Franciscan Environmental Ethics: Imagining Creation as a Community of Care

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This essay seeks to redress the shortcomings of Christian environmental ethics by proposing Franciscan environmental ethics drawn from the affective and embodied experience of Francis of Assisi plus the Franciscan theological tradition that he inspired, as exemplified by Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus. Drawing its inspiration from the love Francis of Assisi had for nature, the Franciscan tradition holds that creation bursts with religious significance. This tradition interprets Francis' affective and direct sensory experience of the natural world with theological concepts creatively reworked from scripture and patristic sources, especially the Incarnation and the Trinity. The Franciscan understanding of the Incarnation emphasizes continuity between humanity, creatures, and elements. The Franciscan vision of Trinity as community-of-one, inspired by Francis's Canticle of Creatures, supports a more inclusive vision of the moral community. Franciscan environmental ethics can inspire an enhanced moral imagination and the praxis of an ethic of care.

Introduction

Christian environmental ethics has yet to fulfill its potential. This field has yet to capture the imagination of a broad cross section of Christians; it has yet to make compelling arguments that moral concern for the Earth and its ecosystems are integrally related to the practice of Christian faith; it has yet to successfully persuade Christians that all creation is a community of moral significance. There are several reasons for this failure. The field of Christian environmental ethics emerged in response to the provocative yet flawed thesis of Lynn White, and it retained a defensive posture for its early years.¹ The field has struggled to find a compelling and coherent moral narrative that embraces the Christian story and care for the Earth. More than forty years after White’s essay, the field is still divided over the appropriate role of scripture in environmental ethics.² Many theologians have been constrained by an excessive focus on the first two chapters of Genesis, as though these were

the only important scriptures for environmental teaching.\textsuperscript{1} The Creation accounts of Genesis express command ethics, and the ethics built on these have too often relied heavily on moral argument that is logical, discursive, and positivistic. Others, such as James Nash, have rejected moral argument from scripture and proposed an ethical construction based on the rational-experiential method, or an ecological rereading of the natural law tradition.\textsuperscript{4} Reliance on Genesis alone is constraining, but rejecting scripture in moral argument would mean to alienate one's environmental ethic from the broader Christian community. A compelling moral narrative is needed, one that stirs the moral imagination, one that proposes a compelling desire to love, and to exercise moral agency, all within an ecologically conscious Christian cosmology.\textsuperscript{5}

Recent developments show some promise. Jame Schaefer convincingly demonstrated that there are many theological resources in Christian history that could be reconstructed for contemporary environmental ethics.\textsuperscript{6} She examines patristic and medieval concepts and proposes a "creative-critical method" that would retrieve, reconstruct, and apply these promising ways of thinking about and acting toward the environment, inspired by the Catholic Christian tradition. The rich themes she works demonstrate that creation has had religious significance in Christian history and suggest that the Christian vision of creation has progressively narrowed over recent centuries. As Schaefer points out, these premodern theological concepts cannot be used uncritically; they must be reinterpreted and appropriately linked to contemporary systems of knowledge. Schaefer's work does not include the use of scripture or anchor an environmental moral vision in the person of Jesus Christ. However, her approach holds great promise for drawing forth resources from within the Christian tradition, for it argues a convincing discourse on Christian environmental theology and ethics.

This essay seeks to redress these shortcomings by proposing a Franciscan environmental ethics drawn from the affective and embodied experience of Francis of Assisi plus the Franciscan theological tradition that he inspired, as exemplified by Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and John Duns Scotus. Lynn White was the first to propose Francis as the patron saint for ecologists, and his proposal was enacting by Pope John Paul II in 1979.\textsuperscript{7} However, White profoundly misunderstood Francis and his relationship with other Franciscans and the Church, although he was clever to advance Francis as a model of Christian love of creation. Subsequent scholarship has described with greater clarity Francis's relationship with nature and its religious significance. Francis loved creation as an expression of divine love, and he described his relationship with it in familial terms.\textsuperscript{8} Unfortunately, Francis is usually presented in the fields of Christian environmental theology and ethics as the idiosyncratic exception within Christianity, thus disregarding the broader Franciscan theological tradition he inspired.
Drawing its inspiration from the love Francis of Assisi had for nature, the Franciscan tradition holds that creation bursts with religious significance. This tradition interprets Francis’s affective and direct sensory experience of the natural world with theological concepts drawn creatively and reworked from scripture and patristic sources, especially on the Incarnation and the Trinity. Of course, medieval Franciscans were in no way addressing environmental degradation or pollution. However, their work can prompt us to retrieve ancient theological currents to inform contemporary applications as a useful ethical method for duties toward the environment. I begin by reviewing the ways in which Francis has been used for environmental ethics and then describe recent efforts to retrieve the Franciscan intellectual tradition he inspired. I explain how Franciscan perspectives on the Incarnation and the Trinity hold potential for revisioning all creation as a community of moral concern. The Franciscan understanding of the Incarnation emphasizes continuity between humanity, creatures, and elements. The Franciscan vision of Trinity as community-of-persons, inspired by Francis’s Canti de Creatures, supports a more inclusive vision of the moral community. The Franciscan tradition can contribute to the field of Christian environmental ethics as it inspires individuals to great love for creation as a manifestation of God’s revelation in and to the world.

Francis and His Followers as Resources for Christian Environmental Ethics

White was the first to propose that Francis could serve as an example of concern for nature, but he profoundly misunderstood or misrepresented Francis’s relationship to Christianity. He described Francis’s sense of nature as “clearly heretical,” even though Francis was canonized as a Catholic saint two years after his death. Subsequent scholarship has proposed Francis as a model of ecological consciousness, but it has presented him as an idiosyncratic exception to the Christian tradition. Nash’s treatment is typical: Francis is presented with the Desert Fathers and Celtic Saints in a few pages summarizing “ecological sensitivity in Christian history.” Curiously, there are virtually no examples of Christian environmental ethicists using Francis along with the broader intellectual tradition he inspired. Scholars working on environmental ethics do not apparently even recognize the relationship between Francis and Bonaventure or other early Franciscan theologians, with a few exceptions.

A chief reason why Francis has not been used more by environmental ethicists is that he was a semiliterate vernacular theologian. He was an intensely charismatic popular preacher and mystic, but most of his texts were written as personal prayers, or exhortations and directives to his followers. He did not leave behind what we would recognize today as formal theological
work. Determining the "historical Francis" has been encumbered by the
volume of hagiographic writings about him, running into the thousands of
pages. Some of the hagiographies are strongly shaped by later polemical dis-
putes among the Franciscans, which have further encumbered efforts to un-
derstand him.

Spurred by the Second Vatican Council, Franciscan scholars have under-
taken an enormous effort to place an understanding of Francis, his spiritual-
ity, and the Franciscan movement on a solid foundation of critical scholarship.
They have created a critical edition of his writings and dozens of hagiogra-
phies written in the medieval period. Francis wrote at least twenty-eight doc-
uments and dictated five others. These writings can be grouped as prayers,
meditations, written sermons, exhortatory letters, and instructions for follow-
ing the Gospel. By using the same tools for textual analysis pioneered by
scripture scholars, a more vivid, coherent, and compelling portrait of the man
and his spiritual vision has emerged from his writings. This portrait highlights
his dedication to following Jesus Christ, his devotion to the Incarnation, his
love of the Gospel and the Eucharist, his religious vision of the human fam-
ily, his practice of intense contemplative prayer, and his public preaching of
God's love and peace. We are now better able to interpret his relationship with
creation within the context of a more accurate and complete understanding
of his life.

Over the past decade, Franciscan scholarly attention has turned to the re-
trival of the broader Franciscan philosophical, theological, and intellectual
tradition of the Franciscan movement (hereafter, the Franciscan intellectual tra-
dition). The most important figures in this tradition are Bonaventure (d. 1274)
and Scotus (d. 1308), both of whom were active participants at the University
of Paris in the thirteenth century. In their work we find the intuition and spirit
of Francis, and that of the primitive Franciscans, translated into formal philo-
osophy and systematic theology. Prior scholarly approaches have emphasized
tension and discontinuity between the primitive and intellectual expressions
of the Franciscan movement; more recent work emphasizes continuity through
in institutionalization.

The Franciscan approach complements the other two major intellectual tra-
ditions within Catholicism: the Augustinian and the Thomistic (or Dominican).
All three conduct theology within the Catholic tradition, yet in their diverse
interpretive approaches, they provide a broader array of theological resources.
The advent of the Franciscan school took place in the context of the rise of the
university and the retrieval of Aristotle and Plato's *Timaeus*. The theology of
Bonaventure, in particular, has enjoyed a resurgence of interest, in part because
it engages and transforms patristic philosophical and theological concepts, and
thus provides a more conducive metaphysical and epistemological basis for di-
ologue with contemporary sciences, including ecology and evolution. Recent scholarship on Scotus has highlighted the influence of his Franciscan religious life on his extraordinary philosophical vision. Thus, Francis's vernacular theology inspired the development of academic institutions that were themselves undergoing transformation under the influence of new discoveries and the retrieval of ancient knowledge.

The retrieval of the Franciscan tradition offers resources for the further development of Christian environmental ethics. Retrieval work has been under way in this area as well, and this essay seeks to make this available to a broader theological ethics audience. This retrieval draws its inspiration from Francis's intuitive and charismatic approach to faith, and elaborates a more sophisticated philosophy and theology than thus far developed for Christian ethics. Francis experienced creation through his embodied senses as an expression of God's love and goodness, and his intuition inspired the philosophical and theological framework of the Franciscan school. Rich theological resources highly appropriate for engaging contemporary environmental issues exist within the tradition, but as Dawn Nothwehr, OSF, points out, Franciscan materials are available chiefly in primary (medieval) sources or within Franciscan circles, and the implications for contemporary Christian environmental ethics remain implicit. Hers was among the first works to make explicit the continuity between Francis and medieval Franciscan scholars in environmental theology, and to apply this explicitly to contemporary praxis. For example, most prior work on Bonaventure's cosmology had remained theological, and had not articulated implications for ethics.

This essay reflects the shift in methodology in the broader retrieval of the Franciscan tradition: from sources to salient theological themes; and from understanding the sources in their medieval context to elaborating their relevance to contemporary theological and ethical scholarship. Two theological concepts have special potential for environmental ethics. The primacy of Christ asserts an integral relation between the Incarnation and Creation, proposing a soteriological and cosmological purpose to the Incarnation. The Franciscan tradition understands the Trinity as a communion of persons that is dynamic, creative, and self-diffusive in love; thus, from this view God is relationship. This essay builds upon the work of Hayes, Nothwehr, Delio, and others to retrieve Franciscan sources, and extends it by presenting integral, crosscutting theological themes. It extends the work of Nothwehr by articulating these themes with contemporary ecotheological work and with the ethics of care. By himself, Francis has little more than inspiration to offer contemporary environmental ethics. However, when Francis and the Franciscans are understood as integral to the broader Christian tradition, they can prompt us to expand our vision of the moral community to include all creation.
Living the Incarnation

Francis is popularly known as "the saint who loved animals." His first hagiographer, Thomas of Celano, makes clear his love toward animals, especially birds, but also bees, crickets, lambs, and fish. Francis had a particular love for birds, which he referred to as "noble creatures." Unfortunately, most modern people have understood these stories in exclusively sentimental terms, without recognizing them as bearing religious and ethical significance. Thomas of Celano wrote that "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." To modern eyes, this story also appears highly romantic, but according to Thomas, Francis understood Psalm 22:7 as a Christological text with implications for a Christian praxis of care for creation.

Francis's encounters with animals cannot be properly understood apart from the broader context of his religious journey and his devotion to the Incarnation. Encounters with animals are just one example of a life full of encounters with "the other," whether leper, religious brother, or sultan. These encounters shaped his religious conversion, and drew him more deeply into God. Francis came to perceive Christ present in all of material reality. He expressed his spiritual vision in his writings, many of which rework scriptural texts and images to reflect his insight. For example, he drew from 2 Corinthians 8:9 to describe the Incarnation as an expression of divine poverty or humility: "For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich." He reworked language from the Gospel of John and the kerygma hymn of Philippians 2 to describe the Eucharist as a continuation of the Incarnation. "Behold, each day He humbles himself as when He came from the royal throne into the Virgin's womb; each day He Himself comes to us, appearing humbly; each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest." Francis understood the Incarnation to be the greatest possible expression of love and humility, and the Christian project is to live out these values. Thus, his love of creatures is integrally related to his experience of Jesus Christ in the materiality of the world, in his understanding of the material kenosis of the Incarnation. Humanity, plus creatures and the material world, all have religious significance for Francis, for as a whole they bear Jesus Christ to us.

In his hagiography of Francis, Bonaventure described Francis's life as growth into the mystery of Christ, and that through the Incarnation, God bends low in love to reveal God's self. Bonaventure significantly reworked earlier hagiographic texts to highlight the miraculous dimensions of Francis life. Although
the *Major Legend of St. Francis* is of limited value for reporting the historical
details of Francis's life, it is highly valuable for disclosing Bonaventure's theo-
logical vision of the Christian life.\(^{33}\) For example, in the chapter about Fran-
cis's relationship with animals and creation, Bonaventure describes Francis's
journey as coming to perceive Christ ever more clearly in the created world:

> In beautiful things he canvassed Beauty itself
> and through the footprints impressed in things
> He followed his Beloved everywhere,
> Out of them all things making for himself a ladder
> Through which he could climb up to lay hold of him
> who is utterly desirable.
> With an intensity of unheard devotion, he savored
> in each and every creature—as in so many rivulets—that fontal Goodness
> and discerned an almost celestial choir in the chords of power and activity
> given to them by God, and like the prophet David,
> he sweetly encouraged them to praise the Lord.\(^{36}\)

Bonaventure is making a theological statement about the role of the senses in
the experience of Jesus Christ in the material world. Creatures themselves
praise their Creator, and they helped Francis, the model Christian in the eyes
of Bonaventure, by conducting him on his spiritual journey. Although the florid
imagery may strike moderns as odd, Bonaventure used mystical language and
bridal metaphors to express his vision of the Incarnation, to describe his un-
derstanding of the spiritual journey into God. Bonaventure drew from the
same scriptures as Francis to describe the Incarnation as an expression of the
humility of God.\(^{17}\)

Against the backdrop of most medieval theology that conceived the purpose
of the Incarnation as satisfaction for human sin, the Franciscan school de-
veloped the "primacy of Christ" as an alternative framework, drawing from pat-
ristic theologies.\(^{38}\) The term "primacy of Christ" is inspired by Paul's vision
of Jesus Christ as "the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation"
(Col. 1:15). The primacy of Christ reframes the Incarnation from an exclusively
redemptive purpose to include a cosmological mission and reflects patristic
themes recovered and articulated by the Franciscan school.\(^{19}\) The primacy
of Christ proposes a cosmic Christology, drawn from Colossians 1:15–16, Eph-
esians 1:3–10, and elements from the Gospel of John, and provides a compelling
alternative to Anselm's theory of satisfaction in *Cur Deus homo*.\(^{40}\)

Scotus was the most articulate spokesperson for the primacy of Christ. His
scholastic writings reflect a deep, penetrating meditation on the significance of
the Incarnation, which he asserted was the highest, most perfect expression of
God's love.\(^{41}\) He was a creative thinker, and he challenged the assumptions that
guided the conventional theological questions of his day. Several medieval
theologians speculated whether Christ would have come had Adam had not sinned, but Scotus reframed the question to ask, what was God's original intention for the Incarnation? What kind of God would choose to become Incarnate among us? He asserted that God is absolutely free and loving; therefore, the Incarnation must be an expression of love and freedom. Arguing from this principle, God could not have been motivated to remedy sin; this motive would be an inferior rationale. The Incarnation was not an afterthought, a remedial strategy. Rather, the Incarnation was conceived before the creation of the world as a means to unite humanity with God through love; it was not a discrete historical event, nor merely a precondition for the Word to be preached to us; it was not necessitated by sin. Rather, the Incarnation is the highest expression of divine love. Scotus does not discount sin or disregard the need for human redemption, but he insists they are subordinate concerns relative to full communion with God through the Incarnation.47

From this principle, Scotus asserts an integral, interdependent relationship between the Incarnation and creation, and the importance of creation in the divine plan. Scotus argued that Creation is not an act of divine love that was followed incidentally, accidentally, or independently by divine self-revelation in the Incarnation. Rather, Creation was conceived by God before the beginning of the world to be capable of bearing Christ in incarnate form. The relationship between Christ and Creation predated the creation of the world. The idea that all of material Creation was made for Christ means that for Christ to come, there had to be a Creation, and Creation had to be capable of receiving, understanding and freely responding to this manner of divine initiative. The act and process of creation was a prelude to a much fuller manifestation of divine love in the Incarnation. Because Creation was created to bear the Incarnation, every element, creature, and person gives material and outward expression of the Word of God. When Jesus came as the Incarnation of God, there was a "perfect fit" because everything has been made to resemble Jesus Christ. Creation, according to the Franciscan tradition, is christiiform, capable of bearing Christ, and the Incarnation is the fulfillment of Creation's cosmic purpose. Thus, the fundamental purpose of creation is to bear Christ.48

The Incarnation is a much better point of departure for Christian environmental ethics than the Creation stories of Genesis because it begins with a positive affirmation of the religious significance of creation. The Franciscan vision of the primacy of Christ draws from the Gospel of John and the Pauline Christic hymns to assert continuity between Jesus Christ and creation. Concern about sin and the fallen nature of the world is relegated to the periphery because this approach emphasizes love through communion with God. Instead, the primacy of Christ orients us toward the gift of Creation in bearing Christ, and thereby reflecting Christ to us. Therefore, gratitude for this gift becomes the central thrust in our understanding of the biophysical world. Creation thus
Trinity: God as Relationship

The *Canticle of the Creatures* best conveys Francis's own voice about his experience of creation. Francis revered the sun, gazed upon the stars, danced with the air, was drawn to the fire, marveled at water, and caressed the earth. He named the elements as brother, sister, and mother. Drawing from the medieval troubadour tradition, *The Canticle* evokes a hymn of praise sung in a cosmic royal court. Francis wrote it after he had become blind and as he lay dying; it serves as an exclamation point for his Christian cosmological vision. The *Canticle* reworks symbolic images from Psalm 148 and Daniel 3:57–68, and its vivid images reflect Francis's sustained contact with the elements and his prayer with scripture. Francis spent roughly one-third of each year praying in a wilderness hermitage with a few brothers. The *Canticle* is best understood as the fruit of sustained contemplative spiritual practice, celebrating God’s love expressed through the incarnate world.

The *Canticle* is a poetic, Christological hymn that reflects an appreciation of all of created life. Francis frequently used familial images in his writings, perhaps because his relationship with his biological family was so troubled (in 1206, at the beginning of his conversion process, he disowned his father). For Francis, the followers of Jesus become the new family. For example, in his *Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance* he wrote:

> We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others. O how glorious it is to have a holy and great Father in heaven! O how holy, consoling to have such a beautiful and wonderful Spouse! O how holy and how loving, gratifying, humbling, peace-giving, sweet, worthy of love, and, above all things desirable: to have such a Brother and a Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recent scholarship suggests that the *Exhortation* is a transcribed sermon, delivered orally and repeatedly by Francis beginning as early as 1209. Note the continuity between it and the *Canticle*; both convey his inclusive vision of Gospel family, from humanity to all creation. His understanding of all people...
united by love in Jesus Christ extends to creatures and elements, who also praise and reverence God.

Bonaventure develops this intuitive, spiritual understanding of divine family in his theology of the Trinity. Bonaventure's vision of the Trinity is essential to Franciscan theology, and his life-long reflection on the Trinity echoes Francis's contemplation of God in creation. Rather than following the more typical Augustinian formulation of the Trinity, Bonaventure drew from the fourth-century Cappadocian patristic tradition. These approaches favor Trinity as a community of divine persons, not Trinity as the unity of God's substance per Augustine. Drawing from the Pseudo-Dionysius and Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure understood the Divine Trinity as self-diffusive goodness and ultimate love. In Bonaventure's view, the divine persons of the Trinity are not only intimately related to one another, but they mutually inhere in one another and draw life from each other. The Father, as unbegotten, is "fountain-fullness" of goodness, who communicates goodness through the Incarnate Son, who returns the love to the Father in the Spirit. The Father is the source and goal of the emanation of the Trinity, the Father is the source and goal of all created reality. For Bonaventure, a God who could create would communicate God's self to others. The self-communicative goodness of the Father is God giving Godself away in the Word, who proceeds from the Father as the perfect expression and Image of God. As the full and total expression of God's primal fruitfulness, the Son is the expression of all that God can be in relation to the finite. Thus, God is Trinitarian community, inviting us to share God's life by entering into communion with Godself. In the Franciscan school, the Trinity is not an abstract concept but an organic relational system animated by love. Some recent scholars have gone so far as to propose that, for Bonaventure, God is relationship itself.

Bonaventure's theology of Creation derives from his understanding of the Trinity. He uses the image of a circle to understand life: we come from God, we exist in relation to God, and we will return to God. For Bonaventure, a God who could create would communicate God's self to others. The self-communicative goodness of the Father is God giving Godself away in the Word, who proceeds from the Father as the perfect expression and Image of God. In Bonaventure's view, the Word is the inner self-expression of God, and the created order is the external expression of the inner Word. The Trinity is the template for all creation.

Bonaventure provides several metaphors to describe the created universe and its relationship to the Trinity. Creation cannot but flow out of the love between the Father and Son. Creation is thus an external Word of God, expressed in finite space and specific history. Drawing from Augustine, Bonaventure wrote, "the entire world is, as it were, a kind of book in which the Creator can
be known in terms of power, wisdom and goodness which shine through in creatures. Bonaventure used the metaphor of a circle many times in his works, as a symbol of the Trinity itself, as well as for the movement of divine life into, through, and back from Creation. He uses a font or fountain as a metaphor for God's self-diffusive love extended to us through Creation. The Father is the "fountain fullness" from which the river of reality flows, both within the mystery of God's self and outside the divinity in the form of Creation. Bonaventure frequently described Creation as a river that flows from that spring of God, spreading across the land to purify and fructify it, and flowing back to its origin. He compares the universe to a beautifully composed song, an image borrowed from Augustine, yet he develops the metaphor further, insisting that full appreciation of a song requires grasping the entire melody, and not only the individual notes but their interrelation with pitch, rhythm, and tone. Bonaventure understands created reality as two books, "one written within, namely the eternal Art and Wisdom of God; and the other written without, namely, the perceptible world." These books are like mirrors, for as one studies creation, one learns more about God, and as one comes to understand God, one recognizes God's love in creation. Scotus' understanding of the Trinity reflects the Franciscan tradition's emphasis on relationality and affect. For Scotus, justice and mercy coincide in God as Triune unity. He differed from Bonaventure (and Augustine) in his assertion that God's essence is not relationship but rather persons in relationship. Like Bonaventure, however, Scotus grounded his vision of all reality in his vision of Trinity as relational communion.

In sum, Bonaventure's view is that all creation is theophanic, for it reveals something of God. His writings on the Trinity convey a sophisticated theological vision that reflects Francis's intuitive understanding of all people and all creation bound together in praise of God. Francis's song about creation is echoed in Bonaventure's metaphor of creation as song. The Trinity as communion of persons proposes God as relationship. The divine persons are interdependent, and the relationship between the Godhead and creation is one of interdependence. Bonaventure proposes a theology of Trinity that is remarkably compatible with the modern scientific notion of the ecosystem, for the emphasis on relationship between entities is fundamental to both. Sally McFague has proposed that the entire created universe be considered as the "body of God." Informed by feminist critique, McFague challenges what she describes as the dualistic, antibody tendencies in contemporary Christianity. She proposes a panentheistic approach, which she develops through Christology, theological anthropology, and spirituality, to open up new horizons for imagining greater continuity between God, humanity, and the material universe. Her proposal may appear novel to modern eyes, but it is merely an elaboration of what Bonaventure taught in the thirteenth century.
Creation as a Community of Moral Concern

A Franciscan theology of creation contains several valuable theological resources for contemporary environmental ethics: the individual, subjective, sensory experience of creation; reflection on New Testament scripture in light of the experience of creation; and highly developed Christological and Trinitarian theological insights. Francis left behind an example of living the Gospel and of love for all creatures. He and the Franciscan tradition conceive of these as integrally related. Francis and the Franciscan school predate modern concern for the environment; their original work was in no way conceived to address human mistreatment of the Earth. These require interpretation for contemporary use in ethics, but Bonaventure and Scotus articulate Francis with a theological vision that has potential for advancing the field of Christian environmental ethics.

The Franciscan tradition has always held that all creation is theologically and morally significant, and this is its most important contribution to environmental ethics. The Franciscan tradition has always held that creation has a religious purpose: it bears God; it communicates God; it prompts human beings to journey into God; it praises God independently of human beings. Once creation is understood to bear religious significance, it readily follows that one recognize creation as morally significant. It is this religious, communicative, symbolic, and Christological significance in the Franciscan tradition that makes it a more fecund foundation for the exercise of the moral imagination for environmental ethics. Drawing from the Incarnation and the primacy of Christ, a Franciscan approach to environmental ethics is clearly tied to Jesus Christ, the Christian scriptures, and tradition. This approach can attenuate the radical anthropocentrism of contemporary Christian thought, for it undermines the sharp ontological division between humanity and the rest of creation assumed by many modern Christians. The Franciscan understanding of the Incarnation as an expression of God's humility invites a response among humans of humility as well.

Yet, simultaneously, the Franciscan vision of Trinity as community of persons, inspired by Francis's Canticle, supports a more inclusive vision of the moral community. The Trinity is the template for all creation, and all creation is related to God as the source of life. Thus, a communitarian cosmology inspires a shared sense of creaturehood and the basis for collective consideration of moral community. This reading of the Trinity orients us toward participation in the community of life, and of expressing love through that participation.

A Franciscan theology of Creation can inspire a moral vision of care as human responsibility. It is able to draw inspiration from the example of Francis of Assisi and his life, and from the rich symbolic language and metaphor used
by subsequent Franciscans. This theology can inspire contemporary Christians to imagine creation as part of the moral community: creation, the Earth, and its ecosystems are neither a novel area of ethical concern nor an appended topical domain to social ethics; they are integral to the Christian life project and moral life. This thinking about a moral community inclusive of creation can shift the focus from duties to loving care.

Drawing from the experience of Francis and the theological vision of the Franciscan school, a Franciscan theology of Creation shares several salient features with a contemporary ethics of care. Virginia Held critiques what she describes as excessive rationalism and universalism within contemporary ethics. She proposes a moral system in which the act and disposition of caring are central, and she embraces the particularity of our relationship with objects of care and the emotional dimension of human ethical choice. Held develops a moral theory along these lines but does not extend this explicitly to the environment. Both Held and the Franciscan tradition share an awareness of vulnerability and interdependence, and focus moral attention on the obligation to care for others. Both reject an approach to ethics based on rationality alone; they privilege love, sympathy, empathy, and responsiveness. Both set aside the emphasis of modern moral philosophers on universalistic and abstract rules because both favor the duties of care that emerge organically from material, mutual relationships. This attention to care, and the duties that emerge from care, can complement concern for justice and individual virtue. Thus, Franciscan environmental ethics emphasizes an ethic of care for all creation.

Conclusion

Francis started a spiritual movement within the medieval Church, and his intuitive spirituality is reflected in and developed by the Franciscan philosophical and theological tradition. His love of creation is best understood within the context of his experience of Jesus Christ, contemplative prayer, and vision of the human family. His love of animals, the elements, and all creation should not be understood as divorced from his integral religious experience. The themes of love, care, kinship, sensory experience, embodiment, and communion were elaborated in philosophical and theological terms by Bonaventure, Scotus, and the Franciscan school. Therefore, any contemporary environmental ethic based on Francis can be made richer and more compelling when he is articulated as a part of this more systematic intellectual tradition. This essay has drawn from Francis and the broader intellectual movement he inspired to retrieve resources within the Christian tradition for contemporary environmental ethics.
The Franciscan school's use of scripture as an ethical resource is significant for several reasons. First, the Franciscan approach to ethics draws from Christocentric texts. Francis's devotion to the Incarnation and the Franciscan vision of the primacy of Christ argue strongly for the moral significance of Creation while underscoring the Christian in Christian environmental ethics. Second, the Franciscan approach uses scripture, but differently than most Christian environmental ethics. The Franciscan approach interprets it in light of embodied human experience, and is an expression of the "scripture-in-tradition principle" of David Tracy.6 The medieval Franciscan scholars drew from Greek and patristic concepts to interpret scripture, then transformed them into contemporary knowledge in light of their own theological reflection. Far from discounting the importance of scripture, the Franciscan approach proposes theological tools for an integral interpretation of personal experience, scripture, and shared tradition. Third, the Franciscan tradition draws from scriptural texts different from typical for contemporary environmental ethics: Paul's Christological hymns and the prologue to the Gospel of John. These texts highlight the cosmological dimension of the Incarnation, its role in salvation history, and the interdependent relationship between the Incarnation and Creation. One cannot perceive or understand the Incarnation without taking seriously the religious significance of Creation that bears it.

The Franciscan tradition offers a religious framework for according Creation moral significance. The Franciscan concepts of Incarnation and Trinity serve as a theological foundation for a contemporary exercise of our collective moral imagination. The exercise of the moral imagination is fundamental to acknowledging all of creation in the community of moral concern. Contemporary Christian environmental ethics can best be developed based on understanding Creation as religiously significant to reach into our moral motivation. From this point of departure, moral action, such as the practice of humility and the exercise of care for creation, readily follow.

This study demonstrates the value of retrieving a theological tradition for use in Christian environmental ethics, a tradition largely forgotten by contemporary scholars. There are resources in Christian tradition that merit retrieval and can yield important religious insights for the basis of developing an environmental ethic. The Franciscan tradition has a way of engaging scripture that is vital and open to contemporary questions and ways of knowing. The Christian tradition is large and diverse across geography and time. Some valuable theological insights outside the dominant forms of contemporary American theology can be of assistance. A moral system based on a Christocentric theology, a communitarian vision, and scripture could appeal to many Christians. The Franciscan approach to environmental ethics can inspire praxis, responsiveness to relationship, and a deep commitment to care.
Franciscan Environmental Ethics

Notes

This essay is dedicated to Bill Shore, OFM, my teacher. Thanks to Kevin O’Brien, Daniel Scheidt, Ryan Thornton, OFM; and David DeCosse for helpful comments that improved earlier drafts.


9. For the most complete analysis of Francis’s relationship with nature, see Roger D. Sorell, St. Francis of Assisi and Nature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Subsequent

9. "The prime miracle of Saint Francis is the fact that he did not end at the stake, as many of his left-wing followers did. He was so clearly heretical that a General of the Franciscan Order, Saint Bonaventura, a great and perceptive Christian, tried to suppress the early accounts of Franciscanism" and that the primitive Franciscans had a "profoundly religious, but heretical" sense of nature. White, "Historical Roots," 1206. Pope Gregory IX canonized Francis in 1228. The canonization is described beginning on page 295 of Regis Armstrong, OFM, Capuchin, Wayne Hellman, OFM, Conventual, and William Shore, OFM, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 1: *The Saint* (New York: New City Press, 1999). All texts of the writings by and about St. Francis are taken from this multivolume source.


15. The hagiographies written between 1228 and 1365 run more than 2,200 pages in Armstrong et al., *Francis of Assisi*, volumes I, II, and III.


26. Nothwehr, *Franciscan Theology of the Environment*. Nothwehr's work is particularly valuable because she assembled material from sources generally available only within Franciscan circles.


29. Francis was one of many medieval saints who had encounters with animals, but the stories of his relationships with them appear to indicate a different sensibility on his part. In contrast to the predominant use of animal stories to demonstrate a saint's power over nature, Francis is represented as loving these creatures, naming them brother and sister. See William J. Short, OFM, *Saints in the World of Nature: The Animal Story as Spiritual Parable in Medieval Hagiography* (600-1200) (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1983), William J. Short, OFM, "Hagiographic Method in Reading Franciscan Sources: Stories of Francis and Creatures in Thomas of Celano's First Life (58-61)," *Gregorian Revue* 4, no. 3 (1990): 33-50.


33. In "The Letter Admonition and Exhortation" 4-6, Armstrong et al., *Francis of Assisi*, vol. I, 46. See also Cousins, "Francis of Assisi and Bonaventure," 79.


36. Bonaventure, *Major Legend of St. Francis*, IX, 2b, Armstrong et al., *Francis of Assisi*, vol. II, 596-97. The Latin "contuitus," can be translated as "concomitant gaze or insight." Bonaventure used this word to express how human beings, on a spiritual journey from the visible to the invisible, can come to know God. See ibid., vol. II, 532, note 4.


39. Irenaeus of Lyons in particular insisted on the primacy of the Incarnate Word in God's creative plan. Ibid., 5.
40. Ibid., 8.
41. Translations of his original texts are difficult to read, but several more accessible derivative works have been recently published, and these form the basis for this section. The most important is Ingham, Status for Dances. Also Delio, Franciscan View of Creation, part IV.
43. See ch. 2 in Ingham, Status for Dances.
44. Delio, “Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ.”
45. Sorrell, St. Francis of Assisi and Nature.
47. Sorrell, St. Francis of Assisi and Nature.
48. Francis, like most vowed religious, would have prayed these regularly; their imagery would have been good material for writing a troubadour song (Francis loved them). See William J. Short, OFM, “Recovering Lost Traditions in Spirituality: Franciscan, Camaldolese, and the Hermitage,” Spiritus 3 (2003): 209–18.
49. Delio, Simply Bonaventure.
50. Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance 8–13b, Armstrong et al., Francis of Assisi, vol. I, 42.
51. Matura, Francis of Assisi.
52. Bonaventure's theology of the Trinity was also influenced by John Damascene, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Richard of St. Victor. See Hayes, Hidden Center.
53. Delio, Simply Bonaventure.
56. From Bonaventure’s Commentary on Wisdom 13.5, cited in Zachary Hayes OFM, Bonaventure: Mystical Writings (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 64.
59. Ibid., 255.
60. Ingham, Status for Dances, 105–12.