

# Foreword

two Franciscans walk into a coffee shop  
a forest, an airport  
or the stillness between thunder and wonder  
they carry nothing but sandals, silence,  
and a grin  
not even trying to be holy  
just practicing presence  
and sometimes they forget how

this little book began as a game,  
a doorway cracked open by laughter, when  
imperceptibly something slipped through:  
a whisper of mystery,  
a wellspring of inner and outer joy,  
a dim reflection in the bottom of a glass  
that looked suspiciously like  
the face of God

no need to understand  
just lightly listen  
and laugh  
or wonder what just happened  
all part of the prayer  
little nudges, maybe  
invitations

to pause

smile  
wonder  
to discover something  
already known



# Introduction to the Series

One day, Jesus and his disciples pass by the decaying corpse of a dog. The disciples remark on the stench, the ugliness, the filth.

But Jesus says only:

“How white are its teeth.”<sup>1</sup>

That story is a well-loved gem from the Islamic tradition. It’s included in Tariq Ramadan’s book *The Muslim Jesus*, which gathers Islamic teachings about Jesus (ʿĪsā) drawn from early Muslim sources, especially Sufi and hadith traditions.

The moment is deeply Sufi and contemplative. Jesus sees beauty even in decay. He chooses praise over criticism, perception over judgment. It’s a teaching in radical mercy, reverence, and presence. A small mercy, a glimmer of grace, honouring beauty even in what others discard. Can this kind of seeing be absent from the Christian tradition and practice?

Didn’t Jesus praise lilies and sparrows? Didn’t Francis bow to lepers and sing hymns to Brother Sun and Sister Water? Didn’t Meister Eckhart declare, “Every creature is a word of God and is a book about God<sup>2</sup>”? Didn’t Teilhard de Chardin remind us, “By virtue of Creation, and still more the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see<sup>3</sup>”? Even Thomas Merton, walking past strangers in a city street, once said, “There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the earliest and most striking titles given to Francis of Assisi is “God’s jongleur” (jongleur de Dieu) — a term used by Brother Thomas of Celano, his first biographer, writing in the 13th century. A “jongleur” in medieval times was a traveling performer—part jester, part minstrel, part street entertainer. Not always highly esteemed, they were known for songs, mimicry, storytelling, and tumbling.

Thomas of Celano<sup>5</sup>writes: “Francis, the jongleur of God, went about the towns and villages announcing the Kingdom of Heaven, preaching peace, teaching salvation and repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” Murray Bodo<sup>6</sup>, OFM calls him: “the court fool of God’s kingdom.”

Francis calling himself, or being called, a jester/jongleur was radical and countercultural. It reflects holy foolishness: like Paul’s “fool for Christ” (1 Cor 4:10). It turns the world’s values upside down: joy, humility, song, and even absurdity as signs of closeness to God. It expresses how he wished to delight God, not the courts or the powerful.

Francis was called “God’s jester” or “jongleur of God”—a title he and his followers accepted joyfully. It encapsulates the paradoxical joy, humility, spontaneity, and spiritual daring at the heart of his life.

The Muslim story mirrors the tone of one of our snippets:

Two Franciscans walk into a junkyard...

They bow to a rusted bicycle.

“Still beautiful,” one murmurs.

The bow to an old and rusty bicycle may first be enjoyed as an absurdity, an exaggeration, or simply a comment on how silly we can, at times, be. But does that have to be all?

Perhaps the story, after more reflection, or with the quiet passage of Brother Time may then be seen as a quiet act of contemplative clarity. A mindful gesture that opens into reverence.

Because “Silence is God’s first language<sup>7</sup>,” these pages may evoke mentally-silent contemplation. And, hopefully, a little more contemplative mischief.

-0-

## REFERENCES

1. Tariq Ramadan, “The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature” (Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 34.
2. Meister Eckhart, quoted in Matthew Fox, “Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister Eckhart” (Inner Traditions, 2000), p. 40.
3. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “The Divine Milieu” (Harper & Row, 1960), p. 65.
4. Thomas Merton, “Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander” (Image Books, 1968), p. 156.
5. Thomas of Celano. (ca. 1228–1229). *The life of Saint Francis (Vita prima)*. [Multiple editions exist; specify translator/publisher if available.]
6. Bodo, M. (1972). *Francis: The journey and the dream*. St. Anthony Messenger Press
7. Keating, T. (1992). *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*. Rockport, MA: Element Books. “Silence is the first language of God.” This book provides insights into contemplative prayer and spiritual growth. St. John of the Cross expressed a related idea: “The Father spoke one Word, which was his Son, and this Word he

speaks always in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul." St. John of the Cross. (1991). *Sayings of Light and Love*. In K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez (Trans.), *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (Rev. ed., pp. 653–669). Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications. This collection includes aphorisms and spiritual insights from St. John of the Cross.



# 1. Sacred Laughter

*laughter is what holiness sounds like when it forgets it's supposed to be serious.*

*only when the self stumbles over its own ego can the soul begin to dance.*

*the divine hides in delight until even solemnity starts to giggle.*



1:1

Two Franciscans walk into a mirror maze...  
They laugh at each other's reflections,  
then at their own.

1:2

Two Franciscans walk into a riddle...  
They laugh before it's solved.

1:3

Two Franciscans walk into a juggler's convention...  
They remain mouths open in silent awe.  
The crowd smiles.

1:4

Two Franciscans walk into a labyrinth...  
They get lost on purpose.  
The Minotaur asks for directions.

1:5

Two Franciscans walk into a hat shop...  
They try on some halos.  
but soon tire of the game.

1:6

Two Franciscans walk into a classroom...  
They fail the test joyfully.  
The students cheer.

1:7

Two Franciscans walk into a luxury spa...  
They're mistaken for towel boys.  
They stay anyway.

1:8

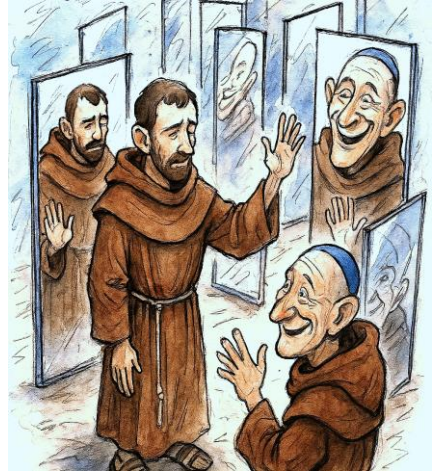
Two Franciscans walk into a debate contest...  
They win by staying silent.

1:9

Two Franciscans walk into a puppet theatre...  
They bow to the puppets.  
The strings vanish.



1:15 spilling soup



1:1 reflections ...



1:4 Minotaur asks for directions

1:10

Two Franciscans walk into a jam session...  
They hum in harmony with the chaos.

1:11

Two Franciscans walk into a wedding uninvited...  
They mistake it for a Mass,  
but stay for the dancing.

1:12

Two Franciscans walk into a comedy club...  
They bless the hecklers.

1:13

Two Franciscans walk into a kitchen...  
They spill the soup.  
And laugh, calling it practice.

1:14

Two Franciscans walk into a sacred text...  
and meditate in the margins.

1:15

Two Franciscans walk into the final page...  
And chuckle.

