

Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



Being Brothers and
Sisters to all:
Reconciliation
with God,
Humanity
and Nature

Lesson Unit 12

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our "cloister," we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.



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Lesson Unit 12 Being Brothers and Sisters to all: Reconciliation with God, Humanity and Nature

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*A Comprehensive
Course on the
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Reconciliation
with God,
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Lesson Unit 12



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Being Brothers and Sisters to all: Reconciliation with God, Humanity and Nature

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All Creatures are Brothers and Sisters



When Francis found an abundance of flowers, he preached to them and invited them to praise the Lord, as though they were creatures endowed with reason.

In the same way he exhorted with the sincerest purity cornfields 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 with cheerful obedience.

He called all creation 'brother' and 'sister,' and in a most extraordinary manner, a manner never experienced by others, he discerned the hidden things of nature with his sensitive heart, as one who had already escaped into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (1C 81).





Universal Reconciliation

The necessity for a universal reconciliation that includes nature, is clearly seen when we think of startling facts and observations such as the following:

- Each day approximately 40,000 children die due to malnutrition. Moreover, many of them are weakened by environmental poisons.
- Millions of children live on the streets. In quite a few countries they are considered as “environmental pollutants” and are therefore “eliminated” by the police or paramilitary forces.
- Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Gali stated, the next world war could be triggered by the fight for clean, safe water.
- Many rich countries ship their toxic wastes to poor countries, which do not have adequate safety measures, thus the environment is polluted and the health of the people is at risk.
- The ozone layer which, like a skin, protects the earth from harmful radiation, is growing thinner largely because of the waste and exhaust fumes from industrial plants and from cars. In Australia, New Zealand, Chile and Argentina, people, plants and animals are already seriously affected. Examples of this are the alarming increase of skin cancer and the loss of sight among animals like hares and sheep.
- Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases contribute to the global warming of the earth’s atmosphere. The polar icecaps are melting and as a result, sea levels are rising. Low-lying lands such as Bangladesh and the Pacific islands are sinking into the sea. At the same time,



desert areas are growing. Consequently, hundreds of millions of people will be displaced from their lands and become "environmental refugees."

Many people today are convinced that the ecological crisis is also a religious crisis which is based, among others, on an incorrect understanding of the creation accounts (Gen 1:1-2:6). God telling people that they have dominion over the earth is understood as a license for unlimited exploitation. In reality, however, it is an invitation to handle it with care, as God's stewards.

The view that the ecological crisis can be dealt with only through a new understanding of religion was already formulated by the 1960's. According to L.White, this new insight is best exemplified by Francis and that is why he suggested that Francis be made Patron Saint of Ecology. In 1979, the suggestion was taken into consideration by the Pope and it became a reality.

The examples of Francis and Clare challenge us to make that harmonious family planned by God a reality. As brothers and sisters, all people and the whole of creation must be reconciled with each other and with God. The forms of enmity, and the fact that they can even exist, are appalling. Wars and violence, hatred, greed and hostility show that people are not prepared for love.

In a very special way we are urged by the life and the person of Francis of Assisi to respect all creation. Hans Mislin and Sophie Latour remarked:

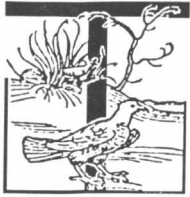
At first Francis had the humbling insight that human creatures are but a small part of a much larger whole. Thus all areas of life are meaningful and justified only in relation to a supernatural, spiritual Reign of God. The Franciscan lifestyle, which acknowledges other living creatures as partners and companions in life, leads to a genuine partnership with all creation and is therefore of special significance to us.

In this lesson unit we will try to recall some elements of the Franciscan mysticism of nature which can help us to live reconciled with the whole cosmos.



Survey

B



The Unity of Creation

In order to capture the lyricism and sincerity which fills the whole theme, we will quote the early sources in detail before attempting to interpret their message. Then we will reflect on the differences between utility, symbolic

meaning and inner sacredness of things as well as the essential unity of the whole of creation. Finally, we will look at the reference to Christ in the Franciscan mysticism of nature.

Information

C



From Early Accounts

1.

Stories told about Francis are of a poetic beauty. There are so many that, even if some of them may have been fabricated, they undoubtedly express the central theme: Francis encounters all animate and inanimate creatures in a way possible only for someone with a radically reconciled heart. It is amazing how he himself embraces the stones and flowers with his heart.

The Canticle of Brother Sun, which was written by Francis in the garden of the Sisters of San Damiano, shows that it does not deal with a few chance encounters with animals or with nature. In this work Francis poetically calls all creatures, without exception, his *brother* and *sister*: the sun, the moon and the stars, fire and earth, death and life. All things are reconciled with one another in pairs: the moon and the stars

with the sun, water with the wind, the earth with fire, death with love. All are brothers and sisters – a single family before God.

The fact that Francis embraces death as his sister, expresses something fundamental: life and death, which are usually seen as opposites, are part of the world that is reconciled in itself and with God. Hostility no longer exists. Even the wildest animal, the wolf, is his "*Brother Wolf*", although Francis naturally treated the lamb and other gentle animals with special care. He treated weak creatures like crickets, hares, sheep, birds, flowers as if they were his best friends.



*Praised be You, my Lord,
with all Your Creatures.*



No one can ignore the tenderness with which Francis encounters everything and which is manifested in everything he does.

- Whenever Francis washed his hands, he chose a place where his feet do not have to step on the water, this *“useful, humble, precious, chaste sister”* (CtC 7; LP 51).

- He walked reverently on rocks, out of his love for Jesus who was called *a rock* in the Bible (2C 165; cf. 1 Cor 10:4).

- Whenever the friars went to cut wood for the fireplace, Francis instructed them to take care of the trees and to cut only one part or else leave the stump behind so that the tree might not lose hope and send forth fresh shoots (cf. 2C 165).

- He advised the gardener not to bring the whole ground available into cultivation, but to leave a sizable area where herbs and flowers can grow wild. There were no such things as *weeds* to him; they were all wildflowers or useful plants (cf. 2C 165).

- *“He treated lights, lamps and candles with care, because he did not want to dim their brightness, which is a glimmer of the Eternal Light”* (2C 165).

- He removed worms from the road so that they would not be trampled upon, especially because they reminded him of Jesus; as the Psalmist had foretold, he would be seen as *“a worm, not a man, the scorn of men, despised by the people”* (Ps 22:7; cf. 1C 80 & 2C 165).

- Francis gave bees honey and the best wine so that they would not perish in the cold of winter (cf. 2C 165).

- He bought sheep that were being taken to slaughter in order to spare them from death (1C 79).

- *“He loved little lambs with a special predilection and more ready affection, because in the Sacred Scriptures the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ is more frequently likened to that of a lamb”* (1C 77).

A series of anecdotes have been told about how Francis related to fire. Before the doctor treated his eye disease with a red-hot iron, he said:



*Praised be You, My Lord,
especially with Sir Brother Sun.*

My Brother Fire, that surpasses all other things in beauty, the Most High created you strong, beautiful, and useful. Be kind to me in this hour, be courteous. For I have loved you in the past in the Lord and still love you now with the love with which God has created you. I beseech the Great Lord Who made you that He temper your heat now, so that I may bear it when you burn me gently. When his prayer was ended he made the sign of the Cross over the fire... (LP 48; cf. 2C 166).

Out of carelessness one time, Francis' linen leggings caught fire. To the Brother who leaped to extinguish the flame, Francis said: *“No, my dearest Brother, do not harm our Brother fire!”* On another occasion, Francis refused to help extinguish a fire which was consuming his cell.





*Praised be You,
my Lord,
through Brother Fire,
through whom you
light the night.*

Indeed, he even felt guilty for saving a fur rug from the burning cell, instead of letting the fire have it. A half-burned log or embers should not be thrown to the winds; one should gently place it on the ground out of respect for God whose creature fire is (LP 49).

Or, as Thomas of Celano said in his summary:

Finally, he called all creatures 'brother' and 'sister', and in a most extraordinary manner, a manner never experienced by others, he discerned the hidden things of nature with his sensitive heart, as one who had already escaped into the freedom of the glory of the children of God (1C 81).

Clare also sees in all creation an image of the Creator, a reference to the Redeemer and an invitation to praise God. When she sent the serving sisters outside the cloister, she reminded them "to praise God when they saw beautiful trees, flowers and bushes" (Proc 14,9).



Clare reminded her Sisters: "Always to praise God for and in all things when they saw all peoples and creatures".



Attempt at an Interpretation

If these accounts and reports are to be something more to us than amazing legends and anecdotes, then they need an interpretation.

The Usefulness, Symbolic Meaning and Inner Sacredness of all Created Things

Before we delve into these three values that characterize all created things, we should note that modern rational thinking will not fully understand the behaviour of these two Saints. It is equally impossible to use such behaviour as a norm for

daily life, because such an attempt would prove futile and there would be nothing left to do but go back disillusioned to life's normal routine.

In order to understand what Francis did, one must have something of the child within: a child



talks to water and to a stone as if talking to a person. Or one ought to be a poet: for poets see the whole world "in a grain of sand."

We can speak about creation having a threefold value dimension:

- **Utilitarian value:** The tragedy of western history lies in its reduction of the earth's resources to the level of their usefulness. We are fortunate that we can make use of water and the other things of this world for our benefit. We have a whole range of basic needs which can be fulfilled only by nature. There is basically nothing objectionable to this. Danger sets in, however, when people seek to exert absolute control over things, always creating new needs and, in order to satisfy them, manipulating the whole world, thereby ignoring the intrinsic value of creation.

- **Intrinsic value:** Francis resisted the attempt to regard all of nature as an object, specifically because everything that exists is a creature in its own right: Trees that were cut down should be allowed to grow again. Wild herbs should be allowed to grow in the garden; they have their justification and an intrinsic symbolic value. As creatures, they are our brothers and sisters.



*Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene.*



*Praised be You,
my Lord, through
Sister Water.*

- **Symbolic value:** Everything that exists points beyond itself. For Francis, everything that exists has meaning. In itself it contains the essence of the all-encompassing whole. What Francis states expressly about the sun, namely that it "bears a likeness of You, Most High One," can basically be said of every object and of the whole of creation. Everything refers back to God, the Creator. They are a sacramental expression of the eternal Word.

Everything that has been said about Francis' attitude towards nature is many times more applicable to his love for people.



Nature provided Francis with a fundamental experience which never left him. The world forms a whole, a unity, a magnificent system that is not arranged hierarchically, but is determined by coexistence. The common factor that makes all beings a creation of God, was more important to him than making distinctions between human, animal, plant and inanimate matter. The early accounts tell how Francis called all things *brother* and *sister*; how he spoke to the fire and how he begged for its favour; how he urged the flowers, vineyards and all creatures to praise God and to listen to Him; speaking to them as if they were humans who could understand. The same thing is true conversely. The sun made Francis' eyes see clearly; the birds listened to him, crickets kept him company; the lark announced the time for prayer; the lamb reminded him to go to Mass; the flowers consoled him; all creatures called to him: "God has made me for your sake, dear man! or He who made us is the best."

Francis' companions summarized it as follows:

It is not surprising that the fire and other creatures respected him. We, who lived with him, were witnesses of his affection and respect for them and of the pleasure they gave him. He had so much love and sympathy for them that he was disturbed when they were treated without respect. He spoke to them with a great interior and exterior joy, as if they had been endowed by God with feeling, intelligence and speech. Very often it was for him the occasion to become enraptured in God (LP 49).



Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us.

There is, therefore, a relationship between human beings and nature. For Francis, everything that exists and the common factor in all existing things must be seen and understood at the human level, not at a subhuman level or in a *dionysian* level where a person loses his or her identity in the intoxicating feelings of *oneness* with nature.

Reference to Christ

2.3.

The religious roots of modern ecological consciousness can be traced back to the 13th Century. As a matter of fact, the "Canticle of Brother Sun" already included an ecological dimension. A source narrating the composition of the Canticle is proof of this: "We need nature every day

and cannot manage without it. And yet it is through nature that we offend our Creator over and over again" (LP 43).

It is doubtful whether Francis would have discovered this relationship with nature, if he had not first found Christ and made a firm decision



for Him. There is even a point in which he specifically links every experience of God to Jesus Christ (Adm 1). His biographer also suggests such an interpretation when mentioning the exceptional circumstances that led to the writing of the "Canticle of Brother Sun": Francis underwent experiences of extreme frailty and infirmity, of resignation and the dark night, an experience that is almost characteristic of our own age. The second experience Francis had was that of the love and mercy of God which gave him renewed strength and reassurance.

Only after this second experience was he able to compose his extraordinary poem on creation, the "Canticle of Brother Sun." Only when they have experienced the love of God and the closeness of Jesus, can creatures become brothers and sisters to each other. This can be expressed in words which Francis himself used:

Kissing your feet and with all that love of which I am capable, I implore all of you brothers to show all possible reverence and honour to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom that which is in the heavens and on the earth is brought to peace and is reconciled to the all-powerful God (LtOrd 12f.).

In the Eucharist, the bread and wine, the gifts of creation, become a place where

God meets us through Jesus Christ. The sacred signs (sacraments) pertain not only to the relationship between God and the human soul. As the Jesuit, natural scientist and philosopher Teilhard de Chardin says, in a truly Franciscan spirit, they have a cosmic dimension. In the Eucharistic celebration all is *consecrated*. As in the Eucharist, the brothers and sisters should also open themselves to the God who reconciles in

the sacrament of penance. Francis often exhorts them to confess their sins immediately. He is confident that God gives the repentant sinner an abundance of mercy.

The Christological roots of Franciscan environmental consciousness are clearly seen in the problem areas where ecological measures had to be undertaken as far back as the 13th Century. At that time there was, of course, no extensive pollution of nature, although there was already a reckless exploitation of nature through deforestation (by the mining and shipping industries, etc). The anecdote about his wanting to leave part of the tree to grow again, as told above, probably has direct reference to the massive operation on the stock of trees on Mount Subasio.



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

On another level, there was, of course, a widespread pollution of language and symbols. Words, sentences, whole texts could degenerate into rubbish. Francis did not want to erase one single word once it had been written. He treated each and every word with the respect due to its mysterious origin. Neither did he allow books and texts to be left lying around; he picked them up and brought them reverently to a place fit-



ting to the dignity of their mystery. For Francis believed that even the most banal words contain the letters from which the name Jesus Christ, the Word of God, could be written.

There was also a disregard of symbols: the churches, altars, altar cloths and hosts. Francis went around with a broom to clean the churches; he would use the griddle for making the hosts for Communion and gather the hosts in a ciborium.

Clare joined him in this effort and during her illness she embroidered corporals for neighbouring churches.

Francis called for a proper relationship between the symbol and the person symbolized, namely Jesus Christ. He was convinced that in this world there is nothing else that the invisible God gave us except Jesus Christ, His Word and His Symbol. From this central point, Francis saw creation with new eyes and in a new light. From his understanding of Christ he would have fought against any form of destruction and pollution of the environment.

Francis was convinced that in this life we can reach the invisible God through a mediator, Jesus Christ. His experience of deep respect and joy over the divine presence in every individual creature can be attributed directly to his understanding of Christ.

The knowledge of Christ, the firstborn of all creation, and belief in the mysterious presence of Christ within every individual creature, are fundamental in the life of a Franciscan. Anyone who is aware of this mystery and recognizes Christ's presence above and beyond the



Praised be You, my Lord, through those who bear infirmity and tribulation.

intrinsic value of every person and thing, cannot inflict harm on any creature. Our age needs such thinking and behaviour and is looking to the Franciscan Family to set the example anew.

A requirement for concrete action is our mental attitude. What is needed first is the readiness to open our eyes, ears and hearts to the value and the beauty of all created things. For we are only able to love the one we acknowledge. Whoever is inspired by St. Francis knows that they are called, together with all people of good will, to take an active part in the preservation of creation.

A requirement for acting on ecological concerns is to know where we human beings stand in relation to the whole of creation. We are not above creation, but *in* creation. Humility is the appropriate attitude for us. The Latin word for humility, *humilitas*, is very meaningful: we are related to the *humus* of the earth; according to the story of creation, the human being is created from it.

As well as our Franciscan spirituality, the Indian, African and Asian religions also emphasise the relational harmony of all creatures.



Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love.



A fundamental attitude on ecological concerns is solidarity. It refers to the coming generations (sustainability), commonly expressed in the statement: *"We did not inherit our earth from our parents, but borrowed it from our children."* In the Franciscan spirit, we must "give it back" to God, so that he can also make it available for future generations to live in. Whoever practices such an attitude, always finds ways – small, but effective steps – to preserve creation. Some areas can be outlined here where behaviour towards creation can be implemented.

is open to make an effective mark. The *life-friendly* spirit of St. Francis can therefore be effective in solving one of the most important tasks of humanity today.

- Whoever tries hard to have a less extravagant lifestyle, deals economically with the resources of the earth. It is about acquiring not more than what is necessary. One's individual lifestyle is a good beginning. The next step leads to like-minded people who are also concerned about the future of planet Earth. Ecological groups should see the members of the Franciscan family as reliable allies. For philosophical or religious reasons, people can together bear a prophetic witness to the urgency of ecological change.

- Whoever is responsible for the society, politics and economy, has additional opportunities to care for *Mother Earth*. Especially for the members of the secular Third Order, the chance



*Praised be You, my Lord,
through Sister Water, who is very
useful, humble, precious and chaste.*

Church and Franciscan Sources

Scripture	Gen 1:1-2:6; Ps 22:7
Documents of the Church	
Franciscan Sources	CtC 7; LtOrd 12f.; Adm 1; 1C 77; 79; 81; 2C 165; LP 83; 86; 88; Proc 14:9.
Inter-Franciscan documents	Gubbio Doc. 'Terra Mater', 1982.
	Franciscans International: Declaration at UNCED/ECO, Brazil, 1992
OFM – OFMCap – OFMConv	
Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Secular Franciscan Order	

Note: please add your own sources.



Exercise



Exercise

Read the following excerpt from the Apostolic Letter of November 29, 1979, in which Pope John Paul II names St. Francis as Patron Saint of Environmental Protection:

For eternal commemoration:

St. Francis is justifiably ranked among those famous saints who have respected nature as a marvelous gift of God to mankind. He knew how to honour each one of the works of the Creator. Moved by the Divine Spirit, he also sang the magnificent "Canticle of Brother Sun", in which he first and foremost gives praise, glory, honour and thanksgiving to the Supreme, Almighty and Good God for Brother Sun, Sister Moon and the Stars of Heaven. On the occasion of a consultation, our Reverend Brother

Cardinal Oddo, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, has requested in the name of the members of the International Union of the Planning Environmental and Ecological Institute for the Quality of Life, that St. Francis be designated as the Patron Saint of Environmental Protection.

Questions

1. What motivated the Pope to name Francis the Patron of Environmental Protection?
2. How are ecology and sacraments related to each other?



Exercise

Read the following text:

Extract of the Declaration of the Franciscans in the UN on the occasion of the Conference of the United Nations on Ecology and Development (UNCED / ECO) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992.

Diverse alternatives for development have arisen. The proposals in this sense were gathered in the term "sustainable development." These two words contain diverse concepts and emphasis. From a Franciscan perspective, this alternative development must point

to quality of life for the people and not only economic growth; toward recognizing the need to attend to future generations and the need to reconstruct cultures as a part of the growing ethic with all life. For the Franciscan family, this means to assume the project of life, without imposing a dominating style and recuperating the art of shared living. The ecological crisis was caused by a rationality that is outdated today, and this is evident from its own weakness.



Utopias and positive developments

Facing the conception that there only exists one type of positive development in Latin America, there are diverse utopic practices springing up. Consequently, alternative styles of development can be generated, based on utopic dreams.

These utopic experiences are being generated by ethical commitment in the defence of all life. Part of this utopia is to look forward to a socio-ecological democracy in which the natural environment is maintained, not only to sustain contemporary society, but also to give attention to the other life forms, the plants and animals, who have a right to pursue their own life projects. Life in itself is a value and as such should be respected and promoted. These utopian projects, in the Franciscan perspective, are realized outside the logic of domination, and are recognized as part of life, in communion with life. Human beings thus become relational beings.

New Spirituality

This ecological perspective allows us to develop a new spirituality anchored in the Franciscan charism. All creatures are related to each other in universal brotherhood. Human beings recognize themselves as part of a cosmic unity encompassing the whole of creation. Only the human person is capable of consciously welcoming the fact that other creatures are different and that we need to live with them in a responsible way otherwise there is the danger that they can dominate them or even destroy them. We recognize the earth as Mother because it generates and sustains life; we also call her Sister because, together with her, we experience and celebrate our relationship with the Creator.

From this Franciscan cosmic vision, we invite all people to renounce consumerism: the accumulation of goods, the plunder and utilitarian abuse of nature. In the same way, we invite you to a simple lifestyle, with fraternal relations, solidarity and reverence for all forms of life. We want to place ourselves in defence of the most threatened creatures.

New culture

A new culture is needed that appreciates anew the feminine, and the masculine; the symbolic, the affective, the caring, so as to overcome machoism, cold rationality and all the forms of domination. There is a need to create a world of fraternal presence, where we rediscover the message of life. There is urgent need to substitute a culture of death with a culture of life. The creation of this new culture leads to an inculturation in diversity, in which we assume the projects of others, not only of human beings, but also the projects of plants, animals, rocks and water.

This will generate a new practice in the light of ecology and the option for the poor. So, as a consequence, it is necessary to renew pastoral practice, where we look for true socio-ecological subjects and where we don't reproduce structures of domination. New politics must also be born, where community organizations are examples of the process of change and solidarity, and that permit one to be inserted in the world of the poor, of the marginalized and of nature.

And so, the Franciscan family should convert itself into an instrument of change, which from its own utopia, makes the generation of this new culture possible: as the sacrament of the God of Life at the service of all life.

Signed by:

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CIPFE Montevideo, Uruguay
SINFRAJUPE, Serviço Interfranciscano de
Justiça, Paz e Ecologia, Petropolis, RJ, Brazil.

Questions and tasks

1. From the Franciscan perspective, what are the criteria for "sustainable development?"
2. Write down the key words from this text that refer to "sustainable development".





Exercise

Read the following text:

From the Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands from the year 1988: "Creating an Environment for Tomorrow:"

The Earth, with its resources, belongs to everybody. Individual or group appropriation of a part of this legacy is lawful only when it is restricted to the proportions adequate for the needs of the individual or the group, or if it is directed in a more realistic and effective way towards its fundamental universal destiny.

Science and technology are both the product and heritage of humanity. Individual contributions, outstanding though they may be, are only an integrating part of the science and technology of humanity and are forever indebted to what has been previously or simultaneously achieved by others. This social debt has to be paid by respecting and making effective the social role of science, technology and all kinds of human work. Human beings are only beneficiaries, administrators, improvers and stewards of this com-

mon patrimony which is the earth and its resources, and they must perform these roles with unselfishness and intelligence.

Following their fundamental pastoral letter, the Bishops of Papua New Guinea posed concrete questions and tasks:

1. How far are we ourselves accomplices when in development projects a short-term and short-sighted profit is at stake?
2. To what extent do we exercise influence on politicians in order to bring about necessary changes of the laws which would guarantee a healthy environment for us and for the coming generation?

Question

What possibilities for action do you see, personally and politically, in your vicinity?



Exercise

Read the Gubbio Document of the international seminar "Terra Mater" in 1982:

On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis of Assisi, the international seminar "Terra Mater" (Mother Earth) was held in Gubbio, a city known for Franciscan reconciliation and peace.

At the end of their deliberations, the participants concluded that they should make the world aware that the future of mankind and of our only home, the planet Earth, is in peril and that, despite warnings issued ten years ago by the United Nations meeting in Stockholm, the environmental situation continues to deteriorate.



Fully aware that humanity is suffering from the malaise caused by its impaired relationship with the environment and by worsening social bonds, the participants urgently call to the attention of everyone, that it is necessary to overcome resignation and fatalism, and to react by planning an alternative future which would be feasible and desirable.

They declare that it is urgent to change humanity's present orientation of dominion and exploitation, especially as practised by humanity's industrialized minority. This orientation, which has characterized up to now people's relationship with nature and with each other, must be substituted by an attitude of sharing, protection, respect and brotherhood among all creatures.

With all of its incisive force, the fundamental example of Francis of Assisi is valid even today. Aware of the environmental implications and of the need of human beings to be in harmonious and conscious relationship with nature, Francis created, after having first experienced it in his own community, an alternative system of universal brotherhood, in which humans, animals, plants and minerals were considered brothers and sisters.

To accept the Franciscan message, which calls for a sparing use of earthly goods, it is necessary:

- to abandon the idea of progress as something measureable in quantitative terms of possessions and in the accumulation of material things;
- to advance the goal of promoting the quality of life;
- to promote respect for nature and the self-worth of persons, communities and cultures;
- to acquire the firm conviction that an alternative project can be realized through the involvement of all people, especially the youth;
- to recognize the need to redefine, contain and counterbalance productive and industrial activities by renouncing technologies which are destructive to nature and harmful to human health and to society;

- to create lifestyles with low consumption of energy and resources through a corresponding change in technology, as well as by creating a balance of activities and settlements in a specific region;

- to call attention to the problem of world hunger, which is a clear sign of the environmental crisis, and to the unequal distribution of resources due to distorted market mechanisms;

- to develop, according to these principles, education, scientific research and technology;

- to guarantee that technology, one of the specific forms of expression of human beings and their creativity, is not harmful as such. Technology will therefore satisfy human needs only if used in a way which respects human dignity and the natural processes of planet earth;

- to apply ethical principles even in the relationships between human beings and with all other living creatures, and to recognize the urgent need to protect plant and animal life against extinction, from excessive inbreeding, irresponsible, wasteful use (i.e. hunting, maltreatment and useless destruction);

- to call attention to three problems which specially threaten the human population at present: population growth, unequal distribution of resources, and aging;

- to reject any form of physical violence against nature and against human beings;

- to acknowledge that the preservation of the natural and human environment represents the essential requirement for just development;

- to discover, in history and in the various cultures of humanity, experiences which make it possible to plan an alternative future and to create a system of an interdependent community;

- to check, in the light of the statements above, how interest in cultural traditions (architectural, artistic, historical and traditional heritage) and their appreciation can be revived as primary sources of enriching the quality of life in every country;



• to reject anew all alienated and alienating aspects of human life, from political monotony to unchanged consumer attitudes, in order to foster the selfworth of every human being through the various social and political organizations which aim for the maximum possible development, diversification and determination of activities, tasks and individual contributions to the life of society.

More specifically, the members of the "Terra Mater" seminar demanded the following:

1. That all possible means be used to develop human abilities in all institutions, in society in general and in behavioural patterns through innovative forms of education which are based on anticipation, that is, responsible attentiveness to our future, and on the participation of all citizens in the choices to be made for that future;
2. That those who are responsible for cultural interests and those who work in mass media communicate correctly and decisively all information concerning the environmental crisis and its causes;
3. That those who are responsible for public instruction establish in all countries and at every grade level and orientation, school programmes which will offer ample education concerning the environment and the crisis in the relationship between man and resources, so as to produce the clearest possible awareness of these matters;
4. That leaders of every religion and churches of every denomination bring to the attention of their members the sacred quality of nature and the moral right and duty to respect both the natural and human environment. With this in mind, that they encourage the education of their respective ministers in the religious value of such principles; in particular, it is desirable that the World Council of Churches and the Holy See institute with that purpose in mind, appropriate organizational bodies for ecology; and that bishops, pastors, and local churches constantly make the faith-

ful aware of their responsibility to be active participants in the development of a different quality of life and in the protection of nature and the environment;

5. That members of world parliaments and individual governments cooperate to heal the wounds already inflicted on the planet assigning every possible priority in the areas of public investments and work projects to programmes of soil protection, water regulation, re-afforestation, cultivation of desert or damaged lands, recovery and depollution, and the reclamation of natural environments and of their relative ecological balance;
6. That non-governmental organizations draw up definite and more effective programmes concerning problems of human survival in order to influence political and economic decisions on environmental concerns.

Finally the participants of the "Terra Mater" seminar urged the governments of the world to work for peace, disarmament, mutual solidarity in international relations, renunciation of every form of nationalism which is contrary to these objectives, and to search for a solution to the imbalances existing between the North and the South of the planet. The realization of these objectives must be pursued concretely through a reduction in military expenditure. The quality of life of all society and of the environment is therefore entrusted to human responsibility. This responsibility should be translated by every man, woman and community into immediate and concrete action, motivated not by visions of a catastrophe but by hope in the future.

Tasks

Summarize the following:

1. How do we use the earth's resources in a responsible way, and not waste them?
2. What actions should guide us in the future?





Application

Rediscovering our relationship with nature

What if we rediscovered our relationship with nature,

- *by not letting ourselves be completely absorbed by our work and duties but by making daily contact with nature in order to win back our naturalness;*
- *by expressing our zest for life and being "in our element" when we are dealing with air and water, with fire and earth;*
- *by making children aware of the beauty of nature, even in small things, and of life impulses or emotions, and share the 'wonder' of the children;*
- *by directly and consciously experiencing the rhythm of the seasons: warmth and cold, sun and rain, the falling of leaves and the bearing of fruits, and to venture to go out in "all kinds of weather;"*
- *by not filling our homes with excessive luxury, but remaining rooted in nature with a simple home and lifestyle;*
- *by not wanting to eat everything in every season, but limiting ourselves to products that are in season;*
- *by counteracting the "cerebral approach" of our society, balancing mental work with physical exercise and manual work;*

What if we tried treating all creatures in a brotherly-sisterly manner,

- *by treating every one with gentleness in speech and in behaviour and also by considering even our "enemies" as our brothers or sisters;*

- *by regarding nature not only in terms of its usefulness, but treasuring it for its value;*

- *by seeking a relationship with the tree, the mountain, the water and all the creatures, learning from human relationships;*

- *by feeling the pain of our fellow human beings and of the suffering creatures, as if it were our own;*

- *by being considerate and careful in treating the air that we breathe, the water that we drink, the fire that gives us warmth, and the soil that provides fruits;*

- *by delighting in the flowers growing in the meadow and not destroying them;*

- *by choosing one or two of the various trees and shrubs and "adopting" them;*

What if we felt and developed the spirit of sharing,

- *by sharing our cars, houses, gardens, and all the things that we possess with others;*
- *by opening doors, sharing our food and by developing genuine hospitality;*
- *by renouncing things for ourselves in order to save nature, and to share creation with all the world's people;*
- *by encouraging owners of seashores and real estate to make their property accessible to the public;*
- *by regularly acquiring information on the interrelatedness of scientific advances and the environmental crisis; of currency dependence and hunger; of industrialization and poverty; and from this knowledge, developing a lifestyle of solidarity;*



What if we exercised the spirit of freedom,

- *by setting aside all the hidden aggressions and the manifold violence in our words and actions and expressing them in physical activities in nature;*
- *by being steadfast and patient in times of conflict and giving time to ourselves and our partner;*
- *by not letting anything force us in life when dealing with ourselves, with other people, with animals and with other creatures.*

(From: A. Rotzetter, OFM Cap, *Franz von Assisi, Erinnerung und Leidenschaft*).

Tasks and questions

1. Cite two points which you can fulfill as an *individual*. Where do you start?
2. Cite two or three points that you can fulfill in your *community* (in your group, parish, organization). Where will you start?



Application

Meditation on a Broken World

Text from the Philippines

Narrator:

The earth was beautiful until the spirit of man blew over her and destroyed everything. And mankind said: Let there be darkness... and there was darkness.

And mankind loved the darkness and so it named the darkness security.

And it divided itself into races, religions, genders, and social classes.

First Group

And there was no evening and no morning on the seventh day before the end. And mankind said: Let there be a powerful government here that would control us in our darkness.

Let there be armies to control our bodies so that, in our darkness, we can learn to kill each other orderly and effectively.

Second Group

And there was no evening and no morning on the sixth day before the end. And mankind said:

Let there be rockets and bombs here, so that it is easier and faster to kill.

Let there be a more thorough militarization and security.

Third Group

And there was no evening and no morning on the fifth day before the end.

And mankind said: Let there be right wing and left wing members of religious Orders here, a pleasant way of life for them, and other means of escape, because there is a constant nuisance – the REALITY of the poor and the oppressed who disturb our comfort.

Fourth Group

And there was no morning and no evening on the fourth day before the end.

And mankind said: Let there be conflict between the nations, so that we will know who is our potential common enemy.

First Group

And there was no morning and no evening on the third day before the end.



And mankind finally said: Let us create God according to our likeness. Let us say that God thinks as we do, hates as we do, and kills as we do.

Second Group

And there was no morning and no evening on the second day before the end.

Third Group

On Judgement Day there was a loud noise on the face of the earth.

Fire ravaged the magnificent globe and there was...silence. The soot-covered earth rested at last in order to adore the true God.

All

And God saw everything that mankind had done. And in the stillness above the smoldering ruins, God wept.

Destructive and lethal means are just too many! And yet, everything is not lost. There are life-giving means – struggles for liberation, spiritual attitudes that keep our people in Asia alive.

Question

Compare this narrative with the biblical story of creation.

What impression does this narrative from the Philippines make on you?



Application

Here are some stanzas of the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, composed by Sisters and Brothers in Kenya and Namibia:

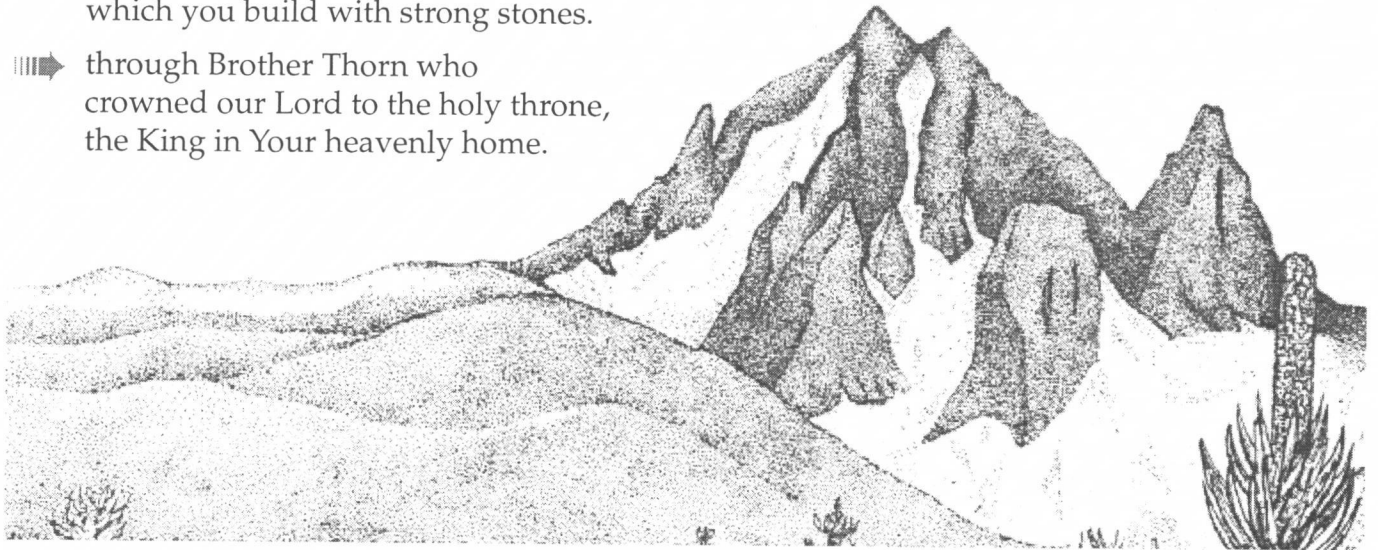
Praised be You, my Lord, ...

- ▶ through Sister Mount Kenya, our highest snow-capped Mountain peak: so majestic, pristine and serene with amazing gigantic green woods, showing Your grandeur, peace and every good.
- ▶ through Sister Hills of the Kerio Valley: Their natural splendour is most inspiring reflecting Your awesome beauty.
- ▶ through our Sisters the Birds, who wake us up early in the morning singing their sweet melody in praise of Your name.
- ▶ through our Sister Sea Coast of Kenya. She brings us rest and delight to our senses and lifts our hearts to You.
- ▶ through our Sisters Lake Bogoria and Victoria, by their gentle waves they remind us of Your living waters flowing in our hearts.
- ▶ through our Brothers the Jacaranda trees that cast their petals to carpet the ground in delicate delight for our senses to feast upon in wonder and joy.



- ▶ through the famous flower of Namibia, our Sister Welwitschia, which is rooted in the depth of our Mother Earth.
- ▶ through Brother Wood which is very important and useful especially for our people in the north of Namibia, who collect it for firewood and building material.
- ▶ through our Brother Mountains which you build with strong stones.
- ▶ through Brother Thorn who crowned our Lord to the holy throne, the King in Your heavenly home.

- ▶ through the blossom of Sister Passion Fruit which reminds us of the five wounds of our crucified Lord.
- ▶ through Sister Intelligence and Brother Knowledge, through them researches, discoveries and inventions are done. Blessed are they for through them You reveal to us Your Omnipotence.



- ▶ through Sister Voice, that has great power to open our spirits that sings for joy and shouts to the *Rock* of our Salvation.

- ▶ through Brother Suffering so painful and cruel, through whom You test and purify us more than gold. Blessed are those who unite their suffering with Christ.

PRAISE BE YOU, MY LORD,
 FOR OUR SISTERS
 TEA and COFFEE PLANTS,
 WHICH GIVE US LEAVES and GRAINS
 WHICH WE USE IN DRINKS
 SO SWEET
 AND REFRESHING...

SR. ANNA MAR: P, CSSP



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Picture Credits

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|---------------------|--|--------------|---|
| Cover | St. Francis. Statue, St. Francis Basilica, Assisi, F. Luigi Sapia OFMConv, 1925. | p. 12 | Canticle of the Sun. Woodcut by O. Frick and W. Frick – Kirchhoff, 1960. |
| p. 3 | Drawing on a Siberian Drum. From the journal: 'Im Gespraech' 3/1992. | p. 13 | Detail of the Cross in St. Chiara, Assisi, 13th Century. |
| p. 5 | Canticle of Brother Sun. Moasic, Sr. M. Ludgera, Reute. | p. 14 | Top: Clare on her sickbed. Lino-cut by Sr. Clara Winkler OSF. |
| p. 6 & 7 | Down to Earth. New Delhi, India, 1992. From: EPD 21/95. Detail. | | Bottom: Justice and peace, symbolised in the fruits of a shared farming. |
| p. 8 | Francis of Assisi. Woodcut by Georg Schrimpf, 1918. | | Church in the Centro Popular of St. Francisco in Floriano, Brazil. |
| p. 9 | Canticle of Brother Sun. Woodcut by O. Frick and W. Frick – Kirchhoff, 1960. | p. 15 | 'All in the River.' Lino-cut by Mariza, Fortaleza, Brazil. |
| p. 10 | Illustration by Robert Wyss. | p. 26 | From: Reports, Documents, Comments 46, "Our Mother Earth," MZF, Bonn. |
| p. 11 | Top: Illustration by Robert Wyss. | | Design from "Praise the Lord", a Namibian Catholic hymn book. |
| | Bottom: Illustration from the journal "Im Gespraech", 3/92. | p. 27 | |



For Reflection



RANCIS' CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory,
and the honour, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High,
do they belong,
and no one is worthy
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 splendour;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

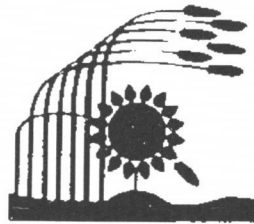
Praised be You, my Lord,
through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.

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

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



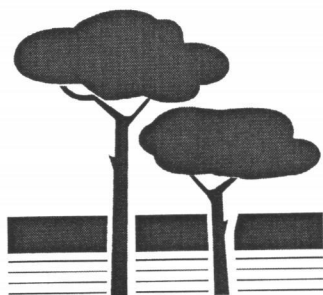
Praised be You, my Lord,
through Brother Fire,
through whom
You light the night
and he is beautiful
and playful
and robust, and strong.



Praised be You, my Lord,
through our
Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains
and governs us,
and who produces
various fruit
with coloured flowers and herbs.



Praised by You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon
for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those
who endure in peace
for by You, Most High,
shall they be crowned.



Praised be You,
my Lord,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living 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.

