



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 7: "Francis' Approach to Divinity"
sheet 4

2. Deus Revelatus
[!] Kenosis {part A}

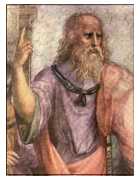


What on earth is 'kenosis'?

The Greek word means 'emptying', 'reduce to nothing'. And this word tells us something of essential importance for Christians—and still more for Franciscans—as we seek to understand God.



These days we're told, 'Be yourself!'



The Greeks said, 'Know yourself!'



Christianity says, 'Empty yourself!'

So, let's ask Jesus, Paul, Church and Francis to explain it...

JESUS

John 15.13f "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

PAUL

Phil 2.5-8 "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

BENEDICT XVI

Homily [19 March 2007] "The love which God has for us, which began with creation, is made visible in the mystery of the cross, in the *kenosis* of God, that self-emptying and humble abasement of the Son of God which we have heard proclaimed by the apostle Paul...Yes, the cross reveals the fullness of the love that God has for us: a crucified love, which did not shut down at the scandal of Good Friday but which culminates in the joy of the Resurrection and Ascension...and the gift of the Holy Spirit by whom our sins are forgiven and we are granted pardon and peace."

FRANCIS

Letter to the Entire Order, 26-29 “Let the whole of mankind tremble, the whole world shake, and the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest. O admirable heights and sublime lowliness! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under the little form of bread! Look, brothers, at the humility of God and pour out your hearts before him! Humble yourselves, as well, that you may be exalted by him. Therefore, **hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves** so that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally.”



Is this that ‘kenosis’?



Then ‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!’ [II Cor 9.15]

Yes. The ‘self-emptying’, the ‘lowering of self’ - the eternal act of God who gives himself totally for love. God who is all, renounces being all. Or, as we’ve seen before, the rich Son becomes poor servant, so that the poor servants become the rich sons! Because, you see, Paul goes on to speak of Christ’s exaltation [Phil 2.9-11], and we, ‘in Christ’, are exalted with him: joint heirs with Christ. From glory God comes to the lowest place; mankind is raised from the gutter-most to the uttermost!

This concept of ‘kenosis’ is important for everyone to understand, but why is it especially important for Franciscans?



Because the great and special **gift** which Francis received was that of perceiving the humility of God; his humble abasement in the Son; his ‘kenosis’, and living it to such an exceptional degree to make it become the foundation of his whole life. For this reason Francis has often been described as the most Christ-like man who ever lived. Francis was given **the gift of basing himself on his intuition into this reality**. This reality is an essential element of his charism, which we too must receive and make present.

The poverty of Francis, understood as ‘kenosis’, is a “theological poverty” in the strictest sense of the term. It is an essential characteristic assumed by the Son of God on becoming man. Christ’s poverty was taken up by Francis as his motivation for his option of radical poverty for himself and his followers. The poverty of Francis is his ‘conformity to the poor Christ’; **the expression of his response to God’s extravagant love.**

All through his life Francis contemplated this mystery and allowed himself to be captured by the **love of the divine poor and humble One**, especially as he reveals himself:

in the cave at Bethlehem
[Greccio];
in the humble conditions of Jesus’
life
[il Poverello];
in doing the will of the Father
[utter obedience];
in continuing to be present and
offering himself
[Holy Eucharist]