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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

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R. James Long (bio)

In Canto XI of Dante's *Paradiso*, Thomas Aquinas (who speaks more lines than anyone else with the exception of Beatrice) sings the praises of St. Francis, the founder of the Order of Friars Minor. This encomium will be

matched in the following canto by Bonaventure's celebration of St. Dominic. Commentators on this text point invariably to the friction, if not outright hostility, that had developed between the two mendicant orders, and call attention to Dante's suggestion of a harmony beyond the grave that should have prevailed as well in this life.

Dante would also have been aware of the parallel provisions in the rule of both orders that a Franciscan preach in a Dominican church and a Dominican in a Franciscan on the respective founders' feast days. Though commentators continue to refer to a sermon of Thomas's whose title suggests that it is on the subject of Francis and that is printed in the Parma edition of the *Omnia opera*, the sermon is not only spurious but also, unfortunately, makes no mention of Francis.¹

My claim in this paper is that there is more in Canto XI than coin-of-the-realm [End Page 56] courtesies. Although Dante relied on Bonaventure's *Legenda* (and possibly also on Celano) as his sources in placing emphasis on Francis's devotion to Lady Poverty,² the poet had, I contend, intuited a deeper truth: namely, that Thomistic metaphysics provides a more solid footing for Francis's nature mysticism than anything developed by his own order.

Francis's discovery of God in every corner of creation is, in fact, a corollary of Francis's profound penetration of the mystery of the Incarnation. In the only piece of writing ascribed to him—aside from a couple of letters and, of course, the Rule—Francis prays as follows:

Most high, all-powerful, all good, Lord!
All praise is yours, all glory, all honor
And all blessing.
To you, alone, Most High, do they belong.
No mortal lips are worthy
To pronounce your name.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,
And first my lord Brother Sun,
Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.

How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor!

Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars;

In the heavens you have made them, bright

And precious and fair.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,

And fair and stormy, all the weather's moods,

By which you cherish all that you have made.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water,

So useful, lowly, precious and pure.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,

Through whom you brighten up the night.

How beautiful is he, how gay! Full of power and strength.

All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother,

[End Page 57]

Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces

Various fruits with colored flowers and herbs. . . .

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,

And serve him with great humility.³

In his *Legenda maior* Bonaventure offers his explication of the Founder's special brand of spirituality:

True *piety*, which according to the Apostle is helpful *for all things*, had so filled Francis's heart and penetrated its depths that it seemed to have appropriated the man of God completely into its dominion. This is what drew him up to God through compassion . . . and symbolically showed a return to the state of original innocence through universal reconciliation with each and every thing . . . calling creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister, because they had the same source as himself.⁴

This feeling of brotherhood was especially pronounced with respect to the creatures, notably the lamb, that in the pages of the Gospels symbolized Christ. One of the dozen stories related by Bonaventure

concerns the newborn lamb that was killed by a ferocious sow while Francis lodged the night; Francis cursed the "impious" sow, which cooperated by promptly becoming ill...

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