

LENT: A TIME FOR CONVERSION INTO LOVE

A MEDITATION
WITH FRANCISCAN
JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

“OUR CALL TO CONVERSION”

“Return to me with your whole heart...”

(Joel 2: 12)

*Be conscious... of the wondrous state in which the Lord
God has placed you, for He created you and formed you to
the image of His beloved Son according to the body, and
to His likeness according to the spirit.*

St. Francis of Assisi, Admonition 5

WHAT IS CONVERSION?

Not merely a turning away from sin... but

turning to “look again”

an invitation to re-consider the way things are

a turning things over in my mind

a meditation, reconsideration of my life

A UNIFIED THEOLOGY CONTAINS:

A CONSISTENT

- THEOLOGY (vision of God)
- ANTHROPOLOGY (vision of the human)
- CHRISTOLOGY (vision of Christ)
- SOTERIOLOGY (vision of salvation)
- ESCHATOLOGY (vision of the Kingdom)
- MISSIONOLOGY: (how to proclaim the Gospel)

THE FRANCISCAN TRADITION

Offers a unified approach to these, centered upon Jesus Christ, yet in a strikingly different way

How does this tradition relate to my life?

How can this tradition offer a “turning point” for conversion?

DIVINE DESIRE AND ABUNDANT LOVE

Ephesians I: 3: “God has given us the wisdom to understand fully the mystery, the plan decreed in Christ, to be carried out in the fullness of time: namely, to bring all things in the heavens and on earth into one under Christ’s headship.”

DIVINE DESIRE AND ABUNDANT LOVE

What if the Incarnation were always part of God's plan? ... What if everything has been created so that God could become human?

“The Incarnation is God's greatest work (*summum opus*).”

- (Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d. 7)

DIVINE DESIRE: COMMUNION

—Manifestation: Salvation history

— Creation

— Incarnation

— Beatitude

CONSIDER THE GOODNESS...

“God’s goal in creating the world was to prepare for the Incarnation. The end of his plan was the beginning, and divine Wisdom saw from all eternity that the Word would become flesh, taking on our nature and coming to live among us. All this was preordained before the creation of Lucifer and the world; before the fall of our first parents.”

- St. Francis de Sales, Homily for Christmas eve, 1622

DIVINE ABUNDANCE

“I have the immense joy of being a human being, a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. THERE IS NO WAY OF TELLING PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE ALL WALKING AROUND SHINING LIKE THE SUN.”

Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

A SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE...

What difference does this make?

Is this an invitation to look again? At what?

THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING

Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo?*:

Incarnation was God's response to sin.

Christ's passion set in balance the scales of justice.

No sin, no Christ.

Felix culpa of the Easter vigil *Exultet*.

FRANCISCAN PERSPECTIVE

Anselm:

Incarnation is:

- God's response to sin
- A divine reaction
- No sin, no Christ
- *Felix culpa*

Scotus:

Incarnation is:

- God's design
- A divine initiative
- Christ
- No one rejoices in sin

A CONVERSION IN OUR WAY OF SEEING THE WORLD

Theology: God = Judge

Anthropology: Sinners

Christ: Sinless Victim

Salvation: Repay the debt

Eschaton: Matthew 25

Ecclesiology: The Few

Missiology: Save the world

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Theology: God = Love
Anthropology: Beloved
Christ: Emmanuel
Salvation: Embrace the beloved

Eschaton: Matthew 20
Ecclesiology: Everyone
Missiology: Imitate love

DIVINE ACCEPTATIO:

“And so, it is well said that God always rewards beyond our worth, and universally beyond any particular value which an act might merit. This merit is beyond nature and its intrinsic goodness; it is from a gratuitous divine acceptance. What’s more, even beyond that justice which would commonly reward an act, for God rewards by means of pure liberality.”

Scotus, Ordinatio I, 17

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We can shift the focus from our fallenness and not lose the Incarnation

God's love is not measured by our brokenness

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE?

1. An optimistic vision of the human person
2. An abundant vision of divine action
3. An affirmation of divine presence
4. A vision inspired by hope and joy

HOW MIGHT SUCH A VISION TRANSFORM THIS LENT?

It's all about divine love, from the very beginning.

How do I see myself in light of that love? How do I see others in that light?

How often can I get trapped in trying to earn God's love? Even in subtle ways?

Where are the moments of divine presence in my life?

A SEASON OF ACTIVE LOVING

It's all about divine desire to be with us, from the very beginning.

How do I see my life as one of presence to others?

How do I see events as divine epiphanies?

A SEASON OF TRANSFORMATION

It's all about a call to share in divine life by my act of presence – *who* I am

How do I already work to incarnate God's love to others?

How might I deepen my ability to see in my act of presence a participation in the Incarnation?

How do I see my life as one of pouring out divine love to a broken world?

BUT WAIT...

All this is fine...

But what about evil? Suffering? Sin?

Aren't we being a bit *too* optimistic here?

BUT WAIT...

Two questions:

1. Why do innocent suffer? Why does anyone suffer? Why is there evil in the world?
2. *What am I, a follower of Jesus, called to DO in the presence of this suffering person before me, right now?*

BREAKING FORTH LIKE THE DAWN

“This, rather is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread... sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn...”

Is. 58: 6-8

OUR VOCATION

“We are his mothers when we carry him about in our heart and person by means of love and a clean and sincere conscience, and we give birth to him by means of our holy actions, which should shine as an example to others.”

St. Francis, Letter to the Faithful, 230j

LENT: A TIME FOR CONVERSION INTO LOVE
A meditation with Franciscan John Duns Scotus

A. Our call to conversion:

“Return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping and mourning; Rend your hearts not your garments, and return to the Lord, your God. For gracious and merciful is God, slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment.” (Joel 2:12-13)

“Be conscious... of the wondrous state in which the Lord God has placed you, for He created you and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body, and to His likeness according to the spirit. And [yet] all the creatures under heaven, each according to its nature, serve, know, and obey their Creator better than you. And even the demons did not crucify Him, but you together with them have crucified Him and crucify Him even now by delighting in vices and sins. (Francis, Admonition 5)

B. Salvation History: a Franciscan vision of abundant love and beauty

Divine intention: share divine life (Ephesians I: 3)

Divine desire to embrace human nature as one of us
Centrality of the Incarnation (Franciscan Christocentrism)

“Consider the goodness of God, whose goal in creating the world was to prepare for the Incarnation. The end of his plan was the beginning, and divine Wisdom saw from all eternity that the Word would become flesh, taking on our nature and coming to live among us. All this was preordained before the creation of Lucifer and the world; before the fall of our first parents.”

-- St. Francis de Sales, Homily for Christmas Eve, 1622

“Now the human nature in Christ was predestined to be glorified, and in order to be glorified, it was predestined to be united to the Word, in as much as such glory as it was granted would never have been conferred on this nature had it not been so united.”

-- John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio II, d. 7, q. 3*

“I have the immense joy of being a human being, a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. THERE IS NO WAY OF TELLING PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE ALL WALKING AROUND SHINING LIKE THE SUN.”

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C. How this insight informs a conversion in our way of seeing the world

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|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------|
| Moving from: | JUSTICE | toward | ABUNDANT LOVE |
| | <i>Anselm's Cur Deus Homo</i> | | Scotus |
| Theology: | God is Judge | | God is LOVE |
| Anthropology: | We are sinners | | We are BELOVED |
| Christology: | Innocent/Victim | | Emmanuel |
| Soteriology: | Repay the debt | | Embrace the FRIEND |
| Eschatology: | Matthew 25 | | Matthew 20 |
| Ecclesiology: | Only the few | | The MANY |
| Missiology: | Save the world | | IMITATE God's love |

And so it is well said that God always rewards beyond worth, universally beyond certain worth which an act merits, -- since that such be worthy of merit, this is beyond nature and its intrinsic goodness, from gratuitous divine acceptance; and even more, beyond that other which normally would be accepting the act, whenever God rewards by pure liberality.

-- Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 17

D. How might such an insight transform this Lent for me? How might I fast?

1. A Season of "paying attention"

How do I see myself in light of that abundant beauty and love? How do I see others in that light?

Where are the moments of divine presence in my life?

What nourishes my own awareness of abundant love within and around me?

How might I make a larger space for divine love to reveal itself to me?

2. A Season of "active loving"

What is my own "salvation history"?

How do I see my life as one of presence to others?

How do I see events as divine epiphanies?

3. A season of transformation into Christ

How do I already work to incarnate God's love to those around me?

How am I already present to others? How might I enhance that presence?

How do I see my life to be like the Eucharist, pouring out God's generous love to a broken world? How might I enhance what I am already doing?

"This, rather is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke; sharing your bread... sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; clothing the naked and not turning your back on your own. Then your light shall break forth like the dawn..."
(Isaiah 58: 6-8)