

JPIC Reflections



This brochure is one of a series on various themes in justice, peace and the integrity of Creation.

You may read them on our website: www.sbfranciscans.org.

You are invited to download them as well from this website and to use them as a way to quickly bring a Franciscan perspective to your discussion group, prayer group or social justice dialogue. We only ask that you would credit the authors of these brochures as you use this material.

Cesar Chavez: A Commitment to Non-violent Social Change by Mark Schroeder, OFM

Cesar Chavez: Catholic Social Teaching in the Fields by Carolyn Colburn, SFO

St Francis, the Sultan and the Quest for Peace by Jack Wintz, OFM

Walking the Talk by Larry Dunphy, OFM

Peace . . . A Call From Assisi by Pope Benedict XVI

Bl. John XXIII: Pope, Breach Mender, Secular Franciscan by Ray Hardwick, SFO

A Franciscan View of Creation by Franklin Fong, OFM

*“everything
is a sacrament
of the goodness
and
creative power of God”*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

How did and do you show respect for the environment?
What caused you to change this in the past several years? More information? Awareness of relationships? Having a companion to help you? Or?
How can you help yourself to deepen the ways you show respect for the environment?

ACTION:

Make a commitment to change some behavior for the next 30 days. After this time, stop the change for another 30 days. Reflect on how you felt before and after each of two 30-day periods. Which do you choose for the rest of the year?

PRAYER:

Loving God, of peace and justice, be with us as we work and pray towards changing the hearts of all who use violence as a way of showing our love and concern for our siblings, Water, Air, Plants and Animals, in the created world.

Justice, Peace & the
Integrity of Creation

St Francis and Eco-spirituality (Part 1)

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PROVINCE OF
SANTA BARBARA



Eco-spirituality and Lenten Practice by Loren Kerkof, OFM

The world has become aware of an environmental crisis developing. The Church has responded to this sense of crisis by dusting off a long social teaching tradition that comes from Scripture and the theological insights of centuries. We are applying our principles of justice, solidarity, common good, option for the poor, and the goodness of creation to environmental realities. And we are articulating new insights into our understanding of spirituality to respond to new insights into ecological realities. We are seeing the development of eco-spirituality.

Three elements of eco-spirituality.

We can respond to ecological realities in 3 ways.

1. Out of our need to deepen our relationship with God.
2. Out of a sense of moral responsibility.
3. Out of a call to promote God's Kingdom of justice.

Eco-spirituality is a response to our need to deepen our relationship with God.

Experiencing God is what spirituality is all about. The heart of eco-spirituality has to do with getting to know and experience God in the world around us. Eco-spirituality realizes that the earth is a reflection of the divine; it sees the universe as a sacrament of God, an incarnation of God. Contemplating the beauty and presence of God in all things can lead us to metanoia, a conversion that moves us to respond to the crisis faced by our planet, our home, God's creation.

St. Francis is the patron of ecology.

As his life became immersed in Christ, Francis found himself immersed in creation. Behind all the stories of Francis, like preaching to the birds and the wolf of Gubbio, lies the basic insight that all creatures are united in the depth of their being *by the fact of being creatures*. True poverty is the realization that there is no intrinsic reason for one's being at all. Like the universe itself we are fundamentally poor: we did not make ourselves.

In this fundamental poverty of 'creature' - liness there is equality. So Francis saw all animate and inanimate creatures as his brothers and sisters because it was simply true. The only reason for anything to exist is the free agape of God. The universe exists because God loves it and wills to give God's self to it. God's overflowing agape is the source of all being and thus everything is a sacrament of the goodness and creative power of God. As Beatrice Bruteau puts it, "The cosmos is an externalized and manifested expression of the indescribable reality that is God."

Remember, a sacrament is not a stand-in for something else, a visible sign for some other unrelated invisible reality. The essence of a sacrament is the capacity to reveal grace, to reveal the self-gift of God, by *being what it is*. By being thoroughly itself, a sacrament incarnates, bodies forth, the self-giving love of God that undergirds it as well as the entirety of creation.

The deepest foundation for reverencing creation is the understanding that every creature, including oneself, is a sacrament of the love of God that causes all things to be. The ability to recognize the other as a creature, as something that exists because of God's love, cannot exist where the other is regarded as an "it". By its nature a sacrament needs to be appreciated for what it is, and not as a tool to an end. In the philosopher Martin Buber's terms, a sacrament is always "thou". Francis saw and addressed every creature as a "thou", *a companion*.

The experience of St. Francis and his mystical intuition into the presence of God in all of creation was elaborated upon by St. Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus and developed into a theology of the Sacramentality of Creation. The world is inhabited by the Sacred. All created things are a sign and a revelation of the Creator who leaves an imprint everywhere. To purposely destroy any aspect of creation is to deface the image of Christ present in all of creation. Christ suffers not only when *people* are denied their rights and exploited, but also when seas, rivers and forests are desecrated.

When we perceive creation as sacramental, as manifesting and leading us to God, we challenge ourselves to move our relationship with other creatures from one of *dominance and power* to one of *reverence and respect*.