



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 7: "[Francis' Approach to Divinity](#)"
sheet 5

[2. Deus Revelatus](#)
[\[II\] Kenosis {part B}](#)

Despite the very Trinitarian Christology of Francis himself, many subsequent Franciscans were, shall we say, guilty of focussing almost exclusively on the centrality of the Passion and the Cross as the only way to experience God. This approach, in part, characterised the Western Church's emphasis on Christ the Victim—which reached its fullest development in the doctrine of 'penal substitution'.

This *difference* with respect to Francis' own relationship with Jesus Christ has had some consequences:

- a certain loss of Francis' own perspective of Christ as the revelation of God, as poor and humble love—for example, even in Duns Scotus the Incarnate Word is a revelation of the glory and power of God rather than of the humility and poverty-minority of God. Here, the Word became man only on account of sin. For Francis, Jesus in his humble existence, his self-emptying **IS** the revelation of the humble God
- a loss of the Christocentric approach understood in a Trinitarian perspective, so essential in Francis' experience of Christ



The key to successful Christian living is balanced 'theology' — 'God-talk' that does justice to the whole package, not just the parts that attract us most. So, 'Why the God Man?' As the Fathers of the ancient Church said: the Son of God became the Son of Man in order that the sons of men might become the sons of God. This desire to reconcile man and God means 'dealing with sin', of course, but it was **love that caused God to lay aside his splendour and come in search of man, not sin**. Francis saw this so clearly because he understood the interactive economy of the Trinity, and with Paul understood that 'God was in Christ' [II Cor 5.19] - even when he became sin who knew no sin [II Cor 5.21]. It is compassion—the desire to suffer with—that brings God to Calvary, not the need to condemn. [John 3.17]

Father, God, thy love we praise,
Which gave thy Son to die;
Jesus full of truth and grace,
Alike we glorify;
Spirit, Comforter divine,
Praise by all to thee be given;
Till we in full chorus join,
And earth is turned to heaven.



So, everything Jesus says and does reveals the Father. At the Incarnation Jesus is true God—revealing God to us through his divine nature; he is true man—revealing man in his perfect state through his human nature. What exists visibly in Jesus, exists invisibly in the Father; and it is in this sense that Jesus says that no one comes to [know] the Father except through [knowing] the Son. [John 14.6—St John tends to use ‘knowing’, ‘seeing’, and ‘believing’ interchangeably]



But what I don't understand is how 'God' - awesome, powerful and all that, can still be fully God when he's a slave, and hanging on an accursed cross with criminals.

This is why we must never lose sight of this word 'kenosis'. The Incarnation is an act of humility and this happens because God himself is a being of humility. Follow carefully the pattern and the wording of that great passage from Phil 2.5-11 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who,...'

We can paraphrase it like this [watch the declension & ascension pattern—this is all-important]

Because he was God ['in the form of God' - 'form' as H²O; different 'states', water, ice, steam—but all H²O], Jesus didn't need to grab hold of divinity ['equality with God a thing to be grasped']; he who was full, chose to be emptied, and so empty that he became the lowest form of human life ['a slave']; he shows God's power in humility, obedience, total shame and degradation ['humbled himself', 'obedient unto death', 'even death on a cross'] - because this was extravagant love like never seen before or since. This was God's innermost character on display.

He left his Father's throne above,
(So free, so infinite his grace!)
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race...

As a result of this ['Therefore'] God the Father rewarded him by restoring his former glory ['highly exalted'], that he had laid aside, and raised him from the guttermost to the uttermost ['bestowed on him the name' of Ps 20.7 'we boast of the name of the Lord'], no longer the slave but the master: Lord of creation itself! ['the name which is above every name']. With the stupendous result that everyone can share in this very exaltation as if it were his own ['that in the Jesus every knee should bow']. We who his death will also share his life—the creature at onation as king and priest with Christ his Lord!

No condemnation now I dread,
Jesus, and all in him is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

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'Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who,...' was the mandate! It was there in every line of the gospel! The way to God is the way of Christ; the way of Christ is the way of the cross. Like the candle, the light is shed by becoming smaller, not bigger; God's power is made perfect in weakness! It is by becoming like Christ himself—by being emptied—that we are filled. Not by grasping at fullness, but by embracing emptiness. For Francis, this was simplicity itself: if he was to follow Christ he must be as much like Christ as possible. And emptying himself as Christ had done he would be filled; and being filled, like Christ, he would in turn bring fullness to an empty world that was full of itself. In obedience to the command to 'repair my Church!' Francis knew that this reparation must first take place in him. He became poor because Christ was poor, and Christ's poverty would be his riches.