

Nature in the Sermons of Saint Anthony

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In a treatise on the learning of preachers by Humbert of Romans, written around the middle of the thirteenth century, we find the following statement: "Blessed Anthony said that creatures are a book."¹ The distinguished master general of the Order of Preachers is most likely referring to a statement that, even if not literal, is certainly found as a theme on almost every page of Anthony of Padua's *Sermons*. Indeed, besides being extremely rich in citations from the book of Scripture and the Fathers, this work also contains a significant number of elements from the book of nature, out of which it constructs an impressive *allegoria in factis*.² Hence the topic is very important for a better knowledge of the thought of the saint from Lisbon and can offer things that are of value for today's world.

There was a real rediscovery of nature in the twelfth-century schools of theology, which were precursors of the Renaissance in this respect. One expression of this phenomenon was the creation of encyclopedias that brought together the thought of the ancients on the natural sciences, and the production of the first bestiaries, herbaries and lapidaries, which symbolically interpreted an important part of nature. The

¹"Beatus Antonius dixit creaturas esse Librum" Humbert of Romans, "De eruditione praedicatorum," in *Maxima Bibliotheca Patrum*, Lyon 1677, t. XXV, 433.

²See M. Zink, *Le monde animal et ses représentations dans la littérature française du Moyen Age (XI-XV siècle)*, (Toulouse: Cedex 1985) 63.

renewal of interest in natural things had different expressions and forms, and gradually a real evolution took place. In the second half of the thirteenth century this developed into an actual division when the science of the philosophers, explained by natural reason, was contrasted with the wisdom of the theologians, enlightened by revelation.³

We can already see, from a first reading of Anthony of Padua's *Sermons*, that he is heir to this rediscovery. On the other hand, he enriches it with contributions that have their own distinctive features. Underlying his thought we find the Augustinian roots of his theological formation, but in this particular area other authors and schools probably also played a part. As with many of his predecessors, Anthony's concept of nature was part of salvation history, his starting point for constructing his symbolic and sacramental view of sensible realities.

In this study we will try to take a closer look at Anthony's view of nature, summarizing the form in which the subject appears in the saint's *Sermons*. We will study the sources he used, his particular way of interpreting the sacred texts regarding creation, his way of appealing to the various elements of nature and the originality of his symbolism. We will try to give an overall assessment of the significance of Anthony's interpretation of nature and its links with the Franciscan conception. Our goal, in a certain sense, is to give a reasoned summary of a question that began to be studied after the first decades of the twentieth century and in which there has been a growing interest in recent years by scholars, some of whom are going back to the *Sermons* with the aid of new methodologies, even using the modern tools of computer science that allow for greater precision in the analysis of texts. The growth in Antonian studies from this angle is entirely understandable in an age such as our own, where interest in ecology and saving the environment is causing our contemporaries to study what our forebears—in this case, the people of the Middle Ages—had to say on the subject.

1. Studies on the Subject

The first signs of interest in nature and the natural sciences in the *Sermons* of Anthony were shown only around the 1930s.⁴ Gustavo Cantini

³For a more complete picture of this evolution, see L. Sileo, "Il *Liber Naturae* al bivio. Dalla cultura pre-universitaria alla prima metà del secolo XIII," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antonia*. Atti del Congresso Internazionale per L'VIII Centenario della nascita di Sant'Antonio di Padova (1195-1995) ed., Fernando Uribe (Rome: Edizioni Antonianum, 1996) 111-114.

⁴Here in alphabetical order are the chief studies we know of that deal with

this subject, either wholly or in part: Saturnino Alvarez Turienzo, "El Libro de las Criaturas y el Libro de las Escrituras en los *Sermones* de San Antonio de Lisboa," in *Congresso Internacional "Pensamento e Testemunho,"* 785-800; Francisco J. Da Gama Caeiro, "A ordenação sacerdotal de Santo Antonio," in *Itinerarium* 46 (1961) 446-60; Idem, "Nature et symbole chez S. Antoine de Padoue," in *La filosofia della natura nel medioevo*. Atti del terzo congresso internazionale di filosofia medievale. Passo della Mendola (Trent), 31 August – 5 September 1964. Milan 1966, especially 363-71; Idem, "Natureza e símbolo em Santo Antonio de Lisboa," in *Rivista de Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa*, III serie 8 (1964) 3-10; Idem, "Fonti portoghesi della formazione culturale di Sant'Antonio," in *Le fonti e la teologia dei sermoni antoniani*. Atti del Congresso internazionale di studio sui "Sermones" di S. Antonio di Padova (5-10 October 1981. Ed. Messaggero, Padua 1982, 145-69; Gustavo Cantini, "De fontibus Sermonum S. Antonii, qui in editione Locatelli continentur," in *Antonianum* 6 (1931) 354-60; Idem, "S. Antonio di Padova oratore," in *Studi Francescani* 4 (1932) 403-28; Idem, "La tecnica e l'indole del Sermone medievale ed i Sermoni di S. Antonio," in *Studi Francescani* 6 (1934) 60-80, 195-224; José Acácio A. de Castro, "Simbologia e analogia nella *Lectio* antoniana del *Liber Naturae*," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 231-48; Idem, *O simbolismo da natureza em Santo António de Lisboa*. Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Fund. Eng. Antonio de Almeida, Porto 1997; Idem, "Fontes do naturalismo antoniani," in *Congresso Internacional "Pensamento e Testemunho,"* 335-47; B Costa, "Le fonti dei 'Sermones' di sant'Antonio," in B. Smalley – B. Costa, *Le fonti dei "Sermones antoniani"*, Padua 1981, 23-24. *Congresso Internacional "Pensamento e Testemunho" 8º centenário do nascimento de Santo António*. Actas. Universidade Católica portuguesa, Família Franciscana portuguesa. Braga 1966; Samuele Doimi, "Le scienze naturali in Sant'Antonio," in *S. Antonio di Padova Dottore della Chiesa*. Atti delle Settimane Antoniane tenute a Roma e a Padova nel 1946, Vatican City 1947, 437-59; Agostino Figueiredo Frias, *Lettura Ermeneutica dei "Sermones" di Sant'Antonio di Padova. Introduzione alle radici culturali del pensiero antoniano*, Padua, Centro Studi Antoniano, 1995; Vergilio Gamboso, "Le creature nelle fonti agiografiche antoniane," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 278-86; Maria de Lourdes Sirgado Ganho, "L'uomo e la natura in Sant'Antonio," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 199-210; Xosé Luis García, "Interpretacións simbólicas no bestiario de San Antonio," in *Congresso Internacional "Pensamento e Testemunho,"* 1089-96; Giovanni Gasparotto, "Dipendenze isidoriane nei "Sermones" di S. Antonio di Padova," in *Le fonti e la teologia dei sermoni antoniani*, 229-54; Benvenuto Giacon, "Le scienze naturali in S. Antonio," in *S. Antonio di Padova Dottore evangelico*. Volume commemorativo della proclamazione di S. Antonio a Dottore della Chiesa universale, a cura della Provincia Patavina di S. Antonio dei FF. Min. Conventuali. Padua 1946, 141-47; Katherine Jansen, "Le fonti erudite nella *Lectio* antoniana del *Liber Naturae*," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 145-59. *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*. Atti del Congresso Internazionale per l'VIII centenario della nascita di Sant'Antonio di Padova (1195-1995). Pontificio Ateneo Antonianum Roma, 20-22 November 1995, ed. Fernando Uribe, PAA – Edizioni Antonianum, Rome 1996; Miguel Angel López, *La Lectio del Liber Naturae e la sua simbologia biblica nel Sermo in Septuagesima di S. Antonio di Padova*, in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 211-30; Tiziano Lorenzin, "Le fonti bibliche nella *Lectio* antoniana del *Liber Naturae*," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 161-79; Maria Cândida Monteiro Pacheco, "Il creato e le creature nel *Liber Naturae* di Antonio," in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 183-98;

could be said to have begun these studies when he became interested in the sources of all the *Sermons* and attached special importance to the nature sources, among which he mentioned especially the works of Pliny, Solinus and Saint Isidore of Seville.⁵

During the studies done at the time Saint Anthony was declared a Doctor of the Church, Benvenuto Giacon⁶ dealt specifically with the natural sciences, but he did so in a somewhat general fashion. He mentions the problem of the sources in passing and, referring to Canti's work, says that we should also look in the *Sermons* for the saint's original passages, even though he offers no suggestions in this regard. He spends time on Anthony's theological and "scientific" knowledge, which he says was purely the result of his direct observation of nature.

Samuele Doimi⁷ probably did the first serious study on the subject. In the first section of his work, the longest and most original, he starts from the assumption that the natural sciences are a body made up of anatomy, physiology, zoology, botany and mineralogy, and he applies this to the *Sermons*, which he analyzes with the help of Locatelli's edition. Each one of the above divisions of the natural sciences is illustrated with concrete examples; in some cases he does a statistical analysis. In the second section he tries to show that the main source of the *Sermons*, as far as the natural sciences are concerned, was Julius Solinus, especially his work *Polyhistor* or *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*.⁸ He clarifies his view with various examples, although he admits the influence of others such as Pliny the Elder and Saint Isidore of Seville.⁹ But he says that there is still no exhaustive study on this subject that would help us to determine better just how original Anthony was in dealing with nature. In the third section he makes a few brief comments on the critical importance of Anthony's ideas of nature, on the method he uses in dealing with them and on his purpose.

The significant contributions to Antonian studies by Francisco Da Gama Caeiro are especially useful because he shows the influence of the

Eadem, "A Natureza no pensamento de Santo António de Lisboa," in *Congresso Internacional "Pensamento e Testemunho,"* 71-85; Fernando Uribe, "È francescana la visione antoniana della natura?" in *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 251-75; Francesco Zambon, "La simbologia animale nei 'Sermones' di Sant'Antonio," in *Le fonti e la teologia dei sermoni antoniani*, 255-68.

⁵See Idem, "De fontibus Sermonum S. Antonii."

⁶See Idem, "Le Scienze naturali nei Sermoni di S. Antonio."

⁷See Idem, "Le scienze naturali in Sant'Antonio."

⁸See C. Iulii Solini, *Polyhistor rerum toto orbe memorabilium*, Basilea 1538.

⁹In this feature of the sources, the author essentially follows G. Cantini's study, "De fontibus sermonum S. Antonii," 354-60.

Portuguese educational environment in Anthony's formation.¹⁰ Among his studies there is also one about the way of viewing nature,¹¹ in which he tries to show that the saint's thought in this regard is a synthesis of nature and symbolism, the two great poles of the medieval universe. In other words, he says that Anthony moves between the two realities without rejecting either one.

Francesco Zambon¹² picks up on certain topics already dealt with earlier, such as methodology, but he goes especially into the sources used by Anthony with regard to animal symbolism. He reviews the sources indicated in the recent critical edition of the *Sermons* and makes some clarifications, showing with concrete examples the marks left by the *Physiologus* in certain passages of Anthony's text.

An important contribution on the importance of nature in Anthony's thought was the Conference entitled *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, organized by the Antonianum in Rome for the eighth centenary of the saint's birth. It was the first time that a group of specialists devoted itself specifically and exclusively to Anthony's reading of the book of Nature. The titles of the papers that deal more directly with our subject give an idea of the many angles from which the topic was treated,¹³ as we shall see.

In her study entitled "Le fonti erudite nella *Lectio* antoniana del *Liber Naturae*," Katherine Jansen examines some of Anthony's sources dealing with the animal kingdom as well as those that refer to human physiognomy. She shows how the saint gives them a significance, especially a moral significance, that is new for the thirteenth century.

Tizio Lorenzin analyzes the biblical sources in Anthony's reading of the book of Nature. Presenting statistical figures, he shows, with texts that are mostly from the Old Testament, how the biblical flora and fauna are abundantly present in the *Sermons*. He concludes that the elements of nature are not used simply to embellish the story but that Anthony explains the book of scripture by means of the book of nature.

¹⁰See especially Idem, "Fonti portoghesi della formazione culturale di Sant'Antonio."

¹¹See Idem, "Nature et symbole chez S. Antoine de Padoue."

¹²See Idem, "La simbologia animale nei 'Sermones.'"

¹³See the Proceedings, cited above: *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*, 145-59. *Il "Liber Naturae" nella "Lectio" Antoniana*. Atti del Congresso Internazionale per l'VIII centenario della nascita di Sant'Antonio di Padova (1195-1995). The studies cited in the following paragraphs are found in this anthology.

In a reflection, philosophical in tone, entitled "Il creato e le creature nel *Liber Naturae* di Antonio," Maria Cândida Pacheco stresses the relationship of difference between Creator and creature in Anthony's thought. She shows the role that he attributes to Christ in the work of creation, she goes into the concepts of goodness and beauty from Anthony's perspective and on the meaning of the human being in the context of creation. In the Conference organized in Portugal, again for the eighth centenary of Anthony's birth, Pacheco presented a similar topic¹⁴ in which, after dealing briefly with the sources that influenced the author, analyzes the two major meanings of the term "nature" in Anthony's sermons (*cosmos* or *universe* and *applied to Christ*), and she shows the intimate link between the two in the symbolic and spiritual language used by the saint.

"L'uomo e la natura in Sant'Antonio" is a subject that María de Lourdes Sirgado Ganho also deals with philosophically. After situating Anthony's anthropology in the context of earlier philosophy, she analyzes Anthony's concept of the human person from four different points of view: insertion in the world, subjectivity, inter-subjectivity and status as image of God.¹⁵

Miguel Angel López does a detailed analysis of one of Anthony's sermons ("La *Lectio* del *Liber Naturae* e la sua simbologia biblica nel *Sermo in Septuagesima* di S. Antonio di Padova"), rigorously applying an exegetical method that enables him to see the symmetrical use of analogies and symbols taken from nature. Among the interesting closing remarks, he stresses that Anthony's use of the book of nature entails a criterion and a method reflecting a type of strict science.

In his study "Simbologia e analogia nella *Lectio* antoniano del *Liber Naturae*," José Acácio Aguiar de Castro goes into Anthony's treatment of nature through the constant use of metaphors and symbols. He dwells especially on the semantic bipolarism used in the sermons as a literary phenomenon. The same topic was treated by Acácio in a much more extensive and systematic study,¹⁶ in which he situates Anthony's symbolism and analogy in the historical context of Western thought, and he analyzes them semantically through strict application of a method that follows the structuralist model. The author also examines anew the problem of the sources used in the *Sermons* in the area of natural symbols,¹⁷ and he devotes

¹⁴See Eadem, "A Natureza no pensamento de Santo António de Lisboa."

¹⁵By the same author see "Homen e natureza em Santo António de Lisboa," in *Colóquio Antoniano* (Lisbon: Câmara municipal de Lisboa, 1982), 195-203.

¹⁶See Idem, *O simbolismo de natureza em Santo António de Lisboa*.

¹⁷The section entitled "A metodologia antoniana e as abordagens de

one chapter to the subject of human beings and nature. In the methodological process the author presents a rather important list of the creatures mentioned in the respective textual citations, divided into three groups: minerals, vegetables and animals. This list could become the starting point for reconstructing the lapidary, the herbary and the bestiary used by Anthony in his works.

Faced with the question of whether Anthony's view of nature is Franciscan, the author has tried to give an objective answer through an analysis of nature language in the *Opuscula* of Saint Francis of Assisi and in the *Sermons* of Saint Anthony, which are compared in two instances: by establishing an overall relationship and by relating some selected cases as examples. He concluded that there is a considerable difference between Francis and Anthony, both as to their aims, their basic attitude toward creatures, and the way in which they deal with them.

Until now, most studies on the meaning of nature in Anthony could be reduced to an analysis of his *Sermons*, but some scholars have shown interest in the hagiographic sources. One of these was Vergilio Gamboso with his reflection entitled "Le creature nelle fonti agiografiche antoniane." He considers the oldest hagiographies and examines various passages where the saint is seen in contact with creatures from the three natural kingdoms: animal, vegetable, mineral. The author concludes that, compared to Francis of Assisi, Anthony "maintains a more detached view of non-human creatures," and "he appears less concerned with ecology."

In the commemorative conference held in Portugal and entitled "El Libro de las Criaturas y el Libro de las Escrituras en los *Sermones* de San Antonio de Lisboa," Saturnino Alvarez Turienzo tried to situate creatures in the context of the period before Anthony, going then into an analysis of some passages in the *Sermons*. He concluded that, even though the *Sermons* show signs of the new awareness of creatures that began to show itself in the thirteenth century, the method of exposition adopted by the saint continues to be traditional.

At the same conference a short paper was also presented by Xosé Luis García, entitled "Interpretación simbólica no bestiario de San Antonio."

Aristóteles, Plinio e Isidoro de Sevilha" (pp. 171-84), was published under the title "Fontes do naturalismo antoniano" in the Proceedings of the *Congresso internacional "Pensamento e testemunho,"* 335-47.

2. Nature in the *Sermons*

It can be said that there are references to nature in all 77 sermons that make up Anthony's works. Logically, the subject appears more often in the Sunday sermons, since they are a complete corpus, but it is also significant in the incomplete *Sermones festivi*. Taking the *Sermons* as a whole, 194 species of animals, vegetables and minerals can be found in them, for a total of at least 605 occurrences. The most frequent and detailed references are to the animal world (at least 99 according to the critical edition, including also some mythical animals), but botanical references are abundant too (around 72 items), whereas the mineral world is less present (around 23 items).¹⁸ Each item, especially those from the animal kingdom, is used two, three or more times in the collection of sermons. To the three foregoing groups must be added a fourth, that of the cosmic elements and meteorological phenomena, which appear in the *Sermons* with at least seven items.

3. Anthony's Sources

A discussion of the sources used by Anthony in his *Sermons* as far as nature is concerned, obliges us to go back to the educational climate in the houses where he received his formation: San Vincenzo in Lisbon and Santa Croce in Coimbra. Both were real centers of learning in Portugal at the time, and there was no lack of interest in them in subjects related to nature. We know for example, that among the eighteen books given by the Augustinian friary of Santa Croce to San Vincenzo in the years 1206, 1218 and 1226, there were some that dealt with the natural sciences.¹⁹ Anthony's professors of theology had studied at the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris, where they came into contact with the ideas and methods of the great Victorine masters, especially Hugh and Richard,²⁰ whose influence is seen in the *Sermons*. And so it was in this educational setting that Anthony also learned many things about nature in accord with the ideas of the time. It cannot be imagined, however, that he had a profound and specialized

¹⁸The most up-to-date statistics are found in J.A. de Castro, *O simbolismo da natureza em Santo António de Lisboa*, 52-141.

¹⁹For more information about the educational climate at the time, specifically in Lisbon and Coimbra, see A. Cruz, *Santa Cruz de Coimbra na cultura portuguesa da Idade Média*, Porto, 1964; F. Da Gama Caeiro, "Fontes portuguesas de formação...", 136-55; Idem, *Santo António de Lisboa*. Vol. I *Introdução à obra antoniana*, Lisbon 1967, Chap. I; M.C. Pacheco, *Santo António de Lisboa, a Água e a Treva*, Chap. I.

²⁰See Châtillon, "Saint Antoine de Padue et les Victorins," in *Le fonti e la teologia dei sermoni antoniani*, 171-202.

knowledge of nature, but rather the knowledge had by educated people at that period. Moreover, this was a highly symbolic view, in which Anthony depended essentially on Augustinian symbolism.²¹

Looking specifically at the explicit or implicit references to nature taken from other authors that are found in Anthony's Sermons, we can see that there are seven major sources: Aristotle (*De historia animalium*, *De partibus animalium*, *De plantis*), Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia*), Julius Solinus (*Polihistor*), Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae*, *Synonymia*, *Differentiae*, *De natura rerum*), Hugh of Folieto (*De bestiis*),²² Rhabanus Maurus (*De universo*) and two anonymous authors (*Naturalia*, *Physiologus*). But it must be pointed out that, from a quantitative standpoint, their presence varies greatly. Indeed, sticking with the data provided by the critical edition of the *Sermons*, the following numbers can be obtained: 554 references to Isidore of Seville, 114 to Aristotle, 51 to Pliny the Elder and 39 to Solinus.²³ This represents a considerable amount of earlier scholarly literature, older material in particular. In any case, there is a distinct preference for Isidore, which has been interpreted not as an accidental numerical frequency of references, but as signaling a great affinity with his thought on the interpretation of nature. The use of Aristotle's books on nature, which came to Anthony in the translation by Michael Scot, most likely took place after he left Portugal.²⁴ These references are partly interwoven with the biblical references, which, as expected, are very abundant in Anthony's works. Indeed, in the *Sermons* there are 57 biblical texts that mention 35 different animals, and 17 texts that mention 12 plants and flowers. Both for zoology and for botany, the greater number of references is to the Old Testament; for the animals the main source is the prophetic books, while for the flora and fauna the wisdom books predominate.²⁵

When Anthony introduces examples from nature, he sometimes uses general expressions, such as "Naturalists say" [*Physici dicunt*], or

²¹See F. Da Gama Caeiro, "Nature et symbole," 369-70.

²²On the presence of this author in the works of Anthony, not always confirmed by other scholars, see J.A. De Castro, *O simbolismo da natureza*, 179-84.

²³See G. Gasparotto, "Dipendenze isidoriane," 232.

²⁴The last critical edition of the *Sermones* emphasized the influence of Aristotle in the texts on nature; the hypothesis is that "Anthony used the translation from the Arabic of Aristotle's zoological treatises, which Michael Scot had completed in Toledo before 1220, and that the saint, according to Paolo Marangon, could have become acquainted with it during his stay in Bologna, where Scot also arrived," Fr. Zambon, "La simbologia animale nei 'Sermones,'" 257. See A. Figueiredo Frias, *Lettura Ermeneutica dei 'Sermones'*, 132-36.

²⁵See T. Lorenzin, "Le fonti bibliche," 162.

"According to physicists" [*Secundum physicos*], but more often (about fifty times) he prefers the expression "It is said in the Natural History" [*Dicitur in Naturalibus*]. Most likely, this last expression does not mean that the author made direct use of the works of Aristotle, but rather of the Stagirite's teachings popularized in the third century by Solinus in his work *Polyhistor*, which was in wide circulation in the Middle Ages. This work in turn reflects, to a large extent, Pliny the Elder's *Storia naturale*, but the latter is never cited. In other cases Anthony probably uses the *De bestiis et aliis rebus* by Hugh of Saint Victor, but this usually is also dependent on Solinus, even though the way the natural elements are used by Anthony and Hugh differs greatly.²⁶ According to Francesco Zambon, his information about nature may also "derive from a compilation of *naturalia* that has not come down to us that included all the material utilized by Anthony: such works were widespread in his day."²⁷

It cannot be ruled out that among Anthony's sources was his own personal experience, the result of his observations, at least for some of the natural phenomena he considers. Some scholars insist on this personal dimension of Anthony's reflection, which would become evident in his way of describing certain elements of nature, certainly those that were more common in the geographical area where he spent much of his time: bees, grapevines, olive trees, spiders etc.²⁸ Others say, without hesitation, that his description of animals comes entirely from books.²⁹

But we must not forget that much of his description of these phenomena does not correspond to reality, but instead to a magical and symbolic view handed down from antiquity, and that such interpretation was very common in the Middle Ages.

In any case, Anthony's use of his sources reflects very clearly his attitude toward the natural sciences. His intention is not scientific, in the sense of acquiring a more exact knowledge of the elements of nature or of

²⁶G. Cantini, "La tecnica e l'indole," 198. "Anthony's specialty consists in having tried to draw a meaning and moral teaching from etymologies, from things of nature and from animals. In this, Anthony distinguishes himself clearly from Hugh of Saint Victor. In Hugh, animals have an allegorical meaning; they signify Christ, Adam and Eve, the devil etc. In Anthony, they signify the vices and virtues: temperance, mercy, poverty of spirit, anger, hypocrisy, false Christians etc. To be sure, even before Anthony, animals etc. had moral meanings; but in Anthony's *Mistica quadriga* this exposition is systematic."

²⁷Idem, "Simbologia animale," 257.

²⁸See B. Giacon, "Le scienze naturali in S. Antonio," 145-46; F. Da Gama Caeiro, "Nature et symbole," 366-68.

²⁹See F. Zambon, "La Simbologia animale," 257.

increasing that knowledge. Rather, he appeals to nature for pastoral reasons, and so he uses the bestiaries, herbaries and lapidaries to provide him with data and new allegories, which he, in a certain sense, imbues with a new content that is Christian, or at least moral and symbolic.³⁰

4. The Method Used by the Saint in His Interpretation

Anthony deliberately uses the elements of nature as tools to help him clarify the text of Scripture and, above all, to get to the moral applications more easily. In the methodological assumptions placed in the prologue to his *Sermons*, the saint is very explicit in this regard when he says: "In order to prevent the Word of God from giving rise to annoyance or disdain, to the detriment of their souls, we have placed at the beginning of each Gospel a suitable prologue, and here and there we have introduced descriptions of natural elements and animals, and etymologies of names, interpreted in a moral sense."³¹ Indeed, when we read the Sermons we can see the author's threefold movement, which starts from the sacred text, goes to nature, and then descends to the moral applications. On the other hand, his method does not present the analogies and symbols in a very homogeneous manner.

Anthony's exegetical method starts from a stated intention (not always realized) to progressively apply the four senses of Scripture: literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical. In reading the book of nature, he does not develop the literal sense very much, and he neglects the anagogical sense, which refers to ultimate realities, almost entirely. In practice the author spends his time on application of the moral and allegorical senses, and between the two he shows a great preference for the allegorical interpretation. This frequently takes the form of a metaphor and, very often, also that of a symbol, but it is not uncommon to find mixed forms.

³⁰"Anthony even Christianizes, 'bestiarizes,' Aristotelian zoology, which in the *Sermons* loses its original scientific character and assumes that of an immense Bestiary, a *Physiologus* whose model was extended to all natural science. The saint behaves toward it exactly in the same way as the early-century Fathers..." Cfr. F. Zambon, "Simbologia animale," 263.

³¹S. Antonii Patavini, O.Min. Doctoris Evangelici, *Sermones Dominicales et Festivi*. Ad fidem codicum recogniti, curantibus B. Costa, L. Frasson, I. Luisetto, coad. P. Marangon, t. I-III, Padua 1979. We shall cite: *Sermones* I, 4 (the Roman numeral indicates the volume, the second number the page). This will always be followed by the corresponding citation in the Italian translation: Sant'Antonio di Padova, *I Sermoni*, trad. G. Tollardo, OFMConv., Ed. Messagero, Padua 1994. We shall cite: *Sermoni* 22 (the number indicates the page).

Each element of nature gives Anthony a chance to see, in the form of a metaphor or symbol, a truth, a virtue, a vice, a state of mind, or even a person such as Christ, the Holy Spirit or the Virgin Mary. First the saint describes the reality as it appears in nature, breaking down the element into its different parts. This step is ordinarily accompanied by an etymological explanation and a more-or-less detailed description of the physiology or anatomy, and even particular habits—data he ordinarily takes from Isidore of Seville's etymologies or from other references in the form of lists of concepts or dictionaries of nature.³² The second step is to re-create the scene according to the sense chosen, and this is what the saint calls the moral exposition. Corresponding to this phase are the moral applications of the things of nature; these are usually at odds with the literary tastes of people today.

More specifically, the following processes can be identified in Anthony's methodology: a) The most frequent consists in breaking down an element of nature, usually an animal, into its individual parts, so that each part acquires a symbolic meaning starting with its function, its form or its color; this is Anthony's so-called "atomization." b) In some cases Anthony uses, in a more sophisticated form, the symmetrical contrast of two elements of nature (two animals, two plants etc.) that have differing characteristics and serve to symbolize different realities, sometimes opposite. c) On other occasions the author associates two or more elements of nature in the development of one and the same subject. The use of such interpretations shows that the author is more interested in the moral and allegorical discussion than in nature itself, which at times is emptied of its vital pulse and often shattered, to the point that it resembles a mosaic of allegorical pieces cut from plants and animals.³³

The foregoing shows us that Anthony applies his chosen methodology very systematically and that throughout the entire text of the sermons an invariable structure is maintained, which includes all the nature references presented. The use of concordances allows the author to create a complex web of analogies between the world of nature and the biblical or spiritual content. On the other hand, he manages to present a true nature discourse, symbolic in character, which can be read independently of the rest of the text.³⁴ We can also see that his appeal to nature is not arbitrary nor a mere literary artifice; it represents a concept of the natural sciences as

³²For the most important of these aids see G. Cantini, "La tecnica e l'indole," 72.

³³See F. Zambon, "Simbologia animale," 264-66.

³⁴See J. A. Castro, *O simbolismo da natureza*, 237.

serious as the means in use at the time to explain them. In a certain sense it expresses, albeit still incipiently, his intention to give a scientific description of nature through his images. But the methodology adopted by Anthony in his treatment of nature cannot be separated from his work as a whole, in which an exegetical passage important for explaining the book of scripture is given from the explanation of the book of nature.

The preceding methodological characteristics allow us to say that, in his treatment of nature, Anthony shows a certain originality compared to his predecessors, especially since the discursive structure of the *Sermons* has a precise effect on the elements of nature in general and on nature symbolism in particular.

5. Anthony's Use of the Elements of Nature

The use of the elements of nature in the *Sermons* varies greatly and can be viewed from different angles. All the elements do not always mean the same thing, and sometimes the animals and various plants are anthropomorphized. In order to give an idea of the different ways Anthony uses nature symbols, we present some examples, with no claim that they are exhaustive.

There are really very few cases in which the same element has more-or-less the same meaning in all the *Sermons*, or at least in most of them, as is the case with elephants, which are always an image of penitents or the just.³⁵ Ordinarily the same element has multiple meanings, as is the case with bees, who occupy a top place among the animals that appear more frequently in Anthony's works. The author provides a curious etymological meaning: "The name *apis* [bee] derives from privative *a*, which means 'without,' and *pes* [foot], because of the fact that it seems to be born without feet." Or else bees are so-called because they bond with each other by means of their feet,³⁶ but he does not have this meaning in mind when he applies the image of the bee to other persons. In one sermon the bee is taken as an example of the purity of the Virgin Mary,³⁷ and in another it is taken as representing Mary Magdalene who went to the tomb of Christ,³⁸ while elsewhere as a symbol of Christ himself³⁹ or as a model for the preacher.⁴⁰

³⁵The charitable: *Sermones* I, 237; *Sermoni* 231. Penitents: *Sermones* I, 245-46; *Sermoni* 237; *Sermones* I, 495; *Sermoni* 478. The just: *Sermones* I, 499; *Sermoni* 481. The poor: *Sermones* III, 78-79; *Sermoni* 1039.

³⁶*Sermones* III, 112; *Sermoni* 1126. *Sermones* I, 151-52; *Sermoni* 146.

³⁷See *Sermones* III, 108-10; *Sermoni* 1123-24.

³⁸See *Sermones* I, 213; *Sermoni* 203.

³⁹See *Sermones* II, 337; *Sermoni* 789.

With regard to the biblical source that inspires Anthony's commentary, in a number of cases the elements of nature can be seen to retain the same meaning, continuing the same line of biblical application. Thus the eagle is a symbol of divine wisdom in Job 39:29, and in Anthony it symbolizes the astute understanding of the saints and their capacity for contemplation.⁴¹ The hind, which in Proverbs 5:19 signifies the young woman's loveliness, has the same meaning in Anthony.⁴² The woodworm of 2 Samuel 23:8 also signifies, for Anthony, the just man who is always busy.⁴³

More frequent are the cases in which the author changes the meaning originally given the elements by the biblical source. Thus the asses of Judges 5:10 are real animals, whereas in the *Sermons* they are turned into a metaphor: the tired asses are those religious who bear the day's burden and heat.⁴⁴ The dog that licks the blood of Israel's enemies (Psalm 67:24) signifies something real in the biblical text, as does the dog that licks the sores of Lazarus (Luke 16:21), while in Anthony it is a metaphor for preachers who care for the wounds of sin.⁴⁵ The fish of Tobit 6:5 is real, whereas for Anthony it symbolizes Christ on the cross.⁴⁶ The same thing happens with the fish caught by Peter at Jesus' command (Matthew 17:26); for Anthony it is a metaphor pointing to Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ A change of meaning also occurs when certain animals in the biblical text have a metaphorical meaning. Thus the heifer that signifies Israel's idolatry in Hosea 4:16, is seen by Anthony as prelates who with their riches silence the cries of those calling them to conversion,⁴⁸ or else as the Christian community wandering through the fields of licentious pleasures.⁴⁹ The locusts in Nahum 3:17 are a metaphor to indicate the scattering of the Syrian enemy, and in Anthony they signify usurers. In Ecclesiastes 12:5 they are an image of weakness in old age, and in Anthony the fattened locust is the soul filled with heavenly

⁴⁰See *Sermones* II, 78; *Sermoni* 611.

⁴¹See *Sermones* II, 202-03; *Sermoni* 674-76.

⁴²See *Sermones* III, 6; *Sermoni* 941.

⁴³See *Sermones* III, 134; *Sermoni* 1171.

⁴⁴See *Sermones* II, 590; *Sermoni* 1060.

⁴⁵See *Sermones* I, 400-01; *Sermoni* 398.

⁴⁶See *Sermones* I, 46-47; *Sermoni* 57.

⁴⁷See *Sermones* II, 222; *Sermoni* 691. See also *Sermones* III, 180-81; *Sermoni*

⁴⁸See *Sermones* I, 365; *Sermoni* 333.

⁴⁹See *Sermones* I, 277; *Sermoni* 263.

blessings,⁵⁰ or the early Church gladdened by the resurrection of Christ,⁵¹ or the glorified soul.⁵² The same thing happens with elements from the world of botany. The lily, one of the iconographic symbols of the saint, in Hosea 14:6 signifies the restoration of Israel guaranteed by the presence of God's blessing; in Anthony it signifies the lily-white splendor of the virginity of Mary.⁵³ In another passage the lily is an image of the true penitent, poor in spirit, humble of heart, chaste in body.⁵⁴ Anthony identifies the cypress on Mount Zion in Ecclesiasticus 24:17 with Jesus Christ,⁵⁵ while the same tree, which in Ecclesiasticus 59:10 is an image of the high priest, is for Anthony an allegory of the Virgin Mary raised above all the angels.⁵⁶

The phenomenon of double semantic valence occurs very often: the same natural element is presented spiritually or morally by Anthony with one positive meaning and another negative, in true semantic bipolarity.⁵⁷ These applications present not only a double meaning, but sometimes one that is also contrasting, conflicting or even ambiguous. Such is the case with the rock, which in a positive sense can signify spiritual strength,⁵⁸ virginity,⁵⁹ chastity⁶⁰ or steadfast faith,⁶¹ and in a negative sense signifies false religious,⁶² opulent riches⁶³ or temptation by the devil.⁶⁴ The tree, in a positive sense, signifies the just person,⁶⁵ goodwill,⁶⁶ the souls of penitents;⁶⁷ in a negative sense, it signifies one who is avaricious⁶⁸ or worldly self-respect.⁶⁹ Locusts, in

⁵⁰See *Sermones* I, 339; *Sermoni* 312.

⁵¹See *Sermones* III, 180; *Sermoni* 216.

⁵²See *Sermones* I, 183; *Sermoni* 218.

⁵³See *Sermones* II, 125; *Sermoni* 1094.

⁵⁴See *Sermones* II, 238; *Sermoni* 705.

⁵⁵See *Sermones* II, 261; *Sermoni* 724.

⁵⁶See *Sermones* II, 149; *Sermoni* 1115.

⁵⁷Two scholars have recently gone into this methodology of Anthony: A.F. Frias, *Lettura Ermeneutica dei "Sermones,"* 147-48; J.A. Castro, "Simbologia e analogia," 139-40, 146, 153.

⁵⁸See *Sermones* II, 216-17; *Sermoni* 687-88.

⁵⁹See *Sermones* II, 243; *Sermoni* 709.

⁶⁰See *Sermones* II, 243; *Sermoni* 710.

⁶¹See *Sermones* III, 35; *Sermoni* 964.

⁶²See *Sermones* I, 27; *Sermoni* 41.

⁶³See *Sermones* I, 287; *Sermoni* 270.

⁶⁴See *Sermones* II, 154-55; *Sermoni* 635.

⁶⁵See *Sermones* II, 194; *Sermoni* 668.

⁶⁶See *Sermones* I, 562; *Sermoni* 535.

⁶⁷See *Sermones* I, 444; *Sermoni* 433.

⁶⁸See *Sermones* I, 319; *Sermoni* 295.

a positive sense, are images of religious who jump with the two feet of poverty and obedience, and in the same context they represent religious who jump backwards like locusts and live contrary to the rule of the Gospel;⁷⁰ or they signify a holy soul⁷¹ or, on the other hand, the devil.⁷² The wild asses signify, on the one hand, the empty joy of those who are sensual and, on the other hand, the full joy of the saints in heaven.⁷³ Bronze, in a positive sense, is the sonority of eloquence or good works,⁷⁴ the sound of confession and final perseverance,⁷⁵ of the eternal sentence⁷⁶ or of divinity;⁷⁷ in a negative sense it is the sound of riches⁷⁸ or of the wicked.⁷⁹ The peacock signifies, positively, the one who is perfect⁸⁰ and, negatively, the one who is a hypocrite.⁸¹

In some cases only the positive or negative sense is taken, but always with a polyvalent meaning. This happens for example with silver, which always has a positive sense: the soul purified of dross,⁸² philosophical eloquence,⁸³ a confession of praise,⁸⁴ the eloquence of this world,⁸⁵ that of prelates and preachers⁸⁶ or the song of praise to God and the confession of one's sin.⁸⁷ The same thing happens with the rose, which signifies charity,⁸⁸ the life of the just,⁸⁹ confession,⁹⁰ the Virgin Mary.⁹¹ The dove signifies

⁶⁹ See *Sermones* II, 281; *Sermoni* 739.

⁷⁰ See *Sermones* I, 106-07; *Sermoni* 112-13.

⁷¹ See *Sermones* III, 186; *Sermoni* 186.

⁷² See *Sermones* I, 339; *Sermoni* 311.

⁷³ See *Sermones* I, 338-39; *Sermoni* 311.

⁷⁴ See *Sermones* I, 253-54, 258; *Sermoni* 243, 247.

⁷⁵ See *Sermones* I, 543; *Sermoni* 519.

⁷⁶ See *Sermones* II, 186; *Sermoni* 662.

⁷⁷ See *Sermones* III, 212-13; *Sermoni* 1193.

⁷⁸ See *Sermones* II, 383; *Sermoni* 826.

⁷⁹ See *Sermones* II, 534; *Sermoni* 992.

⁸⁰ See *Sermones* I, 494; *Sermoni* 476.

⁸¹ See *Sermones* I, 69; *Sermoni* 84.

⁸² See *Sermones* I, 315; *Sermoni* 292.

⁸³ See *Sermones* I, 493; *Sermoni* 476.

⁸⁴ See *Sermones* I, 494; *Sermoni* 477.

⁸⁵ See *Sermones* II, 515-16; *Sermoni* 931.

⁸⁶ See *Sermones* III, 44; *Sermoni* 973.

⁸⁷ See *Sermones* I, 146; *Sermoni* 142.

⁸⁸ See *Sermones* II, 87; *Sermoni* 619.

⁸⁹ See *Sermones* II, 8; *Sermoni* 944.

⁹⁰ See *Sermones* II, 121; *Sermoni* 1091.

Christ,⁹² the Holy Spirit,⁹³ the Church,⁹⁴ contrition, simplicity and purity,⁹⁵ the soul,⁹⁶ the just one⁹⁷ or the apostles.⁹⁸ On the other hand, some always have a negative sense, for example the spider, which signifies a proud heart,⁹⁹ lust,¹⁰⁰ or the arrogance of the clergy;¹⁰¹ the same is true of the thorn, which signifies usury¹⁰² or pain.¹⁰³

6. Originality of Anthony's Thoughts on Nature

From the comparisons made until the present between Anthony's works and similar works by his predecessors, he can be called original not only in his method, especially with regard to the structure of the sermon, but also in his interpretation. The massive presence of natural elements, spread so consistently through all his works and so independently interpreted, is an exception in the context of contemporary works of the same genre.

In an era when bestiaries, herbaries and lapidaries were proliferating, Anthony offers in his work a significant number of elements from nature, presented in a symbolic setting much richer and more complex than that of his contemporaries. The most original and interesting aspect is the allegorical interpretations that accompany the minute, and at times sophisticated, descriptions of the various elements.

We must not forget that even though Anthony used a variety of Aristotelian sources, his thought on nature is much closer to religious speculation than to dialectic reasoning, precisely because his work is so eminently homiletic. To be sure, nature symbolism is part of Anthony's Sermons, at both the narrative and exegetical level, but the purpose of it all

⁹¹See *Sermones* I, 457; *Sermoni* 885.

⁹²See *Sermones* I, 457; *Sermoni* 885.

⁹³See *Sermones* II, 571; *Sermoni* 1045.

⁹⁴See *Sermones* I, 238; *Sermoni* 231.

⁹⁵See *Sermones* II, 323; II, 137-38; *Sermoni* 777, 1105.

⁹⁶See *Sermones* II, 38; *Sermoni* 576.

⁹⁷See *Sermones* II, 556; III, 100; *Sermoni* 1020, 1117.

⁹⁸See *Sermones* III, 84; *Sermoni* 1146.

⁹⁹See *Sermones* II, 52; *Sermoni* 589.

¹⁰⁰See *Sermones* I, 357-58; *Sermoni* 326.

¹⁰¹See *Sermones* II, 408; *Sermoni* 848.

¹⁰²See *Sermones* I, 32; *Sermoni* 46.

¹⁰³See *Sermones* II, 253; *Sermoni* 718.

is to make the pedagogical and pastoral dimension of the text more explicit.¹⁰⁴

Despite the undeniable scientific orientation of Anthony's method in composing his Sermons, his observations about nature are related to their parenetic aim. Indeed, all the elements of nature described or evoked are interpreted symbolically and related to spiritual, or more often moral, teachings. In this sense the saint is entirely faithful to the Christian and medieval idea that nature is a sign or symbol of divine realities, a mirror of God, a book written in his own hand.

7. Significance and Importance of Anthony's Interpretation of Nature

The significance and importance of Anthony's interpretation of nature can be sufficiently understood if we keep in mind that he did not intend to write a treatise on the natural sciences, but only sermons for the benefit of preachers and, indirectly, also the faithful. For this reason, his way of treating these subjects must be appreciated even more, for while he is not a precursor in this regard, he shows himself a true scholar. He used the material he had available, that of the time, to convey a message. The elements he takes from the natural sciences are only aids, and the allegories and symbolisms he constructs are only strategies used to achieve the moral objective of his Sermons.

Anthony's view of the material world is perceptive, inasmuch as he accords real value to sensible objects, but he goes beyond them and does not remain a mere empiricist.¹⁰⁵ The elements of nature are for him seals with which God has marked all of creation, so that by studying his vestiges we might come to him. Anthony himself explains the term "vestiges," saying that "by means of them we investigate, that is, we discover the path of the one who has passed by, pointing out the works by which one is recognized."¹⁰⁶

Anthony's view of nature is in the end theological or, better yet, Christological. From this perspective he makes a highly-packed statement stressing the close relationship between creature and Creator, especially through the work of his hands accomplished in the redemption of Christ:

¹⁰⁴See De Castro, *O simbolismo da Natureza*, 145-46.

¹⁰⁵See F. Da Gama Careiro, "Nature et symbole," 365; Idem, *Santo António de Lisboa*, re-ed. Lisbon, INCM, 1995, II, 266.

¹⁰⁶*Sermões* I, 344; *Sermoni* 316.

"The 'Lord's work' is creation, which, properly considered, leads the one who considers to admiration of the Creator. If there is so much beauty in the creature, how much more will there be in the Creator? The wisdom of the craftsman shines in the material. But those who are slaves to the senses do not heed this, nor do they consider 'the works of his hands,' which on the cross were pierced by the nails. With his hands nailed to the cross, Jesus overcame the devil and snatched the human race out of his hands.... Christ's works are 'creation' and the 'new creation.'"¹⁰⁷

Christ's role in creation is described from an eschatological viewpoint in a curious text that comments on Ecclesiastes 1:5-6, in which Christ is presented as creator and governor of the universe: "Jesus Christ, who as God is creator of nature and governs the entire universe, proceeds by a circular course, for he 'returns to his place' from which he had set out, 'and returning from there,' that is, returning from heaven for the last judgment, 'he makes his round by the south,' that is, he examines the good deeds, and then 'he turns to the north,' that is, he examines the wicked deeds, 'he examines and makes all things clear' because there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed."¹⁰⁸

The relationship of creatures with their Creator is presented by Anthony as one of dependence, understood as a participation in his goodness. Indeed, the Creator is the supreme Good "from whom anyone who is good derives goodness, and who, being the essential Good, radiates his goodness on all that exists. All things in heaven, like the angels, and all things on earth and under the earth, all that is in the air and in the water and all that is endowed with reason and understanding, all that moves, lives and exists, comes from him, the supreme Good, the cause and source of all good."¹⁰⁹ In this case the Creator is presented in terms of goodness; he is *essential Good*. Note also that creatures are, in a certain sense, arranged in opposing groups (heaven/earth, air/water, reason/movement), which might be a way for us to approach Anthony's view of the cosmos. But the relationship with creatures is also expressed in the *Sermons* in terms of beauty. God is supreme Beauty and gives creatures a share in this: "So sublime is the beauty of the divine Majesty who enkindles all those blessed spirits with a desire for him, by enkindling them restores them, and by restoring them enkindles their desire even more."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Sermones* II, 476-77; *Sermoni* 900.

¹⁰⁸ *Sermones* II, 32; *Sermoni* 571.

¹⁰⁹ *Sermones* III, 198; *Sermoni* 1181.

¹¹⁰ *Sermones* III, 292; *Sermoni* 324.

As for human creatures, their relationship with the Creator is expressed with great clarity in a text that is a kind of confession of faith, in which Anthony states his concept of the Trinity, for him "the ultimate principle of all things" (we "proceed" from the Father) and the reason of our existence (we "exist" in the Son and we "live" in the Spirit): "With respect to created things, we understand the Trinity as a single substance, that is to say, one Father from whom we proceed, one Son through whom we exist, and one Holy Spirit in whom we live, in other words, the principle to which we are related, the form or model to which we tend, and the grace by which we are reconciled,"¹¹¹

Taking as his starting point Jesus' invitation to his disciples, Anthony presents the relationship of the human being with other creatures in terms not only of superiority but of responsibility for them, since human nature is a true microcosm: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15), that is, to the whole human race, which has something in common with every creature: with angels, with animals, with plants, with rocks, with fire and water, with heat and cold, with wet and dry, for the human being is called a microcosm, that is, a world in miniature."¹¹² In the hierarchical list of various creatures, which in this case the saint makes his own following the *Glossa ordinaria*, we can also see in some way Anthony's view of the cosmos.

8. Franciscan Character of Anthony's View of Nature

The subject of nature in Anthony of Padua, who during the last eleven years of his life belonged to the Order of Friars Minor, leads almost by necessity to the establishment of a relationship with the spirituality of Francis of Assisi, in which nature and creation occupy a prominent place and have a special significance. On this point not all scholars agree.

Almost all who assert the Franciscan character of Anthony's view of nature do so in a rather general way and in some cases not without generous enthusiasm. Some see in Anthony's interpretation of creation an influence of the Franciscan view of life. Such an interpretation may have been influenced, they say, by his contact with nature during short stays in the Franciscan place at Olivares, near Coimbra, in the hermitage of Montepaolo and in the solitude of Camposampiero.¹¹³ Others place his thought, whose origin is Platonic and Augustinian, in the context of Franciscan

¹¹¹*Sermones* I, 355; *Sermoni* 324.

¹¹²*Sermones* III, 239.

¹¹³See S. Doimi, "Le scienze naturali," 453.

philosophy and see in him one of its precursors,¹¹⁴ but their remarks always remain general, seeing that they do not get down to concrete proofs.¹¹⁵

Those who do not find any clear influence of Saint Francis in Anthony's view of nature, begin with the methodology adopted by Anthony in his *Sermons*, especially in appealing to the elements of nature and in the choice of sources used. In light of this, the vast majority of the elements he cites are taken from books and treatises in order to serve the moralizing aim of his sermons. To these remarks, these scholars add the conclusion that emerges from an objective comparison of Anthony's texts on nature with those of Francis. The conclusion confirms that a great distance exists between the two, not only from the standpoint of methodology, but especially in the different attitude of each: "Indeed, while for Francis creatures are concrete things, for Anthony they are allegories or symbols; while for Francis they are brothers or sisters, for Anthony they represent curious, and sometimes amusing, phenomena; while for Francis they are subject-matter and medium for his praise and communication with God, for Anthony they are these for his preaching, for his moral applications and for his communication with people."¹¹⁶

Conclusion

Study of nature in the *Sermons* of Anthony of Padua brings out what may be a little-known side of this saint, who is usually invoked because of his miraculous powers and identified by his traditional iconographic symbols superficially interpreted (the Child Jesus and the lily). The abundant presence of elements of nature in the works of the Evangelical Doctor in the form of examples, allegories and symbols is one clear sign that he carefully studied not only the *Book of Scripture*, but also the *Book of Nature*, which he uses in his *Sermons* with great methodological seriousness and with an original approach to the natural sciences of his day.

Even though Anthony's particular reading of this *Book* is in some cases very far-removed from the mentality of our contemporaries, his attitude toward nature could enlighten with that wisdom characteristic of medieval men and women, the intense research being done today in the

¹¹⁴See F. Da Gama Caeiro, "Nature et symbole," 371. His assertion is followed by some of his Portuguese disciples, for example M.C. Pacheco, "A Natureza no pensamento de Santo António de Lisboa," 79; M. de L.S. Ganho, "L'uomo e la natura in Sant'Antonio," 208 and n. 43.

¹¹⁵For a more complete presentation of the various opinions on this, see F. Uribe, "È francescana la visione antoniana della natura?" 273.

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 275.

natural sciences, which might contribute to the solution of our ecological problems.