of Christ and is focused on the example of his Passion.<sup>1313</sup> As explained in chapter seven, he is the head and centre of the fraternity of creation, in whom the plurality and diversity of creatures finds its unity. Correspondingly in the icon, Christ is depicted at the centre of both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Cross. His function as Creator-creature Mediator is represented in his sole garment - the priestly *perizoma*.<sup>1314</sup> His stance on the Cross, with raised arms and upturned hands, is one of prayer. Likewise, Francis' writings presented him interceding for humanity with the Father in quotations from John chapter seventeen. Consonant with the Johannine metaphor of light, which recurs in Francis' Christology across the writings, the body of the Crucified in the icon appears to emanate a golden light, which, in iconography, symbolised divinity and eternity.<sup>1315</sup>

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1307 *LtF* 4-13 / *OfP* Ps VII, 3.

1308 Barret, C., et al., *The Crucifix of Saint Damian*, p. 20.

1309 Barret, C., et al., *The Crucifix of Saint Damian*, p. 24.

1310 *ER* XXIII, 3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 82.

1311 *Adm I* / *CtC* 3-4.

1312 Picard, *The Icon of the Christ of San Damiano*, pp. 18-20.

1313 *ER* XXII, 1-4.

1314 Baldyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 14.

1315 Baldyga, *San Damiano Cross*, p. 11 / Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, p. 10.

The 'horizontal' coincidences of opposites in Francis' thought occur between creatures in the vision of human beings. Apart from the angels, all the other creatures in the image are depicted in the bottom half of the Crucifix, from the horizontal beam downwards. On the whole, creation is represented by human and angelic figures, with the exception of the rooster, which also symbolises the dawn, and Christ's triumph of light over darkness.<sup>1316</sup> In the icon, one can see human figures placed opposite each other at the right and left ends of the horizontal. They are said to be looking into the tomb, represented by the black area.<sup>1317</sup> Death is the deepest object of all fears which separate human beings from each other. In Francis' vision, this fear is removed by the Cross and Resurrection of Christ for those in union with him.<sup>1318</sup> In the Crucifix, his illuminated body, alive, with open eyes, is superimposed on the darkness of the Cross between the two human figures, a hand seemingly extended to each. Francis' writings teach that, while fear places enmity between people, the example of Christ's Passion reconciles them as friends.<sup>1319</sup> The union of friend and enemy in the vision of Christ is also represented beneath his arms. Here, one can see Mary, his mother, with John on his right, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, wife of Clopas, with the centurion on his left.<sup>1320</sup> The centurion, who crucified Christ but came to believe in him, stands with his friends.<sup>1321</sup> On the edges of these groups of his friends, but depicted smaller, are one of the Jewish leaders, who appears to be mocking him, and the soldier traditionally known as Longinus, who pierced the side of Christ after his death.<sup>1322</sup> They too are gathered with his friends beneath Christ's arms. Francis wrote that Christ willingly offered himself to his enemies.<sup>1323</sup> For his followers, those who attacked them were likewise to be loved and regarded as friends.<sup>1324</sup> They remained enemies only in the objective sense that their destructive intent or action continued. Positioned on opposite sides of the Cross, the gentile Roman soldier and the Jewish teacher would have viewed each other as enemies. Yet, according to Francis' thinking, they would have been united in the vision of Christ, who regarded all human beings as friends.

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1316Barret, C., *et al.*, *The Crucifix of Saint Damian*, p. 38.

1317Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, p. 10.

1318*CiC* 13 / *ER* XVI, 10-21.

1319*ER* XXII, 1-4, 52-3 / *LtOrd* 12-13 / *ILtFI*, 17-18.

1320Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, p. 16-17.

1321Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, pp. 18-19.

1322Goonan, *Crucifix that Spoke to Francis*, p. 19.

1323*ER* XXII, 2.

1324*ER* XXII, 3-4.

Aside from the characters who can be named, a multitude of spectators is represented behind the left shoulder of the centurion. These could stand for all the members of the human race from whom Christ lived and died.

Therefore, this icon can be seen to represent the 'horizontal' reconciliation of creatures with one another and 'vertical' reconciliation of creatures with the Creator, which featured in Francis' thought.<sup>1325</sup> The centre of both these reunions was Christ. As detailed in chapter two, Francis' theology viewed Christ as the way of return for all the good of creation to its source in the Trinity. Similarly, the Crucifix gives an impression of upward movement towards the Trinity. Christ appears to ascend in triumph to the Father, both in the upper part of the Crucifix, and in his regal stance on the Cross, with upturned hands and straight legs. As the way to the Father, he leads, and brings with him, the human beings gathered together under his arms.

The above interpretation does not attempt to discern the original intentions of the icon writer. Rather, it is a suggestion of how the San Damiano Crucifix might be used to symbolise the entire picture of Francis' theology. The compatibility of its imagery with Francis' vision and the cosmic scope of its subject matter make it suitable for this task. Of course, no symbolic summary will be a perfect representation of Francis' vision. Each will have its limitations and omissions, for which the mind must compensate. One drawback of this image is its lack of representation of non-human creation, apart from angels. The incorporation of the non-human elements of creation is a strength of *The Canticle*. As a visual summary, the Crucifix has the possible advantage that it consists entirely of non-verbal symbolic images. It also depicts the Trinity, which *The Canticle* does not. However, it does not represent the coincidences of opposites in the Trinity. Another alternative for a symbolic summary will now be suggested. It could represent the overall structure of Francis' vision in a much simpler way, with less detail, and would be easy to reproduce.

## **ii. The anchor diagram**

The anchor, depicted in Appendix three, is a traditional Christian symbol of hope. At its centre is the symbol of faith, which is the Cross. This is an appropriate symbol for Francis' theology, because Christ at its centre is the means of reconciliation, among creatures and with the Creator, the focus of hope for the world in Francis' thought.

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<sup>1325</sup>*LtOrd* 12-13.

At the top of the anchor is a circle, which can symbolise eternity. In this realm is the Creator, whom Francis called the 'Most High'. Within the circle is represented the Trinity - the three corners of the triangle stand for the three Persons, and their initials can be added there, so that the Second Person is pointing downwards. If the circle also stands for the unity of the divine essence, the coincidences in the Trinity, between unity and diversity and unity and plurality, can be symbolised through this traditional Trinitarian emblem of a triangle within a circle.

As with the previous image, the lowest point in the diagram is associated with the lowest point of Christ's descent in humility, into the existential poverty of the human condition, and then into death. The central, vertical line of the diagram can be understood as this dynamic of Incarnation in Francis' thought. The Creator is at the top of the line and, at the bottom, the curved hook of the anchor can represent the entire creation. In the centre, the Cross symbolises Christ, in whose Person Creator and creature coincide. The Cross can, therefore, be understood symbolically as the centre of the earth. This resonates especially with Cirino and Gallants' translation from Francis' fifth Psalm in *The Office of the Passion*:

'For the most holy Father of heaven,  
our King before all ages,  
sent his beloved Son from on high,  
and brought about salvation in the centre of the earth.'<sup>1326</sup>

The horizontal line of the Cross can represent the coincidences between creatures, as discussed previously. There is also an area of intersection in his theology between the 'vertical' coincidence of Creator and creature, and the 'horizontal' coincidence of friend and enemy. As detailed in chapter four, the latter coincidence occurs with the emptying out of the appropriated self in a process of conversion. This kenosis is exemplified in the descent of the divine Creator into the most abject poverty of creaturehood.<sup>1327</sup> The 'vertical' coincidence of Creator and creature can also be understood in terms of God's salvific outreach to humanity, including those persons who acted as enemies of God.<sup>1328</sup> Thus, an area of intersection may be conceptualised, between the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' coincidences, corresponding to the centre of the cruciform structure.

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<sup>1326</sup>*OfP*, Ps VII, 3, Gallant and Cirino, *The Geste of the Great King*, p. 283.

<sup>1327</sup>*LtF* 4-13.

<sup>1328</sup>*Adm V*, 3 / *LtF*, 11 / *ER XXIII*, 8.

While the hook of the anchor stands for the whole spectrum of creation, the arrow-like ends can be understood as its human component. The diagram illustrates a main focus in Francis' theology, on the human need for reconciliation. The two tips are separated, from each other, and also from God, represented in the upper circle. In Francis' thought, Christ the centre reconciles opposites in both the horizontal and vertical coincidences. This two-dimensional movement draws human beings towards each other and towards God.<sup>1329</sup> In the diagram, one can imagine this two-way attraction ending in the completion of the arc of the anchor in a full circle. Thus, the human creatures would be united with each other and with the Creator at the top of the picture, and complete the unity of creation, which would be symbolised in the full circle. This would also depict the beginning and end of creation in the Trinity, as shown in chapter one. This alternative image is a simple way to suggest the overall structure of Francis' theology. Although it does not fill in much of the detail of his thought, it is easy to hold in the mind and to reproduce. It could be a useful visual aid in teaching Francis' theology in a sphere wider than the Franciscan world, in which the San Damiano Crucifix would not be so familiar or available.

### **Possibilities for future research**

The map of Francis' theological vision presented here could open up many possibilities for future research projects. Although the present research limited itself to Francis' thought, it could be interesting and fruitful to compare these findings with the work of his spiritual descendant, St. Bonaventure. In this light, one might make a new assessment of the amount of influence the 'Seraphic Father' had on the thought of the 'Seraphic Doctor'. Since they belonged to the same Order, with a set of common values, similarities in their theology would be expected. A dual Trinitarian and Christocentric focus, for example, is evident in the structures of both writer's visions. However, the present study also implies significant differences in their theology. Bonaventure's Trinitarian theology allows for a concept of the Second Person, the eternal Word, who could be considered separately from the Incarnate Word. Francis' Christology differs from this, since it never considers Jesus Christ separately from his eternal divine existence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. His references to the 'beloved Son', 'the Word of the Father', or other Christological titles, encompass both

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<sup>1329</sup>*LtOrd* 12-13.

the Word Incarnate and the Second Person in the eternal glory of the Trinity, without distinguishing between the two ideas. Another significant difference is that the type of coincidence of opposites, which the present study has found in Francis' thought, differs from the type that Cousins found in Bonaventure's thought. In Francis' type, elements which begin as opposites in human vision do not remain as opposites when applied to the Trinity or to Christ. They fall into a relationship of unity and difference. In Bonaventure's type of coincidence, according to Cousins, opposite ideas which coincide in the Trinity or in Christ remain as opposites, in a complementary relationship which intensifies their opposition. This type allows for the properties of the Second Person to be understood as the centre of coincidence for the properties of the First and Third Persons. The 'unity and difference in convergence' in Francis' thought would not allow these kind of opposites to be conceptualised in the Trinity. Thus, it is apparent that, if one accepts this distinction between the coincidence of opposites in the thought of the two writers, it leads to significant differences in the structures of their theological systems. This could raise many questions for further investigation: into Cousins' interpretation of Bonaventure, Bonaventure's interpretation of Francis, and Francis' own sources for the coincidence of opposites. The following or imitation of Christ is a central theme in the systems of both authors.<sup>1330</sup> However, as mentioned previously, only Francis took it to the radical extreme of assuming the viewpoint of Christ in prayer. There are several other elements of originality in Francis' thought, as mentioned above, which would not be found in Bonaventure's work. All of these points show that it would not be advisable to try to read the writings of Francis according to the theology of Bonaventure. As this research has shown, a theological system unique to Francis can be found through an inter-textual study of his writings.

This research presents avenues for further investigation into the sources of Francis' theology. Its findings suggest that an exploration of the influence of the San Damiano Crucifix on Francis' theology could be fruitful. Other writers have pointed to the possible influence of this icon on his faith vision,<sup>1331</sup> but its helpfulness in this study indicates that a more in-depth comparison of its symbolism with the theology

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<sup>1330</sup>Bonaventure wrote: 'The height of Christian perfection consists in the universal imitation of the acts of Christ.' (Bonaventure, *Apologia pauperum*, 2, 13, in: Quarrachi eds., *Opera Omnia*, vol. VIII, p. 243 [my translation]).

<sup>1331</sup>Martignetti, *Tree of Life*, pp. 145-7 / Barret, C., et al., *The Crucifix of Saint Damian*, p. 8.

throughout his writings could yield further insights. The present project has also brought to light more connections of Francis' thought to the liturgy of the Church, particularly the doxology of the Mass and the theology of scriptural canticles included in the Divine Office, such as Philippians 2:6-11, Daniel 3:57-88, Revelation 4:11; 5:9,10,12, and Colossians 1:12-20. These results hint that there could be more to discover about the influence of the liturgy on Francis' theology.

In the light of the present research, the development of Francis' theology over the years of his converted life could be further investigated, with reference to what is known of the historical progress of the movement he founded, and what the early sources report of situations and events which affected him. Francis' spirituality and teaching as reported in the early hagiography could also be compared with the theology extrapolated from his writings, using the latter as a touchstone of authenticity.

This study has presented a summary of Francis' theological vision, showing how its various elements relate to each other. Due to limitations of length, it has not been possible to examine every element in detail. Some have only been touched upon in relation to the whole. However, with the whole structure of his vision established, there is now scope for further research into the detail of various branches of his theology. Some examples might be: Francis' Mariology, his theology of the Eucharist, and his theology of creation.

Future study might also apply Francis' theology to questions relating to modern issues. For instance, he had particular insights into the mystery of creation. He saw non-human creatures in union with the Creator. In a fraternal unity in diversity, creatures returned glory to the Trinity just by being themselves, serving and being served by the other elements of creation. Thus, the non-human elements of creation set an example for human beings, who are estranged from themselves, from each other, from the rest of creation and from the Creator. These insights of Francis might be fruitfully applied to modern theological questions relating to ecology: considering the interdependence of ecosystems, the value of biodiversity, and the relationship of humanity to the natural environment.

Francis' radical and far-reaching interpretation of Jesus' command: "'Love your enemies'" could be applied to modern issues of peacemaking. His theology offers a unique collection of insights in this area. It teaches that peacemaking must begin with an inner conversion in subjective concepts of friend and enemy. This includes the

principles that no human being is to be regarded as an enemy, and that the true enemies of the human person are the instincts of fear and appropriation. A gradual conversion is then needed in habitual responses to all that seems to threaten or attack the self. The end result would be a kind of 'pacifism in action': a commitment to go out in love to be among human beings who seem to be against oneself and to endure in peace those conditions and states of being which oppose one's comfort and security. Issues of conflict are just as prevalent today as they were in Francis' lifetime and warfare takes place on a larger scale than ever. Francis' teaching on peacemaking could have much that is challenging to say when applied to today's situations of conflict.

Finally, this study could open up more possibilities for research to scholars who may disagree with its methods or findings and wish to suggest alternatives. This project has introduced the idea of the coincidence of opposites as a key to Francis' theological vision. Future studies may modify or further develop this approach. The coincidence of opposites could be one of many possible tools for understanding Francis' theology. This study has proved it useful for the purpose, since it is a prevalent feature of his thought. Further research may find other helpful tools. Nevertheless, using the coincidence of opposites, the present study has removed what has been a major obstacle to regarding Francis as a theologian by reassembling the structure of his unique vision.

### **St. Francis of Assisi: a theologian**

In conclusion, this research has found that Francis of Assisi satisfies all the requirements of a theologian, according to the definition by Matura, which was quoted in the Introduction.<sup>1332</sup> It has been shown how his diverse writings drew on a consistent vision of all reality related to God. His panology includes: the Trinity, Christ, the human person and all creation. The mysteries of the Incarnation, Passion and Eucharist are also embraced. In Francis' concept of reality, creation emerges as a gift of God's goodness from the Father in the Trinity, through the Son.<sup>1333</sup> It returns to him through, with and in the Incarnate Son, and human beings conformed to him. Thus, Francis' vision deals with everything that exists, and he writes about how all

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<sup>1332</sup>Matura, 'Francis - Theologian?' p. 14.  
<sup>1333</sup>ER XXIII, 1.



things are led back to God. Although it borrows many words and ideas from other sources, especially Christian scripture and the liturgy of the Church, Francis' vision has original elements in its presentation of Christian doctrine, as described above. The relative brevity of his works, their varied purposes and non-theological genres had made it difficult to summarise Francis' thought from his writings. However, through an inter-textual study of the message in these writings, taking the coincidence of opposites as a unifying idea, the present research has reassembled the fragments of his thought into a coherent theological vision. Using this key, and building on Matura's previous study of Francis' written message, this research has clarified the overall structure of Francis' theology so that it can easily be visualised. It has thus strengthened the case for viewing Francis as a theologian in his own right.

Another obstacle to regarding Francis as a theologian was his basic level of education. This meant that Francis did not count himself among those 'theologians' who had received a higher education as part of their clerical training.<sup>1334</sup> Therefore, he did not set out his thought in a systematic way, but wrote in response to needs, which he perceived at different times in his life. Although he was not a trained, professional theologian, this study has argued that he was a theologian in the wider sense, of one who communicated, in words, a vision of all reality related to God. The issue of Francis' level of education was addressed in the fifth chapter. It was argued that his theology could be described as 'experiential', rather than philosophical or systematic. It was not written in technical language, and affectivity clearly played an important role in his meditations on God. As proposed by Thomas Aquinas, 'experiential cognition', translated from '*cognitio experimentalis*', can apply to a way of thinking about God aside from rational comprehension of doctrine.<sup>1335</sup> This experiential cognitive approach to divine things relies more on love for God and a sense of union with God than on formal education. It is a gift of wisdom concerning things of God to a person who cultivates habits of living in tune with the divine will.<sup>1336</sup> For these reasons, the term 'experiential' is particularly applicable to Francis' theology, accommodating his level of education, his insistence on the praxis of God's word and the prominent role of affectivity in his reflections on God.

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<sup>1334</sup>Test 13.

<sup>1335</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 97, a. 2, ad 2, Forzani and Sodales, eds., p. 693, cf. Suto, 'Virtue and Knowledge', p. 62.

<sup>1336</sup>Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 45, a. 2, Forzani and Sodales, eds., p. 346.

Although Francis never considered *himself* to be a theologian, his early biographers observed that his lack of scholarly learning did not prevent him from having profound knowledge of the things of God through the scriptures, and communicating his insights by preaching. Thomas of Celano (d. 1260), a contemporary of Francis, and the writer of his first biography in 1228-9, wrote in his second life of Francis in 1245-7:

'Although this blessed man was not educated in scholarly disciplines,  
 still he learned from God wisdom from above  
 and, enlightened by the splendors of eternal light,  
 he understood Scripture deeply.  
 His genius, pure and unstained,  
 penetrated hidden mysteries.  
 Where the knowledge of teachers is outside,  
 the passion of the lover entered.  
 ...He affirmed that it was easy to move  
 from self-knowledge to knowledge of God  
 for someone who searches scripture intently  
 with humility and not with presumption.  
 He often untangled the ambiguities of questions.  
 Unskilled in words,  
 he spoke splendidly with understanding and power.'<sup>1337</sup>

This study has confirmed Francis as a theologian from his own writings, without relying on accounts of his life by others. Nevertheless, the findings of this research are consonant with Thomas' view of Francis, quoted above and in the Introduction.<sup>1338</sup> The profundity of his theology *is* evident to others in his words, even though he himself was not skilled in writing them down. His thoughts about creation in relation to God, which have survived in written form, are worthy to stand with the teachings of the learned scholars of his era. In conclusion, Franciscan theology did not begin with Alexander of Hales or St. Bonaventure. It began with St. Francis of Assisi.

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<sup>1337</sup>2C 102, *FA:ED*, vol. 2, pp. 314-5.  
<sup>1338</sup>2C 103.

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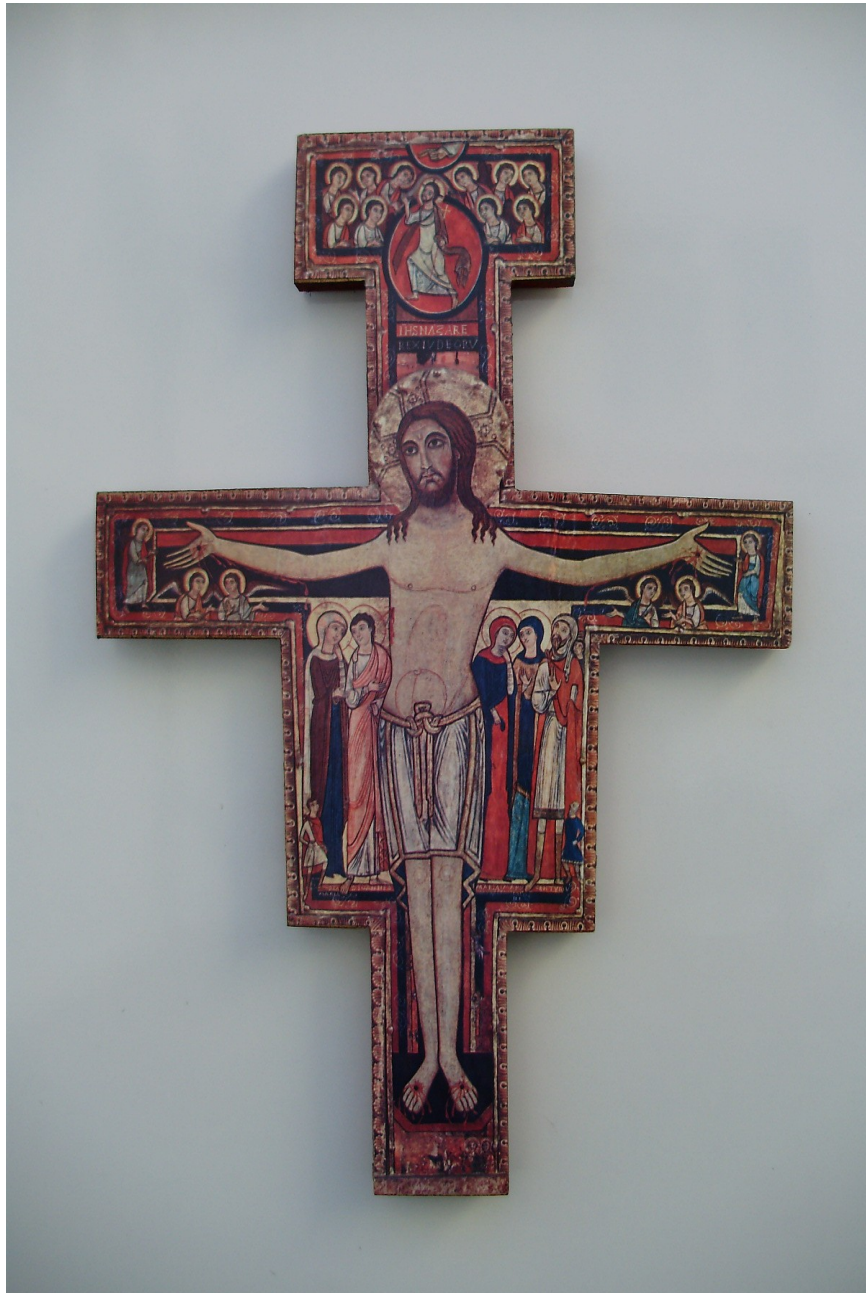
## Appendices

### Appendix one: Writings of St. Francis referred to in this study

<p>The Prayer before the Crucifix (1205/06)</p> <p>The First Letter to the Faithful (1209-1215)</p> <p>The Second Letter to the Faithful (1220?)</p> <p>The First Letter to the Clergy (before 1219)</p> <p>The Second Letter to the Clergy (1220)</p> <p>The First Letter to the Custodians (1220)</p> <p>A Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples (1220)</p> <p>The Second Letter to the Custodians (1220)</p> <p>A Rule For Hermitages (1217-1221)</p> <p>The Earlier Rule (1209/10-1221)</p> <p>A Letter to a Minister (1221-1223)</p> <p>The Later Rule (1223)</p> <p>A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua (after 1223)</p> <p>The Praises of God (1224)</p> <p>A Blessing for Brother Leo (1224)</p> <p>The Canticle of the Creatures (1225)</p> <p>The Canticle of Exhortation for the Ladies of San Damiano (1225)</p> <p>A Letter to the Entire Order (1225-1226)</p> <p>A Letter to Brother Leo (1224-1226)</p> <p>The Testament (1226)</p>	<p><b>The Undated Writings</b></p> <p>The Admonitions</p> <p>Exhortation to the Praise of God</p> <p>The Office of the Passion</p> <p>A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father</p> <p>The Praises to Be Said at All the Hours</p> <p>A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p>A Salutation of the Virtues</p> <p>True and Perfect Joy</p> <p>The Form of Life Given to Saint Clare and Her Sisters</p> <p>The Last Will Written for Saint Clare and Her Sisters.</p>
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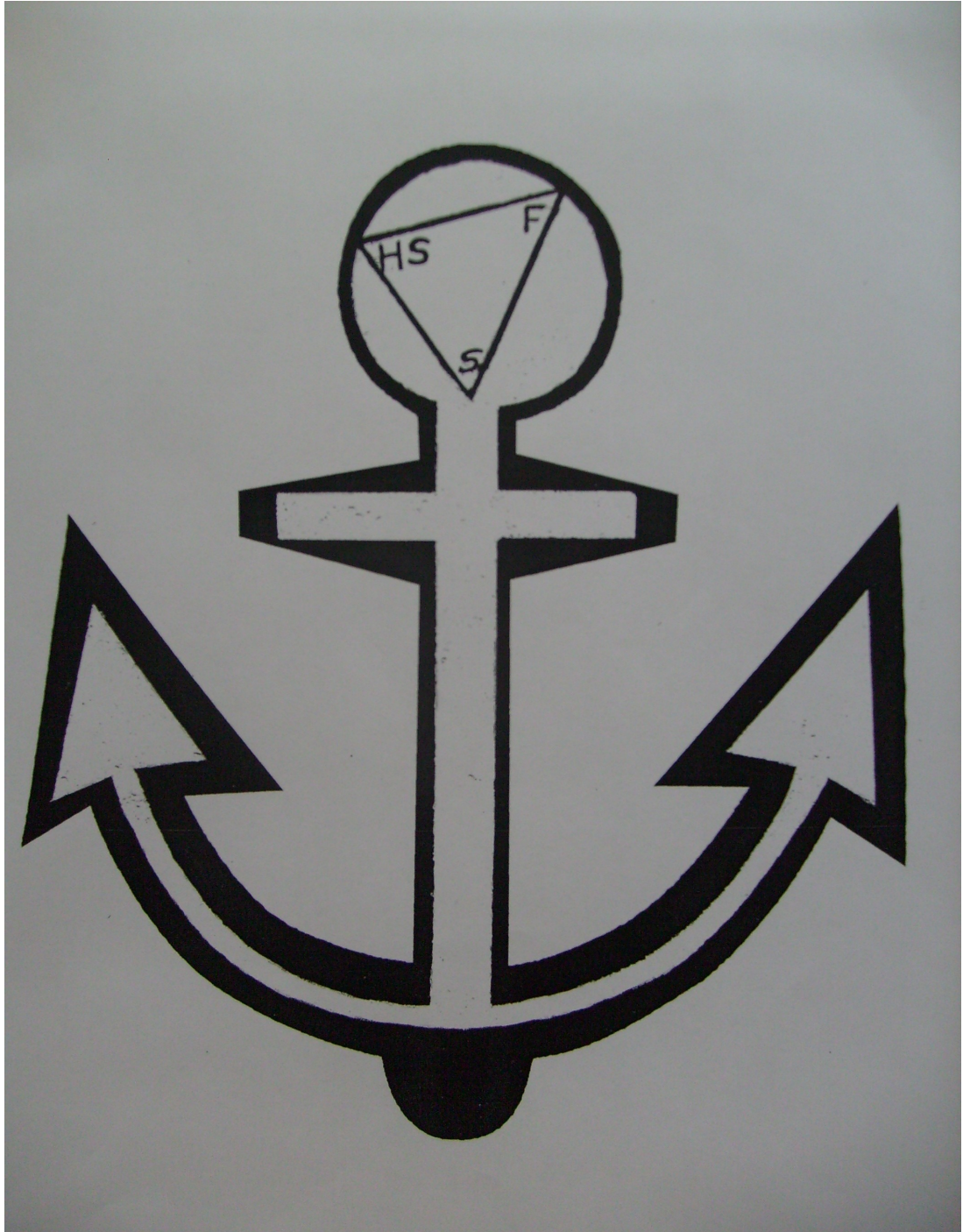


Appendix two: The San Damiano Crucifix<sup>1339</sup>



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1339 Replica of San Damiano Crucifix (photograph, C.B. Knowles 03/11/12).

Appendix three: Anchor diagram<sup>1340</sup>

1340 Adapted by C.B. Knowles, 2012, from a clipart image [Internet] Available from <http://office.microsoft.com/en-gb/images/results.aspx?qu=anchor&ex=1&origin=FX010132103#ai:MC900329241>. [Accessed 01/11/2012].