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ECUMENICAL TRADITIONS:
BYZANTINE AND FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE

by

Gino G. Grivetti

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Theology.

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ABSTRACT
ECUMENICAL TRADITIONS:
BYZANTINE AND FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE

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Marquette University, 2023

This thesis investigates the convergences between the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions in the areas of hagiography, mysticism, and dogmatic theology. Historically marginalized in the neo-scholastic synthesis of the nineteenth century, the closeness of Patriarch Bartholomew (b. 1940) and Pope Francis (b. 1936) has symbolized the significance of this dialogue in the modern ecumenical movement. The anonymous *bios* of St. Nilus of Rossano (d. 1005) and the first *vita* of St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226) by Thomas of Celano (d. 1260) are representative of the hagiographical traditions of the Italo-Byzantine monks and the early Franciscans. The traditions came into direct contact in the context of the Second Council of Lyons (1274). Despite the failure of the council to reunify the Greek and Latin Churches, the mysticism of St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) displays significant resonances with the apophatic methodology associated with Eastern Christianity, indicating the compatibility of the emerging Franciscan intellectual tradition with Byzantine theology. While Vladimir Lossky (d. 1958) emphasized that the doctrinal divergence created by the *filioque* controversy was the primary fracture in the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches, the Trinitarian dogmatics of John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) and St. Gregory Palamas (d. 1359) disclose substantial parallels that transcend this ecclesiological division. The harmonious convergence between the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions offers an important point for further study in the modern renewal of the ecumenical movement.

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Gino G. Grivetti

Theology is a discipline that is best realized in the context of its own history and community life. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge and thank those who have helped to guide my writing of this thesis. I want to begin by thanking the members of my review committee: Dr. Mark Johnson, Dr. Lezlie Knox, and Dr. Marcus Plested. I would also like to acknowledge the support of Dr. Deirdre Dempsey throughout my studies at Marquette University. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the students, faculty, and staff of Cardinal Stritch University (1937-2023), where I was blessed to serve as Director of University Ministry and to write most of this thesis prior to its closure. I hope that this brief work might serve as a little testament to the Franciscan mission in the world: that we might learn “to approve the better things” – *ut probetis potiora* (Philippians 1:10).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Symbols of Unity: Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis	1
The Retrieval of the Franciscan Tradition	4
Mystical Traditions.....	8
II. HAGIOGRAPHY: ST. NILUS AND ST. FRANCIS	14
Life of St. Nilus	17
Life of St. Francis	24
Summary: Hagiography.....	33
III. MYSTICAL THEOLOGY: ST. BONAVENTURE	34
Franciscan Diplomacy and the Second Council of Lyons (1274)	34
<i>On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology</i>	39
Summary: Mystical Theology	42
IV. DOGMATIC THEOLOGY: JOHN DUNS SCOTUS AND GREGORY	
PALAMAS.....	44
John Duns Scotus.....	45
St. Gregory Palamas	51

Summary: Dogmatic Theology	55
V. CONCLUSION	57
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	61
Primary Sources	61
Secondary Sources	62

Introduction

The Byzantine and Franciscan traditions constitute an important point of convergence between the theology of the Eastern and Western Churches. Historically marginalized by the neo-scholastic synthesis of nineteenth-century Catholicism, the modern retrieval of the Franciscan sources and the simultaneous resurgence of the ecumenical movement represents an opportunity for renewed encounter and dialogue between Greek and Latin Christianity. A historical analysis of contemporaneous Byzantine and Franciscan saints and theologians reveals substantial harmony between the traditions, particularly in the areas of hagiography, mysticism, and dogmatic theology.

Symbols of Unity: Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis

Fifty-years after the initial ecumenical encounter between Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI in Jerusalem,¹ Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis have further advanced the dialogue between the Greek and Latin Churches, re-affirming the journey towards “communion in legitimate diversity.”² Even in the absence of definitive theological agreement, the Pope and Patriarch have noted the universal responsibility of all Christians “to offer common witness to the love of God for all people by working together in the service of humanity . . .”³ Subsequent declarations have reflected the commitment of both Churches to the common good.⁴ However, the most notable area of ecumenical convergence has occurred in the theology of creation.

¹ For an analysis of the meeting between Athenagoras and Paul VI, see *Dialogue of Love: Breaking the Silence of Centuries*, ed. John Chryssavgis, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

² *Common Declaration of Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 25, 2014), No. 2.

³ *Common Declaration of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew*, No. 5.

⁴ For example, Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew, and Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens, issued a declaration in support of refugees and migrants. *Joint Declaration of His Holiness Bartholomew*,

Bartholomew has been called “the Green Patriarch” in recognition of his strenuous support for environmental protection since his enthronement in 1991.⁵ One year after his meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch, Pope Francis promulgated *Laudato Si*, the first papal encyclical on ecology, in which he cited the teachings of Bartholomew as evidence that the Churches are “united by the same concern.”⁶ In the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, issued a joint appeal for the protection of creation, declaring: “In our common Christian tradition, the Scriptures and the Saints provide illuminating perspectives for comprehending both the realities of the present and the promise of something larger than what we see in the moment.”⁷ While the appeal focused on the social and spiritual imperatives of environmental stewardship, it also indicates the intimate connection between Christian ecology and ecumenical theology.

In *Laudato Si*, immediately following his citation of Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis offers a reflection on his “guide and inspiration” as Bishop of Rome: Saint Francis of Assisi.⁸ The letter opens with the sonorous words of the *Canticle of the Creatures*, the hymn of praise that the saint sang before his death.⁹ Similar to St. Bonaventure, whom he also cites, Pope Francis invokes his namesake as an icon of his theological vision. Recalling the writings of the Brazilian Franciscan theologian

Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, of His Beatitude Ieronymos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, and of His Holiness Pope Francis, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 16, 2016).

⁵ The numerous statements of Patriarch Bartholomew on ecology and care for creation have been compiled in *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer*, ed. John Chryssavgis, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003) and in *On Earth as in Heaven*, ed. John Chryssavgis, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 24, 2015), Nos. 7-9.

⁷ *A Joint Message for the Protection of Creation*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, September 1, 2021).

⁸ *Laudato Si*, Nos. 9-12.

⁹ *Laudato Si*, No. 1.

Leonardo Boff, St. Francis appears as the inspiration and for an integral ecology: the ability to hear “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”¹⁰

The centrality of *il poverello* in the theology of Pope Francis is both obvious and surprising. In both form and content, this intentional *ressourcement* of the Franciscan tradition contrasts with the primacy of neo-scholastic theology in nineteenth century Catholicism, particularly as reflected in the statements of the pontifical *Magisterium*.¹¹ However, the example of Pope Francis demonstrates the importance of returning to the sources of theology in order to actualize the vision of Christian unity. As Fr. Georges Florovsky observed following the 1964 meeting of Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI, the modern ecumenical movement should be matched by an “ecumenism in time,” a dialogue in which both Churches return to the sources of Christian theology in “a mutual process of coming to terms with the fullness of Tradition.”¹² Isolated for many centuries, the positive juxtaposition of Patriarch Bartholomew and St. Francis of Assisi in *Laudato Si* indicates the potential of the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions to advance this dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches.

¹⁰ *Laudato Si*, No. 49. Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Phillip Berryman, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

¹¹ Pope Leo XIII stated the essential definition of the neo-scholastic program in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, in which he exhorted Catholic theologians to “restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas [Aquinas]”: Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, August 4, 1879), No. 31. However, in a letter to the Franciscan General Minister, Pope Pius X would later praise St. Bonaventure as “the other prince of the scholastics” (*princeps scholasticorum alter*): Pius X, *Doctoris Seraphici in Acta Pii X*, Vol. I, (Romae: Ex Typographia Vaticana, 1905), 236. Reflecting the revival of Franciscan scholarship in the early twentieth century, Pope Pius XI dedicated the encyclical *Rite Expiatis* to the celebration of the seventh centenary of the *transitus* of St. Francis of Assisi: Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 30, 1926).

¹² Georges Florovsky, “A Sign of Contradiction,” trans. Matthew Baker in *Dialogue of Love*, 65-66.

The Retrieval of the Franciscan Tradition

The Byzantine and Franciscan traditions are both difficult to define. Archbishop Joseph Raya of the Melkite Church described Byzantium as “the sum total of three distinct cultures and civilizations: Greek, Latin, and Eastern, with elements and contributions of Slavic and other ethnic groups,” which correspondingly generated rites and Churches with a distinct spirituality, theology, and liturgy, “in short, the Christian life-style which enables it to see the face of God.”¹³ The ecclesiology of the particular Churches can be added to this description to further delineate the unity and diversity of institutional structures that serve the communion of the Christian faithful.¹⁴

However, this positive definition of Byzantium contrasts with the historically negative connotations of the term, particularly in eighteenth century historiography.¹⁵ Indeed, the use of “Byzantine” to contrast both the Orthodox and Eastern Catholics from the Roman-Latin Catholic Church demonstrates the primary problem with the term: the denial of the historical continuity of ancient Rome with the Eastern Empire centered the city of Constantinople, which was originally named *Byzantion*.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the lingering influence of this negative historiography, from an ecclesiological perspective,

¹³ Joseph M. Raya, *The Face of God: Essays on Byzantine Spirituality*, (Woodland Park, NJ: God With Us Publications, 2012), 17.

¹⁴ The Second Vatican Council utilized the terms particular and local somewhat interchangeably to describe the various churches that constitute the Catholic Church, especially the Eastern Churches in communion with the Bishop of Rome. For an analysis of the ecclesiology of the local and particular churches in the documents of Vatican II, see: Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982): 171-232.

¹⁵ On the historical development of the term Byzantine, see the “Introduction” in *People and Power in Byzantium: An Introduction to Modern Byzantine Studies*, eds. Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 1-18, esp. 9-15; F. K. Haarer, “Writing Histories of Byzantium: The Historiography of Byzantine History,” in *A Companion to Byzantium*, ed. Liz James, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 9-21.

¹⁶ The Byzantines referred to their state as the Roman Empire (*basileia ton Rhomaion*). Cf. “Byzantium,” in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, eds. Alexander P. Kazhdan *et al.*, Vol. I, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 344.

Byzantine can also be interpreted as a positive term that describes the liturgical and theological tradition associated with the Church of Constantinople. In this sense, Byzantine is inclusive of both Catholic and Orthodox Christians, regardless of their geographic location in reference to the ancient borders of the Eastern and Western divisions of the Roman Empire.¹⁷ Additionally, Byzantine is preferable to the designation of Eastern Christianity as Greek, which does not accurately reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Churches associated with the spiritual legacy of Constantinople.¹⁸ Therefore, for the purpose of a comparative analysis, the Byzantine tradition can be identified with the saints and theologians of the Churches associated with the ecclesial-cultural patrimony of the Eastern Roman Empire.

Similarly, in the Roman Catholic Church, the Franciscan tradition can be identified with the spiritual movement and canonical religious orders inspired by Francis, Clare, and the early penitents of Assisi. However, whereas the Greek Orthodox Church functioned as the authoritative custodian of the Byzantine legacy, in the polyphony of Latin spirituality, the Franciscan tradition lacked a similar status in Roman Catholicism. As a result, the early sources of the Franciscan movement were generally unavailable for ecumenical dialogue until the modern era.

The modern retrieval of the Franciscan tradition began almost a century before the Second Vatican Council, which mandated that religious orders return to “the original

¹⁷ Byzantine may have been originally used as a general term for Eastern Roman culture, prior to the pejorative redefinition of the term in early modern historiography. Cf. Panagiotis Theodoropoulos, “Did the Byzantines Call themselves Byzantines? Elements of Eastern Roman Identity in the Imperial Discourse of the Seventh Century,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2021): 25-41.

¹⁸ However, several Eastern Catholic Churches do continue to use the term “Greek” or “Graeco-Catholic.” Cf. Peter Galadza, “Eastern Catholic Christianity,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Eastern Christianity*, ed. Ken Parry, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 293.

spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”¹⁹ In 1893, Paul Sabatier, a French Calvinist theologian, published his seminal biography of the saint: the *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*.²⁰ Simultaneously academic and romantic, Sabatier described his research as “a work of piety to seek behind the legend for the history.”²¹ Departing from the *Legenda Major* of Bonaventure and the accounts of Thomas of Celano, Sabatier based his portrayal of the saint on sources he believed predated the officially-sanctioned hagiographies, particularly on a manuscript he discovered of the *Mirror of the Perfection*. Sebastian Evans summarized the importance of the text in the preface to his English translation: “For nearly seven centuries the world has seen St. Francis of Assisi darkly through the sea-green glass of the cloister casement. Those that care to look upon the *Poverello* as he lived can now see him face to face, for the casement is gone.”²² Through the lens of the *Mirror of the Perfection*, Sabatier believed he could perceive the historical Francis behind the hagiographical saint.

Termed “the Franciscan Question,” the historical-critical study of St. Francis of Assisi continued throughout the twentieth century, culminating in the compilation of the early Franciscan sources, including the monumental English *Omnibus of Sources*.²³ At the end of the century, a critical English edition of the Franciscan early documents was published.²⁴ On the basis of these studies, the Franciscan Question has largely reached a

¹⁹ *Perfectae Caritas*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, October 28, 1965), No. 2.

²⁰ Paul Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Louise Seymour Houghton, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894).

²¹ Sabatier, *Life of St. Francis*, xxxiv.

²² *The Mirror of Perfection*, trans. Sebastian Evans, (Boston, MA: L.C. Page & Company, 1899), vii.

²³ *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis*, Fourth Revised Edition, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

²⁴ *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents [FA:ED]*, Vols. I, II, and III, eds. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, (New York: New City Press, 1999, 2000, and 2001); *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. and trans. Regis J. Armstrong, (New York: New City Press, 2006).

resolution with the conclusion that the various *vitae* written by Thomas of Celano are the earliest accounts of the life of St. Francis.²⁵ Despite this consensus, the extraordinary popularity of Sabatier's *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* has exercised an equally immense influence on the reception of the Franciscan tradition, including its presence in ecumenical dialogue.

The importance of Paul Sabatier in the retrieval of the Franciscan tradition demonstrates the unique "ecumenical appeal" of St. Francis of Assisi.²⁶ However, while this appeal has been broadly inclusive of Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and other Reformed Churches, prior to the Second Vatican Council, dialogue had been extremely limited between the Franciscan tradition and Eastern Orthodoxy. Moreover, these sparse contacts generally appeared as polemical tracts based on false or inaccurate information.²⁷

²⁵ The decisive evidence for this conclusion is the "Umbrian Legend" reconstructed by Jacques Dalarun and validated by the rediscovery of the *Vita brevior* of Thomas of Celano. For the primary text, see: Jacques Dalarun, *The Rediscovered Life of St. Francis of Assisi: Thomas of Celano*, trans. Timothy J. Johnson (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2016); For an analysis of the text, see: Jacques Dalarun, "The New Francis in the Rediscovered Life (*Vita brevior*) of Thomas of Celano," in *Ordo et Sanctitas: The Franciscan Spiritual Journey in Theology and Hagiography, Essays in Honor of J.A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv.*, eds. Michael F. Cusato, Timothy J. Johnson, and Steven J. McMichael (Boston, MA: Brill, 2017): 32-46; See also the series of essays "Towards a Resolution of the Franciscan Question:" Michael F. Cusato, Giles Constable, Michael W. Blastic, and Timothy J. Johnson, "The "Umbrian Legend" of Jacques Dalarun," *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 66 (2008): 479-510.

²⁶ Cf. Petá Dunstan, "The Ecumenical Appeal of Francis" in *The Cambridge Companion to Francis of Assisi*, ed. Michael J. P. Robson, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 273-287.

²⁷ For example, a polemical tractate by Fr. George Macris, a deceased priest of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR), has been widely disseminated: The tractate has a convoluted publication history. It originally appeared in *Synaxis: Orthodox Christian Theology in the 20th Century*, Vol. II (Chilliwack, BC: Synaxis Press, 1977): 39-56. The press was founded by Lev Puhalo (now Archbishop Lazar) in connection with All Saints of North America Monastery, also known as "New Ostrog." Puhalo affiliated with several Orthodox ecclesial jurisdictions before being received into the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) in 2002. Macris remained affiliated with ROCOR prior to his death in 1992. His tractate was republished in 1999 and later circulated online: George Macris, "A Comparison: Francis of Assisi and St. Seraphim of Sarov," *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1999): 33-50. The only early Franciscan source cited in the tractate is from the *Little Flowers of St. Francis (fioretti)*, which is a compilation of legendary stories about the saint dated to the fourteenth century and associated with the

Mystical Traditions

In his seminal *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Vladimir Lossky mentions the *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by Paul Sabatier as evidence of the Western separation of theology from mysticism, and thereby also from the Eastern Church.²⁸ In his account of ecclesial history, Lossky traces the schism between the Churches to the addition of the *filioque* to the Latin Creed, which he describes as “a spiritual commitment, a conscious taking of sides in a matter of faith.”²⁹ This dogmatic divergence radically ruptured the unity of the Church, which subsequently influenced the development of each respective tradition. For Lossky, Eastern Christianity maintained the centrality of mystical experience in its theological tradition, whereas the Western Church increasingly emphasized the primacy of philosophical reason.

However, the Franciscan movement has historically been described as a mystical tradition within Roman Catholicism, especially in contrast to neo-scholasticism.³⁰ The extraordinary diversity of spiritual practices and apostolic ministries that flourished among the followers of Francis and Clare of Assisi reflects the multiform nature of mysticism. For the early Franciscans, both the ecclesial institution of the canonical *Rule* and the charismatic inspiration of the Holy Spirit could coexist in harmony, such that

emerging Spiritual Franciscan movement. The only authentic quotation from St. Francis is his final absolution of the brothers, which is indirectly cited from Sabatier.

²⁸ Vladimir, Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1957), 8.

²⁹ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 13.

³⁰ The mystical dimensions of the Franciscan tradition have been analyzed in several studies: Dunstan Dobbins, *Franciscan Mysticism*, Franciscan Studies: Monographic Series, No. 6, (New York: Joseph Wagner, 1927); Ewert H. Cousins, “Francis of Assisi: Christian Mysticism at the Crossroads,” in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983): 163-190; Kevin L. Hughes, “Francis, Clare, and Bonaventure,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Julia A. Lamm (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 282-296.

“[t]he *Regula* of the Order was one, but the *vitae* many.”³¹ The movement was inclusive of city convents, itinerant preachers, missionaries, solitary hermits, teachers, theologians, cloistered women, ordained clerics, and laymen and women living in their own homes. Although the movement was gradually institutionalized into the Three Orders – the Friars Minor, the Poor Ladies, and the Lay Penitents – and thereafter into innumerable independent religious congregations, the mystical charism of the Assisi penitents continues to form the core of the Franciscan tradition.³² Moreover, the coexistence of this spirituality with the extensive intellectual contributions of Franciscan theologians attests to the intrinsic harmony between the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of Christian mysticism.

From the beginning, Francis and Clare of Assisi and their followers looked to the light of the east for inspiration. In the Scriptures, the Franciscans learned of the Holy Land, where Jesus Christ, the “rising sun” (Luke 1:78),³³ appeared to the world and walked with humanity. Through the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son and Word of God left an example for his disciples, so that they might follow in the footsteps of Christ. This Gospel life (*vita evangelii*) formed the simplest yet highest ideal of the Franciscan movement. As Francis of Assisi wrote in the *Earlier Rule*: “The rule and life of these brothers is this, namely: “to live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their

³¹ Neslihan Şenocak, *The Poor and the Perfect: The Rise of Learning in the Franciscan Order, 1209–1310*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 40.

³² For a concise history of the Franciscan movement, see: William Short, *The Franciscans*, (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989).

³³ The Vulgate renders the phrase: *oriens ex alto*. Inspired by this image, Pope John Paul II described Christ as the *Oriente Lumen*, who guides the Churches of East and West in their journey towards unity. Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Oriente Lumen*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, May 2, 1995): Nos. 1, 2, 28.

own,” and to follow the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ. . .”³⁴ Alongside the Scriptures, the citation of the traditional evangelical counsels reveals a second inspiration from the east: the lives of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who similarly sought to follow the mystical way of the Lord Jesus through the asceticism of Gospel discipleship.³⁵

The early hagiography of both the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions illustrates that the example of the early Christian ascetics functioned as the common inspiration and archetype for both the monks of the Eastern Church and the mendicants of Assisi. Commenting on the failure of the thirteenth century efforts to reunify the Eastern and Western Churches, John Meyendorff speculated that “if, instead of formal, officially-sponsored debates of theologians on the Filioque issue, more spontaneous and direct encounters were possible between early Franciscans and Byzantine hesychasts, the dialogue would have followed somewhat different directions.”³⁶ Similarly, in his comparison of the spirituality of St. Francis, as presented by Bonaventure, with that of the hesychasts, Tikhon Pino concluded that “such a portrait of Francis finds many parallels in Greek hagiography,” while noting that further study of the early Franciscans sources would be necessary to determine additional areas of resonance with the Byzantine tradition.³⁷ Since the Italo-Byzantine monks lived in the closest geographic

³⁴ *Regula et vita istorum fratrum haec est, scilicet vivere in obediential, in castitate et sine proprio, ed Domini nostril Jesu Christi doctrinam et vestigia sequi. . .*” Francis of Assisi, *Earlier Rule*, 1.1, in *FA:ED*, Vol. I, p. 63.

³⁵ For an introduction to the relationship between ascetical theology and mysticism, see: Luke Dysinger, “The Ascetic Life,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Mysticism*, eds. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020): 164-185.

³⁶ John Meyendorff, “The Mediterranean World in the Thirteenth Century, Theology: East and West,” in *The 17th International Byzantine Congress: Major Papers*, (New Rochelle, NY: Aristide D. Caratzas 1986), 678.

³⁷ Pino, “Francis of Assisi As A Hesychast,” 1009.

and historical proximity, if not in immediate linguistic and cultural contact, to the early Franciscans, a comparative study of the hagiographies of St. Nilus of Rossano and St. Francis of Assisi offers an initial investigation into this ecumenical convergence.

After the death of St. Francis, the generalate of Bonaventure represents a critical moment in the history of the Franciscan order, marking both the transformation of the penitential movement into an ecclesiastical institution and the translation of its charismatic inspiration into a theological tradition. Simultaneously, the events of history forced the Greek and Latin Churches into direct contact during this time, with dialogue often facilitated by the members of the Franciscan Order in the years prior to the Second Council of Lyons. Particularly in this context, the mystical theology of Bonaventure discloses substantial affinities with the apophatic tradition associated with Eastern Christianity.³⁸ Whereas Lossky interpreted the neo-scholasticism of the nineteenth century Catholic Church to be evidence of the displacement of mysticism from Western Christianity, the importance of apophatic discourse in the thought of Bonaventure attests to the centrality of mystical theology in the Franciscan intellectual tradition.

Nevertheless, as Lossky also emphasized, the division between the Eastern and Western Churches has historically been traced to the dogmatic division connected to the *filioque* controversy.³⁹ Dogmatic theology defines the essential articles of faith concerning the identity and activity of God. Summarizing the importance of the term in the Scriptures, John Zizioulas described dogma as the “authoritative decisions about the

³⁸ For a discussion of apophatic theology, see: Rowan Williams, *Understanding and Misunderstanding “Negative Theology,”* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2021).

³⁹ In his survey of the controversy, Zizioulas notes the importance of Lossky in reigniting the modern theological debate on the *filioque* but emphasizes that the issue can be resolved through dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches: Zizioulas, *Christian Dogmatics*, 75-82.

faith, received by the Church and linked to the presence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰ More specifically, Christian dogmatics concerns both the eternal life of the Trinity, which is theology proper, and the actions of God in the economy of salvation.⁴¹ Suggesting a bridge between Eastern and Western theology in a letter to St. Sophrony (Sakharov), Georges Florovsky noted that John Duns Scotus was “worthy of greater attention than is paid to him under the influence of Thomism.”⁴² Expanding on this note in his survey of patristic and medieval opinions on the motive of the Incarnation, Florovsky concluded that the position of Scotus appears to be closely aligned to that of St. Maximus the Confessor, and by extension to Orthodox theology.⁴³ Both Scotus and Maximus maintained that the Incarnation was the ultimate motive of Creation and would have occurred even if humanity had not fallen into sin. Similarly, Richard Cross has observed that Scotus achieved a Trinitarian theology that “is much closer to that found in the Greek Fathers,” even in the absence of direct access to the primary Patristic texts.⁴⁴ Potentially answering the dogmatic objection of Lossky and confirming the intuition of Florovsky and Cross, the profound parallels between the dogmatic theology of John Duns Scotus and that of St. Gregory Palamas constitutes the most critical point of convergence between the Franciscan and Byzantine traditions.

⁴⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Douglas Knight, (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 6.

⁴¹ Zizioulas, *Christian Dogmatics*, 69.

⁴² *The Cross of Loneliness: The Correspondence of Saint Sophrony and Archpriest Georges Florovsky*, ed. Nicholas Sakharov, trans. Nicholas Kotar, (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Monastery Press, 2021): 77.

⁴³ Georges Florovsky, “*Cur Deus Homo?* The Motive of the Incarnation,” in the *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. III: Creation and Redemption, (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing, 1976): 163-170.

⁴⁴ Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus on Divine Substance and the Trinity,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (2005): 183.

The echoes of the desert ascetics in the hagiographies of St. Nilus of Rossano and St. Francis of Assisi attests to the common inspiration of both the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions. In the context of the medieval attempts to reunify the Churches, the importance of apophatic mysticism in the thought of St. Bonaventure further indicates the substantial harmony between Greek and Latin theological methodology. Finally, the Trinitarian theology of John Duns Scotus and St. Gregory Palamas represents a dogmatic convergence that transcends the most controversial division in the history of Christianity. Therefore, historical analysis of the hagiography, mysticism, and dogmatic theology of the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions represents a comprehensive opportunity for ecumenical dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches.

Hagiography: St. Nilus and St. Francis

The lives of St. Nilus of Rossano and St. Francis of Assisi are separated by the span of about two hundred years but otherwise share a similar geographical and historical context. The Norman conquest of the Byzantine *Katepanate* occurred during the lifetime of St. Nilus and initiated a gradual process of cultural and ecclesial Latinization in South Italy that lasted into the sixteenth century.⁴⁵ Even in the modern era, remnants of Byzantium endure in the Graecani communities of the *Mezzogiorno*.⁴⁶ However, in the early medieval period, South Italy remained a place of cultural and liturgical diversity: clerics, monks, and saints “were judged not based on their geographical origin or language of worship but rather on their abilities or background, be it piety of lifestyle, the capacity to perform miracles, administrative skills, or a family tradition of entering the clergy.”⁴⁷ At least for the majority of the laity, the only functional distinction between the Greek and Latin Churches was linguistic.

The establishment of Christian asceticism across Italy is closely connected with the monastic tradition of the Eastern Church. As early as the fourth century, Christians from Italy were settling in the desert of Egypt, notably including at *Paromeos*, the Monastery of the Roman Brethren (*Deir el Baramus*).⁴⁸ As the empire approached the terminus of its long decline and fall, Abba Arsenius expressed the close connection

⁴⁵ For detailed study of the Latinization process during the Norman regime, see: Valerie Ramseyer, *The Transformation of a Religious Landscape: Medieval Southern Italy 850-1150*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ For a concise history of the Graecani people, see: George Alexandrou, “The Land that Gave Birth to Saints: 2,700 Years of Greek Culture in Southern Italy,” *Road to Emmaus*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2007): 50-63.

⁴⁷ Ramseyer, *Transformation of a Religious Landscape*, 91-92.

⁴⁸ For a history of the Monastery of the Roman Brethren, see: Hugh G. Evelyn White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'N Natrun, Part II: The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and of Scetis*, ed. Walter Hauser, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932): 98-104.

between the Eternal City and the desert, lamenting the raids that had devastated both: “The world has lost Rome, and the monks have lost Scetis.”⁴⁹ In the sixth century, during the reign of Emperor Heraclius, the war between the Byzantine Empire and Sasanian Persia devastated Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, impelling a “mass immigration of hermits, anchorites, and cenobites” out of the desert to the relative safety and seclusion of Italy.⁵⁰

According to tradition, some of these ascetics settled in Umbria, especially near the cities of Spoleto and Norcia. In the *Dialogues*, Pope Gregory relates that “in the early years of the Goths,” a holy man named Isaac “came to Spoleto from Syria,” where he was devoted to asceticism and eventually founded a monastery.⁵¹ He continues to narrate the legend of Eutychius and Florentius of Norcia, which was related to him by Sanctulus, an Umbrian priest.⁵² Eutychius appears to have been an itinerant preacher prior to becoming the superior of a nearby monastery, while Florentius was devoted to solitary contemplation. Faintly prefiguring the nature mysticism of St. Francis, Florentius befriended a bear, whom he called his brother. The lives of these ascetics likely formed the historical basis for the *Legend of the Twelve Syrians*, which narrates the evangelization of Umbria by a Syrian family.⁵³

⁴⁹ *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward, (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), no. 21 (p. 12).

⁵⁰ Anthony Via, “Eastern Monasticism in South Italy in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” in *Nova Doctrina Vetusque: Essays on Early Christianity in Honor of Fredric W. Schlatter, S.J.*, eds. Douglas Kries and Catherine Brown Takacz, (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 270; cf. David Paul Hester, *Monasticism and Spirituality of the Italo-Greeks*, (Thessaloniki, Greece: Patriarchal Institute for Patristic Studies, 1991), 26-33.

⁵¹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 3.14, trans. Odo John Zimmerman, *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, Vol. 39, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 130.

⁵² Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 3.15, 135-137.

⁵³ An expanded version of the *Legend of the Twelve Syrians* is preserved in the *Acta Sanctorum* under the title “*Tractatus Praeliminaris*.” AASS 28 (Paris, July 1867).

Regardless of the exact origins of the early Umbrian ascetics, it is evident that the Italo-Byzantine monks practiced a semi-eremic spirituality. In Southern Italy, this asceticism was often associated with isolated cave hermitages, reminiscent of “the many *lauras* of Egypt and Syria.”⁵⁴ However, this hermeticism was not exclusive of itinerant apostolic activity. The early *bioi* of St. Elias of Enna (823-903) and St. Elias Spelaiotes (860-960) reflect the ascetic values of *hesychia* and *hypotage*, rather than the later monastic emphasis on the strict observance of the rule of the *cenobia*.⁵⁵ Anthony Via summarizes that “the ideal of the south Italian monk may not have been the cenobitic life but *hesychia*, that is, contemplation in tranquility and silence; not the *hypomone*, the life of obedience required by the cenobitic life, but simply the *apotage*, the life of renunciation of the world and a consequent acceptance of *hypotage*, the submission to a spiritual father.”⁵⁶ It was not until the eleventh century, during the time of St. Bartholomew of Simieri (1050-1130) that the Italo-Byzantine monks began to establish large *cenobia*, regulated in accordance with the reforms of St. Theodore the Studite (759-826).⁵⁷

In the late sixteenth century, Gabriele Barrio di Francia, a historian of the Order of Minims, emphasized the traditional connection between the Italo-Byzantine monks and the ancient Christian ascetics. In his *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae*, Barrio

⁵⁴ Via, “Eastern Monasticism in South Italy,” 270.

⁵⁵ According to his *bios*, Elias of Enna received the monastic habit in Jerusalem before returning to South Italy. Hester, *Monasticism and Spirituality of the Italo-Greeks*, 166.

⁵⁶ Via, “Eastern Monasticism in South Italy,” 266.

⁵⁷ Via, “Eastern Monasticism in South Italy,” 267-269. Bartholomew of Simieri was named after Bartholomew of Rossano (979-1054). For a study of the younger monk, see: Angela Prinzi, “St. Bartholomew of Grottaferrata between tradition and innovation,” in *Greek Monasticism in Southern Italy: The Life of Neilos in Context*, eds. Barbara Crostini and Ines Angeli Murzaku, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 360-374; for a study of the elder monk, see: James Morton, “Latin Patrons, Greek Fathers: St. Bartholomew of Simieri and Byzantine Monastic Reform in Norman Italy, 11th-12th Centuries,” *Allegorica*, vol. 29 (2013): 20-35.

compared his homeland to the Egyptian desert and St. Nilus of Rossano to John the Baptist, the New Testament archetype of the ascetic: “At that time, Calabria was another Egypt, father and nurse of the holy monks. So then, when the blessed Nilus had decided to turn away from the customs of men and had fallen in love with the seclusion of the solitary life, he truly emulated John the Baptist.”⁵⁸ In his classic modern biography of St. Francis of Assisi, Omer Englebert similarly stated that the Franciscans had transformed Umbria into “a second Egypt of the Desert Fathers.”⁵⁹ For both the Italo-Byzantine monks of Calabria and the early Franciscan penitents of Umbria, the ascetics of the Egyptian desert were the archetype for the lives of their own saints, reflecting the common spiritual patrimony and historical memory of the Greek and Latin Churches in Italy.

Life of St. Nilus

In this constellation of saints, Nilus of Rossano (d. 1004) appears as the most prominent representative of the Italo-Byzantine tradition. Narrated by an anonymous hagiographer, the *Life of St. Neilos* is the most theologically and literarily sophisticated *bioi* of the Greek saints of Southern Italy.⁶⁰ Informed by the ascetic exemplars of the Christian East and local conventions of hagiography,⁶¹ the life of St. Nilus is presented in three sections: “the monk first senses a call to monastic life, then goes to a spiritual father

⁵⁸ “*Erat per id tempus Calabria altera Aegyptus sanctorum monarchorum parens & nutrix. Cum igitur beatus Nilus hominum consuetudinem declinare statuisset, secessumque adamasset solitariam vitam de legit Ionnbaptistam aemulatus.*” Gabriele Barrio di Francia, *De antiquitate et situ Calabriae*, (Romae, 1571), Book V, p. 386. The English translation is mine.

⁵⁹ Omer Englebert, *St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography*, Second English Edition, trans. Eve Marie Cooper, (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1965), 195.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hester, *Monasticism and Spirituality of the Italo-Greeks*, 200-201.

⁶¹ Among other hagiographical allusions, Gregory the Theologian, Basil of Caesarea, Theodore the Studite, Ambrose of Milan, and Benedict of Nursia are directly named in the text. Cf. Raymond L. Capra, Ines Angeli Murzaku, and Douglas J. Milewski, “Introduction,” in the *Life of St. Neilos of Rossano*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), xiii.

and learns the monastic life as his disciple, and finally gradually progresses in perfection so that he too may perhaps become a spiritual Father to the next generation of disciples.”⁶² This ascetic itinerary narrates the *theosis*, or divinization, of the monk into a living icon of the Incarnate Christ, and thereby into a holy example for the veneration and imitation of their disciples.

The Incarnation is the central mystery of the theology of *theosis*. As Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov summarize: “[W]ithout the incarnation, there would be no *theosis*. Christians are meant not only to learn from the life of the divine Son, but to reproduce the pattern of spiritual progress that he revealed, even to the point of taking on the character of God!”⁶³ Although difficult to define, Benjamin Drewery identified three common *leitmotifs* in the *theosis* tradition: “*teleiosis* (ethical perfection), *apatheia* (exemption from human emotions or passions), *aftharsia, athanasia* (exemption from mortal corruption or death).”⁶⁴ These attributes generally correspond to the stages of spiritual progress in Italo-Greek hagiography.

First, embracing the call to conversion, the saint begins to practice asceticism and gradually attains ethical perfection (*teleiosis*). Second, the saint progressively acquires the virtues of monastic life and attains freedom from the passions (*apatheia*). Third, after imparting their wisdom to the next generation of disciples and ministering to the local Church and civic community, the saint demonstrates their freedom from corruption

⁶² David Hester, “Monastic Spirituality of the Italo-Greek Monks,” in *Greek Monasticism in Southern Italy: The Life of Neilos in Context*, eds. Barbara Crostini and Ines Angeli Murzaku, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 17.

⁶³ Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, “Introduction,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, Vol. I, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 4.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Drewery, “Deification” in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp*, ed. Peter Brooks, (London: SCM Press, 1975), 38.

(*aftharsia*) and death (*athanasia*) by continuing to practice strict asceticism until they “fall asleep in the Lord” (Acts 13:36). Thus, the *theosis* of the saint concludes with their union with the Triune God. This spiritual itinerary is evident in the *Life of St. Neilos of Rossano*.

The anonymous hagiographer begins his account by describing the early indications of sanctity that prefigured the vocation of St. Nilus to the monastic life. However, after the death of his parents, Nilus married a beautiful woman, who gave birth to a daughter, threatening his unknown calling.⁶⁵ Intervening against this outcome, “the all-seeing providence of God . . . planted in his heart the inescapable memory of death and the unending torment of future punishment,” and afflicted him with a grave illness.⁶⁶ After being cured on the way to the Monastery of Mount Merkourion, Nilus realizes his call to conversion.⁶⁷ Prevented from entering Mount Merkourion by a decree of the local governor, he departs for the Monastery of San Nazarios in the Lombard principality of Salerno.⁶⁸

On his journey, Nilus is captured by Saracen raiders, who surprisingly recognize his sanctity and encourage him to continue “on the path of virtue.”⁶⁹ When, Nilus doubts their sincerity, he is accosted again by the Saracen leader, who reproaches him for his failure to trust in divine providence: “In truth,” he said, “we regret that we have nothing worthy with which to honor you, and yet you think the worst of us. Take these small

⁶⁵ *Life of St. Neilos*, 3.1.

⁶⁶ *Life of St. Neilos*, 3.2.

⁶⁷ *Life of St. Neilos*, 4.1.

⁶⁸ *Life of St. Neilos*, 5.1; The Principality of Salerno was nominally loyal to the Byzantine *Katepanate* but was functionally independent from the imperial administration.

⁶⁹ *Life of St. Neilos*, 6.1.

items which God has provided, and continue your journey in peace.”⁷⁰ Completing his journey to San Nazarios, Nilus is clothed in the monastic habit.

Returning to Mount Merkourion, Nilus is tested by his spiritual father, the elder monk John, to verify his achievement of *teleiosis*. First, testing his obedience, John orders Nilus to drink a large cup of wine. He unquestioningly complies, since “he preferred as the greatest foundation of salvation the denial of his own will, whether with good reason or without reason.”⁷¹ Second, testing his humility, John criticizes Nilus for his intemperance, who responds by pleading for forgiveness, since “to attain a most holy blessing from your venerable hand, whether through a drink of wine or a piece of bread, is worth as much as the grace of a patriarch and equal to the gift itself.”⁷² Third, in a test of discernment, John reproaches Nilus for interpreting the writings of St. Gregory (Nazianzus) the Theologian, since “it was not possible for him to investigate such matters, inasmuch as he was still young and a neophyte, still wallowing in the mud of life’s passions.”⁷³ Although Nilus accepts this reproach, he doubts its truth, and is tempted by the demons in his dreams, who praise his superior theological insight. Realizing the spiritual danger of this deception, Nilus discloses his thoughts to John, who affirms both the orthodoxy of his interpretation and the purpose of the trial: to help Nilus to overcome the vice of pride.⁷⁴

Having passed the test of *teleiosis*, Nilus, “ever progressing and growing in his ascent toward God and deification,” is granted permission to live as an anchorite, and

⁷⁰ *Life of St. Neilos*, 7.2.

⁷¹ *Life of St. Neilos*, 10.2.

⁷² *Life of St. Neilos*, 11.1.

⁷³ *Life of St. Neilos*, 11.3.

⁷⁴ *Life of St. Neilos*, 13.1.

thereby to attain *apatheia*, the second mark of *theosis*.⁷⁵ Admitting the divine secrecy of these ascetic achievements, the hagiographer nonetheless narrates the trials of the saint, detailing his attainment of “the virtues to which he aspired, I mean poverty and abstinence, vigilance and prayer, spiritual tranquility, purity, humility, and the rest, through which one becomes an image and likeness of God.”⁷⁶ Affirming his attainment of *apatheia*, disciples begin to join Nilus at his hermitage. A man named Stephen became the most spiritually renowned of these early followers.

Although there is no female counterpart to Nilus, the hagiographer does note that the mother and sister of Stephen were sent to a monastery in Arinarion governed by Theodora, who is lauded for her ascetic virtues: “An old woman, she was most clever and holy and wise, and from her youth had practiced the harsh training of monastic life. . . .”⁷⁷ The hagiographer notes the close connection between Nilus and Theodora, who had loved him “as her own son from the time of his youth” and devotedly cared for the relatives of Stephen for the rest of their lives.⁷⁸ Eventually, twelve brethren were assembled there under the spiritual fatherhood of Nilus, and a monastery was established near Rossano.⁷⁹ Resembling a new garden of Eden, the monks worked in harmony with both their neighbors and animals, producing abundant grain and offering their labor to God.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *Life of St. Neilos*, 13.2.

⁷⁶ *Life of St. Neilos*, 18.1.

⁷⁷ *Life of St. Neilos*, 28.4.

⁷⁸ *Life of St. Neilos*, 28.4.

⁷⁹ *Life of St. Neilos*, 36.

⁸⁰ *Life of St. Neilos*, 38.1-2.

After attaining *apatheia* through the ascetic trials of both *hesychia* and *cenobia*, the hagiographer chronicles the increasingly public ministry of Nilus. Addressing an assembly on the outskirts of Rossano, he exhorts the people to pursue virtue and interprets various questions on about the Scriptures and the writings of St. Gregory the Theologian. Having edified the people, the crowd departed, “marveling at the blessed man’s virtue and wisdom; even the metropolitan himself said, “God bears witness that this monk is great.””⁸¹ Subsequently, Nilus intervenes on numerous occasions to help those oppressed by demons or threatened by punishment by imperial officials. The hagiographer explains that Nilus, “who contemplated the heavens and was a true son of spiritual tranquility . . . still condescended to mingle with crowds and officials, suffering many ills and putting himself at risk in order to provide aid and ardent protection for those suffering injustice, or often even for those who suffered justly.”⁸² However, after narrowly avoiding being named Bishop of Rossano, Nilus relocates his monastery, settling in Valleloukion at the invitation of the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino.⁸³

In a remarkable ecumenical encounter, Nilus composes a hymn of praise to St. Benedict and his followers celebrate the night office with the Benedictine community.⁸⁴ The Latin monks marvel that Nilus had attained “a mind fully cleansed of all passions, illuminated by the light of heaven.”⁸⁵ The *apatheia* of the saint is further demonstrated in a cycle of subsequent stories, during which Nilus confronts the wicked ruler of Capua and is described as “truly passionless” for his prophetic denunciation of injustice.⁸⁶ As an

⁸¹ *Life of St. Neilos*, 49.2.

⁸² *Life of St. Neilos*, 62.3.

⁸³ *Life of St. Neilos*, 73.4.

⁸⁴ *Life of St. Neilos*, 74.1.

⁸⁵ *Life of St. Neilos*, 78.1.

⁸⁶ *Life of St. Neilos*, 81.2.

enlightened spiritual father, Nilus helped his followers to also attain *apatheia*, applying to each brother “the salve of learning in accordance with the passion which overcame him.”⁸⁷ However, after the death of the abbot of Monte Cassino, Venerable Aligernus, Nilus and his followers relocated from the monastery of Valleloukion to a “small desert” near Gaeta, between Rome and Naples.⁸⁸

Having attained *apatheia*, the hagiographer narrates the *aftharsia* and *athanasia* of the saint, accentuating the extraordinary physical asceticism of Nilus despite his advanced age: “It was impossible for him ever to break the fast, or eat or drink anything at a time that was not prescribed, as is usual for those growing old.”⁸⁹ Nearing the end of his life, Nilus nevertheless continued his public ministry, notably intervening before Emperor Otto III and Pope Gregory V on behalf of Philogathos, who had been enthroned as Bishop of Rome during a revolt against the imperial regime. Although he was disfigured for his disloyalty, the life of Philogathos was spared due to the intervention of the holy monk.⁹⁰

Proving his humility to the end, Nilus departed from the monastery at Serperi to avoid the possibility of it becoming a shrine in his honor after his death. The monk made his final repose at the Monastery of Saint Agatha in Tusculum, near Rome.⁹¹ His disciples followed and were allotted a portion of land where they established the Monastery of Grottaferrata.⁹² Nilus requested a simple burial to reflect the poverty and

⁸⁷ *Life of St. Neilos*, 84.1.

⁸⁸ *Life of St. Neilos*, 86-87.

⁸⁹ *Life of St. Neilos*, 87.3.

⁹⁰ *Life of St. Neilos*, 90.2.

⁹¹ *Life of St. Neilos*, 95.3-96.1.

⁹² *Life of St. Neilos*, 97.1-2.

humility of his life: “[I]f you really wish to make some sign to indicate where I am buried, let it be on level ground, so that the pilgrims may rest there – for I too have been a pilgrim all the days of my life.”⁹³ Despite the closeness of death, a physician confirmed the *aftharsia* and *athanasia* of the saint, describing the incorruptibility of his body: “He is not dying, for he has no fever or any other sign of death.”⁹⁴ Recalling the death of Jesus, the hagiographer states that Nilus “gave up his spirit” (Mt. 27:50) at the end of vespers: “To speak truly, the sun set along with the sun, a light left the earth on that day, and a lamp has gone out from the face of those who see.”⁹⁵ Contrasting the divine light of the saint with the darkness of his times, the hagiographer concludes his praises by noting that Nilus was “truly ambidextrous and could see with both eyes.”⁹⁶ He was capable of both teaching the mysteries of theology and instructing others in the way of *theosis* and of practicing ascetic virtue and good works himself. Thus, having completely actualized his humanity, the passage of Nilus into “eternal memory” marks the culmination of his *theosis*, the attainment of communion with divine life.

Life of St. Francis

The Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano, while historically separated from the time of St. Nilus by almost two hundred years, reflects a similar hagiographical structure to those of the Italo-Greek monks.⁹⁷ Although Celano does not directly disclose his hagiographical sources, the narrative contains numerous allusions and references to

⁹³ *Life of St. Neilos*, 97.3.

⁹⁴ *Life of St. Neilos*, 98.2.

⁹⁵ *Life of St. Neilos*, 99.1.

⁹⁶ *Life of St. Neilos*, 99.2.

⁹⁷ Thomas of Celano, *The Life of St. Francis* [ICel.], in *FA:ED*, Vol. I. Celano wrote several *vitae* of St. Francis. The first life (*vita prima*) was composed for the canonization of the saint on July 16, 1228.

the lives of various saints, including the *Life of Anthony* by St. Athanasius,⁹⁸ the *Life of St. Martin* by Sulpicius Severus,⁹⁹ and the *vitae* of St. Bernard of Clairvaux,¹⁰⁰ among other examples.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the gradual attainment of *theosis* through the ascetic itinerary of *teleiosis*, *apatheia*, and *aftharsia* and *athanasia* is even more detailed than in the *Life of St. Neilos*. In the prologue, Celano describes the structure of his account: “The first book . . . is devoted principally to the purity of his blessed way of life, to his virtuous conduct and his wholesome teaching . . . The second book . . . tells of his deeds from the next to last year of his life up to his happy death. The third book contains many miracles . . .”¹⁰² More literarily and theologically sophisticated than the Italo-Byzantine *bioi*, the hagiography of Celano was written for the same purpose: to present the life of the saint according to traditional standards of sanctity for the veneration and imitation of their disciples and for the edification of the Church.

The first book of the *vita* narrates the *teleiosis* of Francis, beginning with his conversion from the vanities of the world and his gradual growth in ethical perfection. Celano accentuates the moral corruption of the society of Assisi that captivated Francis during his youth. Following hagiographic conventions, he contrasts this pervasive

⁹⁸ Cf. Sean Kinsella, “Athanasius’ Life of Anthony as Monastic Paradigm for the First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano: A Preliminary Outline,” *Antonianum*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (2002): 541-556; Bert Roest, “The Franciscan Hermit: Seeker, Prisoner, Refugee,” in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, eds. Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 163-189.

⁹⁹ Cf. John W. Coakley, “The Conversion of St. Francis and the Writing of Christian Biography, 1228-1263,” *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 72 (2014), 33-36.

¹⁰⁰ For a comparison of the saints, see: Stephen Jaeger, “The Saint’s Life as Charismatic Form: Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi,” in *Faces of Charisma: Image, Text, Object in Byzantium and the Medieval West*, eds. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Martha Dana Rust, (Boston, MA: Brill, 2018): 181-204.

¹⁰¹ In particular, the nature mysticism of St. Francis reflects many parallels with the desert ascetic tradition and with Cistercian spirituality. Cf. Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 14-38.

¹⁰² ICel, Prologue, 2.

sinfulness with the early indications of sanctity that prefigured the future spiritual greatness of the saint: “He was nevertheless, a rather kindly person, adaptable and quite affable, even though it made him look foolish.”¹⁰³ Similar to Nilus, after Francis is afflicted with the “divine anointing” of a serious illness, he begins to abandon his former way of life.¹⁰⁴

A “vision during the night” ultimately discourages Francis from journeying to Apulia to become a knight and convinces him to embrace conversion instead.¹⁰⁵ Celano relates that this time of repentance was witnessed by an anonymous friend, who accompanied Francis to the caves on the outskirts of the city, in which he “prayed with all his heart that the eternal and true God guide his way and teach him to do His will.”¹⁰⁶ This period of purgation culminates with the famous trial before Bishop Guido II, in which Francis strips off his garments and renounces his inheritance in front of his outraged father, Pietro di Bernardone. Confirming the spiritual motivation of this dramatic action, the Bishop covered Francis with his own mantle and “embraced him in the depths of charity.”¹⁰⁷ Afterwards, he traveled to a monastery, but unlike Nilus, the monks there showed him no mercy, and Celano states that he was “forced by necessity” to depart for Gubbio, where an old friend gave him a cheap tunic.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ ICel, 1.1.2.

¹⁰⁴ ICel, 1.2.3.

¹⁰⁵ ICel, 1.2.5.

¹⁰⁶ ICel, 1.3.6.

¹⁰⁷ ICel, 1.6.15.

¹⁰⁸ ICel, 1.7.16.

Rather than a monastery, the *leprosarium* functioned as a novitiate for Francis, where he served alongside the *Crocofieri*, who were dedicated to the care of the lepers.¹⁰⁹ Quoting the *Testament* of the saint, Celano summarizes the centrality of this experience in his conversion: “When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers, and the Lord led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.”¹¹⁰ It is only after this foundational experience in the *leprosarium* that Celano relates the memorable encounter with an individual leper on the road, whom Francis embraced as a sign of his humility and compassion.¹¹¹ The initial conversion of Francis culminates with his penitential restoration of the Church of San Damiano, which Celano notes became a community for Clare and the Poor Ladies, whose virtues he praises as deserving of “another book and the leisure in which to write it.”¹¹² After restoring several other churches, Francis was inspired to practice a stricter asceticism and became to proclaim the Gospel as a semi-itinerant, penitential preacher.

Demonstrating his increasing ascetic renown, disciples began to follow Francis, who became their spiritual father. Similar to Nilus and the Italo-Byzantine monks, Celano portrays Francis as alternating between itinerant preaching and contemplative seclusion. Withdrawing to a solitary place sometime after gathering his first followers, Francis prayed with compunction for the sins of his past way of life, repeating the famous phrase

¹⁰⁹ The Crocofieri were founded between 1160-1170 by Pope Alexander III. For a history of the Order, see: Nickiphoros I. Tsougarakis, “The (Italian) Crociferi,” in *The Latin Religious Orders in Medieval Greece: 1204-1500*, (Tournhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2012): 213-232.

¹¹⁰ Francis of Assisi, *The Testament*, 1-3, in *FA:ED*, Vol. I, p. 124.

¹¹¹ ICel, 1.7.17.

¹¹² ICel, 1.8.18.

of the pilgrim: “Lord be merciful to me, a sinner.”¹¹³ After experiencing divine consolation, Francis and his brothers, now numbering twelve, traveled to Rome, where Pope Innocent III (1160-1216) verbally approved the rule of the nascent order and authorized the brothers to “preach penance to all.”¹¹⁴

Illustrating the *apatheia* of Francis, Celano extensively details his strict asceticism and the miracles wrought during his life. In the tradition of the ancient Christian ascetics, Francis practiced extreme physical renunciation, avoiding cooked food, wine, and sleep. Furthermore, freedom from the passions impelled Francis to expand his itinerant ministry and to seek martyrdom. After failing to reach Morocco, Francis encountered “the Sultan of the Saracens,” Malik al-Kamil, in Egypt during the Fifth Crusade.¹¹⁵ Similar to the dialogue between Nilus and the Saracen raider, the Sultan honored Francis and “recognized him as a man unlike any other.”¹¹⁶ Relocating his narrative to Italy, Celano portrays Umbria as a new Eden, describing the friendliness of the animals to Francis, whose “complete submission to God” made him “worthy of the great honor before God of having the obedience of creatures.”¹¹⁷ Additionally, numerous miracles, including healings and exorcisms, are wrought through his intercession. Celano summarizes that the miracles merely serve to demonstrate “the excellence of his life and the honest form of his manner of living.”¹¹⁸ The encounter with the Sultan, the kinship with the animals,

¹¹³ ICel, 1.11.26.

¹¹⁴ ICel, 1.13.33. The *Rule* of St. Francis was formally approved by Pope Honorius III in the bull *Solet Annuere* on November 29, 1223.

¹¹⁵ ICel, 1.20.57. For an study and reflection on the encounter between the saint and the sultan, see: Jan Hoerberichts, *Francis and the Sultan: Men of Peace*, trans. Hans Baars, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2019).

¹¹⁶ ICel, 1.20.57.

¹¹⁷ ICel, 1.21.61.

¹¹⁸ ICel, 1.26.70.

and the miracles are all reflections of the *apatheia* of Francis. Celano describes the desire of the saint “to be set free and to be with Christ . . . to live free from all things that are in the world, so that his inner serenity would not be disturbed even for a moment by contact with any of its dust.”¹¹⁹ Free from the passions, Francis became an icon of the Gospel to all those he encountered.

Celano concludes the first book with the celebration of the Nativity at Greccio, an episode that encapsulates the centrality of the Incarnation in Franciscan theology. The union of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ effects a sacred exchange that restores the grace of *theosis* to humanity. Reflecting this theological exchange, Celano records a saying of the saint: “Anyone who curses the poor insults Christ whose noble banner the poor carry, since Christ made himself poor for us in this world.”¹²⁰ Furthermore, the incarnation of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit reveals the abiding presence of divinity in creation. As Celano explains, Francis contemplated “in creatures the wisdom, power, and goodness of the creator.”¹²¹ Rather than a simply romantic delight in the natural world, Franciscan mysticism is intended to recall the universe to its original vocation to praise and bless the Triune God. Thus, Celano prays: “O good Jesus, with the angels in heaven he now praises you as wonderful, who, when placed on earth, preached you as lovable to all creatures.”¹²² The re-enactment of the Nativity scene symbolizes the radical spiritual reality effected by the Incarnation and its paradoxical reversal of human wisdom: “There simplicity is given a place of honor, poverty is exalted, humility is commended, and out of Greccio is made a new

¹¹⁹ ICel, 1.27.71.

¹²⁰ ICel, 1.28.76.

¹²¹ ICel, 1.29.80.

¹²² ICel, 1.29.81.

Bethlehem.”¹²³ Having attained *apatheia* through his asceticism, the saint was conformed into the image and likeness of Jesus, who had humbled himself to make humanity partakers of his divine life.

In the second book, Celano relates the last years prior to the death of Francis. Conformity to Christ Crucified is the central theme of the narrative, prominently symbolized by the miraculous reception of the stigmata on Mount La Verna. The concepts of *aftharsia* and *athanasia* closely correspond to the theme of conformity, both of which emphasize the embodied dimension of *theosis*. In this sense, Celano invites his readers to encounter a reflection of Jesus in the holy example of Francis: “If people intend to put their hand to difficult things, and strive to seek the higher gifts of a more excellent way, let them look into the mirror of his life, and learn all perfection.”¹²⁴ After this introduction, the narrative continues with Francis reading the Gospel account of the passion of Christ. Immediately afterwards, he experiences a mystical vision of a Seraphim bearing the image of a man crucified.

As the vision disappears, Celano relates the reception of the stigmata, describing the appearance of the marks of the crucifixion: “Signs of the nails began to appear on his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little while earlier on the crucified man hovering over him.”¹²⁵ In addition to the nails, Francis was marked with a scar on the right side of his body. The stigmata and the numerous illnesses suffered by the saint both function as a demonstration of his complete conformity to Christ, such that Francis

¹²³ ICel, 1.30.85.

¹²⁴ ICel, 2.1.90.

¹²⁵ ICel, 2.3.94.

proclaimed the Gospel by through the witness of his life, “edifying his listeners by his example as much as by his words, as he made of his whole body a tongue.”¹²⁶

Despite the physical decay of his body, Francis embodied the ideal of *aftharsia* and *athanasia* through the incorruptibility of his inner spirit. Scripturally interpreting these afflictions, Celano states that “he had not yet filled up in his flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, even though he bore the marks on his body” (Colossians 1:24).¹²⁷ However, Francis refused to abandon his strict asceticism: “When he had to relax this rigor because of illness, he used to say: “Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing.” He did not consider that he had already attained his goal, but tireless in pursuit of holy newness, he constantly hoped to begin again.”¹²⁸ Approaching the end of his life, Francis returned to the Portziuncola in Assisi.

Confirming the *aftharsia* and *athanasia* of the saint, the brothers and doctors “were astonished that the spirit could live in flesh so dead.”¹²⁹ Gathered around Francis, they sang the *Canticle of the Creatures*, which he had composed during his illness. In response to the sadness of one of the brothers, Celano records the final absolution offered by the saint: “See, my son, I am being called by God. I forgive all my brothers, present and absent, all their faults and offenses, and I absolve them insofar as I am able. When you give them this message, bless them all for me.”¹³⁰ After listening to the Passover account in the Gospel of John, Francis completed his *transitus* into eternal life.

¹²⁶ ICel, 2.4.97.

¹²⁷ ICel, 2.4.98.

¹²⁸ ICel, 2.6.103.

¹²⁹ ICel, 2.7.107.

¹³⁰ ICel, 2.8.109.

The second book concludes with the revelation of the “new miracle” of the stigmata, confirming the *aftharsia* and *athanasia* of the saint.¹³¹ The body of Francis, previously wrecked by disease, appeared completely restored to health, recalling the resurrected body of Christ: “They looked at his skin which was black before but now shining white in its beauty, promising the rewards of the blessed resurrection. They saw his face like the face of an angel, as if he were not dead, but alive.”¹³² For Celano, Francis attained *theosis* through the sacred exchange of the Incarnation, since he mystically “bore Jesus always in his whole body.”¹³³ The narrative closes with the funeral procession to Clare and the Poor Ladies at San Damiano, who receive the body of Francis through the same portal that they received “the sacrament of the Lord’s body,” drawing a clear analogy between the presence of Christ in the Eucharist and in the life of the saint.¹³⁴

In the third book, Celano recapitulates the significance of the life of Francis and narrates his canonization by Pope Gregory IX, the former Cardinal Ugolino (1170-1241). The language of *theosis* is especially prominent in the introduction: “Stamped with the holy stigmata, he reflects the image of the One, co-equal with the Father, who is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high. . . .”¹³⁵ Furthermore, the theme of conformity to Christ Crucified is explicitly stated: “Conformed to the death of Christ Jesus by sharing His sufferings, he displays His sacred wounds on his hands, feet, and side.”¹³⁶ The miracles wrought at the tomb of Francis and the recognition of his sanctity across the world further attest to the authenticity of his spiritual transformation. Celano records the

¹³¹ ICel, 2.9.112.

¹³² ICel, 2.9.112.

¹³³ ICel, 2.9.115.

¹³⁴ ICel, 2.10.116.

¹³⁵ ICel, 3.1.119.

¹³⁶ ICel, 3.1.119.

verdict of Pope Gregory IX and the Roman Curia: “The holy life of this holy man,” they said,” does not require the evidence of miracles for we have seen it with our eyes and touched it with our hands and tested it with truth as our guide.”¹³⁷ Celano concludes his account with the celebration of the sacred mysteries in thanksgiving for the life of the saint. The *vita* ends with a selection of the miracles read at the canonization ceremony.

Summary: Hagiography

The resonances between the *Life of St. Neilos of Rossano* and the *Life of St. Francis* by Thomas of Celano indicate the common inspiration of both the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions in the spirituality of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. While written in different historical, cultural, and ecclesial circumstances, both hagiographies are centered on the theology of *theosis*. The content of this mystical experience, if not the language and imagery used to describe it, is essentially identical. First, the saint embraces the call to conversion and begins to practice ascetic penitence, gradually attaining ethical perfection (*teleiosis*). Second, continuing to practice strict penitence, the saint progressively acquires the virtues of asceticism. Demonstrating their freedom from the passions (*apatheia*), disciples begin to gather around the saint, who becomes their spiritual father. Third, the saint begins to actively minister to the local Church and community through teaching and working miraculous signs. Suffering innumerable illnesses, the saint remains strident in their asceticism until the end, demonstrating their incorruptibility (*aftharsia*) and freedom from death (*athanasia*), despite the physical decay of their body. Ultimately, these attributes affirm the deification of the saint and the attainment of complete union with the divine life of the Triune God.

¹³⁷ ICel, 3.1.124.

Mystical Theology: St. Bonaventure

In addition to the similarities between Franciscan and Byzantine hagiography, the course of historical events after the death of St. Francis of Assisi placed the traditions in direct contact, especially during the generalate of Bonaventure. In 1204, before Francis had begun his penitence, the armies of the Fourth Crusade conquered Constantinople, which fractured the ancient Byzantine Empire into a series of Latin and Greek successor states. The extraordinary violence of the event had the effect of sealing the Great Schism of 1054, adding the animosity of war to ecclesial disagreement.¹³⁸

Franciscan Diplomacy and the Second Council of Lyons (1274)

Although Pope Innocent III initially believed that the capture of the city would benefit the crusade, once he learned the extent of the destruction inflicted by the crusaders, he recognized the deleterious implications of the attack for the unity of the Church: “For how indeed is the Greek church, which has been afflicted to some degree by persecution, to be returned to ecclesiastical unity and devotion to the Apostolic See? They look upon the Latins as nothing but an example of perdition and works of darkness. . .”¹³⁹ Nevertheless, Innocent III and his successors recognized the reality of the Latin

¹³⁸ Numerous studies have emphasized the deleterious effects of the Fourth Crusade on the Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches. The conclusion of the classic study by Steven Runciman is representative: “But when the papal demands were backed by the aggressive public opinion of the West insisting on the subjection of the East, and when public opinion in the Orthodox East, remembering the Crusades and the Latin Empire, saw in papal supremacy a savage form of alien domination, then no amount of compromise over the Procession of the Holy Spirit or the bread of the Sacrament would be of avail.” Steven Runciman, *The Eastern Schism: A Study of the Papacy and the Eastern Churches during the XIth and XIIth Centuries*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 168; cf. also George E. Demacopoulos, *Colonizing Christianity: Greek and Latin Religious Identity in the Era of the Fourth Crusade*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

¹³⁹ Pope Innocent III, “Reprimand of the Legate Peter, Cardinal Priest of Saint Marcellus,” July 12, 1205, in *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291*, eds. Jessalynn Bird, Edward Peters, and James M. Powell (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 65.

Empire in Constantinople and attempted to utilize the Crusaders to enforce a reunification of the Churches, an ambition which would continue until the final fall of the restored Byzantine Empire in 1453.¹⁴⁰

The Franciscans were instrumental in the medieval efforts to reunify the Churches. Even during the lifetime of St. Francis, friars had been dispatched to the East, establishing a convent in Constantinople as early as 1220 under the leadership of a brother named Luca of Apulia.¹⁴¹ The first Franciscan provincial minister of Romania and Greece was probably Benedict of Arezzo (1190-1282), a close confidant of John of Brienne (1170-1237), who reigned as the penultimate Latin Emperor in Constantinople.¹⁴² The accidental arrival of five friars in the Byzantine Empire of Nicaea in 1232 initiated the first attempt to achieve a theological agreement to reunify the Churches. At the invitation of Emperor John III Vatatzes (1192-1254), Pope Gregory IX dispatched two Franciscans and two Dominicans for a council in Nicaea and in Nymphaeum in 1234.¹⁴³ Although the council was unsuccessful in achieving a reunification formula, it did identify the primary theological fractures between the

¹⁴⁰ For a concise history of the relationship between the Latin and Greek Churches from 1204 to 1453, see: Charles A. Frazee, "The Catholic Church in Constantinople, 1204-1453," *Balkan Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (1978): 33-49.

¹⁴¹ Nickiphoros I. Tsougarakis, *The Latin Religious Orders in Medieval Greece, 1204-1500*, (Tournhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2012), 106; Frazee, "Catholic Church in Constantinople," 37; Robert Lee Wolff, "The Latin Empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans," *Traditio*, Vol. II (1944): 214.

¹⁴² Wolff, "Latin Empire," 214-222; Interestingly, Brother Benedict of Arezzo commissioned Thomas of Celano to compose the *Legend for Use in the Choir*, which is an abbreviated version of his first *vita* of St. Francis. The *vita* of Brother Benedict, along with a supporting study (in Italian), has been published: *Vita et Miracula B. Benedicti Sinigardi de Arietio Ord. Min.*, ed. Girolamo Golubovich, (Quaracchi, 1905).

¹⁴³ J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 211-216; Henry Chadwick, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church: From Apostolic Times Until the Council of Florence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 238-243; Tsougarakis, *Latin Religious Orders*, 142.

Churches, the most important of which remained the addition of the *filioque* to the Latin Creed.

Negotiations between the Byzantine Empire and the Roman Church continued throughout the reign of Pope Innocent IV (1195-1254). John of Parma (1209-1289), the Franciscan Minister-General, led a delegation to Nymphaeum in 1249, which ended without any significant results.¹⁴⁴ A formula of concord was reached in 1254, only to immediately evaporate as Pope Innocent IV, Emperor Vatatzes, and the Patriarch of Constantinople all died that same year.¹⁴⁵ Subsequently, Michael VIII Palaeologus (1224-1282) reconquered Constantinople in 1261. He immediately reopened negotiations with the papacy in exchange for peace and a crusade to support the Empire.¹⁴⁶ Pope Gregory X (1210-1276) essentially dictated the terms of the agreement and convened the Second Council of Lyons in 1274.¹⁴⁷ Both Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas were invited to attend the council, but since the outcome had been predetermined by Michael VIII and Gregory X, their contributions to the theological dialogue were limited.¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, Aquinas died on the way to Lyons, and Bonaventure died during the council.

¹⁴⁴ Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 216-217.

¹⁴⁵ Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 217-219.

¹⁴⁶ Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 220-224; Chadwick, *East and West*, 246-7; Tsougarakis, *Latin Religious Orders*, 142-4.

¹⁴⁷ Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 224-226; Chadwick, *East and West*, 248-250; Pope Gregory X has traditionally been identified as a member of the Franciscan Third Order. St. Bonaventure likely encountered Gregory at the University of Paris and was later named to the cardinalate after his election. Both Greek and Latin sources note his sincere desire to achieve an amicable reunification of the Churches at Lyons II. For a detailed study of his pontificate, see: Philip B. Baldwin, *Pope Gregory X and the Crusades*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2014); cf. Marion A. Habig, *The Franciscan Book of Saints*, (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959): 21-24.

¹⁴⁸ On the limited contributions of St. Bonaventure to Lyons II, see: Deno John Geanakopolos, "Bonaventura, the Two Mendicant Orders, and the Greeks at the Council of Lyons (1274)," in *Constantinople and the West: Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches*, (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): 195-223.

The ephemeral union effected by the Second Council of Lyons cannot be considered an authentic ecumenical achievement. Even in the limited sense that the council attempted to overcome the Schism of 1054 and the Crusader occupation of Constantinople through theological concord instead of military enforcement, the agreement of Michael VIII to the dictates of Rome was essentially a political calculation designed to deter the threat of an invasion by the Norman King of Sicily, Charles of Anjou.¹⁴⁹ However, the vehement opposition of the Byzantine people to rapprochement with the Latins and the increasing antagonism of the papacy after the death of Gregory X, resulted in the complete collapse of the conciliar accords.¹⁵⁰

Despite the ultimate failure of the council, the diplomatic activity of numerous friars in facilitating the dialogue between the Latins and Greeks attests to the inherent harmony between the Franciscan and Byzantine traditions. However, in the historical circumstances of the time, this diplomatic dialogue could not overcome the entrenched animosity between the Churches. It would remain for John Duns Scotus, in the generation after the Council, to recognize that the *filioque* controversy was “more apparent than real.”¹⁵¹

Bonaventure remains an important figure in the ecumenical dialogue between the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions because of the centrality of mysticism in his

¹⁴⁹ On the political motives of the Emperor, see: Deno Geanakoplos, “Michael VIII Palaeologus and the Union of Lyons (1274),” *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1953): 79-89.

¹⁵⁰ Surprisingly, even after his excommunication by Pope Martin IV, Michael VIII did not renounce the reunification agreement. However, the Sicilian Vespers rebellion against Charles of Anjou and the death of Emperor Michael VIII several months afterwards ended the remaining support in Byzantium for maintaining the agreement. Cf. Donald M. Nicol, “The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyons, 1274,” in *Councils and Assemblies*, eds. G.J. Cuming and Derek Baker, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971): 113-146.

¹⁵¹ Chadwick, *East and West*, 253.

theology. Beyond the Trinitarian concerns of Lyons II, the alleged divergence between the methodology of Catholic neo-Thomism and Orthodox neo-Palamism, retrojected onto the medieval Scholastics and Byzantine theologians, has presented another challenge to ecumenical dialogue. Although modern studies have recognized the resonances between the thought of Thomas Aquinas and the traditions of Eastern Christianity,¹⁵² historically, Bonaventure was regarded as the preeminent mystic among the Scholastic doctors.¹⁵³

Mystical theology can be defined as “an experience of union with God far more intense than enjoyed in ordinary, everyday experience.”¹⁵⁴ Reflecting the limits of human nature to comprehend and communicate these extraordinary experiences, the methodology of apophatic theology emphasizes the “negative way” (*via negativa*) of describing divinity, as contrasted with the kataphatic method, which attempts to make affirmative statements about the absolute reality. Apophatic methodology, received from the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, marks the mystical writings of Bonaventure.¹⁵⁵ Among numerous examples, the brief reflection *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology* (*de Reductione Artem ad Theologiam*) demonstrates the integration of apophatic and Scholastic methodology in the thought of the Seraphic Doctor.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Cf. Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): esp., 9-28; Bruce D. Marshall, “Ex Occidente Lux? Aquinas and Eastern Orthodox Theology,” *Modern Theology*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2004): 23-50; A.N. Williams, “Mystical Theology Redux: The Pattern of Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” *Modern Theology*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1997): 53-74.

¹⁵³ For a corrective to the dialectical comparison of Aquinas and Bonaventure, see: Kevin L. Hughes, “Bonaventure *Contra Mundum*? The Catholic Theological Tradition Revisited,” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (2013): 372-398.

¹⁵⁴ Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 24.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Adriaan T. Peperzak, “Bonaventure’s Contribution to the Twentieth Century Debate on Apophatic Theology,” *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1998): 181-192.

¹⁵⁶ Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, trans. Emma Thérèse Healey, ed. Zachary Hayes, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1996).

On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology

Traditionally, the *Reduction of the Arts to Theology* has been regarded as the preeminent summation of the theology of the Seraphic Doctor.¹⁵⁷ As indicated by the title, Bonaventure envisions life as a journey out from God (*exitus*) that inevitably returns (*reditus*) or is “uplifted” to its divine source.¹⁵⁸ All human arts, including intellectual and philosophical activity, are inseparable from the essential task of life: theology and ultimate union with divine love.¹⁵⁹ Bonaventure utilizes a metaphysics of light to describe the relationship between the Word of God, through whom all creation came into being, and the human arts. The purpose of the arts is to uncover the vestiges (*vestigium*) of the Creator that remain in the world, despite the corruption of sin and death. Thus, theology is essentially sapiential and mystical: a journey guided by wisdom on the way to union with God.

Bonaventure begins his meditation by invoking Scripture to introduce the theme of light: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). After defining his terms, Bonaventure retraces each of the arts to theology. The Incarnation is the focal point of this meditation. Since Jesus Christ is the “visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), he is the mediator of the divine knowledge infused throughout all creation, the vestiges of which are discernable in

¹⁵⁷ The *Reduction of the Arts to Theology* may have originally been the inaugural sermon of St. Bonaventure at the University of Paris. Cf. Joshua Benson, “Identifying the Literary Genre of The *De Reductione Artium Ad Theologiam*: Bonaventure’s Inaugural Lecture at Paris,” *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 67 (2009): 149-178; Joshua Benson, “Bonaventure’s *De reductione artium ad theologiam* and Its Early Reception as an Inaugural Sermon,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 85, No. 1 (2011): 7-24.

¹⁵⁸ The Latin *reductio* has its origin in the Dionysian concept of “anagogy” or “uplifting.” Cf. Paul Rorem, “Uplifting (Anagogy) in Bonaventure’s *Reductio*,” *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 70 (2012): 183-188.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Zachary Hayes, “Introduction,” *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, 1-10.

the light of faith. Similar to how the mind perceives the semblance of objects through the senses, the Incarnate Word reveals the way to union with the divine life of the Trinity: “Through Him all our minds are led back to God, when, through faith, we receive the Similitude (*similitudinem*) of the Father into our hearts.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, as beings with the capacity to both know and love God, humanity was created “bearing not only the nature of a vestige but also that of an image so that through knowledge and love creatures might become like God.”¹⁶¹ Bonaventure emphasizes that this *theosis* is the primary motive for the Incarnation: “And since by sin the rational creature had dimmed the eye of contemplation, it was most fitting that the eternal and invisible should become visible and assume flesh in order to lead us back to God.”¹⁶² This mystery of divine love is the central truth of Scripture and theology.

Expounding on the reduction of moral philosophy to theology, Bonaventure defines human righteousness in three senses. First, it is a middle way between extremes, which reflects the mediation of the Incarnation in the creation and salvation of the world: “Therefore, as creatures went forth from God by the Word of God, so for a perfect return, it was necessary that the Mediator between God and humanity be not only God but also human so that this mediator might lead humanity back to God.”¹⁶³ Second, echoing the example of St. Francis, moral rectitude describes spiritual transformation in accordance with the divine law, which occurs when humanity is “conformed to that by which it is ruled.”¹⁶⁴ Third, moral rectitude describes the manifestation of complete union with God,

¹⁶⁰ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 8.

¹⁶¹ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 12.

¹⁶² Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 12.

¹⁶³ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 23.

¹⁶⁴ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 24.

which Bonaventure illustrates in terms reminiscent of the ascetic path to *theosis*: “[T]he apex of the mind itself must be raised aloft. And indeed this is what actually happens when our rational nature assents to the first truth for its own sake and above all things, when our irascible nature strives after the highest generosity, and when our concupiscible nature clings to the good.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, the way to union with God involves the call to conversion, the attainment of the virtues and regulation of the passions through asceticism, and the incorruptible repose of the spirit in the goodness of divine life.

Ultimately, love is the end of theology and the expression of *theosis*: “a charity in which the whole purpose of sacred Scripture, and thus of every illumination descending from above, comes to rest – a charity without which all knowledge is vain because no one comes to the Son except through the Holy Spirit who teaches us all the truth, who is blessed forever.”¹⁶⁶ For Bonaventure, participation in the mystery of divine love is the actualization of all the arts and the sublime vocation of every person.

Apophatic theology is an essential element of the *Reduction of the Arts to Theology*. Bonaventure grants that human reason has the capacity to comprehend the exterior light of mechanical arts, the inferior light of sense perception, and the interior light of philosophical knowledge. However, the superior light of sacred Scripture transcends reason and cannot be acquired by natural research; rather, the truth of salvation “comes down from the “God of Lights” by inspiration.”¹⁶⁷ Recalling the six days of Creation, Bonaventure recognizes these lights, including the divine revelation of

¹⁶⁵ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 25.

¹⁶⁶ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 26.

¹⁶⁷ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 5.

Scripture, are only partial reflections of the absolute reality of the Triune God:

“Therefore, in the present life there are six illuminations; and they have their evening, for all knowledge will be destroyed. And therefore they will be followed by a seventh day of rest, a day which knows no evening, namely, the illumination of glory.”¹⁶⁸ The reduction of the arts to theology illustrates the limits of human knowledge, which must inevitably end in the embrace of divine love: “And there the circle is completed; the pattern of six is complete, and consequently there is rest.”¹⁶⁹ Although Bonaventure does not utilize the language of “divine darkness” in the *Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, it is evident that human reason, philosophical knowledge, and even the study of theology are insufficient to completely comprehend the mystery of the Triune God, who can be contemplated only in the union of divine love.¹⁷⁰

Summary: Mystical Theology

In a brief letter, St. Francis of Assisi authorized St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231) to teach theology to the Friars Minor with the important provision that “as is contained in the *Rule*, you “do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion” during study of this kind.”¹⁷¹ The integration of apophatic and Scholastic methodology in the mystical theology of St. Bonaventure reflects this vision of harmony between academic study and contemplative prayer. Rather than a deviation from the spiritual asceticism of

¹⁶⁸ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 6.

¹⁶⁹ Bonaventure, *Reduction*, 7.

¹⁷⁰ However, the language of “divine darkness,” and references from Dionysius, does appear in the *Journey of the Mind to God*: Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, trans. Zachary Hayes, ed. Philotheus Boehner (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2002): 5.4 and 7.5-6; cf. Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 131-4; Ewert H. Cousins, “The Coincidence of Opposites in the Christology of Saint Bonaventure,” *Franciscan Studies*, Vol. 28 (1968): 27-45.

¹⁷¹ Francis of Assisi, *Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua* in *FA:ED*, Vol. I, p. 107.

the Assisi penitents, the development of Franciscan education represents the necessary transposition of the Franciscan charism into an intellectual tradition. Echoes of the Byzantine apophatic and theological tradition resound in the mysticism of St. Bonaventure, mediated by the inheritance of a common hagiographical, ascetic, and contemplative patrimony from the ancient Christian Church.

Dogmatic Theology: Bl. John Duns Scotus and St. Gregory Palamas

The hagiography of Thomas of Celano and the mystical theology of St. Bonaventure demonstrate the substantial convergence between the Franciscan and Byzantine traditions. However, the primary division between the Latin and Greek Churches was historically crystallized around the *filioque* controversy. As Lossky emphasized: “The *filioque* was the primordial cause, the only dogmatic cause, of the breach between East and West. The other doctrinal disputes were but its consequences.”¹⁷² Besides the canonical objection to the modification of the Latin Creed, Orthodox reactions to the interpolation have accentuated the divergent Trinitarian theologies allegedly implied by the *filioque*.

Lossky argued that the absolute monarchy of the Father is necessary in order to maintain the mystery of the unity and triunity of the One Triune God:

This is why the East has always opposed the formula of the *filioque* which seems to impair the monarchy of the Father: either one is forced to destroy the unity by acknowledging two principles of Godhead, or one must ground the unity primarily on the common nature, which thus overshadows the persons and transforms them into relations within the unity of the essence.¹⁷³

Although modern ecumenical dialogue has acknowledged the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the *filioque*, particularly within the historical context of the Latin Church, the contribution of the Franciscan tradition has remained an underutilized resource in the movement towards a resolution of this theological controversy.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 56.

¹⁷³ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 58.

¹⁷⁴ For an overview of the modern ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches concerning the *filioque*, see: A. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque: A History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010): 209-213.

John Duns Scotus

John Duns Scotus developed his Trinitarian dogmatics in the context of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century theological disputation between Dominican and Franciscan theologians on how to account for the distinction between the three divine persons in the One Triune God. Whereas the Dominicans focused on the category of relations, the Franciscans emphasized the distinction between the emanations, or origins, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Both traditions maintained that besides this “minimally distinguishing property,” either relations or emanations, the three persons equally share the same, absolutely simple divine essence.¹⁷⁵

Lossky criticized the use of relations in Latin Trinitarian theology for subordinating the three persons to the unity of the divine essence. This tendency is further exacerbated by the addition of the *filioque*, which replaces the monarchy of the Father as the sole source of divine unity and triunity, with a reductive simplification of God: “that of the one substance in which the relations intervene to establish the distinction of persons, and in which the hypostasis of the Holy Spirit is no more than a reciprocal bond between the Father and the Son.”¹⁷⁶ In contradistinction to the reductive tendency of relational Trinitarian theology, Franciscan focus on emanations offers an account of the *filioque* that is in harmony with the Byzantine tradition.

In the account of his lectures at the University of Paris, the “examined report” or *Reportatio* I-A, John Duns Scotus presented his Trinitarian theology, which he has first

¹⁷⁵ Russell L. Friedman, “Divergent Traditions in Later-Medieval Trinitarian Theology: Relations, Emanations, and the Use of Philosophical Psychology, 1250-1325,” *Studia Theologica*, Vol. 53 (1999): 14.

¹⁷⁶ Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 62.

composed in the *Ordinatio*, his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.¹⁷⁷ In Distinction 11, Scotus considers the question: “Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father and the Son?”¹⁷⁸ Against this position, Scotus cites eight authorities, including John of Damascus, the *Legenda Sancti Andreae*, and Pope Leo I. He also states that neither the Gospel nor the New Testament teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, noting that “this is one of the reasons cited by the Greeks” for opposing the *filioque*.¹⁷⁹

Continuing to the question, Scotus cites an extended note by the Bishop of Lincoln, Robert Grosseteste (1168-1253), questioning the actual disagreement between the Churches.¹⁸⁰ The note states that the Greeks understand that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father “through the Son,” a formula that appears in various patristic writings. At the Synod of Blachernae of 1285, which rejected the unification accord of Lyons II, this formula was the subject of extensive debate among the Byzantine theologians. In addition to the traditional understanding that the phrase can refer to the temporal procession of the Holy Spirit in economy of salvation, the *Tomus* of 1285, promulgated by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregory II of Cyprus (1241-1290), further distinguished between the hypostatic existence of the Holy Spirit, which proceeds from the Father alone, and His eternal manifestation: “For the formula “through the son” here denotes the manifestation and illumination [of the Spirit by the Son], and not the emanation of the Spirit into

¹⁷⁷ For an overview of the Trinitarian theology of John Duns Scotus, see: Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 61-72;

¹⁷⁸ John Duns Scotus, *Reportatio* 1-A, Vol. I, trans. Allan B. Wolter and Oleg V. Bychkov, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2004), 11.1.

¹⁷⁹ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.1 objection 5.

¹⁸⁰ The Bishop of Lincoln was a major scholarly influence on John Duns Scotus. For a brief discussion of his note on the *filioque*, see: James McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 26-28, 481.

being.”¹⁸¹ Despite the controversial reception of the *Tomus*, it remains an important Orthodox response to the Latin doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit, as defined at Lyons II.¹⁸²

Unaware of the Synod of Blachernae, Scotus simply restates the conclusion of Grosseteste: “In this way, therefore, two wise ones, one Greek and the other Latin, not lovers of proper speech but of divine zeal, would perhaps find the disagreement not to be real, but one of words, for otherwise either the Latins or the Greeks would be heretics.”¹⁸³ However, Scotus resolves to defend the *filioque* as an authoritative teaching of the Roman Church, and constructs his argument on the foundation of the unique emanations, or productions, of the three divine persons.

Scotus defines the principle of production in divinity as “the infinite will having an infinite loveable object present to it.”¹⁸⁴ In this divine will to infinite love, the Trinity is eternally constituted as the unbegotten Father produces both the Son, by generation, and the Holy Spirit, by spiration. Nevertheless, in the order of logic, Scotus maintains that the Son precedes the production of the Holy Spirit, which he describes according to the order of intellect and will: “[T]he will does not have an object unless it is through the intellect making it present in a cognitive way.”¹⁸⁵ Antoine Vos explains that, for Scotus, the intellect and will describe the ontological identities of the Son and Holy Spirit as distinct persons within the Triune God:

¹⁸¹ *Tomus of 1285*, No. 9, in Aristeides Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium: The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283-1289)*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983): 162.

¹⁸² Cf. Siecienski, *Filioque*, 140-143.

¹⁸³ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.1.10

¹⁸⁴ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.1.12

¹⁸⁵ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.1.14.

“There can be only two processions, since for God there are only two constitutive characteristics of personhood, namely knowing and willing . . . The two basic constituents of knowledge and will are the only constitutive characteristics of divine personhood (*simpliciter perfectiones*), because God does not need any additional faculties of action.”¹⁸⁶

In Scriptural language, as the Word of God, the Son is spoken by the Father along with the Holy Spirit, who accompanies the Word as the wind or breath of speech.

In this logical sequence of emanations, there is a clear primacy of the Father, from whom the Son and Holy Spirit are produced: “[I]n the Father there is fecundity toward generation and spiration and these have an order in the Father in respect to being. For fecundity towards generation is prior to fecundity towards spiration, since it is through fecundity towards generation that the Father is constituted in being Father.”¹⁸⁷ Answering the original authorities, Scotus acknowledges the limitations of his description the Son and Holy Spirit as intellect and will, while reiterating the perfection of the emanations in the Trinity: “In the divine, however, there is but one nature and the Father communicates the whole fecundity to the Son before producing the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Word in the divine produces love.”¹⁸⁸ Thus, the divine will to infinite love is both the eternal beginning and perfect life of the Triune God.

Furthermore, Scotus continues to answer a second question: “If the Holy Spirit did not proceed from the Son, could he be really distinguished from him?” After defending the legitimacy of this question, Scotus concludes that oppositional relations are insufficient to distinguish between persons; rather, the primary constitutive principle of

¹⁸⁶ Antione Vos, *The Theology of John Duns Scotus*, (Boston, MA: Brill, 2018): 95.

¹⁸⁷ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.1.15

¹⁸⁸ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.1.20

any being is its unique *haecceitas* or “thisness.”¹⁸⁹ The Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Son because his *haecceitas* is generation by filiation, and not by spiration.¹⁹⁰ Scotus explains that even if the Father did not produce the Holy Spirit, and the Son did instead, the Father would be still be distinguished “by paternity” and the Son “by that same distinctive sign by which he is presently distinguished, namely filiation.”¹⁹¹ Although Scotus concedes that these “active disparate relations” of opposition can be utilized to distinguish between the three divine persons, he maintains that the primary, formal principles of distinction are the “passive disparate relations” of emanation.¹⁹²

Following this subtle distinction, Scotus reconfigures the Augustinian analogy of the Holy Spirit as the bond of love between the loving Father and the beloved Son. Instead, elaborating on his description of the divine intellect and will, Scotus understands that the Son has infinite knowledge of the divine essence, which the Holy Spirit wills to infinitely love: “. . . so here I say that the infinite will, having its first object as an infinite lovable, namely the divine essence or the infinite goodness of God, presented to itself by an act of the intellect, is the principle of producing the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹³ In contrast to the Augustinian analogy, which could be criticized for reducing the Holy Spirit to the reciprocal bond between the Father and the Son, the emphasis on the *haecceitas* of the three divine persons ensures that each is clearly distinguished in both emanation and

¹⁸⁹ On *haecceitas* in the thought of Duns Scotus, see the “Introduction” in *John Duns Scotus: Early Oxford Lecture on Individuation*, trans. Allan B. Wolter, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 2005), ix-xxviii.

¹⁹⁰ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.2.38-9.

¹⁹¹ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.2.46.

¹⁹² Scotus, *Reportatio*, 11.2.48.

¹⁹³ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 12.1.12.

activity, while simultaneously maintaining the eternal unity of the Trinity within the divine essence.

Further elaborating his description of the Triune persons, Scotus states that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all perfectly share the principles of divine intellect and will.¹⁹⁴ However, the Father receives both principles from Himself, and therefore, is “the principle and fount of the entire deity.”¹⁹⁵ Echoing Eastern Trinitarian theology, Scotus maintains this understanding of the primacy of the Father in order to preserve the distinction between the triunity of the persons and their unity in the divine essence. To complete his analogy, the Father is the divine, unbegotten font of infinite love, the Son is the eternally generated, divine knowledge of infinite love, and the Holy Spirit is the eternally proceeding, divine will to infinite love. Ultimately, for Scotus, the mystery of divine love is the eternal source of both the unity and triunity of the Trinitarian God.

The dogmatic theology of John Duns Scotus discloses significant resonances with the Trinitarian tradition of the Byzantine Church. As his opening citation of Grosseteste indicates, Scotus assumes the compatibility of Latin and Greek theology and only constructs his defense of the *filioque* because he accepts it as an authoritative teaching of the Roman Church. Moreover, by avoiding the use of oppositional relations in his account of the distinctions between the three divine persons, Scotus refocuses the Trinitarian debate on the issue of the emanation of the Holy Spirit. While unaware of the Synod of Blachernae, Scotus does emphasize the incontestable primacy, if not the explicit monarchy, of the Father as the source of the Son and Holy Spirit. There is also an

¹⁹⁴ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 12.1.13.

¹⁹⁵ Scotus, *Reportatio*, 12.1.14.

apophatic dimension to his insistence that the persons can only be distinguished according to their emanations as unbegotten paternity, generated filiation, and spirated procession. Furthermore, this insistence admits the possibility of distinguishing between the Triune persons even if the Holy Spirit did not proceed from the Father and the Son. Therefore, for Scotus, the doctrine of the *filioque* is only dependent on the authority of the Church, and not on theological necessity.

St. Gregory Palamas

St. Gregory Palamas represents a final point of convergence between the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions prior to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. A monk of Mt. Athos, Palamas was originally a hagiographer. However, after receiving reports of a theological debate between Barlaam the Calabrian (1290-1348) and several Dominican representatives from Rome, Palamas began to write polemics against the *filioque*. His *Apodictic Treatises on the Holy Spirit* dramatically accentuate the discontinuity between Latin and Greek theological traditions; the first treatise opens with the stark image of “the subtle serpent and source of vice” reappearing, like the heads of the hydra, through various heresies, including the *filioque*.¹⁹⁶

In his first treatise, Palamas recapitulates the canonical objection to the modification of the Latin Creed but concentrates his criticism on the theology of the *filioque*. He reasons that the phrase implies two origins of divinity, simultaneously relegating the Holy Spirit to the status of a creature and reconfiguring the Triune God into a Dyad. Instead, Palamas emphasizes that the monarchy of the Father expresses the

¹⁹⁶ Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises On the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Christopher C. Moody, ed. Gregory Heers, (Uncut Mountain Press, 2022), Treatise 1, Preamble, p. 57.

unity of the Trinity: “The creative origin is one: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. [. . .] Not that the Son is a different origin . . . but the same origin, since the Father, through Him, in the Holy Spirit, both brings forth and leads back and sustains all things well.”¹⁹⁷ In the temporal economy of salvation, Palamas reflects the traditional interpretation that the three divine persons operate together in concert, while maintaining their hypostatic distinctions in their eternal divine life.

Palamas acknowledges that certain patristic teachings allow for a Trinitarian theology in which the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son. Palamas specifies that the Greek *διὰ* should be understood as the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit together with the Word: “As a result, the Spirit is not “and from the Son” but from the Father together with the Son. . . .”¹⁹⁸ Distinct from the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation, this hypostatic procession occurs in eternity since it is “causeless and in everything separate and transcendently beyond both good pleasure and love for man, since it is from the Father, not according to will but only according to nature.”¹⁹⁹ This eternal procession terminates with the abiding rest of the Holy Spirit on the Son. Extrapolating from the teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian that Christ, as the Incarnate God, is the “Treasurer of the Spirit,” Palamas specifies that the temporal mission follows forth from this eternal procession: “The Treasurer, however, absolutely does not emanate from Himself what is being given, although God from God naturally has in Himself the Holy Spirit, which also naturally proceeds from Him to the worthy but does not possess existence from Him.”²⁰⁰ Therefore, for Palamas, the Holy Spirit

¹⁹⁷ Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises*, 1.14, p. 91.

¹⁹⁸ Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises*, 1.25, p. 117.

¹⁹⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises*, 1.29, p. 121.

²⁰⁰ Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises*, 1.29, p. 125.

proceeds through the Son both in time and in eternity, provided that the Father, as the unbegotten hypostasis of the divine essence, is understood to be the only origin of divinity.

Notwithstanding the polemical rhetoric of the *Apodictic Treatises*, the Trinitarian theology of Gregory Palamas appears to be remarkably compatible with the thought of John Duns Scotus. For Scotus, the three divine persons are distinguished by their emanations, or origins, as the unbegotten Father, the generated Son, and the spirated Holy Spirit. Similarly, quoting St. John of Damascus, Palamas affirms: “We acknowledge the difference of the divine hypostases only in three personal properties: in the causeless and paternal, in the caused and filial, and in the caused and proceeding.”²⁰¹ Although Scotus defends the *filioque* as an authoritative teaching of the Roman Church, he emphasizes that the doctrine is unnecessary to differentiate between the three divine persons.

The Hesychast controversy illuminates the importance of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit in the theology of Gregory Palamas. The controversy erupted after the publication of the *Apodictic Treatises*.²⁰² Seeking to learn more about his interlocutor, Barlaam of Calabria traveled to Thessaloniki and encountered a community of hesychastic monks, with which Palamas had been affiliated. Barlaam was scandalized by their claim to experience physical union with the divine energies of God, famously

²⁰¹ Gregory Palamas, *Apodictic Treatises*, 1.6, p. 77. Cf. St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, 3.5.49, in *John of Damascus: Writings*, Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Vol. 37, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr., (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958): 277.

²⁰² For a detailed account of the Hesychast Controversy, see the seminal text: John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence, (London: The Faith Press, 1964): 42-62; cf. also the important update: Robert E. Sinkewicz, “A New Interpretation for the First Episode in the Controversy between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Oct. 1980): 489-500.

described as the vision of the uncreated light, as seen by the disciples during the transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor.²⁰³ A series of polemical accusations ensued with Palamas composing his nine treatises entitled *For the Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*, commonly called the *Triads*.

John Meyendorff summarizes the central thesis of the *Triads* as a defense of the doctrine of *theosis*: “The living God is accessible to personal experience, because He shared His own life with humanity.”²⁰⁴ For Palamas, the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit through Christ, the Son of God and Incarnate Word of the Father, empowers human beings to mystically partake in the divine life of the Trinity. The distinction between the divine essence and energies of God is critical in the description of this sacred exchange. Palamas specifies that the vision of uncreated light does not encompass the totality of the divine energies, “but only in the measure in which it is rendered receptive to the power of the Holy Spirit,” who, nevertheless, remains incomprehensible.²⁰⁵

The transfiguring vision of the uncreated light functions as an icon of the Trinity, which conforms the one who partakes of the divine energies into the image and likeness of the Triune God: “So we carry the Father’s light in the face of Jesus Christ in earthen vessels, that is, in our bodies, in order to know the glory of the Holy Spirit.”²⁰⁶ Moreover, Palamas describes the *theosis* of the saint as analogous to the Incarnation of Christ:

For just as the divinity of the Word of God incarnate is common to soul and body, since He has deified the flesh through the mediation of the soul to make it also accomplish the works of God; so similarly, in spiritual man, the grace of the

²⁰³ Mt. 17: 1-8; Mk. 9: 2-8; Lk. 9:28-36; 2 Peter 1:17-21.

²⁰⁴ John Meyendorff, “Introduction,” in Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. Nicholas Gendle, (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 1.

²⁰⁵ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 1.3.17-18.

²⁰⁶ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 1.2.2.

Spirit, transmitted to the body through the soul, grants to the body also the experience of things divine and allows it the same blessed experiences as the soul undergoes.²⁰⁷

Nevertheless, Palamas also emphasizes that the contemplative does not see the divine essence.²⁰⁸ Rather, the vision of the uncreated light is an experience of union with the divine energies communicated by the Holy Spirit, who “transcends the deifying life which is in Him and proceeds from Him, for it is its own natural energy, which is akin to Him, even if not exactly so.”²⁰⁹ Palamas further specifies that the “theurgic grace of the Spirit” empowers the contemplative to experience “the deifying energy of God” in this mystical process of *theosis*.²¹⁰ Ultimately, Palamas ends his defense of the hesychastic vision of uncreated light with an apophatic appeal, since *theosis* remains an ineffable experience, reflecting the incomprehensibility of the Holy Spirit, in whom the saints and contemplatives participate in the mystery of the divine life.

Summary: Dogmatic Theology

In the generation after the death of Gregory Palamas, the compatibility of his thought with that of John Duns Scotus was recognized by other Byzantine theologians, including George Gennadius Scholarius (1405-1473), who served as the Ecumenical Patriarch during the conquest of Constantinople.²¹¹ Preparing for the reunification Council of Ferrara-Florence (1445), Scholarius, along with Emperor John VIII Palaeologus (1392-1448) and Mark of Ephesus (1392-1445), studied both Nilus

²⁰⁷ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 2.2.12.

²⁰⁸ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 2.3.12.

²⁰⁹ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 3.1.9.

²¹⁰ Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, 3.1.31-32.

²¹¹ For an analysis of the influence of Scotus in the thought of Scholarius, see: Christiaan W. Kappes, “The Latin Sources of the Palamite Theology of George-Gennadius Scholarius,” in *When East Met West: The Reception of Latin Theological And Philosophical Thought in Late Byzantium*, eds. John A. Demetracopoulos and Charalambos Dendrinos, *Nicolaus*, fasc. 1 (2013): 71-114.

Cabasilas (1295-1363), a disciple of Palamas, and John Duns Scotus at least in part to refute the defense of the *filioque* by St. Thomas Aquinas. In modern theological studies, Martin Jugie concluded that “Scotism in this question is Palamism *in fieri*.”²¹² Despite this recognition, the unavailability of a critical edition of the works of Duns Scotus, the general marginalization of Franciscan theology in nineteenth-century Catholicism, and the historical animosity and isolation of the Eastern and Western Churches effectively impeded the initiation of ecumenical dialogue between the two traditions. In the absence of this dialogue, the failure of the Council of Ferrara-Florence and the Fall of the Byzantine Empire appeared to mark the final seal of the Great Schism of 1054.

²¹² “...Scotismus in hac questione est quasi palamismus in fieri...” Martin Jugie, *Theologia Dogmatica Christianorum Orientalium ab Ecclesia Catholica Dissidentium*, Vol. II, (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1933), 148. Jugie was committed to the Roman Catholic neo-scholasticism of his time and viewed both Scotus and Palamas as inferior to the Thomistic synthesis. Cf. Norman Russell, *Gregory Palamas and the Making of Palamism in the Modern Age*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019): 45-74.

Conclusion

The Second Vatican Council has been termed the most significant “catholic” event in the modern history of the Church.²¹³ The contributions of observers from beyond the confines of Catholicism²¹⁴ and the important interventions by the representatives of the Eastern Catholic Churches²¹⁵ helped to guide the Council in both its embrace of the ecumenical movement and in its recognition of the spiritual diversity already present within the Roman communion. In the vocabulary of the council, the opening to ecumenism constitutes an *aggiornamento* that “updated” the previous Roman antipathy to the movement; whereas the retrieval of the diverse patrimony of Catholicism, including the Franciscan tradition, represents a *ressourcement* that “returned to the sources” that antedated the neo-scholastic synthesis. After centuries of triumphal and adversarial polemicism, Vatican II marked the decisive moment in which the Churches of both the East and West embraced a renewed path of encounter and dialogue.

The closeness of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew is emblematic of the positive reception of the Second Vatican Council. However, new challenges to the ecumenical movement have also emerged in both the Latin and Greek traditions,

²¹³ Cf. Donald W. Norwood, “Vatican II: The Most Catholic Council?,” *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (2014): 421-432.

²¹⁴ On the contributions of the observers at Vatican II, see: Radu Bordeianu, “Orthodox Observers at the Second Vatican Council and Intra-Orthodox Dynamics,” *Theological Studies*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (2018): 86-106; Donald W. Norwood, “The Impact of Non-Roman Catholic Observers at Vatican II,” *Ecclesiology*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2014): 293-312.

²¹⁵ Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh and the delegation from the Melkite Church was particularly influential in moving the council fathers “to realize that Catholicism was bigger and more diversified than the bishops of the West seemed to realize.” John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 124; see also, *The Greek Melkite Church at the Council: Discourses and Memoranda of Patriarch Maximos IV and the Hierarchs of His Church at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, (Newton, MA: Sophia Press, 2014).

especially in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. These challenges suggest that the modern “existential ecumenism” symbolized by the closeness of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew must be further supported by the renewed development of theological dialogue among the traditions of Christianity.²¹⁶

The historical harmony between the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions represents a particularly important point of confluence between the Eastern and Western Churches. The legendary origins of Christian asceticism in both Calabria and Umbria attests to the common inspiration of the Egyptian desert for both the Italo-Byzantine monks and the early Franciscan mendicants. A comparative analysis of the *bios* of St. Nilus of Rossano and the *Life of St. Francis* by Thomas of Celano illustrates the importance of this shared spiritual patrimony in both hagiographical traditions. Reflecting conventional standards of sanctity, both accounts present the life of the saint as following a triple-progression from ethical perfection (*teleiosis*) to freedom from the passions (*apatheia*) to embodied incorruptibility (*aftharsia*) and spiritual liberation from death (*athanasia*). Although Celano accentuates the newness of the stigmata of St. Francis, it is evident that the miracle functions as the ultimate symbol for the completion of this ascetic itinerary: the *theosis* of the saint according to the image and likeness of the Incarnate God. Recalling the example of the martyrs, the stigmata identifies the sufferings of the saint with those of Christ Crucified, emphasizing the paradoxical connection between deification and the Paschal Mystery of the Cross.

²¹⁶ The phrase “existential ecumenism” was used by John Zizioulas in his comments on the encyclical *Laudato Si* to describe the importance of uniting divided Christians to confront a common crisis together, particularly the threat of ecological devastation: John Zizioulas, “A Comment on Pope Francis’ Encyclical *Laudato Si*,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 60, No. 3-4 (2015): 190-191.

After the death of St. Francis, the Franciscans were instrumental in facilitating diplomatic dialogue between the Greek and Latin Churches. While the Second Council of Lyons was ultimately unable to implement an enduring ecclesial union, this failure can be primarily traced to the insurmountable animosity created by the Crusader capture of Constantinople in 1204. In this context, the mysticism of St. Bonaventure, exemplified by the *Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, reflects the integration of apophatic and Scholastic methodology in the emerging Franciscan intellectual tradition. Both John Duns Scotus and Gregory Palamas utilized a similar methodology in their contributions to the *filioque* controversy, which continued to appear as the primary fracture between the Churches.

The dogmatic theology of both John Duns Scotus and Gregory Palamas recognizes that the Scriptures and patristic writings suggest a relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit in the inner life of the Trinity. Although Scotus defended the *filioque* as an authoritative teaching of the Roman Church, he also emphasized that the different emanations of the three divine persons are the only essential distinctions between them. Additionally, by describing the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit as the infinite intellect and will to know and love the divine essence shared by Triune God, Scotus clearly maintains a position of primacy for the Father as the uncreated source of divinity, while simultaneously balancing this unity with the trinity of divine persons. Similarly, Gregory Palamas, following the distinction made by Gregory of Cyprus at the Synod of Blachernae in 1285, acknowledged that the Holy Spirit is eternally manifested or illuminated through the Son. Despite the differences in their thought, both Scotus and Palamas envision an orthodox Trinitarian theology that maintains the mysterious unity and triunity of the three divine persons,

The Byzantine and Franciscan traditions remain distinct expressions of the Christian faith, instantiated in the ecclesial patrimony of the particular Churches of the East and West. After centuries of division, the recognition of the commonalities shared by the saints and theologians of the past opens new opportunities for encounter and dialogue between the Greek and Latin faithful in the present. The convergence of the Byzantine and Franciscan traditions represents an important point for continued study and reflection, as the Churches continue to journey together on the pilgrimage toward the restoration of communion. On the foundation of these venerable traditions, the ecumenical movement will further actualize the prayer of Jesus Christ: “that they may all be one” (John 17:22).

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