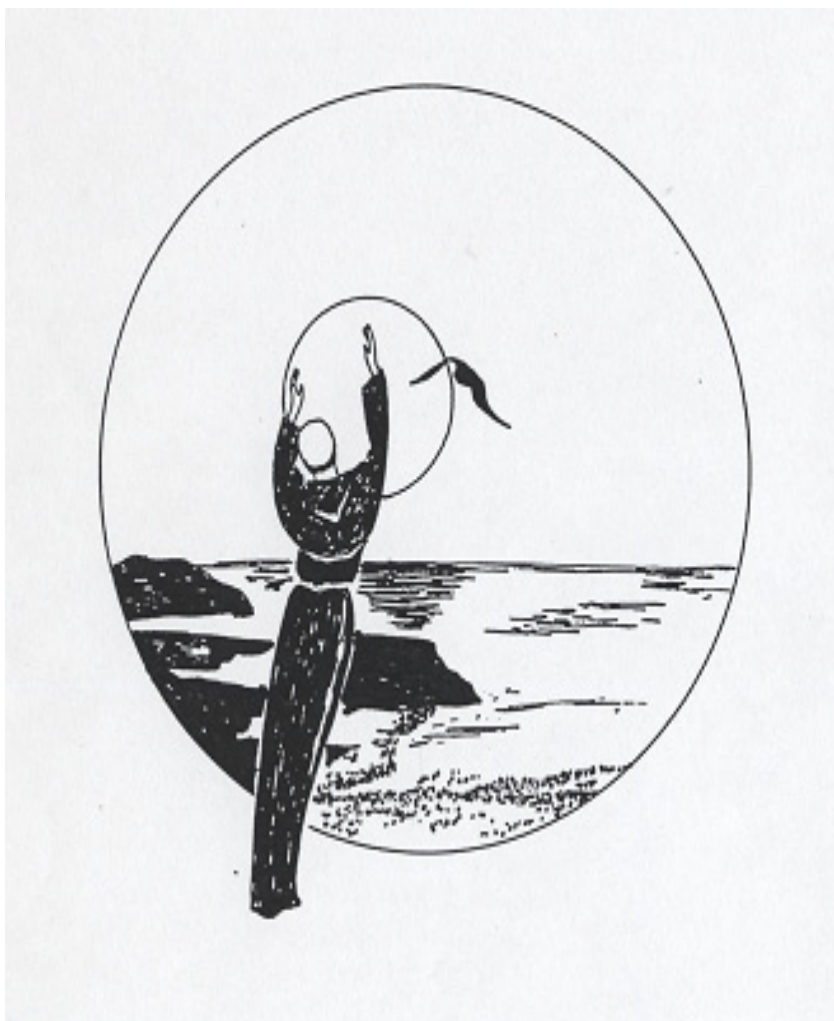


# THE CORD

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• A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW •

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## FOREWORD

Greetings from the frozen northwest of New York State! The world is white for a while, sounds are somewhat muffled by the cushioning snow, and the slowly lengthening daylight hours are still closer to a light/dark ratio that encourages hibernation.

None of these conditions, however, seems to impede our period of transition here at the Institute. Beginning with the announcement, last spring, of the suspension of classes in the School of Franciscan Studies during the academic year – the summer classes are still going strong, though – and continuing with the addition of our new Executive Director of Publications, we have recently experienced a changing of the guard for the Franciscan Institute. Citing a need for new ideas for the future, Michael F. Cusato, O.F.M. has resigned his position as Dean and Director of the Institute. “These are challenging times for us, especially with the diminishment of religious vocations — our natural audience for the teaching program. I realize that this time of transition for the Institute calls for new ideas and energies that can outline a new pathway and vision moving forward.” We need not say farewell to Fr. Michael yet, however, as he continues as a member of the Institute faculty.

Br. F. Edward Coughlin, O.F.M. has been appointed to take his place effective February 1, 2011. In the announcement of his appointment, Michael Fischer, University Provost said, “Br. Ed understands the importance of the Institute as well as the challenges it faces at this important time. He has a sure grasp of the needs and an understanding of the unique position of this program at national and international levels.”

In the midst of these changes, challenges, and transitions, however, one thing remains the same. In the spirit of Francis we can all pray together: “Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing ...”

*Daria R. Mitchell, O.S.F.*

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**MURRAY BODO, O.F.M.** is a member of the St. John the Baptist Province of the Order of Friars Minor. He is the author of *A Retreat with Francis and Clare of Assisi*; *Song of the Sparrow*; *Clare, A Light in the Garden*; *Tales of St. Francis*; *Through the Year with Francis of Assisi*; *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*; and *The Almond Tree Speaks: New and Selected Writings, 1974-1994*. Father Murray Bodo's latest book is *Tales of an Endishodi* (University of New Mexico Press).

**GREGORY CELLINI, O.S.F.**, is a member of the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn and serves as Franciscan Advisor to St. Francis College in Brooklyn Heights, New York.

**WILLIAM DEBIASE, O.F.M.**, is a member of the Holy Name Province of the Order of Friars Minor. Ordained in 1966, he spent 28 years in ministry in Japan. Illness cut short a stint in India to work with lepers. After recovering he spent two years in the Holy Land. Since returning stateside he has served in Albany, NY, and is currently serving at St. Francis Inn, a soup kitchen run by the province in New York City.

**DAVID FLOOD, O.F.M.**, is a member of the Province of St. Joseph in Montreal and serving on the research faculty at the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, New York. A renowned and pioneering scholar of Franciscan history, he is the author of fifteen books, numerous articles and several critical editions of texts on early Franciscan history. He received his doctorates in history and philosophy from the Universitat Koln.

**MAUREEN HARTMANN, S.F.O.** is a professed secular Franciscan. She graduated from Dominican College, and earned masters' degrees from Duquesne University, San Jose State University, and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. She has edited newsletters for St. Francis Fraternity in San Francisco, for Pope John XXIII Community in San Leandro, and for St. Elizabeth Fraternity in Oakland and been published in *Sojourners*, *Creation Spirituality*, *The Catholic Voice*, *The Way of St. Francis*, and *Street Spirit*.

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**DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M.** is a Franciscan friar of Holy Name Province (NY) and currently teaches at Siena College in Loudonville, NY. The author of more than twenty scholarly and popular articles on theology and spirituality, his work has been published in several journals including *America*, *Worship*, *The Heythrop Journal*, *The Downside Review*, *Spiritual Life*, *Review for Religious*, *The Merton Annual* and others. For more information, visit [www.danhoran.com](http://www.danhoran.com) or follow him at [twitter.com/DanHoranOFM](https://twitter.com/DanHoranOFM).

**BILLY ISENER, O.F.M.** is a member of Christ the King Province of Western Canada. He serves in a variety of ministries and preaches on the following topics for 2011: Franciscan perspectives of environmental sustainability in Alberta, Franciscan prayer and social action, and a Franciscan view of global reconciliation. When he finds time he cooks up decadent feasts for his fraternity and friends.

**FRANCIS ASSISI KENNEDY, O.S.F.** is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis, Oldenburg. A dedicated teacher for many years she has recently retired from the position of Archivist for her congregation. She has done extensive research into the background of Mother Theresa Hacklemeier, the foundress of the Oldenburg congregation, and also translated the biography of Sister Restituta, a nurse during World War II who was executed by the Nazis.

**SÉAMUS MULHOLLAND, O.F.M., Ph.D.**, lectures in Biblical Literature, Philosophy, and Franciscan Studies at the International Study Centre at Canterbury. He has published extensively on Franciscan Studies and Biblical Literature. A qualified teacher, he is Director of the MA Franciscan Studies and First Order Formators programme.

**PATRICIA M. RUMSEY, O.S.C.**, is a Poor Clare nun with an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Wales, Lampeter, UK. She has written and published on liturgy and early Irish monasticism and has lectured in England, Ireland and Scandinavia.

# **A FRANCISCAN THEOLOGICAL GRAMMAR OF CREATION**

**DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M.**

## **CREATION AND LANGUAGE**

Recently, while introducing the doctrine of creation to my college students in an introductory course in systematic theology, I asked the thirty young adults seated before me to think about the way they might treat something entrusted to their care (something like their on-campus student apartments) and something that has been passed on to them that they own (something like their parents' or grandparents' house). Upon reflection, the students confessed that there is indeed a distinction in their attitude toward the two objects in each situation. The evidence is not simply hypothetical, but is empirically rooted in the statistical reports that colleges and universities generate every year that account for the destruction of property on campus and the subsequent repair or replacement costs. The students, rather casually, admitted that they feel less compelled to "take care" of something that was not "theirs."

This conversation provided a segue to a discussion about language and its role in shaping the way we view something like one's obligation or responsibility to care of this or that thing. The way we talk about our connection to creation impacts the way we treat creation. Provided that one is expected to care for something, as when a student is expected to care for the university property on loan to him or her for the academic year, how does one's understanding of the

thing's relationship to another relate to the way the care is described?

Traditionally, the command of the Creator in the book of Genesis for human beings to care for the rest of creation has been interpreted in one of two ways: dominion or stewardship. The dominion model is particularly problematic for it elicits any number of dysfunctional and generally abusive types of relationship. Dominion is often associated with monarchical or tyrannical structures of power that necessarily subordinate one party to another, a description of control rather than mutuality. It is this mindset – of unaccountable sovereignty in human beings dealing with creation – that has given rise to twentieth-century critiques of Christianity for its ostensible responsibility in contemporary ecological disasters. Historians like Lynn White suggest that it is precisely the “Christian” (by which he means, “dominion”) view of creation that has led to human beings plundering the earth, destroying habitats and bringing about the extinction of thousands of species of plants and animals.<sup>1</sup> Are Christians solely responsible for these catastrophes? Certainly not, but the challenge raised suggests that Christians, in general, have not helped prevent such events nor have they offered a satisfactory alternative to their generally appropriated model of dominion, at least for a while.

More recently, certain Christians have become attuned to the inadequacy of the dominion model of the human-creation relationship, proposing instead that the command in Genesis be understood in terms of right stewardship. Comparatively, this is indeed a grammatical improvement in terms of reshaping the collective interpretation of humanity's role in creation. Diminished is the sense of sovereignty and mo-

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<sup>1</sup> See the now famous essay, Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-07. Some theologians have responded to the critique, suggesting that White's views are based on an untheologically-sophisticated reading of scripture and Christian history. However true that may be, the challenge remains pertinent and worthy of consideration. For more see Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 93-94.

narchical authority over the rest of the economy of creation (*oikos*) and, instead, there is increased sensibility of the obligation human beings have to tend to non-human creation. Willis Jenkins summarizes the emergence of a stewardship model of creation within the Christian tradition well:

The strategy of Christian stewardship frames environmental issues around faithful response to God's invitation and command. By appropriating the biblical trope of stewardship, this strategy organizes concern for environmental problems around obligatory service to the Creator, who entrusts to humans measured responsibilities for creation. To specify the character of this earthkeeping trust, the strategy looks to biblical accounts of how God invites humans into relationship. Stewardship thus situates the specific call to care for the earth within a general divine call to faithful relationship.<sup>2</sup>

This perspective does seem to introduce an improvement over that of the dominion model in terms of the relational dimension of care for creation. It suggests that God invites us to relationship with God, while at the same time inviting us to care for God's creation partly in response to God's gratuitous invitation of love.

However, like a number of today's theologians, I have serious reservations about the efficacious dimensions of the stewardship model of creation.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most telling concern is that of the "obligatory service to the creator" that Jenkins rightly notes arises from this outlook on creation and human-divine relationship. There remains a relational vacuum in terms of the connection between humanity and the rest of creation that is overlooked in the explicit advocacy

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<sup>2</sup> Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent collection of essays on this point, see *Environmental Stewardship: Critical Perspectives*, ed. R. J. Berry (London: T & T Clark, 2006).



of stewardship arising out of the human-divine relationship. To put it another way, one could see in this model of creation vestiges of the dilemma in which my undergraduate students find themselves concerning the stewardship of campus property. If humanity's obligation to care for creation is rooted in a response to God's command to be in relationship with God and not from some intrinsic connection humanity has to creation *in se*, then what is different about the obligation of students to care for their dormitories that arises out of their relationship to the college, the school's administration, their parents' expectations, and so on?

The stewardship model, while an improvement to the previous approach, continues to bear the disjointed sense of connectivity to creation that places humanity over and against the rest of creation as if to "lord" (or, perhaps more aptly, "landlord") over it, albeit in a more subtle fashion than is found in the dominion model. Stewards tend to something to which they generally have no inherent connection. Stewards, in popular parlance, are those employed to care for something, a property or inventory. Likewise, humanity is seen as obliged to tend to creation because of God's command, a deontological approach that lacks the necessary recognition of the intrinsic relationship humanity has with the rest of creation by virtue of precisely *being part of creation*.

It is here that the Franciscan tradition offers us a heuristic key. At the end of his essay criticizing the Judaic and Christian models of creation that have seemingly led to ecological crises, Lynn White suggests that Francis of Assisi provides us with a Christian model of creation that is in fact more acceptable, going so far as to name him "the patron saint for ecology" (something Pope John Paul II would make a reality on November 29, 1979).<sup>4</sup> While White's understanding of Francis was less-than substantial, his intuition was correct in that Francis and his followers provide us with a more authentically Christian and scripturally based model of creation. While never explicitly articulated as such, I believe

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<sup>4</sup> White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," 1207.

that we can name the Franciscan approach one of kinship in place of dominion or stewardship. This is a recent theological development that has been explored by thinkers such as Elizabeth Johnson and Denis Edwards.<sup>5</sup> Edwards writes:

We cannot treat any of our fellow creatures as if they exist without value. In spite of all the distinctions between us, we are family. In my view both kinship and the call “to till and keep” creation (Genesis 2:15) are fundamental in locating the human vocation within the wider creation before God. But the heart of ecological conversion is the invitation to see, feel and act in this kinship with creation.<sup>6</sup>

Adopting the theological moniker of kinship and exploring it in light of the Franciscan tradition, we will be able to further develop a comprehensive and Franciscan theological grammar of creation.

This essay is divided into two parts. First, drawing on the systematic theological insight of some contemporary theologians, we will examine the theological significance of adopting a grammar of “kinship” in place of stewardship. At this point, it is generally agreed that the dominion (or what Johnson calls, the *kingship*) model of creation is entirely inadequate and wholly problematic. Such a view does not sustain an authentically scriptural conceptualization — from either the perspective of the Hebrew or Christian scriptures — and will therefore not be considered at length in this essay.

Second, following the work of three contemporary Franciscan thinkers — the late British friar Eric Doyle, the former friar Leonardo Boff and the American friar and environmental scientist Keith Douglass Warner — we will look at how an expressly Franciscan view of kinship might be constructed.

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<sup>5</sup> See Elizabeth Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); and Denis Edwards, “Foreword,” in *Care For Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*, by Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner and Pamela Wood (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008), 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Edwards, “Foreword,” 1.

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In this way, we might better uncover a Franciscan theological grammar of creation. What should become clear is that what we say and the way we say it about creation influences how we envision, relate to and ultimately care for creation.

## **FROM STEWARDSHIP TO KINSHIP**

The renowned German systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg made a telling observation about the state of creation theology when he wrote, “theology has to reckon with the fact that right up to our own day there is no general agreement about the Christian truth claim as concerns the understanding of the world as God’s creation.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike certain dogmatic or even lesser doctrinal claims asserted by Christianity, the doctrine of creation remains one of the more malleable and tentative of the tradition. Pannenberg, for one, believes that this is in part due to the reliance on science that any legitimate theology of creation must depend. Others, however, find the divergence among scriptural and historical sources to be a stumbling block to doctrinal clarity. In any event, the truth remains: the condition of myriad articulations of creation theology presents a problem, but it also presents an opportunity. The problem is clearly seen in the lack of a singular, authoritative approach to creation. But an opportunity is also latent in this situation, for there remains a space within which we might explore and better articulate a Christian theology of creation.

Some theologians have already responded to the opportunity, seeking to clarify a sustainable theological vision of creation. One such thinker is Elizabeth Johnson, who, although she is perhaps best known for her early work in feminist theology, has made some significant contributions to the theology of creation. It should come as no surprise that for Johnson the issues of ecology and creation are closely tied to justice issues with regard to subjugated populations, namely women and the poor of the world. Drawing on her work in

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<sup>7</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 59.

feminist theology, Johnson critiques the traditional dominion view of creation – which she calls the “kingship” model to emphasize the coextensive embedded patriarchy and sovereignty – and suggests that such a view is both inherently dualistic and practically unjust.<sup>8</sup> Johnson does not stop there. In addition to critiquing the dominion perspective, she also raises serious concerns about the inadequacies of the stewardship model.

Granting that the stewardship model of creation is an improvement on the dominion model, Johnson suggests that it still lacks the necessary sense of interdependency found among all creation. Instead, it bears the dualistic and hierarchical distinctions – albeit in more subtle ways – found in the dominion model, and appears to offer a deontological motivation for human care for creation. In other words, it is primarily for “our purposes” or plainly selfish reasons that humans are moved to tend to the rest of creation, again as one over and against the rest of the created world.<sup>9</sup> What results is a subcontractor-like relationship among creation, humanity and God that places human beings in the position of “God’s landlord” or “building manager” for creation. The relationship between humanity and the rest of creation is seen as defined by explicitly distinct roles with an intrinsically uneven power structure.

Pannenberg’s work further highlights the problems with a stewardship-based perspective of creation. He reminds us, citing New Testament scriptural evidence, that, “the goal of *all creation*, not just humanity, is to share in the life of God.”<sup>10</sup> If that is the case, as St. Paul seems to insist time and again in his epistolary, then there is an eschatological or salvation-related reason why stewardship lacks the necessary relational character to articulate an authentically Christian view of creation. Creation is not simply the rental property of humanity in which women and men inhabit and promise to take good care of according to the lease agreement between

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<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 10 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 136.

God and Noah (talk about a long-standing rent-stabilized property!), but instead creation is, in some sense, humanity's partner in salvation. Its goal is intrinsically connected to ours. Our return to God takes place along with and is dependent upon creation. One reason this is the case is because human beings *are part of* creation. We are not disembodied souls "trapped" in a Platonic world of creatureliness awaiting our salvific release apart from the material world. No, we *are* creation as Mary Grey so poetically writes, "It follows that the challenge is to see both men and women as bodily-enspirited organisms, interdependent with plant and animal life yet with particular responsibilities towards the sustains of this life."<sup>11</sup>

Humanity's relationship with creation is best described as familial rather than viewed as contractual. The interdependence Grey describes stands at the heart of the Christian eschatological vision of creation. Johnson explains, "If separation is not the ideal but connection is; if dualism is not the ideal but the relational embrace of diversity is; if hierarchy is not the ideal but mutuality is; then the kinship model more closely approximates reality."<sup>12</sup> Our interconnectedness is not simply poetic or sentimental. Instead it is a statement of the most profound truth affirmed as it were by both science and religion.

The scientific narrative of the emergence and history of the cosmos tells of the unifying origins of both humanity and the rest of the universe. As Johnson is fond of saying, we are literally made of the same space dust that the rest of creation – the earth, the stars, and so on – is made.<sup>13</sup> Our interconnectedness is as biological as it is theological. The air we breathe, the iron in our blood, the calcium in our bones, all of who we are materially is part of and originated out of some other part of God's creation. From the theological perspective, we see this interconnectedness play out in a number of ways.

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Grey, *Sacred Longings: Ecofeminist Theology and Globalization* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 133.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 37.

Scripturally, we find God's creation intimately connected to the actions of human suffering, flourishing and sinfulness (e.g., Hosea 4:2-3). We also see the inchoate cosmological perspective expressed scientifically in the wisdom tradition of the Book of Job (12:7-10), where we read that God cares and sustains *all* creation including humanity. We note the Hebrew prayers of the Psalms, which time and again recall the familial relationship the rest of creation shares with humanity as God's beloved creation (e.g., Psalms 65, 135, 145, 147, 148 and *passim*). Yet, the most compelling scriptural articulation of this kinship model is found in St. Paul's eschatology and theology of salvation, such as it appears, for example, in Romans 8:20-23:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from the bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.  
(NRSV)

The delineation of human and nonhuman creation as found in the stewardship model, the former as caregiver and the latter as the dependent charge, is not present in a contemporary cosmological and theological reading of the universe and the Christian tradition.

In light of the ongoing discoveries of the manifold areas of scientific inquiry and the richer exploration of our biblical and theological tradition, we are left with a mandate to shed the previously appropriated notion of stewardship and adopt a more familial model of creation. It is in this sense that the notional implications of language, expressed most clearly in the intimate signification of "kinship," plays a role in our understanding of a theology of creation. Johnson summarizes why this approach, the use of "kinship" to articulate the re-

ality of human-nonhuman creational interdependence is essential:

Appreciating the deep patterns of affiliation in the cosmos, the kinship model knows that we are all connected. For all our distinctiveness, human beings are modes of being of the universe. Woven into our lives is the very fire from the stars and the genes from the sear creatures, and everyone, utterly everyone, is kin in the radiant tapestry of being. This relationship is not external or extrinsic to who we are, but wells up as the defining truth from our deepest being.<sup>14</sup>

This theological imperative, to recognize the truth in the intrinsic kinship of all creation, is found in the Franciscan spiritual and theological tradition. It should come as no surprise to anyone at least vaguely familiar with the Franciscan movement that such identification with creation as kinship expresses well what St. Francis and his followers understood in fraternal terms.

### **THE FRANCISCAN VIEW OF KINSHIP WITH CREATION**

Francis of Assisi's understanding of a theology of creation was in no way systematic or scholarly. Ilia Delio, building on the work of earlier thinkers like Ewert Cousins, suggests that a good way to understand Francis's experience of creation was as a "nature mystic." Delio writes:

A nature mystic is one whose mystical experiences involve an appreciation of creation as God's handiwork; nature manifests the divine. Francis's nature mysticism included a consciousness of God with the appropriate religious attitudes of awe and gratitude ... he took spontaneous joy in the material world, singing its praises like a troubadour poet. With a disarming

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<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 39.

sense of immediacy, he felt himself part of the family of creation.<sup>15</sup>

While not expressed in the scholastic categories of his day, the thought of Francis of Assisi as articulated in his own writings – prayers, rules of life and letters – and in the writings of the early Franciscans about Francis reveals a theology of creation that is easily identifiable with the kinship model.

There is perhaps no more accessible example of this characteristic of Franciscan thought than that of Francis's *Canticle of the Creatures*.<sup>16</sup> Eric Doyle explains: "As a prayer of praise to God the Creator, *The Canticle* is a sublime expression of the authentic Christian attitude to creation, which is to accept and love creatures as they are."<sup>17</sup> What makes Francis's attitude toward creation "authentically Christian," to borrow Doyle's phrase, is precisely this innate sensitivity to the universal kinship of all creation as experienced in the mystical and fraternal worldview of the *Poverello*. The brilliance of the canticle is multilayered, staged as it is in overlapping strata of increasing agency within creation.<sup>18</sup> All dimensions of the created world (with the exception of non-human animals) – planetary bodies, weather phenomena, elemental features of the earth, vegetation, human beings and death – are included in this hymnic reflection of the interrelationship of creation. Although non-human animals are not

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<sup>15</sup> Ilia Delio, *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World*, Franciscan Heritage Series, vol. 2 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2003), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Creatures," in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, ed. Regis Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 113-14.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Doyle, "The Canticle of Brother Sun' and the Value of Creation," in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 157-58.

<sup>18</sup> I have written on this subject elsewhere with regard to *The Canticle's* treatment of death. See Daniel Horan, "Embracing Sister Death: The Fraternal Worldview of Francis of Assisi as a Source for Christian Eschatological Hope," *The Other Journal* 14 (January 2009), available online at [<http://www.theotherjournal.com/article.php?id=572>]



expressly included in this canticle, Francis's reverence for all creatures shines through in the more hagiographical sources and the earliest traditions of the Franciscan movement.

Doyle continues to explain well the place of the created order for Francis as it is seen in this famous hymn of praise.

Nature for Francis was not just a reflection of human activity and reactions, because this would have been to destroy the unique value of other creatures. They are not mirrors of us, but like us, they reflect God. He began with equality: we are all created ... we are all brethren. Francis believed the doctrine of creation with his whole heart. It told him that the entire universe – the self and the total environment to which the self belongs (microcosm and macrocosm) – is the product of the highest creative power, the creativity of Transcendent Love.<sup>19</sup>

How does one come to this realization or reach this degree of understanding? Doyle insists that, “the mystical experience which gave birth to *The Canticle* was a creative encounter with reality.”<sup>20</sup> To put it another way, through prayer and a deep appreciation of God's revelation in Scripture (as St. Bonaventure will later attribute this gift), Francis became prophetic in his ability to see the world as it really is – to truly see reality. This reality, this truth in creation, is God's loving act of bringing into and sustaining all things in existence.<sup>21</sup> Francis of Assisi did not need to be a professor of theology at the University of Paris to come to this conclusion, his inspired worldview, shaped as it was by his total surrender to God's grace and Gospel life, allowed him to see this truth: all of creation is one family.

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<sup>19</sup> Doyle, “The Canticle of Brother Sun’ and the Value of Creation,” 158-59.

<sup>20</sup> Doyle, “The Canticle of Brother Sun’ and the Value of Creation,” 159.

<sup>21</sup> For more see Daniel Horan, “Light and Love: Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus on the How and Why of Creation,” *The Cord* 57 (2007): 243-57.

Keith Warner has written on this very subject. A Franciscan friar by (religious) profession and environmental scientist by training, Warner asserts that Francis did indeed have an explicitly familial sense of creation, one that we can call a “kinship model” of creation. For Warner, this means three things for a Franciscan understanding of creation: it must celebrate relationship, it promotes courtesy and it reflects a commitment to the practice of penance.<sup>22</sup> Warner explains what this might mean for Franciscans and those inspired by Francis’s view of creation today.

We can imitate him by being environmental peacemakers. Just as Francis built peace in the relationship between the bishop and mayor 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 wellbeing 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. I believe that by encouraging others to acknowledge, respect and enjoy the relationships they have with others, that greed can be replaced with courtesy, and this seems fully consistent with Francis’[s] approach.<sup>23</sup>

Becoming “environmental peacemakers” is indeed a novel way to approach our vocational call as brothers and sisters to creation. How is it that we advocate for the “least among us,” particularly when the least among us includes the earth, endangered species, rainforests or the ocean? Following the example of Francis’s fraternal worldview, his kinship theology of creation, we might help to reconcile not just the broken relationships among the world’s men and women, but

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<sup>22</sup> Keith Douglass Warner, “Get Him Out of the Birdbath! What Does it Mean to Have a Patron Saint of Ecology?” in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment*, 370.

<sup>23</sup> Warner, “Get Him Out of the Birdbath!” 371.

we might also help to reconcile the broken relationship all of humanity shares with the rest of creation.

The renowned Brazilian theologian and former Franciscan friar Leonardo Boff has also observed this creational model of kinship in the thought and practice of Francis of Assisi. Boff goes so far as to suggest that, in opposition to other models of creation, Francis was in fact “the living embodiment of another paradigm, one of a spirit that acts in kinship, one that is filled with compassion and respect before each representative of the cosmic and planetary community.”<sup>24</sup> Unlike some other Franciscan theologians and environmentalists, Boff offers what appears to be a more radical interpretation of Francis’s worldview. Boff suggests that what Francis innately discovered was really an intuitive sense of classical paganism. The term paganism is indeed off-putting for it conjures images of heresy, polytheism and non-Christian religiosity. However, Boff believes that throughout Christian history, the Church has (necessarily perhaps) had to struggle to define itself against traditionally pagan cultures. In an effort to maintain something resembling orthodox Christian faith in the face of paganistic heterodoxy, anything that hinted of pre-Christian pagan religion was effectively squashed. As a result, the previously ubiquitous notion of divinity found in all aspects of the cosmos, all of creation reflecting something beyond itself, was categorized under the genus of pagan and suppressed for fear of heterodoxy.

Leonardo Boff believes that Francis was, in some way, able to transcend the limitations of the hegemonic popular worldview of Christendom to see the sacred indwelling of creation around him. Boff explains:

St. Francis brought this whole age of purgation to an end. Eyes recovered their innocence. Now one could contemplate God and the splendor of God’s grace and glory in the extensive wealth of creation, which is the great sacrament of God and Christ. Intuitively

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<sup>24</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 203-04.

and without any previous theological training, Francis reclaimed the truth of paganism: this world is not mute, not lifeless, not empty; it speaks and is full of movement, love, purpose, and beckonings from the Divinity. It can be the place for encountering God and God's spirit, through the world itself, its energies, its profusion of sound, color, and movement.<sup>25</sup>

Boff goes on to note that all of the biographies of Francis written after his death, including those works by Bonaventure and Celano as well as *The Legend of the Three Companions*, *The Legend of Perugia* and *The Mirror of Perfection*, portray Francis as having existed in a unique relationship with all creatures and the entire creation.

Francis's way of living in the world was one of intimate relationship in which Francis lived *with* the world and not above and against it as others so commonly do. Boff explains that for Francis nothing was simply available for human possession or consumption, but instead there exists only God's magisterial creation that is related to all other parts of creation in a divine interconnectedness. Boff puts this in another, more poetic way: "Everything makes up a grand symphony – and God is the conductor."<sup>26</sup>

To speak of a Franciscan view of creation that resembles the dominion or even stewardship models is not possible. Such an approach is trenchantly inauthentic for the founder of the Franciscan movement and later the patron saint of ecology, lived his life in a manner expressly counter to these outlooks. The plentitude of examples to illustrate the sense of kinship associated with Francis's engagement with all aspects of creation in his own writings and those later hagiographic works about Francis is too much to rehearse here. Following Doyle, Warner and Boff, as well as Francis himself, we can say with confidence that a Franciscan view of creation is inexorably a kinship model.

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<sup>25</sup> Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 205.

<sup>26</sup> Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, 211.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a direct relationship between what we say about creation and how we treat creation. Our theological language should not be overlooked as an area worth examination during such times of environmental crisis. Lynn White's critique, more than half a century ago, continues to echo in the halls of churches, legislative chambers and corporate boardrooms. The way in which certain professed Christians speak of creation, such that the language of dominance and stewardship reigns supreme, is reflected in the contemporary tragedies of strip mining, off-shore drilling, wars over oil, natural gas retrieval, animal and plant extinction and global climate change.

The Franciscan tradition has something to offer the Christian Church, which is the Body of Christ, and the global human community by appropriating, living and modeling a Franciscan kinship vision of creation. To speak about the earth and all of its inhabitants – humans and nonhumans alike – as one speaks of family is to make a concerted effort to refashion the popular image of the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. In such an image, no longer are environmental tragedies simply the consequence of human dominance over creation, but instead they become cases of ecological domestic abuse. In such an image, no longer can we step back and watch the destruction of the earth from afar, but instead we must recognize that all life is interconnected and the death of a species or the destruction of a forest is also somehow a transgression that implicates all of us and from which we all suffer. In such an image, no longer is the earth simply our rental property or dorm room to be treated as if we were its stewards, but instead we must come to see creation for what it really is: the dwelling place of the divine in and through and among us.

## THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

SÉAMUS MULHOLLAND, O.F.M.

The key to understanding the attitude of St. Francis of Assisi to creation is the concept of *Fraternity-in-Unity/Diversity*. The whole thrust of the life of St. Francis is that of the experience of God redeeming him in Christ. But there is more than this: Francis's love of creation and his care for it has its source in his love for Christ. It is only when he has experienced the power of the love of Christ, which transformed him interiorly and exteriorly, that he is led to love and care for creation. However, in St. Francis this is not just *response* it is *experience*. Francis is not a disinterested lover: he is actively and emphatically engaged and involved in and with that which he loves. Love of creation is part and parcel of his whole existential outlook and the cardinal tenet that holds the whole vision of Francis of Assisi together is that of *Brotherhood/Sisterhood*.

Francis's creational attitude is a natural corollary of his love of and for Christ and it is the simplicity of his argument from experience which is so attractive. Obviously, Francis's approach to this is the Christian approach, but while that forms the context for his vision, it is not of itself a *partisan* determining factor. In this context men and women, of all faiths and none, may develop the same attitude of Francis of Assisi since it is motivated not by a sense of self but by a sense of the dynamic inter/intra relationship that exists between humanity and creation. The simplicity of Francis's arguments which I mentioned above is this: Francis saw and experienced God as Father, Jesus was Son of God incarnate,

therefore, Jesus was the brother of Francis [he calls him “Eld-est Brother”] and God was his Father. Since God as Father was also the Creator, and all things were created in, through and for Christ [John 1.4; Eph 1-15; Col 1:1-15] then the entirety of creation was a “brother and sister” to Francis.

In this context the whole vision and experience of God, Jesus and creation in Francis of Assisi is *relational* – and it is relational vertically [God] and horizontally [creation]. Humanity is not a superior, separate being from the created world in which it lives and moves but integrally involved with it at the fraternal level. The vision of Francis can be used to ask a very fundamental question: if humanity lives, moves and is grounded in the existentiality of its own being in the created world, then what sort of being does humanity possess as an ontological reality if that creation is being “attacked” through pollution, global warming, and overuse of natural resources etc. Issues surrounding environmental justice and Christian, especially Franciscan responses, have a much deeper importance than simply “being good to the earth.”

This is because creation is understood to be a freely willed act of God in the love of his own essence. For the Christian the answer to the question “Why is there something instead of nothing” would be, “Because God willed it to be so.” The biblical data of Genesis 1-2 does not give us any reason why God creates, only that he does. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” [Gen 1:3] and that the response of God to all that he had made was to see that “it was good.” So, God not only wills the world to be, he also wills its essential goodness. And that goodness is a participation in the Divine Goodness since creation is sourced in the free act of God willing to create. It is this same sense of seeing the inherent, essential goodness of the created order that leads the author of the Fourth Gospel to say “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” [John 3]. The goodness and the glory of creation are also echoed by the Psalmist: “The heavens show forth the glory of God”; “How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth.” The psalmist also recalls how God made everything that moves “All creeping things, birds of the air, and fish that make their way through the waters.”

The Genesis writer and the Psalmist are agreed that creation belongs to God because God is its maker. Creation, therefore, sourced in the goodness of God, participating in the life of God, has its own inherent goodness as a product of God's free willing and free loving.

Everything that exists, therefore, is brother and sister since God is their Father. Given what Francis experienced of God as Creator and Father and Jesus as Brother, one may then move from the biblical data to the more speculative elements of the development of Christian theology and apply some of these notions [and thus an even more radical Franciscan ecological vision] by using the Stoic notion of the "logos" [the principle of meaning and reason] which would later be Christianised by Platonists such as Justin martyr, Origen of Alexandria, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and Bonaventure.

The Stoics considered that the whole of reality was infused or permeated with the *spermatikoi logoi* the "seeds of the Logos" which they understood to be the Principle of Reality or Intellect [Reason] immanent in the cosmos. It was through the Logos that the One, the Supreme Reality of All Being, brought the material universe to be. Thus, every part of creation had a "seed" [*sperma*] of this Ultimate Reality in it. The whole of the created cosmos was infused with some spark of the Divine and it was this which gave it meaning. The great Philo of Alexandria also writes of this in great detail. Creation, therefore, participated in the Divine life. This idea of "Logos" was picked up by the Christian Platonists and developed by them, so that now the Logos could be understood not just as an intellectual concept, or a philosophical concept, but also a Person, the Son. This idea was especially prominent in the Greek Fathers of the Church. So, the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, now becomes the ground of all ideas of God present to and immanent in the cosmos. The writer of the Fourth Gospel may have some vague understanding of this when he writes "In the beginning was the Logos." [John 1:1].

Normally, this is translated as "In the beginning was the Word," which, as it stands, is an accurate *literary* translation



but the nuances of the use of this word in John 1:1 are much more complex and deeply rich in meaning. We cannot go into all the meanings of the Greek, but Logos can also mean “conversation,” “communication” and it can refer to both the substance of the message [the idea] and the content of the message and the message itself. Words are used to convey ideas and ideas seek to convey meaning. John 1:1, therefore, could be read as “In the beginning there was Meaning, and the Meaning was with God, and the Meaning was God, etc. ...” In other words, in the beginning there was everything that was the principle of all ideas, reason and meaning. Adding the Wisdom notions of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish religious tradition, especially Prov 8, to this and the opening words of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel take on a much richer theological hue.

Christian Incarnational theology designates the Second Person of the Trinity with the interchangeable terms of “Word” [*Logos*] and “Son,” though they are one and the same, and it is through this Word-Son that creation comes to be. In this context, the Logos, as understood by Christians, becomes the “blueprint” for creation. This idea is present in St. Irenaeus, Athanasius and Bonaventure’s theology of the Word in his Trinitarian theology. In Christian Incarnational theology, this same Logos [Meaning] becomes enfleshed in Jesus of Nazareth [John 1:14]. Now the Christian conception of Logos becomes much more radical. It posits not just the idea that all creation comes to be through the Logos who is its model/blueprint [or to use a Bonaventurian term its “Exemplar”] but also that this same Logos has become part of that creation in Jesus. Creation, therefore, no longer has a “spark” of the divine; it has the “fullness” of the Divine. This is because God as Creator is not independent of his creation [the argument of the Deists]; while it is true that God is transcendent, transcendence of itself does not mean independence or indifference, only Otherness. Here, therefore, is the radicality of the confluence of Biblical tradition, patristic theology and philosophy and Christian dogma: God becomes one with his creation through the total union of himself with the created being Jesus of Nazareth. Creation now is no longer “seen” by

God to be good, it is *experienced* by God to be good through the history of Jesus. From a Franciscan point of view this is explored theologically by Bonaventure and philosophically by Duns Scotus. The very source and meaning of all meaning is now enfleshed in the world of matter, the world of “stuff.” The Greek word *sarx* does not just mean flesh; it means everything that flesh undergoes, the muck, the mire, the rubbish that human life finds itself in every moment of its existence. This is what God does when he enfleshed in Jesus – he becomes one like us in all our things [except sin]. The creator of the universe now lives a creaturely life.

If we return to the Franciscan approach to environmental theology with these notions in our mind, then we can see that while the basis of Francis’s creational attitude and that of contemporary Franciscanism may be existentially experiential, it also has a radical Trinitarian and Christological basis. In the Incarnate Word-Son, God becomes one like us: it is this which is constitutive of creation’s fraternal unity under the one Fatherhood of God. Thus the sun is truly “brother” and the moon truly “sister” and this at an ontological level as well as relational level. Through the Incarnation all things are constituted as brothers or sisters of the one who is the “first born from all creation” at the level of existence and meaning since he is the Logos through whom they all come to have that existence and also their Divine Exemplar [I shall return to this when speaking of Bonaventure].

Francis of Assisi saw everything as signs of God’s love active and operative in the whole of creation. In this context it is inaccurate to call Francis a nature mystic; he is rather a nature sacramentalist. He sees the presence of God everywhere and everything for him is a sign of God’s love immediately present both in the existing material thing itself and in what the thing points to, i.e. its Maker. And for Francis they are signs and communications of God’s grace. If we turn to Bonaventure we can see how the spiritual and mystical intuitions of Francis’s experientialism are brought together in a theological synthesis.

The core of Bonaventure’s theological architecture is his doctrine of the Trinity. From this follows his doctrine of the

centrality of the Word and then creation. For Bonaventure the Father is the source of all life and being, even within the Trinity. Bonaventure calls the Father the *fons et origo* and the *fons plenitudo* [the fountain fullness] of all things.

But there is another approach to a specifically Franciscan theology of environment which is even more radical than Bonaventure's: that of Duns Scotus. This application of Scotus's theology and philosophy to contemporary explorations of theological issues concerning the environment allows us to see how Scotus's theology and metaphysics is not tied to the debates of his own time but has a contemporary significance and relevance. Undoubtedly Scotus is difficult to understand but tenacity in reading Scotus will repay great dividends. In using Scotus to examine and explore a Franciscan theological reflection on environmental issues we can do so using two of his most important doctrines 1. the doctrine of the Primacy of Christ in the universe and 2. the doctrine of *haecceitas* [hay-chay-it-tas], or as it is more formally known, the doctrine of the Principle of Individuation. So, Scotus's contribution is therefore a theological one and a metaphysical one.

These two approaches do not admit of an interpretation of the world that says something external to a reality which in itself can determine what its rights are. The Principle of Individuation is the guarantee of a thing's individual uniqueness. Every existing thing, no matter how great or small, right down to a single grain of sand on a beach, or a single blade of grass, is unique. Amid all the same types of things in the species, each one possesses some intrinsic positive determination at a substantial level that the other does not possess. One grain of sand on a beach is not like the other grains of sand. Its uniqueness is beyond any of the external factors: shape, size, and color. It is that thing, in itself, as not another thing of the same class or species. In the myriads of existing things there is none like it. Thus, the whale, tiger, shark, flower, tree, microbe, etc. has not just a *right* to exist but they also have rights within that existence because they are existing things with their own unique *haecceitas*. It is not simply because an existing thing is part of God's creation [at

least from a Christian point of view], but simply because it has an ontological reality as that thing in itself and is thus distinguished from all other things, even of the same class, as an ontological and existential reality.

If this is transposed onto Scotus's understanding of the Incarnation within a Franciscan understanding of an environmental theology, then the argument for the inherent rights of creation independent of an external determination and imposition [i.e. rational humankind determining the rights of creation and determining how those rights are to be understood, or indeed determining whether creation has any rights at all, let alone inherent rights] becomes all the stronger. Scotus argues from the premise that there was no external motivating factor for God to become part of his creation. He argues that there is no "necessity" for it against the traditional argument which says the "need to be saved" results in the Incarnation, and he further argued that he could not conceive that the greatest good [the Incarnation] could be the result of a lesser good [the need to be saved]. If this is the case, then the primary function that Christ has in the universe is the assuaging of humanity's guilt.

Scotus says in his work *Ordinatio* III that the Incarnation was always in the mind of God so that the Logos would have become part of God's creation even apart from sin. In this context we can extrapolate from Scotus and say that the Incarnation is the ultimate sacrament, i.e. the definitive sign and graced presence of God and God's love in the universe. However, we can push this argument of Scotus further: Scotus is presenting Christ as the beginning, the middle and the end of the creative process. So at the center of the cosmos stands Christ through whom all things were made and through whom everything that exists participates in the life which is sustained and nourished by the Spirit who communicates that divine life to the whole of created reality.

This can be taken to its absolute edge by arguing that if this is the case, the whole of created reality is actually the Church: if the Church is understood as the Spirit of Jesus alive in all things, and since Christ is not separate from the reality of the cosmos but at the center of it, then the entirety

of the cosmos is infused and permeated with his presence. The Incarnation, therefore, is the guarantee, irreversible and nonnegotiable, of the right to and rights within existence of the whole of creation regardless of size, shape, function, intellectual, rational or sentient capabilities or determinations. Since all things come to be through Christ and all things are created with Christ in mind, then the Incarnation is constitutive of the very “stuff” of life, animate and inanimate, to the extent that even a single gene has Christ as its model. Thus the entirety of creation is subsumed in the reality that is Christ since whatever lives, animal, vegetable or mineral, has its reality of existence only because he exists. This is a development of Francis, Bonaventure and Scotus.

The contemporary Franciscan argument suggests that as Christ stands at the head and centre of the created universe and the Incarnation is a unique event, it itself possesses its own principle of singularity whereby all other principles derive their reality as their uniquely existing selves. From this we can infer, at least at the level of spirituality, that the universe itself has a principle of uniqueness and singularity. It is a creation of “radical contingency” which means that when this universe has run the course of its existence, there will be nothing after it. The entire universe is suffused and permeated with the presence of Christ so that one can reasonably speak of a cosmos that is “Christified.” In this context a Franciscan approach to environmental theology or spirituality would say that the whole of creation not only participates in Christ or is suffused and permeated with the presence of Christ but that the whole of creation is the body of Christ. If this is accepted as a plausible hypothesis in relation to environmental theology and understood as a distinctive Franciscan approach, then the conclusion can be reached that any lack of respect for the rights of creation is lack of respect for the body of Christ.

In a Franciscan conception, the end of the universe is union with God and the means to achieve this end is the Incarnation; the entirety of creation, therefore, is destined for union with God since this is what God first willed when he created it. This creation that is destined for union is not just

humanity. As Bonaventure remarks, one of the functions of humanity in the world is to assist creation to come to its fulfilment. And humanity is the only part of creation who can choose to freely accept or reject this union. Animals, trees, mountains, rocks, etc. will have union with God because they are created by God and they are not reducible to their nature, i.e. a man-eating shark is more than a man-eating shark. It is “shark” and has reality and existence precisely as the thing it is and it does what sharks do – it does ‘sharkness.’ In other words, it does what it is because a single shark is like no other shark because of its *haecceitas*. In this conception, and using Duns Scotus’s concept of the Primacy of Christ, a contemporary approach to environmental theology from a Franciscan perspective posits the immorality of killing sharks, tigers, crocodiles, etc. simply because they are man-eaters. In other words, while the principle of Individuation as a created reality guarantees the right of some thing to be that some thing uniquely as itself, the Incarnation, treated in this radical way, guarantees the truth of that reality as part of the dynamic process of creation and assumes and subsumes into that reality the reality of every existing and existent thing – animate and inanimate.

In this Franciscan vision, which finds its source in Francis of Assisi and which is distilled in the theology of Bonaventure and philosophy of Scotus, environmental theology and ethics become a central tenet of contemporary Franciscan thought whereby ideas stemming from the Bible, ancient philosophers of Stoicism and Platonism are re-interpreted in a contemporary contribution to environmental theology. Through the vision and experience of St. Francis and the theology of Bonaventure and philosophy of Scotus, there is expressed the desperate need for a new environmental theology and ethic which has as its centre a “creational covenant,” a bi-lateral agreement between humanity and the created order.

Since creation in Franciscan thought stands as a sacrament, it is worthy of respect and honor and dignity because of the reality of which it is a sign and to which it points in its symbolic value. A Franciscan contribution to Catho-

lic environmental theology radicalizes the thought of Francis and to some extent politicizes it from the point of view of creational ethics. In this contemporary Franciscan approach to environmental theology, humanity does not stand at the center of the cosmos, that place is reserved for Christ, but rather humanity actively participates in the ongoing creative process of God through being the image and likeness of God and through assisting creation to come to its fulfilment. That process includes the acknowledgment of the rights of creation to justice as a creature of God: every member of every species has its own integrity, uniqueness, rights and future because they are unique and have as their “blueprint” the Incarnation.

This is the conclusion of a Franciscan ecotheology. There is an urgent need for humanity to seek more equitable ways in which to live harmoniously in and with and for creation, not as master but as member and partner in mutual cooperation. At the moment it would appear that the scales are tipped against creation and ultimately through climate change, global warming, pollution, etc., it will tip against humanity. Given this, it is not too melodramatic to speak of an environmental catastrophe in the waiting, or in a more poetic vein, an environmental Armageddon. Ultimately, the Rio and Kyoto environmental accords have done little or nothing to tilt the scales in creation’s favor. Environmental pressure and lobby groups can bring about a change through direct action [as long as it is not violent] and help to conscientize. But ultimately humanity must come to the realization that creation seeks to be respected for its own reality and truth and not because of its utility value to humanity.

The contribution of Franciscan theology, philosophy and spirituality to environmental theology does not pretend that the complete answer is to be found in the inspiration of Francis of Assisi, or in Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, but it certainly does posit the need not only for a fresh theological approach but also a new ethical approach. While it is true that a Franciscan approach does not involve itself in the politics of the environmental debate, it nevertheless sees its parameters as being set by the issues of justice and

Séamus Mulholland

peace and creation's integrity which are broader than the social sphere. Franciscan environmental theology will speak of the "integrity" of creation since it conceives this as one of the elements present in the relationship of Francis with and to creation. Francis of Assisi stands for us today as an inspirational figure who experienced creation truly and really as brother and sister and mother, and not as master and slave. The fraternal/sororal relationship is as crucial today, even more so, as it was during the life experience of St. Francis. Franciscan environmental theology, therefore, argues that it is not only incumbent on humanity to seek improvement in relationships with creation so as to acknowledge its right to existence and that it has rights within that existence, it suggests that such improvements are absolutely necessary if humanity itself is to survive.

The Poppies of Assisi

Where dark night once cloaked the valley,  
Lights, like stars painted on your vault,  
Pulse at midnight where lepers lay in  
The dark death you lit with mercy.

Like lanterns of your silvered souls  
Electric lights make earth heavens,  
Their constellations coded in  
Star charts of your courier lives.

Now mere votive lamps flicker far  
As stars to where we brake-light  
And lurch among ghosts of lepers  
And friars who became Church.

Forgive now our poor antiphonal  
Trespass of your blood-red poppies.

Murray Bodo, O.F.M.  
*Pleasant Street Friary  
Cincinnati, Ohio*



**ALL PRAISE BE YOURS, MY LORD, FOR ALL CREATION  
FRANCIS AND CLARE AND ECOLOGY<sup>1</sup>**

**PATRICIA M. RUMSEY**

Francis, named “Patron Saint of Ecology” in 1979 by Pope John Paul II, may be best known internationally as a friend of animals and poet of creation.<sup>2</sup>

The conventional image of Francis, repeated in countless pictures and statues, is that of a little man in a brown dress, with a piece of rope round his waist, with birds in his hands, rabbits at his feet and a rather coy-looking wolf lurking somewhere in the background. The one thing that is universally known about St Francis, even by many who claim no allegiance to Christianity, or even to any religion at all, is that “he loved the animals.” But is the fact of Francis “loving the animals” sufficient grounds for making him the patron saint of ecology?

This paper will examine Francis’s conception of the created world as presented in one of the most characteristic literary genres in which Franciscan theology has been transmitted. Human beings are story-telling animals and this has religious implications. It is the retelling of our memories as preserved in the Gospel stories that helps to constitute us

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I acknowledge with gratitude much inspiration from articles in John Behr, Andrew Louth and Dimitri Conomos (eds.), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West, Festschrift for Bishop Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> William Short, “Franciscan Spirituality,” in Philip Sheldrake (ed.), *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 311.

as the Church. It is the retelling of our origins as preserved in the memories of our Order that helps to constitute us as followers of Francis and Clare. Whereas other religious Orders have learned treatises, mystical poetic writings, ascetic and mystical sermons, our theological tradition comes largely and unashamedly in story-form. But although at first glance simplistic and artless, these stories enshrine profound theological truths and principles. Francis was not a professional theologian; he had had little schooling and does not seem to have profited much by the little he had; his Latin was poor. Although he had so many connections with France – his mother, his name; the troubadour songs he loved so much – his French was poor, although he loved the French language and spoke it, as his biographer says “in times of great exaltation.” But in spite of this lack in his life, he had a kind of natural – or perhaps “supernatural” would be truer – theological sense, which comes out in his life and his writings, few and humble though these are, with a simplicity and a sincerity which, even after 800 years, is deeply moving.

“Ecology” comes from the Greek word *oikos* meaning “house” – which can lead us to think about household accounts and domestic trivia, but the sense here is the “house” of creation, the home that God created “in the beginning” to be a dwelling place for the human race – or even better still the “temple” of the created universe – where God is worshipped and towards the perfection of which we are moving at the *Parousia*. In this house or temple of the universe, it is the privilege and responsibility of human kind to give voice to the praise and worship of God and so exercise our priesthood by giving a voice to creation with which to praise, glorify and worship God. This view of the goodness and holiness of a cosmos created by God comes to its fulfillment in the great early Christian hymns in Ephesians and Colossians. Here, Christ is presented as the head and the first fruits of the created universe: “all things ... things in heaven and things on earth” are “gathered up ... in him” (Eph 1:3-14). He is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible

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and invisible ... all things have been created through him and for him ... in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-20). A similar theology is found in the Prologue to John’s Gospel: “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1: 3). Christ is the *logos*, the rational principle behind the created world; as such, he gives it being and meaning and holds it in existence. Christ is the head and crown of a good and holy creation, and as such, is honored liturgically. Now the universe, instead of simply inspiring praise and worship of God, is actually caught up into that worship, by its inclusion in Christ:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and varied ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb 1:1-3).

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, ‘To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ And the elders fell down and worshipped (Rev 5:13-14).

These scriptural passages reveal to us the dynamic of God’s communication to us through the natural world of his creation held in being by Christ: in the wonder and beauty of the natural world we see the *vestigia Dei* – God’s footprints on earth, and these faint glimpses of his glory invite us to respond in praise and worship.

Francis was not a trained theologian and he might have been hard put to articulate these ideas in theological terms, but he was a poet, and he expresses all these concepts in his *Canticle of Brother Sun*. So to describe Francis as “the poet of creation” is perhaps a happier description than that of “the

friend of animals.”

Franciscan spirituality has been traditionally – and rather simplistically – summed up as “the Crib, the Cross and the Eucharist.” In this paper I will change the focus slightly and look at Francis’s perception of the created world and his understanding of his – and by accommodation – *our* - place within it under three main headings:

- *Creation*, the relationship of the world with God;
- *the Incarnation*, which is the consummation of that relationship;
- *the Eucharist*, as the transfiguration of the relationship between God, humankind and matter.

## **FRANCIS AND CREATION**

By Francis’s winsome habit of referring to each created thing as “brother” and “sister” – Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water – he managed in a pre-ecological era to express in a very much simplified way what later generations would understand scientifically as the interconnect-edness of the entire cosmos. Medieval Christians would not have understood our concern for “ecology” and the archae-ologists tell us from their exploring medieval middens<sup>3</sup> that our forbears were probably just as exploitive in their use of natural resources as we are in the modern world. Our “eco-logical footprint” is far heavier than theirs could ever have been due to the greater possibilities in the modern world for the exploitive use of natural resources, and the fact that we seem to need so much more “stuff” to keep ourselves clothed, fed, and amused than they ever did, and also that there are just so many more of us around to use up those resources. So, whereas some of Francis’s actions, such as that of en-couraging the Brother who looked after the garden to plant

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<sup>3</sup> “Midden” is defined as a kitchen refuse heap which, when excavated by archeologists, would reveal details about the lifestyle of earlier centu-ries. See *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition (Spring-field, MA: Merriam Webster, Inc. 2001), 734-35.

flowers around the edge of the vegetable patch, have a strikingly modern ring to them, other actions are decidedly un-ecological, such as when he told the brothers to rub meat onto the very walls of the houses on Christmas day, so that even the bricks and mortar could share in the celebrations for the birth of Christ. Liturgical that might have been, but ecologically friendly – definitely not ...

Francis saw the whole natural world and each creature in it as giving a unique honor and glory to God and this was the burden of his *Canticle of the Brother Sun*: “Be praised my Lord *through (per)* Brother Sun.” As he lay blind, wounded and in pain from the stigmata and very near to death he wrote this beautiful hymn of praise in which he called on the entire created universe stanza by stanza to praise its Creator, and his understanding was not simply that God should be praised *for* the existence of the natural world, but that each created object should itself somehow assume a voice – a vocal consciousness which enabled it to offer honor and glory to its Creator by and through its own particular characteristic qualities – the sun by its heat and light, the water by the fact that it is so essential to the existence of everything created and its purity, and so on. According to this vision, the created world is a theophany – a revelation of God, and it is precisely through the knowledge of God, expressed in thanksgiving that we rediscover that knowledge of the world for which we were created. And once we know the created world in this way, it is an impossibility to treat “things just as things.” Every single thing created is embraced and held in being by the love of God – they are not simply “good things” provided out of God’s love for us, for us to use or abuse as we please. As Elizabeth Theokritoff wrote:

The material world is thus integral to the divine purpose. It is not disposable packaging for the spiritual, or a mere backdrop to the human drama.<sup>4</sup>

The created world has its own relationship with God,

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<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Theokritoff, “Embodied Word and New Creation: Some Modern Insights Concerning the Material World,” in John Behr, Andrew

having been created by him and having eventually to return to him. Each of us, and indeed every single creature, even each microscopic grain of sand is loved by God in a divine and overwhelming manner. Each and every thing in creation reveals in itself the evolution of the world towards the fullness of Christ. So St. Francis teaches us that as we integrate our own spiritual lives with the life of the created universe we learn to recognize in every creature a spark of divine love, unique to its own self.

[T]here is not an atom in this world, from the meanest speck of dust to the greatest star, which does not hold in its core ... the thrill ... of its coming into being, of its possessing infinite possibilities and of entering into the divine realm, so that it knows God, rejoices in him.<sup>5</sup>

In this perception of creation, the whole of the created world is sacred; it is not for us to treat as we like; we have a divinely given responsibility towards the natural world. Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Father Zosima speaks about the "merciful heart which burns with love for the entire cosmos" because it is God's creation. That is why Francis had such reverence even for the smallest particle of the created world.

## **FRANCIS AND THE INCARNATION**

*Cur Deus Homo?* Why did God become man? Was it, as the Dominicans said, to redeem a sinful, fallen world? Or was it, as the Franciscans said, that Christ came among us as the crown and perfection of a good and holy creation and the Incarnation would have taken place even if Adam had not sinned. Franciscans see the world as created in, through

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Louth and Dimitri Conomos, (eds.), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West*, 226.

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Anthony, "Body and Matter in Spiritual Life," in *Sacrament and Image* (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1987), 41, quoted in E. Theokritoff, "Embodied Word and New Creation," 223.

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and for Christ, in preparation for his coming as the crown of God's creation. St. Paul put it like this:

He (Christ) is the image of the unseen God and the first-born of all creation, for in him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and everything invisible ... all things were created through him and for him. Before anything was created, he existed, and he holds all things in unity ... (Col 1:15, 16).

The entire world was created with the incarnation "in mind" as it were; as a preparation for the coming in the flesh of Christ as the crown of that creation. And Christ holds all the created universe together in unity. A Russian theologian wrote:

Christ walked this earth and there is nothing in this world which has remained a stranger to his humanity and has not received the imprint of the Holy Spirit.... Matter has been rendered dynamic by its sanctification in the incarnation.<sup>6</sup>

The stories of Francis preaching to the birds and taming the wolf of Gubbio are part of his legendary legacy to the human race, and they are part of the universal attractiveness of his character. But Francis's love of creation was far more deeply rooted theologically than the view that he was the "friend of animals" gives him credit for. It has various different aspects. Certainly he picked worms up off the pathway and moved them where they would not be trodden on, but this was not simply out of concern for the worms; he himself explained that it was because the Old Testament prophesied of Christ: "I am a worm and no man" (Psalm 21). He rescued lambs which were destined for slaughter, not simply because they were attractive little animals and in order to save their

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Evdokimov, "Nature," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 18 (March 1965): 18-26..

lives (Christians of previous generations probably did not share our enthusiasm for the “cuteness” of the young of the various species), but because Christ was described in the Gospels as “the Lamb of God.” According to these anecdotes, Francis’s vision of the natural world was Christocentric, and the various creatures referred to in the Gospels in a prophetic connection with Christ had for him a kind of semi-sacramental value which rendered them precious because by their existence they mirrored the person of Christ the Savior and brought his presence to Francis’s mind. Christ walked this earth and so there is nothing in this world which is alien to God; everything in the universe is blessed by the Holy Spirit, and that is why the Church blesses material things and uses them in her worship – bread, water, wine, ashes, oil, candles and light, incense, ... everything created is sacramental, and the sacraments reveal to us the intrinsic sacredness of creation.

Francis, though, was Christocentric, not only in his vision of the world around him, but in his own life, too. He was described as “the Christ of Umbria” and his early biographer, Thomas of Celano, described him as having “regained Paradise” – in other words, Francis, by his life of asceticism and his desire to follow Christ as closely as possible in poverty and humility, had reversed the punishment imposed on the original human pair because of their pride and disobedience, of banishment from Eden and the subsequent disharmony which obtained between themselves and creation, and themselves and God. For his biographer, Francis’s great love of all created things and their acceptance of and willingness to cooperate with him, had tremendous theological implications, signifying a return to the original innocence of Paradise before the fall, when Adam walked with God and the animals were at peace with him and with each other. Francis was Christ-like, not only in his loving and lovable character, his way of life as a wandering mendicant – *Il Poverello* – and because of the stigmata, but also because he was, in a sense, the New Adam, whom we see by his love for animals and all created things, bringing back into creation the peace and harmony which had been lost by the first Adam. The same dynamic



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is at work in the life of Francis as in the lives of the Desert Fathers with their stories of friendship and companionship with wild beasts.

It is in this context that we need to understand Francis's asceticism – his treatment of “Brother Body” that was so harsh in its fasting and other penances that at the end of his life he felt he had to apologize to his body for having treated it so badly. Francis, like the early monks in the desert, who also practiced severe asceticism, decided to tackle the fundamental causes of corruption and to restore within himself the image of God which had become deformed by sin, so that creation, which had fallen through Adam, might be restored in Christ. When we see Francis's asceticism bearing fruit in the holiness which was his, then we actually see the new creation taking shape already in this world. This is one reason why the lives of the saints are so important in the life of the Church: the saint becomes an image and a reminder of the world to come, when all will be transformed and renewed.

## **FRANCIS AND THE EUCHARIST**

In the Eucharist we see the whole of creation, the universe that was made by Christ and for Christ, now transfigured into Christ, and so his transfigured glory shines through the whole cosmos. It is only our weak and dim human eyes that are yet too blinded to recognize him. There is nothing in this world that is not holy, or has the potential for holiness. Every single element in creation is present in the Eucharist – literally, the “Thanksgiving” and so is transformed into Christ.

In the Eucharist we see the whole of creation caught up into God – we have the very “stuff,” the actual physical matter of the created world – the rain, the sun, the seed, the wind, the weather, the cycles of day and night, of summer and winter, the soil, the minerals in the soil, even the manure to enrich the soil and make it fertile, animals to produce the manure, the worms and all the little microscopic beings that live in the soil and the animals in the fields, the hedgerows, the heat, the

fire, to bake the bread – all these transfigured into Christ – by human labor and this is very important. People today do not have the same immediacy with agricultural labor as people would have done in Francis’s day – the farmer: ploughing the land, sowing the seeds, reaping the crop, threshing the grain; the miller: grinding the corn; the baker: producing the bread; all the local villagers: sharing in the hard work and the joys of the grape harvest and the making of wine – today all this takes place mostly out of sight and by means of twenty-first century technology. But for Francis and Clare all this would have been a common sight and part of everyday life going on around them. So they saw all human labor as sacred and holy, not, as it is presented in the Book of Genesis, as a curse and a punishment for sin. Clare calls it a “grace” – a means of sharing in the life of God himself. She wrote: “Let the sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace of working work faithfully and devotedly after the Hour of Terce at work that pertains to a virtuous life and the common good.”<sup>7</sup> And Francis expressed himself thus in his testament, his last message to his friars before he died:

And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness.<sup>8</sup>

Work is holy and a grace because by means of our human labor the world is being transformed into Christ, his kingdom is being brought to fruition among us, and we ourselves are made more truly human by the work we engage in. Everything around us reflects the divine presence and is drawn itself, and so draws us, into the presence of God. This

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<sup>7</sup> Regis Armstrong, *Rule of St Clare*, Ch. 7:1, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady* (New York: New City Press, 2006), 119.

<sup>8</sup> Francis of Assisi, *The Testament 20-21*, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 1, *The Saint*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 125. Hereafter referred to as *FA:ED* followed by volume and page number.

world participates in the holiness of God.

So, how did Francis understand the Eucharist and its place in our lives? His writings are full of references to the Eucharist – his first admonition is about the Body of Christ; his *Letter to the Clergy* is all about the Body and Blood of the Lord and how it was being left by many in dirty places, carried about in a miserable manner, received unworthily and the distress this caused Francis. But his devotion to the Eucharist did not stop at the written word; he put that devotion into practical actions. In one of the early Franciscan texts – the *Legend of Perugia*, it says that during his preaching tours he

would carry a broom to sweep the churches. For blessed Francis was very sad when he entered some church and saw that it was not clean. Therefore, after preaching to the people, at the end of the sermon he would always have all the priests who were present assembled in some remote place so he could not be overheard by secular people. He would preach to them about the salvation of souls and, in particular, that they should exercise care and concern in keeping churches clean, as well as altars and everything that pertained to the celebration of the divine mysteries.<sup>9</sup>

It was the same with his respect for priests – not because they were holy men – because many of them palpably were not – but because it was from their hands he received the Body and Blood of Christ. One deeply moving story tells of his visit to a village where the priest was living with his mistress and they brought the priest out to Francis, expecting this holy little man to reprimand the priest for being such a public sinner – and yet Francis said “Whether he be a sinner, I know not, but I do know that he has power to consecrate the Body of the Lord,” and he knelt down right there and kissed the hands of the priest the villagers wanted him to condemn.

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<sup>9</sup> *A Mirror of the Perfection* (The Lemmens Edition), FA:ED 3, 241.

Clare, too, had a great love for created things – even today in the monastery at San Damiano, visitors and pilgrims can step into her little garden terrace, which looks out over the valley where she grew plants and herbs. She told the sisters when they went out of the monastery to “praise God for every shrub and flower and leafy tree.” The legend has it that she had a pet cat. Perhaps nothing illustrates better the link between Clare and creation than the fact that her place in the refectory and the dormitory are marked and honored, not by a statue or a picture or a plaque with a quotation from her writings, but by a vase of fresh flowers.

Her spirituality was centered on the incarnation. She wrote to Agnes of Prague: “Gaze upon that mirror [the mirror of Christ] each day, O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually study your face in it ...”<sup>10</sup> She thus counseled Agnes to look daily upon the example of Christ and measure herself by that example. She said “as the glorious virgin of virgins carried him [Christ] materially, so you, too, by following in her footprints, especially those of humility and poverty, can, without any doubt, always carry him spiritually ...” She was so convinced of the reality of Christ’s presence within each believer that she said: “the soul of the faithful person, the most worthy of all creatures because of the grace of God, is greater than heaven itself ... only a faithful soul is his dwelling place and his throne ...”<sup>11</sup>

Holy pictures and statues of Clare holding the monstrance are as ubiquitous as the statues of Francis holding birds and rabbits. Although completely anachronistic, because when Clare was alive monstrences had not yet been initiated as Eucharistic vessels, yet these pictures and statues do hold a profound truth in that Clare’s spirituality was intensely eucharistic. In her Rule she writes that “Let them [the sisters] receive Communion seven times.”<sup>12</sup> To us, used to receiving Communion every time we celebrate the Eucharist,

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<sup>10</sup> Clare of Assisi, *Fourth Letter to Agnes*, 15, in *CA:ED*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Clare of Assisi, *Third Letter to Agnes*, 24, 21 in *CA:ED*, 52.

<sup>12</sup> Clare of Assisi, *The Form of Life of Clare of Assisi*, Ch. 3: 14, *CA:ED*, 113.

this hardly makes sense. Yet in her day, when people only received Communion perhaps once a year, this was amazingly frequent. In times of great peril and danger, when the monastery was in imminent danger of being invaded by foreign mercenary troops, it was to the Eucharistic presence of Christ that she turned in her need, and a voice was heard saying “I will always protect you.”<sup>13</sup>

These stories also illustrate another intensely Franciscan trait – Franciscan theology and spirituality are radically incarnational. Whatever the aspect of Franciscan life, it cannot remain at the notional, or purely abstract level. It has to be put into practice, it has to be lived out to be genuine. Clare said to her sisters: “loving one another with the love of Christ, may you demonstrate without in your deeds the love you have within so that, compelled by such an example, the sisters may always grow in the love of God and in mutual charity ...”<sup>14</sup> And Clare put this into practice in her own life; she washed the feet of the sisters (even when one of them accidentally kicked her in the face while she was doing it); she did all the unpleasant jobs that go with caring for the sick; she tucked the sleeping sisters up in bed when it was cold; she healed their illness by making the sign of the cross.

Whatever the quality or the virtue it cannot remain only an intention. If love, it cannot remain just warm feelings, but means living peacefully and patiently with all the annoying and irritating habits of those around me, just as they have to live with mine. If poverty, it cannot remain just a pious idea, it means going without, sometimes seriously, so that others can have the basics of life. If penance, it is not just an inner change of heart, but has to be lived out in radical and even painful asceticism. Love of creation is not just sentimental feeling for little lambs, but a deep respect and reverence for every single thing in creation – just as the dying Francis in his little hut at San Damiano let the rats and the mice run over his tortured body. He let them run, because in his mind, they had just as much right to be in the universe as he had.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Legend of Saint Clare*, Ch. 10, CA:ED, 301.

<sup>14</sup> Clare of Assisi, *The Testament*, 59-60, CA:ED, 64.

So also for the Eucharist, Franciscan devotion is expressed not in abstract treatises, but lived out in action. For Francis this meant sweeping out neglected churches; for Clare it was being propped up in her sick bed making altar linens to send to poor churches round Assisi.

So this is why these stories are so important for Franciscans and why we treasure the stories and tell and retell them; in these stories we find the concrete examples left us by Francis, by Clare and the early companions. These stories show us Franciscan theology and spirituality lived out in the practicalities of daily existence. They show us Franciscan theology incarnated in the lives of the holy ones who founded our religious family.

In conclusion, when we try to understand Francis and Clare in the modern context of ecology: the vision that Francis and Clare had of the *oikos* – that the house of God, the Temple of God that is this created universe, is something essentially good and holy – good because created by God, redeemed and sanctified by the incarnation of Christ and transfigured by and into the Eucharist.

**ECO-PENANCE,  
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI AND LENT**

**MAUREEN HARTMANN, S.F.O.**

The Greek root word for the “eco” prefix in “eco-penance” and “ecology” is “oikos.” This word means house, dwelling, or habitat.<sup>1</sup> In common usage the word “ecology” is equated with “environment.” As human beings, along with other living creatures of this planet, we depend on this earth for our bodily functions. The webs of life on which we depend are our eco-systems, or areas, or arenas or surroundings, or “oikos.”

For instance, we human beings, and other mammals, in our breathing, or respiratory processes take in oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. Vegetation, or plant life in the process of photosynthesis takes in carbon dioxide from the air and releases the unused oxygen which mammals use in breathing.

True conversion, or penance, is realizing that we are absolutely dependent on our Creator through his/her creation and relate to creation accordingly. It means conversion toward our outer and inner experience of the Earth, both appreciating the beauty of nature and having compassion for the industrial misuse of the planet, and identifying emotionally with the Earth in both a joyful and sorrowful way. Especially, this interior awareness will lead to the sacrifice necessary to positively changing our life-style to accommodate our environment. It will lead to repentance, not only for our per-

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Partridge, *Origins; A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 176.

sonal sins against the Earth, but repentance for humanity's sins as a whole. For example, humanity has sinned against the Earth and impoverished it in terms of the numbers of species, whether accidentally or on purpose, and drained it of its resources by failing to replant/reclaim areas stripped by mining and drilling.

Out of the suffering, which this penance and conversion involve, comes a new vision, or model of living, example, pattern for life, or paradigm. A case in point is the vision of Pachamama, an organization whose purpose is to struggle against the deforestation of the planet. Their mission as expressed on their web site, ([www.Pachamama.org](http://www.Pachamama.org)) is:

The Pachamama Alliance has a two-fold mission: To preserve the Earth's tropical rain forests by empowering the indigenous people who are its natural custodians. To contribute to the creation of a new global vision of equity and sustainability for all.

It further notes that the native peoples of the rain forests took the initiative in the contacts between the ancient, developing folks of humanity, and the modern technological society. The Achuar native peoples of Ecuador were afraid that contemporary technology would interfere with their cherished traditional way of life, and communicated with citizens of the wealthy nations about this, and out of this new connection, Pachamama was born. Out of the fear of being destroyed as a people, as individuals, was birthed a new hand-to-hand connection, a new reaching out which hopefully would protect the rain forest and ultimately save the Earth.

How does this concern for the Earth connect with St. Francis? St. Francis, while he does not espouse specific practices for the environment, does espouse penance and conversion toward God, the Creator. He refers, in his *Admonition XXIII*, to the "faithful and prudent ... servant who does not delay in punishing himself for all his offenses, inwardly through



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contrition and outwardly through confession and penance for what he did.”<sup>2</sup>

It seems to me that we, the human species, need to repent for damage done to the earth in mining its resources and endangering, sometimes to extinction, even accidentally, other species.

St. Francis did practice penance in relation to creation when he wrote his *Canticle of the Sun*. It must have taken great effort and conversion for him to get the inspiration to compose it. According to Adrian House he was in a depressed state, both emotionally and physically, when he wrote it.

I’m sure he still felt it and was hurting emotionally because his order was no longer united on the literal living out of the poverty of the gospels. Adrian House says about his physical pain and discomfort:

the inflammation of his eyes – became increasingly serious. He couldn’t stand sunlight and found it impossible to see by the light of a lamp or candle at night. Imprisoned in darkness, his pain was so intense that he seldom rested or slept, and if he did drop off, was soon wakened by the field mice that scampered all over him.”<sup>3</sup>

House said in introduction to Francis’s composing *The Canticle of the Sun*,

God deigned to assure me, while I’m still here in the flesh, that there will be a place for me later in heaven. I therefore want to compose a song praising him and thanking him for all his creatures on earth, because we cannot live without them, and we daily offend him by our lack of gratitude for them.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Francis of Assisi, *Admonition XXIII*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1, *The Saint*, ed. Regis Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, William Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 136.

<sup>3</sup> Adrian House, *Francis of Assisi: A Revolutionary Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Hidden Spring, 2000), 268.

<sup>4</sup> House, *Francis of Assisi*, 268.

His song, or poem, of the sun did show a kinship with all of creation. He did refer to the sun as “brother,” and the moon as “sister,” and the earth as “mother.” The sun and moon were his siblings, and the earth was his parent.

Francis’s poem was certainly alive to God’s creation; spring is the time of renewal of creation. Lent is the time of inner renewal and means “spring” – Middle English, “lenten, lente,” Anglo-Saxon, “lengten, lencten,” from lengthening of the days in Spring.<sup>5</sup> The Church’s season of Lent is the time of inner renewal, the increase of God’s light in us, and a time for practices that will make that radiance grow and glow. What period of time is more appropriate than the season of spring and Lent to intensify our care and practices for the environment, which, we hope, will continue to naturally renew itself after the death of winter?

Lent is a time of contemplation and the authors of the book *Care for Creation* note that action has to flow out of contemplation. So one might use the guided meditations in the ends of the chapters in *Care for Creation* for daily or weekly prayers, alone or in groups.

*Care for Creation*<sup>6</sup> in the final chapter, “Eco-Penance,” suggests numerous penances, some of which may involve changes in habits, but will basically be positive experiences rather than mortifications. We may begin by taking the “ecological footprint” test on the internet and attempt to adjust our life styles accordingly. We are consuming too much when the amount of resources we use everyday, multiplied by the number of human beings on the planet, use up more than Earth’s environmental assets. One concrete project to take on is making your church “green.” *Care for Creation* mentions an organization called Interfaith Power and Light, which does energy audits for churches and gives them prac-

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<sup>5</sup> Webster’s *New World Dictionary of the English Language* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1968), 838.

<sup>6</sup> Iliia Delio, O.S.F., Keith Douglass Warner, O.F.M., and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation*, Forward by Denis Edwards (Cincinnati, Ohio, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008), 185-99.

tical suggestions for reducing their use of energy and thus becoming more environmentally friendly. We can cut down on pollution by using public transportation or by forming carpools to church events and functions. Churches can initiate practical aids, such as having farmers' markets in their parking lots, to help parishioners purchase food locally. Newman Hall, Holy Spirit Parish in Berkeley, is in the process of forming an ecology group to discuss and work on ecological issues, among the members of the congregation.

It takes inner and external effort to plan and initiate these projects, but hopefully the rewards and resurrection, and new paradigm vision, which are a result, will be great.



## FRANCISCAN POVERTY ONCE AGAIN

DAVID FLOOD, O.F.M.

The stoic philosopher Seneca was banished from Rome and had to make do on the island of Corsica. He wrote to his mother Helvia to console her in his absence. (The letter of consolation was at the time a recognized literary genre.) Seneca had to make do with little. That dimension of exile had not bothered other Romans of stature, whose memory Seneca recalls; nor did it bother him. He had not lost his wealth, he observed, but the many occupations that he could well do without. He knew, and now from life, that a man needed little to take care of himself. “For how little is needed to support a man!” (*Quantulum enim est quod in tutelam hominis necessarium sit* [10:1-2]). Seneca goes on to relate, mockingly, some of the sumptuous dinners of the Roman rich. He comments: “Say someone contemns such practices. How can poverty harm him?” (*Ista si quis despicit, quid illi paupertas nocet?*) And so we have to do with Seneca’s poverty, the little with which he must make do.

When we speak of poverty today, we have something else in mind than the poverty embraced of Seneca. He used the term well; his mother and his other readers knew exactly what he meant. We say and hear the term today, and we follow easily when speakers distinguish between absolute poverty or destitution and the relative poverty of the low percentiles in a society’s distribution of goods. The former “is a

violation of human dignity.”<sup>1</sup> It should not happen to anyone to lack food, health, and education.

We encounter something different from Seneca’s poverty in the year 42 and the UN’s poverty today when we look at what the Four Masters had to say about Franciscan poverty in 1242. Alexander of Hales and his colleagues had been given the task of writing about their province’s difficulties with the Franciscan rule. The results have come down to us as the earliest of the thirteenth century’s six (at least) commentaries on the rule to have survived. (We do not include in the category, although that is what each is, the *Recordatio* of Francis of Assisi at death, commonly called his Testament, and the 1230 bull *Quo elongati* of Pope Gregory IX.) The Masters defined the poverty of Rule VI as owning nothing and begging for the things of life. That is a fair reading of Rule VI, on the face of it, although I doubt if such poverty would appear in the Masters’ circumstances. Though they made sense of the words, the context in which they spoke in 1242 was hardly the one whence the formulation of Rule VI emerged in 1223.

We can describe the social conditions in which the Masters found themselves when writing their commentary as well as the reasoning that led them to their conclusion. In 1239 a group of learned clerics had ousted Brother Elias as general minister and set about drawing up a new set of constitutions for the order. One of the constitutions severely restricted the admission of non-clerics to the order. New brothers had to have a clerical formation so that they could pursue their studies and prepare themselves for pastoral service in the church. When setting up their explanation of Rule VI, the Masters drew on the theological tradition which, as Masters, they represented. They used it to reach their conclusions on troubling passages in the rule.

We end up with a different grasp of Rule VI if we sketch the chapter’s genealogy. We can do so easily, for the formal purpose of the group producing the new version of the rule

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<sup>1</sup> UN, *Indicators of Poverty and Hunger* (U. of Bristol, Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research, 2005); i.e., Wikipedia, “Poverty.”

was to reach a succinct reformulation of the *Early Rule*. Seeing as Francis stood behind the formulation of the chapter, he knew exactly what he was talking about. He drew on the words and the ways that he and his brothers had developed in their first fifteen years together. For example, they had drawn up a sound way of seeing to their material needs. We must read Rule VI:7-9 in that light. That second part of the chapter sums up the economics of the brotherhood, such as the brothers had developed it. They worked to see to their needs. They claimed no portion of the communal economy's circulation of goods as exchange for their labor. By nature, they deserved the means of sustenance, and in the early years had no difficulty getting by. After a rough start, given that they had to prove themselves, soon the sole danger was the generosity of those who were grateful for the brothers' abundant generosity towards others. This is a different mendicancy than the one the Masters had in mind.

So too with poverty. The early brothers extricated themselves from the society of their day. They did so by disengaging themselves from social relations and from claims of ownership. When the brothers had proven the solid quality of their life at others' service and society attempted to include them as holy men of exemplary lives, they distinguished very clearly between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of the Lord (*Early Rule* XVII:10-16). They dared confess that the Spirit of the Lord led them. They easily saw that the representative agents of society could not understand the spiritual distance between the brotherhood and the ways of the Christian world. They were routinely misunderstood. They accepted the misunderstanding; they readily paid the ensuing price of their resolution. With time they were able to declare the success of their resolution: in the Hymn to Obedience, an obedience to the Spirit of the Lord, they celebrated their humility and their poverty. And so we see, in *Early Rule* IX:1-2 and Hymn 11-12, early in the history and later in the history of the term, the origins of Rule VI's poverty. This is not what was going on in Francis's mind alone in November 1223 when he was helping fix the text of Rule VI. Rather, this is the point in their common life at which Francis and his

brothers had arrived, and he above all was faithful to it. Poverty had become their term for tracing the border between them and the world about them. It marked their success as well as the price of leaving the world. Francis said it and his brothers understood.

Some did, that is, while many did not. There was no way for a high-powered cleric such as Haymo of Faversham to grasp the dialectics of early Franciscan life. There was no way for the Masters in 1242 to understand, especially as they belonged, as did Haymo, to the forces that had dragged the brotherhood back into society. They accused those who did understand of ignorance. This same drama lay behind the discussion about *usus pauper* at the end of the century. Brother Peter of John said: A brother stands with Christ or he stands with society's primary agents. He is in exile with the Lord. Of course he pays a material price. And of course Franciscans well ensconced in society did not understand the consequence of occupying a sure if modest place in society.

Franciscan poverty is a question of critical social action and not of individual virtue. It is a practice named by the brothers as they trod the way of the Lord and not a mystical dimension of Francis of Assisi's life. In the Hymn to Obedience, poverty confounds worldly concerns while humility mocks the wisdom of the world. A Master cannot mock the world that acknowledges his learning and calls him Master. The Four of 1242 most certainly understood themselves as masters. We see them perform as masters in the introduction to their magisterial commentary.

The poverty of Rule VI does not lack food, health, education, and responds critically to the poverty of those who do. Rule VI 7-9 resolves the economic needs of the brothers. They continue to generate much more in the way of goods and services from within the working population than they need. As for their education, the brothers laid down their policy on study in Admonition VII. The Early Writings, as the written remains of their educational process, have much to teach us today still. It is by immersing oneself in that process that one becomes a Franciscan. In the Message of Recall

and Exhortation, Francis packed the dying man off to hell because he failed to see to a just distribution of his wealth. Francis offered the narrative as an example of the blindness he had just excoriated. As with Seneca, in spite of his poverty, the dying man was the prisoner of his class consciousness. Franciscan poverty has its history, as does the misuse of the term. Its history began with *Early Rule* IX:1-2. Its meaning was necessarily perverted with the *coup d'ordre* of learned clerics in 1239. It remains a conundrum for historians today, for they are the age's masters.

I dispense myself from censuring the method (30) and the conclusion (66-67) of Malcolm D. Lambert's *Franciscan Poverty* from 1959. It seems to me obvious that, given the method I have followed and the conclusion at which I have arrived (and arrived long ago), I cannot countenance such a treatment. I mention the book because it has been reprinted. Lambert does scrutinize the sources, however, whereas Franciscan spirituality proceeds otherwise. There a writer turns Francis of Assisi into a stand-in for his lesson on Franciscan poverty. The result is Franciscan spirituality, constructed with terms from the Early Writings, serenely uninterested in what the terms do in the *vita*. I see little use for such spiritual doctrine, of which we have reams and reams within the Franciscan world. The term poverty arose within a common narrative, whence all our words come. Francis and his brothers had recourse to the poverty and humility of Christ to explain the misunderstandings and opposition they encountered. It was a characteristic of Jesus's story, who suffered the misunderstanding and rejection of society. Francis and his brothers figured out they were following in his footsteps when it happened to them.

The word poverty found its way into Franciscan life when Francis and his brothers understood and embraced the distaste and censure they elicited in others by the ways of their living. They did encounter opposition and criticism, they did bear with opprobrium, and they did come to grips with it. When did that happen in the early years? How did they name it? What price were they made to pay for their stubbornness? And if they did not call it "the poverty and humility of the



*The Cord*, 61.1 (2011)

Lord” (*Early Rule IX 1-2*), what does poverty mean in early Franciscan life? Certainly not destitution, certainly not the lack of food, health, and education. Certainly not the poverty of Seneca. Materially the brothers lived at the level of the poor working class, with the added insurance of belonging to the brotherhood. If Francis wanted to do more, by fasting, with ragged and dirty clothes, that had to do with his own struggle and not with Franciscan poverty. And I’m sure he was not the only one who manifested his individual need for more prayer and more asceticism.

At the end of one of his studies on Brother Peter of John, Johannes Schlageter cites Carl Friedrich von Weizsaecker about the great need in the western countries of our day for people who refuse to go along with the ways of the world, who, for the sake of human truth and our future, refuse categorically to belong and who, as the consequence, live differently. That is the life to which the Franciscan rule commits those who profess it. At the core of that text we have Chapter Six, and at the core of Chapter Six we find poverty. It’s not wrong, I submit, to talk about it, once again.

## CHRIST'S JOURNEY TO CALVARY: PARALLELS WITH RELIGIOUS LIFE<sup>1</sup>

GREGORY CELLINI, O.S.F.

In February 2010, our Congregation's Director of Formation (my former Novice Director) called to ask that on Good Friday I present a twenty-minute reflection to our Brothers attending the Community celebration of the Holy Week Tridium. Upon taking the request to prayer, I was surprised not only to be moved to say, "Yes," but to be inspired to talk about an important epiphany in my personal life. When I professed First Vows with the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn in August 2009, I thought religious life was a call to *serve* the *distressed* Christ who journeyed to Calvary. In just a short time I had come to see that Religious occasionally experience moments when **we** are that *distressed* Christ needing to be served. The theme of this article is the parallels I have discovered that exist between the suffering endured by the distressed Christ during His journey to Calvary and those challenges we as Religious – either individually or collectively in our Congregations – face in our daily lives.

Christ's suffering begins Passover morning. It is then Jesus becomes fully aware this will be his last meal with a group of people he loves very much and who love him very much. When Jesus called them, the apostles were twelve ordinary men. In just three short years, they had become a community of believers. Now he is about to leave them and it

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are due to Brother Richard Contino, O.S.F., Director of Formation, and Brother Jack Moylan, O.S.F., Temporary Professed Director, for their contributions to this reflection.

brought Jesus much mental anguish to know he was going to have to say farewell to his beloved Apostles.

How many times as Religious do we need to transition from people we have come to love and who love us? As Franciscan teachers or administrators in schools, we let go of students at graduation. Sometimes it is we who are changing ministries who say goodbye to valued colleagues with whom we have become very close. I recall someone telling me, "Every beginning starts with an ending." If we stop and think about it, Jesus was in transition his entire life. Similar to Jesus, we are in constant transition. Our vows mandate us to be ready at a moment's notice to be on the move, whether for ministry or another aspect of our vocation. The fact that we have professed vows does not make it any easier to say goodbye to those we are leaving behind.

The next relevant segment of the Passion Story is the Last Supper. There are some wonderful things happening at this final meal, including the washing of the feet and institution of the Eucharist. Overshadowing these for Jesus is that he is going to be betrayed. Jesus is so upset he openly mentions this to his Apostles, creating a very tense atmosphere. To be betrayed, not only by one of his disciples – but by a member of the twelve – was a terrible blow to Jesus. It cut him emotionally right to the heart.

Are we as Religious ever betrayed? Sure! Sometimes it is the people with whom we minister who pull the feet right out from us. Even harder to take, occasionally it is a valued co-worker who betrays us. Maybe we shared something in confidence with a member of our congregation but, before you know it, it is all over the gossip trail. Being the victim of betrayal impacts our ability to trust, not only the betrayer, but others. Much more than this, it can produce scars which last a lifetime.

Jesus suffers next in the Garden of Gethsemane. He takes a physical beating here, his sweat becoming like drops of blood – he is practically dehydrated at this point. Even more significant is the mental anguish caused by Peter, James and John. After all he has done for these three Apostles, they

cannot even stay awake to comfort him in his time of distress. How disappointing this must have been to Jesus.

Disappointment is the difference between expectations and reality. Someone coined the phrase “disappointment gap” to describe the distance between the two. We expect here and reality is there – the resulting gap is the disappointment. Do we as Religious ever experience disappointment? Maybe only every day! As one example, our students disappoint us. We see their great potential. We expect them to perform at high levels, but they sometimes do not. How can we handle this disappointment? Just the way Jesus did – by forgiving those who disappoint us and remembering that, for better or for worse and just like us, they are doing the best they can.

The next suffering is Peter’s denial of Jesus, another devastating emotional blow. Peter is a very interesting character. He has this amazing propensity to swing between heroic inspiration and cowardice almost instantaneously. Only hours before Peter had proclaimed, “Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.” Not only does he deny Jesus once, he does so three times.

Someone once said to me, “When you label me, you deny me.” It is so easy to label people. A homeless person – he is lazy; a drug addict – she is weak.

One quality about a label – it sticks and for a long time. I surmise that if someone said the name of a Brother or Sister who has been within our Congregations for fifty years, a label might pop into mind which was several years old. How negating it is to think of someone as they used to be or judge them based on an incident occurring decades ago. Imagine if Jesus saw Peter as the denying apostle he was instead of the courageous martyr he was to become.

Jesus experiences his next suffering when being brought before Pilate. An often overlooked fact is that, by this time, Jesus had been up over twenty-four hours straight. We may remember the last time we went twenty-four hours without sleeping and how we felt physically. Maybe it was for a happy occasion, such as not being able to sleep on an overnight flight to Europe; fortunately, the excitement of the trip overrode the fatigue. Or maybe it was for a medical reason such

as a procedure. A Brother shared with me about his first experience having a colonoscopy. The appointment was for 7:30 A.M. When the doctor arrived, he asked the Brother, "How are you doing?" The Brother responded, "Other than the fact that I have not eaten anything or slept for twenty-four hours, I am doing great." Thank God, the Brother's test results were fine, and he could return home to take a shower, eat something and go to bed. Jesus, on the other hand, was not so lucky. Anyone who saw Mel Gibson's, "The Passion of Christ" witnessed first hand the savage whipping that Jesus took being scourged at the pillar. You could feel the beating he was getting with every sound of the stick connecting with his flesh. One of our Brothers who saw this movie in the theatre said to me, "All I could think of during this scene was when is this scourging going to end."

We feel the same regarding our physical challenges. As we age, it becomes all too apparent that time waits for no one – even us. Deteriorating eyesight, cranky knees, bad backs are just a few of the myriad of ailments we suffer. We ask a similar question – "When will this pain end?" Just as difficult, it is very hard to see a Brother or Sister we have come to deeply love suffer, when it seems just like yesterday they were so strong and vibrant.

Jesus is now carrying the cross to Golgotha. His physical, emotional and mental exhaustion are starting to get the best of him. He falls not once, not twice, but three times – in short, Jesus has failed. Failure is something to which Franciscans can particularly relate. Francis had come to a point late in his life when he considered himself a failure. His Brothers could not agree on the meaning of Poverty. He was not getting the desired results. Nothing was going as he wanted.

A book was recently published entitled *Celebrating Failure*. Celebrating failure sounds like an oxymoron, if ever there was one. Another oxymoron is Brother/Sister Failure, as many people perceive us to be perfect. All day it is, "Brother, Brother, Brother, Brother" or "Sister, Sister, Sister, Sister." Individuals we serve continuously come to us with questions on a range of topics. Since we are known as peacemakers, colleagues approach us for advice on how to handle conflict

in the office. People we do not even know stop us in Church for guidance on tough life issues. We are always expected to have the right answer, provide the optimal solution and offer comforting advice. In reality, we are not super heroes with a big S on our chest. We do not always have the answer, solution or advice. A Brother shared with me recently, "Not only do I no longer have the answers, some days I do not even understand the questions!" What a powerful admission of the absolute nothingness that sometimes we have to bring to the table.

The next part of Jesus' Passion journey is meeting the women who are mourning and lamenting for him. Jesus tells them, "Do not weep for me, but for yourselves." He knows what is going to happen to them and mentally suffers from his great fear for their future. Of all the challenges touched upon, fear appears to be the one we experience most as Religious. Somehow, Religious and fear do not seem to go together. After all, we are peacemakers, and peace is the fruit of love, and love is the opposite of fear. Yet, we are human beings and humans have fears. At a recent meeting of Religious, an attendee courageously stood up and pointed out that we, as Religious, are often afraid to articulate our true feelings. We have this wonderful ability to share time, talent and treasure with each other; however, when it comes to sharing what is in our hearts, it is another matter. Maybe it is a fear of being mocked or embarrassed. Maybe it is the fear of appearing vulnerable or of the conflict which will result. Whatever the fear, we sometimes put up a firewall which blocks us from expressing our truest self. Maybe we need to spend time reflecting on our fears and asking for God's grace to work through them.

To this point in his Passion journey, Jesus has remained spiritually strong. It is when he is nailed to the cross that even the divine savior has a spiritual meltdown. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus is not questioning the existence of God, but is struggling with the apparent silence of his Father. Occasionally, even Religious struggle in this way. The illness of a Brother, the death of a Sister or other traumatic event can lead us to say, "God, I cannot hear

you.” In 2009, a Junior at one of our high schools died. His death was impossible to accept, until someone proclaimed that this student’s shortened life had impacted literally thousands of people, probably many more than if he had lived to ninety. This reinforced that God is always speaking, even when we cannot hear him.

As we have seen, there are significant parallels between Christ’s sufferings during his journey to Calvary and the challenges Religious face in our daily lives. So what is the end result? In a word, it is conversion. It was only after the crucifixion that Jesus could experience the ultimate conversion – the sorrow of Good Friday to the resurrection of Easter Sunday. It is the same with us. As someone told me, “Change only comes from suffering.” It is only when we experience despair that we surrender to God’s molding us in the way he wants us to be, the way he created us to be. It is not until then that we can possess perfect joy.

So when we recognize that we are the *distressed* Christ, let us consider four things: First, recall that Jesus endured similar suffering during his passion and death. Second, say “Thank you Jesus” for yet another opportunity to experience the gift of conversion. Third, be comforted by the thought it is in our darkest moments when God’s grace is most present. Finally, be open to whatever our great God wishes to bestow.

## **SOME MORE OF THE STORY**

### **WILLIAM DeBIASE, O.F.M.**

A great deal of imagination mixed with some fact and a little experience of Francis added up to the following reflection. I imagined myself sitting at a table with the people mentioned below, all of whom were close to Francis. Then I imagined what they would say about Francis. When they looked at Francis who did they see? What did God through Francis do in their lives? One by one they told their stories. In listening to them I also discovered some aspects of Francis in my life which I may have forgotten.

You will notice that *LADY CLARE* does not share. She was sitting at the table listening very joyfully. In my imagination I saw Clare as the one who kept everything alive. She did not have to share. She was the dream of Francis among us.

*PIETRO BERNADONE* (Francis's father) ... I am Francis's father. I do not come out very good in most books. The general impression is that I was just angry and abusive. As strange as it may sound the reason for the anger and what appears to be abusive behavior was that I had so many hopes and dreams for Francis. I wanted him to be a knight. I wanted him to take over the family business. I wanted him to be one of the leading citizens. I saw all of these disappearing in the way he was behaving.

It would have been so good if he had just acted like the other youths. I felt obliged to correct him. He could not make this mistake and throw everything that I had planned for him away. For a while we were together. Maybe it was the war with Perugia, maybe it was being in prison, perhaps it



was his sickness, whatever the case he changed. I just did not understand what was happening.

Instead of being a knight he was a beggar, instead of being one of the leading citizens he was laughed at, instead of taking over my business he turned his back on it. It all came to a head on that day when he stood in front of the Bishop took his clothes off and announced that from now on his only father was his Father in heaven. I thought my heart would break. I did not know what to do. I watched as he walked out of the city gates. He was alone covered by some old clothes the Bishop had given him. My dreams walked out the city gate that day.

He was away for quite a while. I do not think it is necessary for me to tell you the story. Of how people started to follow him, how his reputation for holiness for simplicity and joy captivated people.

When he would come to Assisi to preach his mother and I would go to listen. As I listened to him I realized that I had changed. I saw my son living his dream and that made me happy. I think he knew his mother and I were there. Although we never spoke I am sure that he sensed the anger was gone. Maybe he felt that at long last I could in some way share in the dream that God had given him.

BISHOP GUIDO ... I was Bishop of Assisi during the time of Francis. At the beginning I did not know what to make of Francis. Of course I knew of him. His father was a prominent business man and Francis had gained a reputation for being the leader of the youths in the city. When all the talk about his living at San Damiano's and rebuilding the dilapidated chapels in the area came to me I did become concerned. The world was filled with reformers who for some reason eventually became heretics. I did not want this in my diocese. So I called Francis in for a chat. It was not what I expected. All he wanted to do was to live a simple life, rebuild the Churches and beg for his food. When I asked him about reform he was a little taken aback. He was not the least bit interested in reforming the Church. He was just interested in living the life which he thought God wanted him to live.

His simplicity was my teacher. It was obvious to me, if not to others, that Francis was being called by God for some special task. I gave him my blessing and we parted. Subsequently we had many conversations. In all of them the only thing that shone through was his love of God. I did get the feeling that he wasn't very sure about how to express this love.

Then the incident which his father has already told you about happened. It did not come as a complete surprise to me. So many things were happening inside of Francis that at some point they would have to be resolved. When he took his clothes off I was probably the only one not surprised. When I put my cloak around him I whispered in his ear, gathered some old clothes for him and watched him start on his solitary journey. As he left the city I thought that surely he was with God. Quite a bit later Francis returned. This time, however, he preached – very simple sermons about good and evil. Many people laughed at him. His old friends were especially mean to him. But nothing seemed to bother him.

BERNARD (the first follower of Francis) ... We grew up together. I always enjoyed being around Francis. He was a good friend. Sometimes Francis's idea of fun would get us into some trouble. Looking back I can see how God took Francis's natural exuberance and made it something holy. Maybe he did not change so much as grow into the fullness of those gifts. All good things come to an end. Those childhood years passed. Francis became involved with his father's business and I went off to study law. I heard through some mutual friends that Francis had become the leader of the young men in Assisi. He was the king of the revelers. This really did not surprise me too much. He was just taking that little boy exuberance and translating it into late teen joy of living.

When I finished my studies and returned to Assisi I had another surprise. People were now telling me that Francis had changed. The young man who prided himself on being the best dressed in the group was now walking through the streets dressed in rags. Francis who loved the best food was

now going from house to house begging for food. Francis who used to sing about the fair lady that he would marry was now singing about someone called “Lady Poverty.” I had to find out what had happened to my friend.

I invited him to my house for dinner. All the stories were true. At first I was shocked at his appearance. As the evening drew on and our conversation turned to his vision of life and God I became captivated. Could Francis’s dream be the dream I had searched for. I always thought that being a lawyer was my life dream. I loved the law. I enjoyed helping people through some of the things of life. I was happy but at the same time I sensed something was missing. To be honest, I did not know what it was.

Listening to Francis something new started to happen within me. It was easy to talk about this vision, it was even easy to dress in rags and go begging for food. I had to find out whether it was for real. We finished talking and went to bed. I feigned sleep. When Francis thought I was sound asleep he got up and started to pray. Not with words so much as with being wrapped up with God. I knew then that Francis was, to use one word to sum it up, “credible.” What he was saying and doing was not simply external but really who he was. This is the dream I had been searching for and Francis made it real.

In the morning I told Francis I would like to be with him. I really think he was very surprised. Not once in our conversation did he ask me to follow him. When I told him, just for the briefest moment I sensed that inside the surprise Francis was thanking God for giving him a brother who shared his vision. As we were going to church another of our friends, Peter, joined us. We opened the book of the Gospels three times and each time it spoke about poverty. This would be our life.

We did not know exactly how we were going to live it. We were confident that God would lead us. Peter and I sold all we had, gave it to the poor and went with Francis to a little hut by Rivo Torto.

GILES (joined Francis after Francis returned from Rome. Francis called him “the knight of the round table”) ... Francis has been dead for twenty years but his memory is very much alive with us who walked with him. I heard of Francis and the life he was leading. Rebuilding chapels, working in the fields, begging for his food. How different from the Francis of just a few years ago. What had happened to him? I had not seen Francis but certainly was curious. These moments of curiosity were soon smothered in the cares of the day.

Then I discovered that two of my closest friends, Bernard and Peter, had gone to live with Francis in that little hut by Rivo Torto. Now my curiosity was really ignited. What would ever prompt these two very prominent young men to give up everything and follow Francis? I searched out Bernard and Peter. They had changed. All the things they thought were important just a short while ago did not seem to be important. They were looking at the world through a new prism, one which Francis had given them. They spoke about simplicity, prayer, about living the Gospel, and how it feels to be different. They explained that they were different because of God. They had in a way met God in a new and marvelous way through Francis.

The conversation ended but the words remained. I started to look at my life in a different way. A desire grew within me. I wanted to meet God in the same way that Bernard and Peter had. One day, without telling anyone, I went to Rivo Torto. I told Francis I wanted to meet God. He received me into the small group and things have never been the same. One of the strange things is that Francis never asked anyone to follow him. He simply lived the life God showed him and that was enough to attract. I mention this because shortly after I joined the small group three of my friends made the same decision. We were now seven, living in the small hut. Discovering each day what our life was.

LEO (exactly when he joined Francis is not sure but it was between 1209 and 1212. He was Francis’s secretary, confessor and companion.) One of the most difficult things I had to learn, as did most of the early followers, was that it

was not Francis but the Lord we were called to follow. Francis was, if I may use the expression, the finger pointing to God. Because of the attraction we all felt for Francis this was at times a difficult thing to remember.

Sometimes the way Francis is depicted is that he was always happy. That his heart was never troubled. This image takes something away from Francis. It is true that he was a man of very deep emotions. He was happy when he saw his brothers leading the life he had taught them. He was happy walking through the fields singing the praises of God. There were also times of deep sadness. When he saw the brothers compromising his dream his heart ached. He was sad when he saw his dream being put into a legal structure. There were times he fell almost into a state of depression. Rather than taking away from his holiness I always felt that these drew me closer to him. They just proved that no matter how holy he was he was still human. I could be holy without being perfect.

One part of his personality I could never understand. It seemed to me that whenever there was an issue among the brothers that asked for his leadership he would go away. Most of the time he would go to LaVerna. Perhaps he thought he was not that type of leader. Perhaps it was his ultimate expression of poverty, the order and the brothers belonged to God and not him.

ELIAS (At one time a very trusted Friar. His story is one of the saddest of the early years of the Franciscan movement) First of all I want to thank you for asking me to share. As you all know my life as a Friar was, to say the least, chequered. Looking back, the turning point for me was the death of Francis. After he died everything seemed to fall apart.

I was always a very ambitious man. That engine was constantly churning in my stomach. Probably that accounted for my efficiency and being highly capable at any post. Francis trusted me. He put me in some very important positions. At each one I did a very good job.

For a time I was considered one of the bright lights of the Order. Then Francis died. I never realized how much his presence in my life kept my demon under control. He was the rock, the light that kept me from being eaten alive. When he died this all went. When he died my life's dream of following in his footsteps disappeared. I grabbed onto one thing after another to feed the monster within me.

Hindsight is always 20/20. It never occurred to me that Francis did not leave me. He was always with me. All I had to do was keep the way of life to make him present. He was still my rock. I do know that he has forgiven me.

INNOCENT III (the pope who approved the first Rule) God works in strange ways. Left to myself I would not have granted Francis an audience. These groups of poor men who felt it their mission to reform the Church were getting bothersome. The Church did not need another one. My close friend, Cardinal John of St. Paul, however, persuaded me to listen to him.

I was a little put back when they entered the audience hall. They were dressed, if you could call it that, in patched and dirty garments. Francis was a slight man. He really did not look too much like a leader. Then he began to speak. His speech was simple but aflame with a supernatural power. All he and his companions wanted to do was to live the Gospel simply. They wanted to turn people back to God. As I listened something strange started to happen within me. I was no longer the powerful Pope. I was no longer the learned man who could give eloquent sermons. As he spoke I became a student. This man with his simple words was teaching me how to dream again. Through this unlearned simple beggar I met Christ once more.

BROTHER JACOBA ... The title "brother" given to a woman probably sounds strange. For me it was a great honor. For me it meant that I was accepted as one of the knights of Francis's round table. I lived in Rome and he was all over

so we did not meet often but for some reason there was a closeness which went beyond space.

When my husband died I decided to raise my children by myself. I was not going to marry again. I would fulfill a dream I had as a little girl, to dedicate myself to God. I prayed, did works of mercy but something was missing. I finally discovered what it was, some sort of vision. Something to make all these parts – my prayer and acts of mercy – one.

One day as I was caring for the poor in the Trastevere section of Rome I saw this little man wearing a raggedy garment. At first I thought he was simply one of the poor. Then he began to preach or better yet to speak to the poor people. His words were different from others who came. He spoke of heaven, he spoke of poverty as being a blessing because it brought one closer to God. He spoke of joy, of hope. His words were more than just words. They were darts touching my heart. I knew that I had found what I was looking for, a form for my life.

I approached him and for a long time we talked about God. He told me about the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, laypeople who are living in the world but would like to follow his life. This is what I wanted. He received me, looked at me and said “Brother Jacoba.” Maybe he saw something in me that even I was not aware of.

We parted. Occasionally, he would pass through Rome. I would make him the sweet cakes of which he was very fond.

One of the Brothers came and told me Francis was dying. He wanted to have one of my sweet cakes. As I made them there was a sadness in my heart. Never again would I see him. But then I realized, why be sad? What God had done in my life through Francis was something to be thankful for. Thanks is never sad.

# **FRANCISCAN HOSPITALITY: A CHEF'S THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**BILLY ISENER, O.F.M.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As a chef de cuisine, I am sensitive about receiving and giving hospitality. In recent years I have traveled and met many great Franciscan brothers and sisters in North America. As I entered each friary and convent, I was always amazed at the hospitality I received. Hospitality, undoubtedly, seems to be an important trait of the Franciscan family. It is important to be received well, to eat well and it is equally important to show our gratitude and deepen our commitment to one another. Why is it so important to us? In the following article I will reflect theologically on the importance of hospitality contained within the scriptures, our Franciscan tradition and my own experience as a chef.

## **1. DEFINING HOSPITALITY**

To speak about the hospitality of God we must first define what is exactly meant by hospitality. The word hospitality is often used to describe an event where careful preparation, in particular food, is done to create a suitable ambience where guests are made to feel “at home” in order to celebrate the gift of life in communion. There is a sense of anticipation that goes with this kind of hospitality.

Anticipation is initiated when the invitation is offered. For both parties involved, there is an expectation of the un-



expected—the unexpected is fulfilled when a deeper relationship is developed among strangers and friends in a communal setting. The relationship itself, then, becomes the great gift of the event.<sup>1</sup> A famous Chicago chef, Charlie Trotter, argues that cooking and hospitality are “more about achieving a higher good intellectually, spiritually, and sensually” than meeting basic needs.<sup>2</sup>

Hospitality includes certain rules of engagement that aid the relational process along.<sup>3</sup> The expectation of the host or hostess is to make others feel welcomed, comfortable, nurtured and appreciated. Hospitality of this type is based on loving our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:29-32). It is common for the guest to bring a small gift as a token of appreciation for the hospitality received; and there a certain kind of etiquette required which serves to put the host and hostess at ease; therefore, encouraging social engagement.<sup>4</sup> All of this is done to deepen the relationship between guest and host.

## **2. A THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF HOSPITALITY**

The nemesis of hospitality is sin because of its divisive influence on relationships; it separates people from each other and from God.<sup>5</sup> There are many examples of this in the OT

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Visser, *The Gift of Thanks: The Roots, Persistence, and Paradoxical Meanings of a Social Ritual* (Toronto: Harper Perennial, 2008), 141. “In our society, the necessities of life are nearly always supplied by means other than gift-giving, so that the sphere of the gift is left free, as it were, to concentrate on sentiment and on personal relationship alone.”

<sup>2</sup> Charlie Trotter, *The Kitchen Sessions* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1999), 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> In the early Church there is a set of stipulations written on how to give and receive hospitality in the *Didache*. Roy Joseph Deferrari, ed., “Didache or Teaching of the Apostles.” Vol. 1, in *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, trans. Francis X. Glimm (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press, 1947), 171-86.

<sup>4</sup> Visser, *The Gift of Thanks*, 85.

<sup>5</sup> “When theologians have spoken in the past of salvation from ‘original sin,’ they have pointed to many likely suspects for what seems to lie at the root of human disintegration: idolatry, pride, self-hatred, fear, and many other evils. One thing these all have in common is a hideous distortion in

and NT. For example, Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16); the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29); Jacob's son's revenge for their sister (Gen 34:1-31); Joseph being sold as a slave because of his brothers' jealousy of him (Gen 12:12-36); the Israelites' ingratitude to God concerning food and water (Ex 15:22-27; 16:1-36; 17:1-7); David's murder of Uriah after committing adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1-26); the rebellious nature of the Israelites with God (Isa 30:1-18); the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth because of his social status (Matt 13:53-58); and Peter's denial of Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). In today's world, sin is related to war, intolerance of other people's race and culture, and committing acts of violence against our neighbor. In all these examples, sin is rooted in greed, jealousy, power and fear.<sup>6</sup>

God's hospitality, alternatively, invites us to use our freedom in lifegiving ways so that we may nourish our relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters. When establishing right relationship with God and neighbor, we must be prepared to serve in Christ's mission by welcoming, serving and empowering others to do the same. Francis echoes these words when he invites the faithful to act in charity toward our brothers and sisters:

O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make Its home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father whose works they do ...<sup>7</sup>

Mark's Gospel (5:41-43) explains that God's hospitality seeks to fulfill people's primal needs through the giving of

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the relationship between the world and God. It is as if humanity, by refusing over and over to risk a freely given love of others, both human and divine, has constantly slipped into violent and mortal self-preservation." Mark A. McIntosh, "Mysteries of Faith," *The New Church's Teaching Series* Vol. 8. (Boston: Cowley Publications, 2000), 121.

<sup>6</sup> McIntosh, "Mysteries of Faith," 121-22.

<sup>7</sup> 2LtF I: 4-7 in *FA:ED* 1, 46.

food, but more importantly by acknowledging the dignity of our guest(s). Whether it is an addiction program or simply preparing meals for the homeless, there is a need to acknowledge the uniqueness and goodness of people who are part of God's created order. Creating a setting which acknowledges the other person helps to foster God's healing grace in a holistic way with our neighbor (Mark 2:1-12). Francis took this notion to heart. In the ER, he sets the rules of etiquette concerning the brother's relationship within the fraternity. He tells them to act with charity always and to remember that their calling should always take on the form of a servant who is to attend to their master's needs like a physician.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, all four Gospels testify that no one is excluded in the heavenly fellowship at God's table. From this table, God nourishes and empowers humanity with the expectation that humanity will show the same generosity to one another. Jesus Christ comes for this precise purpose: to make manifest the Word which speaks of and lives love in service to humanity (John 4:7-21). One of the most obvious signs of this is when Jesus washes his disciples' feet like a slave.<sup>9</sup> God's grace, furthermore, can be made manifest through our actions only by following in the footsteps of Jesus—for us this is done by, metaphorically speaking, washing the feet of everyone in the world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> ER V: 7-13 in *FA:ED* 1, 67.

<sup>9</sup> Pheme Perkins, "The Gospel According to John," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 973. "Foot washing was a sign of hospitality (Gen 18:4; 1 Sam 25:41; Luke 7:44). It might be performed by the master's slaves when welcoming a dignitary to the house" [...] "Instructions that the disciples must follow in the path shown by Jesus occur in the Synoptics."

<sup>10</sup> Francis reminds his brothers that to live the Gospel means doing it through their deeds with one another and with the world: "Give praise to him because he is good; exalt him by your deeds; for this reason he has sent you into the whole world: that you may bear witness to his voice in word and deed and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him." LtOrd: 8, 9 in *FA:ED* 1, 117.

### 3. JESUS' HOSPITALITY

Food imagery is a prominent image of Jesus' mission. For example, he prays on the Mount of Olives (John 8:1; Luke 21:37-38; Matt 21:1-2), he curses a fig tree and uses the fig tree to teach about the eschaton (Matt 24: 32-35; Mark 11:20-25; Luke 17:6), he is referred to as the Lamb of God by John the Baptist (John 1:29-36), he refers to himself as the bread of life (John 6:35), he speaks about leaven and the kingdom (Matt 13:33), and fish become an important symbol (Matt 13:13-21; John 21:11-13). Food imagery is always related to celebrations and, in fact, Jesus enjoyed many celebrations. The question is why—what is the purpose of celebration and food in conjunction with hospitality?

John 21:11-13 sheds some light on the subject. Although the apostles were Jesus' beloved followers, they act more like strangers than friends of Jesus in various accounts in the gospels. In John's resurrection account, Jesus is preparing a meal for the disciples on the beach. The followers of Jesus did not yet understand who it is preparing the meal. Instead of telling the apostles who he is, Jesus invites them to partake in breakfast—a hospitable gesture.<sup>11</sup> With his act of hospitality, Jesus shows an act of love for his friends by setting a space where that love can transpire and flourish. It is not until after they finish breakfast that Jesus commands Peter to unconditionally love his neighbor in the same manner.

In a certain sense, it is absurd to think that Jesus would bother cooking breakfast for the disciples; it should have been the disciples preparing a feast for Jesus, the One who died and rose again for the sake of humanity. In another sense, the account depicts a beautiful, loving God who is so hospitable that he comes to humanity, without reservation,

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<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Prichard, *Sensing the Spirit: The Holy Spirit in Feminist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 60. "Food is the focus of both gratitude and longing; spiritual satisfaction is tied to the appetites and desires of both *nephesh* and *basar*. God's indwelling Spirit transforms and sanctifies our hunger, moving us from greed and idolatry to justice and generosity."

to invite them to be his guest at the simple heavenly table where they eat fish on the beach and are nourished by the Word. Jesus' act of cooking is symbolic of God's continuous, abundant and nurturing love for us—with God's love, humanity will never starve.<sup>12</sup>

This understanding of God's responsibility for us is recorded in the life of Francis—particularly in the miracle story recorded by Thomas of Celano. The account begins when Francis embarks on a missionary journey to Syria. A mysterious person (God) gives Francis food to save and use for the needs of the sailors. They, indeed, ran out of food and Francis's food, obviously too small to feed everyone, miraculously multiplied for sake of the sailors well-being (which Francis hospitably shared). Through this miracle, the sailors were able to survive and they recognized that through Francis, God saved them from peril both physically and spiritually.<sup>13</sup>

Today, God continues to feed humanity and does so by coming to us in the Eucharist and through the aid of our neighbors. God does not wait for an invitation from us; he comes into the world today through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through our good works. Our good works are to manifest the presence of Christ who gives those we serve an invitation to enter into more fully a relationship with God through the communion of the Church (John 1:1-18).

#### **4. A KEY ELEMENT OF HOSPITALITY: TRIUNE LOVE**

If hospitality is rooted in communal gatherings concerned with right relationship, its exemplar model is found in the relationship among the members of the Trinity. Each

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<sup>12</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, Vol. VI, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1989), 182. "Bodily life, which elsewhere in the Old Testament, is the highest of all good things, is clearly relativised here: 'thy steadfast love is better than life,' just as thy being is more nourishing than worldly food. Earthly life, food, and light have their source and root in God, and the one who is chosen and 'given' is permitted to penetrate as far as that sphere, in order to dwell there."

<sup>13</sup> 1C XX: 1:55-56 in *FA:ED* 1, 229-30.

member of the Trinity is uniquely open and responsive to the other.<sup>14</sup> Each member, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, expresses and accepts the invitation to love from the other. In this acceptance, each member of the Trinity affirms the other's uniqueness. It is this unlimited openness to the other which creates a mood of anticipation, excitement and ecstatic love.<sup>15</sup>

God's love is so active, alive and full of possibilities between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that it naturally overflows to the rest of God's creation because creation—blessed by God—is an act of God's original love. God's love is so passionate that it has only one desire to be in a relationship with us. This is revealed to us in an intimate way vis-à-vis Christ and guided by the efficacious action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

The life of Jesus is the complete expression of the Father's love; this is articulated in the Incarnation, paschal mystery and the resurrection. He reveals God the Father's action of love and desire to be in relationship with creation—Jesus reciprocates this hospitality by glorifying the Father through constant service and thanksgiving (Matt 11:25-30).

In a surprising turn of events, Jesus is given by the Father, in the complete hospitable act, as the ultimate paschal sacrifice, so that humanity is able to enter into the fullness of life with the Father (John 11:25-26; 12:28-30; 12:44-50).

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<sup>14</sup> Billy Isenor, O.F.M., "Franciscan Spiritual Theology: The Ascetic Life," *The Cord*, 58.2 (2008): 163-64.

<sup>15</sup> The role of hospitality within the Trinity is unified but distinct. Each member of the Trinity is always subordinated to the Father's will and hospitality. For example, "Jesus has not come to reveal God by order of the Trinity, but by order of the Father. His revelation of God is 'in the personal mode, and in so doing he is driven by the Holy Spirit.' With the Spirit making known the will of the Father in the day to day life of Jesus, the image conveyed is that of a person who radiates simultaneously 'his own supremely free decision, his resolute freedom.' One sees this most clearly in the 'hour' that is to come and for which Jesus must wait. The mission directs him and not vice-versa." Dave Norman, O.F.M., "The Christian State of Life of the Fulfillment of the Commandment to Love through the State of the Cross in the Theology of Hans Urs Von Balthasar" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Fribourg, 1995), 55.

<sup>16</sup> Norman, "The Christian State of Life," 33-34.

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Francis captures this Theo-dramatic mystery in his *Office of the Passion* which clearly emphasizes the importance of Christ being for and in solidarity with humanity. This drama ends neither at the Cross nor in the resurrection of Jesus—the Father and Son continue to lavish humanity with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit continues to prompt, nourish and lead the human family back to the heavenly banquet table prepared by the host himself—God (John 16:5-11; Acts 2:1-13).

## **5. NO ROOM AT THE INN: WHERE GOD’S HOSPITALITY BEGINS, THE MANGER**

As mentioned, the way God’s love and hospitality is revealed is through the life and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus, in Luke’s Gospel, always seems to be going to a meal or coming from a feast. In fact, he developed the reputation of being quite the glutton and drunkard (Luke 7:34)! It is no accident that Jesus is always linked to food in the gospels because food is an accessible symbol for us—all of creation needs to be fed, sustained and nourished.<sup>17</sup>

Jesus’ birth in a manger (Luke 2:6-7) reveals the latter because the manger represents the place where life is given, nurtured and sustained. The manger itself is where animals, in older days, went to eat and most times were born. By the very action of God coming into the world, Jesus, born in a manger, becomes the revelation of God’s divine plan; Jesus is the priest, prophet and king who comes to feed, nurture and sustain a hungry world (Gen.9:3-5; Isa 60:15-16; 61:6; Jer 3:15). Francis at Greccio also recognizes that Jesus chooses to be born poor so that he makes himself available to receive hospitality from us and shows us his gratitude by giving us

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that Francis’s rejection of food was not so much about the pleasures detracting from his focus on God; rather, he was nourished from the food of God’s power, wisdom and goodness. LJS IX: 44 in *FA:ED* 1, 400.

the gift of everlasting life and he sustains us throughout our earthly journey to God's kingdom with the Eucharist.<sup>18</sup>

This type of God-human interaction is reiterated in Mary's *magnificat*: "he has filled the hungry with good things" (Luke 1:53). Mary, the mother of God, hungers for God and God, indeed, does fill her with good things, Jesus. The scene of the annunciation also reveals the mystery of the Trinity; the angel of the Lord representing God the Father, the Holy Spirit impregnating Mary with the Word made manifest in Jesus (Luke 1:26-35). She responds in two acts of hospitality; first, she openly says yes to God's invitation to give birth to Jesus; second, when Jesus was older, she gives her only Son to a world full of thirst and hunger—emphasized at the Wedding at Cana and the death on the Cross (John 2:1-12; 19:25).

These actions, especially found in the Incarnation of Christ, reveal the goal of God—a God who gives the gift of himself, in the form of Jesus Christ, to the world in order to comfort and nurture creation in an intimate and sensual way. Hospitality in God's world is an everlasting love offered through lavish and hospitable actions especially through the giving the Eucharist.

## **6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT, HOSPITALITY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST**

The goal and mission of hospitality is to create an environment that acknowledges our brothers and sisters as important members of the body of Christ. Acknowledgment is also a process of gratitude and affirmation of our sisters and brothers in Christ. Francis clearly states that the fullness of the sacramental life of the church is lived out by affirming and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

In the many letters of St. Paul, he always acknowledges and is grateful for the communities he addresses (Rom 1:8-15; 1 Cor 1:4-8; 2 Cor 1: 3-7; Eph 1:15-23; Phil 1:3-11; Col 1:3-8; 1 Thess 1:2-10; 2 Thess 1:3-4; 2 Tim 1:3-7). Whether

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<sup>18</sup> 2LtF: 1-8 in *FA:ED* 1, 45-46; 1C XXX:87 in *FA:ED* 1, 257.

<sup>19</sup> 2LtF: 26 in *FA:ED* 1, 47.



the community was new to faith in Jesus Christ, or people Paul knew personally, like Timothy, Paul always acknowledged with great gratitude the faith of the people. This was for him and for Francis an important component to hospitality. Francis throughout the corpus of his writings always acknowledges the importance of each person and their vocation to live the gospel life—he always affirmed his brothers and sisters' faith and looked upon them as a gift from God.<sup>20</sup>

It is unmistakably implied throughout the gospels one cannot open the gateways of God's compassion and love if one does not acknowledge the other person's existence as a gift (Mark 6: 30-43). Hospitality, first and foremost, is an action of loving our neighbor and recognizing their fundamental goodness as always rooted in Christ. When we love our neighbor, we are serving Christ (Matt 25:31-46). And for Franciscans we live this essential gospel message by taking it to the margins of the world.<sup>21</sup>

Franciscan hospitality is about serving the marginalized people of the world—those who are poor physically and spiritually. In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus teaches us that when we prepare a feast we are called not to just invite those marked by baptism, distinction, or by wealth. We called to serve people who are marginalized, who are from other cultures and from all economic backgrounds—gospel hospitality, then, is all-inclusive package. This is a unique attribute of the missionary dimension of Franciscan spirituality.<sup>22</sup> We are invited to strip away, in our vow of poverty, our old self and recognize that we have been renewed in such a way that we are invited by God to recognize the equality that everyone shares

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Francis was always concerned with acknowledging the importance of each brother's vocation. 1C XI: 26-28 in *FA:ED* 1, 205-06.

<sup>21</sup> ER XIV:2-4 in *FA:ED* 1, 73. Francis is explicit in the ER about giving and receiving hospitality: "Whatever house they enter, let them first say: Peace to this house. They may eat and drink what is placed before them for as long as they stay in that house. Let them not resist anyone evil, but whoever strikes them on one cheek, let them offer him the other as well. Whoever takes their cloak, let them not withhold their tunic. Let them give to all who ask of them and whoever takes what is theirs, let them not seek to take it back."

<sup>22</sup> ER XIV:1-5 in *FA:ED* 1, 73.

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in being children of God because “Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:9-11)!

## **CONCLUSION**

If Franciscans are called to receive God’s invitation of hospitality, they are also called to be exemplars of that hospitality by sharing it. By setting a heavenly table, we create a space for active and healthy dialogue. It is around the dinner table that Jesus visits and has compassion for saints and sinners; teaches the disciples; shares the good times and bad times with the people; defends the poor and marginalized; and draws people to himself and to the mystery of God. For the Franciscan family, we have been invited to do the same through our actions of hospitality within the fraternal life with others in the world.

## **A COLLABORATION MADE BY HEAVEN**

### **FRANCIS ASSISI KENNEDY, O.S.F.**

In early summer of 2008, Sister Barbara Piller, Congregational Minister for the Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenburg, Indiana, told her sisters that she had a very important announcement to make. Naturally ears perked up and speculation ran from wild hopes to high tension.

After much of the expected hubbub had quieted, Sister explained that nine Carmelite Sisters from the Monastery of the Resurrection in Indianapolis had decided to look for a smaller residence. For some time they had realized they could no longer manage their large home on Cold Springs Road in Indianapolis. After several visits to Oldenburg, they had chosen part of one of our under-inhabited buildings for their new home.

Sister Barbara's plan was to seek congregational support for this move but there was no need. The community rose to their feet immediately and clapped vigorously. The hall resounded with delight. Many of the Franciscans already had friends among the Indianapolis Carmelites, due to the proximity of their monastery to Marian College (now Marian University). Their welcome assured, the Carmelites made plans to settle in the quiet little town of Oldenburg, Indiana.

After long days of packing, transporting, sending truckloads and unpacking all they brought with them, nine contemplative Sisters settled into their new home in July 2008. The Carmelites had meals with the motherhouse community until their long delayed kitchen furnishings arrived. But that

early sharing led to a weekly noon meal on Thursdays, a treat for both groups of religious women.

While the Carmelites joined the Franciscans in daily liturgy in the main chapel, both groups continued their own form of traditional daily prayers. When villagers join the Sisters for Sunday liturgy there is no visible separation between Franciscan and Carmelite as they all join in worship as members of the choir, lectors, extraordinary ministers for Communion, etc. As time passed, each group toured the others' living accommodations and learned the many shortcuts to the far corners of the motherhouse property.

As Sister Jean Alice, the Carmelite Prioress, reflected on the change for both groups of Sisters, she realized how different their transition was from what might have happened in the early days of Vatican II renewal. Then, she recalled, people were apprehensive about Contemplative Orders mixing with other congregations because they were sure the contemplatives would lose their charism. Many active congregations had similar fears.

In the mid 1960s, Sister Jean remembered inviting a School Sister of Notre Dame, a professional, to give a workshop at their monastery. The one condition of the presenter was that Sisters from other monasteries and communities could attend also. This early exposure to the richness of charisms "drew us to gratitude, love and service," Sister Jean stated.

The transitions of the 2000s were much easier. When Carmel moved to Oldenburg, only the large black Labrador they brought with them had to be curtailed lest the full freedom of the little town prove dangerous to canine health. Fortunately, the high school students liked to feed her part of their lunch. Lucy, no doubt, ended up in a high place in Dog Heaven, when old age caught up with her. She was soon replaced after her death by a younger, and in the eyes of its fond owners, equally lovable but better trained puppy.

So life settled down in companionable sharing – the Carmelites, to look forward to eternity near a place of final rest, and the Franciscans who had settled in the little town in 1851.

Little did anyone know just when the first of the nine newer village residents would occupy a space in the community cemetery. But on the morning of June 10, 2010, while picking flowers for the Feast of the Ascension, Sister Betty Meluch, O.C.D. fell in the parking lot. She suffered a severe head injury and by six o'clock that evening Sister Betty had gone home to God. She left behind her a shocked and saddened group of friends on both sides of Oldenburg's Vine Street that night. But she also left many memories of her loving kindness, wisdom, and reassuring words.

Sister Betty's name is the first on the gravestone marking the final resting place of the Carmelites in the cemetery of the Franciscan motherhouse. There is no doubt in this writer's mind that when the heavenly choir of religious men and women, both active and contemplative, raises a hymn of praise it is a rich concert of peace, joy and love to all the world.

## BOOK REVIEW

***Things Seen and Unseen: A Catholic Theologian's Notebook***, by Lawrence Cunningham (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2010), ix + 242 pp., \$20.00 hardcover.

This has been a year for theologian memoirs. Although University of Notre Dame theologian Lawrence Cunningham prefers not to categorize his latest book as a memoir, it follows the recent publication of Cunningham's former ND colleague and now Duke University professor Stanley Hauerwas's *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Eerdmans). Cunningham's book, *Things Seen and Unseen*, is a collection of selected entries made in the multiple notebooks he kept for nearly two decades. Largely inspired by Thomas Merton's disciplined journal keeping, Cunningham attributes his own interest in jotting down seemingly random thoughts in notebooks to the twentieth-century monk's almost-aphoristic injunction "to contemplate with a pencil" (vii). Merton plays a recurring role in the reflections published in this volume, as does the centrality of the Franciscan tradition for Cunningham's scholarly work and spiritual life.

Cunningham is perhaps best known in the Franciscan world for his 2004 book *Francis of Assisi: Performing the Gospel Life* (Eerdmans), in addition to his many articles and books on spirituality and Christian saints. Unlike his *Francis of Assisi* book, *Things Seen and Unseen* is not exclusively "Franciscan," nor is it thematic in any identifiable sense. Instead, the reader has at his or her reach random tidbits of wisdom, questions to ponder and selections to reflect on from a variety of sources and different seasons of life.

While one might initially think that a selection of unrelated reflections and observations would be less-than-interesting, particularly given the singular voice of the author, Cunningham surprises the reader with a captivating series of insightful snippets. In a sense, the lack of context – not knowing precisely where this or that passage is found in the chronology of Cunningham’s notebook keeping – actually adds to the universal applicability and appeal of the book. Additionally, the relatively small passages that characterize the entries in this volume permit the reader to take a selection here and there and digest, reflect and consider the material in portions allotted by one’s schedule. It makes for good bite-sized reading when one does not have an extended period of time to sit down with a book, such as in the morning, during lunch breaks, in the evening before bed, at prayer times, during a commute or other times of travel (I read most of the book while riding on Chicago’s “L”).

As mentioned above, this book is not expressly thematic, but one consistent undercurrent of this text might particularly appeal to readers of this journal who are interested in the Franciscan tradition. Frequently, Cunningham makes reference to the Franciscan tradition, usually in connection to a thought about St. Bonaventure’s work, but the *Poverello* also makes a few appearances in the text. Take, for example, this little passage with reference to St. Francis:

It would be crucial, of course, not to sentimentalize nature. It should involve specifics as did Francis in the “Canticle of Brother Sun.” As I once said somewhere in print: Francis never talked about nature; he had an eye for specifics: sun, moon, water, flowers, fire, and so on. His vision was not “natural” – it was sacramental. Chesterson in his book on Francis made the very same point. It is far from a bad one. (178)

While this sort of snippet related to St. Francis is not uncommon throughout the book, the real locus of Cunningham’s Franciscan reflection centers on the thought and inspiration of St. Bonaventure.

The references to St. Bonaventure sometimes come in the form of passing allusions, but, surprisingly, there are several more-lengthy entries that bring the Seraphic Doctor into the spotlight. One example is found near the middle of *Things Seen and Unseen*. It is worth quoting in its entirety to give an accurate feeling for an entry of average length.

At the very end of his treatise *Lignum Vitae*, Bonaventure has a really beautiful prayer asking for an outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is a capsule of his wonderful treatise on the Seven Gifts. A doctoral student of mine (Joan Crist) wrote a very elegant dissertation on that treatise and did a translation of the same treatise from the Latin.

I like Bonaventure a lot; having taught a short course on his writings in the summer MA program has led me to think of doing a full semester seminar using some of his more challenging texts (e.g., *De Reductione Artium in Theologiam*). That may be one of those projects to which I will never move from potency to action! Despite his tendency to subdivide everything into triads and multiple categories, he is, in places, a beautiful writer in Latin and that, in itself, is attractive. (129)

After finishing the book the reader is certainly aware of the centrality the Franciscan tradition holds in both the spiritual and intellectual heart of Cunningham.

In addition to the Franciscan current identified periodically throughout the text, the reader discovers a number of particularly insightful passages that display a keen theological sensitivity for social justice and authentic Gospel living. The ways in which these observations are expressed occur within the framework of a personal narrative that makes particular passages even more recallable. Whether it is Cunningham's insight about the impetus for a friend's conversion to radicalism arising from the flagrant excesses of the rich or Cunningham's affinity for the wisdom of Karl Rahner in discharging spiritual advice to a student, the reader be-



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comes caught up in the evangelical call to justice and solidarity that Cunningham sees as intrinsically Christian. One gets the sense that Cunningham is not simply an academic who studies the Christian tradition, but someone who happens to be an academic and struggles to live as a Christian.

Overall, this is a little treasure of a book. It is difficult to categorize because its composition is so eclectic. That is both the book's charm and its burden. The charm is the collection of insightful, challenging, reflective, and, at times, random nuggets of wisdom. The burden is the inability of the reader to easily and succinctly describe the book's content – it remains too varied. Compared to Hauerwas's memoir and the recent publication of Pope Benedict XVI's book-length interview, *Light of the World* (Ignatius, 2010) – two very important and personal publications by two renowned theologians, each in their own right – Cunningham's *Things Seen and Unseen* is less focused on the author's personal narrative and more accessible to all readers. At the same time, the reader is privy to what captures the heart, mind and soul of one of this country's greatest Catholic theologians.

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Using the historical record that Francis worked on repairing three churches in the vicinity of Assisi, we will look at the ways in which we are in relationship to the church of our time. Given the recent tensions created by the sexual abuse crisis, the Vatican study of the American sisters, and the increasing loss of members to evangelical churches here and in South America, we will ponder our own call to “rebuild.”

Some questions to be pondered:

Where do we find the will and the way to repair and rebuild a church damaged by serious scandal?

What do we do when faced by polarization and the division of church members into camps of “liberal” and “conservative?”

What prayer experience of Francis and Clare sustained them when they faced similar questions?

Can our Lenten discipline this year take us to a new peace, a new place for our work of repair and revitalization?

MARCH 12, 2011

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Suggested donation \$450.00

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Sun. 5:00 p.m. – Sat. 11:00 a.m.

Suggested donation \$450.00

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Sun. 3:00 p.m. – Sat. 11:30 a.m.

Suggested donation \$450.00

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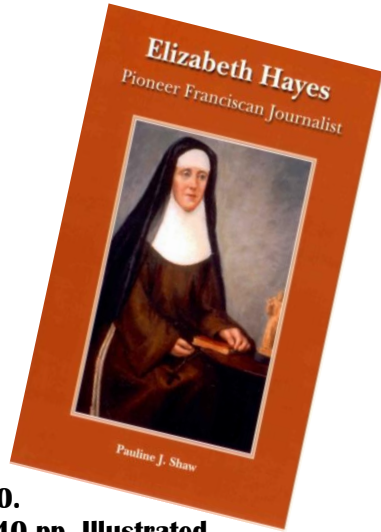
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# **FIRE 2011**

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#### **Minority**

Theology of Franciscan Formation

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Minority: The Inverted Pyramid

*Tom Herbst, OFM*

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*Paula Pearce, SFO*

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*Crispin Jose, TOR*

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*Philippe Yates, OFM*

God's Extravagant Love

*Kathleen Bishop, SFO and Team*

### **\*July 10-14 Week II**

#### **Poverty**

The Poverty of Being Human

*Michael Copps, OFM*

Humility in the Cantic of the Sun

*Clare Knowles, TOR*

Francis and Clare: Models and

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*Mary Elizabeth Imler, TOR*

The Sine Proprio Father

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**\*Each week begins Sunday evening with a 6:00 PM Supper/social and an introduction of faculty and topics.**

### **\*July 17-21 Week III**

#### **Conversion**

Franciscan Conversion in Today's World

*Colin Wilford, SSF*

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*John Petrikovic, OFM Cap.*

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*David Blowey, OFM Conv.*

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*Frances Teresa Downing, OSC*

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Rule and Life of the Brothers and

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### **July 24-30 Week IV Contemplation**

#### **An Affair of the Heart:**

#### **A Franciscan Eremitical Retreat**

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*David Blowey, OFM Conv*

*Focussing on the relationship between the hermitage within and the hermitage without, the retreatant is invited to engage in a gentle, sensitive journey through Scripture and the Life of St. Francis into the mystery of God's extravagant love in the embrace of our beauty and brokenness.*

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**Timetable:** *The retreat opens Sunday 24 July at 19.00 and concludes Saturday morning 30 July, with Mass and Breakfast.*

**Recommended Text for the Retreat:**

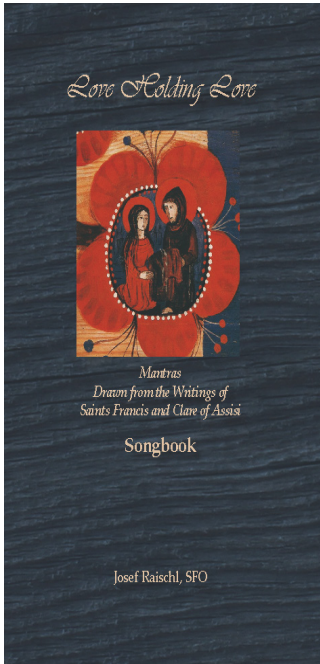
***An Affair of the Heart: A Biblical and Franciscan Journey*** by Patricia Jordan.

For more info please contact Pauline Marks  
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 so that you are all fullness of grace and every good."  
 Hail! God's spouse, but God's eternally, but God's issue.  
 Hail! God's spouse, but God's beloved, but God's mother.  
 Hail! all you holy virtues poured into Adoring hearts through the grace and light  
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*A - ve - ri - ri - a, We - gli - made Church.*

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 Original: Italian, 1200s  
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*11 - Ave Maria*

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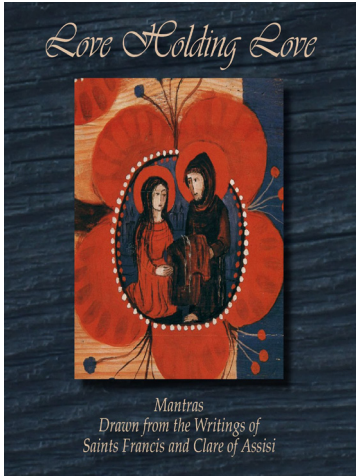
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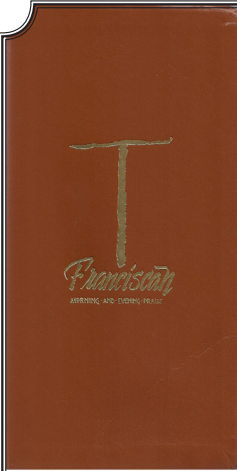
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DAVID B. COUTURIER, OFM. CAP., is the Director of Planning for the Archdiocese of Boston. He is the former Dean of the School of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, MD. He served for several years as President and Board Member of Franciscans International, the NGO at the United Nations. He teaches applied spiritual theology at the Pontifical Antonianum University in Rome and courses in Franciscan formation at St. Bonaventure University. He is the author of *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics* and *The Four Conversions: A Spirituality of Transformation*.

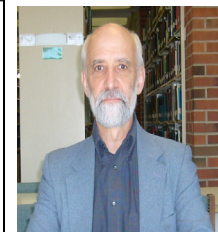


564-01: Saints and Cinema: The Portrayal of Francis and Others in Film

Taught by: Paul Spaeth, M.A., M.L.S.

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PAUL SPAETH is the Director of the Library & Special Collections Librarian at St. Bonaventure University. He is a 1987 graduate of the Franciscan Institute, where for years he taught the Research Methods course. In more recent times he has taught honors classes dealing with film, literature & religion. Among other publications he has been active in editing and promoting the writings of the poet Robert Lax.



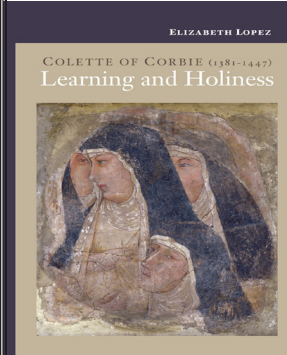
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**SUMMER SESSION 2011**

**SUMMER 2011: JUNE 27 — JULY 29**

COURSE INFORMATION	INSTRUCTOR	TIMES
<b>Weeks 1-5: June 27 - July 29</b>		
507: Early Franciscan Movement [3 credits; Core]	Michael Cusato, O.F.M.	MWF/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.
528: Pre-Franciscan Religious Movements [3 credits; Track]	Jacques Dalarun, Ph.D.	MWF/ 1:00-3:50 p.m.
560: Introduction to Franciscan Medieval Studies [3 credits; Core]	Cyprian Rosen, O.F.M. Cap.	T-Th/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.; W/ 6:45-9:35 p.m.
505: Integration Seminar [0 credits; Core (option 1)]	Faculty (Cusato)	TBA
597: Comprehensive Exams [0 credits; Core (option 2)]	Faculty (Cusato)	TBA
<b>Weeks 2, 3, 4: July 4 - July 22</b>		
518: Franciscan Hagiography [3 credits; Core]	Jean François, Godet-Calogeras, Ph.D.	MWF/ 1:00-3:50 p.m.
527: Rule of the Third Order Regular [3 credits; Track]	Margaret Carney, O.S.F.	M-F/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.
538: Development of the Franciscan Person [3 credits; Elective]	F. Edward Coughlin, O.F.M.	M-F/ 1:00-3:50 p.m.
558: Readings in Franciscan Theology: Peter Olivi [3 credits; Track]	Joshua Benson, Ph.D.	M-F/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.
567: Franciscan Studio Painting [3 credits; Elective]	David Haack, O.F.M.	M-F/ 1:00-3:50 p.m.
564-03: Franciscan Obedience in Context [3 credits; Elective]	Jens Röhrkasten, Ph.D.	M-F/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.
<b>One-Week Enrichment Courses: June 27 - July 1</b>		
564-01: Saints and Cinema: The Portrayal of Francis and Others in Film [1 credit; Elective]	Paul Spaeth, M.A; M.L.S.	M-F/ 8:30-10:15 a.m. M-Th/ 7:00-9:00 p.m.
564-02: Franciscan Leadership in a Time of Crisis [1 credit; Elective]	David Couturier, O.F.M. Cap.	M-F/ 1:00-3:50 p.m.
<b>General Orientation Courses</b>		
501: Survey of Franciscan History [3 credits] July 11 - July 29	Fr. Maurice Carmody, Ph.D.	M-F/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.
520: Francis: Life and Charism [2 credits] June 27 - July 8	Mary Meany, Ph.D.	M-F/ 8:30-11:20 a.m.



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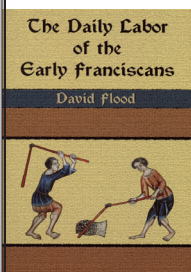
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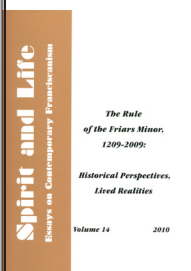
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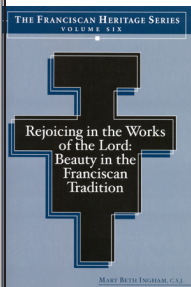
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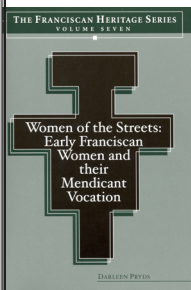
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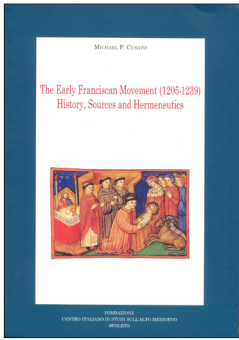
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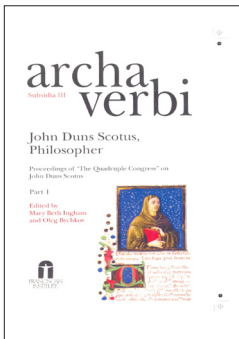


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