

SALESIAN UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

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Francis de Sales, who died in 1622, was a Christian humanist. For him the human person, under the impact of revelation and grace, is the portrait upon which is depicted the vast and wonderful panorama of God's dealings with creation and the human family. This portrait also reflects the reality of God as Triune and the trinitarian dimension of creation, the human person and the human family.

After some introductory remarks establishing the linkage between the reality of God as trinity and the human person, we will look at how Francis develops his Christian anthropology upon this linkage. This will be done in several steps: trinity and creation; trinity and the creation of the human person; ecstatic love: the image of the trinity in the human person; sin in Christian anthropology. A summary of conclusions will follow and end this essay.

### Introductory Remarks

In an Ash Wednesday sermon (March 7, 1612), Francis indicated that the starting point for a Salesian knowledge of God is the human person. "The first elements of a knowledge of God are in the knowledge of self." An analysis of one's self can lead to a knowledge of God. Further, under the impact of revelation, this self-analysis can lead to a knowledge of the triune reality of God. He preached this idea as early as his first sermon on June 6, 1593. In exegeting Gn 1:26, "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in the likeness of ourselves...'", Francis insisted that the verb form in the text indicated that the three persons of the Trinity had participated in the creation of man. "For if only one Person created man, he would have said, 'I will make' and not 'Let us make'."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We are using the Annecy edition of the works of St. Francis de Sales: *Oeuvres de Saint François de Sales: Evêque de Genève et Docteur de l'Église*, 27 volumes, (Annecy: Imprimerie J. Niérat, 1892-1964). The volume (Roman numerals) and page (Arabic numerals) of this edition will be cited. Here, for instance, we cite VIII, 80 and VIII, 5. Scriptural references are from *The Jerusalem Bible*, ALEXANDER JONES General Editor (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966).

Accepting the Renaissance reappropriation of the Greek maxim, "Know thyself!", Francis taught that the human person as such can proceed from anthropology to theology; accepting the patristic preference for a trinitarian reading of Gn 1:26, he taught that a Christian analysis of the human person reveals a trinitarian clue to anthropology.

The independent thinkers (*libertins erudits*) of Francis' day, e.g. La Mothe Le Vayer, Gabriel Naude, Guy Patin and Pierre Gassendi, as well as their forerunners—Erasmus, Montaigne, Charron—understood the necessity of self-knowledge and gave it an important place in their lives and in their works. Erasmus, for example, insisted that the Delphic oracle "Know thyself!" was the beginning of wisdom. Further, this great Christian humanist emphasized that self-knowledge is accomplished by leaving or going out of oneself in the movement of an ecstasy of love. For Charron, disciple of Montaigne, the practice of self-knowledge leads inexorably to a consideration of God. Le Vayer insists that a knowledge of God the creator is acquired by the observation of his works, with the human person, God's greatest work, being the surest guide to such knowledge. These men and their thought form the humanistic context in which the Bishop of Geneva expressed his own Christian understanding of the human person.<sup>2</sup>

Francis took the Greek maxim "Know thyself!" as a basis for exploring the mystery which is the human person.

It is not wrong to consider ourselves in order to glorify God for the gifts he has given us, providing we do not become vain and complacent with ourselves. It is a saying of the philosophers, but which has been approved as a good one by the Christian doctors: "Know thyself." That is to say, know the excellence of your soul so that you will not debase nor despise it. However, it is necessary always to remain within the terms and limits of a holy and loving recognition of God on whom we depend and who has made us what we are.<sup>3</sup>

The ancients stressed the Delphic oracle in order to bring the human person to a humble recognition that he is not a god; Francis used it for the same purpose. The humility thus engendered is, however, simply the foundation for a much more positive affirmation: gratitude to God. "...A lively consideration of graces received makes us humble because knowledge of them begets gratitude for them".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ALEXANDER T. POCETTO, "An Introduction to Salesian Anthropology", *Salesian Studies* 6 (Summer 1960), 37-39 [hereafter "Salesian Anthropology"]; ALEXANDER T. POCETTO, "S. François de Sales et les libertins erudits" Ph.D. dissertation (Laval University, 1970), 68-113. For background to the thought of these humanists whose thought influenced Francis, see: RENÉ BADY, *L'Homme et son "Institution": de Montaigne à Bérulle: 1580-1625* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1964).

<sup>3</sup> IX, 254.

<sup>4</sup> III, 146 [For St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to the Devout Life* (Vol. III) and *Treatise on the Love of God* (Vols. IV and V) the translation followed is that of John K. Ryan. Ryan's

Francis, like Erasmus, biblically grounded self-knowledge in the Song of Songs 1:18: "If you do not know this, O loveliest of women, follow the tracks of the flock, and take your kids to graze close by the shepherd's tents." In his 1612 sermon for Ash Wednesday, he explained this scriptural text: "Do you wish to be certain...begin with self-knowledge." Unlike Ambrose, Gregory and Bernard, Francis did not see in this verse a reproach. Rather, he saw it as an invitation to learn "in what we ought to begin (our) quest after God." We begin, as he interpreted the verse, by going into and then out of ourselves: "For both Erasmus and St. Francis de Sales the verb 'leave' (*egredere*) represents an invitation to a knowledge of oneself conceived as a voyage outside oneself".<sup>5</sup> One comes to self-knowledge and self-definition by discovering that he and everything he is and has is a gift. But this recognition is penultimate. For the second movement is an ecstatic thrust outward in search of the Giver. This double movement is important for understanding Francis' development of Christian anthropology.

In this Salesian turn within in self-knowledge, the human person discovers the secret of who he is and who God is. For, when one moves within, he finds his soul and "how noble the soul is since it is the image and likeness of God!"<sup>6</sup>

Our saint was fascinated and almost bewitched by the profound and practically unfathomable mystery of our resemblance to God. From it he derives his conception of man, his cosmogony and his spirituality...Man as the image of God [reveals]...the Christian God, the Blessed Trinity.<sup>7</sup>

In a sermon for the Feast of the Trinity on May 21, 1595, Francis looked again at Gn 1:26: "God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in the likeness of ourselves...'" He insisted that "by these words the Trinity of this Creator is demonstrated".<sup>8</sup> Trinity, creation, the human person: once one in a turn within in self-knowledge has affirmed the image of God in the human person, it leads inevitably to a consideration of the interplay among these three concepts and, more significantly, to a deeper appreciation of the nature and destiny of humankind so divinely imaged.

translation of the *Introduction* is published by Image Books, Doubleday (Garden City, N.Y., 1972); and his translation of the *Treatise* is published by Tan Books (Rockford, Ill., 1975)}.

<sup>5</sup> VIII, 80-81; POCKETTO, "Salesian Anthropology", 43; See: IV, 54-62 and V, 25-29 for further clarification of the Salesian understanding of ecstatic love.

<sup>6</sup> VIII, 85.

<sup>7</sup> POCKETTO, "Salesian Anthropology", 44.

<sup>8</sup> VII, 255.

## Trinity and Creation

All that the holy Trinity effected and made outside of itself, all three Persons, in reality, communicated and effected without any distinction or division...When it [Gn 1:26] speaks of the creation of things in their natural state, and [in particular] while speaking of [the creation of] man, it introduces the divine Majesty in three Persons saying: "Let us make man in our image"; for if only one Person had created man, it would have said: "I will make", and not "let us make man in our image, in the likeness of ourselves." [Insertions mine].<sup>9</sup>

In this early sermon (1593), Francis gave expression to his belief in the trinitarian structure of God's creative act. He gave further biblical support for this conviction by an analysis of the last verse of Ps 67 which, in the old Latin Psalter, repeats "God" three times. This thrice repeated use of the word "God" is to show that not only does the Father bless but also the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is thus necessary to conclude "that no one Person does anything without the others when something is effected outside the Godhead."<sup>10</sup> Francis used such texts to convey one overwhelming conviction to his audience: creation is the work of the trinity of divine persons. In this same sermon, for the feast of Pentecost, he cited the role of the Holy Spirit at the creation and re-creation of the world.

In the beginning, in the first formation of the world, I find that 'God's spirit hovered over the water' [Gn 1:2]. This means that the chaos or elementary world, or indeed, the globe of water which covered the entire face of the earth, having been created, the Holy Spirit of God hovered above it in order to give to this unformed chaos, this unfecund element, such fecundity that henceforth, without water, neither plant nor animal would be able to grow: in this way it is meant that it [the Spirit] covered and made fruitful the waters so that they could produce aquatic animals and serve the coming forth of every living thing. Thus this same Spirit hovers today over the fire, not now to create and form the world, but to re-create and re-form it. [Insertions mine].<sup>11</sup>

The preacher was demonstrating the continuity between the first creation and the new creation by pointing out the continuity between the creative agent of the first and second: the Holy Spirit. Further, he underlined the trinitarian structure of both.

In a much later sermon, Francis returned to the theme of the Holy Spirit's contribution to the creative act. The "breath of life" of Gn 2:8 is really "spirit of life" of Rm 8:2 and this, in turn, is the Spirit who gives life, natural life at the

<sup>9</sup> VII, 5.

<sup>10</sup> VII, 6.

<sup>11</sup> VII, 10-11.

first creation and graced life at the new creation wrought by Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> Once again the continuity of both creations is grounded in the continuity of agent. The pneumatic dimension of the creative act adds weight to Francis' belief in the trinitarian reality of God's dealing with the world from the very beginning.

The Son, also, contributes to God's creative act. Discussing the Christian's duty to love the neighbor, Francis preached: "Love one another as Jesus Christ loved us, not because of any merit that was in us, but simply because he has created us in his own image and likeness". Here he attributed the creation and dignity of humankind to the Son. The Son's creative role is also discussed in his *Treatise on the Love of God*. Whereas Genesis described creation in many words, "the glorious St. John has expressed [it] in a single word. 'By the Word', he said, that is, by that eternal Word who is the Son of God, 'all things were made'".<sup>13</sup> The Son as Word is the vehicle through which the creative act is realized.

Francis never explicitly assigned a distinctive role to the Father in the creative act; however, he did attribute to him the divine "power" which is generative of everything that is:

Nevertheless, by a certain appropriation and suitability of language, works which express power more fully are usually attributed to the Father, like creation and such matters, for he is the source and origin of all power and divinity; works which connote more the appearance of wisdom [are usually attributed] to the Son; those [works which connote] goodness [are usually attributed] to the Holy Spirit, the love and unique charity of the Father and of the Son. [Insertions mine].<sup>14</sup>

The Father's special appropriation remains the creative Source within and without the Trinity.

In preaching on the opening verses of Genesis, Francis made it clear that his principal point was to show that Creation was the work of the entire Godhead, the Trinity. In stressing the trinitarian cooperation in the creative act, he seemed eager to establish the appropriate theological context in which to express his understanding of humankind, Christ, redemption and justification.

It is indeed said well at the beginning of Genesis that God said: "Let us make man to our image and likeness", for by these words the Trinity of this Creator is demonstrated...It is the fundamental article of our whole Christian faith...On this article of the Trinity is founded [that] of the Incarnation, and on the Incarnation [that of] our entire salvation; on this article is founded the mission of the Holy Spirit and on this our entire justification. [Insertions mine].<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> VIII, 230-31.

<sup>13</sup> X, 268; IV, 92.

<sup>14</sup> VII, 6.

<sup>15</sup> VII, 254-57.

In these few passages his theological enterprise is given. God, as Triune, is the author of both creation and re-creation. Further, the locus of this divine trinitarian activity is material creation in general and humankind in particular.

### **Trinity and the Creation of the Human Person**

Cardinal Berulle once said that “by revealing himself to us, God reveals us to our ourselves.”<sup>16</sup> This truth was espoused by Francis, a contemporary of Bérulle. His preaching on our being made to the image and likeness of God as triune invites investigation as to what this tells us about ourselves. For Francis was affirming that God, as Trinity, defines us.

The first anthropological clue given with Francis’ affirmation of the trinitarian activity in creation is our uniqueness in being addressed by the Persons of the Trinity in and through their appropriated roles in creation.

God’s address to us is based on the communicative nature of God.

From all eternity there is in God an essential communication by which the Father, in producing the Son, communicates his entire infinite and indivisible divinity to the Son. The Father and the Son together, in producing the Holy Spirit, communicate in like manner their own proper unique divinity to him.<sup>17</sup>

God is communicative and this is constitutive of the Three Persons within God. This same communicative essence causes God to go “outside” to create.

God made his dwelling in himself. His center was no other than himself. Also when he desired to communicate himself to man he went out of himself: he made, as it were, an effort. He had been...in a state of rapture and ecstasy by which he went out of himself in order to communicate with his creature.<sup>18</sup>

This intra-trinitarian communication pours over into creation, supremely so in the God-man; dependent on the Incarnation, into all other creatures: angels, people, plants and animals. For Francis, the reason for creation is the communication of what it means to be God to “that humanity which later was actually united to the person of God the Son”.<sup>19</sup> Both the human family and angels were created

to have company with his Son, to participate in his grace and glory, and to adore and praise him forever...Furthermore, sacred providence determined to produce all other things, both natural and supernatural, for the sake of our Savior so that angels and men might serve him and thus share in his glory.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> HENRI DE LUBAC, *Le Mystère du Surnaturel* (Paris: Aubier, 1965), 265.

<sup>17</sup> IV, 99-100.

<sup>18</sup> X, 166.

<sup>19</sup> IV, 100-102.

<sup>20</sup> IV, 100-101.

The human family, along with all else, was made with special reference to the humanity of the Logos, Jesus Christ. The Second Person of the Trinity is not only the vehicle, as Word, for creation. He is also the reason for creation. Thus, one element of Salesian anthropology is certainly the Christo-centricity of the human person. As creature and prescinding from his subsequent need for a Savior, the human person has an orientation to Jesus Christ from the beginning. Thus, the “image” of God in us takes on Christological dimensions. We are made in light of Christ and for Francis “Christ’s coming [is] not first for man’s redemption, but for the creation’s completion”.<sup>21</sup> Made for Christ, we can find our ultimate self-definition only in and through Christ. In our turn within and in the light of revealed truth, we discover that we can be completed as human only when we find that completion in Christ.

The Spirit also plays a role in our creation. The Spirit of God, whom Francis understands as the personification of the communicative or ecstatic love of the Father and Son, the breath of love, presides over the creation of the universe and especially over our creation.

When God with his almighty hand “formed it out of the slime of the earth”...it would be a body without movement, without life and without beauty until God breathed (*inspirast*) into it “the breath of life”, that is holy charity.<sup>22</sup>

According to Francis’ understanding of Gn 2:7, Adam became human only when he was “inspired” (*inspirer*) by God. And this breath of life is the breath of love, the Third Person of the Trinity. When Francis wrote in the *Controverses* that God “breathed into (*inspira*) him a living soul, and he was no sooner inspired (*inspiree*) that this heavenly man began to breathe [respirer]”, he was making more than a play on words. So inspired, to live is really to love. Human life is nothing less than the image of divine life in which love, as communicated, is what constitutes God as God: Trinity. This is why Francis could assert that love is the measure and meaning of humanity: “*caritas est Mensura hominis*”.<sup>23</sup>

Thus love enters into the very make-up of man, into the innermost structure of his being. It is love that defines him as man.<sup>24</sup>

For this reason, Francis stated that “It is...because God created man to his own image and likeness [that be] wills that just as in himself so also in man all

<sup>21</sup> RICHARD JOHN MCKENNA “The Personal Religious Life in the Thought of St. Francis de Sales” (Th.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1962), 208.

<sup>22</sup> V, 268-69.

<sup>23</sup> I, 64: XXV, 116. See HUBERT PAUELS, “Der Standort der salesianischen Theologie”, *Jahrbuch für Salesianischen Studien* (1964), 91-102 but especially 92-93.

<sup>24</sup> POCKETTO, “Salesian Anthropology”, 64.

things must be set in order by love and for love".<sup>25</sup> Because of the Holy Spirit's part in our creation, we are to live only by love.

The essence of God is communicative. When this communication *ad extra* constitutes the Hypostatic Union, it orients all of creation to search for ultimate meaning in an ecstatic thrust outward towards Christ.<sup>26</sup> This ecstasy, because of the Spirit's contribution, is an ecstasy of love. To be human, then, is to be inclined toward the love of God and to be Christian is to effect this inclination.

As for ourselves, Theotimus, my dear friend, we see already that we can be neither true men without having this inclination to love God more than ourselves nor true Christians without putting this inclination into effect. Let us love more than ourselves Him who is more than all things and more than ourselves. This is the truth. Amen.<sup>27</sup>

We are created by and imaged to God who, in perpetual ecstatic love, is Triune. Therefore, we are essentially other-directed. This other-directedness is actualized by, in and through love. Further, this other-directed love allows us to become fully ourselves and, ultimately, brings us to union with the Source of this love who is God. This is Salesian anthropology, an anthropology in which ecstatic love constitutes the image and resemblance, in us, of the Triune God. For Francis, this love is "the fundamental law of the universe".<sup>28</sup>

### **Ecstatic Love: The Image of the Triune God in the Human Person**

For Francis, each human being is the résumé of the universe: "man is a little world".<sup>29</sup> "For man is an epitome of the world, or rather, he is a little world in himself, in which all that is to be found in the great world of the universe is found".<sup>30</sup> "Man is the perfection of the universe; spirit the perfection of man; love the perfection of spirit; charity the perfection of love".<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> IV, 40.

<sup>26</sup> Francis insisted on the divine freedom in creating. Nothing compels the creative act, from within or from without. See: X, 20; see also: DELUBAC, *Le mystère du Surnaturel*, p. 289, n. 4.

<sup>27</sup> V, 203.

<sup>28</sup> MICHAEL MÜLLER, *St. Francis De Sales* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1937), 35.

<sup>29</sup> VII, 464.

<sup>30</sup> VI, 42; see: VII, 132. For the *Conferences* of Francis (Vol. VI) the translation by Gasquet and Mackay is followed (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1962).

<sup>31</sup> V, 165; see: JAMES LANGELAAN, *Conferences* (Center Valley, PA: By the author, n.d.) 17-20 where he argues effectively that Francis' understanding of man as a microcosmos is deliberately chosen over against the too pronounced dichotomy, in Patristic thought, between God and creation, on the one hand, and on the other, the popular Renaissance view espoused by Cajetan and Pomponazzi that man, like everything else in nature, has a natural end prior to grace. Neither anthropological starting point was seen as adequate for Francis who preferred the concept of man as a microcosmos, as articulated by Nicholas of Cusa. Creation as basically theocentric, with man as its résumé, was Francis' anthropological starting point.

Since the human being is the perfection of the created universe, Francis needed only to define what it means to be human to express at the same time the profound meaning of creation. His analysis of the trinitarian dimension in creation led him to focus on the divine image in humanity which is ecstatic love. And since love strives for union,<sup>32</sup> he needed only to discuss the process whereby the human person, as lover, grows into ever greater union with the love who is God to describe at the same time the groanings of creation for the Creator. In short, humanity measures the created universe. Therefore, Salesian anthropology is one and the same as Salesian cosmology. The human family and world are two aspects of the same trinitarian love come to expression *ad extra*. An analysis of the divine image which characterizes the human person, who in turn résumés creation, leads inevitably to the Triune God.

In a conference to the Visitandine Sisters several years before the publication of the *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bishop de Sales commented on Gn 1:26 and the divine image in us:

. When God said: *Let us make man in our likeness*, He thereby bestowed on him reason and the use thereof, in order to be able to discuss and consider good and evil, to know which things should be chosen and which rejected. It is reason which makes us superior to all the animals, and masters over them.<sup>33</sup>

He continued his reflections on Gn 1:26 and affirmed that when God created our first parents he gave them absolute dominion over the fishes of the seas and the beasts of the earth.

Francis stressed the fact that the human family is to have dominion over the world, and not be dominated by it. "It is said that the wise man, that is, the man who is guided by reason, will render himself absolute master of the stars". While in agreement with this assessment, he nevertheless insisted that we use the image of dominion first to master ourselves by reason and then to go on to the mastery of the world.<sup>34</sup> The divine image in us, then, comes to expression in the lordly domination, guided by reason, of both the cosmos and the microcosmos. This aspect of the image challenges us to reproduce that creativity in dominating the earth which the creator demonstrated in forming it.

This creative power, though a significant part of Francis' concept of humanity, does not dominate his anthropology. For humanity

is called to existence by the love of God. Hence man is the image of God first of all by his power to love as God loves and not primarily by his power to rule over creation.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> IV, 50-53.

<sup>33</sup> IV, 50-53.

<sup>34</sup> VI, 34; see VII, 431.

<sup>35</sup> POCKETTO, "Salesian Anthropology", 46.

The love dimension of the divine image in humanity is dominant in his thought and it is certainly his unique contribution to anthropological considerations. "Just as God created man in his image and likeness, so also he has ordained for man a love in the image and likeness of the love due to his divinity".<sup>36</sup>

The triune God is imaged most perfectly by us when we love. But this love can go in the direction of self-less love of God and neighbor or it can go the route of self-centered love.

Ancient philosophers recognized that there are two kinds of ecstasy, one of which raises us above ourselves while the other degrades us below ourselves. It is as if they meant that man is by nature between angels and beasts;...that by his life-conduct and by constant self-care he could free and emancipate himself from his middle state;...and that because an ecstasy is merely to go out of oneself, whichever path a man takes he is truly in ecstasy.<sup>37</sup>

For Francis, humanity has indeed been given love in the divine image and likeness. This likeness to God in love is not, however, automatically realized. Though it results in a natural inclination and tendency to love selflessly, it remains free.<sup>38</sup> It produces only the inclination to love selflessly. How is this inclination realized?

To understand Francis here, a distinction must be made between the "already" and the "not yet" of our resemblance to God.<sup>39</sup> The "already" is our possession of the love dimension of the divine resemblance. The "not yet" is the imperative to realize the resemblance by loving as God loves. Each human being is in a middle position with a potential, based on natural inclination, to love selflessly. Each may or may not do so: all are free. Francis' entire effort in the first five books of the *Treatise* is to persuade his readers to go in quest of union with divine love.

The resemblance to God shows us the possibility of such love in ourselves and the recognition of possible union with the Beloved:

but this recognition is not enough to awaken a longing for the union to become real. The sight of a 'like' object does not necessarily incite striving and effort, for one does not long for what one possesses but rather for what one lacks, the possession of which, however, appears as a gain. The beginning of love, therefore, is not in the contemplation of similar qualities, but in the contemplation of such

<sup>36</sup> V 204; see RUTH KLEINMANN, *A Revolution in Charity* (Hyattsville, MD: Institute of Salesian Studies, 1968). In this work, the revolutionary impact of Francis' notion of love is considered.

<sup>37</sup> IV, 57.

<sup>38</sup> IV, 77-79.

<sup>39</sup> In his *Conferences* (pp 13-16) Langelaan discusses the distinction conveyed by the terms "already" and "not yet" of our divine image. However, the actual terms as applied to this Salesian distinction are the present writer's.

dissimilar qualities as are complementary to our own and the union with which will complete our own ego.<sup>40</sup>

Müller has recognized that for Francis the affinity between God and us does not rest on the principle of similarity but on dissimilarity. The cause of love, then, is the enhancing mutuality possible to both, based on God's abundance and man's need.

We are created to the image and likeness of God. What does this mean if not that we have the utmost congruity with his divine majesty?...

In addition to this congruity based on likeness, there is an unparalleled correspondence between God and man because of their reciprocal perfection. This does not mean that God can receive any perfection from man. But just as man cannot be perfected except by the divine goodness, so also divine goodness can rightly exercise its perfection outside itself nowhere so well as upon our humanity. The one has great need and great capacity to receive good; the other has great abundance and great inclination to bestow it. Nothing is so suitable to indigence as liberality and affluence, and nothing is so agreeable to general affluence as need and indigence.<sup>41</sup>

This dissimilarity as cause, first, of the recognition in God and the human person of their mutual "need" and, second, of the corresponding ecstasy of one towards the other has been termed bold, startling and "the most original aspect of Salesian thought".<sup>42</sup> For Francis, it is precisely that correspondence which begins the quest towards union between us and God.

Hence the affinity that causes love does not always consist in likeness, but rather in a proportion, relation, or correspondence between lover and thing loved...Hence love is not always caused by likeness and sympathy, but by correspondence and proportion...Therefore, the affinity of lover and thing loved is the primary source of love. This affinity consists in correspondence, which is simply a mutual relation that makes suitable things unite so as to communicate some perfection to one another.<sup>43</sup>

Francis' notion of correspondence is a recognition that mutuality is not simply a codicil to self-realization and self-perfection but its key element. He drove this point home: "in music, harmonies are produced in a discord in which contrasting voices correspond so that all of them together make a well-proportioned whole".<sup>44</sup>

This concept of correspondence helps to illuminate the trinitarian structure

<sup>40</sup> MÜLLER, *St. Francis de Sales*, 36.

<sup>41</sup> IV, 74-75.

<sup>42</sup> POCKETTO, "Salesian Anthropology", 48.

<sup>43</sup> IV, 48-50.

<sup>44</sup> IV, 49. According to Müller in *St. Francis de Sales* (p. 37), Francis is using Vives, the prince of 16th century Spanish humanism, for this example of musical harmony.

of the human person as lover. For we are created in the resemblance of *that* kind of communicative or ecstatic love. Therefore, when we realize our potential as lovers, we image God as Triune.

And the love of God is possible because we are created in the image of God in his Trinity. In short there is congruity between God and man.<sup>45</sup>

Agreeing with Aristotle that all people tend toward the good in order to find happiness, Francis joined with Augustine in locating this tendency in the human heart which “tends naturally towards God who is its happiness”.<sup>46</sup> The Salesian concept of correspondence, following upon the prior notion of congruence between the divine and human, begins the anthropological analysis of the quest for union between God and the human heart. But almost as soon as the quest is begun it is checked by sin and impotence.

If there could be found any men in that original integrity and righteousness in which Adam was created, then, even though they otherwise had no further assistance from God beyond that which he gives every creature...they would not only have an inclination to love God above all things but they would likewise be able naturally to carry out so righteous an inclination...The state of this human nature of ours is no longer endowed with that original health and righteousness possessed by the first man when he was created. On the contrary, we are greatly deprived by sin. Still, that holy inclination to love God above all things remains with us...It is impossible for a man who thinks attentively about God, even by natural reason alone, not to feel a certain glow of love.<sup>47</sup>

We are checked in our outward thrust towards union with the divine by our fallen state. Sin renders the enterprise impossible to us if we are unaided. Yet, this capacity and yearning remain alive and burning, even though buried like a spark in the ashes of fire. Given sufficient air and fuel it will spring to life again.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, we must look to the gracious God whose love is the only power capable of effecting the divine potential in us.

Ah, I am not made for this world! There is some supreme good on which I depend. There is an infinite workman who has stamped on me this limitless desire to know and this appetite which cannot be satisfied.<sup>49</sup>

We who cannot proceed beyond the beginning, nevertheless desire the infinite.<sup>50</sup> And it is not

<sup>45</sup> LANGELAAN, *Conferences*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> X, 19; see IV, 74 where God is termed the “God of the human heart”.

<sup>47</sup> IV, 77.

<sup>48</sup> IV, 79-80.

<sup>49</sup> IV, 76.

<sup>50</sup> IV, 199.

without purpose that this inclination to love God above all things...dwells in our hearts. On God's part, it serves as a crook by which he can gently hold us and draw us to himself.<sup>51</sup>

Francis specified how this "paschal ascension of the soul into God" is effected. The soul, which for Francis always represents the whole person, has two dimension, a lower and a higher. The natural damage characteristic of fallen humanity is located principally in the lower part of the soul. The inferior part reasons according to what it learns and experiences by the senses. Reason, on this level, rationalizes and humanizes the data of the senses and the passions of the sensual appetite. It is on this level that the sensual appetite enters into conflict with reason, thereby bearing witness to what Francis referred to as two wills in us, the inferior and the superior. There are not, of course, really two wills or powers. Rather, "our one power divides, as it were, approving by the lower [inferior will] what sensuality proposes to us and reproving it by the higher [superior will], in the name of the divine law...It is at this juncture that the ascension or abasement of love is decided."<sup>52</sup> The superior part reasons according to two kinds of light, natural and supernatural. Further, it operates with three degrees of reason: 1) according to the natural light of the intellect, 2) according to the light of discursive faith or theology, and 3) according to a simple intuition of intellect and a movement of will "whereby spirit acquiesces in and submits itself to the truth and to God's will".<sup>53</sup>

These "two wills" witness to a debilitating tension in us which characterizes our weakened nature. An integration is needed so that a concerted effort can be made to realize the natural inclination to love selflessly. It is the fine point of the soul where we, through the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, encounter God and from which we integrate all aspects of our being human.

Faith, hope and charity diffuse their divine movements into almost all the soul's faculties, both rational and sensitive, and in a holy way reduce and subject them to their just authority. However, their special dwelling, their true and natural abode, is in this supreme point of the soul. From it, as from a joyous source of living water, they spread forth by different springs and streams over the inferior parts and faculties.<sup>54</sup>

For Francis, the human person is challenged to achieve unity and integration. This integrative unity is the special function of the fine point [supreme point] of the soul where the trial of theological virtues, in touch with

<sup>51</sup> IV, 94.

<sup>52</sup> ÉTIENNE-MARIE LAJEUNIE, *St. François de Sales et l'esprit salésien* (Paris: Aux Éditions Du Seuil, 1962), vol. 2, 306-307. See XII, 383 where Francis explains these "two wills" in light of the struggle between Esau and Jacob.

<sup>53</sup> IV, 67.

<sup>54</sup> IV, 69.

God, follows his will in plotting the course of integration. In his sermon on April 12, 1594, Francis related each of the theological virtues to one of the three persons of God. While discussing the appearance of the Risen Jesus to his disciples, he affirmed that this risen Lord gave them Peace and showed them “the indubitable marks and signs of the reconciliation of men with God”. And, though the disciples were overjoyed, “this joy was not the principal fruit of this holy appearance; (rather the principal fruit was that) their vacillating faith was strengthened, their frightened hope assured, and their love, almost out, was re-lit”.<sup>55</sup>

Quoting 1 Cor 13:13: “There are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love”, Francis went on to say that

Faith [is] for the understanding, hope for the memory, love for the will. Faith honors the Father because it rests on the all-powerful; hope honors the Son because it is founded on his Redemption; love honors the Holy Spirit because it embraces and cherishes goodness. Faith shows us happiness; hope makes us aspire to it; love puts us in possession of it. ...In Heaven only love will remain...in order to love God in everything, through everything and above everything. [Insertions mine].<sup>56</sup>

Francis took up this theme again when he challenged his congregation to raise their eyes to the light of the Triune God so that his light

may deign to illuminate us with its Spirit so that in his clarity we may be able to see, with reference to the Holy mystery, what we ought to know and what it may please him to allow us to see in order to believe him and, believing him, to hope in him and, hoping in him, to love him and thus, truly “may glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>57</sup>

The complexity which is the human person is to achieve an integrative unity. Elaborating his own version of the maxim, “what rises converges”, Francis suggested that the highest dimension in the human person must be the instrument which structures this integrative and converging unity, for

our soul is spiritual, indivisible, immortal. It understands, wills and wills freely. It is capable of judging, of reasoning, of knowing and of having virtues. In all this it resembles God.<sup>58</sup>

As God is in every part of the universe, the soul is in every part of us. Using the psychological analogy, Francis went on to say that the acts of the intellect and will, though distinct, are inseparably united in the soul and the faculties from which they proceed. In this way they resemble the eternal processions of Son and Spirit. Although

<sup>55</sup> VII, 166-67.

<sup>56</sup> VII, 167.

<sup>57</sup> VII, 256.

<sup>58</sup> IV, 74.

these persons are distinct from one another and from the Father, yet they are inseparable and united. Or rather they are the one same, sole, simple, and most uniquely indivisible divinity.<sup>59</sup>

The human being is caught up in the age-old dilemma of the one and the many. Being made, however, in the resemblance of the Triune God, we can allow the theological virtues to govern our growth in unity. For, just as the one God is Three, so too can we achieve such integration; so too can our complexity and plurality come to ever deeper unity and inner harmony. This is achieved by freely surrendering to the natural inclination to love which characterizes the divine image in us and which will perdure even in heaven.

Beyond doubt, Theotimus, we are drawn to God not by iron chains, like bulls and buffalos, but by means of allurements, sweet attractions, and holy inspirations. In short, these are the cords of Adam and of humanity, that is, bonds that are proportionate and fitted to the human heart to which liberty is natural. ...The eternal Father draws us: even as he teaches us he gives us delight and does not impose a bond of necessity upon us.<sup>60</sup>

For Francis, our natural inclination to love is the crook by which God draws us to himself. God allures, attracts and seduces; he will not force. In this connection Francis gave our response to the Song of Songs (1:3): “Your love is more delightful than wine; delicate is the fragrance of your perfume, your name is an oil poured out, and that is why the maidens love you”. Our response is: “If I follow you it is not because you pull me along but because you allure me”. In the Salesian scenario we freely capitulate to the echo of diving love in us, taking complacency in God’s love for us; this complacency leads to benevolence, the desire on our part to return this love by pleasing and loving God; benevolent love leads us to invite all creation to please and love God in the same way.<sup>61</sup>

Simultaneous with becoming aware of our being created in the divine trinitarian image of ecstatic love is our awareness of the double thrust of this love, towards God and neighbor. The triune God, source of this love, is its model and goal. Solidarity with all people, who also image the triune God, effects our outward ecstasy to the neighbor as well. Francis brought this out in a sermon (October 4, 1614): “Man has been created to the resemblance of God; therefore, love of the neighbor leads us to love in him the resemblance and image of God, that is to say (that we are to help) to render this resemblance more and more perfect”.<sup>62</sup>

Loving our neighbor permits us to continue the creative act by aiding him

<sup>59</sup> IV, 75.

<sup>60</sup> IV, 126.

<sup>61</sup> IV, 84; IV, 132; IV, 255-58; IV, 275-77; IV, 281-88.

<sup>62</sup> VIII, 148.

to bring the “already” of his divine image to the “not yet” of union. “By our love we make the other become the image and likeness of God. This is the creativity of our love”.<sup>63</sup> This gives precision to what Francis preached as early as 1593. God could have created us in Paradise from our very birth “but our nature requires that he make us his cooperators”, his co-creators. It is this union of fraternal love which symbolizes and produces the type of unity among people that exists in the Trinity. When he preached on the subject of the Lord’s high priestly prayer for unity, he marveled: “Who else would have dared...to make such a comparison and ask that we be united like the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are joined?” For this reason, “From the moment God created man to his image and likeness he ordered him...to love God and also his neighbor”. The image of God that we are is the real chain of friendship which binds all people together. “How lovingly should we receive the neighbor, honoring in him the divine resemblance, tying again the sweet bonds of charity which keeps us bound, tied and joined to each other”.<sup>64</sup> Referring to Acts 4:32 he preached that “the first Christians behaved in this way by having only one heart and one soul...(For) God engraved this truth in the depth of our hearts while creating all of us in the image of the Creator; (therefore) we are the image of one another, all of us representing only the one portrait who is God”.<sup>65</sup>

Francis built his whole theology of the love of neighbor on the truth that we are the image and likeness of God. All are equally worthy of love because all are fundamentally lovable. He wrote in the *Treatise on the Love of God*:

Dear God, Theotimus, when we see our neighbor, created to the image and likeness of God, should we not say to one another “Stop, do you see this created being, do you see how it resembles the Creator?” Should we not cast ourselves upon him with love? Why so? For love of him? No indeed, for we cannot know whether in himself he is “worthy of love or hate.” Why so? O Theotimus, it is for love of God who made him in his own image and likeness and therefore capable of sharing in his goodness in grace and glory...For this reason the love of God not only often commands love of neighbor, but it produces such love and even pours it into man’s heart as its resemblance and image. Just as man is God’s image, so the sacred love of man for man is the true image of a heavenly love of man for God.<sup>66</sup>

Our challenge to love comes to expression in a unitive movement towards God and neighbor. Each human person and God, having ecstatic love in

<sup>63</sup> LANGELAAN, *Conferences* 15. See: V, 204-06. On the question of the Salesian understanding of love of neighbor, see: LOUIS LAVELLE, *Four Saints*. Trans. by Dorothea O’Sullivan. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963); JOHANNA KOPP, *Bruderliebe im Lichte der Inkarnation: Eine Studie über den Begriff der Condescendance in der Französischen Frömmigkeitslehre des 17 Jahrhunderts*, (Eichstätt: Franz-Sales-Verlag, 1963); IDESBALD VAN HOUTRYVE, *L’Ami de Dieu et des Hommes* (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1926).

<sup>64</sup> VII, 14; X, 267, 270, 275; see: POCETTO, “Salesian Anthropology”. 55.

<sup>65</sup> X, 270-271.

<sup>66</sup> V, 206.

common, tend inexorably towards perfecting union. Perfection-sanctity is the realization and fulfillment of what it means to be human: other-directed. "Hence because of this tendency to companionship with God, the completed saint is the completed man".<sup>67</sup>

Obviously, Francis was an optimist. And this optimism is rooted squarely on the love dimension of the divine image in us. Thus, in Salesian thought, the will is given priority over the intellect in the traditional psychology of the human person. It is interesting to follow Francis as he developed his thought on this point. In the *Treatise on the Love of God*, for example, which was published in 1616, he was decidedly within the Scholastic tradition when he discussed our final happiness, the essence of which will consist in the knowledge of God.

In heaven...divinity will unite itself to our intellect without mediation of any species or representation whatsoever. Such is infinite happiness...God will give himself openly and "we shall see him face to face, as he is" [1 Cor 13:12].<sup>68</sup>

In a 1618 sermon, however, he hesitated:

I know that some doctors hold that the vision of the Divinity is that which will constitute this happiness. However, the one is not contrary to the other inasmuch as this sacred vision is that which will excite us to incomparable movements of love for him.<sup>69</sup>

Finally in a sermon on November 1, 1620, the hesitation is gone:

The Blessed love Our Lord; heaven is also filled with this love of complacency which is the principal cause of their happiness. ...I have said that this love of complacency is the principal cause of the beatitude of the saints because, while always speaking with esteem and respect of those who hold the contrary opinion, I believe that the principal cause of the glory of the Blessed does not consist in the intellect by which they will see and know God, but in the will by which they love him with this love of complacency; and I hold that in that lies their happiness.<sup>70</sup>

Given the beginnings of his anthropological considerations, this development was predictable. We are circumscribed by love; it is our alpha and omega. Further, it is the means to our fulfillment. The "already" of the divine

<sup>67</sup> MÜLLER, *St. Francis de Sales*, 45. This whole understanding of love of neighbor based on each person's divine resemblance and loveliness would add a needed nuance to the generally fine presentation of the Salesian contribution to the question of fraternal love in Thomas Smith, "The Role of Creatures in Saint Francis de Sales", (S.T.D. dissertation, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1967), especially 102-28.

<sup>68</sup> IV, 201-02.

<sup>69</sup> IX, 213; see: *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. IV, Art. II.

<sup>70</sup> IX, 369-70.

<sup>71</sup> VIII, 85.

image in us is love; the “not yet” is realized by means of this same love; the consummation is immediate presence to God who is this love. We begin and end in God, in love. Enroute to God we draw all creation along with us by love. This is Salesian anthropology.

### Sin in Christian Anthropology

In light of such anthropological optimism, a consideration of Francis’ understanding of sin is imperative. In the beginning, Adam was created in original justice.

How noble is the soul, since it is the image and likeness of God! “Let us make man in our image...” God formed him and breathed into him a breath of life, of life which is mortal and immortal, temporal and eternal, vegetative, sensitive and rational, the life of nature and of grace.<sup>71</sup>

As a student in Paris, Francis had been taught the then popular opinion which held the notion of purely natural end for human beings based on a supposed creation into a purely natural state, without theocentric orientation.<sup>72</sup> He, however, finally rejected such a possibility. In 1622 he preached:

It is written that God created man and woman in original justice, which rendered them extremely beautiful and wholly capable of grace so that there was no sin at all in them, nor consequently any rebellion of the flesh against the spirit. They had no repugnance or aversion to good, no appetite or inclination towards evil; everything was peaceful and tranquil. They enjoyed an unparalleled sweetness and suavity; they lived with a great purity and innocence, not in a simple purity and innocence, but one clothed with grace.<sup>73</sup>

This creation in original justice gave the first parents a natural inclination to love God. Francis explained this in the *Treatise on the Love of God*.

On the one hand, this help would be natural as conformable to nature and tending to God as nature’s author and supreme master. On the other hand, it would be supernatural, since it would correspond not to man’s bare nature, but to his nature adorned, enriched and honored by original justice. Such justice is a supernatural quality proceeding from God’s most special favor.<sup>74</sup>

But sin entered the human scene and this natural inclination to love God was no longer naturally realizable.

The state of this human nature of ours is no longer endowed with that original health and righteousness possessed by the first man when he was created. On the

<sup>72</sup> XXII, 6-10; see: F.N. 31 of this essay.

<sup>73</sup> X, 171; see: VIII, 113; X, 119.

<sup>74</sup> IV, 77-78.

contrary, we are greatly depraved by sin. Still, that holy inclination to love God above all things remains with us, as does the natural light of reason by which we know that this supreme goodness is lovable above all things. It is impossible for a man who thinks attentively about God, even by natural reason alone, not to feel a certain glow of love.<sup>75</sup>

Sin results in a profound weakening of the will. The intellect, too, has been weakened but not to the same extent. Thus, human beings can know that God is worthy of love, but the will is so feeble that it cannot respond as it should. Grace is needed.

Since [our human minds] are animated by a holy natural inclination towards God, they have far more light in the intellect for seeing how worthy of love the godhead is than strength of will for loving it. Sin has weakened the human will far more than it has darkened the intellect...Hence the poor will, already very weak, is shaken by the continued assaults that concupiscence launches against it and it cannot make as much progress in divine love as reason and natural inclination indicate it should...

So...this human heart of ours in the most natural way produces certain beginnings of love for God. But to advance as far as loving him above all things, which is the true maturity of love owed to such supreme goodness, belongs only to hearts animated and assisted by heavenly grace and in the state of holy charity. [Insertion mine].<sup>76</sup>

Despite the Fall, this image, this portrait of God in us, was not totally destroyed. But as Francis preached in 1622, “the colors were infinitely discolored and [made] imperceptible” on this portrait. To restore the portrait to its original beauty the Creator himself “came to repair, by means of his death, this image and likeness of God imprinted in us”.<sup>77</sup> He who created us in his image and likeness came to re-create us in it and it is in this re-creation that Francis again saw an overflow of God’s love. “Our ruin has been to our advantage since human nature in fact has received greater graces by the redemption wrought by its Savior than it would ever have received from Adam’s innocence even if he had persevered therein”.<sup>78</sup> Jesus re-establishes the image in us and his redemptive grace so strengthens our will that, once again, our natural inclination to love God can be an effective “crook by which he can gently hold us and draw us to himself”.<sup>79</sup>

Sin was real for Francis and as a result of it the human family is less powerful but not powerless in that the image implanted at Creation and restored

<sup>75</sup> IV, 78.

<sup>76</sup> IV, 82.

<sup>77</sup> X, 273.

<sup>78</sup> IV, 104. One recognizes here the “O Felix culpa” of St. Augustine.

<sup>79</sup> IV, 84.

at the re-creation (Redemption) is enough for God to get a hold on us and for us to freely allow ourselves to yield. On this continuity between Creation and re-creation, he preached very early in his priesthood that “When I look at the resemblance and beautiful congruity which there is between the creation of the world and its re-creation and reformation, I admire greatly this great Creator who knew so well...how, in creation and reformation, to show unity of Creator and Reformer”.<sup>80</sup> Creation and re-creation have the same Source. Their unity of purpose, to realize God’s ecstatic love for us, stems from the continuity of the creative agent, the Triune God. For Francis “Creation and Re-creation form a beautiful unity, or to put it another way, God’s revelation was neither the destruction nor a merely external addition to his creation, but re-creation of creation”.<sup>81</sup> While sin is real, it is not all-determinative. There is enough of the divine image left in us for God to call and for us to respond. Our grace-filled ability to respond in love to love is enough for Francis to see in us the image of the Triune God and to build on the foundations of his anthropology the trinitarian implications of his theology.

## Conclusions

Francis wrote in his Preface to the *Treatise on the Love of God* that “it is most important to keep in mind the age in which one writes”. He took his own advice; he was thoroughly grounded in scripture, the fathers, the contemporary Christian and humanistic thinkers”.<sup>82</sup>

It is not surprising then that Francis began his study of God (theology) with the study of the human person (anthropology). Whereas the decades following Copernicus caused many Catholic thinkers to retreat behind the rather formidable walls of tradition and authority, Francis wholeheartedly embraced the Renaissance starting point for the theological enterprise: he began with the human person, with a “turn-within”, anticipatory of the great movement in Post-Kantian transcendental thought. In his version of the “turn-within” as starting point, Francis appropriated the category of the Greek maxim, “Know

<sup>80</sup> VII, 33.

<sup>81</sup> LANGELAAN, *Conferences*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> IV, 9. See: ANTANAS LIUIMA, *Aux Sources du Traité de L'Amour de Dieu de Saint François de Sales* 2 vols. (Rome: Librairie Editrice De L'Université Grégorienne, 1960); he has an appendix (vol. 2, pp.681-709) where he lists the scriptural, patristic, hagiographical, theological, spiritual, conciliar, liturgical, profane and Reform sources cited in the *Treatise*. The listing betrays a thorough steeping of Francis into the mainstream of the heritage and contemporary expression of both his culture and his Church.

thyself”, grounding that imperative biblically as did Erasmus. The double movement in and out of interiority came to expression in the biblical notion of *imago Dei*, in which the human person recognized himself as God’s gift. This recognition was logically penultimate, for the recognition of oneself as gift impels a quest for the Giver. A patristic interpretation of the Creation accounts led Francis to see the *imago Dei* as trinitarian, both in source (the Triune God) and in term (man’s trinitarian structure). Francis followed an analysis of the trinitarian structure of creation, based on an analysis of the contribution made by each of the Persons to the creative act, with an analysis of the trinitarian contribution specifically with reference to the human person.

The communicative nature of God and the corresponding ecstatic dimension of intra-trinitarian love was the clue needed to establish the addressability of humanity by God and to make more precise the trinitarian image in us as ecstatic love, breathed into us by the Spirit at Creation. This pneumatic contribution has prompted one Salesian scholar to term the human person the inspiration of God. The Salesian understanding of the motive for the creative act (the communication of the divine *ad extra* in Jesus Christ) introduced the Christo-centricity of creation in general, and of us in particular, and revealed the true Other of our other-directedness. This other-directedness is, in turn, the result of our imaging divine ecstatic love which, by definition, is communicative.<sup>83</sup>

An analysis of the movements in us of this ecstatic love revealed for Francis not only human psychology but also our role as microcosmos or résumé of creation. In this way, a study of the movements through which we realize the “not yet” of the “already” of this divine image reveals the inner and anonymous groanings of creation for redemptive union with its creator. It further reveals the impulse in us to thrust outward, in integrative and integrating union, towards God, via the categories of congruity (likeness) and correspondence (dissimilarity or mutuality), and neighbor. The commonality of the *imago Dei* in all discloses not only the innate communal or social character of the human family but grounds that character in the communitarian life of the Trinity which comes to expression in all as they collectively image that Triune God and become his visibility or portrait.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup> POCETTO, “Salesian Anthropology”, 45-50. This Christo-centricity in us has been treated exhaustively under the category, *Prayer*, by JAMES FINNEGAN in his S.T.D. dissertation, “Christocentrism in Meditation and Contemplation According to Saint Francis de Sales” (Fribourg, Switzerland: University of Fribourg, 1965).

<sup>84</sup> See: WILLIAM RUHL “Saint Francis de Sales: Papal Office in the Light of Church and Ministry”, S.T.D. dissertation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1971) and ALEXANDER POCETTO, *Ecclesial Dimensions of Salesian Thought* (Hyattsville, MD: Institute of Salesian Studies, 1972). This social character of the human family, based on trinitarian and thus communitarian image, has led Salesian ecclesialogists to discover a thoroughly trinitarian thrust to Francis’ understanding of the

In our outward movements toward God and neighbor, even though we are weakened by our fallen state, we are aided by grace as it comes to expression in the triad of theological virtues which themselves belie a trinitarian reference. Like the utter unity of the Three from whom they flow and to whom they lead, these virtues, located in the fine point of the human soul, guide us towards an overcoming of the inner struggle characteristic of our fallen humanity (“two wills”) and lead us first to inner harmony and then propel us outward in a life-long effort to unity by bringing to completion the unifying love which is the divine trinitarian image in all.

As this *imago Dei* is brought to greater completion in each person, the unity thus engendered rises toward greater and greater union with its Source. The entire theological enterprise of Francis can be viewed as a circle of love, in which God’s ecstatic love leads to creation and creation’s response, in us and through our similar ecstasy of love, leads back to God.

This basically optimistic anthropology is nuanced by Francis’ understanding of sin which, though real, is not victorious. Constituted in original justice, we sinned and weakened the image which was the gift of Creation. But the re-creation wrought by Jesus restored the image superabundantly. Francis took the “*felix culpa*” of Christian patristic and liturgical tradition with utter seriousness. The continuity of image/renewed image rests on the continuity of Creator/Re-Creator and this continuity, for Francis, grounded his positive and optimistic assessment of humanity before and after the Fall.<sup>85</sup>

Even fallen, we are the crook by which God draws us to Himself. The ageless dialogue between God and the human heart is the language of ecstatic love whose communicative and unitive character ground the beginning (Creation), the present (Re-creation) and the future (New Creation) of God’s dealings with us and our response to God, and gives to all three an unbreakable unity. This is the Salesian understanding of Christian anthropology.

Church. For Ruhl, for example, St. Francis “views the Church in a totally Trinitarian frame of reference, especially in relation to the Holy Spirit who is the manifestation of the love of God toward the whole of creation”, (p. 135); Pocetto also finds that Francis “grounds very deeply the roots of his ecclesiology in the sublime and extremely personal operations of the Holy Trinity”, (p. 3).

<sup>85</sup> It is Francis’ stress on the continuity of Creation and Re-creation which prompted him to articulate a positive anthropology, thereby excepting himself from a recent indictment against many post-Tridentine Catholic theologians: “Certain factors...(among them, the hamartiological framework of Western nature-grace theology since the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy with its consequent emphasis on the hypothetical necessity and the factual gratuity of grace, together with the Scholastic distinction—and later separation—between the natural and the supernatural), led Catholic theologians to exaggerate the difference between the two orders of creation and redemption”. The indictment is from MICHAEL SCANLON, “Convergence in Theological Anthropology”, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 29 (June 10-13, 1974), 289. Francis is within the scope of Blondel, Rahner and Lonergan whose anthropological starting point to the theological enterprise capitalizes on “God’s ‘Yes’ in Christ to the fulfillment of the human potential which is the realization of the divine intention of the *imago Dei*”, (Scanlon, 297).