

# Custodians of the Tradition

*Reclaiming the Franciscan  
Intellectual Tradition*



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

Zachary Hayes OFM  
Bonaventure Fest, 2003, Aston, PA



## Selected Writings

by Zachary Hayes OFM

### Christ through the Eyes of Francis and Clare

Franciscan spirituality and theology has long taken an approach that finds its creative insights from the spirituality of St. Francis and St. Clare. Their spirituality led the great theologians of the Franciscan movement to develop a style that has a number of distinctive traits. This is particularly true in the area of Christology. Many of us are accustomed to think of Christ only in terms of his relation to sin and redemption. Our focus, then, is on the cross, and on the idea that the death of Christ is a sacrifice of infinite value for the salvation of humanity. It is commonly argued that, had there been no sin on the part of Adam and other humans, there would have been no incarnation. The point of the Franciscan tradition is not to deny the significance of the crucifixion, but to place it in a larger context.

**T**he early Franciscan theologians were convinced that, however we view the crucifixion, the entire mystery of the incarnation, which includes the crucifixion, could not have been an after-thought on the part of God. They were convinced that the mystery of Christ was what God first intended in creating the world.

And the process of creation from the beginning has always been moving to the goal which we see in the person of Christ. We wish to discuss this by seeing it in relation to the spirituality of St. Francis and St. Clare, and *by reflecting on the implications* that the theologians of later history were to draw out of this.

There can be no doubt that the life of St. Francis, from the time of his experience before the cross at San Damiano, became more and more centered around the mystery of the person of Christ. Francis' journey to God, which reached a high point on the hill of Mount Alverna, is by way of Christ. This was a spirituality in which the humanity of Christ took on a special significance. Because the Son of God became a human being, Francis easily thought of himself as a brother of Christ. Similarly, Clare could easily use familial language in speaking of her relation to Christ. This form of spirituality is sometimes called an "imitation of Christ" spirituality. It is known also as a Christo-centric spirituality; and it is basic to both Francis and Clare.

The theology developed early in the Franciscan movement was deeply inspired by this spirituality. We might put the basic conviction of this development in the following way. If spirituality is a way of ordering our life and putting ourselves into a life-giving relation with reality, including God, then we must ask: What must reality look like if the spirituality lived by Francis and Clare is capable of doing that? Or to put this in another way, if their spiritual journey is Christ-centered, does this mean that the whole of reality is centered around Christ as well?

St. Bonaventure was convinced that this was, indeed, the case. His theology is influenced by his reading of the *prologue to the Gospel of John* as well as by the spirituality of Francis. The Word, of which John's Gospel speaks, is the second person of the Trinity. *In Bonaventure's theology, the second Person is the perfect expression of all that God is within*

*the divine life, and all that can be called into being in creation. He is simply the Word of God. Thus, the entire plan of creation is contained in the mystery of the Word. He is the original, in the mind of God, after which all creatures are formed.*

This means, first, that all of creation is an external language system the purpose of which is to give expression to the internal Word of God. Creation, then, may be compared to a book. The basic content of that book was written first in the inner Word of God. As we learn to read the book of creation, we are learning something of that divine Word. And it is that same divine Word that became enfleshed in Jesus. This means that *in learning to read and meditate on his life and to shape our own lives in that light, we are discovering the depths of meaning of humanity and of the cosmos within which we exist.*

This means that the person of Christ encapsulates something of all creation in

himself. All the glories of nature — the glorious heavenly galaxies, the cataracts of mountain springs, the tender flowers of spring-time, the soaring eagle against the blue vault of heaven — all catch a gleam of Christ's beauty. *The single beauty of the divine life embodied in Christ is refracted in countless ways in the glories of the created order.*

The spiritual life, then, is a journey to the center of reality. But the center of reality is the mystery of the eternal Word through whom the world is created, and who became flesh in Jesus to show us by his life where the center of reality is to be found, and how we might most effectively travel that spiritual journey to our home in God. It is through that journey that creation will be brought back to its point of departure in the mystery of God's loving, creative power. But it will not look as it did when it emerged. It will be radically transfigured in the power of the Spirit, as was the humanity of Christ.

What happens in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is the anticipation of what God holds open to all of creation.

*This is a tradition that is convinced:*

1. that the cosmos is basically incomplete without Christ;
2. that the Word became flesh out of sheer divine love, because God wished to share the mystery of the divine life and love and beauty as fully as possible with a creature; and
3. that in Christ we see the most emphatic instance of life. All this comes together in the question: *Would the Word have become flesh if Adam had not sinned? The Franciscan answer to that is: Yes. For that union of the divine and the created that takes place in Christ is what God intends from the beginning.*

## Creation and the Humility of God

Francis rejoiced in all *the works of the Lord's* hand  
and from these joy-producing manifestations  
he rose to their life-giving  
principle and cause.  
In beautiful things  
he saw Beauty itself  
and through his vestiges imprinted on creation  
*he followed his Beloved* everywhere,  
making from all things a ladder  
by which he could climb up  
and embrace him *who is utterly desirable*.  
With a feeling of unprecedented devotion  
he savored  
in each and every creature —  
as in so many rivulets —  
that Goodness  
which is their fountain-source.  
And he perceived a heavenly harmony  
in the consonance  
of powers and activities  
God has given them,  
and like the prophet David  
sweetly exhorted them to praise the Lord.

Legenda Maior, IX, 1, translated by Ewert Cousins



Moving from the experience of Francis and Clare, the Franciscan tradition has developed a rich form of *cosmic Christology*. It is a vision of reality that alerts us to the deeply religious significance of the material world, since the humanity of Jesus which played such a central role in their *spirituality is rooted in chemistry of the cosmos*. *This is a tradition that raises important questions* about the values with which we relate to the world around us. This is particularly significant in the context of **environmental issues** which have become such an important dimension of our current experience of the world. This sacred character of creation might be heightened by seeing it in its strong sacramental significance. By sacramental we mean that the mystery of God's self-communication is mediated to us in a tangible form. This does not mean that we identify the created world with God. But it means that we learn to see it as a means of manifesting and communicating the divine to the human. This sense of the sacramental quality of the cosmos is radicalized in the Christian perception of Christ. *The human reality of Jesus is the most focused statement of what God is about with the world more generally.*

**T**his tradition has important insights to bring to the common Christian task of allowing the Christian vision of God, of humanity, and of the world to become an effective participant in the broader human search for wisdom as we struggle with the many crucial problems that tear at the heart of humanity in this third millennium of history after the birth of Jesus.

Lecture given by Zachary Hayes OFM  
at Alverno College, Milwaukee, WI  
July 22, 2001

# The Formulation of The Doctrine of The Unconditional Primacy of Christ

as presented by John Duns Scotus

from "Christ and The Cosmos" in *The Gift of Being*  
by Zachary Hayes OFM

*The core* of this tradition can be expressed in the following way.

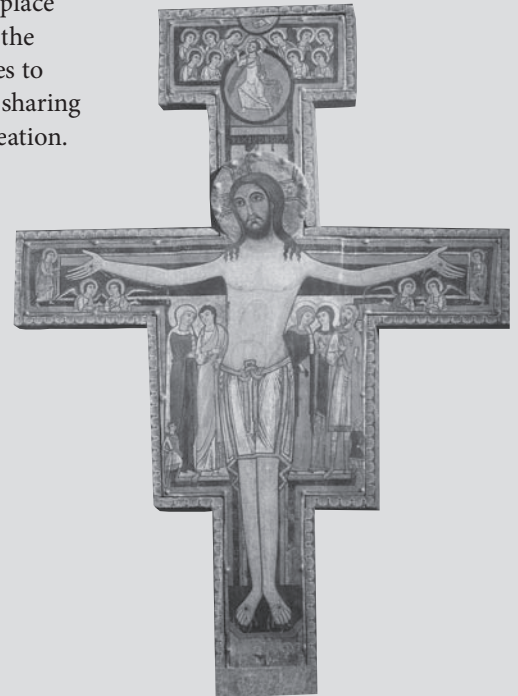
The cosmos without Christ would somehow be incomplete. Therefore one speaks of the unconditional predestination of Christ. This relates to the conviction that the Word became flesh not because humans had sinned, but rather because God wished to share the mystery of the divine life and love and beauty as fully as possible with a creature. And that is the primary meaning of the mystery of Christ.

In this sense, God's aim in creating is so that Christ may come to be.

The conclusion, then, is that with or without sin, the incarnation is God's initial aim in creating and would have taken place even if sin had never entered the picture.

But when sin does become a factor, the modality of the incarnation changes. Because of sin, we see the actual incarnation taking place in the mode of a suffering, crucified, and glorified Christ.

That is, the incarnation takes place in such a way as to overcome the humanly constructed obstacles to achieving God's first aim: the sharing of divine life and love with creation.



*The Gift of Being.*  
Collegeville, MN:  
The Liturgical Press, 2001.  
Page 105. [www.litpress.org](http://www.litpress.org)

## The Hidden Center

Humanity comes forth from God stamped with an ineradicable image of its Creator, and marked by an unquenchable desire for truth and happiness which will find its fulfillment only in union with God who is both the origin and the goal of this desire. In making the journey *we need a center of orientation*: but because of the historical reality of sin, the center of the world, which must become our personal center, has become lost and hidden from our view. . . . But the center has been located for us again *in the incarnation of the Word who is the center of God* and the center through whom God communicates being and grace to the world.

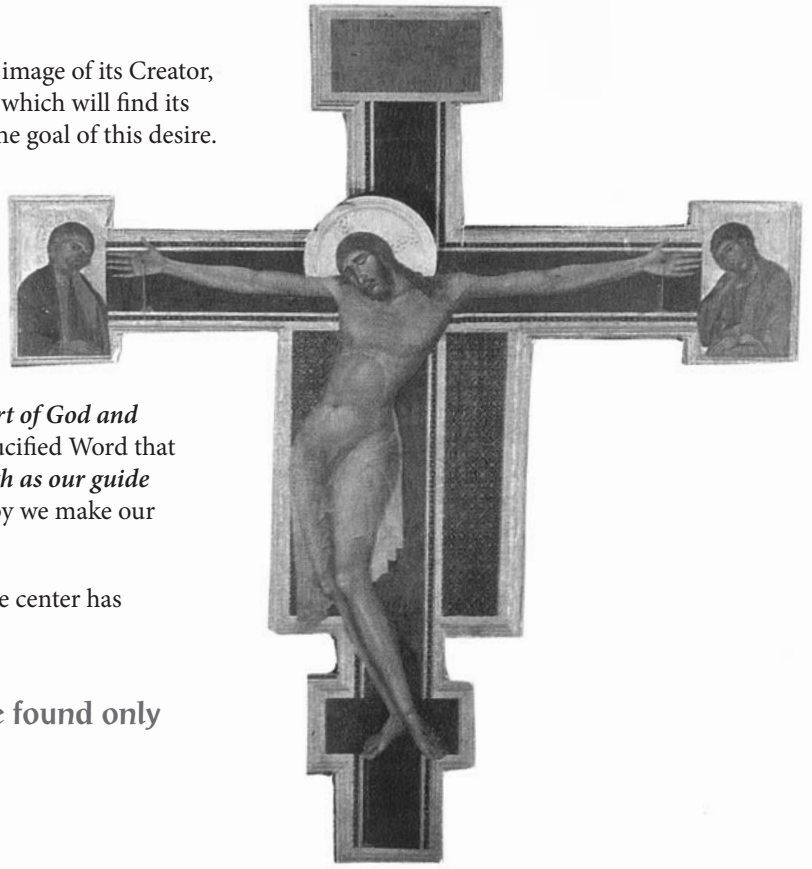
*Above all, in the cross of the incarnate Word is revealed the heart of God and the center of reality.* It is in our relation to this incarnate and crucified Word that our lives will become focused on the center of reality. *With truth as our guide and love as the animating spirit of our lives*, the journey whereby we make our way back to God will be successful.

Employing a geometrical analogy, Bonaventure explains how the center has been re-located for us in the humility of the cross:

**F**or, when the center is lost in the circle, it can be found only by two lines that intersect at a right angle.

Hexaameron. 1, 24 (V, 333)

Zachary Hayes OFM, *The Hidden Center*. Pages 23-24; 200.



## Selected Writings by Zachary Hayes OFM

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### Selected Readings

*The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure*. St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1996

*The Gift of Being: A Theology of Creation*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001

*A Window to the Divine: Creation Theology*. Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1996

*Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*. New York: Crossroad, 1999

“Franciscan Tradition as a Wisdom Tradition,” in *Spirit and Life: Franciscan Leadership in Ministry*. Volume 7, St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1997, 27-40.

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