

Was St. Francis a Deep Ecologist?

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On Easter Sunday 1980, Pope John Paul II proclaimed St. Francis of Assisi the patron saint of ecology, following the suggestion offered thirteen years previously by Lynn White, Jr., in his seminal article on Christianity and ecology.¹ Since then, remarkably little has been written on St. Francis's relationship with nature and even less attention has been given to exploring his environmental philosophy. What can we learn about environmental ethics from Francis? And how can the ecological wisdom of Francis promote dialogue between Christianity and ecology?

Since the advent of the contemporary environmental movement thirty years ago, different understandings of how human beings should relate to their environment have emerged. One of the most vigorous current debates occurring among environmental circles centers around a form of ecological philosophy called deep ecology. According to Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher who coined this term, deep ecology (as distinguished from shallow ecology, which is the usual, short-term view of nature) asks deeper questions.

The adjective "deep" stresses that we ask why and how, where others do not. . . . We question our society's underlying assumptions. We ask which society, which education, which form of religion is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole, and then we ask further what we need to do . . . to make the necessary changes.²

Deep ecology seeks to challenge our culture's fundamental human assumptions, especially those which have led us to accept materialism, militarism, and human domination over nature as normal



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human behaviors. Deep ecology seeks to understand and challenge the root causes of our planetary despoliation.

In the following pages I will discuss the deep ecology principles lived and preached by Francis of Assisi. By his life and writings, I hope to show, Francis demonstrated a way of living in harmony with nature that provides a much needed basis for dialogue between ecology and Christianity. I acknowledge the danger of misinterpreting Francis by bringing him to a discussion in today's vastly different cultural context,³ but I feel this risk is outweighed by the benefit we can gain from understanding the value he placed on nature and his spiritual experiences in it. After introducing several basic concepts in deep ecology, I will discuss the ways Francis anticipated these concepts and how he differed from them. I will conclude by proposing the development of a distinctly Franciscan model of relating to Creation.

What Is Deep Ecology?

Arne Naess began developing the basic tenets of deep ecology in the late 1970s, because he was frustrated by the failure of most ecologists and scientists to address root causes of our environmental crisis. He decries shallow ecology, which studies and analyzes small sections of biological life while ignoring human behavior that threatens to destroy entire ecosystems. Naess and his followers want to ask more fundamental questions, such as, What changes do we need to make in our understanding of the world so that other forms of life can continue?

According to Naess, there are three basic principles of deep ecology. First, all life, human and nonhuman, has value in itself, independent of human purposes, and humans have no right to reduce its richness or diversity except for *vital* needs. Second, humans at present are far too numerous and intrusive with respect to other life forms and the living earth, with disastrous consequences for all, and must achieve a substantial decrease in population to permit the flourishing of human and nonhuman life. Third, to achieve this requisite balance, significant changes in human economic, technical, and ideological structures must be made. Humans must move toward stressing not bigness, growth, and higher standards of living, but rather sustainable societies emphasizing the nonmaterial quality of life. From these three basic principles other deep ecologists have identified a more precise platform, which specifies political values flowing from deep ecology: the primacy of wilderness, a sense of place, opposition to stewardship, opposition to industrial society, spirituality, and self-realization.⁴

Naess believes that almost every religious movement, from Buddhism to Christianity, has some elements consistent with deep ecology already present within it, and he challenges all his readers to identify principles of deep ecology in their respective traditions. I would like to develop some themes in the life of Francis that coincide with these principles.

Francis and Conversion

Francis Bernadone was born into a family of Italian cloth merchants around 1182. His father was an active member of the emerging bourgeois class. After several failed attempts as a knight errant, Francis went through a long period of illness during his early twenties, 1203-4, and after these experiences, his early biographers tell us, he began to undergo a profound change. He spent a lot of time by himself in the wilderness, especially in some caves near Assisi. Francis was trying to work through the beginnings of his conversion, trying to lay a foundation for living a holy life. Thomas of Celano wrote that Francis was so exhausted when he emerged from his struggles in the cave that he "seemed to be a different person than when he went in."⁵

This was a period of intense inner questioning for Francis, a time when he began to reevaluate the fundamental understanding of life which he had held up to that point in his life. He questioned the militarism, violence, and greed which were part of the culture he knew. He later became one of Christianity's most famous preachers of peace and nonviolence. Beyond preaching he expressed his conversion by his lifestyle: he moved from the comforts of the city of Assisi to the leprosarium on the periphery, he abandoned the selfishness of his youth for a life of itinerant preaching, and in his later years he spurned the popularity his fame had brought him for the life of a mystic and hermit in the wilderness. His questioning and refutation of his culture's values indicate the same probing that Naess articulated as the essentials of deep ecology. By his life and preaching, Francis challenged the basic paradigm of his culture by refusing to live by its secular values, and he encouraged his followers to do the same.

How Francis Viewed Nature

Francis valued the diversity and beauty he saw in nature. Celano wrote that Francis insisted his brothers leave a border around the community garden untouched so that wild grasses and flowers could

announce the beauty of the Creator.⁶ He forbade his followers to cut down a whole tree so that it might have hope of sprouting again.⁷ By these concerns Francis indicated that he valued the existence of other creatures and wild plants for their own sake, that they have intrinsic value. With refreshing simplicity he calls us to refrain from a human greed that unnecessarily injures other aspects of creation.

Francis loved creation because in it he found the Lord, but his love was not limited to popular or beautiful species. Celano wrote:

He was aflame with love for even the humble worms, because he had read that it was said of the Savior: "I am a worm, and no man" (Psalm 21:7). For that reason he would pick them up off the road and put them in some safe place so they would not be trampled underfoot by the passers-by.⁸

Francis found God in worms. In a creature not known for being powerful, quick, intelligent, or strong, he found Christ. Francis related with compassion to all creation, whether human lepers or lowly worms.

Yet Francis appreciated more than just individual species; he viewed the created world as a network of relationships, with individual elements living together in harmony joining together in an orchestra of glorious beauty.

When he found an abundance of flowers, he preached to them and invited them to praise the Lord as though they were endowed with reason. In the same way he exhorted with the sincerest purity grainfields and vineyards, stones and forests and all the beautiful things of the fields, fountains of water and the green things of the gardens, earth and fire, air and wind, to love God and serve Him willingly.⁹

Francis was a sensuous Italian, and he experienced through his senses the vibrancy of creation around him, believing that in their very act of being, all creatures could give praise to God. By affirming the roles of and relationships among the diverse elements of nature, Francis offered a spiritual description of the interdependence of an ecosystem.

Francis and Vows

Beginning around 1210 the fraternity Francis founded began to grow exponentially, and he was no longer able to instruct new members personally. His brothers needed a constitution that would

guide them, and so he wrote a Rule; in 1223 Pope Honorius III approved it. Francis adopted the monastic vows and used them to help communicate the gospel, which is what he wanted to live. The opening line of his Rule reads:

The rule and life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of their own, and in chastity.¹⁰

In the history of Roman Catholic Orders, poverty, chastity, and obedience came to be known as the evangelical vows, and Franciscans still profess them. They guide us in our efforts to imitate Jesus Christ and to follow his gospel. I believe that each vow, interpreted today, can offer us some insight into how Franciscans can live out Francis's values in a way that is sensitive to nature.

Francis is most famous as a preacher and lover of poverty, but for him poverty was not an ideology, but rather a personal commitment, and he spoke of having a relationship with Lady Poverty. He loved her because he saw Christ's incarnation as the ultimate expression of poverty and thus the clearest expression of God's love for the world. For Francis, to imitate Christ meant to live a life of simplicity and poverty. In the same way, those who look to Francis's example can simplify their lives and live with fewer possessions—and escape the manic greed which possesses North America. Only by standing against the all-consuming avarice of our culture, which creates demand for environmental degradation around the globe, can we enter fully into the joy Francis found in creation.

In "The Canticle of the Creatures" (the complete text closes this chapter), Francis refers to "Sister Water, which is very useful and precious and chaste." Francis obviously intended chastity to refer to something other than illicit sexual activity. A broader definition of chastity can be understood to mean the right ordering of relationships, the correct kind and balance of relationships with all persons. The meaning of the Hebrew word *shalom* may cast light onto his understanding: more than simply "peace," *shalom* implies rightly ordered relationships that lead to the peace of God. I believe that Francis understood chastity in this context, and he saw Sister Water as a kind of example. Most living creatures are composed primarily of water, and one of our primary needs is making sure that we take in as much water as we transpire. We depend on our environment to provide water and all nonhuman life depends on us to return clean, safe water to the environment. A contemporary interpretation of chastity can expand the frame of reference for this right ordering of interdependent relationships to include all aspects of creation.

Francis was renowned for his humility, and his understanding of obedience should be understood in this context. Francis insisted on placing himself and his order in the hands of the church, specifically the pope and his successors, so that he might be able to hear and be obedient to Christ. Yet Francis's own humility called him to an obedience that went beyond church authority. He wrote:

Holy Obedience destroys
 every wish of the body and the flesh
 and binds its mortified body to obedience of
 the Spirit
 and to obedience of one's brother
 and the possessor is subject and submissive
 to all persons in the world
 and not to man only
 but even to all beasts and wild animals
 so that they may do whatever they want with
 him
 inasmuch as it has been given to them from
 above by the Lord.¹¹

Francis wanted to give himself fully to his relationship with creation, and thus he sought to be submissive to it and to encourage his followers to be submissive to it. In the late twentieth century, as the rate of species extinction surpasses one per minute, Francis's exhortation to make ourselves subject and submissive to beasts and wild animals takes on new urgency. The overarching reason for species extinction today is habitat destruction. If Franciscans are to concern ourselves with the survival of the diversity of the world's species, we must begin to defend the integrity and intrinsic right of "all beasts and wild animals" to have habitat, to have a home. To be faithful to our founder, Franciscans today must give voice to the cry of all creatures threatened with extinction and stand against the economic and political forces which encourage the destruction of their habitat.

The Canticle

Toward the end of his life Francis suffered greatly from ill health (he had gradually become blind, and some historians believe he suffered from tuberculosis) and also, some believe, from watching his fraternity grow into the thousands while losing some of its original passion for poverty and simplicity. During his last few years he spent over half his time in the wilderness, deepening his experience of contemplative prayer. He withdrew with a few companions

from the complexities of his order's administration to seek God in nature, and it was there that he had his most profound mystical experiences, most notably the stigmata. The hermitages in which he dwelled were really no more than small caves or huts constructed of sticks, leaves, and mud, but they were located in areas of great natural beauty.

During this twilight of his life on Earth, Francis wrote his greatest piece of poetry, "The Canticle of the Creatures." During the spring of 1225, a little over a year before his death, Francis had a dream in which a voice spoke to him and encouraged him to praise God even in the midst of his infirmities. The Legend of Perugia tells us Francis arose the next day and said:

I wish to compose a new "Praises of the Lord," for his creatures. These creatures minister to our needs every day; without them we could not live; and through them the human race greatly offends the Creator. Every day we fail to appreciate so great a blessing by not praising as we should the Creator and dispenser of all these gifts.¹²

Francis composed "The Canticle of the Creatures" in vernacular Italian during the period when this language was branching out from Latin, and this is the earliest recorded poem in Italian. For this reason, "The Canticle" has received a great deal of attention from philologists, with hundreds of articles treating it in this century.¹³ Sadly, it has yet to be interpreted adequately by an environmental ethicist.

This poem reveals the summit of the spiritual journey of Francis as a Christian and a lover of nature. He communicates his vision of the interconnectedness of life and an inspiring mystical unity, all in a poem that is remarkable for its spontaneity and freshness. It speaks of the essential values of what is today loosely referred to as Franciscan Spirituality: the intrinsic goodness of all the created world, the interdependence of all life, a passion for beauty and for peace, and the personalism of Francis.

As Francis sang of the diverse parts of nature, he described them in remarkably intimate terms; he expresses great joy at having lived in relationship to them. He wrote:

Praised be You, my Lord, by Brother Fire,
 through whom you light the night,
 and he is beautiful, and playful and robust
 and strong.
 Praised be You, my Lord, for our Sister
 Mother Earth,
 who sustains and governs us,

and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Francis saw the diversity of nature, and he sang its praises, seeing this diversity as a value in itself. In this century ecologists have begun to describe the previously unknown biological diversity of life and to warn us of the severe environmental consequences of not protecting it. We Catholics have the responsibility to preach the value of biodiversity of which Francis sang.

In his description of nature Francis used intimate, familial terms. He sang their praises because God was glorified through them, by them, and for them. He loved them because they complemented each other, making an orchestra of praise to our Creator. All forms of life, in all their marvelous diversity, are valuable and have a role in God's world. "The Canticle" is remarkable for the way it points out a principle ecologists have only recently begun to prove scientifically: all of life is interconnected. It is also suggestive of Paul's metaphor for the interdependence of the diverse members of the body in 1 Corinthians 12.

The word *for* in the above verse is translated from the Italian *per*, which can be translated "for," "by," or "through." All are acceptable, and the variety of meanings lends greater charm to the poem. I believe Francis was comfortable praising God *for* creation, praising God with and *through* creation, and witnessing God being praised by creation.

But Francis was also aware of the limitations of this life. The second stanza was written when the mayor and the bishop of Assisi were in conflict with one another; he composed it and had it sung for them so that they might achieve reconciliation. He wrote the last stanza on his deathbed, and it is believed to be his final work.

Francis and Deep Ecology: Where Do They Part Ways?

As shown above, there is much in common between the ecological philosophy of deep ecology and St. Francis. Both value the diversity of life and its intrinsic value. And Francis believed strongly in the gospel call to conversion, simplicity, and penance, values that are consistent with the third principle of deep ecology, that of achieving balance through simplifying and reforming our lives to emphasize the nonmaterial value of life.

In one respect Francis asks and responds to an even deeper set of questions, which Naess does not address: Why do human beings insist on destroying their habitat? What is it in our race that leads us to destroy other forms of life? In the context of Medieval

Europe, which understood Adam's Fall and original sin primarily in terms of disobedience, Francis understood that greed also played a part:

For the person eats of the tree of the knowledge of good who appropriates to himself his own will and thus exalts himself over the good things which the Lord says and does in him, and thus, through the suggestion of the devil and the transgression of the command, what he eats becomes for him the fruit of the knowledge of evil.¹⁴

It is humankind's sinful nature,¹⁵ our grasping, greed, and disobedience, which leads us to break shalom, the peace of God. Only by repentance, or turning away from our sinful ways, can we find healing for ourselves and our relationship with creation and our Creator.

Most of the specific tenets elaborated by deep ecology are consistent with Francis's views as well. Wilderness has intrinsic worth, because without undisturbed wild places the diversity of life cannot be preserved. The love of a sense of place was a value for Francis, and he had great affection for several of his wilderness hermitages. Spirituality and self-realization were also very much a part of his religious journey.

Another principle of deep ecology is its opposition to industrial society, but it is more problematic to evaluate Francis's attitude toward this. While industrial society has helped many in the Northern Hemisphere attain a more comfortable standard of living, its consequences include the further impoverishment of the underdeveloped Southern Hemisphere. He certainly would be opposed to the large-scale environmental destruction being wreaked on nature in the form of the loss of biodiversity, ozone destruction, and industrial-scale deforestation.

Francis lived as capitalism was just beginning to take hold of Medieval Europe, and regional economies were rapidly converting from barter methods to currency. This enabled the accumulation of previously unknown quantities of wealth and power, which the Catholic church had traditionally opposed (with its stance against usury). Francis forbade his followers to possess coins, not because he wanted to deny them their basic needs, but because during the early thirteenth century coins were roughly equivalent to owning stocks and bonds today, and this would contradict his love of poverty.

Because he forbade his brothers to participate in the nascent capital economy of his time, I believe Francis opposed the concentration of wealth and power upon which industrialized society is

based. He understood that it would create barriers to human relationships, further marginalize the poor, and instigate threats to peace. For this reason I conclude that he would agree with deep ecology's notion that appropriate-scale, simpler lifestyles and economies are essential for a more humane society, one that fosters spiritual virtues. Francis, like deep ecologists, looked to an alternative philosophy of life, differing from that of his dominant culture.

The thinking of Francis and Naess conflict most clearly over the second basic principle of deep ecology: humans at present are far too numerous and intrusive with respect to other life forms and the living earth, with disastrous consequences for all, and must achieve a substantial decrease in population to permit the flourishing of human and nonhuman life. Francis, of course, was neither an ecologist nor a demographer, so even had he anticipated the impending environmental catastrophes of this century, he could not have analyzed their causes. First, however, I feel a quote from the U.S. bishops in their pastoral letter on the environment can help frame this issue.

In public discussions, two areas are particularly cited as requiring greater care and judgement on the part of human beings. The first is consumption of resources. The second is growth in world population. Regrettably, advantaged groups seem often more intent on curbing Third World births than on restraining the even more voracious consumerism of the developed world.

We believe this compounds injustice and increases disrespect for the life of the weakest among us. For example, it is not so much population growth, but the desperate efforts of debtor countries to pay their foreign debt by exporting products to affluent industrial countries that drives poor peasants off their land and up eroding hillsides, where in the effort to survive, they also destroy the environment. Consumption in the developed nations remains the single greatest source of global environmental destruction.¹⁵

While the bishops do not adequately address the problem of overpopulation or prescribe any solution to the problems it presents, they are correct in pointing out that there are basically enough resources, at present, to meet the needs of everyone on the planet. More important, however, they address the most grievous sins (from an environmental standpoint) of the industrialized North: overconsumption and idolatrous greed. The North has no grounds to criticize the South until it "removes the log from its own eye" (Mt 7:3-5) and repents of its ecologically ruinous practices driven by

industrial capitalism. Still, the time has long passed when the church should have rethought its failure to address the problem of population. We don't know what Francis would think about the population explosion. But we do know, based on Francis's unequivocal commitment to living and preaching peace in the context of a church bent on crusading, that he was willing to adopt unpopular positions. I suspect that Francis would agree with Naess that we humans are too intrusive with respect to other life forms on earth, but I seriously doubt he would feel that there are too many human beings. I suggest that, for better or worse, in his humility Francis would not presume to criticize the population growth of other cultures.

A more fundamental critique of deep ecology, however, would address its relationship to ideology. Naess supports "significant changes in ideological structures." If Francis were alive today, I believe he would say that it is precisely the nature of ideologies themselves that help create social and environmental problems; indeed, they help foment societal sin and sinful structures. Consider how the ideology of nationalism has helped bring about a society which is predisposed toward war and violence. The solution to problems created by selfish and destructive ideologies is not the restructuring of ideologies or a misanthropic ideology. The most compelling critique of ideology by Francis is demonstrated by his value structure, which moved beyond ideology.

St. Francis is famous for the value he placed on relationship and a personal touch. Much of his enduring charm can be traced to this. G. K. Chesterton, who wrote a biography of St. Francis almost forty years ago,¹⁶ notes that Francis deliberately did not see the forest for the trees. In other words, he never lost track of an individual in a group, and for this reason Francis has been called the supreme personalist. He even personalized his relationship with Christ's poverty, referring to it as Lady Poverty, and exhorting his followers to be her knights errant. In "The Canticle" he writes about the elements as friends and family members, expressing his mystical vision of life's interdependence. He refers to them with terms of familiarity and affection.

This view can be contrasted clearly with the misanthropic attitude of some deep ecologists toward overpopulation problems. Dave Foreman, one of the founders of the Earth First! Movement, when interviewed about starvation in Ethiopia, said: "The best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance—to let the people there just starve there." A different author wrote in the *Earth First! Journal* that, despite the suffering involved, AIDS was a "welcome development" in the necessary reduction of human overpopulation, especially since, unlike war and environmental catastrophe,

AIDS only affects human life. Even though these are careless statements publicized outside of their contexts, and even though the Earth First! Movement has contributed much to the environmental movement, I believe such comments reveal a flaw in the thinking and strategy of some deep ecologists. More concerned with ideology than with helping their fellow humans appreciate the gift God bestows upon us in creation, deep ecologists settle (in frustration, I believe) for misanthropy. Sadly, creation itself is betrayed by this kind of hateful language, because people turn against the environmental movement as a result. A misanthropic ideology is no solution to the problems posed by an anthropocentric ideology. Only the transformative power of love and spiritual conversion can help us recover a healthy relationship with nature. Anyone who truly cares about the survival of nature's diversity on this planet must realize that ideology and contempt for the human race will only alienate people from our interest in nurturing a love for creation. Our path must lead us to personal and social conversion, not a rearranged ideology.

Recovering the intimate, sensual, personal relationship of Francis with creation is essential if we are to arrest environmental destruction. Nature is already suffering from overpopulation and overconsumption, and this will only get worse in the near future, but I believe no rearrangement in ideology can initiate the improvements needed. What does have the power to transform human conduct? It must be love, love for our fellow humans and love for the fellow creatures on spaceship earth. Love had the ability virtually to eliminate slavery on a global scale in the period of a few decades, and it had the ability to initiate dramatic changes in the thinking of the United States regarding racism (although both required painstaking generations of effort before they were achieved). In its effectiveness as a tool of persuasion, love far outshines ideology, and for this reason, if for no other, I believe Christians must recover the relationship Francis had with creation. It has been given to us as a gift, and it is now our responsibility to live it out.

Francis and Benedict: Brother and Steward

I believe deep ecologists are correct in their criticism of the stewardship model of understanding the human relation with the rest of creation, at least as it is popularly understood in the United States. Stewardship used to mean caring for things on behalf of others, in this case, both our Creator and future generations, but in the context of our North American culture's narcissism, we have twisted the term to serve our own greedy desires. In extreme cases the term stewardship has been corrupted by groups such as the

so-called Wise Use Movement to mean further ecological despoliation by unneeded resource extraction. I believe we must reform our understanding of stewardship, fully aware of our society's pre-disposition toward myopic selfishness. I ask, indeed beg, my brother and sister Benedictines to promote a stewardship that includes selflessness and altruism. I pray that they can help our church rediscover the prayerful and God-dependent roots of this model. Stewardship should incorporate the understanding that nature has a right to be cared for and safeguarded, not simply manipulated for our desires.

But Francis offers us another way to relate to nature. As shown above, he related to nature with altruism and humility, and he respected and praised the way we are interdependent with creation. Francis valued nature for its intrinsic goodness, seeking to submit himself to it, and I believe that if the integrity of our environment is to survive we must rediscover these ideals. All of creation has the right to exist so that it can give praise to God; it need not meet human needs to justify its continued existence. I refer to this as the fraternal model of relating to creation.

The fraternal model holds that the Lord God has always been involved in every aspect of the creation of nature and that as humans our role is to strive to live in harmony with creation by giving praise to God. Presenting an alternative to the utilitarianism of the stewardship model, the fraternal model emphasizes fraternity and humility, the most important values Francis brought to his relationship with nature. Respect for the right of other species to live in peace will propel adherents of this model to challenge their fellow humans to live within limits so that other species may simply live.

The stewardship model has dominated Christian thinking because it explained theologically the way humans made contact with nature, through agriculture. In the past two centuries the effect of the Industrial Revolution has been twofold: it has brought a previously unthinkable quantity of land under human domination (with the resulting ecological damage) and simultaneously resulted in massive worldwide human migrations from rural to urban areas, further removing us from nature. In the context of this changed relationship, with a much greater proportion of human population living in urban areas and a lesser proportion directly dependent upon nature for living, the fraternal model can move us toward greater friendship with the earth and more habitat protection. The Catholic church must begin to respond to the massive wave of species extinction now occurring. The fraternal model cannot replace the stewardship model, but as a complement it can help us as Catholics draw from our own tradition to meet the challenges posed by alienation from nature and guide our church's thinking

toward a sustainable future. We Franciscans have the obligation of promoting this model.

Wolf of Gubbio

The Little Flowers of St. Francis relates the story of when Francis visited the town of Gubbio while it was being terrorized by a huge, ravenous wolf.¹⁷ Francis, filled with faith in God, journeyed out of the town, found the wolf, and began to preach peace to it. The saint commanded it to stop terrorizing the citizens, pledging that they would feed him and care for his needs. He then led the wolf into the town, preached penance and peace to the citizens, and forged a covenant between the humans and the wolf, bringing about happy reconciliation and peaceful lives. It would be impossible to verify whether these events ever occurred or whether Francis actually was able to work such a miracle, but my point in introducing this story has little to do with establishing either. I am more interested in the impact Francis had on his biographers; he was understood to be a man of peace and a preacher of reconciliation. He wanted the residents of Gubbio to be free from their fear of the wolf, so he exhorted them to reform their lives and live out gospel values. Francis did not seek to destroy or eradicate the wolf; he sought to become its brother and bring it into peaceful relationship with its environment. For our peace and well being, we humans must undergo conversion and strive for reconciliation with God, each other, and nature. This is the kernel of truth communicated by this story of the wolf, and to be faithful to Francis, we must seek to live out this message of reconciliation.

Francis and deep ecology communicate many compatible truths. The essential difference, it seems to me, is that deep ecology seeks to change ideologies, while Francis prefers a spirit of fraternity and respect. I hope that the twentieth-century followers of Francis can imitate this, freeing ourselves from anger and rancor, and freeing ourselves for love, love for the soil, the flowers, the micro-organisms, the birds, the wild animals, for the diverse, incredible, intricate interconnectedness of life that St. Francis sang about with such joy. St. Francis, pray for us!

The Canticle of the Creatures

I.

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,
and no one is worth to mention Your name.
Praised be You, My Lord, with all Your
creatures,

especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day and through whom You give
us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great
splendor;

and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praise be You, my Lord, by Sister Moon and
the stars,

in heaven You formed them clear and
precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, by Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and
every kind of weather
through which You give sustenance to Your
creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, by Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and
precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, by Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust
and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, by our Sister
Mother Earth,

who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruits with colored
flowers and herbs.

II.

Praised be 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, they shall be crowned.

III.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister
Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in
Your most holy will, for the second death
shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him
thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

Notes

1. Lynn White, Jr., "The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* (March 10, 1967), p. 1203.
2. Naess, Arne, "Intuition, Intrinsic Value, and Deep Ecology," *The Ecologist* (England), vol. 14, no. 5-6 (September/October 1984). The most comprehensive work on deep ecology is Devall, Bill, and George Sessions, *Deep Ecology* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 1985).
3. The best treatment of this problem is found in Roger Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
4. Kucak, Tanya, "Deep Ecology," *Yoga Journal* (September 1986), p. 36.
5. Thomas of Celano, *First Life of St. Francis*, 6. All the biographies are taken from *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies*, ed. Marion A. Habis O.F.M. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1972), which is commonly referred to as the *Omnibus of Sources*. All numerical references to these biographies of Francis refer to paragraphs, not pages. Celano was a friar, a contemporary of Francis, and an eyewitness to some of the events later in his life. His was the first biography of Francis.
6. Thomas of Celano, *The Second Biography of St. Francis*, 165.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Thomas of Celano, *First Life of St. Francis*, 80.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Francis of Assisi, *Rule of 1223*. All of Francis's own writings are taken from Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).
11. Francis of Assisi, "Salutation of the Virtues," verses 14-18, in Armstrong and Brady.
12. Legend of Perugia, 43, in the *Omnibus*.
13. See Armstrong and Brady, p. 37.
14. Francis of Assisi, "Admonitions," para. 2.
15. United States Catholic Conference, *Renewing the Earth* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.C.C., 1991), p. 9.
16. G. K. Chesterton, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Image Books, 1957).
17. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, 21, in the *Omnibus*. This is a later biography, composed at least one hundred years after the death of Francis. Most scholars question its historical accuracy.

Choose Life

Ascetic Theology, History, and Ecology

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ALSO KNOWN AS H.H. BHAKTI ANANDA GOSWAMI

I have set before you life and death. . . . Choose life that you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Without God, the Human Race Is a Threatened Species

What has been the historical role of Catholic asceticism in relationship to ecology and the spiritual, moral, and physical health of individuals and society? To answer this question we must confront the tragedy that much of Christianity has widely deviated from: the ascetic moral discipline of the Apostolic Fathers. This failure of moral leadership has largely contributed to the fact that the human race is a threatened species, and that it is the pollution of sin that is destroying us. The ancient Hebrew and Sanskrit words for defilement due to sin is *tame/tama*, to be "polluted" or to be "darkness," "defiled," or "ignorant." In Old Testament times the righteous one (*tsaddic*, *sadhu*, *sattvika*, or "ascetic") was to battle the cause of all filth/pollution. The English word *ascetic* derived from an ancient Greek word used to describe persons who practiced a religiously motivated discipline (called *sadhana* in Sanskrit). In ancient times asceticism was originally associated with the widespread, multi-ethnic religious alliances of the Old Testament Eli-Jahu (Vaishnava Hari-Vasu).

With the coming of the gospel, Jesus Christ was received as promised redeemer of Jew and Gentile alike. Within two hundred years of the age of the apostles, the Mediterranean regions' Sac