



Tau Maria Franciscan Formation Meditations
***Various
Sources***

M Meditation – Franciscan Theology and the Incarnation

Pocket Catholic Dictionary

Theology:

Literally, “the science of God,” used by the Stoics in the third century B.C. to describe a reasoned analysis of the deity. Earlier uses were more naturalistic. Thus, Plato in the *Republic* Aristotle in *Metaphysics* called Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus theologians because they first determined the genealogies and attributes of the gods.

With the advent of Christianity, theology came to mean what its etymology suggested, and was defined by St. Augustine as “reasoning or discourse about the divinity.” Through the patristic age to the period of the Schoolmen, this remained the acceptable generic meaning. Peter Abelard (1079-1142) is credited with first having used the term in its modern connotation. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) defended theology as a science because it investigates the contents of belief by means of reason enlightened by faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*), in order to acquire a deeper understanding or revelation. He distinguished theology proper from “natural theology” or what Gottfried Leibniz later called “theodicy,” which studies God as knowable by reason alone and independent of divine authority. Since the thirteenth century the term has been applied to the whole study of revealed truth and gradually replaced its rival synonyms.

**BENEDICT XVI – GENERAL AUDIENCE; Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 10 February 2010**

St. Anthony of Padua (or Lisbon)

In the last period of his life, Anthony put in writing two cycles of “Sermons”, entitled respectively “Sunday Sermons” and “Sermons on the Saints” destined for the Franciscan Order's preachers and teachers of theological studies. In these Sermons he commented on the texts of Scripture presented by the Liturgy, using the patristic and medieval interpretation of the four senses: the literal or historical, the allegorical or Christological, the tropological or moral, and the anagogical, which orients a person to eternal life. Today it has been rediscovered that these senses are dimensions of the one meaning of Sacred Scripture and that it is right to interpret Sacred Scripture by seeking the four dimensions of its words. St Anthony's sermons are theological and homiletical texts that echo the live preaching in which Anthony proposes a true and proper itinerary of Christian life. The richness of spiritual teaching contained in the “Sermons” was so great that in 1946 Venerable Pope Pius XII proclaimed Anthony a Doctor of the Church, attributing to him the title “Doctor Evangelicus”, since the freshness and beauty of the Gospel emerge from these writings. We can still read them today with great spiritual profit.



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In these Sermons St Anthony speaks of prayer as of a loving relationship that impels man to speak gently with the Lord, creating an ineffable joy that sweetly enfolds the soul in prayer. Anthony reminds us that prayer requires an atmosphere of silence, which does not mean distance from external noise but rather is an interior experience that aims to remove the distractions caused by a soul's anxieties, thereby creating silence in the soul itself. According to this prominent Franciscan Doctor's teaching, prayer is structured in four indispensable attitudes which in Anthony's Latin are defined as *obsecratio, oratio, postulatio, gratiarum actio*. We might translate them in the following manner. The first step in prayer is confidently opening one's heart to God; this is not merely accepting a word but opening one's heart to God's presence. Next, is speaking with him affectionately, seeing him present with oneself; then a very natural thing presenting our needs to him; and lastly, praising and thanking him.

In St Anthony's teaching on prayer we perceive one of the specific traits of the Franciscan theology that he founded: namely the role assigned to divine love which enters into the sphere of the affections, of the will and of the heart, and which is also the source from which flows a spiritual knowledge that surpasses all other knowledge. In fact, it is in loving that we come to know.

Anthony writes further: "Charity is the soul of faith, it gives it life; without love, faith dies" (*Sermones Dominicales et Festivi II*, Messagero, Padua 1979, p. 37).

It is only the prayerful soul that can progress in spiritual life: this is the privileged object of St Anthony's preaching. He is thoroughly familiar with the shortcomings of human nature, with our tendency to lapse into sin, which is why he continuously urges us to fight the inclination to avarice, pride and impurity; instead of practising the virtues of poverty and generosity, of humility and obedience, of chastity and of purity. At the beginning of the 13th century, in the context of the rebirth of the city and the flourishing of trade, the number of people who were insensitive to the needs of the poor increased. This is why on various occasions Anthony invites the faithful to think of the true riches, those of the heart, which make people good and merciful and permit them to lay up treasure in Heaven. "O rich people", he urged them, "befriend... the poor, welcome them into your homes: it will subsequently be they who receive you in the eternal tabernacles in which is the beauty of peace, the confidence of security and the opulent tranquillity of eternal satiety" (*ibid.*, p. 29).