

Franciscan Reflections on Creation

[Advance one click on mouse at colored asterisk . Slides are numbered.]

This is the script that goes along with the presentation.

(Slide 2) * “This world is pregnant with God.” *Angela of Foligno 13th-Century Franciscan and Mystic*

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* On November 29, 1979, Pope John Paul II declared * St. Francis of Assisi to be the Patron of Ecology or Ecological Literacy. Delving into this title reveals a much deeper reality than the birds and the bees in the backyard. * One cannot deny that Francis of Assisi had a special relationship with the created world.

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* That the bees not perish of hunger in the icy winter, he [Francis] commands that honey and the finest wine should be set out for them. . . . He calls all animals by a fraternal name.

Thomas of Celano, Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul

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* But the question is why? Why did Francis of Assisi have such respect for the created world?

* Even for worms he had a warm love, since he had read this text about the Savior: *I am a worm and not a man*. . . That is why he used to pick them up from the road and put them in a safe place so that they would not be crushed by the footsteps of passersby.

Thomas of Celano, Life of Francis

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* For Francis of Assisi, Jesus was everything and Jesus manifested God, the Creator, to him.

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* St. Bonaventure wrote of Francis of Assisi:

* Aroused by everything to divine love,

*he rejoiced in all the works of the Lord's hands, and through their delightful display he rose into their life-giving reason and cause.

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*In beautiful things he contuited Beauty itself, * and through the footprints impressed in things he followed his Beloved everywhere *out of them all making for himself a ladder through which he could climb up to lay hold of him who is utterly desirable. *Bonaventure, Major Life of St. Francis*

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*In creation, Francis experienced the presence of the Author of that creation, God. As he walked the hillsides, the valleys, and the mountainsides of Italy, Francis came in contact with God. He saw the result of God's love surrounding him.

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*One of the elements of the Franciscan charism is belief that God is totally self-giving; that *from the abundance of God, *goodness overflows; that an infinitely *loving God is the source of creation *which can only be good. Francis of Assisi would pray:

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*You, Lord, are Supreme Good, the Eternal Good,
from Whom all good comes
without Whom there is no good.

A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father

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*Many times each day these words emanated from Francis of Assisi:

All powerful, most holy, most high, supreme God:
all good, supreme good, totally good,
You Who alone are good,
may we give You all praise, all glory, all thanks,
all honor, all blessing, and all good.
So be it! So be it!

The Praises to Be Said at All the Hours

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* Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (Doctor of the Church) perceived *creation as the external expression of God's love *while the Word-Become-Flesh was the inner expression of God.

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* To say that creation flows out of the infinite fountain of divine self-diffusive goodness is to say that God is creative and loving. *The Word, as we have said, is the Art of the Father because the Word expresses all the divine ideas (of the Father).

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*When the Word is uttered in time, the canvas of creation unfolds. The triune God is then revealed as a divine Artist, and creation is the finite expression of the Artist's infinite ideas. *As a work of art, creation is intended to manifest the glory of the Artist-Creator.

Ilia Delio. Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to His Life, Thought, and Writings, p. 55

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However, a primary reason for Francis' respect for the created world flowed from Francis' understanding of the Incarnation: the Word of God taking on a human nature and participating in the everyday activities of life.

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*Through his studying and prayer, John Duns Scotus, a great Franciscan theologian, came to understand that the created world came to be because of the Incarnation. *From the very beginning of creation, God intended to enter into a relationship with humans and the entire created world. God, who is love, loves. Scotus maintained that God* wanted to express God's self in a creature who would perfectly return that love. *This love desire became incarnated in Jesus. *Even if sin had not entered the world, the Word would still have become flesh because only through a perfect reflection of God could people come to know God and God's love for them.

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*God's self-revelation through Jesus resulted in the creation of the universe. In the gospel of John we read:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life...

**John 1: 1-4a*

*Scotus describes this as the primacy of Jesus.

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*The countless, created varieties in the universe *reflect the diversity that exists within God. Each individual *being is uniquely and singularly created by God. In the Franciscan tradition, God did not create humankind. *God created Tom and Anne and Sue and Bill: specific and unique people. Each creature is loved into existence. Each atom or smallest element of matter exists because of God's precise choice to reveal some aspect of "godness" through each creature. Scotus explains the concept of each created entity being unique, distinct, and individualized, with no repetition of expression, *using the term *haecceitas* or "thisness." Tom is Tom and not Bill. Even if cloning humans were possible, the two would not be the same.

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*Because of the explicit decision by God to bring forth each entity in creation, *everything has an inherent dignity *and a common Source of existence. Humans have a singular significance, being *made in the image and likeness of God. In Admonition V, Francis echoes the creation story:

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*Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for He created and formed you *to the image* of His beloved Son according to the body and *to His likeness* according to the Spirit.

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*Francis' growth in this realization matured slowly. *The leper and the outcast were his equals before God, as well as the rich and the poor, the Christian and

Moslem, the holy and sinful. *Interconnectedness of life was extended to animals, then to animate and inanimate things.

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*If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who deal likewise with their fellow men. **[Francis of Assisi]**

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*The *Canticle of the Creatures*, authored by Francis of Assisi, is more than one of the earliest Italian poems written in the Umbrian dialect. *These verses flowed from the depths of a mystic. *Composed near the end of his life,

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*the *Canticle* *reveals the relationship of Francis with God, Jesus Christ, and the world, inanimate and animate, human and other living creatures. Creation becomes the place where Francis experiences the presence of God and a means for praising God.

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*The *Canticle* begins with praises to the "Most High."

*Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong. **

** *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. Volume I. *The Saint*. Edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellman, and William J. Short. New York: New City Press, 1999

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*After moving through the bodies of light, * Francis uses the four basic elements of the universe, air, water, fire, and earth to praise the Creator. A natural harmony and interconnectedness exist in their world.

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*With the creation of humans, discord enters.

Praised be to You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned. **

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*Integration of every creature and experience takes place for Francis with
welcoming death.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, ...

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will... **

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*Coming full circle, Francis returns to praise.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility. **

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*Throughout the *Canticle* Francis intertwines his understanding of God's self-revelation through Jesus. The *Canticle of the Creatures* begins by proclaiming the "Most High" and concludes with "serve ... with great humility." The Creator empties, strips, becomes human and serves creation through humility.

(Slide 32 – 33 – 34 - 35) The Canticle of the Creatures ****

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* What does this have to do with our environment, with ecology, or with the created world? * What solid theological and Christological principles can environmental decisions be based upon?

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*The rights of creation *are unique and individuated. * The fact of their own existence determines* their value and* right to be what each was created to be.

Interject the killing of elephant for ivory, the destruction of the rain forests, the mining of the earth, the death of people due to lack of food.

Humans are a part of the “whole” and understanding their dependency on the environment for survival is crucial. Without a healthy environment, future societies and economies are at risk.

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*Matter does matter to a Franciscan. Franciscans have been intimately engaged with issues of social justice, ecology, and the dignity of the human person. The Franciscan tradition is a perspective on the created world which is needed in our world today: *a familial mode of relating to creation, *the intrinsic goodness and value of all of creation, * the sacramentality of creation, *acknowledgement of the effects of our sinful behavior,

(Slide 39) *biological diversity, *interdependence of all that exists, and *the common good.

(Slide 40) *Truly “This world is pregnant with God.” *Angela of Foligno*

Questions

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* 1. How can we encourage the belief of the centrality of creation in making God known to humanity?

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* 2. Creation became as a ladder on which Francis became more immersed in God. As a Franciscan based college, we are challenged to discover traces of God in our academic disciplines. What is that ladder in your discipline?

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* 3. Who benefits, and who loses, by public policy that does not protect the environment?

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* 4. We are a consumer-driven society defined by its usefulness and profitability. What steps can be taken to support a child-of-God or a kin-with-creation approach?

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* 5. When Francis went to live among the lepers, these people were not the marginalized or outcasts of his society. They were not just excluded from their society. They were non-persons. They had no name, no voice, no benefits, no existence.

(Slide 46) * What role does the Franciscan spirituality, especially in Franciscan institutions of higher learning, in being brother or sister to the “no people” of our time?

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* End with a prayer by Sister Ilio Delio, *Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St. Francis*, p. 127.

God of overflowing goodness, since time began you have been revealing yourself in all creation. From the Big Bang to the convergence of galaxies, from the distant stars to this Earth, which is our home, you have never ceased shaping and fashioning us, urging us toward life.

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* We are truly amazed at the work of your hands and for the life of Jesus, who reflects your radiance. We are blessed by the gift of self-awareness that you have given to us. Help us to be mindful that we are the universe conscious of itself and that we are sister and brother to all creation.

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* Open our hearts to receive the gift of life that comes to us each day from the sun, the stars, plant life, animal life, and the unique giftedness of each human

person. Lead us kindly on this cosmic journey that we may become the fullness of Christ who is our peace. Amen.

* **(Slide 50)** Picture

Up-dated 9/12/13

Up-dated 10/7/13 *