

Bringing out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations . . .

*The Prophetic Heart* (1994) — Joseph P. Chinnici OFM



## The TAU

From the time of Ezekiel the sign of the **TAU**, marked on the forehead of those turning to God in faith and repentance has long represented faithfulness and wholehearted love. It was used for healing and victory.

Pope Innocent III, evoked the sign of the **TAU from Ezekiel** when opening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1216 calling for the renewal of the Church, “*Mercy will be granted to those to bear the TAU, a mark of a life of penance and renewal in Christ.*”

And so Francis, who was present at the Council, wanted to sign himself with the **TAU**, and his brothers along with him. The **TAU** became the sign of the little Band’s mission: the preaching of faith and repentance (Rule of 1221:23).

Thomas of Celano, writing in 1252, notes, “The **TAU** symbol had, above all others, his preference. Francis used it as a signature for his letters, and he painted a drawing of it on the walls of all the cells.” One of these paintings, believed to be created by Francis, is found in the little chapel of Mary Magdalen at Fonte Columbo in the Rieti Valley where Francis wrote his Rule.

Another very precious document, housed in the Basilica of St. Francis, is Francis’ own handwritten blessing for Brother Leo — signed with the **TAU**.

*Above all else, the TAU meant mission for Francis: a mission to proclaim the Goodness of God by a wholehearted following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ because of whom all life is sacred.*



This Study was sponsored by the **Commission for the Retrieval of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition** — OFM English-speaking Conference, CFIT — now a Secretariat of the Order of Friars Minor, 2001. Its purpose focuses on two basic questions: What is the FIT? What are some of the *unique contributions* the FIT might make to *contemporary theology*, science and social justice.

## Introduction

Over the past thirty years members of the world-wide Franciscan Family have focused their efforts on understanding the “spirit of the founder,” and discovering ways to bring the “charism” of Francis and Clare into the foreground of the renewal of Franciscan life. These efforts have borne fruit in a greater appreciation of the distinctive character of our shared “evangelical life,” as brothers and sisters of the three Orders.

**We have a responsibility** — toward those who came before us, toward those who are around us today, and toward those who will come after us. That responsibility is one of passing on what we ourselves have received: the **Franciscan tradition** itself.

This tradition includes more than the “founding charism” expressed in the words and example of Francis and Clare, that is, **life according to the form of the Holy Gospel**. The tradition has continued to live and develop in the generations following Francis and Clare. Their (our) brothers and sisters in every branch of the Family have made important contributions to the world of culture, science, art, philosophy, spirituality, theology, mysticism, and literature. This is our inheritance, passed on to us thanks to the efforts of earlier generations of copyists and teachers, printers and popularizers. **Ours is now the responsibility to assure that this “patrimony of the poor,” our Franciscan ancestors, survives and thrives in the coming generation.**

We must be honest with ourselves about this task. With the many pressing needs in our fraternities and communities today, the many legitimate demands of Church and society, the task of passing on this tradition may seem to some a matter of low priority. It may even seem irrelevant to the more urgent business of everyday ministry and community needs. And so it would be, if this were merely an exercise in museum-keeping, carefully labeling and dusting antique artifacts of a past long-dead.

**But this is not the case.** Our **Franciscan tradition** has a “word” to speak today, one that responds to deeply-felt needs in our Church and our world. Our tradition can help to articulate a viable way of being Christian in the world today: as brothers and sisters, in harmony with the natural environment, in solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed, in reduced consumption of the earth’s resources. And for all these concerns we can offer a “word” from an ancient and eloquent tradition, giving an account of the hope that is in us.

But that word will be lost, and that alternative vision will disappear if we do not take steps in these critical years at the threshold of the millennium to retrieve, preserve, and articulate that tradition in a language that is understandable to the men and women of our day.

**Who else if not us? When else if not now?**

# Identifying Nine Markers of the *Franciscan Intellectual Tradition.*

## I. View of God

## II. Christ, The Incarnate Word

## III. Passion and Death of Christ

## IV. View of the World, Creation

## V. Natural Sciences

## VI. View of Human Person

## VII. View of the Church

## VIII. Philosophy and Theology: The Franciscan Wisdom Tradition

## IX. Economics, Property and Poverty

## I. View of God

**Francis:** emphasis on divine goodness; Father, Son, Holy Spirit

**Bonaventure:** Trinity, WORD as Center, Metaphysics of the good (love)

**Scotus and Ockham:** emphasis on freedom of God

Beginning with **Francis**, our tradition has emphasized God especially as the Good (Earlier Rule, 23): “You are Good, all Good, supreme Good.” In light of the good, Francis understands God as both transcendent, infinite mystery and immanently related to us through the Incarnation. “The Most High Father” is shown to us, as to Philip, in the beloved Son (Adm. 1).

For Francis, the Spirit is the ‘theological center’ of his spirituality. Everything begins with the Spirit and returns through the Son to the Father. He indicates in both earlier and later rules that everything begins with the Spirit of the Lord. The main point of the [Christian] life is *to have the Spirit of the Lord and his holy manner of working.*

As the Most High who is intimately related to us in the Incarnation, Francis’ God is a humble God and he specifically emphasizes the humility of God in his writings. Thus God’s omnipotence is not a patriarchal type of power but the diffusion of overflowing goodness, the fullness of love, hidden in the details of the created world.

**Bonaventure** picks up the notion of God as overflowing goodness and borrows the notion of *bonum diffusivum sui* from Pseudo-Dionysius to emphasize God as Self-diffusive Good and as the heart of the Trinitarian communion of divine persons. This makes goodness (love) the center of all reality.

While the notion of goodness or “the good” undergirds creativity within the Godhead, it is also the basis of divine fecundity. For Bonaventure divine fecundity lies within the Godhead so that while God is intimately related to the world through the good, God is also independent of the world as infinite fecund goodness. God is, therefore, a coincidence of opposites. As the Most High, God is also intimately related to us as ultimate goodness.

The *humility of God* in Bonaventure’s writings is described as God turned towards us — as the Father is turned towards the Word in the Godhead and towards us through the Word. The turning towards the other corresponds to the communication of love so that the Father is hidden in the eternal Word, and in creation as the finite expression of the Word. Bonaventure places less emphasis on the Spirit than Francis. However, the significance of the Spirit as that vivifying power of love who joins one to Christ and brings one into union with the Father and Son, is present in his writings.

**John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham** add an emphasis on the freedom of God's actions: no one and no thing compels God's good actions. Thus while Bonaventure emphasizes God as *overflowing goodness* or self-communicative love, Scotus emphasizes *divine freedom*. In essence, absolute love is absolutely free. However, Bonaventure's emphasis on love corresponds to relationality whereas Scotus/Ockham's emphasis on freedom corresponds to the exercise of will power or contingency. By shifting the emphasis from love to freedom, God becomes "one step" removed from the world and the theological conditions for modern "objective" science are established!

## II. Christ, The Incarnate Word

**Francis:** Humility of God; *Sine Proprio* (without property)

**Clare:** Christ as Mirror

**Bonaventure:** Primary reason for Incarnation: God's excess love and mercy; the Primacy of Christ as exemplar or firstborn of all creatures; Mysticism of historical event (Tree of Life)

**Angela of Foligno:** Mysticism of the humanity of Christ (Memorial)

**Jacopone da Todi:** Affective mysticism focused on humanity of Christ (Laudes)

**Scotus:** Primacy of Christ

**The Franciscan Tradition places the Incarnation squarely at the heart of all**

**reality.** Francis sees the Incarnation as the expression of the poverty and humility of God, daily re-presented in the Eucharist (Adm 1). Christ is the mediator between God and humanity and reconciles these opposites in the unity of his person. Clare encourages Agnes of Prague to consider the circumstances of Christ's Incarnation, his birth, life and death as a mirror in which to see God's love.

Theologically, **Bonaventure** considers the Incarnation as motivated by God's desire to express loving goodness. Thus, it is motivated for its own sake and not for the

sake of a lesser good. The reason for the Incarnation is simply the excess love and mercy of God.

While the notion of the Primacy of Christ resides in **Bonaventure's** thought, he does admit that sin is also a reason for the Incarnation, albeit the last one. In addition to primacy, Bonaventure emphasizes that the purpose of the Incarnation is both redemption and completion. That is, the Incarnation is the goal and center of creation and its consummation.

The notion of primacy will be put even more strongly by **John Duns Scotus** who affirms that Christ would have come even if Adam had not sinned. God's goodness, not human sin, is the motive for the Incarnation. For Scotus, God's first thought or intention is Christ (doctrine of the Primacy of Christ), and all reality is to be read as subsequent to that intention. He is the first Adam, without sin, Mary the first Eve, also

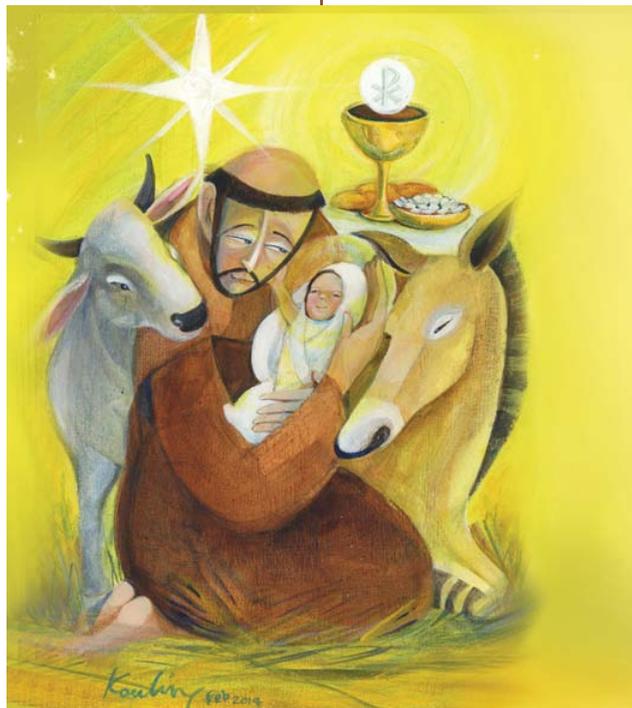
without sin (doctrine of the Immaculate Conception).

*The primacy of Christ remains a fundamentally important piece of the Franciscan Tradition worth further reflection today.*

In the thought of **John Duns Scotus** the fact of Christ, the Incarnation of the Son, becomes the center of all reality. The Incarnation was willed by God from all eternity, and all things were created in light of this central event. Scotus affirms that Christ would have come even if Adam had not sinned. The Incarnation is the fullest or primary expression of divine goodness: it does not happen

as a result of some other action, e.g., human sin. Here lies the most emphatic expression of the "Primacy of Christ," or Franciscan Christocentrism. On this basis much of the later Franciscan theological tradition will be built.

Contemporary translation-interpretation of the Franciscan notion of the Primacy of Christ may be of significant help today in overcoming adversarial notions of the relationship of religion to science, faith to reason, or Church to society.



### III. Passion and Death of Christ

**Francis:** Compassion with the suffering Christ and suffering humanity

**Clare:** Christ as the Mirror on the Cross

**Bonaventure:** Metaphysical centrality of Christ crucified

**Angela of Foligno:** Identification with the suffering Christ

**Jacopone da Todi:** Dramatization of the Passion in Lyrics

**Influence in the Arts:** The realistic panel-crucifixes of Franciscan art

Affirming that Christ's passion and death is an expression of self-giving love, our theological and spiritual heritage at its origins avoids the language of "atonement" or the Passion as "repaying a debt" to an outraged God. **Francis** expresses tender compassion (co-suffering) with the suffering Christ, and credits his conversion to the Lord's leading him among the suffering, the lepers (Test.) He speaks of following the footprints of Christ, identifying the footprints with the suffering Christ.

**Clare's** "Mirror" is the One who hangs on the cross, inviting passersby to "see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow." She encourages Agnes to gaze into that cross, quite likely having the crucifix of San Damiano in mind. Clare formulates

a 'theology of the Crucified' by indicating that Christ crucified is the image of God in which we are to be transformed through contemplation of it. She advises Agnes to gaze, consider, contemplate and imitate. Clare distinguishes following Christ from imitating Christ. She associates imitation with transformation in the image of the Crucified, thus becoming Christ for others. Christ is expressed in the form of compassionate love.

**Bonaventure** makes the Crucified Christ the center of his theology, particularly after his retreat at La Verna

in 1259, as he meditated on Francis as the likeness of the Crucified Christ. This implies the ability to read the experience of another, a contemporary, as a revelation of the mystery of Christ. Theologically, Bonaventure emphasizes Christ crucified as the absolute center between God and humanity — there is no other path to God other than through the Crucified. Since union with God is expressed in compassionate love, Bonaventure holds up the desire for martyrdom as a spiritual state. The Christian is to be both mystic and missionary, willing to suffer or sacrifice one's life for the sake of the gospel [perhaps the medieval counterpart of political theology.] Bonaventure's wisdom theology is based on union with the crucified Christ.

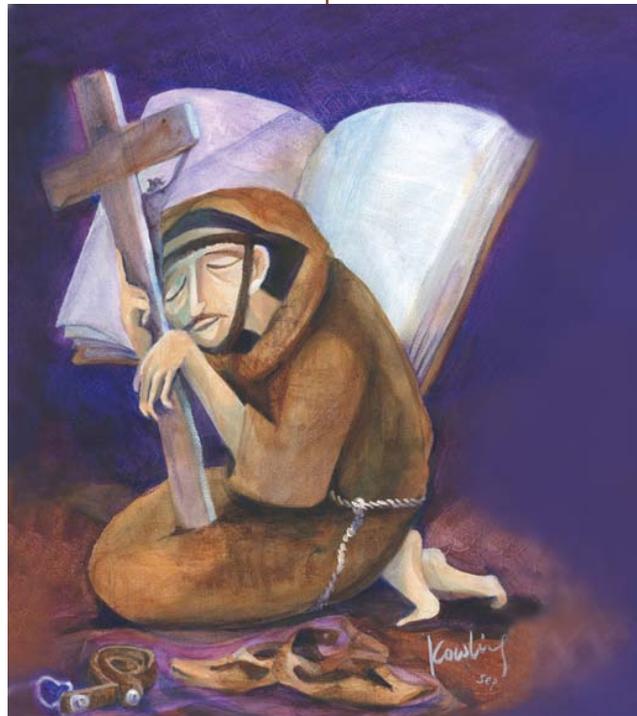
Using vivid, even disturbing, language **Angela of Foligno** describes her personal participation in representations of the Passion (early mystery plays), and the profound religious experiences that moved her from meditation to service of the sick in local hospitals (notably lepers). Angela's graphic description of union with Christ crucified depicts a knowledge of God that departs from the intellectual tradition. God is known by means of the flesh and through personal experience.

The great hymns to the Cross as Life-giving Tree, and the plaintive hymns of compassion for the sufferings of Mary mark some of the best known compositions of **Jacopone da Todi**. Some of these works he apparently set to music for public performance.

Such devotion to the human aspect of the suffering of Christ and Mary appears

artistically in the increasingly realistic portrayals of the suffering and death of Christ in representations of the Crucifixion commissioned for **Franciscan churches**, gradually spreading throughout the Western Church.

While frankly admitting past exaggerations of "affective devotion" to the suffering Christ, a return to healthy, heart-felt devotional practice may be of significant help in filling a contemporary lacuna of solid, accessible forms of Catholic piety in today's multicultural ecclesial reality.



## IV. View of the World, Creation

**Francis:** brother-sister relationship

**Bonaventure:** positive emphasis on creation

**Angela of Foligno:** the world pregnant with God

**Scotus:** Univocity of being; *Haecceitas*: emphasis on the individual, concrete

**Francis' view of creation is sacramental** — God shines through creation. As Bonaventure writes, Francis saw the Beauty of God within the beautiful things of creation. Through his union with Christ, he came to perceive his own integral relation to creation. He identified the things of this earth as brothers and sisters, recognizing that they have the same primordial source of goodness as himself. Creation is light-filled, replete with goodness, and in an essential relationship with humanity.

**Bonaventure** described creation as emanating out of the relationship between the Father and Son. Thus creation is grounded in relationship and is a mirror and book of the Triune God. Everything in creation, from the quark to the human person, reflects the Trinity. Bonaventure's doctrine of exemplarism connotes a doctrine of relations between God and creation. That is, the Trinity is expressed on every level of creation, from vestige to image to similitude. Matter, for Bonaventure, tends towards spirit; thus, there is a drive within creation towards the spiritual. However, the material world is unable to attain its [spiritual] perfection without the human person who is a unique 'synthesis' of spirit and matter. Thus to have dominion over creation is to recognize the human's responsibility towards creation. These ideas relate to and reflect a cosmic Christocentricity as found in the writings of P. Teilhard de Chardin.

**Angela's** insight that the world is 'pregnant with God' flows out of her deep union with Christ crucified in which she comes to understand the immanence of God in and through Christ, again, a type of cosmic Christocentricity.



The Franciscan understanding of creation, in general, is related to contemplation of the mystery of Christ as Word. This Word, incarnate, serves as the underlying blueprint or form for all of created reality, rendering attention to all of creation religiously significant to the Christian believer.

Along these lines, **Scotus'** principle of *haecceitas*, connoting individuation, refers to the intrinsic goodness of each and every thing in creation, and thereby emphasizing the dignity of every creature. Even beyond this notion of the specific and the individual, Scotus asserts that the being or existence of creatures is as "true" as that of the Creator, and is not just an "analogy" of divine being. *This notion of the "univocity of being" posits a fundamentally existential connection between the things of the world and God.*

Such attention to particularity, diversity, and uniqueness as divinely known and loved offers one possible response to issues of minorities in society, and the ability to accept differences as enriching. *Moreover, such divinely loved*

*uniqueness* can serve and as a caution against totalitarian philosophical, social or ecclesial claims.

## V. Natural Sciences

**Robert Grosseteste:** metaphysics of light

**Roger Bacon:** Empirical reasoning;  
Positive value of creation

**Ramon Lull:** Science and evangelization

**Ockham:** Beginnings of modern science

The **English Franciscan Tradition** in particular tends to affirm the physical world as something worth knowing in itself. Scholars of this important strand of our tradition emphasized knowledge of the particular, and ultimately helped to validate the study of natural sciences, history, and the human sciences as significant to the religious enterprise itself.

For the medievalist, knowledge of the human sciences was essential to the task of theology. “The perfect theologian ought to be not moderately learned in the human sciences.” Understanding creation, therefore, encompassed both metaphysics and Scripture. The fact that the first manifestation of the divine *fiat* is light [in Genesis] gave to light a special place of importance in the universe. **R. Grosseteste** assigned to light the role of first substantial form in the universe from which all subsequent forms in part derive [an idea also held by Bonaventure].

The use of **Aristotle’s** writings became the basis of the medievals’ pursuit of science. Thus, in the work of **Roger Bacon**, nothing in the world could be known without experience, since knowledge derives from sense data. Ideas such as microcosm — macrocosm, cause and effect, also helped pave the way for modern science.

With a mystical and missionary bent, the Catalan **Ramon Lull** attempted a vast organization of all human knowledge within a theological framework. It was, ultimately, a plan for the revision of all higher education in his day. His grand synthesis, never fully realized, points once again toward the Franciscan desire to assert a profound underlying unity to all phenomena, rooted in a mysticism of the primacy or centrality of Christ.

**William of Ockham** is famous for his frequently misunderstood “razor”: “Plurality should not be assumed without necessity.” He argued against the multiplication of unnecessary abstractions in attempts to understand reality. This principle of modesty in approaching reality, and his opposition to exaggerated claims about “universal” concepts as things that really exist, are credited by some with setting the stage for knowledge as observable data and the contingency or randomness of effects. Thus “Ockham’s Razor” contributed to the beginnings of modern approaches to scientific observation.

**The Franciscan Tradition** offers a helpful point of contact for contemporary believers striving toward substantive dialogue between the worlds of theology and the sciences.

Further, it offers a religious, theological motivation for engagement in the study of the sciences, research and experimentation.

## VI. View of Human Person

**Francis:** conversion, from “bitter to sweet” (Test.); dignity of the human person as *imago Dei* (Adm 5); brother-sister relationship (Ltr to Faithful)

community/relationality; poverty as inter-dependency, importance of work (Rule 5)

**Alexander of Hales** (Summa): emphasis on goodness; role of grace

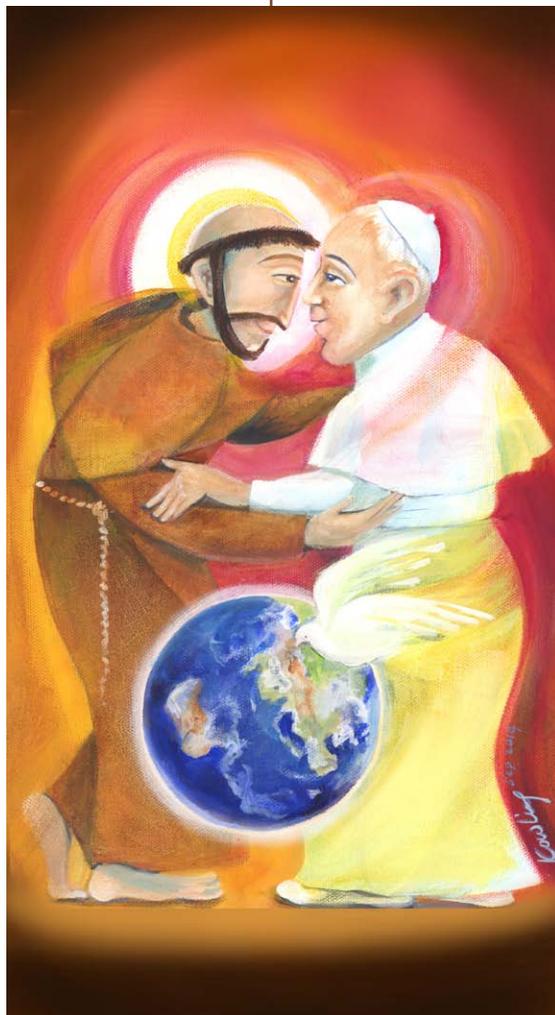
**Bonaventure:** primacy of affectus (Itin. 7); human person as image of God; thus grace-filled nature (Itin. 2-3); original goodness/original justice; role of compassionate love especially in movement towards historical peace

**Scotus:** Moral goodness (harmony of goodness); Emphasis on contingency

**Ockham:** Voluntarism, primacy of the will

**Francis** viewed the *human person* as created in the image of God in body and spirit. Because the true image is Christ, Francis perceived the human person as an image

of Christ. The Father is hidden in the Son. Thus he advocates a bodily context of relationship with God precisely through the other — “tasting” God in the other becomes an experience of sweetness. By identifying a shared ground with all of humanity in and through the suffering Christ, Francis locates the body as a ground of connection and familiarity. We are truly united to one another as brother and sister. Impeded by sin from truly seeing the other as family, Francis pursues a path of radical poverty by which we live without possession of anything so that we may be free to love the other in whom God dwells.



**Bonaventure's** notion of the *human person* corresponds to that of Francis. The soul does not assume priority over the body nor is it encased within the body in a Platonic fashion; rather, the soul is given its nobility by the body and the body needs the soul for perfection. Thus, body and soul are ordained to one another. The wholeness of the human person as matter-spirit is what Bonaventure strives to articulate in his theology. The nobility of the human person lies in being created as image of God. While the image connotes capacity for union with the infinite God of love, the image is distorted by sin yielding intellectual blindness and self-grasping. Christ, the Word, is the true image in which human persons are restored [made whole] not only for oneself but for the healing and wholeness of the world.

**Scotus'** notion of *haecceitas* is the ground of individuality which gives each being a singular and unique character and which makes it what it is and distinguishes it from others. *Haecceitas* refers to the totality of concreteness of which the human body is the most visible expression. Scotus holds together the primacy of Christ and the autonomy of the person. We are endowed with a freedom which has a relationship of mutuality with the divine freedom. Genuine exercise of human freedom is a freedom-in-love. Human dignity is taken up in a dialogic relationship that truly allows the person to emerge and come to fulfillment. The person is a mystery of knowing and agency, of autonomy and mutual relatedness, and of the universal and the most concrete particularity.

*Such a view of the human person as imaging divine goodness, in radical solidarity with the human experience of God in Christ, helps to ground dedication to the defense of human rights, economic and social justice, and the pursuit of peace-making. In doing so, the Franciscan view links an incarnate spirituality with efforts for social change.*



## VII. View of the Church

**Francis:** church as the mystical body of Christ; gospel of presence

**Alexander of Hales:** sacramental theology

**Bonaventure:** The place of Gospel life in the Church

**Peter John Olivi:** Poverty and Church authority, the *usus pauper* controversy

**Scotus:** papal Church and national church

**Ockham:** Theory of separate spheres for Church and state

**Francis'** understanding of the church is broad — very inclusive — and spirit-oriented. The church is the mystical body of Christ — not as an institution but as a living person — a body that continues to grow through participation of its members in the Christ mystery.

To **Bonaventure**, the Church is both the body of Christ and the creation of the Spirit for the glory of the Father. There are **three forms of *communio* (relationship) in his thought.**

- First, there is corporal or external communion, which corresponds to the Church in its historico-juridical form.
  - Second, there is interior communion, which points to the mystery of grace as uniting believers.
  - Finally, there is sacramental communion, which realizes in time the action of Christ, particularly in the Eucharist.
- **The Church** is all three and comes to expression in a trinitarian formulation: the visible Church exists only through the life-giving sacramental actions of Christ *and* in the actual mission of the Holy Spirit effecting interior bonds of communion among the members here and now. Understanding Church as communion marks our ecclesial personhood. To be a person is to be a person in communion, in relationship. The roots of this understanding are trinitarian. To be a person in the Church is to live out both the life of Christ and the impulses imparted by the Spirit who brings us into the fullness of Christ's as we return to the Father, the source of life.

The writings of **Peter John Olivi** explored a quite different aspect of the Church: the limits of its leaders' authority. In the long and painful controversy over the understanding of Francis' Rule and Testament, Olivi helped to point toward an allegiance to the Gospel deeper and more demanding than mere acquiescence to Church authority.

Both **Bonaventure and Scotus** had the painful experience of seeing their vision of Church rejected and vilified by others. In Bonaventure's case, it was the clerical elite of the university who rejected his view of an essentially international Church, and an understanding of Gospel life that was not bound to structures of parish and diocese (Secular-Mendicant controversy).

**Scotus** suffered exile from France as a result of his defending the claims of an international Church, operating under the direction of the Pope, against the claims of a national and nationalistic church under its monarch (conflict with Philip the Fair).

**William of Ockham**, along with the Minister General, **Michael of Cesena**, eventually fled the papal court and rejected the authority of **Pope John XXII** in disputes arising from the interpretation of the Franciscan evangelical life. Taking refuge with "secular" authority (the German Emperor), Ockham used these events in his reflections on the autonomous authority of the secular state in relation to the Church, a position with far-reaching implications for understanding the relationship of Church and world.

**The Franciscan Tradition** may offer a healthy alternative vision of Church beyond the parochial and the diocesan model, emphasizing the universal and international character of the Church community. While promoting lively and effective participation in the life of local churches, this tradition constantly challenges the Church to remember the wider world, "the Saracens and other non-believers," and the legitimate freedom of political processes.



## VIII. Philosophy and Theology: The Franciscan Wisdom Tradition

**Francis:** Theologians — ministers of spirit and life; Sacred theology not to extinguish prayer and devotion

**Anthony of Padua:** Scripture commentaries

**Alexander of Hales** (*Summa fratris Alexandri*) *Habitus fidei* (perfecting the intellect with the intention of forming the *affectus*) i.e. loving devotion

**Bonaventure:** purpose of theology as path to holiness; Wisdom explored through Christ mysticism

**Spanish Franciscan Mystics:** affection and contemplation

As a person with limited education, **Francis** placed primary emphasis on the spirit of prayer although he did not oppose the study of theology. In fact he seemed to have approved the teaching of theology as long as it did not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion. The purpose of studying theology is to preach the Gospel, and he advocated respect for theologians as ministers of God's Word.

**Anthony of Padua** is the first of these theologians (Ltr Ant), and his Scriptural commentaries and sermons help us to appreciate the tradition's strong connections to earlier theological tradition, especially that of the Victorine school and the broad Augustinian tradition.

Those writing about theology within the University had the greater challenge of identifying the purpose of theology vis-à-vis philosophy. **Alexander of Hales** saw the pursuit of [theological] knowledge as necessary for the development of *affectus* (devotion). Theology is not an end in itself but a means to love God, that is, a path to holiness. The motto of this approach is frequently seen in older Franciscan schools: "*In sanctitate et doctrina*," connecting learning to holiness.

**Bonaventure** explores this further in his writings, writing against Averroism and the tendency to separate out philosophy as an independent discipline. While both Platonism and Aristotelianism are helpful to understand theological concepts, they should not be held independently of theology: philosophy is at the service of

theology (*philosophia ancilla theologiae*). Since theology is rooted in Scripture, Bonaventure said that the defects of Greek philosophy stand open to correction in light of the New Testament. Thus he posits a new theological metaphysics based on Christ as center. The pursuit of knowledge is not a matter of the intellect alone but 'head and heart' working together. The goal of theology, therefore, is not *scientia* but *sapientia*, that is, knowledge deepened by love. Christ crucified, he states, is the treasury of wisdom and knowledge.

Under the influence of the theologians of the traditions and the writers and teachers of spirituality within the **Franciscan Tradition**, the Wisdom approach led into the realm of mysticism. Following the traces of Bonaventure's 'Itinerarium,' **Hendrik Herp** (Harpius) insisted on simple, accessible methods of contemplative practice based on the affections, aiming at the highest degree of union with God. In his wake the Franciscan mystical writers of Spain developed methods of "recollection" and quiet prayer (**Francisco de Osuna**) that gave pride of place to the heart in contemplative practice. Their contributions helped to connect the excitement of the Age of Discovery with a sense of inner exploration (**Bernardino de Laredo**) that also had notable influences on writers better-known today (**Teresa of Avila**).

In this regard the **Franciscan tradition** may help to promote a dialogue on important issues of Christian faith and "how we are to live" in contemporary society, translating intellectually-understood truth into *experienced goodness*.

## IX. Economics, Property and Poverty

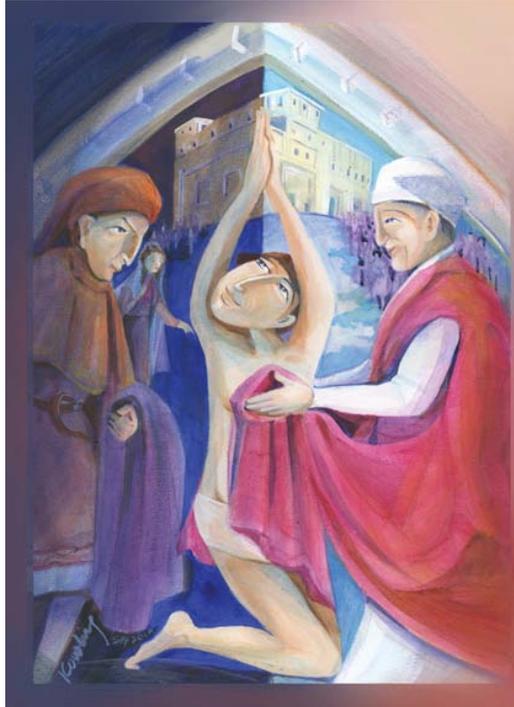
**Early Franciscan Masters:** property ownership and nature

**Scotus:** Division of ownership

**Social reform:** Health-care for the poor;  
The *montes pietatis*

**Francis'** notion of life according to the Holy Gospel includes living "sine proprio:" a term sometimes translated as "without property," or "without anything of one's own."

The only One who owns anything is God, the source of all good. To claim anything as "mine," whether material goods, offices, knowledge, or virtue, is to sin against the Lord whose lordship extends over all things. The only thing we can truly claim as our own are "vices and sins," since these clearly do not come from God. Everything created is good, and everything good belongs to God, the Highest Good. We recognize our true identity when we acknowledge that all things come from God to us as gifts, and we rightly return every good thing to God through giving thanks and praise for the gifts we have received.



For Francis the commitment to "holy poverty" means to recognize our true state: we are the recipients of the alms God graciously gives to us each day. The greatest almsgiving on God's part is the gift of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word who became poor for our sakes through the Incarnation, in order to make us rich in every gift of God. The starting-point of Francis' poverty is expressly Christological, though it would be expressed also through plain economic facts (not owning land or houses or living by guaranteed forms of income).

Work and "recourse to the table of the Lord" were to assure the necessities of life for the brothers. Together with the other *pauperes* of their day, the brothers were to "go about confidently for alms," "the inheritance of the poor," won for them by Christ.

After Francis, the early masters of the "Franciscan School" carried forward seminal insights of the founder and, especially at the *Universities of Paris and Oxford* put those insights into new forms of philosophical and theological language. The *Summa Fratris Alexandri*, at the beginning of this tradition, approaches the question conservatively: both communion of goods and distinction of ownership proceed from the law of nature. **Richard of Middleton**, allows *private* ownership of property, but recognizes such ownership as a result of the Fall. **Peter John Olivi** analyzes carefully the meanings of ownership and use in his writing in the *usus pauper* controversy over papal interpretations of the Franciscan Rule.

On another point, however, the law of nature *cannot* be invoked: that of the private ownership (*dominium*) of property. Private property, in fact, revokes the law of

nature, for in the state of innocence “communion of goods” was the natural norm: “*erant omnia omnibus communia*,” [all things were common to everyone] a strong medieval tradition with roots in **Augustine**.

**Scotus**’ emphasis on the *immense* difference between the natural order and *societies founded on divided ownership* has its origins in Franciscan reflections on poverty, which became a “scandalous” characteristic of the Friars Minor in discussions of the poverty of Christ and the Apostles during the reign of **John XXII**. As Scotus indicates, *a special concern for the connection between poverty and property was at the very basis of Franciscan self-understanding*, and this was expanded into a particular sensitivity about production and distribution of wealth within society.

This concern is apparent in the attention given by Franciscan authors, including **Scotus**, to the question of usury. In this regard, Scotus follows the argumentation of his predecessor, **Peter John**

**Olivi**, in addressing the question of restitution for sins of usury. In this (Franciscan) view, only the money *originally received* was to be returned, since further profit is the result of industry on the part of usurer, and thus not the property of the offended party.<sup>1</sup> “Only an emphasis on continuity between the state of innocence and the state of fallen nature made it possible to consider absolute poverty as a choice for absolute perfection.” No wonder John XXII strove to revise traditional Scriptural interpretation of his day, to assert that Adam was a property-holder!

Contributions to social reform were also made by Franciscan men and women in the offering of *health care to the poor*, and in the establishment of early *low-interest lending* institutions (*montes de pietate*). *Examination of these areas would certainly help to expand our view of Franciscan contributions to the theory and practice of justice, contributing to our contemporary reflection on the issue of human economic rights.*

*Living sine proprio became an identifying characteristic of the Franciscan tradition, with expressions in its spirituality, its Christology, its anthropology, and, eventually in political and economic positions.* Today the Franciscan tradition can draw from some of our authors of the past to offer a *different view of notions of property and the common good*. Considering the intense debates over human rights in the context of economic globalization and environmental destruction, this *quintessentially Franciscan topic* can offer useful approaches to questions of property and the just distribution and use of the earth’s resources.

### Conclusion:

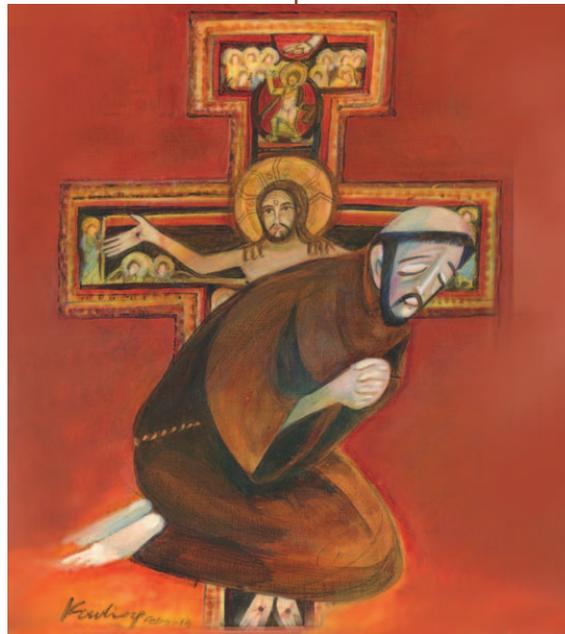
This summary of the **Franciscan Intellectual Tradition** indicates only a general framework or outline. But it may be sufficient to demonstrate the riches of our tradition, a “patrimony of the poor.” That patrimony already has a solid basis, as the first steps toward its dissemination have already been taken.

1. In our day the basic, critical working of editing and publishing major original texts of the tradition has been largely accomplished.
2. The second step of scholarly critical analysis and interpretation of the texts has also been done, abundantly in the cases of some major authors.
3. A third step is currently being accomplished, that of translating all the major works of the tradition into English.

**At this point it becomes crucial for us to undertake the next steps, which will bring the tradition into dialogue with**

**today’s questions:** in regard to Christian faith, the life of the Church, the world of science and culture, and the needs and longings of the human family. In order to accomplish this, our current task, we will need the collaboration of members of the English-speaking Franciscan Family, the contributions of scholars interested in Franciscan authors and themes, and the advice of experts in pedagogy and communications.

To paraphrase a familiar Franciscan saying, **our brothers and sisters in the past did what was theirs to do, may Christ now show us what is ours.**



<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

## AUTHORS:



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Among Ilia's Catholic Press Association Book Awards are *Christ in Evolution*, *The Emergent Christ*, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*. The 2015 Orbis book is *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness*. She is the founder of the *Center for Christogenesis*, an online spiritual and educational resource for the integration of science, religion and culture.

Special teachings from both Bill Short OFM and Ilia Delio OSF are found in [www.franciscantradition.org](http://www.franciscantradition.org) and <https://osfphila.org/spiritualityprayer> (open resources: videos CFIT/ESC, Tau Series, Custodians and <https://franfed.org/videos>)

**SYNTHESIZED** by **Kathie Uhler**, a Franciscan Sister of Allegany, NY, who has newly established *The House of Prayer for All People* at Gulph Mills, PA, May, 2021, of which she writes, "This is not a church or a mosque or a synagogue but a place made holy by the people who come there to pray (etc.) for peace with words agreed to by all."

Kathie holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Georgetown University. Her academic ministry in fields of philosophy, medical ethics and peace studies has been at the Universities of Georgetown, Scranton and St. Bonaventure. She was also Academic Dean at Christ the King Seminary, East Aurora, NY.



Through the 1990's Kathie co-directed Franciscans International (F.I.), the NGO for Franciscans at the United Nations, with Kevin Smith OSF and Ignacio Harding OFM. During this time she led the F.I. delegation to the 1995 UN 4th World Women's Conference in Beijing, China. In 1999 Kathie served as Secretary General of the People's Peace Conference. A 2001-2002 sabbatical year took her to Egypt, Iraq/Palestine, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangkok — all in reverence to the world's religions!

In the 2000s Kathie ministered in the Middle East in Hebron with Christian Peacemaker Teams for six years. Returning to the U.N. with F.I. her work included attending the Bonn, Germany preparatory Meeting for the Paris Green House Gas Accords of 2009. For two years Kathie assisted the Executive Director of the Catholic Mobilizing Network to End the Death Penalty, Washington, DC.

Having served in leadership in her own congregation, Kathie became a member of the Franciscan Federation's Spirit and Life Committee that drafted the Federation's *Lineamenta* Response for the Bishops Synod on Consecrated Life, 1994. Kathie also authored *Part II of the History of the Franciscan Federation TOR* (1996-2016). She was also the Federation's President, 2015-2017.

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