

Mystical Theology

Ss. Francis of Assisi, Claire, and
Bonaventure

Kenneth Alonso, MD, PhD



Giotto di Bondone Francis of Assisi in Glory
Fresco, Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi
<http://www.wga.hu>

Francis of Assisi

- “It is the highest and holiest of the paradoxes is that the man who really knows he cannot pay his debt will be forever paying it.” GK Chesterton
- 1181-1226 AD
- Totally identified with the mysteries of Christ.
- Dedicated to an intense living of the Gospel life, with unwearied application to prayer, preaching repentance and peace.

- “Those who strive after the perfect life should cleanse themselves daily with streams of tears.”
- The Son of God descended from the Father to our lowly estate “so that our Lord and Teacher might teach humility in both word and example.”
- The proud demons flee from the humble.
- “The impiety of detractors is a greater sin than that of robbers; for the law of Christ, which is fulfilled in the observance of piety, obliges us to desire the well-being of the soul more than the body.”

- “All-power, most holy, most high and supreme God, Holy and just Father, Lord, King of Heaven and Earth, we thank you for Yourself, for through your holy will and through Your only Son with the Holy Spirit, You have created all things spiritual and corporal, and, having made us in Your own image and likeness, You placed us in paradise.

And through our own fault we have fallen.

And we thank You for as through Your Son You created us so also, through Your holy love, with which You loved us. You brought about His birth as true God and true man by the glorious, ever-virgin, most blessed, holy Mary, and You willed to redeem us captives through His cross and blood and death...

- And we thank You for Your Son Himself will come again in the glory of His majesty to send the wicked ones who have not done penance and who have not known You into the eternal fire, and to say to all those who have known You and have adored You and have served You in penance, 'Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you since the beginning of the world.' And because all of us wretches and sinners are not worthy to pronounce Your name, we humbly ask that our Lord Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, in whom You were well pleased, together with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, give You thanks as it pleases You and Him for everything, (He) who always satisfies You in everything through whom You have done such great things for us. Alleluia! ...

- And through Your love we humbly beg the glorious Mother, most blessed Mary ever- virgin, Blessed Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael and all the blessed choirs of ... angels..., Blessed John the Baptist ... and all the saints who were, who will be, and who are to give You thanks for these things as it pleases You, the supreme and true God, eternal and living, with Your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, world without end. Amen. Alleluia.”

- “Let the whole of mankind tremble, the whole world shake, and the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the Living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest. O admirable heights and sublime lowliness! O sublime humility! O Humble sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself, that for our salvation He hides Himself under the little form of bread! Look, brothers, at the humility of God and pour out your hearts before Him! Humble yourselves, as well, that you may be exalted by Him. Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves so that He who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally.”

- “If the blessed Virgin is so honored, as it is right, since she carried Him in her most holy womb; if the blessed Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb in which He lay for some time is so venerated, how holy, just, and worthy must be the person who touches Him with his hands, receives Him in his heart and mouth, and offers Him to others to be received. This is He who is now not about to die, but Who is eternally victorious and glorified, upon whom the angels desire to gaze.”

- “Fear and honor, praise and bless, give thanks and adore the Lord God Almighty in Trinity and in Unity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Creator of all. Do penance, performing worthy fruits of penance since we will soon die. Give and it shall be given to you. Forgive and you shall be forgiven. And if you do not forgive men, the Lord will not forgive you your sins. Confess all your sins. Blessed are those who die in penance, for they shall be in the Kingdom of Heaven. Woe to those who do not die in penance, for they shall be the children of the Devil whose works they do, and they shall go into the eternal fire. Beware and abstain from every evil and persevere in good till the end.”

- “Whoever possesses one (of the virtues), and does not offend the others, possesses all. And whoever offends one (of the virtues) does not possess any and offends all. And each one destroys vices and sins.”

Unknown master

Altarpiece of St
Claire

Tempera,
Monastery of Santa
Chiara, Assisi



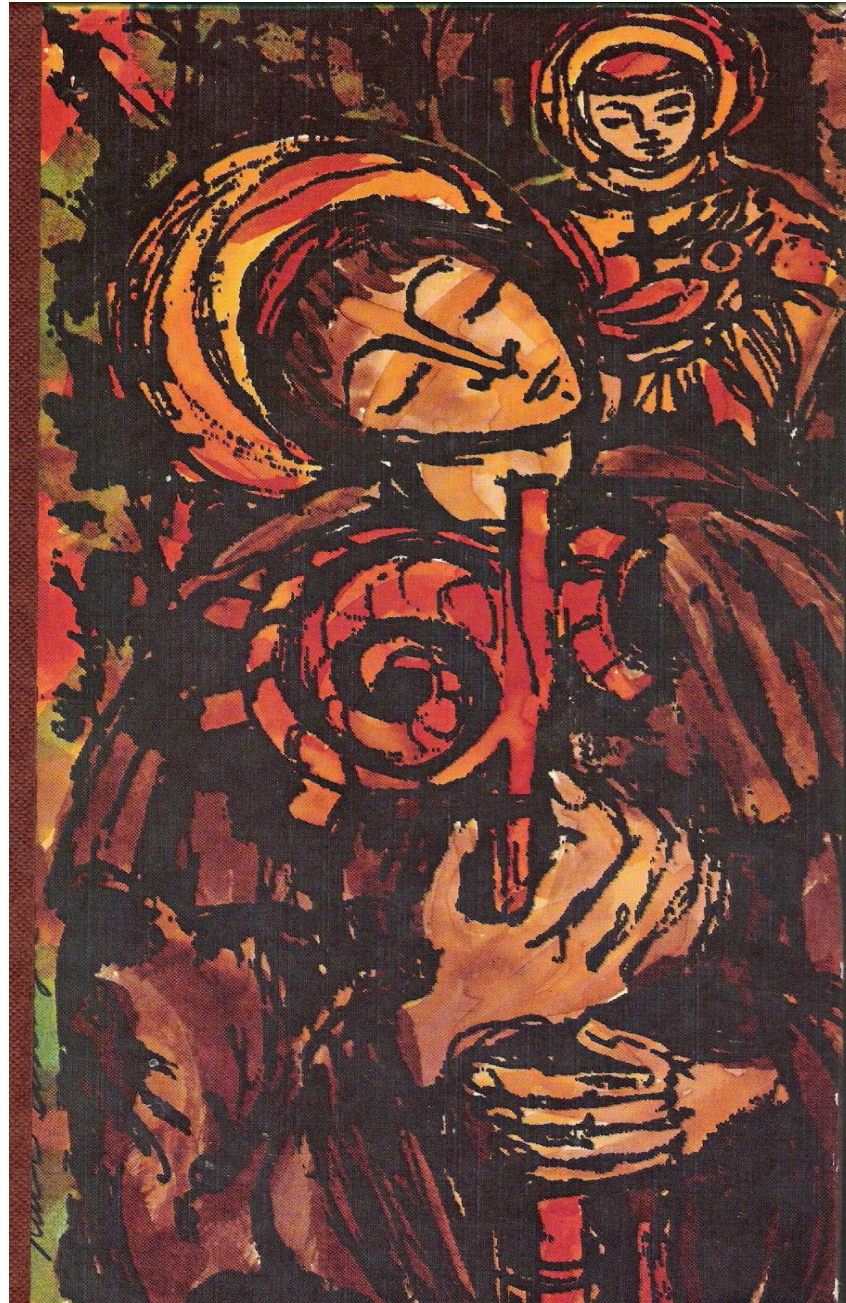
Claire of Assisi

- 1194-1253 AD.
- As the total obedience of Christ to the will of His Father prompted Him not to cling to what was rightfully His but to empty Himself (Phil 2:6-11), Francis stressed the practice of obedience.
- As mankind is spiritually poor and deprived of eternal values, Christ made Himself physically poor and helpless in order to bring spiritual riches.
- Claire stressed poverty: Conform to the poor Christ by observance of the most perfect poverty.

- Claire, further, had a profound sense of relationship with Christ as Son and Bridegroom.
- Her sisters are seen as a means of salvation as manifesting that profound relationship that exists in the Godhead: “Let the tongue of the flesh be silent when I speak to express my love for you; and let the tongue of the Spirit speak because the love I have for you can never be fully expressed by the tongue of the flesh.”

- “Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance! And transform your whole being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation! So that you too may feel what His friends feel as they taste the hidden sweetness which God Himself has reserved from the beginning for those who love Him.”

- “Gaze upon Him; consider Him. contemplate Him, as you desire to imitate Him . If you suffer with Him, you shall reign with Him; weep, you shall rejoice in Him; die on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendor of the saints, and, in the Book of Life, your name shall be called glorious among men.”



Bonaventure

Ruth Anaya
Paulist Press

Bonaventure

- 1217-1274 AD
- Minister General of the Friars Minor during the conflict with the Spirituals regarding what constituted evangelical poverty.
- Professor at the University of Paris. He viewed Aristotelian thought as opposing Christian belief. As Minister General he forbade Roger Bacon from publishing. Nevertheless, nominalist thought blossomed in the Franciscans of the 13th Century, particularly with John Duns Scotus and William of Ockam.

- The mission God gave Francis, as well as to the men of his day and ours, is to be a herald of the Gospel and its demands, to be a living Gospel in deed and in truth, to mourn and weep over one's sins, to take the Cross as men who follow the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.
- God is present in His creation; the physical universe and the soul are seen as mirrors reflecting God and as rungs in a ladder leading to God. The Incarnation is the fullness of this manifestation.
- “How wholesome it is, always to meditate on the cross of Christ.”

- With Christ as the road and the door, Bonaventure begins his ascent in the material world, meditating upon God's presence as revealed in Nature as did his model, Francis, but he notes that one can bypass that stage by immediately turning into the soul; or, bypass Nature and the soul and turn at once to contemplate God. Knowledge of God is innate in the soul and does not have to be derived from the sensible world through a reasoning process. Though such a reasoning process has validity, it is not necessary for one to know God.

- Only in the Trinity can be actualized the fullest expression of the power, wisdom, and goodness from the Father who is the source. The world is an expression of this fecundity but cannot contain it. The Son is the link between the Godhead and creation.
- “The creatures of this sense world signify the invisible attributes of God.”
- “Whoever, therefore, is not enlightened by such splendor of created things is blind; whoever is not awakened by such outcries is deaf; whoever does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; whoever does not discover the First Principle from such clear signs is a fool.

- Therefore, open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips and apply your heart so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love and worship. Glorify and honor your God lest the whole world rise against you.”
- Bonaventure cautions (and history has demonstrated both with Bonaventure and the exercises of Iñigo of Loyola) that meditation on intelligible nature or the life of Christ may result in merely a quietist piety that remains in superficial sentimentality, a sop to the senses.

- “Then ... by praying, to receive restoring grace; by a good life, to receive purifying justice; by meditating, to receive illuminating knowledge; and by contemplating, to receive perfecting wisdom. Just as no one comes to wisdom except through grace, justice and knowledge, so no one comes to contemplation except by penetrating meditation, a holy life and devout prayer... (concentrating) our attention upon the reflections of truth.”

- When our intellect knows truth it does so in the light of eternal Truth; and when our will desires or judges something as good it does so in the light of the absolute Good. This means that we grasp truth in God Himself, who shines as the light of truth and goodness in our souls.
- “To grow in the things of the Spirit, love must go hand in hand with learning; nay, at a certain point it must leave study to dally behind while the heart runs ahead with inner joy to the gift that is God Himself.”

- “All intellectual activities must be left behind and the height of our affection must be totally transferred and transformed into God.”
- “Our mind, accustomed to the darkness of beings and images of the things of sense, when it glimpses the light of the Supreme Being, seems to itself to see nothing. It does not realize that this very darkness is the supreme illumination of our mind, just as when the eye sees pure light, it seems to itself to see nothing.”

- “First, therefore, I invite the reader to the groans of prayer through Christ crucified, through whose blood we are cleansed from the filth of vice – so that he not believe that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy, work without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, endeavor without divine grace, reflection as a mirror without divinely inspired wisdom. To those, therefore,... the humble and the pious, the contrite and the devout, those anointed with the oil of gladness, the lovers of divine wisdom, and those inflamed with a desire for it, to those wishing to give themselves to glorifying, wondering at and even savoring God, ...

- I...(suggest) that the mirror presented by the external world is of little or no value unless the mirror of our soul has been cleaned and polished. Therefore,...first exercise yourself in remorse of conscience before you raise your eyes to the rays of Wisdom reflected in its mirrors, lest perhaps from gazing upon these rays you fall into a deeper pit of darkness.”
- “Whoever wishes to ascend to God must first avoid sin, which deforms our nature...”

- “The function of the power of choice is found in deliberation, judgment, and desire. Deliberation consists in inquiring which is better...the notion of the highest good is necessarily imprinted in everyone who deliberates.”
- “No one judges with certitude according to law unless he is certain that the law is right and that he should not judge the law itself. But our mind judges about itself...In judging, our deliberative power touches the divine laws if it reaches a solution by a full analysis.”

- “Happiness is had only in terms of the best and ultimate end. Therefore, human desire seeks nothing except the highest good... Creatures, when they take the image and copy for the Truth are deceived and in error.”
- “Memory leads to eternity; understanding, to truth; the power of choice, to the highest good...to the most blessed Trinity itself.”
- “The study of the divinely imparted Scripture is especially helpful (to contemplation) for Sacred Scripture deals principally with the works of reparation.

- Hence, it treats mainly of faith, hope, and charity by which the soul is reformed, and most especially by charity...the fulfillment of the Law...And our Savior asserts that the whole Law and the prophets depend on these two commandments: love of God and of our neighbor.”
- Without the Holy Spirit “we cannot know the secret things of God. No one can know ‘the things of man except the spirit of man which is in him; so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11).’ Let us...be rooted and grounded in charity.”

- “Let him who wishes to contemplate the invisible things of God in the unity of his essence fix his attention first on being ... for Being itself is first and last; it is eternal and most present; it is utterly simple and the greatest; it is most actual and most unchangeable; it is most perfect and most immense; it is supremely one and yet all-inclusive...the beginning and the consummation, the Alpha and the Omega...within all things, but not enclosed; outside all things, but not excluded ... all in all...from Him, through Him, and in Him are all things...”

- “After considering the essential attributes of God, the eye of our intelligence should be raised to look upon the most blessed Trinity...see, then, and observe that the highest good is without qualification, that than which no greater can be thought... that it cannot rightly be thought of unless it be thought of as three and one. (For the highest good) cannot exist unless it is actual and intrinsic, substantial and hypostatic, natural and voluntary, free and necessary, lacking nothing and perfect... (unless) the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...were present, it would (not) be the highest good.”

- In the Trinity is “supreme communicability with individuality of persons, supreme consubstantiality with plurality of hypostases , supreme configurability with distinct personality, supreme coequality with degree, supreme coeternity with emanation, supreme mutual intimacy with mission...Therefore, when you consider these in themselves one by one, you have matter for contemplating the truth; when you compare them with one another, you have reason to be lifted up to the highest wonder. Therefore, that your mind may ascend ... (to) contemplation, these should be considered together.”

- “This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.’ (Jo 17:3) For we should wonder not only at the essential and personal properties of God in themselves but also in comparison with the super-wonderful union of God and man in the unity of the Person of Christ ...born of the Virgin in the fullness of time ...the most actual with the one who suffered supremely and died, the most perfect and immense with the lowly, the supreme and all-inclusive one...the man Jesus Christ.”

- “Wonder that in Christ personal union exists with a trinity of substances and a duality of natures; that complete agreement exists with a plurality of wills; that mutual predication of God and man exists with a plurality of properties; that co-adoration exists with a plurality of excellence, that co-exaltation above all things exists with a plurality of dignity; that co-domination exists with a plurality of powers. In this consideration is the perfection of the mind’s illumination...nor does anything more remain except the day of rest ...the mind’s discernment comes to rest.”

- “Whoever desires to attain the height of poverty should renounce in some way not only worldly wisdom but also learning, that having renounced such a possession, he might enter into the mighty works of the Lord and offer himself naked to the arms of the Crucified.”
- “Leave behind your senses and intellectual activities, sensible and invisible things, all non-being and being; and in this state of unknowing be restored ... to unity with Him who is above all essence and knowledge.”

Bibliography

- RJ Armstrong (translator), **Francis and Claire. The complete works.** Paulist Press. New York. (1982)
- E. Cousins (translator), **Bonaventure.** Paulist Press. New York. (1978)