

## Session Two – Reclaiming our Heritage

We began today with St Francis' song of praise to the Creator, praise due for all the wondrous works of creation we see and experience every day. The experience of wonder we have when we look at the natural world and the love and the praise of God that it can arouse: these are important elements of eco-spirituality. They have been with Christianity from the very beginning, and yet somewhere along the way they have become marginal rather than central to our Christian practice. We need to reclaim wonder and praise for our spiritual lives.

We also need to reclaim our sense of gratitude, our sense that everything we receive is gift. As Pope Francis tells us, "creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion" (LS 76).

I would like to start this morning's session with a little exercise. I would like you to take a few minutes now to write down all the blessings you receive from creation and to thank God for them.

Joanna Macy, an American teacher of deep ecology, has said, "Gratitude is a culturally subversive act" (Delio et al 2008, 63). When we acknowledge our blessings, when we practise gratitude, we are less susceptible to those forces in our society which keep telling us that we need to have more and more to be happy. We are less likely to mindlessly take part in the overconsumption that is ruining our planet. So try and incorporate practices of gratitude into your daily life.

Yesterday, I spoke about two stories, the wondrous story of how the universe came to be and how it continues to evolve, and the devastating story of the manmade destruction of the earth. These two stories, both individually and together, have been changing people's perceptions across the world, for a number of decades now, leading to movements and organizations devoted to promoting sustainable development and lifestyles and the continuation of a rich bio-diversity on the planet. There are many groups you could join tomorrow to make a difference. In this context, you might ask yourself the question, "Why do we need ecological theology?" I believe that eco-theology matters, for two reasons. First, I believe Christian theology has a moral responsibility to make amends for a past that has not served the earth well. Our focus on sinful humanity and our preoccupation with the next world have both taken our gaze away from the earth as a serious theological concern. Paul Collins, an Australian theologian, goes so far as to say that "throughout its history Christianity has injected a negative approach to the natural world into its theology" (Collins 1995, 96). Thomas Berry is even more critical: "The greatest failure of Christianity," he says, "in the total course of its history is its inability to deal with the devastation of the planet" (Collins 1995, 152).

Second and more importantly, Christianity has something positive to offer. In one sense, this "something positive" is timeless, is what Christianity has always offered: the hope of conversion and personal transformation through Jesus

Christ, only today the conversion is an ecological one, personal transformation is transformation into someone who lives simply and treads lightly upon this earth, and new lights are shone upon the person and meaning of Jesus. However, it is also the case, I think, that for people of faith the *theological* understanding of why we should seriously turn our attention to the earth has significant power to change us. And I also suspect that for some, it is *only* a theological understanding that will truly change them. It is certainly my own experience that new theological insights have radically changed me. And that is why we need eco-theology.

I find eco-theology exciting. It is filled with a sense of urgency, an awareness that we are at a crucial juncture in history – “an elbow of time” as the Grail founder, Fr. Jacques van Ginneken would have called it. Unless we change and change radically, we will destroy the earth as we know it and ourselves along with it. Eco-theology is ground-breaking, it is certainly challenging and sometimes conceptually difficult, but it is always fresh and new. It registers wonder, mystery and awe and invites the reader (or listener) to enter the mystery and be transformed.

While it definitely breaks new ground, one of its important tasks has been to reclaim some of the riches of our tradition, and here I am talking about the creation theology that has always been with us, though pushed to the margins in the last 500 years and often neglected or forgotten by the teaching bodies of the Christian churches. So I would like to begin this morning by looking at the Christian creation story in Genesis.

We know this story is not the literal truth. But we do believe that it contains theological truth. What does it tell us about creation? I think we all know that it is good and even very good. That it is God’s abundant gift and that God blesses it. But how deeply do we really know that? Diarmuid O’Murchu contends that perhaps the first step in ecological conversion is “to understand our universe in terms of blessing rather than of curse...The shift in awareness from viewing the world as an object to be conquered to seeing it as a gift to be received begins an expansion of mind and heart....In our commercial, consumerist world we have lost virtually all sense of this cosmic generosity” (O’Murchu 1995). Have any of you here read *Original Blessing* by Matthew Fox? It came out in 1983 and was one of the most read and influential spiritual books of the 1980’s. It preached original blessing rather than original sin and its insights were felt to be liberating for many people. I can truly say from personal experience that I found it to present a liberating view of the world and perhaps reading it 25 years ago was the start of my own ecological conversion. It is probably still a good book to read. However, to get back to my question: how deeply do we know that creation is God’s abundant good gift? Do we feel it in the core of our being? Does it live in our hearts as the source of all our actions? Because this is what is absolutely necessary. Eco-theology can give us the motivation to change, but unless the knowledge lives in our hearts, we will not be changed. We need to develop a spirituality that will lead us to conversion and give us the inner strength we need.

As Christians, we have a store of riches in our Sacred Scripture to turn our hearts and minds to the wonder and mystery of God's creation, to God's presence therein, and to our own humble but unique and responsible place as one creature in the interconnected web of life. We have beautiful psalms of praise to the Creator and all creation, particularly Psalms 104 and 148. We have the Wisdom literature: Proverbs, Job, the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, the book of Wisdom and Sirach.

The book of Job, in chapters 38-41, contains the longest sustained piece of writing on nature in the Bible, and I urge you to study it if you are not already familiar with it. In the words of Elizabeth Johnson, "its theological vision offers a strong antidote to the human arrogance that has flowed in the modern era from the view of dominion as domination" (Johnson 2014, 269). It is an amazing piece of writing that highlights the otherness of God and of God's creatures, and puts Job firmly in his place, which is not the centre of everything, but next to everything else. God hammers Job with question after question: "Where were you when the Earth was measured out, when the stars began to sing together, when the sea was placed within boundaries and its proud waves given limits? Have you commanded the light to rise at dawn? the snow and rain to fall even where no one lives? the thunder and lightning to play? Orion and the other constellations to run their courses across the sky?" (Johnson 2014, 269-270). We human beings are truly put in our place here.

And then follows a litany of questions to do with the animal world, in which God obviously takes great delight. Here is just one brief example:

Who gave the wild donkey his freedom,  
and untied the rope from his proud neck?  
I have given him the desert for a home,  
the salt plains as his own habitat.  
He scorns the turmoil of the town:  
there are no shouts from a driver for him to listen for.  
The mountains are the pastures that he ranges  
in quest of any type of green leaf or blade.                      Job 39: 5-8

Each creature is loved for its own sake, in all its wildness and integrity, and we are afforded the possibility of deeply sharing God's delight and love. By the end of this magnificent speech, Job, and the reader along with him, have grasped an intimation of a God far greater than we can even begin to imagine, but also an intimation of a different way of being in the cosmos, a way of being marked by both humility and joy. Johnson endorses such a response to God's voice in the whirlwind, so that "humbled and delighted by the other life around us, we can grow to know ourselves as members of the community of creation and step up to protect our kin" (Johnson 2014, 273).

And of course there is the life of Jesus in the gospels. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis devotes 5 paragraphs to "the gaze of Jesus," to show us what we can learn from him. Let me summarise briefly for you: "In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognise the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures...As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to

contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things...Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed...He was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world...In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning...the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence (96-100).”

Denis Edwards has written about ecology from just about every theological perspective there is, so it is not surprising he has written a book called *Jesus and the Natural World*. In this book, he writes, “The importance of the natural world to Jesus can be glimpsed in two aspects of his life and ministry: his preaching of the kingdom of God in parables taken from the natural world and his prayer to God outside” (Edwards 2012, 27). With respect to the parables, he considers they “are the work of one who sees the natural world as the gift of God and as the place of divine presence” (Edwards 2012, 28). I will leave it to you to go back to the gospels and discover this for yourselves. And when you do, see how often Jesus prays in the open air, starting with his temptation in the wilderness for 40 days and finishing in the garden of Gethsemane. We could learn much from Jesus’ relationship with creation, as well as what he says about it. Listen to these words of his:

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these...Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (Mt 6: 26, 28-9; 10: 29)

Are there any questions at this stage?

Are you aware that there has been Catholic teaching on ecology for the past 25 years? Our Pope Francis’ recent encyclical has not sprung out of nowhere, but has a solid foundation in recent Church teaching. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1990 Pope John Paul II issued a document for the World Day of Peace, entitled “Peace with God the Creator; Peace with all of Creation”, which he began by saying that “a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge which, rather than being downplayed, ought to be encouraged to develop into concrete programmes and initiatives.” In various encyclicals and documents he spoke out against environmental destruction and encouraged ecological conversion. Benedict XVI took a similar approach and it is well worth reading his World Day of Peace Message in 2010, “If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation.” I want to look at what he says there about God giving dominion to Adam over all the earth. We know that this idea gave legitimacy for centuries to Western civilization’s exploitation of the earth’s resources. We know that Christianity has to accept some responsibility here. This is what Benedict says:

Human beings let themselves be mastered by selfishness; they misunderstood the meaning of God's command and exploited creation out of a desire to exercise absolute domination over it. But the true meaning of God's original command, as the *Book of Genesis* clearly shows, was not a simple conferral of authority, but rather a summons to responsibility...Biblical Revelation made us see that nature is a gift of the Creator, who gave it an inbuilt order and enabled man to draw from it the principles needed to "till it and keep it" (cf. Gen. 2:15). Everything that exists belongs to God, who has entrusted it to man, albeit not for his arbitrary use. Once man, instead of acting as God's co-worker, sets himself up in place of God, he ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, "which is more tyrannized than governed by him". Man thus has a duty to exercise responsible stewardship over creation, to care for it and to cultivate it.

Pope Francis, too, is well aware of how much Western civilization has been influenced by a misunderstanding of God's command in Genesis. He says,

Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. *Gen 2:15*). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. (*LS*, 67)

I would like to make one other point about Genesis 2:15, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." The Hebrew word that we usually translate into English as "to till" or "to work" is *abad*, which also means "to serve." Now that's an interesting thought – our human vocation is to serve the earth. That certainly makes sense in light of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth came to serve and not to be served (Mt 20:28).

I would like now to talk about *Care for Creation: A Franciscan spirituality of the Earth*, written by three people, Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner and Pamela Wood. For two reasons. First, because they not only acknowledge that we, the reader, have to go beyond the theology to reflect deeply and pray and act, but because they devote several chapters to practical suggestions for ways in which we can develop our eco-spirituality and our eco-praxis. I highly recommend it. I used one of their guided meditations yesterday and I will use another one at the end of today's session. The other thing I want to talk to you about is Franciscan spirituality. Here is another treasure in our Christian heritage that we would do well to reclaim for the present moment. First, there is the life of St Francis himself which can serve as a model of life for us. It was a physically hard life of penance and understandably not one that greatly appeals to us, even though we would embrace his loving relationship to the whole of creation. Where did he find the motivation and the courage to live such a countercultural but joyful life? The same as where many of us find such motivation and courage: in our

relationship to the divine, nurtured through Scripture, reflection, prayer, and loving service of others.

Francis felt at home in the cosmos, and he considered the earth as God's home, not his. He is one of the first deep ecologists. If you are not familiar with the term, "deep ecology", it is a philosophy and a movement that arose in the 1970's; its core belief is the inherent worth of every living creature. Francis felt himself to be in kinship with the whole of creation. We can see this so clearly in the *Canticle of the Creatures*, where every created thing is called brother or sister – brother Sun, sister Moon, and so on. In *Care for Creation*, we read, "Francis lived out of a horizontal, not a vertical, relationship with the earth. He manifested a familial or kinship ethic...in the Franciscan tradition, creation has integrity and intrinsic value not because of its 'worth' but because it is a reflection of God" (Delio et al 2008, 77).

There are two important insights here for ecological conversion. First, there is the idea that creation is a reflection, or revelation, of God. The great St Augustine had said that there were two books revealing God, the book of nature and the book of Scripture. This is what he said: "Others, in order to find God, will read a book. Well, as a matter of fact there is a certain great big book, the book of created nature. Look carefully at it top and bottom, observe it, read it. God did not make letters of ink for you to recognize him in; he set before your eyes all these things he has made. Why look for a louder voice? Heaven and earth cries out to you, "God made me." You can read what Moses wrote; in order to write it, what did Moses read, a man living in time? Observe heaven and earth in a religious spirit" (Johnson 2014, 152).

In the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hildegard of Bingen, Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas all spoke of creation as something that communicated to us the knowledge and the presence of the divine. And then the Church in the main seems to have lost sight of this. Eco-theology and spirituality is reclaiming this from our Christian heritage, as it is also reclaiming the notion of our kinship with creation. Indeed this is perhaps one of the most obviously important themes in the literature. It strikes at the heart of our belief that humans stand at the apex of the created order, superior to everything else and thus it is the most powerful antidote we have to dealing with the bio-diversity crisis we looked at yesterday. If we could see ourselves differently, as brother or sister to every living thing, then we would not be indifferent to the accelerating rate of extinction of species; we would do something to stop it. Furthermore, this notion of kinship, which we can apprehend in some of the Hebrew psalms and in Francis' *Canticle*, is firmly grounded in science and is something that the deep ecologists have believed for a long time. As Elizabeth Johnson so eloquently puts it, "A community of descent is the hidden bond that ties together all living beings into one narrative of life and death stretching over millions of years. Darwin's theory uncovers the inner affinity of all organic beings to one another" (Johnson 2014, 63).

Denis Edwards is a renowned Australian eco-theologian and writer of many books and I had the good fortune to attend a three-day seminar of his a few years ago. He speaks passionately about our relationship to other creatures and you

have the distinct feeling that he cares deeply about them. He calls them sacraments of divine presence. He believes that we must imitate God in caring for every little sparrow that falls. He proposes that the Bible's vision of reality is centred on God and not on humanity, and that this provides us with just the framework we need for developing our theological understanding of kinship with creation.

The question for us is how to appropriate this feeling of kinship for ourselves? How can we incorporate it into our spirituality and make it a reality in our lives? What would it mean for the way we relate to other creatures on earth? I would like to go back briefly to St Francis. St Bonaventure, who wrote the life story of St Francis from personal knowledge, showed that "through union with Christ, Francis stood in the midst of creation as a brother, and in turn, all of creation spoke to him of Christ" (Delio et al 2008, 83). There is a real cyclical pattern here, isn't there? Francis' spiritual life with Christ made him see every creature as a brother or sister, while they in turn showed him Christ. You have the sense of an on-going and deepening dialogue that Francis had with Christ and the world, leading him ever closer to the mystery of God.

Francis can teach us much as we try to move our ecological knowledge from our heads to our hands and our hearts. We need to reflect deeply and we need to take action. In *Care for Creation* the authors understand this and provide exercises and ideas to get us thinking, feeling and acting. They provide a Franciscan ecological examination of conscience – it's very challenging, I can assure you. They provide practical suggestions for how to simplify your life, build a supportive community, take action in your community. Each one of us will have our own unique way of dealing with the challenge of ecological conversion, but if it is real it will effectively take us out of our comfort zones and effect radical change in our lives.

I have prepared some readings on St Francis for you to reflect on, one from *Laudato Si* and one from *Care for Creation*. We shall take some time now to read and reflect and share our thoughts.

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* invites us to see the world with the eyes of St Francis: "If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously" (LS 11).

St Francis is a model of ecological conversion and life for us, but there is more to the Franciscan legacy than Francis. The theology of St Bonaventure in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and of John Duns Scotus in the 14<sup>th</sup>, both Franciscans, has been reclaimed in recent years by eco-theologians for offering important insights into the Trinity, creation and incarnation. I mention this in passing, in case anyone here is interested in exploring this further. Denis Edwards and Elizabeth Johnson have both been very influenced by these Franciscan scholars.

I have already remarked, several times now, that an ecological spirituality needs to have a contemplative dimension. This comes through very strongly in all the literature. In that regard, we have a serious, ongoing mystical tradition in the Catholic Church that can serve us well here. I don't intend to say much about that right now, but will come back to it in my last lecture. However, I mention it here because I think it is one of the great treasures of our religion and certainly one that can enlighten us on our ecological journey.

Tomorrow I am going to speak about God the Trinity and show you how the eco-theologians have expanded what we ever thought about God into something breathtakingly beautiful. We are going to finish this morning's session with a guided meditation from *Care for Creation*, "Creation as Family," 96-99.

"As you begin your prayer time, find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Bring your attention to the breath and allow your body to relax. Simply notice your breath, with no need to change it in any way. When your mind wanders, gently nudge it back to the breath, letting it rest there as your body begins to relax.

Bring to your awareness the fact that your breath happens by itself, without any act of will. No decision to inhale or exhale is necessary to do this simple and life-sustaining act of breathing. It is almost as if you are being breathed, breathed by life. Spend a few minutes now, imagining yourself being breathed in this way—the Spirit moving through you in every instance, in a grace-filled act of replenishing each of your cells with oxygen, every moment of your life, whether you are aware of it or not.

Now bring your attention to other people around you. They, too, are being breathed by life in this same moment. Let the faces of those you love – family and friends – slowly pass across your mind's eye. Wherever they are, whatever they are doing, they, too, are being breathed by life, by the Spirit that connects us all.

Imagine this circle of connection widening out, beyond your loved ones to others all across the place where you live...people driving and eating, people sleeping, reading, dancing, people enjoying a meal together or going to church; people giving birth, people dying; people laughing and people crying, people in hospitals and nursing homes, people in prison, people in villages, on farms, in great cities all over the world, people in war-torn villages, people all across the globe, sleeping on the other side of the planet, people just waking up as the Earth turns toward the sun – all of them are being breathed by life in this present moment.

Now extend your circle of care even further to include all of creation. Beginning with the mammals, bring to mind any pets you might have in your home. Remember, then, all the animals in your ecosystem. These brother and sister beings, too, are being breathed by life today. With them, we are embedded in a diverse web of life that is greater than human understanding.



Now bring to your attention all the little animals – bees, flies, dragonflies, butterflies, spiders. Think of all the services they provide us – they who help pollinate the flowers and plants, who help break down waste, who enrich the soil – all of them playing crucial roles in the interconnected mystery of life on our planet. Bring to mind, too, the other winged creatures – sparrows, songbirds, great birds of prey. Bring them into your circle of awareness, all of God’s creatures being breathed by life right now in this present moment.

Remember, too, the creatures living in the waters of our planet – fish, dolphins, whales, jellyfish and frogs, plankton and phytoplankton and all the microscopic creatures that float through our seas and make up the foundation of our food chain. We are all genetic kin in the great community of life that emerged from the ancient seas. Give thanks for these creatures, part of the family of creation, also participating in the great breath of our world.

Widen your circle of awareness now to include that living mantle of vegetation that is home to millions of creatures across our globe. All the plants, flowers, trees, algae...they too take part in that great exchange of air, acting as the planet’s lungs, constantly regenerating the entire atmosphere in the mutual dance of breath that sustains us all.

We are connected through time and space with all of creation, and our home is within a dynamic, expanding universe. We are made of stardust, along with everything else in the universe. As humans, we have evolved the capacity not only to know, but to reflect on what we know. Through humans, creation has become conscious. Because we can reflect on our knowing, we can make choices and thus change the course of things. We can learn from creation how to love and praise our common Creator, and we can use our human voice to speak on behalf of all that is created. Directing our mind to our breath, even for a few moments, exercises that exquisite capacity for attention that comes with the precious gift of being human. When our society would have us clench up in fear, the Spirit breathes in and out through each of us, reminding us of our inherent belonging in the family of life, allowing us to reconnect with our Creator at any time, in any place.

When you are ready, bring your attention back to this room, back to the sensations of the breath as it breathes in and out through you this mystery of life, remembering that it is always there, whether we are aware or not, to beckon us back to that connection with all life – with this living planet, with our brother and sister creatures, bound together in God’s love within the living canticle of creation. Pause to give thanks for this magnificent kinship of life that we have been given. Set an intention to walk as Francis did, more aware of the interrelatedness and sacramentality of all of creation as you move through your life today. In any moment, you can draw strength from the family of creation of which you are a part and bring this strength and wisdom into your daily life. When you are ready, open your eyes.

## Session Two Readings

### *Laudato Si' - Saint Francis of Assisi*

10. I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

11. Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason". His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, "from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother' or 'sister'". Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

12. What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. "Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (*Wis* 13:5); indeed, "his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world" (*Rom* 1:20). For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

**Ilya Delio, Keith Douglass Warner, Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation: A franciscan spirituality of the earth*, “What is Ours to Do?” pp78-9.**

Francis observed God’s creatures, and learned from them. From the birds, he realized that he had the responsibility to preach to them, to care for them, to share his essential identity as creatures of God with them. From the earthworm, he learned humility. He lived simply and close to the soil and the earth. From the bees he learned community, conviviality. He praised their hard work and their cooperative living. Francis understood himself as brother to all creation. If we understand our identity to be that of sister or brother to all creation, what do we need to do?

A Franciscan identity should give rise to a particular consciousness and ethical concern. Together these can help us deepen our spirituality of our Sister Mother Earth. First, we have to recover our ecological niche, our role in creation, based on our identity as “in-relationship-to” the rest of the Earth. We must develop greater awareness of the choices we make that harm the Earth and its creatures. These choices are individual and social. Making choices to simplify our lives, to lessen our use of resources, is fundamental to developing a Franciscan ecological consciousness...But ultimately, we can make a greater impact by engaging others. Franciscan spirituality is a common project, lived out in relationship to other humans and creatures. Francis can inspire us to speak on behalf of God’s other creatures, to take action to protect their habitat and to promote policies that protect the integrity of life on Earth.

Learning how to live in relationship is fundamental to following the patron saint of ecology. Francis was open to relationship, to receiving from all, whether leper, human brother and sister, worms, birds, bishops, water, fire, wind or Blessed Mother Earth. Francis recognized the Incarnate Word of God in all living creatures.

### **Meditation as Social Transformation**

In the Christian tradition, contemplation has always been seen as a movement of love.

This is why the fruits of meditation are both a personal transformation, (you change because you know that you are loved), and it is the meaning of the social transformation that takes place when there are enough of us on this planet who have experienced that love. Meditation is not just a private spirituality. It is a way of love that transforms us into brothers and sisters, and into responsible inhabitants of this universe. (Laurence Freeman, *Meditation Talks 2005A*)

We face a global crisis today on an unprecedented scale. The problems of the world are very great and very complex. What is needed is a new consciousness, a new way of looking, a new way of seeing. And this is how we, with our Christian faith, can contribute to that, because in contemplation that is exactly what we find: a new way of seeing God, a new way of responding to God’s presence in the world. (Laurence Freeman, *Meditating as a Christian*)