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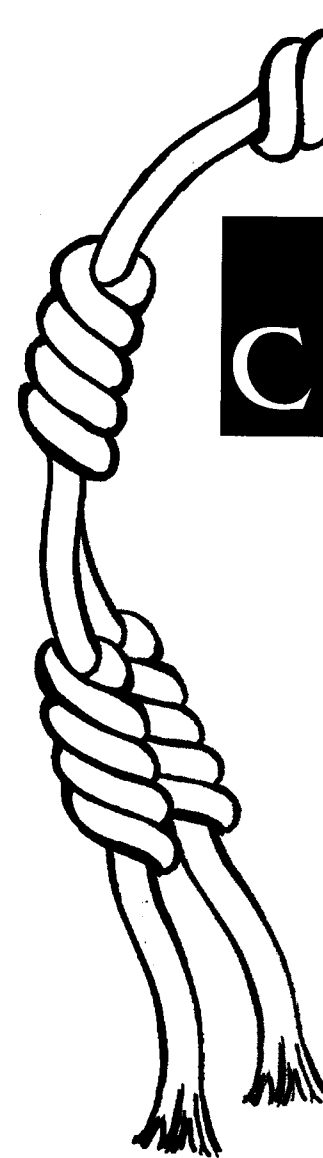


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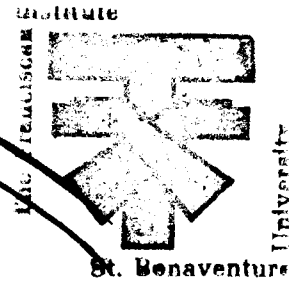
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**THE CORD**  
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

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1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.  
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4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:  
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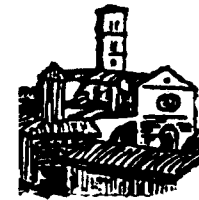
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## Editorial



Watching the opening ceremonies of the winter Olympics was a moving, if brief, experience of global unity. For a fleeting moment it seemed as though the entire world hung suspended in an aura of peace, goodwill, and even happiness. The ritual had, at times, a mystical quality. Realizing that we were among millions of other human beings doing exactly the same thing at exactly the same time throughout the entire world was truly awesome. As Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" rang out from five continents simultaneously, we could glimpse how our world could be, what it is meant to be. Perhaps, in just that moment, we saw the world and all creation through God's eyes.

Technology made such a moment possible for us. We are among the most blessed of all human beings. But with such blessing comes commensurate responsibility. When the mystical moment has passed, the work still lies before us—the work of building a world that will truly be the world we envisioned in that moment. The saints are those whose vision of a beautifully fulfilled world stirs and energizes them to commit themselves completely to the human enterprise. They live in the faith that what God had in mind for the world from the beginning will surely be the end result—and that each of us is lovingly placed here and graced to participate in the drama of this unfolding.

Franciscans believe that what God intended for the world was completely epitomized in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was what God had in mind from the first moment of creation. As we gaze on Christ we are able to see the wonderful unity, peace, and happiness that was the original inspiration of creation. The awesome moment of truth in front of our televisions is a pale image of the profound revelation that is expressed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in his continued life among us in the Spirit.

In this issue of *The Cord* we offer two reflections on the meaning of facing the Christ Incarnate. Gabriele Uhlein and Michael Higgins gave these originally as participants in a program sponsored by the Franciscan Federation of the Third Order Regular. Keith Warner's article calls us to the ecological responsibility that accompanies such a Christological view of our world.

The God of Jesus Christ is not an Olympian God who remains on an inaccessible summit and looks down on us from some lofty height. This is a God who joins us as a brother and works with us to make a divine dream come true.

## Facing the Christ Incarnate: an Experience in Living Christology

Gabriele Ühlein, OSF

*This is what we proclaim to you:  
What was from the beginning,  
what we have heard,  
what we have seen with our eyes,  
what we have looked upon  
and our hands have touched —  
We speak of the Word of Life.  
This life become visible;  
we have seen and bear witness to it  
(1John 1:1-2).<sup>1</sup>*

These are the words that begin the First Letter of John, and they are the words that, along with an image of the face of the San Damiano Christ, have welcomed over fifteen hundred participants to the *Facing the Christ Incarnate* experience. The program was begun by the Franciscan Federation in 1996 at the request of the membership. Joseph Chinnici, OFM, keynote presenter at the 1994 annual Franciscan Federation Conference, dared Franciscans to answer the profound "prejudice against the incarnation" in the prevailing American culture. He urged them to bring "out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations."<sup>3</sup>

As a result, the next year Zachary Hayes, OFM, professor of historical and systematic theology at Chicago Theological Union was invited to provide a contemporary Christological grounding for the 1995 Franciscan Federation first Joint Conference. He noted that Franciscans are "the immediate heirs" and the "custodians" of a tradition capable of spiritual healing at a level of global magnitude. He went on to add that "there has been no period in history

when the doctrine of the cosmic Christ was so important as it is right now."<sup>4</sup> Thus Hayes's contemporary articulation of Franciscan Christology and Chinnici's cultural-historical analysis of the incarnational Franciscan tradition became the founding reference points for the *Facing the Christ Incarnate* program.

At the heart of the program is the flesh and blood reality of daily living in the world. If there is to be a specifically Franciscan antidote to the "bias against the incarnation," it will be because individual Franciscans enflesh a counter-cultural understanding of what it means to experience the Christ incarnate and thereby give this transformative reality a tangible, embraceable face. As Franciscan heirs to a living "fioretti" or storytelling tradition, we can begin with a consideration of our own experience. But we must also place our individual reflections in thoughtful conversation with not only other contemporary Franciscans but also the Christological tradition that has preceded us.

The efficacy of such a Franciscan Christological project, however, will not be measured in terms of its specific systematics alone. Rather, its ultimate measure will be its capacity to reveal evermore deeply, the "living stones" that we are—all of us together—in Christ. Hence each participant of *Facing the Christ Incarnate* was asked to reflect on just that very revelation: How have you experienced the face of Christ? How have you experienced the power of God's presence in being human? How have you experienced the bias against the Incarnation in our human condition?

As a result, the experience of the program has a profoundly confessional character. When individual stories are told, and the retreat experience unfolds, often a remarkable rapport and deep level of sharing becomes evident. We each have recognized the face of Christ. We each have experienced God-with-us in flesh and blood. We each have also managed to insulate ourselves selectively against the incarnation ever present to us. Our mutual sharing—our "apologia"—is thus not simply a result of the specific external facts and circumstances of our lives and relationships. Since we interpret and edit our stories in the telling, they also reveal the inner private Christological synthesis that informs the quality of our experiences. And there is always more to learn.

To this end, a consideration of the ambiguous nature of the word "facing" in the program's title is helpful. To turn to "face" the Christ incarnate is to give that very incarnate Christ a "face." It cannot be otherwise. To see the Christ requires that we look with "Christ-eyes." It is as if, in the very act of "facing" the Christ, the seer and the seen simultaneously participate in the transformative experience of seeing the face of Christ in flesh and blood. It is as if "facing" and being "faced" are subjective aspects of one unitive objective reality. To see the Christ-face I must look, not with the biased limited vision of my own eyes, but with Christ's own eyes. For my own Christ-face to be seen requires of the seer the same Christ-like looking.

It is no wonder therefore, that the bias against the incarnation is so prevalent. Often that which I "see" is presumed to be too small to be so profound a revelation of God-with-us. But this is not the only form of the bias. How quick I am to assume that the God who is ever with us, is not "big enough" to be present in what I take to be God-forsaken. *To reflect on "facing" the Christ incarnate then, is to come face to face with both vast transcendent divinity and gritty flesh and blood minority.* This reconciliation of opposites—the divine become one among us—is the central gospel koan each of us struggles with and is both the measure and stumbling block of Franciscan spirituality itself. Is this not the very Paschal paradox:—that the God-with-us is present and available to be "faced" even in what heretofore we thought to be God forsaken?

What follows here will not be a review of the *Facing the Christ Incarnate* program, nor is it intended as a systematic development of a Franciscan theology. It is rather presented in the spirit of the sharing that is possible between the brothers and the sisters as we look to find each other in Christ. I offer it as my attempt to make sense of my experience. My hope is that it might be a "conversation starter" of sorts and invite others to speak from their own "flesh and blood" richness and their own God-given capacity to love as Christ loves.

### Love Is Not Loved; Nobody Understands Love

I begin my own reflection with a consideration of my face in a mirror—a sort of spontaneous shared conversation with myself as to what I see, who I see, and what experience is reflected back to me. Different each time, the sharings have nonetheless made clear for me the confusion within myself, within our tradition, and within religious life in general around the holy particularities of our individual "faces." In the experience of "facing" the Christ incarnate, a particular "face" is required. Yet there is a bias toward "effacing"—that is, an inappropriate "effacing" of myself, as well as others, as convenience or ignorance might move me.

*The faceless seldom move our hearts or prompt our creativity.* It takes much faith and great wisdom to acknowledge the truth that God has a "face," possibly even my own face, that yearns to be fully recognized by our senses and our spiritual sensibilities. The incarnate God speaks in enfleshed words that yearn for access to human hearts and in creaturely ways yearn for creative human participation. I believe that such an awareness of "facing" (that is, ascribing a face to, or seeing the face of) the incarnate Christ is what allowed Francis of Assisi to run weeping through the streets exclaiming: "Love is not loved; nobody understands Love." And it made the La Verna requests of St. Francis possible: to know, to feel in body and soul the pain of the most bitter passion, and to feel the exclusive love that made such suffering endurable on our behalf.

It is fitting poetry then for St. Francis, fresh from his La Verna experience (with his body now marked as Christ's was), to bless Leo with both peace and a "face." Francis prays that Leo be blessed, kept by God, divinely "faced," and given peace. The La Verna story and the Franciscan prayers from it that we treasure reveal the particular genius of our Franciscan spirituality. Francis knows this truth—that even at the most God-forsaken crucifixion moment of human experience, Love can live and God is. Francis knows too just what a greatness is required of God to become so empty and small. Francis's La Verna Praises of God are the only possible fitting response.

Moreover, our fioretti tradition<sup>5</sup> goes on to tell us that Francis's first human act toward another after encountering the seraphic glory is the comforting and "blessing" of his depressed and anxious friend. May God face Leo, too. May God give Leo a peace that will forever elude the understanding of a world biased against such divinely humble and incarnate experience.

La Verna affords Francis the ability to offer a subversive spiritual peace—the capacity to attend to the individual transforming experiences of "God-with-us" in our own encounter of the cross and seraph, in the living, breathing fabric of our bodies. It takes very great courage, great "enheartenment," to "face" suffering passion and broken crucified dreams and not resort to violence or despair. Franciscan spiritual practice in the world can be measured by its capacity to "enhearten" and bless, much as Francis did Leo. Little did Francis dream that subsequent generations would claim that blessing as their own, to bless with and encourage.

It is worth noting that Francis does not tell Leo to be at peace because he, Francis, had just been divinely visited. Rather, Francis prays that Leo might have his own experience of the face of God. This action reveals an aptitude peculiar to the Poverello—the ability to hold the incarnate Paschal paradox in peace, to allow the experience of the paradox to generate divine praise, and to bless. Francis intends others to be blessed, not with his experience, but rather with their own La Verna experience, and thus know for themselves the peace that he now knows.

Moreover, the peace that Francis offers Leo is no less than Christ's peace. He intends it as a comfort to Leo, and in that blessing moment, Francis becomes the image of Christ for Leo. Fittingly, Francis freshly bears the marks of Christ in his own flesh. Thus I am reminded that my own visitation moments and transformations into an experience of Christ for others take place within the particularities of my own life. And they are revealed in my own capacity for blessing—with the loving desire and sure conviction that the incomprehensible Peace of God will be birthed in the flesh and blood lives of those I so bless. But more is required of Francis and of us. I must also come to understand that this enfleshed peace-bringing is not only for myself and/or

the two-legged creatures who are like me. The whole of the world, in all its rich diversity of expression, continues to await eagerly such Christ-fullness.

## Toward a Christological Re-formation

For the past two years, the brochure for *Facing the Christ Incarnate* with its distinctive face of Christ from the San Damiano icon, its words from the First Letter of John, and the accompanying image of the world with a human fingerprint<sup>6</sup> upon it have been a constant in my life. I have carried them cross-country, encountered them constantly in the program correspondence, and have even faced them in my dreams once or twice. I must confess that the image of the fingerprinted world has proved to be most troublesome for me, and consequently most revelatory of my own particular bias against the incarnation.

This image was inspired by Bonaventure's understanding that creation reveals its creator much as a sculpture reveals its maker by the inevitable fingerprints the creative process leaves in the clay. The image was intended to suggest a beloved creation bearing the signature of its creator and to celebrate the *imago dei* enfleshed in that very world. But I am also acutely aware of the enormous burden the human species presently places upon the eco-systems of this planet. We know that the "fingerprint" of our collective species is omnipresent in the bio-sphere in troublesome ways which Francis and Clare never could have imagined. The fingerprint on the world presents me with a painful and ominous reminder of how my species has not yet learned that the earth is not ours to appropriate.

Might I find the face of Christ incarnate even in the midst of our present difficult ecological reality? Do I dare to trust the transformative nature of incarnational presence in what I presume to be a God-forsaken eco-system degradation? In response, I am haunted by the keynote words of Zachary Hayes, who stated that

there is an intrinsic connection between the mystery of creation and the mystery of the incarnation. We discover in a deeper sense, in what we see and hear and touch in Jesus, the divine clue as to the structure and meaning of not only humanity but of the entire universe.<sup>7</sup>

I must confess that I have not resolved this puzzle for myself, and thus must continue to keep vigil with the paradox of the human as both revealer and crucifier of the divine incarnate human-earth connection. The particular Franciscan perspectives that therefore present the most challenge for me as I grapple with this problem are:

- a) the centrality of the figure of Christ,
- b) God as loving Father, and
- c) creation as mirror and image of God.

Hayes observes that these are the very three confessions that were "developed into distinctive theological perspectives by the authors of the Order."<sup>8</sup> He also goes on to note that Francis expressed these convictions in his own individual way as did Clare.<sup>9</sup> I might add that for any specific theological reflection to qualify as Franciscan, it also must affirm all three. What is mine to do then is to express these same insights in a manner appropriate to the particulars of the world I perceive. I shall attempt that here. But there is a caveat—to express them in a way that is continually transformative in the spirit of the Fifth Admonition as suggested by Hayes: "Try to recognize the dignity that God has conferred upon you. He created and formed your body in the image of His beloved son, and your soul in His likeness."<sup>10</sup>

## On Contemplating the Figure of Christ

Setting aside contemporary gender bias concerns for the moment, the Fifth Admonition expresses a profound Christ-centered basis for a life-long process of ongoing transformation. The purpose of this conversion process is to reveal ever more clearly the Christ-likeness that is ours from the first moment of our creaturehood. It is precisely here that the purpose of our penitential form of life springs into fresh relief for me. Penitential practices ought to be gladly chosen, not as punishment, but as a means to affirm and support our capacity both to be and to recognize the *imago Dei*—"facing" the Christ incarnate for all other creatures and indeed all creation.

The penitential life at its finest ought to confirm my original likeness to Christ, the beloved of God. Penitential practices at their best, ought to be chosen with an eye to their ability to evoke the Christ "face." I ought to practice those penances that allow me best to recognize the Christ in myself and all that I see. Moreover, while "the Cross" (and specifically for Franciscans, the San Damiano icon) is the premier archetype of the fullness of Christ's love, it is not to be understood as the ultimate penitential act to be sought after and desired by either ourselves or God. The cross is the consequence of living the Christ-life in a world that is not yet unbiased enough, not yet ripe enough, to hold so much fullness. Thus Francis's cries as he runs through Assisi: "Love is not loved; no one understands Love."

*In our spiritual maturation and ripening we are not meant to pursue crucifixion. We are meant to pursue love.* Our suffering and crucifixion are not the measure of our Christ-likeness. Our loving is. "What is mine to do" as Francis exhorts, is to be "subject and submissive to all persons in the world, not only to human

beings, but even to all beasts and wild animals" (SalVirt 16-18) out of the fullest love I can muster. My ever-ripening capacity to "face" the Christ incarnate is revealed in the particulars of my life to the extent that I love myself, my neighbor, and the full gorgeous wholeness of the creation in which all of us are held inescapably together in divine loving. My own suffering and crucifixion are inevitable in that embrace, but so is my resurrection and my fullness of life. Of this we have the very assurance of the Word made flesh.

## On Contemplating God as Loving Father

It is not my intention at the moment to speak to specific doctrinal Trinitarian concerns. Rather I am led to speak about how, as a contemporary Franciscan woman, I can come to a reasonable measure of peace with the "Father" language that permeates the Franciscan corpus. I have given careful consideration to the words I might choose to express the fullness implied by a Franciscan understanding of the First Person of the Trinity.<sup>11</sup> Clearly the "Father-role" requires a capacity for an omnipotently creative bringing forth, a begetting, a birthing, a loving into being that is at its heart the evocative source of none other than Christ, the first begotten. The vocation of the Christ then, as the first begotten become incarnate, is to give a "face" to that source—to reveal "the Father," as Scripture tells us. *The incarnate Christ bears no less than the Creator's face.*

My sense of what the Creator might have intended to be revealed through the incarnation is confirmed by Meister Eckart's oft-quoted insight: "From all eternity God lies on a birthing bed." This image of birthing "from all eternity" is compelling for me perhaps because I have always felt close to God while being creative. To lose myself in creativity, as participative artist or as audience, is for me a timeless pleasure. Or is it because I am companioning my mother as I write this? It is our first Christmas shortly after the unexpected death of my father. To live daily with the one from whose incarnation I was born to flesh and blood life is a compelling and potent meditation. Perhaps it is also because I am familiar with Sara Ruddick's book *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace*.<sup>12</sup> In it she describes several aspects of what she calls "maternal practice," and I can think of no better behavioral descriptors for the faces of those who have mirrored God to me—that is, Love loving. I understand the hallmarks of Ruddick's "maternal practice" to be as follows:

1. *Holds close, welcomes change.* This is the ability to continue to be in loving relationship as the child grows. The changes heralding the ripening of the child into creative maturity are cause for celebration and not regret. There is no attempt to arrest the transformation process. Change is welcomed for its ongoing

revelation of the divine—an evolution into an evermore expansive experience of the possibilities of God-with-us.

2. *Attends to the particular rather than to the abstract general.* Each child is loved in her or his unique particularity. The notion of loving each child equally is exhibited not in uniform behavior toward each, but rather is given expression through attentive and individualized responses to the needs and best interests of each child. Each of us, and each bit of creation is loved uniquely and in a never again to be repeated articulation of divine love.
3. *Appreciates the unique her/his-story expressed in costly human flesh.* Not one of us has the same exuberant experience nor occupies the same place in time and space. And we have, each according to our own particular life, felt the cost of embodiment. There is no doubt our incarnation exacts its price. Our bodies require care, feel pain, suffer sickness, diminish, and ultimately slip from all of us. To know this is to be capable of great compassion and wise loving. Does not the face of Christ companion us even there too?
4. *Sees the lovable and extends a love that "knowledge" does not destroy.* There is a certain capacity for loving that does not diminish in the light of truthfulness. No matter what children may do, no matter what the consequences of their behavior, the love that is there for them remains steady, and indeed can continue to grow. For the past to be known, even its inevitable unsavory aspects, and for God's loving to continue in the wake of such knowing is the certain hope of every penitent.

What is particularly useful about these observable and eminently experienceable behaviors is that they are not gender specific. They serve as descriptors of God's activity in my life. Those who have been a "face of Christ" for me have either embodied or evoked such responses. These behaviors provide for me a transgender appropriation of God-like loving values that allow for the full range of human variation in every way imaginable. Here diversity is not a problem. Differences are wondrous opportunities to reveal further the capacity for loving inherent in the incarnate human experience. Cast in the widest way, such loving can find fruitful expression not only in immediate familial relationships, but can afford too a basis for community life and creativity in inter-religious dialogue and political accord.

But "maternal practice" in and of itself, is theologically neutral. For "maternal practice" to be useful in my own spiritual development, it requires a humble, disciplined contemplation—such that when I experience these be-

haviors, I can recognize the face of God-with-us. Only then can these behaviors be for me reflective of God and of the full range of the human Christ experience. In addition, in this particular spiritual context, not just the "cross" event, but all the human adventures and artful dimensions of the Christ-life can be understood as operative in the "facing" of my own life. When I contemplate the Christ-life, I contemplate the fullest life that is possible. For example, I too can experience annunciation, undergo transfiguration, meet another at Jacob's well, and intercede for the one discovered in sin. The gospel life, that is, the revelation of God-with-us, is no less than my life in its fullest possible truth. Love loving.

## On Contemplating Creation

I have already confessed earlier my ambivalence regarding the effects of the human presence in creation. I must grapple with a Franciscan tradition that insists on an important connection between the mysteries of the incarnation and creation. Quoted by Hayes, St. Bonaventure expresses this fact most succinctly:

All things are said to be transformed in the transfiguration of Christ, in as far as something in each creature was transfigured in Christ. For as a human being, Christ has something in common with all creatures. With the stone he shares existence; with the plants he shares life; with the animals he shares sensation; and with the angels he shares intelligence. Therefore all things are said to be transformed in Christ since—in his human nature—he embraces something of every creature in himself when he was transfigured.<sup>13</sup>

Hayes makes much of the Christic center this paragraph of Bonaventure presumes. I am equally intrigued by this apparent focus. Here not just the human but all things are caught up together in a common matrix. And that matrix is the Christ, the first-begotten beloved divine expression ultimately spoken in human incarnation. Thus Bonaventure understands the Word—the Christ—to impact and transform the cosmic whole of things. In this process the Cosmos is loved as the human is loved, for it is no less than the very stuff from which the flesh and blood incarnation of the first-born Christ, Word come among us as one of us, is articulated.

It could never be the intent of the God who birthed creation in love to discard eventually the physical Cosmos. Nor can we. To trivialize or diminish any of its awesomeness is to truncate the very vocabulary by which the Word of God originally found, and continues to find, incarnate expression.<sup>14</sup> *Every bit of creation, no matter how infinitesimal, reveals its loving creator.*<sup>15</sup> Nothing is

without possibility of transfiguration. Creation in its full Christed expression, becomes the body of the eternal Word and primary text of divine self-revelation—vast, monumental, and of which we are but a small part.

In my own life and in the life of the worshipping community, the cosmos is not merely background. It provides the necessary support and context for my physical life. It is a divine expression requiring my finest contemplative respect. Its value lies not so much in what I might use it for, but what it can reveal to me about its loving Creator and mine. The act most befitting the cosmos is not the pursuit of its utilitarian possibilities and riches, but rather an appreciation and celebration of the divine revelatory richness of expression it manifests, so generously and so irrepressibly.

Simply to utilize the creation I might find at my immediate disposal then—no matter how pragmatic or well meaning—is simply materialistic appropriation. But use it as humans we must. *We live by the congenial dispensation of our cosmic kin, and are thus nested in a cosmos whose purpose and "destiny" is the familial cosmic destiny of the human.* What this familial bond requires of us in turn is a spiritual sensitivity that understands that God intended for us to be participants in "redemptive completion" and not "salvific consumerism." Such a sensitivity becomes all the more urgent the more technologically creative we become in reaping the economic benefits of our "kinship." Likewise required of us is a willingness to consider the necessary means of affording a "fullness of life" for the whole of my "kin" in widest possible embrace.

Understanding ourselves as participants in creation's ultimate completion in Christ has a profound moral implication. We are nothing if not beloved participants in a great cosmic "kin-dom" coming.<sup>16</sup> While we may well opt to act as if estranged from this "kin-dom," or suffer involuntary ignorance of it, it is the whole of the cosmos, and thereby we too are completed in Christ. I do not participate in creation in order to appropriate it for my personal salvation at whatever level I might take that to be. To judge what is appropriate participation only in terms of personal or political rights, possessions, and control, while necessary, is inadequate in light of the great community in which we are nested and upon whose verdancy our very existence depends.

To paraphrase from the native tradition of the American continent, *we belong to this creation, this creation does not belong to us.* To act as if it does, is material consumerism in its most toxic incarnation. Similarly, I also ought not think of the Christ as somehow only "out there." The Christ incarnate is not separate from the created world I encounter in everyday life. In this sense therefore it is more accurate to say, as the Scriptures also affirm, that I am "in" Christ, rather than that Christ is "in" me. Nor is it the purpose of the incarnate Christ to "save" or "exempt" me from this world. It is in the very matter of the world that the incarnate Christ takes on flesh and blood expression.

## Toward an Intentional Incarnational Presence in the World

If we are to confirm the kinship with creation that St. Francis immortalized in his *Canticle of the Creatures*, we ought to be able to say that we “love that world. And [our] love for the world need not replace [our] love for God.”<sup>17</sup> Given the above three meditations (for that is how I hope they are received) on the Christ, the Father, and Creation, what might there be in the Franciscan tradition that can provide both wisdom and encouragement to live as intentional incarnational presence in this awesome world and in the circumstances of the life we face today?

Included in the *Facing the Christ Incarnate* program is an opportunity to hear from specially invited local guests the story of their experience of “facing” the Christ incarnate in their lives and ministry. They are “hosted” by a so-called “heritage guest,” a member of the team that for the occasion takes on the persona of a Franciscan from the historical tradition, such as Lady Jacoba, Giles, Leo, Francis, Clare, or even the foundress of a particular congregation. There is a certain grace that accompanies this role-playing and the shared stories of the heritage guests. I find myself listening differently no matter how familiar the words might be, when they are spoken by a sister or brother—a living fioretti—whose face I can see, and who can see mine.

The ensuing conversation in which all present participate is often a deep, heartfelt exchange. While specific trappings of culture, role expectations, and world circumstances vary and differentiate, there is a profound solidarity of heart that emerges in the story-telling and the dialogue. I am continually awed by the level of mutual vulnerability and encouragement these “fioretti” moments afford. To call forth the stories and to honor them as revelatory is a precious Franciscan tradition. And the wisdom that the heritage guest offers is some variation of what Clare wrote to Agnes in her third letter: “I consider you a co-worker of God . . . and a support of the weak members of his ineffable body. Who is there then that would not encourage me to rejoice over such marvelous joys?” (3LAG 8-9).<sup>18</sup>

The heritage guest best confirms the common spiritual inheritance of all the participants and can urge as Clare did of Agnes when she wrote to her: “Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance. And transform your whole being into the image of the Godhead Itself through contemplation” (3LAG 13).

For Clare, to become vulnerable to seeing God is to become transformed into God’s image, the very purpose of creation. Only in such mysterious knowing can I understand littleness, compassionate hospitality, and gratitude. Often, in doing humbling or troublesome work or in addressing personal fear or collective prejudice, we find the Christ incarnate most necessarily and most

transformatively “faced.” Hunger, lack, loss, discomfort, powerlessness, and the suffering of greed and materialistic attachment are part of the human condition. What is given me to do then is to be willingly little, knowingly subject to the vicissitudes of this life, everywhere Christ-hospitable, and in every circumstance blessing, as Francis did Leo: may the “face” of God manifest and give peace.

Such a spiritual practice of blessing presence requires a certain penitential maturity. I weep for the good that could be and is no longer or is not yet. I rejoice for what already is and praise God for what is still to come. I try everywhere and in every circumstance to be a willing participant in the creativity of love. In the process of this practice, should I find myself “taken where I would rather not go,” it requires that, even in those places, I dare to anticipate the transformation possible only with God. Surely this surpasses all reason and expectation and no other refuge than the Paschal paradox. In the presumed God-forsaken place, God-with-us is found as companion and mirror—incarnate, crucified, and resurrected.

Finally one more aspect must be considered. Conversations subsequent to *Facing the Christ Incarnate* need to affirm the cosmic dimensions of our incarnational vocation. We struggle daily with our issues of human interdependence, trying to discern the best ways to be brother and sister to each other. No Franciscan who is a Franciscan can say of a human body: “It is nothing.” What we are only now beginning to realize *from within the tradition* is that no Franciscan who is a Franciscan can say of any aspect of creation: “It is nothing.” For the Word to be incarnate among us requires not only human participation, but earth’s hospitable cosmic clay and sunlight for flesh and blood. Brother Sun, Mother Earth, Sisters Water and Moon: these names are not accidental flights of poetic fancy, but express our profound non-optional familial participation in the cosmic Christ event.

## A Parting Toast

One of the most helpful images for me from *Facing the Christ Incarnate* is that of fruit ripening. To recall that grapes ripen over time, that there are distinct phases in the planting and maturation processes is useful when grappling with the notion of the Cosmic Christ in my spiritual practice. To understand and then to actualize this concept is much like participating in a ripening process. It requires of me a particular graced love, a particular active interest and willingness, and much patience.

I must wryly admit that it is “patience” that affords me the most “growth opportunities.” Desiring sudden revelation or result, I forget the ripening process proceeds gradually and is punctuated with only apparently sudden trans-



formations. What are experienced as dramatic breakthroughs are actually the result of the "day-to-day-ness" of barely perceptible growth. Suddenly the seedling bursts out of the ground into the light. Suddenly a branch is pruned. Suddenly the fruit is plucked and pressed. And only in its own time is the divine wine in apparent "suddenness" poured out and celebrated.

So it is in "facing" the incarnate Christ. And so it is in ripening into our own cosmic Franciscan destiny. There are the "sudden" circumstances of my life that profoundly alter my way of being in the world and my understanding of it. And there is my perception of the "day-to-day-ness" of my life. What I am beginning to discover is that it matters profoundly what I think of my life's daily-ness. What affords the vintner patience in the wine-growing process is the vision of the loveliness of the mature wine.<sup>19</sup> That vision *from the beginning* lovingly informs the planting and the pruning. It determines *from the beginning* the length of time the wine ages, and it is what is celebrated in the actual savoring of the wine itself. To complete the metaphor, it might be said that *from the beginning* it is the destiny of the Word as the Christ become flesh and blood to be woven into the cosmic fabric of creation. *From the beginning* it is the destiny of the cosmos to ripen to fullness in Christ. *From the beginning* it is the destiny of the human to participate in that same incarnate destiny. Thus it is my task to allow the vision of my cosmic participation in this divinely intended end, to inform my patience and my daily life.

It is my hope that the considerations I have offered here stimulate a desire for further conversation. They are what is most currently "ripe" in my own reflection. *Facing the Christ Incarnate* was and continues to be for me a rich source of grace. I now conclude with the full text of Clare's exhortation to Agnes, already partially quoted earlier. It is an appropriate way to bless "what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched," and it is a happy toast to the cosmic adventure we share in Franciscan community.

*Place your mind in the mirror of eternity!  
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!  
Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance!  
And transform your whole being into the image of the God-head Itself  
through contemplation!  
So that you may feel what his friends feel  
as they taste the hidden sweetness  
which God himself has reserved from the beginning  
for those who love Him (3LAg 12-14).*

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Quoted directly from the cover of the *Facing the Christ Incarnate* brochure as designed by Kathleen Moffatt, OSF.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph P. Chinnici, OFM, "The Prophetic Heart: The Evangelical Form of Religious Life in the Contemporary United States," *The Cord*, 44.11(Nov., 1994): 298.

<sup>3</sup>Chinnici, 304.

<sup>4</sup>The quote is directly from the *Facing the Christ Incarnate* brochure. See Zachary Hayes, OFM, "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity: The Roots of Franciscan Christocentrism and Its Implications for Today," *The Cord*, 46.1(Jan./Feb., 1996): 3-17.

<sup>5</sup>See the complete text of these prayers of St. Francis and the accompanying notations in *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 99-100.

<sup>6</sup>The fingerprint image was initially suggested by Bill Short, OFM.

<sup>7</sup>Hayes, 7.

<sup>8</sup>Hayes, 3.

<sup>9</sup>Hayes, 3.

<sup>10</sup>As cited in Hayes, 4.

<sup>11</sup>What I am sharing here is not so much a discussion of the specific culture-bound gendered appellation of "Father." Instead, I want to name the First Person of the Trinity with those words that express my own best graced intuition of that ever mysterious and ultimately ineffable reality. For me this reality is best expressed in words that harken back to the process of Christ-begetting. Yet I must also acknowledge that the words I speak will never fully capture the whole process. Inherent to the conversation is a willing humility to learn what other possibilities there are for what is best understood in our Franciscan tradition as Love loving. There is much I do not yet know.

<sup>12</sup>Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup>Bonaventura, *Sermo I, Dom II in Quad. IX*, 215-219, as quoted by Hayes, 13.

<sup>14</sup>I am indebted to Thomas Berry for this notion. It was part of a lecture he delivered in 1982 at Mundelein College, Chicago.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. LM 9:1 in *Bonaventura: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, tr. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 262-3.

<sup>16</sup>I am indebted to Georgene Wilson, OSF, for this term. She introduces it in *Sabbath Bread* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, nd).

<sup>17</sup>Hayes, 16.

<sup>18</sup>Quotations from Clare's writings are from *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis Armstrong and Ignatius Brady (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

<sup>19</sup>This image is taken from St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*. It came to my attention via Jack Wintz, OFM, "Christ, the Head of Creation," *America* (Sept. 14, 1996): 22-23.

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(Gabriele Uhlein, OSF)

## Franciscan Spirituality and Christology

Michael Higgins, TOR

### The Place of Christ in Franciscan Spirituality

Due to Francis's intense devotion to Jesus, Franciscan spirituality has often been described as profoundly Christocentric. Francis encountered in Jesus the fullest expression of the length that God was willing to go to reach out to all women and men and enter into relationship with them. The key moments of this Divine inbreaking were highlighted for Francis in the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Eucharist—in the Crib, the Cross, and the Chalice. "There is nothing that shows more graphically the humility and the poverty which the Divine Word accepted in becoming incarnate than in the helplessness of infancy, the defencelessness of the crucifixion, and the silence of the Eucharist."<sup>1</sup>

These elements of the saving power of God were experienced by Francis in a very personal way. He saw in Christ the paradigm *par excellence* of how poverty and obedience are expressions of a loving relationship with Divine love. God had touched his life in such a profound way that he yearned to live as Christ had lived and thus to become a worthy son of "so noble a Father." The recreation of the first Christmas scene at Greccio, the intense love for the Eucharist, and the mystical events of a lonely retreat on La Verna and the reception of the stigmata bear eloquent witness to Francis's tremendous devotion to Christ. However, the ordinary events of the Saint's life give us an even more profound insight into his spirituality.

Several stories from the early biographies make clear that what separates Francis from those inspired by a stunning sunset is that Francis found beauty and significance also in the less aesthetically pleasing aspects of the physical world. A worm signified Christ because in Psalm 22, David, ancestor and pre-

figuration of Christ, proclaimed, "I am a worm and no man." In a leper, Francis discovered the image of Christ as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. When Francis saw two sticks crossed on the ground, they led him to meditate on Christ and his cross.<sup>2</sup>

Francis's gift was to be able to see differently. When one is in mindful relationship with God, the Mystery of all that is, the whole of creation is seen as being imbued with the very presence of divinity.

### The Incarnation—Jesus Christ, the God-Man

God confirms the dignity of women and men not only in creating them in love and in the Divine image and likeness, but also, more forcibly, in the awe inspiring event of the Incarnation (cf. RegNB 23). Francis often underlines the love of God which is manifested in the humiliation of Christ in the Incarnation. Praise should be given to God who has created all things "spiritual and corporal and, . . . made us in [the Divine] image" (RegNB 23:1), who "sent the beloved Son from on high and He was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary" (OffPass 5:3). And, when men and women fell into sin, this loving God "brought about [Christ's] birth as true God and true man" (RegNB 23:3). The Son then "humbled Himself when he came from the royal throne into the womb of the Virgin" (Adm 1:16). This act of self-emptying had such a profound impact on Francis that he often could think of nothing else (1Cel 84). The fact that Christ took "the flesh of humanity and our frailty" from the Virgin Mary and became human (2EpFid 4) surprised and delighted Francis. He states that Christ did not take on only our human flesh, he took on our frailty as well—the fullness of what it means to be human, body and soul, with all the limits of the human condition.

It is a common misconception that Francis saw the body only as sinful and as something that has to be tamed, whipped into submission, and castigated. While there are some elements of this kind of thinking, particularly in the way that he treated his own body, his writings frequently point out the goodness of the human body:

- The human body was the instrument God used to enter into creation in a dramatic way in the Incarnation (Adm 1:16-22).
- It is through our human bodies that we are able to touch other people and enter into relationship with them and the rest of creation (1EpFid 1-4; 2EpFid; CantSol).
- It is through our bodies that we are able to encounter Christ in this world and to receive him in the Eucharist (2EpFid 14).

- It is through our human bodies that we are able to be followers of Christ. Men and women are to be disciples of Christ not only in the spirit, but with the fullness of who they are, both spirit and body (OffPass; RegNB 16; 2EpFid; Adm 6:2).

From these texts it is clear that following Christ implies the donation of one's whole self, body and spirit. The physical dimension of women and men is an integral aspect of our relationship with God.

## Christ in the Passion

Christ was, according to Francis, "the Good Shepherd Who suffered the passion of the cross to save His sheep" (Adm 6:1). This was the result of Christ's obedience to God, a sign of Divine love for women and men, and the consequence of a life lived in radical openness to the guiding force of the Divine will. Therefore, in the passion Jesus submitted his will to the will of God, and the will of God

... was such that the blessed and glorious Son, Whom He gave to us and Who was born for us, should, through His own blood, offer Himself as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross: not for Himself through Whom all things were made, but for our sins, leaving us an example that we should follow in His footprints (2EpFid 11-13).

The death of Jesus was, for Francis, the consequence of the irresistible power of Divine love and goodness. He died from a love that did not know compromise, based as it was on an all consuming desire to be one with the Divine will which was directed to the salvation of all men and women.

The self-emptying of Jesus, demonstrated most clearly in the Incarnation and his free choice of poverty, became the model of faith for Francis. He saw in Christ a man who embraced the Divine will in love, even to the point of dying on the cross, and he wanted to do the same.

## Christ in the Eucharist

In the Incarnation and Passion of Christ the love of God is demonstrated, the full dignity of humanity is shown, and men and women are given the opportunity to share in the fullness of Divine life and love. For Francis, this Divine favor continues in the Eucharist, which is nothing less than a continuation of the Incarnation and the ongoing fruit of the Passion. It is the very presence of Christ among us. The only difference between this sacramental

presence and the historical presence of Jesus is one of modality. Francis expresses this clearly:

Why do you not recognize the truth and believe in the Son of God? See, daily He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne in the womb of the Virgin; daily He comes to us in a humble form; daily He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as He appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now He reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by means of their bodily sight, yet believed Him to be God as they contemplated Him with the eyes of faith, so, as we see bread and wine with [our] bodily eyes, we too are to see and firmly believe them to be His most holy Body and Blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful (Adm 1:15-22).

Through participation in the sacrament, men and women become united with Christ, share intimately in the love and saving power of God, and are connected more deeply with all of creation.

Let the whole of humanity 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 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 (EpOrd 26-29).

And in the Letter to the Clergy he writes:

In this world we have and see nothing corporally of the Most High except [His] Body and Blood, and the words through which we have been made and have been redeemed from death to life. . . . Are we not moved by a sense of piety concerning all these things, since the good Lord offers Himself into our hands and we handle Him and receive Him daily with our mouth (EpCler 3,8).

Francis's great love of the Eucharist helps explain why he had such a strong reverence for priests and encouraged them to live a holy life:

Listen: if the blessed Virgin is so honored, as it is right, since she carried [Christ] in [her] most holy womb; if the blessed Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb

in which he lay for some time is so venerated, how holy, just, and worthy must be the person who touches [Him] with his hands, receives [Him] in the heart and mouth, and offers [Him] to others to be received. Look at your dignity, you [who are] priests, and be holy since He is holy. And as the Lord God has honored you above all persons because of this ministry, so you should love, reverence, and honor Him above all others (EpOrd 21-24).

Francis's insistence on the cleanliness of the vessels and linens used in the celebration of Mass, as well as his encouragement to the priests to live holy lives, was a natural outcome of his reverence for the Eucharist and his devotion to Churches. However, even when priests sinned and fell short of their calling, Francis continued to venerate them:

I act in this way since I see nothing corporally of the Most High Son of God in this world except His Most holy Body and Blood which they receive and which they alone administer to others (Test 9).

## The Christocentric Nature of Franciscan Theology

The special relationship that Francis had with Christ and his ardent devotion to the significant events in the Savior's life spilled over into every action and colored every thought of the Saint. The relationship conferred a special Christocentric character to his spirituality, a spirituality that was born in a personal encounter with Divine love. Francis was such a popular figure in his own time and down through the ages that it is easy to see how his experience of God gave birth to a uniquely "Franciscan" way of doing theology—a theology which preoccupied itself primarily with the place of Christ in human life and in creation and with God's activity in all parts of creation through love and grace.

Francis placed Christ at the center of his love because he experienced Christ as the center of God, One and Three, and at the center of creation. In a word, Christ always and everywhere led him to God. Franciscan theologians, influenced and guided by the example of the Poverello, struggled to give sound theological expression to the centrality of Christ—the One sent by God into the world because of Divine love, the One who was the model and channel of creation, the One who established the possibility of salvation through the redemptive power of the Paschal Mystery, and the One who remains with his people always in the Eucharist.

For Francis, the first absolute is God, the Divine One who cleared up the darkness of his heart, who entered into relationship with him, and who guided him throughout his life. Christ is the one who showed him how best to be in relationship to this great and awesome God and who showed him what a truly

Christian life is all about. Christ assumed the central position in Francis's spirituality. With the force of his very being, in his actions and preaching, and through his profound example of humility and poverty, Jesus revealed and pointed the way to God, the Most High. Franciscan theologians, from Alexander of Hales to Duns Scotus, used this Christocentric vision as a point of departure in their own speculative theologizing about the mystery of God.

The theology of St. Bonaventure (1217-1274) is "imbued with characteristically Franciscan concerns and qualities, to such a degree that some interpreters see him as the most complete embodiment of the spirit of the Franciscan school."<sup>3</sup> For Francis, the experience of God in and through the person of Christ, which expressed the reality of God as the Supreme Good, characterized his spirituality. However, the Poverello was not a theologian and never wrote about his experience in a theological or systematic way. This is certainly not the case with Bonaventure. Influenced by Francis, Bonaventure developed a theology that is highly Trinitarian and Christocentric while maintaining a distinctly "Franciscan" flavor based on the love and goodness of God. It is a theology that is at once profoundly personal and intellectually lofty and complex. The foundation of his Christology is grounded in the firm belief that Jesus, the center of all reality, became incarnate and visible to women and men.

In its deepest sense, is not the question of the saving significance of Christ precisely the question of how we, in our relationship to Christ, find a saving, healing, integrating relation with the reality of God? ... The work of Bonaventure reflects the same concern.<sup>4</sup>

Christ is the exemplar of all that it means to be holy and the fullest example of what it means to live a moral life. His example, though, is not merely one way among many possible ways to live, but it is the obligatory way for men and women. Since Christ is the center of all that is, when one lives as Christ did and acts as Christ acted, then one is able to participate in the very structure of reality itself.

Christ is the blueprint, the form, or the inspiring image that God uses as a model in molding every part of creation. The human person in a special way reveals that creative model.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the focus of a life of grace is ultimately one of conformity to Christ. By becoming more and more like Christ, we enter into an ever deeper relationship to God. In this sense, Bonaventure's Christology is very practical. However, on another level, it is intensely mystical in nature.

Yet Bonaventure is able to avoid the Gnostic and Docetic tendency inherent in cosmic Christologies to ignore or deny the full humanity of Christ.

This is the significance of his strong and insistent appeal to the actual historical form of Jesus' life; and above all to his human poverty and weakness; to his real human obedience which caused such anguish and suffering and led eventually to the violent death on the cross. This is what Christians call an incarnation.<sup>6</sup>

The challenge of the Christian life, our very destiny, is to become more Christ-like. He is, after all, the revelation of the ultimate structure of all that is and the clearest example of what it means to be in relation with God. When we participate in this mystery we personalize the reality of our sonship or daughtership in relation to Divine love itself. "It is in this deepest level of God-likeness that the created world is brought to its God-appointed end in man."<sup>7</sup>

Duns Scotus (1266-1308) is the Franciscan theologian who best expressed theologically what was implicit in the spirituality of St. Francis: the centrality of Christ in all of creation and the great dignity of women and men. He presented Christ as the unique key through which all of the created universe, especially women and men who are called to participate in Divine life itself, can be interpreted. In other words, theology has God as its prime and absolute objective, and God, through Divine grace and love, created everything—natural and supernatural—through Christ. Christ was not created outside of God, nor was he created at all. He was from all times part of the uncreated triune Godhead. However, he entered creation in a profound and inextricable fashion in the Incarnation—the fullest expression of God's willingness to enter into the very stuff of human existence in order to be in relationship with men and women. In the reality of Christ's human existence, humanity itself is elevated to an immeasurable dignity. In this sense, Christ becomes the highest of all creation in every sense of the word and the model for all of human life and endeavors. Specifically, Christ is the "first" absolute in the Divine plan and greater by far than any imperfection caused by human sinfulness or imperfection. Thus, even if Adam had not sinned, the Word of God most definitely would have become Incarnate in the God-man, Jesus Christ. Scotus put it this way:

I say that the Incarnation of Christ was not foreseen as occasioned by sin, but was immediately foreseen from all eternity by God as a good more proximate to the end. Thus Christ in his human nature is foreseen as closer to the end [God had in mind in creating] than the others—speaking of those predestined, for each and everyone of these was first ordered to grace and glory before the fall.<sup>8</sup>

William Short presents this wonderful image of Scotus's position:

The Incarnation of the Word is the highest good, the supreme expression of God's love. By comparison with the infinity of love revealed in the Incarnation, Adam's sin and correcting its effects appear as a lesser good. (To use a metaphor, why build the Taj Mahal to cover a pothole?)<sup>9</sup>

In essence, then, the universe is not sin-centered, but rather Christ-centered. Further, since God created all things through Christ, every being and every aspect of creation ultimately finds its reason for existence in him. "The human nature of Christ is the motif the Divine Architect was to carry out in the rest of creation. . . . The whole universe is full of Christ."<sup>10</sup> As every point in the circumference of a circle is defined by its distance from the center of the circle, so every facet of creation can define itself only in relation to Christ, the center of all. The cross, with its four arms, points to every direction of the universe. At the center of the cross is Christ. In the same way, Christ is the center of all of creation—spiritual and physical—and is the ultimate source of meaning.

The Incarnational thrust within Scotus's thought defines it as a specifically Christian view of reality. Jesus Christ stands at the center of the Scotistic universe as the fullness of human nature in union with God. Scotistic thought centers around the importance of each person and the unique dignity of each human act and of each human life. Salvation history recounts the story of concrete and contingent events in which God freely chose to enter into the unfolding of a particular human life. Each life, each moment, then, offers an opportunity for the discovery of the value and dignity each one of us holds in the eyes of God.<sup>11</sup>

Scotus is also the theologian who developed an acceptable theological explanation for what would become the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Many theologians, including Origen, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas, had rejected this concept as impossible. They reasoned that Scripture is clear in its presentation of Christ as the Redeemer of all women and men. This would not be true if even one person had not needed redemption because she was not subject to original sin in her conception. Scotus responded that if Mary had in fact been preserved from original sin, then it must have been the result of the merits of her son. Christ was therefore her redeemer as much as he was the redeemer of everyone else. Thus, the Immaculate Conception poses no problem to the universality of Christ's redemptive role. With this rather simple argument, Scotus provided a theologically sound basis for the eventual acceptance of the Immaculate Conception as an article of faith.

## Summary Points

The basis for the grandeur and dignity of humanity is grounded in Francis's conviction that women and men are beings created by God, created in the image and likeness of Christ, and redeemed through the instrumentality of the Incarnation. All of human existence is set against the backdrop of love. God, who is love, created men and women through love and for love. Human existence is, in a very real sense, an incarnation of the love of God and a consequence of Divine love. Every man and women, then, is an incarnation of God.

One important implication of this Franciscan vision of human existence is this: if we are indeed made in the image of Christ, both in our physical and spiritual dimensions, then the more human we become the more Christ-like we become. Therefore, holiness does not consist in the denial of humanity and everything that makes up who we are as humans. Rather, it is found precisely in the embrace of our humanity.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Eric Doyle, OFM, and Damian McElrath, "St. Francis of Assisi and the Christocentric Character of Franciscan Life and Doctrine," in *Franciscan Christology*, ed. Damian McElrath (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1980), 10.

<sup>2</sup>William R. Cook, *Francis of Assisi* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 54-5.

<sup>3</sup>Zachary Hayes, "The Life and Christological Thought of St. Bonaventure," in *Franciscan Christology*, 59.

<sup>4</sup>Hayes, 63.

<sup>5</sup>William Short, *The Franciscans* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 114.

<sup>6</sup>Hayes, 64.

<sup>7</sup>Hayes, 67.

<sup>8</sup>Duns Scotus, "Redemption and the Incarnation," trans. Allan B. Wolter, OFM, in *Franciscan Christology*, 153.

<sup>9</sup>Short, 115.

<sup>10</sup>Alan B. Wolter, "John Duns Scotus on the Primacy and Personality of Christ," *Franciscan Christology*, 141.

<sup>11</sup>Mary Elizabeth Ingham, "John Duns Scotus: An Integrated Vision," in *The History of Franciscan Theology*, ed., Kenan B. Osborne, OFM, (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 1994), 227.

*If we are indeed made in the image of Christ, both in our physical and spiritual dimensions, then the more human we become the more Christ-like we become.*

*(Michael Higgins, OOR)*

*I have never seen you, Assisi,  
aside from photos and postcards;  
yet, I feel I know you.  
Your story has been told to me over and over.*

*There you are, high on a hill;  
a beacon for all to see.  
Your buildings glimmering in the sun,  
Standing high above, beckoning all  
to raise their hearts to our Lord  
as you do your towers.*

*You have stood as a light among the nations;  
a sign of peace; a sign of hope,  
ever since the Poor Little Man  
walked your streets begging and preaching.*

*Here you were, Assisi, in the final preparation days  
to celebrate the Feast of the Poor Little Man  
when God called from the depths of Mother Earth.*

*God called and all the stones trembled in awe.  
God bellowed out, "I AM," and the foundations  
shook and bowed in adoration.  
The stones heard and recognized God's voice  
and crumbled to the ground in homage of  
"I AM."*

*The world was in shock.  
What does it mean?  
How can this be?  
Our Assisi which stands for peace for all humankind  
lies in heaps of rubble.*

*Oh! The heaps know, as does all the rubble ...  
"I AM" has spoken again.  
The Poor Little Man in his grave knows ...  
"I AM" has spoken again.*

*"Go rebuild my Church which has fallen into ruin,"  
the stones shouted as they fell to the ground.  
Not with brick and mortar, but rebuild it with hearts  
afire in the Spirit:  
Rebuild it with the joy and penance of the  
Poor Little Man.*

*Assisi, I have never seen you aside from photos,  
but your story is being told once again to the world, and,  
"I AM" is whispering from among  
the piles of debris.*

Althea Anne Spencer, OSF

## Stones of Assisi

## Out of the Birdbath: Following the Patron Saint of Ecology

Keith Warner, OFM

On Easter Sunday, 1980, Pope John Paul II named Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology. As we approach the twentieth anniversary of this event, it is important that as a Franciscan family we begin to address environmental issues more seriously and to reflect on what it means to be followers of *il Poverello* in an age of ecological crisis. This essay, which makes no pretense to being either scholarly or comprehensive, addresses the issues through the lens of Christian Franciscan spirituality and offers some ideas on how we might get involved in solutions.

### What Role Can Franciscans Play?

There is sometimes an odd disconnection between the difficult and practical struggle to defend the integrity of creation and the majority of discussions that I have had around these matters. Often when I listen to Franciscans talk about nature I feel that I'm looking at one of the nineteenth century romantic painters, who created fantastic and beautiful landscapes of the American frontier. While this point of view is preferable to one which sees nature only in terms of consumption, we must move beyond seeing nature exclusively as a gift of beauty. We need to face the facts of our environmental crises and hold in tension creation's beauty and the unprecedented threats it faces. We Franciscans seem reluctant to commit our time or resources to these concerns.

Question: where are the Franciscans in the debate about the environment? Question: what efforts are being made to address environmental issues from a Franciscan perspective? Question: does the Franciscan family have a distinct

contribution to make? As followers of the patron saint of ecology, we have a responsibility to devote at least part of our life's effort to imitating his example of love for creation. How might we do this?

### Incarnational Spirituality

The two major components of importance are to construct a Franciscan theological lens for viewing nature and environmental problems, and to help those with whom we minister to realize that our environmental behavior is an expression of our spirituality. The first is perhaps an assignment of a more specialized nature, but it cannot stand alone. In Francis's writings and the historical sources of his life we have evidence of his spirituality of nature. Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, and John Duns Scotus have developed the Franciscan theological frameworks that help approach the question.

But we need a contemporary, fully developed Franciscan theology of nature as a way to organize our thoughts and perspectives on nature and to provide a response to environmental crises that is both consistent and faithful. Until recently the relationship between humanity and nature was much more simple, and inherited biblical attitudes toward nature were sufficient to provide guidance in this area. The human/nature relationship is now far more strained and problematic than it has ever been, and there is need for a more positive view of nature which assigns non-human creation a value. Until there is a broader awareness of the consequences of indifference toward the environment *and* a consensus to value the survival of non-human creation over human convenience and greater consumption, we will not see noticeable improvement in the well-being of the earth's natural systems. In our Franciscan tradition we have the basis for articulating a theological approach that can provide this framework.

For many, Creation spirituality has provided a refreshing change from theologies concerned exclusively with human endeavor. Writers such as Thomas Berry, Matthew Fox, and Brian Swimme have argued for a re-interpretation of the creation story which is more positive and centered on the inherent goodness of creation. While there is much to like about Creation spirituality, it can also be a bit utopian, short on specific suggestions for how to address our problems. It is a prescription for how human/nonhuman and human/divine relationships ought to be, yet it fails to explain adequately how to move in that direction. Creation spirituality seems at times to be more concerned with rejecting major pieces of Christian theology than renewing it in a way relevant to the social and ecological problems we currently face.

Franciscans cannot accept Berry's, Fox's, and Swimme's works uncritically. For while both Franciscan spirituality and Creation spirituality advocate a deep

sense of relationship with nature, there are points of conflict between them. Two of the conflicts revolve around the person of Christ and the means of reforming human behavior. The Franciscan theological tradition has the insight and tools which can help connect the faith of ordinary Christians with the need to see the well-being of all of creation as something in which God takes great interest. The importance placed on the incarnation of Christ unites Christocentric and creation-oriented theologies.

Christocentrism has always been a defining characteristic of Franciscanism based on Francis's mandate to follow "the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ" (RegNB 1:1). While there is need to broaden the focus of God's salvific activity beyond just the human species, there are problems with theologies that fail to make any connection between Jesus and our relationship with nature or the material world. Perhaps Christians would be more open to an ecological theology if it were connected to the Jesus they worship on Sunday morning.

### Franciscan Christocentrism, Redemptive Completion, and the Cosmic, Ecological Christ

It's remarkable how succinctly the theology of the cosmic Christ in the Franciscan tradition addresses the need for an understanding of Jesus that lays a foundation for a greater valuation of the natural world.<sup>1</sup> A Franciscan understanding of Jesus' life and person, as interpreted by Bonaventure and Scotus, connects the Jesus-story with our contemporary needs to re-value nature. A deeper reflection on the mystery of the incarnation of Christ is a portal into a more sophisticated understanding of God's belief in the goodness of the created world. The incarnation marked a threshold in the relationship between God and humanity, and God and the whole created world. God chose to sacramentalize the world in a more profound and unprecedented way. This belief in the goodness of creation has always been present in the Franciscan tradition, but we are now in a social situation in which we need to give this belief greater prominence.

In his succinct essay on John Duns Scotus, *Incarnation, Individuality, and Diversity*, Kenan Osborne writes:

Jesus, in his humanity, indeed sacramentalizes the finality of God's whole world, a world in which human freedom and mis-freedom (sin) exist. The whole world is sacramentalized, not just the "nice" part of it. The incarnation, then, begins one might say, with the very first act of God *ad extra*—the first creative moment of our world. The incarnation is a process moving through the history of our created world, and with each subsequent step the meaning of the world, the finality

of the world, the "why" of the world emerges to some degree in a clearer way. We are finding out more about the incarnation than ever before. It is an ascending experience. Like climbing a mountain, the higher one goes, the wider and broader one's perspective. In the Jesus-event, a major revelation of the meaning of creation, the "why" of creation, takes place. This is what the world and its history are all about.<sup>2</sup>

This understanding of incarnation is deeply Christocentric and, at the same time, embraces material creation as good. God's generosity to us is expressed through creation, and the incarnation of Christ sacramentalizes that creation.

The cosmos, as Bonaventure writes, is the primal book of divine self-revelation. And the meaning of the cosmos is concentrated in humanity and radicalized in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the doctrine of the primacy of Christ points the believer to an understanding of the inherent meaning of the cosmos. There has probably been no period in history when this doctrine of the cosmic Christ was as important as it is right now.<sup>3</sup>

In Hayes's explanation of Franciscan Christocentrism, we are freed from the dilemma of being forced to choose between a creational theology and a redemptive theology. Hayes proposes Bonaventure's theory of redemptive completion as a way to integrate a positive appreciation of creation and humanity's need for redemption.

Completion refers to the process of bringing creation to its God-intended end which is anticipated already in the destiny of Christ. Redemption refers to the necessary process of dealing with all the obstacles that stand in the way. Such a model could be easily related to the sense of an emerging cosmos as it appears to us today in the light of the sciences. This would allow us to create a larger framework for spirituality and theology which would have some resonance with the cultural images that have such a pervasive impact on the minds of our people.<sup>4</sup>

These two contemporary theologians, among others, remind us that Jesus Christ is not irrelevant to our environmental problems. Although not a trained theologian, Francis had a profound insight into the love of God expressed through creation. Francis, Bonaventure, Scotus and many others have preached a theology broad enough to embrace the Christ of the Scriptures, our Christian tradition, and a theology of nature as inherently valuable and good.



## Penance in an Ecological Age

Francis also understood the human heart, and his prescription for its change was to do penance. He identified himself as penitent and chose to follow Jesus in this way. While our ecological situation may be quite different today, there are several key penitential values that point us toward what I believe would be a Franciscan response to environmental problems. Some of these values are: humility as expressed through poverty and simplicity; service to the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized; participation in the mystery of the Eucharist; and peacemaking.

Here again we see a clear contrast with Creation spirituality. Fox and Berry have both been criticized because they fail to take into account the difficulty of changing human behavior. Berry writes beautifully of the mystery and celebration of the vitality of life on our planet, and his prose is truly inspiring. Fox, like most Creation spirituality writers, is uncomfortable with the idea that human beings are fallen and in need of redemption, and he prefers an emphasis on "original grace." He suggests that the release of the "mystic child" within us will lead us to want to share our wealth and develop a respect for the Earth.

A major problem with Creation spirituality, however, is that it fails to take into account the real brokenness and darkness in human nature brought about by sin. Compulsive greed and chronic indifference are the two greatest obstacles to a healthy relationship with creation. Mainstream Christianity and Creation spirituality have failed to acknowledge that sin has an ecological dimension. We North Americans are grasping for so much wealth that it cannot possibly be sustained. Our lifestyle is robbing the underdeveloped world as well as nature's ability to restore herself. We are refusing to accept our place—a classic definition of sin. Creation spirituality, without an emphasis on repentance, and life-changing *metanoia*, will remain a utopian or eschatological vision.<sup>5</sup>

Creation spirituality does, however, provoke us to reflect on what the human/nature relationship could be. Reflection on Francis's writings and spirituality, gives evidence that the model for all of the relationships in which humans participate is the model of human family. The two texts which provide the clearest indication of this are *The Canticle of the Creatures* and the *First Letter to the Faithful*. In the latter, Francis writes of how our decision to do penance places us in relationship with Jesus. When we do penance we become the spouse, brother, and mother of Jesus (1EpFid 1:17). The strongest theme to emerge from this part of the *Letter* is that we become related to Jesus when we become penitents.

Francis assumes this same underlying grid of familial relationship when he writes the capstone of his theological vision, *The Canticle of the Creatures*. This poem expresses, through powerful symbolic language, how the elements of nature are praiseworthy and related both to God and to humanity. Francis praises the diversity and beauty of the plant kingdom: "Praised be You, my Lord, through our sister mother earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs" (CanSol 9). He admits that we humans are subject to sin and in need of forgiveness, but he affirms the even more fundamental truth that we are all related. This work seems to capture the sense of peace and reconciliation Francis achieved with the various parts of himself at the end of his life. I believe that Francis was named the patron saint of ecology not only because he loved nature but also because he articulated a mystical vision of the interrelatedness of all creation in his life and in his *Canticle*.

Francis's lyrical vision of the goodness of the world presents a vision in clear contrast to the pessimism of the heretical Cathars of his time. Italian social historian Raoul Manselli wrote a biography of Francis that is most useful in helping us understand Francis in the context of the popular religious currents of his era.

Francis's repeated affirmation of deep devotion to the Eucharist and to the permanent presence of Christ on earth that it signified was directed in turn against the Cathars. Similarly, the *Canticle's* praise of God as Creator and for what he created strikes at the heart of one of the basic tenets of Catharism, according to which the Creator, or at least the ruler, of the physical world is Satan, as portrayed in the heresy's many and varying myths.

Against these ideas Francis did not resort to theological argumentation that would have been foreign to his temperament and, frankly, to his level of education. Rather, he brings out two aspects of the world: the omnipotence of God and the positive quality of creation as a work of beauty, implying as well its goodness. . . . The universe, therefore, cannot be evil: this is the conclusion contained in Francis's *Canticle*. Nor is it hell within which angels are imprisoned. Rather, it is the work and the result of an extraordinary, almighty goodness that, in the creation of the universe, reveals itself to be beauty as well.<sup>6</sup>

In *The Canticle of the Creatures*, therefore, we understand Francis's view of nature as a sacramental expression of God's generous love, a love which binds us to interdependent relationship. As in Francis's era, we live in a time that devalues nature's inherent goodness. The Cathars rejected this notion on reli-

gious grounds, while today our society strips, beats and pollutes nature for economic profit. Both stances are fundamental rejections of the incarnation.

## Beyond the Stewardship Model: Nature as Family

In the past thirty years religious people in North America have begun to address the abuse of nature, generally by asserting that the Genesis story has been misunderstood and appropriated to justify profit at the expense of ecological wholeness. Christians and Jews have pointed to Genesis as a model for environmental stewardship. Stewardship is, indeed, a good idea, and a model which can help bring sanity to a species destroying its own life-support systems. But those of us in the Franciscan tradition have an additional model to which we can turn: the *familial* model of relating to creation left to us by Francis. In the stewardship model, humans care for the earth because they want to take care of themselves and future generations: God "put us in charge" of the beauty and bounty of earth. The familial model values relationship with the beauty and diversity of creation, celebrating the interaction between ourselves and earth's many creatures.

Obviously we cannot live without objectifying parts of nature and using them for our food and well-being, but at the same time, we are called to reflect on God's generosity to us expressed in the diverse colors, shapes, power, smells, textures, intricacy, and magnificence of creation. Agriculture necessarily operates out of the stewardship model, but we all need to practice some appreciation of nature for its own sake, whether it be bird-watching, flower planting, or other forms of immersing oneself in creation. Creation has intrinsic value, and we do well to remind ourselves of this through regular activities. Nature observation is a spiritual discipline.

## Cortesía and Creation

Francis is perhaps most original when he extends his notion of chivalric courtesy to non-human creatures. He was, of course, deeply influenced by the ideals of the troubadour and courtly love. He "spiritualized" the notion of *cortesía*, a term far stronger than the English word "courtesy." *Cortesía* implies the notion of honorable deference, respect, largesse, special and personal consideration of the needs of others, especially the poor and vulnerable. Francis embodied a joyous humility in his respect for the good of creation.<sup>7</sup> The courtesy of Francis charms us even today. Generosity, respect and honor, all pillars of courtesy, are much-needed virtues in the contemporary world, especially in areas of conflict over environmental issues. At stake in the heated arguments is the well-being of plants, animals, and humans. All forms of life have an inherent right to exist, and elementary courtesy requires that we acknowledge this.

What form might these attitudes, so fully embodied by Francis in the Middle Ages, take among us today? Celebrating our relationship with Brother Wind, Sister Water, Brother Fire, and our sister Mother Earth must serve as the foundation, but for many this must be preceded by acknowledging the existence of interdependent relationships. In the industrialized West we have forgotten how dependent are our bodies on safe and pure air, water, and food. As Franciscans, whose legacy it is to celebrate the simple elements of life which most take for granted, we can provide a tremendous service to the Church and world by reminding our brothers and sisters to be grateful for the gifts of each day. Like Creation spirituality, a Franciscan incarnational spirituality will begin by changing our internal focus or consciousness. Personal, familial, and communal celebrations can help this immensely.

Proclaiming peace and reconciliation was another expression of Francis's courtesy. We can imitate him by being environmental peacemakers. Just as Francis built peace in the relationship between the bishop and podestà by singing *The Canticle of the Creatures*, we can bring reconciliation to the conflicts around us by practicing and promoting respect for the existence and well-being of others. By honoring both parties in a conflictual situation we invite others to adopt a stance of respect and to acknowledge the right of others to exist. Direct confrontation of personal and corporate greed can be ineffectual. If we encourage others to acknowledge, respect, and enjoy the relationships they have with others, greed can be replaced with courtesy, a practice fully consistent with Francis's *cortesía*.

## Eco-penance

In the face of the global scale of environmental problems, there is often a felt paralysis and despair. So many people are making so many choices that cumulatively damage the earth's oceans, forests, food supply, and atmosphere. Is there any reason to hope for a change of heart? I take great solace in being able to turn to the example of Francis. In the face of conflict, war, vice, and violence, he practiced penance. More than simply manufactured feelings of regret, the Franciscan practice of penance is embodied humility. It consists in acknowledging our brokenness and sinfulness, our dependence on God's grace, and our need for conversion to the gospel of Jesus. In our age we can adopt Francis's stance of penance and humility in our relationship with the environment. We need to acknowledge that our environmental problems are not caused by species other than ourselves. We need to admit that we are in need of God's grace to reform our behavior so that we might live in peace with creation, which is God's plan. We need to practice eco-penance.

Eco-penance is both an interior attitude and a praxis. It promotes consistency between the statement of values we make about creation and our behav-

ior toward it. The practice of eco-penance includes a sense of personal responsibility for the environmental impacts of our lifestyle, and that of our society, and will lead to efforts to reduce the harmful effects that we have on other forms of life and the planetary habitat on which we all depend. We can call upon the Church and world to join us in adopting this stance and then take action appropriate to our local area.

Eco-penance promotes a sense of connection with the earth and relationship with other creatures, but it can take various forms—political advocacy, local actions, and communal prayer. In many cases the most important action on behalf of other forms of life takes place in the political realm, whether writing letters of advocacy on behalf of endangered species or speaking at public meetings to urge the clean-up of abandoned toxic sites near family homes. Or the best way may be to create and maintain a passion for creation through a local project which shows specific, observable results. Beach and creek clean-ups can generate great enthusiasm because people can see the fruits of their labors. A community garden can provoke a neighborhood to a greater connection to their locale and foster a greater awareness of the need for clean air, soil, and water. This kind of activity is even more powerful if it is accompanied by reflection and social analysis. Transformation of individuals and structures is most possible when action is joined to reflection. How powerful might it be if a parish community had a period of theological reflection the week before a clean-up day and hosted a large celebration afterward!

As Franciscans we could foster more of these good actions not only by participating in them but also by bringing concern for the earth into our prayer. We have the ability to influence our parishes, retreat houses, and educational institutions by including concern for creation in our teaching, our homilies, and prayers. There is no reason that concern for other forms of life and our planet's health could not be made a major part of a parish penance services during Advent or Lent. If we did nothing else, simply encouraging the need to simplify our lifestyles by reducing consumption and spending more time with friends, family, and nature would do wonders for those among whom we minister, and encourage those who work in the environmental movement as well.

## A Distinctive Franciscan Contribution

One of the greatest strengths in the Franciscan tradition has been the diversity of responses to God's generous love. There are many ways in which Franciscans can begin to take action to address the threats to our sister mother earth. I would like to highlight two broad issues in particular—environmental justice and biological diversity.

Environmental justice is an issue that ties together two dimensions of our Franciscan charism—concern for creation and option for the poor and

marginalized—by stressing equal protections for those typically ignored in the pursuit of the environmental agenda, people of color and the poor. Environmental justice directly links environmental concerns with social justice issues by addressing the disproportionate impact of pollution on the poor. Low-income neighborhoods suffer more than those with greater income because they cannot marshal the resources to defend themselves from those who have more political and social power. The appalling contrast between the obese bodies in the industrialized nations and the distended bellies of starving children in the poorer nations is a powerful picture. Environmental racism is yet another manifestation of injustice. For example, immigrants from Mexico working in agriculture may suffer the harmful effects of pesticides. Powerful agribusiness corporations have resisted efforts to restrict the use of these chemicals, but when there is an incident in the fields, the media often doesn't report it because it doesn't concern "their audience."

For those who do not yet feel comfortable embracing concern for creation, or who do not yet see any connection between their religious faith and environmental concern, environmental justice is a perfect "starter issue." Anyone with an awareness of God's justice can see the harmful effects of environmental injustice in the United States and throughout the world. Concern for environmental justice is, of course, more than a "starter issue," but we can begin to express our solidarity with suffering human and nonhuman communities by taking action to defend their well-being.

The second issue, biological diversity, addresses the interdependence of the many forms of plant, animal and insect species on our planet. When human activities injure one species, its loss may impact many other forms of life. For example, in the Yellowstone ecosystem there are only about 200 grizzly bears left; these are the only grizzly bears in the United States outside of Alaska. They have suffered a decline for many reasons, most significantly the loss and fragmentation of habitat. But ecologists have suggested that one additional factor may have been the destruction of the wolf population around the beginning of the century. Grizzlies are not fast enough to catch deer, bison, and elk, but when wolves were present, the bears used to find carcasses taken down by a wolf pack and then chase the wolves away and feast on the rest of the dead carcass. Perhaps by re-introducing wolves to this ecosystem in 1995 we have helped the bears as well.

Our ecosystems need all their "pieces," all their species. Biological diversity, however, is not simply an abstract concept removed from our everyday existence. Many medicines are based on new chemical compounds discovered in rare species in the tropics. People in the United States used to consume a far more diverse diet than they do today, but industrial agriculture now finds it easier to manage a smaller number of crops. Because of disruptions to our

planet's climate, biological diversity is needed even more today. Such diversity between species and within species provides more flexibility for responding to environmental changes.

Psalm 148 and the canticle of the three young men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:56-88) are the scripture passages which are the clearest influences on *The Cantic of the Creatures*, and both speak of the value of diversity—fishes, sea monsters, different kinds of trees, beasts, creeping things, flying birds, all things growing from the earth. God loves all kinds of diversity and individuality; otherwise, God wouldn't have made it so! Christianity has celebrated the goodness of this diversity, but we Christians have never had to confront the threats to its diversity that we do today. John Duns Scotus provides another way of viewing diversity through the lens of *haecceitas*, or "thisness," but a proper discussion of the intersection of his thought and biodiversity is beyond the scope of this essay. Because Scripture and Francis speak so eloquently of diversity, indeed because they treasure it, we are called to be its advocates today.

Few other Christians have the rich theological tradition of relationship with nonhuman creation and of valuing diversity and individuality. Because of this tradition, we Franciscans are uniquely positioned to address issues of species diversity and to become better advocates for all forms of life.

## Conclusion

While there are many environmental issues we could take on as a Franciscan family, we can best serve the Church and the world by articulating a Franciscan incarnational spirituality which unites Christocentrism and love of creation. Creation spirituality and eco-spirituality are both good, but they do not tie us into the Christian story with sufficient strength to sustain us. The issues of ecology, biodiversity, and environmental justice seem to be most clearly connected to the heart of the enduring concerns of Franciscans over time. We were all drawn to the charism of Francis and we aspire to incorporate that into our own life and ministries. Given our tradition of working with the common person, we can use our varied means of ministering, whether through word or deed, to present a gospel which is broad enough to include concern for creation.

We can incorporate an awareness of the ecological implications in our ministry and prayer by bringing creation into our liturgies, by praying for solutions to environmental problems and greater sensitivity to other species, by advocating justice for those impacted by environmental abuse, by exploring an ecological dimension to our practice of penance, and by living simply so that others (human and nonhuman) may simply live.

As Franciscans we are called in a special way to a healthy relationship with creation. As followers of the patron saint of ecology, we have a special responsibility to model a loving, familial relationship with all creation, especially with those members, human and nonhuman, who are threatened by actions of violence, greed, and callousness. We are called to be advocates for those who cannot speak of the suffering caused by human ignorance and indifference. As Franciscans in the late twentieth century, we are heirs to a rich theological tradition that can provide a framework for incorporating environmental sensitivity into religious practice and activity. We are a resource for the Church, and we are capable of embodying Francis's passionate love of creation in our word and in our example.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See Zachary Hayes, OFM, "Christ, Word of God and Exemplar of Humanity," *The Cord*, 46.1 (Jan./Feb., 1996): 3-17.

<sup>2</sup>Kenan Osborne, OFM, "Incarnation, Individuality and Diversity," *The Cord*, 45.3 (May/June, 1995): 23-24.

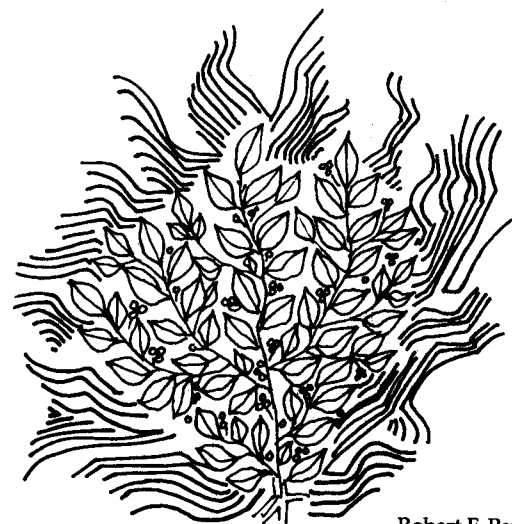
<sup>3</sup>Hayes, 13-14.

<sup>4</sup>Hayes, 16.

<sup>5</sup>For a critique of Creation spirituality, see Sallie McFague, *Body of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 69-73.

<sup>6</sup>Raoul Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi*, trans. Paul Duggan (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 316-317.

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of Francis's courtesy toward nature as innovation, see Roger Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69-75. This work is the best treatment of Francis's attitudes toward nature.



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## BOOK REVIEW

William R. Hugo, OFM Cap. *Studying the Life of Francis of Assisi: A Beginner's Workbook*. Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1996. Xv., 223 pages, ISBN: 0-8199-0970-X, \$17.95.

As the title of this workbook suggests, William Hugo provides beginners with both tools and a method for studying the early hagiographical works written about Francis, as well as Francis's own writings. In Part I, he provides the basic tools which are necessary for developing a critical attitude toward the texts. The goal for Hugo is "accurate history: the facts as best we can know them" (p. 10). To this end, he first underlines that an awareness of the biases which shape one's perspective is essential from the outset. Hugo then turns to the use of positive criticism, or the literary and historical-critical method; an understanding of the purpose and techniques of the hagiographical genre; and, with regard to the Franciscan texts themselves, a basic knowledge of the current scholarly positions surrounding each of the texts. From all of this emerges his approach to history as a three-fold process of collecting data critically, organizing data meaningfully, and interpreting the data accordingly (p. 116).

In Part II, Hugo provides work sheets which students would use to study various aspects of the life of Francis, e.g., Francis's family, his illness, Bishop Guido, the first companions, etc. Here the method of form criticism is applied to parallel texts across the tradition, with a series of questions intended to lead the student to an informed position concerning what might be regarded as the historical truth of the event. In addition, Hugo provides extended treatment of a number of questions including Francis's encounter with lepers, a conversion paradigm, the life of Penance, Francis's Eucharistic writings, the genesis of the First Order Rule, and the Stigmata. All of this, Hugo insists, is simply the prolegomena for arriving at the meaning of the text for today, a hermeneutical question which demands another set of skills. But, as Hugo insists throughout: "I believe our spirituality and theology are only as good as the history on which they rest" (p. 217).

Concerning the primary sources, hagiographical texts which give us "clues about what really happened" (p. 28), Hugo recommends systematic suspicion since a medieval person's criteria for truth are very different from our own. His own admitted bias toward miracles leads him to articulate at the outset of Part II that "My principle is to search for the most humanly understandable rendering of a story" (p. 78). Here too, however, one could raise the issue of different understandings: do we today understand what it is to be human in the same manner as the medieval person would?

The way we answer this question will ultimately determine the value we place on hagiography as a resource for history. Hagiography does not intend itself as history according to our standards—hagiography is about the construction of meaning, of what it means to be so humanly alive to God that an individual's life can become revelatory of the divine. In other words, the truth of a person's life is not limited to historical facts but appears in the meaning those historical facts express—this is what hagiography does. So, which is the best source, or where does the true Francis appear? Actually, the real Francis appears in each text; one is not more true than another! Each recounts the true meaning of Francis on its own terms. Or, to apply David's Tracy category of the classic to our texts, they all contain a residue of meaning and need to be approached as such.

The primary hagiographical texts which Hugo uses include those found in the *Omnibus*, to which he adds the *Anonymous of Perugia*, the *Actus*, and the *Chronicles* of Thomas of Eccleston, Jordan of Giano, and Salimbene. Hugo does not include the *Liturgical Texts* or the *Life of St. Francis* of Julian of Speyer, nor the *Versified Legend of St. Francis* by Henry of Avranches, nor does he refer to the Lemmens *Speculum* or the Little Manuscript, each of which have been given much more attention in the recent decade. Like all of us, Hugo awaits the publication of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, which will make most of these sources available to us in English. (Contrary to Hugo's statements in the *Workbook*, the staff of the Franciscan Institute is not preparing this text for publication).

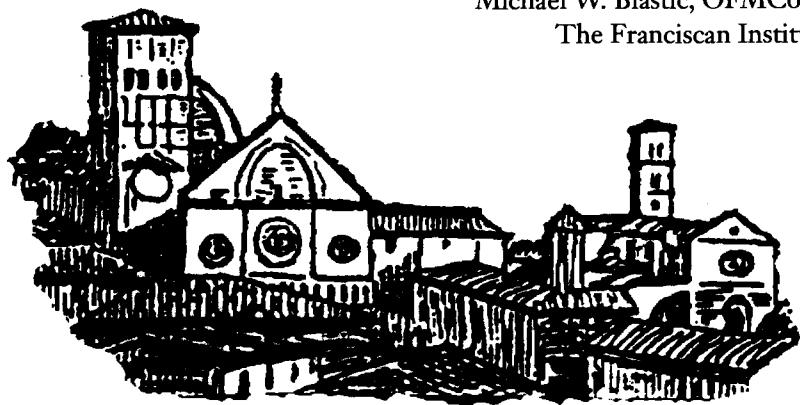
Hugo provides the basic information concerning editions, dating, and questions surrounding each text treated. Scholarly interest in these texts continues, especially in Italy, with a corresponding number of publications. (A very fine summary of all this can be found in Felice Accrocca, "Some Knotty Problems in the Franciscan Sources," *Greyfriars Review* 11:2 [1997]: 143-183.) Again, Hugo is very clear about his biases toward specific texts. His "favorite and most trusted source for the life of Francis" is the *Anonymous of Perugia* (p. 43). The *Vita prima* of Celano is a "mixed bag" (p. 40). His least favorite and of "questionable value" is the *Legend of Perugia* (p. 52). While I would not question his biases, I do wonder whether announcing his biases so clearly might

not just bias the students who would use his workbook. His position that "The important thing is that we are aware of each other's biases in this regard" (p. 52) seems to confuse bias with criticism.

It is possible to be critical of a source without being biased—this seems to be the very goal of the historical-critical method, while it is certainly possible too, to use the historical-critical method in a biased manner. For example, Hugo's bias against the *Legend of Perugia*, which seems to be linked to his connection of this source to the Spiritual Wing of the Franciscan movement, blinds him to the text's focus on Francis as example for his brothers and the resulting centrality of exemplarity as a quality of Franciscan life. At least one reading of the *Legend of Perugia*, which employs no miracles to tell its story of Francis and which gives no special importance to the Stigmata of Francis, sees a very human Francis in the last two years of his life, struggling with his own suffering and limitations to be faithful to what the Lord called him to do—to be an example of gospel living. To approach the text with a negative bias seems to preclude any appreciation for the text as a bearer of Franciscan meaning.

My criticisms of Hugo regarding his approach to the genre of hagiography, his quest for the real history behind the text, and his announced biases toward certain texts should not be read as a dismissal of the *Workbook*. Quite the contrary. Hugo has provided a valuable service to the Franciscan world. He presents the tools and a method which provide access to the primary sources concerning Francis of Assisi for the beginner and non-specialist. My hope is that once the long-awaited *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* does appear, Hugo will do a revision of the *Workbook* based on the texts it makes available in English. My hope also is that Hugo would add a Part III to his text, dedicated to a hermeneutics of retrieval focused on the text as bearer of meaning and not simply as resource for historical facts. Of course, that is my bias toward the primary sources and not Hugo's.

Michael W. Blastic, OFMConv.  
The Franciscan Institute



*The Cord*, 48.2 (1998)

## Contributors

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**Althea Anne Spencer, OSF**, is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is on the Steering Committee of the Franciscan Federation, Region 2. A certified massage therapist, she serves as a Parish Social Minister at St. John of God Parish, McKees Rocks, PA, and also does clown ministry.

**Gabriele Ühlein, OSF**, is a Franciscan Sister of Wheaton, Illinois, and a member of the Franciscan Federation Spirit and Life Committee. A Jungian and process theologian, her recent interdisciplinary doctorate from The Chicago Theological Seminary explored eco-feminist possibilities for both a theological and psychological understanding of the human in a trans-gender species context. She is currently preparing her dissertation reflections for publication.

**Keith Warner, OFM**, a friar of the St. Barbara Province, is a geographer, deep ecologist, and naturalist. He works for St. Anthony Foundation in San Francisco, California, where he leads educational workshops on economic justice and ecological sustainability from the perspective of Franciscan values. With John E. Carroll, he co-edited *Religion in Ecology: Scientists Speak* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1998).

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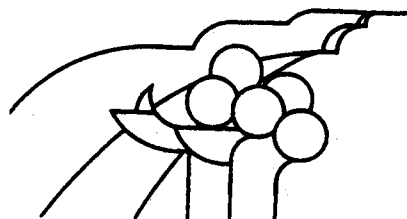
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### Thursday, April 16-Sunday, April 19

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### Thursday, April 23-Thursday, April 27

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**Franciscan Retreat Weekend.** With James Gavin, OFMCap. \$100. At Franciscan Center, 49 Jackson Ave., Hastings-on-Hudson, NY 10706; ph. 914-478-3696 or 3930.

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**Dreams and Francis of Assisi—Dream Images.** With Bernie Tickerhoof, TOR, and J. Lora Dambroski, OSF. At Franciscan Spirit and Life Center, 3605 McRoberts Rd., Pittsburgh, PA 15234-2340; ph. 412-881-9207.

### Saturday, May 23-Tuesday, May 26

**Harmony: The Gift of Clare and Francis.** With Regis Armstrong, OFMCap., and Ingrid Peterson, OSF. At Franciscan Retreat Center, Andover, MA (see ad p. 95).

### Friday, May 29-Sunday, May 31

**Franciscan Studies: The Difference Women are Making.** Washington Theological Union. Regis Armstrong, Maria Calisi, Margaret Carney, Ilia Delio, Paul LaChance, Dominic Monti, Roberta McKelvie, Elise Saggau, Gabriele Uhlein. Contact: Linda Dougherty, 6896 Laurel St., NW, Washington, DC 20012; ph. 202-541-5235.

### Saturday, May 30-Saturday, June 6

**On Being Simply Human.** Retreat with Michael Blastic, OFMConv. \$350. At Tau Center, Winona (see above for contact information).

### Sunday, July 12-Saturday, July 18

**The Way of Desire: The Human Journey into God.** With Adele Thibaudeau, OSF, and Jerry Schroeder, OFMCap. At Siena Center, 5635 Erie St., Racine, WI 53402-1900; ph. 414-639-4100, fax: 414-639-9702.

### Friday, July 24-Friday, July 31

**Carrying the Hermitage in our Hearts.** With Michael Higgins, TOR. \$350. At Tau Center, Winona (see above for contact information).

### Monday, August 17-Thursday, August 20

**33rd Franciscan Federation Conference.** At Hyatt Regency Hotel, Milwaukee, WI. Contact Franciscan Federation, P.O. Box 29080, Washington, DC; ph. 202-529-2334 (see ad p. 92).

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BenLeo	Blessing for Brother Leo	1Fragm	Fragment of other Rule I
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EpAnt	Letter to St. Anthony	LaudDei	Praises of God
EpCler	Letter to the Clergy	LaudHor	Praises to be said at all the Hours.
EpCust	Letter to the Custodians	OffPass	Office of the Passion
1EpFid	First Letter to the Faithful	OrCruc	Prayer before the Crucifix
2EpFid	Second Letter to the Faithful	RegB	Later Rule
EpLeo	Letter to Brother Leo	RegNB	Earlier Rule
EpMin	Letter to a Minister	RegEr	Rule for Hermitages
EpOrd	Letter to the Entire Order	SalBMV	Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
EpRect	Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples	SalVirt	Salutation of the Virtues
ExhLD	Exhortation to the Praise of God	Test	Testament
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1LAg	First Letter to Agnes of Prague
2LAg	Second Letter to Agnes of Prague
3LAg	Third Letter to Agnes of Prague
4LAg	Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague
LEr	Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges
RCI	Rule of Clare
TestCI	Testament of Clare
BCI	Blessing of Clare

## Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel	First Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
2Cel	Second Life of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano
3Cel	Treatise on the Miracles by Thomas of Celano
AP	Anonymous of Perugia
CL	Legend of Clare
CSD	Consideration of the Stigmata
Fior	Fioretti
JdV	Witness of Jacque de Vitry
LM	Major Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LMin	Minor Life of St. Francis by Bonaventure
LP	Legend of Perugia
L3S	Legend of the Three Companions
Proc	Acts of the Process of Canonization of St. Clare
SC	Sacrum commercium
SP	Mirror of Perfection