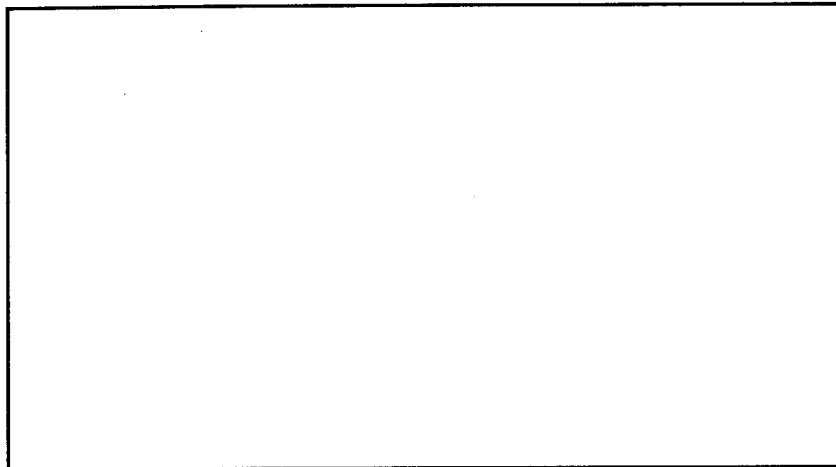


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The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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Volume 42, No. 12

The CORD

A Monthly Franciscan Spiritual Review

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The CORD (ISSN 0010-8685) USPS 563-640) is published monthly with the July and August issues combined, by the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778.

Subscription rates: \$15.00 a year; \$1.50 a copy. Second class postage paid at St. Bonaventure, NY 14778, and at additional mailing office.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The CORD, P.O. Drawer F, St. Bonaventure NY 14778 USA.

Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions	Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221
BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo	LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God
CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun	LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours
EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony	OffPass: Office of the Passion
EpCler: Letter to Clerics ¹	OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix
EpCust: Letter to Superiors ¹	RegB: Rule of 1223
EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful ¹	RegNB: Rule of 1221
EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo	RegEr: Rule for Hermits
EpMin: Letter to a Minister	SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady
EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order	SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues
EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of People	Test: Testament of St. Francis
ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God	UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare
ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father	VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy
Form Viv: Form of Life for St. Clare	¹ I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis	LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis
2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis	LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis
3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles	LP: Legend of Perugia
CL: Legend of Saint Clare	L3S: Legend of the Three Companions
CP: Process of Saint Clare	SC: Sacrum Commercium
Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis	SP: Mirror of Perfection
Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., <i>St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis</i> (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).	
AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., <i>Francis and Clare: The Complete Works</i> (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).	

Reflection: Story as Gift, Incarnation

ROBERT M. STEWART, O.F.M.

It has been cold these past November days, snow already covering the ground, but this evening in chapel during our prayer our hearts were warmed by the brothers and sisters who shared with us stories of faith. How is it that we do not always remember the power of story, its power to proclaim, to nurture, to challenge, to speak to the heart?

As I listened and basked in the warmth, I remembered the words of Walter Wangerin, a Lutheran minister, pastor and writer... *he knew well the power of story; he had waxed poetic (and theologically) in his collection of stories called *Ragman and Other Cries of Faith*. In the silence of my heart I listened again as Walter spoke of his childhood, of his terrible bouts of poison ivy, of that one fateful day while suffering terribly with that itch how his father came to speak with him...*

Without turning my head, without so much as a sob or a moan, I began to cry. The tears trailed down my temple and pooled in my ear. I thought that I would die soon. But then I heard a strangled sound to my left. It was my father. He'd risen to his feet. His hands were up and empty. His face was so full of anguish, seeing my tears, that my own heart went out to the man. He turned, turned fully round in the bedroom, seeming so helpless; and then he bolted for the door, crying "Calamine lotion!"— hit the wood and left.

*Calamine lotion. I was experienced in the ways of poison ivy. I knew that calamine lotion was utterly useless... Nevertheless, when my father appeared again with a giant bottle of the stuff; when my father knelt down beside the bed, uncovered me, and began so gently with his own hand to rub it on; when my father's eyes dampened with tears of suffering, so that I saw with wonder that my pain had actually become *his own pain* and that it was *our* pain that had sent him rocketing to the drug store; when I saw and felt that miracle, a second miracle took place: the ivy did not itch.*

Calamine lotion did not do this thing!

My father's love did this thing - and I knew it! Oh, my heart ached to have such a father, who could enter into me and hurt so much that he took my hurt away.

I was a special child that day, abed and still and watchful.

For this was the love of God, incarnate in a man with a receding hairline and a patch of whisker on his chin and a smell I shall never forget.

Whom was I naked before? Whose hand made miracles against my skin? God. God's.

It was here I first began to discover the mercy of God and such magnificent preachments as "Vicarious Suffering." And it was here I learned that love was no word, but an event, a sacrifice. But as yet I knew none of the phrases, nor the *theou logoi*. Simply, I had experienced the power of God.

I tell you the story, dear brothers and sisters, to say — tell stories. It is the fullness of witness. (pages 81-82)

This evening some of my brothers and sisters gave witness. This evening we celebrated the commemoration of the deceased members of the Seraphic Order by sharing some stories about franciscans that they had known. Stories revealed how those men and women had spoken of God through their lives. Only a few present spoke story, offered witness; I suspect that all present treasured memories in their hearts and felt renewed in the challenge and promise of franciscan vocation.

My own thoughts ran to my earlier years at St. Bonaventure University, to that time when our provincial infirmary was located here on the first floor of the old friary. I remembered, in particular, Cyril and Henry. Brother Cyril Vey had been a tailor in the province for many, many years. His small body had grown quite frail and he shuffled ever-so-slowly down the long corridors of the infirmary and friary. We would meet in those corridors or in the refectory, for Cyril loved his coffee and donuts. I had quickly learned Cyril's favorite type of donut and how to fix his coffee: half coffee, half milk, and lots of sugar. We would sit and talk as he dipped those donuts in his cup filled-to-overflowing. I cannot remember exactly what we talked about, though I remember laughing often. I *do* remember his shuffling feet, his smiling face, his gentleness, his innocence, his simplicity... he was for me *Brother Leo*; he lived for me what our holy father Francis had asked: that "we must be simple, humble, and pure."

Fr. Henry Sharp also spoke powerfully to my heart during his days at the infirmary. During his struggle with cancer and radiation treatment, he had somehow developed a large open wound at the base of his spine which would not heal. It needed to be packed with gauze each day. Often I heard about his

pain - from the nurses and some of the friars who marveled that he could endure it - but never from Henry. His life was one of patient endurance. In my conversations with Henry he spoke with joy and enthusiasm about his life and ministry; he spoke of prayer and blessing; he spoke of God. In his patient suffering, he was for me *Brother Francis*, his pain becoming a prayer of praise, as he knew more deeply the suffering Christ.

I remembered my dear friend, Sr. Helen James, and the words she spoke to me one bright fall day, words that continue to sustain me: "Bob, a day does not go by when I do not remember you in prayer." She had spoken deliberately and with great love words of covenant. Indeed, I knew that every day of her life her faithful prayer embraced me. I remember my tears upon hearing of her death. The General, as I affectionately called Sr. Helen, was in her own way my *Sister Clare* sustaining me with her love, her prayer, her witness...

A peaceful calm seemed to settle upon us as we continued our prayer. We left the chapel, greeted by winter's frozen breath, to return home with holy joy. We had been strengthened by the witness, empowered for our journeys. And we had learned (I think... I hope) that we must tell stories, that we must remember the incarnation of God in our midst. For 'tis the season of Advent; we will soon celebrate Christmas and the mystery of the Incarnation. We remember the stories of salvation history; we revisit Bethlehem so that our imaginations might be formed by the One who came among us - Wonder Counselor, Almighty God, Prince of Peace; but who came among us as poor and lowly, suffering servant...

Francis knew so very well...

What he did on the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ near the little town called Greccio, in the third year before his glorious death, should especially be noted and recalled with reverent memory. In that place there was a certain man by the name of John, of good reputation and an even better life, whom blessed Francis loved with a special love...

Blessed Francis sent for this man... and he said to him... "I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed." When the good and faithful man heard these things, he ran with haste and prepared in that place all the things the saint had told him...

The gifts of the Almighty were multiplied there, and a wonderful vision was seen by a certain virtuous man. For he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw the holy man of God go up to it and rouse the child as from a deep sleep. This vision was not unfitting, for the Child Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of many; but, by the working of his grace, he was

brought to life again through his servant St. Francis and stamped upon their fervent memory. At length the solemn night celebration was brought to a close, and each one returned home with holy joy. (*I Cel* 84, 86)

So let us remember Christ born among us; let us celebrate by remembering those who have given witness to the truth that is God, the One who is Love... through being simple, humble servants.

This Christmas let us give the gift of story: let us remember and retell of Jesus born in Bethlehem, Christ born among us; let us remember and tell of those franciscan saints among us who have followed in his footprints, Christ born among us. Let us share stories that we might be strengthened in our journeys, that we might remember, celebrate and believe, that we might live the story, follow in his footprints, and speak to others this holy joy. This Christmas, let us give stories... "for they are the fullness of witness."

* * *

The faculty and staff of the
Franciscan Institute
join the editors
in wishing all of you
a most blessed and holy Christmas.
May the light which is Christ
enlighten your hearts
and give you
a correct faith,
a certain hope,
a perfect charity,
so that you may more fully follow in his footprints
throughout this new year.

The Christian Religion, Ethics and Environment

GIANMARIA POLIDORO, O.F.M

So as to avoid any misunderstandings, it would be convenient first of all that I specify exactly what I mean by "environment." Air, water earth, mountain ranges, plains, plants and animals, all this fruit of creation I call "environment." It is in this same sense I intend the term *nature*, which I willingly substitute with the term *creation* at times.

Then when I speak of ecology (borrowing from Alfonso Auer's book *Ethics of the Environment*), I intend it as the doctrine the world as home (from the Greek word *oikos*). In view of the fact that the doctrine of ecology is developed by human beings for human beings, it needs to be treated as the correct way that a person must live in this home which is the world.

The ecological problem, that is the problem of the correct way of our living in our home which is the world, was not felt only by our contemporaries, even though, as I said before, only now has the question become more alive and explosive.

Ever since we as human beings began making our way in the world, using our intelligence through which we are able to create technologies which produced an ever progressive growth, the problem of human beings and their environment began to be both objectively and subjectively relevant to ethical

A previous lecture by Fr. Gianmaria Polidoro was published in the May issue of The CORD. A member of the International Center for Peace in Assisi, Fr. Polidoro also serves as a delegate of the Order of Friars Minor for Albania. This lecture was delivered at Siena College in Loudonville, New York.

reflection. As long as the human species was a hunter in the same way as other animals, human actions fitted into an environmental balance. Human predatory activity could be either pleasant or difficult for primitive peoples, but certainly by no means was it an activity which bothered nature and its preservations.

Bit by bit that human intelligence created a more developed and powerful technology; nature began to be subjected to the human species who developed a purely instrumental vision of nature. Undoubtedly in early times and for many centuries nature's subjection to humans was of little weight. Human beings were frightened by the forces of nature which, not being able to overcome, they sought to befriend by means of various magical rites. However, in this last century it seems that the human species has overwhelmed nature to such an extent, because of ever advanced technology, that we can envision the possibility of destroying that very environment in which we live. Now we fear only great apocalyptic phenomena which we are not able to dominate, such as earthquakes. We no longer fear drought or floods; we have enough resources to take remedial measures. (This naturally refers to the so-called "first world" which more than any feels the ecological problem.) As for ecological alarm, it's interesting to read what Thomas Sieger Derr writes in *Ecology and Human Liberation* (Italian translation, Brescia 1974) concerning human wrong-doings against nature ever since ancient times. He states that:

the destruction of the pastures, forests and other similar mistakes of such enormous dimensions as to destroy entire civilizations were committed by Egyptians, Assyrians, Romans, North Africans, Persians, Aztecs... More than three centuries before the Christian era, Plato already deplored in his *Critias* the cutting of the forest in Attica. Ever since the dawn of history, man has never ceased from altering his environment dramatically, upsetting every ecological equilibrium. Primitive hunters used to burn the woods to be able to drive the game out. (page 58)

We can add to these observations the need to find cultivatable land, which for many centuries was so great that often it drove people - agriculturally unskilled - to plant predatory cultivations and thus to be unable to regenerate the used lands. Many deforestations and desertifications have been the work of humans, even though helped by nature itself.

During this early history of the ecological problem we can see how ethical ecological thought was being organized. It is interesting to re-read different descriptions which exalt times of peace over against times of war when everything is destroyed. It is moving to read words of ecological concern in Deuteronomy:

If you besiege a town for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you must not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them. Although

you may take foods from them, you must not cut them down. Are trees in the field human beings that they should come under siege from you? (Dt 20:19).

This verse has value even though it is followed by a seemingly utilitarian verse which permits the cutting of trees, which don't bear fruit, to make bulwarks.

Let us now enter more deeply into this view of things. For that which concerns the philosophical systems of ethics regarding nature, I recommend the precise analysis offered by Sergio Bartolommei in his book *Ethics and Environment* (Milan 1989), particularly in the second and third chapters.

The main question in the present discussion taking place in our Western tradition we can find in two options or antithetical visualizations: one anthropocentric and the other physiocentric.¹ The terms of this debate can be stated in this way: Do humans have moral obligations toward the environment, the non-hunting species and natural system? Do moral principles exist when dealing with the non-human world? Or are such principles to be used only in interhuman relationships?

Bartolommei, in above-mentioned work, singles out two groups into which the various philosophical positions can be summarized:

The first group, or "party" radically protests against the idea of "human domination of nature" and sustains that such new problems for ethics, such as the relationship between man and his natural environment, are problems which also demand "new ethics," and with new principles, new values and a new hierarchy of these values. This is the "party" of those who sustain the urgent need for an *ethical ecology*, which founds the moral worth of natural objects on ecological notions such as the "biotic pyramid"; the "interdependence of living and non-living beings," the "balance of nature."

The second "party," on the contrary, sustains that there is no need for any revolution of the ethical theory in order to face the new questions on how humans treat nature; all that is asked for is to enlarge the context of what comes under the influence of morality and for this purpose it is enough to extend, to integrate or to render more flexible the categories of traditional ethics so as to be able to include new topics and new questions. This is the "party" of the supporters of the ethics of "rights," of "respect for life" and of utilitarianism applied in the field of the relations between man and nature. (page 25)

¹ In the Anglo-Saxon world in particular, there is an articulated debate on the relationship "man-nature" which dates back to the beginning of the seventies. Some very interesting publications have given birth to an inter-disciplinary magazine *Environmental Ethics* dedicated to the philosophical aspect of the environmental problem. This magazine began in the Spring of 1979 at the University of New Mexico and presently is published by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Georgia.

As one can well see, the whole debate is centered on the theme of anthropocentrism - those in favor of it and those against it - almost like a "Manichaeism," with no more ample vision of things.

Regarding anthropocentrism, an accusation against the Judeo-Christian tradition claims that such tradition is responsible for the concept of the human species as a being all on its own in the context of nature. This tradition has greatly influenced moral and intellectual habits in the West. For example, L. White Jr. in *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford 1952) states: "No more fundamental change in the idea of man's relation to the soil can be imagined: once man had been part of nature; now he became her exploiter." (page 56)

I have tried to present a broad enough vision of the question so that one can see the novelty of Christianity within the context of ecological discussions. It is a novelty expressed with religious language which must be translated and introduced into other languages: economical, ethical, social, political. The religious language in fact allows us to enter into the problem using categories which are not contrary but complementary, and in some ways basic for a correct approach to reality.

Peace with Creation

In an article of mine I stated:

This word *ecology* arouses in us, first of all, a sense of worry. Like saying: But what are we up to? What are they doing to nature? Don't they realize that the waters are dying (who would have ever thought a hundred years ago that the waters could die?), that day after day whole breeds of small and large animals are disappearing (who knows if we will get to a point of having only cows, sheep and chickens...?), that pollution is making Planet Earth unlivable?

These are things which we say when we talk about ecology and we are very worried about what we are losing: if there were only someone who cared about chickens? Or somebody who felt compassion for the flea's fate!

That is the picture. That's what normally gets written: ecology considered as apprehension of that which is growing short or of that which is about to be lost; and this fills us with emotion.

This kind of ecology is not for me. It gives me the impression that a lot gets written just from an egoistic standpoint, just because we are about to lose or we are about to be left without something.

We Christians understand ecology in another way: in the light of Revelation. That is why I prefer an alternative to the word "ecology" using in its place "peace with Creation." This latter expression contains and manifests our religious point of view on the ethical problem regarding the environment. On the

first page of the Bible we find the description (using its own categories) of the beginning of the adventure of the whole creation, including the creation of human beings. Creation is presented as an act of God's love. This basic principle, when we talk about peace, leads us to perceive the human person as having been created constitutionally non-violent. When we talk about ecology, it leads us to see fraternal relationship in all created things, though each single creature has its own precise distinctions. It is God who creates heaven and earth and all that is therein. "He who lives forever created the whole universe" (Sir 18:1) and if the Creator is "the Living" then he can not be the author of death. Let us recall the Biblical Narrative of Creation. The scene presents God who creates heaven and earth and all the animals with the power of his word. The sacred writer, during his narration, continually inserts the expression: "And God saw that it was very good" (the Greek word *kalos* which can be translated as "beautiful" is significant). According to the Bible's viewpoint, the environment is something which is very good/beautiful, or, so to speak, corresponding to God's plan, perfectly brought about according to his will. The Sacred Scriptures add: "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). Here we have the same creative act as for all the rest, with this particularity that humankind is created in the image of God. For this reason the human is a creature just like all the rest of creation, and at the same time is also something more, as an image. From this point in common and from this difference stems the problem of their relationship; that is, there begins a relationship which has to follow certain rules, and this is a problem. If human beings and other creatures had only this point in common in that they were all created together, there would have been no problem. However, the problem rises up on account of this particularity which is added on to the common meeting point, the particularity of the image, which is also intelligence, reflection, etc. In this matter, we can say that God himself offers rules for relationship in the context of creation: God blessed them (the man and woman) and said to them: be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Gn 1:28). The rule which God entrusts for this relationship is included in the words "subdue" (the earth) and "have dominion" (over living things). These are definitely words which to modern day ears, given our enormous technological power, can sound very alarming. But they didn't sound so alarming to our ancestors and forefathers who are used to doing battle tirelessly in order to maintain their own vital living space.

However, the whole issue is clarified and made more precise: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Gn 2:15) To subdue and to dominate must be interpreted in this new light: to till and

to keep. Just like saying: to subdue is to cultivate and, in a certain way, to take possession, but not by means of an evil exploitation. A similar consideration can be made regarding the following decision made by God: "To every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps in the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food" (Gn 1,30). This is a decision which opens the issue on food and which, as we'll soon see, is also quite a problem. God gives to all the living creatures every green herb for food and this balances the providence foreseen for the human creature, that is, cultivation - foreseeing and providing for our own nourishment using our own intelligence and ability. Human beings are given the intelligence to be able to till the land, that is, to modify the environment, and also the ethical rule of "keeping" it. In other words, we have the ability to modify it, but at the same time we have to take care of it. I'll speak later on the richness of the development of this religious viewpoint of the ethical support in relations between human beings and the environment. However, it seems necessary here to make a distinction between the technical solution to the environmental problem and the ethical solution. The technical solution is consequential to the ethical one and cannot take its place. In other words, we cannot just say that the water is polluted and thus seek a technological method to clean it. Before using any kind of technology, we must first identify the ethical link that needs to be reconstructed where it has been destroyed; and only after that can we choose a more apt way to reach our goal. Too often when treating ecological problems or environmental safeguard, the point of arrival in our worries and measures is simply to restore the usefulness of some benefit, without worrying about whether or not the foreseen use be in conformity with God's plan in creation.

The Sense of Created Things

The Sacred Writer opens the narration of the creation of Eve with a motivation which seems very interesting. Verses 18-20 of the second chapter of Genesis (which according to Scripture scholars comes from another tradition, which however, takes nothing away from its religious teaching), confronts us with other information.

And then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper like unto him." And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air and he brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And so Adam gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the air and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper like unto him.

In the mentality of the Bible, to give something a name means to take intellectual possession of that certain reality. For that which concerns us, the Sacred Writer wishes to show us that the man created by God understood God's plan for creation, and in this way he understood the sense that it had.

In this wider vision, the figure of the garden expresses in its totality this theological concept: there exists a reality, besides the human, which is not purely instrumental. It is a reality, an environment, where human beings cooperate not (or not only) on an instinctive and natural level like other living things, or as mass and energy like the inanimate world, but with intentionality and for certain purpose, because they are the image of the Creator who created with intentionality and with a purpose in mind.

When I realize that the environment belongs to me in the same way that I belong to Christ, and that Christ, the Son of God, belongs to his Father, then my way of treating things, my way of treating the environment becomes a wonder-full experience.

Thus the first step of human ethics regarding the environment is that of making a "garden" out of it; that is to say putting order in it by completing (if you'll allow me to use this verb) the work of creation, in a certain sense. This seems to be in line with what a Christian must do in order to cooperate in his own redemption - we must "add on" so that redemption can become functional in us. St. Paul says: "I am now rejoicing in my suffering for your sake and in my flesh I am completing what was lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church." (Col 1:24). If Christ had done everything, he would have avoided any human collaboration and he would have taken away any human creativity, intentional action, and free expression. This is what happens with creation: human beings are called to live ethically in relationship with the environment forming the *cosmos* (neither exploiting it, nor trampling on it, nor making an instrument out of it). In the *cosmos* humans and animals and plants and rocks each have their own purpose and their own place. In the light of this vision we can say, for example, that the nuclear energy used to make bombs is not respected in its dignity and in its sense as "force of nature" which we are called to discover and to "cultivate" and to put in order. A force of that nature created by a God of love cannot be used to do evil without a lack of respect for

its particular significance. If we should do this, then instead of cosmos we create chaos (*caos*). We do not act as an image of that God which instead of chaos created the cosmos.

One might object that this is an idyllic vision: very rewarding emotionally, but which in no way corresponds to reality where, on the contrary, we see so much violence. To such an observation, the Bible offers an explanation for the violence which stains the various relations in the context of the created world. This explanation is centered on the reality of sin. The Bible looks at it and explains this very evident reality from a religious standpoint, offering its own interpretation to cosmology. For this reason we will have to introduce here the narration of Adam's sin, underlining that part of the story which most pertains to our topic:

And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and dust you shall return." (Gn 3:17-19).

What is the meaning of this sin and of this malediction which from the man flows upon nature as well? If we want to interpret it in a language which isn't religious, it means that in nature there's an imbalance which should not be there, which is not "natural." Relations among created things are of mutual violence and exploitation. Such relations are wrong! It cannot go on like this! It must not be like this (ethical commitment) because in the beginning it was not like this. Old Testament thought waits for a redemption.

As we have seen, the Old Testament concludes its discussion on the environment in a pessimistic way, however remaining open to hope. Nature, which followed man in the curse, will follow him also in the redemption. Thus we read in psalm 36 (35):

Your steadfast love, O Lord extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. (verses 5-6)

As with sin of Adam even the earth was dammed, in the same way with the redemption of human beings there is also a redemption of the earth. It is a mysterious redemption, just beginning to germinate, eschatological, but certainly a redemption. Christ is the hope. Jesus Christ redeems us, and with us all creation.

Before going any further with this discussion, I think it would be worth citing a few enlightening lines from the book *Creation Theology* by J.L. Ruiz de la Pena (Italian trans, Borla 1988):

If the Old Testament faith in creation was not, as we have seen so far, so much simply information regarding the past, as the assertion of the beginning of a salvific process opens toward the future which is in need of it, so also the coming of Christ, culminating point of history begun with creation, would be decisive for that faith...the New Testament brings an absolute novelty to the Old Testament's teaching on creation: the insertion of Jesus Christ... Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New can we find anything like a purely "chemical" cosmology; the cosmological aspect is in the function of the historical-salvific aspect, or, speaking in New Testament terms, Christological. (pages 55-56).

The theorist of this Christological vision, of a way that leads towards redemption, is St. Paul. He profoundly senses the various potentials of the redemption worked by Christ. In his letter to the Colossians, after having spoken of Christ by means of whom "all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible," he continues, adding on Christ's work as a renewer of all that which had been scattered by sin: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross." (Col 1:19-20).

These expressions are filled with significance which we still need to unfold. This theme is definitely the result of a personal drama between sin and redemption lived by Paul himself. Surely the words and ideas have to do with the curse of Genesis referenced above.

This opens up to our evaluation a new relationship which human beings have with creation after the redemption. We pass from a relationship of "custody," to that of reciprocal violence due to the curse, finally to arrive at a new relationship of reconciliation, of joyous peace, which is a prophecy to be brought about bit by bit as the redemption enters into our hearts and very flesh.

I believe that the sensibility so felt today for the environment and for all non-human creatures can be ascribed to this view of pacification which is coming about even in the midst of so many human contradictions. The fatigue of this pacification is very dramatic. The ethics of present human-environment relations is to be found in the methodology and in the fatigue of rebuilding peace, of bringing forth peace, of once again making cosmos out of all that which sin had transformed into chaos. Looking again to Ruiz de la Pena, we read:

Paul can't hide the fact that the impressions stamped upon the world by the divine creation have been deformed. Creation is presently "subject to frailty"; it lays under the "slavery of corruption" (Rom 8:20-21). It doesn't faithfully reflect harmony and the divine order. On the part of creatures, the path towards God runs by way of similarity-dissimilarity dialectic. The deformation of the initial order calls for restoration, a new creation. This is where Paul will introduce the event of Jesus Christ into the theme of creation. (page 61)

The Magna Carta of this dramatic passage from sin to redemption, from the malediction to the reconciliation, we find in the letter to the Romans:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of one who subjected it. I hope that the creation itself will set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (Rom 8:18-21)

The picture presented here is intense and dramatic and points out the effort of human beings and creation in the "way of return." How different from the Christian point of view is the approach to the environmental problem of certain ecologists.

The ecologism in vogue today looks at things poetically. Very often it just works on one's emotions. It mainly has confidence in human laws and depends on egoistic fears. A Christian cannot act like this: the Christian knows that the environmental problem, separate from momentary emotivity, is a problem which has to do with the human person as a whole and with effort one makes to change interiorly. Only the person at peace with self and well-balanced can be sure of living a good relationship with nature. The question is not marginal. In fact, for many currents of thought regarding ecology, it is enough for human beings not to damage nature to be able to have a good relationship with it. For a Christian it has to do with nature's liberation from a violence (which would seem impossible to exterminate), in such a way that this violence gets turned into a force, like human violence which becomes *power* if one accepts being redeemed by Christ. It is the power which we call *non-violence*.

Relationship of Belonging

This relationship of united effort to be freed from the conditioning of sin, brings us still further in our reflection to be able to perceive a more perfect ethical relationship between human beings and nature.

Here again we have the Pauline theology which is sensitive to this matter: "all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollo or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future - all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God." (Cor 3:21-22).

In this simple yet dense expression we can perceive all created reality in a coral relationship, though distinct one thing from the other. All things are yours: like saying everything belongs to us. But how does it belong to us? As a possession? Through exploitation? No! Everything belongs to us just like we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

This type of belonging has nothing to suggest exploitation or egoism. It is a belonging understood in a positive, not negative way. When I realize that the environment belongs to me in the same way that I belong to Christ, and that Christ, the Son of God, belongs to his Father, then my way of treating things, my way of treating the environment becomes a wonder-full experience. My ethics goes beyond the ethics of respect for every created thing, beyond the ethics of respect for their real sense, beyond the ethics for accepting their rights, and even beyond the ethics of benevolence. My ethics becomes an ethics of participation, of loving care, of peace. Keeping in mind the due distinction, in a way we can apply to our relationship with the environment that very invocation in which Christ prays for the highest level of relationship among all Christians: "I pray... that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (Jn 17:20-21). Even seeing the way we treat nature, the world may believe "that you have sent me."

This type of vision is truly wonderful and suggestive. But like the Commandment of Love of which it is a part, either it seems unreachable or it clashes with concrete human behavior. One of the points which can most cause friction is the problem of food. How is it that we who claim to love with a love of participation eat not only vegetable life but even animal life? Though no easy problem, it has to be dealt with so that the ethical picture of the relationship human-environment may be even better clarified and enlightened.

Some time ago, I attempted to draft an ecological decalogue to which I gave the title "The Decalogue of Francis at the Porziuncola," due to the Franciscan sensibility which animates it. In this decalogue, I inserted the problem of food, a topic which I have not seen dealt with, at least in an appropriate rather than emotional way. The sixth point of the decalogue reads: "You are given the task of discovering the mastery of food: because life is nourished with life."

It is a question which could destroy at its very root any fancy of an ecology of Love and not just mere convenience because it's useless trying to hide the fact: every time that we eat food, we kill life. A very small thing is the excuse of those who limit themselves to the problem of the killing of those animals which arouse in us a particular tenderness, or even the killing of all animals for that matter. Every time that we eat, even if it be only vegetables, it always has to do with life. Faced with so great a problem, which is eminently an ethical problem, I only tried to suggest an answer which I repeat here for intellectual honesty, with the hope of helping in some way to find a solution.

I'll make use of that typical religious reality which concerns the "mysterium"—mystery. This mystery is not the breaking into man's life of that which is irrational. Too often it has been confused with irrationality. Instead it is the ability to look beyond, if I can so express myself, to perceive that which cannot be expressed with the usual human tongue. It helps us to discover a new way of understanding. It is the understanding which comes to us from the "Wisdom" of God, which is able to untie even the tightest knots such as suffering and death.

"so that life may nourish life."

This "mysterium" transforms the expression "for life is nourished with life" into another with a much more profound meaning: "so that life may nourish life." In this way the possessive "devouring" of the first enunciation is transposed to a donation of life so that from the former we move to a way of acting: "... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (Jn 10:10). And again: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn 15:13). This is the way a hero acts, who sacrifices his own life so that others may be saved. It is the attitude of service of one who spends his or her own time and existence in order to help others. It is also like a mother who offers her breast to her new-born baby: life which joyfully nourishes life. This "mysterium" is found in this intuition and in this conviction: that the offering of oneself can be joyous donation. I make no claim to offer a solution, but rather, to offer an intuition that may lead to a possible solution.

This sense of giving up one's own life for another was suggested to me by a story of St. Francis narrated by Thomas of Celano (2 Cel 111). Once when the saint was near the monastery of St. Verecondo, it so happened that one night a ewe gave birth to a lamb, which unfortunately was bitten by a sow. When St. Francis heard of it, he wept for the lamb (being a symbol of Christ, and normally so sweet and calm), and cast this malediction: "Cursed be that evil beast which

killed you; let no man or animal eat your flesh." And so it happened that a short while later the animal died and was thrown into a pit outside the monastery "where it remained for a long time a dried like wood; and it did not serve as food for any hungry creature." (The same thing happened to a sparrow in 2 Cel 47.) This curse of Francis is very strange: "that no one eat of your flesh." I believe that Francis perceived the act of "becoming food" for others as an act of love, just like Christ becomes Eucharistic food for us. I wonder if this type of reflection would not prove to be enlightening for us.

In this way, we can present the Christian's ethical relationship with the environment in a dynamic way, a relationship which is developing and becoming even more perfect, bit by bit, that our capability of understanding increases. This relationship is a voyage, which accepts leaving the egoistic "shore" of the fear of the various types of pollution or the fear of losing nature, as long as it reaches the other "shore," that of love, of participation with the whole of creation which we thus realize to be brother, sister and mother (cf. The Canticle of St. Francis).

I would summarize this idea following with a line from Davide Marzaroli:

All that which we see and all that which is unseen has been created by God. Everything has been created: the earth and the universe, living things, men and spirits. Only the Son was generated. All was created through the Son and for the Son. Thus "all things are yours, but you are Christ's and Christ is God's." In this ascending ownership indicated above, we have the Son who first received the creation from the Father and who then reconsigns it to the Father.

Today, post-redemption, we are living this reconsignment. Unfortunately however, we are committing a second original sin. If with the first original sin we ruined that which descended from the hands of the Creator Father ("dammed be the earth for cause of you"), now we run the risk of spoiling this "reconsignment to the Father." Creation, which is mystically returning to God, we are ruining once again. We are "consigning" to Christ a creation which God did not make. We are giving back to him a nature which is disfigured because it is not respected in its original sense and it is not loved with a love of belonging. We are reconsigning death and ugliness in place of life and beauty. For this reason, a Christian way of dealing with ecology is important... one which arouses an ethical commitment and which must be translated into the concrete languages of safeguarding and care and correct human behavior.

To our ethical commitment for a peaceful cohabitation this adds an attitude of humble repentance for the evil done to nature. This repentance is the beginning of a new life.

LEAVES GLUED TO PERPENDICULAR SKY

red clump sprouting silent.

Metallic quietude. I listen to the silence of your gaze. It is mum. Something stirs on the stone, there, sombre. You do not surmise it is a bird.

At the detour by scraggy genistas, your farewell smile steals over the asphalt, faster than my searching eyes. Trees run motionless in semi-darkness.

In the mirror I see the pointed sprout of sansevieria, some books and, seated at this table, my head bent like the neck of the lamp.

It is night.

I exhausted my dream with bronze syntactics behind the closed door solitude screams its silence copper curves the sea's hiatus meeting my gaze I pursue my dream basin with windy reflections

the heavy stone whirls round

Lisa Boscane, O.S.C.

Nice-Cimiez, France

[Translated by Mary McCarthy, R.S.M. from a *dialogue de nuit* (Paris: Editions St-Germain-des-Prés, 1976), 28, 29.]

Considerations on the Holy Stigmata
(Poems based on *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*)

III

The Third Consideration on the Holy Stigmata

Mid-September, at the foot of the Holy Cross, feast day and Leo, again, across a narrowing bridge. No answer; he moved closer, mouth open, barely conscious, only that voice: "Who art thou, O my most sweet God. And what am I, most vile worm, and thy worthless servant?" Leo, yellow-faced in the touch descending, it rested on the unkept head, the absent voice murmuring in the remaining leaves, guilt above him. He turned to go, but heard his rescue, his father. At forgiveness's still whole feet, he wept. And Francis, this watered sprig, this speech of God, what could he say beyond a playful tug at Leo's ear, and then all of his own. WHAT LEO HAD ALMOST HEARD? The dogwood was in bloom, the carp swimming, mouths gaping and flakes of light,

David Craig, an assistant professor of English at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, published a book of poems based upon the Fioretti in 1980 entitled "The Sandaled Foot." Recently the poet revisited the Fioretti; here we offer one of his artful renderings of the Considerations on the Holy Stigmata.

the absolute love of God, over us, in every high nettle, their graceful bobbings. And us, out of sync, rioting over rock and road; we could beat ourselves until we bleed. It would not help. When we look then, leaning, in the water, we see the best we can make of it: what He can do. AND THE REACHING FROM HIS CHEST? God's three perfect gifts, perfectly given: uttermost poverty, chasity, obedience. Yes, and soon God would do holy things on this mountain, all the world will wonder. Leo wondered—what more of a sign could there be?

Together they opened the Gospels three times: each time to the time of our Lord's keeping. The Passion. Francis' heart stuck each time: this was the One who still dragged him up that sorrow road, the One whose pulse beat above oblivious gray trees, in the fat purple hearts of eggplant, in the veined wheel and all of its turnings. And when the stars rose above him, when the winters bit him, His was the sweet dirt breast he slept on. And the repaying? This small sad life given, though he knew it couldn't be little enough.

The day before the feast, an angel for comfort, to advise preparation. And the next day, heavy on the spool of his nature, he faced east like the Soldan, prayed, for two last graces. (As God had reckoned this time and all his days, One's delight having become the other's smile.) He wanted to feel the passion bodily, not just psychologically, but where it was real, in his heart muscle, in his tendons, joints, the road, dolorosa beneath his feet. He wanted, in short, God. And God, as He always does, answered. He inflamed Francis. And Francis felt God again touch the world through him, upward, fiery, rising, and the Seraph came. On six wings,

a Soul to feed his own. It moved toward him like a sun, had the form of a man crucified: two wings extended above His head, the Father as ever, being glorified. Two wings were used for navigation, though their movement was more one of an intent, of giving the appearance of movement rather than of physicality. And two wings covered Him: this return for Francis only, both hidden. And Francis, lost in the cold of feathers, in the eyes of his Lord who convulsed in a short spasm, a shiver, the side wound yawning without blood, in his own splintered body, the entrails speaking: Jesus nailed to the cross. And that little man, the one who saw the truth and had the sense to stand there, the measure of who he was, where he was.

The whole left side of the mountain lit up. Shepherds saw it from their rock seats for an hour or so. Had another star settled down between Italian cliffs, had the moon lost a sliver, thus signaling early winter, or had the nearest king decreed it day? A tax on all who resisted? Silk or the mud they were in? Hostelry windows blinked. So early, this rising, yawns in creaking beds, the maid turning up and out, butter churn in hands, cold as the months to come. And certain multheers who were going to Romagna rose as if slapped and groggy, believing that the light came from the rising sun. They saddled and loaded their beasts. As they journeyed along, they saw the light cease and then the natural sun rise. Awakened, they sat on muleback. A wise one shortly spoke of two days pay, but their ride soon became a silent one. Closed-in on themselves, clinging to what they thought they knew, they counted hoof beats or the buzz of flies, early, too early in the morning.

And in that light, Giovanni promised an anniversary.
On his death date to descend, God's breath, out
over the pale waters, into Purgatory, deliver
any of his faithful. A sign, what God would do
for the least of these. And who would see him come
down, this kiss of Christ, dirt and wound to any
ruby-jeweled crown and sun on a now fully fleshed head?

The wounds remained. No heavenly blood stained
tunic, nether garments, and the red lines of pain
shooting upward, mapping the force and reel in
open air. He held his hands on his lap, a couple
of dying birds, quailing, or behind his back,
fingers that couldn't grip, gripping fingers.
His thought was to hide them. He asked his brothers.
Illuminato told him that this pain was for the world,
so Francis took God's way. Asked them not to tell
of his disfiguration while he was alive. Covered,
the wounds bled, stuck, ripped, and yawned. When
Leo cleaned them, he had to tear cloth off of his
hands and breast. Francis would cry out, Leo nearly
swoon from the piercing cries of heaven.

Francis left the relic, the mountain, to his
brothers. Where he was going they could not follow,
yet, as Jesus told Peter. With the absurdly quaint
Leo beside him, he went back to St. Mary of the Angels.
His hands, not his, he gave to the brothers, to touch
and kiss. The pain of living as an opened wound in
the wind, heart of God, its slow beat and decline.
Brothers reverently took their comfort, his pain
with them. He left them there, and with Leo,
Little Sheep, came down from the holy mountain.
He wanted to die on common dirt, feel the good
cold ground seep into the dust that was his flesh.
He wanted to feel it take him in.

BLACKEYED

Were you trampled, susan, by a toad?
Did a storm crush you against the limestone
that rocks your bed?

Does your "shiner's" humiliation cause
sleepless comparison with sparkling eyes of
Sister Marguerite,
Brother Cosmos,
your Michaelmas cousins
and the Astors?

Daisies don't tell, susan; neither will you!
But remember all cannot be
graceful morning glories.

Your remedy is within reach:
vaporized lavender to clear your head
dewy eucalyptus to compress your hurt
astringent rosewater to cool the sting
warm mint tea to lift your spirits.

Today, you can stand a sunflower 10' tall
and tonight reflect the **PAX ET BONUM** radiating
from (Saint Francis') Sister Moon.

Daisies don't tell, susan, but we easily guess
those strewn loves-me loves-me-nots:
He loves you! — Does He not?

Mary McCarthy, R.S.M.

St. Bonaventure on “Light”

DONALD DE MARCO, PH.D.

The thought of St. Bonaventure is remarkably proportioned, symmetric, and unified. Perhaps this is nowhere more evident than in his discussions on **light**. We present here an outline of the Seraphic doctor’s thought concerning “light” in association with **Creation and Our Knowledge of Creation**.

For Bonaventure, light shines so powerfully throughout the universe and upon the human soul, that it is no more possible to deny the truth it impresses on that soul than it is to deny its presence in the physical world. “For even if truth did not exist,” writes Bonaventure, “it is true that truth does not exist: and so something is true. And if something is true, it is true that truth exists.”¹

Creation

In his **Breviloquium**, Bonaventure offers an explanation of the six days of creation in accordance with degrees of light varying from the **luminous** and the **translucent** to the **opaque**.² The luminous is represented on the first day of creation when God separated light from darkness. The translucent is evident on the following day when He divided the waters from the firmament. The opaque is manifested on the next day when God separated the land from the waters. Collectively, these three days of creation show us how **division** reveals Divine wisdom. God manifests His wisdom through a series of divisions that allows the emergence of light, water, and land. It should be clear that such a series of events illustrates a direction that God’s creation is taking, one that is moving from the more general and numinous to the more specific and concrete.

The next three days of creation display a recurrence of the progression from luminosity to translucence to opacity. But in this second triad, God is manifest-

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ing not the wisdom that is associated with **division**, but the goodness that is associated with **provision**. Thus, on the fourth day, God adorns the heavens with lights: the stars, sun, and moon. The following day He brings fish and birds from the waters. On the sixth day, He brings forth land animals: mammals, reptiles, other beasts, and finally human beings. In this way God provides us with the beauty, food, and companionship.³

At the same time, another triad is involved. Whereas the first three days reveals God’s **wisdom**, and the next three days His **goodness**, the essential fact of creation manifests God’s **power**. God, therefore, who begins creation with light and proceeds to translucence and opacity, intends creation to take place over a period of six days so that He can clearly and distinctly manifest to us three essential features of His personality, namely, that He is **omnipotent, all-wise, and all-beneficent**.

In addition, when God declared that “light” was good, He was calling attention to the existence of yet another trilogy. As the cause of being, light is **powerful**; as the cause of understanding, light is **clear**; as the cause of ordering life, light is **good**.⁵

St. Bonaventure reminds us, in his intricately balanced explanation of the **Genesis** account of creation, that God is speaking to us in a most personal way, that He wants us to know about His **power, wisdom, and goodness**. He wants us to know about these divine attributes because He wants us to feel comfortable in the knowledge that God is not only the creator, but a wise one who is generous and provident. He wants us to feel assured and confident — at home, so to speak — as inhabitants of the world He created. He created the world for us and will not abandon us in our times of need.

In his **Collations on the Six Days**, Bonaventure calls upon “light” in order to develop a correspondence between the six days of creation and six levels of **vision**. The first level of vision is provided by nature (including intelligence), the second day by faith, and the third by Scripture. The next three levels of vision are provided by contemplation, the enlightenment of prophecy, and rapture in God.⁶ After these there is a seventh vision of the glorified soul. According to St. Bonaventure, St. Paul had all seven levels of vision. The first two belong to many, the following pair to a few, and the fifth and sixth to an extremely small number.⁷

The first day of creation corresponds to the light of natural vision in accordance with the Psalmist’s proclamation that “The light on the countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us.”⁸ Secondly, faith is the **firmament** which divides the waters. Next, Scripture is relatable to the dry land. The lights created on the fourth day are associated with contemplation. The enlightenment of prophecy is a certain kind of sight looking into the Eternal Mirror and is represented by the fifth day.⁹ The vision of the sixth day, rapture in God, is implicit in God’s

decision to “make humankind in Our image and likeness.” The seventh day coincides with the separation from the body and the promise: “This day thou shalt be with Me in paradise”.¹⁰

Our Knowledge of Creation:

When God created the world, He signed His work. His sign reveals His glory. But due to sin, humans suffered a severely diminished capacity to perceive this sign that God established in His work. To remedy the matter, God gave us a second book, Scripture, to serve as a light by which we could rediscover the relationship that exists between creation and its Creator.

As we develop science, we are able to discover traces of this signature which appear to him as flashes from the light that theology offers in full. In his *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, Bonaventure distinguishes four lights, of which the lesser three may be reduced to the fourth which is theology.

1) **The Exterior Light** is the light associated with mechanical arts and crafts that produce things external to us.

2) **The Inferior Light** is that of sense perception which is made possible by the corporeal light within us.

3) **The Interior Light** is the light of philosophical knowledge whose object is intelligible truths. This light itself is subdivided into three branches: rational knowledge which seeks the truth of concepts and words (logic and epistemology); natural philosophy, which studies the truth of things (metaphysics); moral philosophy, which examines the truths of human behavior.

4) **The Superior Light** is the light of the Scriptures (of theology), which is directed to the truths of salvation.¹¹

After describing the function of these four lights, Bonaventure shows how the three lesser lights are reducible to the light of theology. In this way, all knowledge is unified since it is brought under a single light, the light of Sacred Scripture. The exterior, inferior, and interior lights are all subsumed under one light and are all perfected by it.

The light by which we **make, know, and do** is one light that unifies all these activities. God’s light permeates every facet of human life. It is possible, therefore, that by following the lesser lights, we may see God in all things as we are drawn ever closer to Him.

When the lesser lights are disconnected from the “superior light”, we labor in vain. The divine light penetrates human intelligence as well as all five corporeal senses so that human beings, by tracing these lights back to their source, may return to God.¹²

God’s light permeates every facet of human life

By following the path of light back to God, one finds no reason for pride. The proud person discontinues his journey at the point where he ceased to honor God by taking credit himself for what he knows. Bonaventure himself is both a philosopher and a saint. In his own spiritual journey, his philosophical acumen allowed him to see the path; his sanctity allowed him to follow the path to its divine origin. As Bonaventure writes in the “Fourth Collation” on the **Six Days**: “But many philosophers, while attempting to void the darkness of error, have themselves become involved in major errors. **While professing to be wise, they have become fools.** Because they boasted of their knowledge, these philosophers have become the likes of Lucifer. With the Egyptians was the densest darkness, but with Your saints was the greatest light. All those who properly followed the Law of Nature the patriarchs, the prophets, and the philosophers, were the sons of light.”¹³

Endnotes

¹ St. Bonaventure, “Collations on the Six Days”, *The Works of Bonaventure*, Vol. V, tr. by Jose de Vinck (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1970), p. 60. Subsequent references to this series of volumes will be designated as **Works**.

² **Works**, Vol. II, “The Breviloquium” —II”, pp. 72-75.

³ **Ibid.** p. 74.

⁴ **Ibid.** p. 72.

⁵ **Works**, Vol. V, “Fifth Collation”, p. 73.

⁶ **Ibid.** “Third Collation”, p. 56.

⁷ **Ibid.** p. 54

⁸ **Ibid.** p. 55

⁹ Saint Bonaventure, *The Mind’s Road to God*, tr. by George Boas (Indianapolis: Library of Liberal Arts, 1953), p. 21: “But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who has transported us out of darkness into His wonderful light, when through these lights given from without we are disposed to re-enter into the mirror of our mind, in which the divine lights shine.”

¹⁰ **Works**, V, p. 57.

¹¹ **Works**, “Introduction to Bonaventure”, tr. from the French of J. Guy Bougerol, O.F.M. by Jose de Vinck, pp. 163-168.

¹² **Ibid.** p. 165.

¹³ **Works**, V, p. 59.

Book Reviews

In Mysterious Ways: The Death and Life of a Parish Priest. By Paul Wilkes, NY: Avon Books, 1990. \$4.99.

Reviewed by Fr. Daniel Hurley, O.F.M., National Chaplain of the St. Bonaventure University Alumni Association, Instructor in English and Campus Minister at the University.

George Bernanos was a French novelist who died in 1948. Most of his novels had a Catholic priest as protagonist or principal character. One of his novels was translated into English in 1933 under the title, *A Diary of a Country Priest*. The work became a spiritual classic. Paul Wilkes, an American journalist, was so impressed by the work that he wanted to write "a modern corollary to Bernanos' spiritual classic" (xv). Bernanos' hero was a fictional character; Wilkes wanted a real life character. He approached the authorities in the Archdiocese of Boston and eventually settled upon writing the story of Father Joseph Greer, pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Natick, Massachusetts.

The writer received Father Greer's permission to accompany the priest in his daily life and to observe how he dealt with a life-threatening illness and still continued his duties as a busy pastor. Author Wilkes begins his story shortly after Father Greer was diagnosed as having multiple myeloma - a cancer of the plasma cells in bone marrow. The author is able to describe in detail the medical treatment that Father Greer received as well as the priest's response both to the illness itself and the treatment and to his return to active ministry.

The author gives a background summary of the state of the Catholic Church in St. Patrick's, a typical suburban parish in the Boston Archdiocese. He locates Father Greer in a parish whose physical plant is in dire need of repair and whose parishioners have become settled in a customary laid-back pattern. Father Greer reluctantly accepted the responsibility of becoming the parish's fifth pastor and immediately started making plans to update the plant and the people (p. 10). A year and a half into his responsibilities, the priest discovered his life-threatening illness was cancer.

Paul Wilkes spent hours at a time with Father Joseph Greer. They had long conversations in which the priest spoke with the greatest of candor about his past life, his present life, and his outlook on his future life. The reader will learn much about the life of a parish priest, about the life of a Catholic parish in the years since the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965), and about the response of a particular cancer patient to a painful surgical technique. The description of Father Greer's hospitalization, surgery and recuperation is especially gripping.

This reviewer found *In Mysterious Ways* to be a compelling story about a modern Catholic priest who has a strong, ardent faith in a loving God. The illness taught Joseph Greer a lot about himself and about God's love and mercy. A reader will find much encouragement in living a life plagued by illness and strengthened by faith and courage.

The subtitle of *In Mysterious Ways* is "The Death and Life of a Parish Priest." The

writer deliberately chose those words to describe the return of Father Greer to his parish in Natick. The priest's hospital and recovery experiences were so intense, powerful and life-threatening that the Father Greer who returned to St. Patrick's was a

different Father Greer from the one who had left for the hospital seven months previously. This reviewer was strongly moved by the story of Father Joseph Greer, parish priest.

* * *

I salute you! There is nothing I can give you which you have not;
But there is much, that while I cannot give, you can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today.
Take heaven.

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present instant.
Take peace.

The gloom of the world is but a shadow; behind it,
yet within our reach, is joy.
Take joy.

And so, at this Christmas time, I greet you,
with the prayer that for you,
Now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Fra Giovanni, A. D. 1524

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