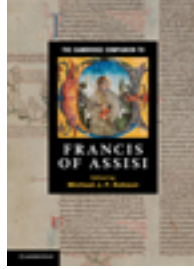


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9 Francis and creation

TIMOTHY J. JOHNSON

What have they done to the earth?
What have they done to our fair sister?
Ravaged and plundered and ripped her and bit her
Stuck her with knives in the side of the dawn
And tied her with fences
And dragged her down.¹

Long before contemporary musicians, scientists, theologians and politicians lamented the toxic denigration of the environment, Francis of Assisi displayed a profound empathy for the created world. Not surprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church confirmed the unique rapport of Francis with creation by singling him out as the patron saint of ecology. While the popular image of Francis in nature is often that of a painfully pious, ornamental statue on a bird bath, an examination of his writings and biographies reveals him as the embodiment of Paul's most fervent hope for creation. He writes that all creation groans for the redemption of the children of God, for the material world has been unwillingly subjected to frustration, bondage and decay in the company of humanity. Nature will be set free only if and when humanity is freed in the flesh through the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 8: 18–27). This chapter first and foremost considers Francis as a harbinger of this eschatological hope, a man whose evangelical conversion draws him into a compassionate, liberating relationship with animate and inanimate creatures alike. Indeed, Francis goes well beyond the Pauline understanding of creation as companion to propose a gendered model of familial equality and freedom in which men and women are joined in prayerful ministry by other creatures, who are all brothers and sisters under one Father in heaven. Following on Francis, we shall then examine the insights of later Franciscans into the nature and significance of creation, especially animals, in salvation history. The writings of Thomas of Celano, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, Roger

Bacon, Duns Scotus and Angela of Foligno provide a compelling witness to the variegated Franciscan appreciation of creation.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI: CANTICLES OF CREATION AND DIVINE GOODNESS

Francis was neither by talent nor training a systematic theologian. A close reading of the *Canticle of the Creatures* is perhaps the most common, and certainly the most celebrated, entry point into his perspective on creation. Nevertheless, it is arguably his stance towards the Eucharist that illuminates his fundamental appreciation of material reality and grounds his familial praise of the elements. Francis states:

I implore all my 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 heaven and earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to Almighty God.²

The simple rudiments of daily life, bread and wine, mediate the presence of him who is the hope of all creation. Indeed, the consecrated elements offer the only visible, corporal encounter possible in this world with the Redeemer.³ To appreciate the presence of the Son of God in the sacramental bread and wine on the altar is to accept the humility of the Lord who deigned to dwell among the faithful in a corporal manner.⁴ This affirmation flies in the face of those who would deny the goodness of creation and the willingness of the divine to enter into the materiality of the world. At this time the religious movement known as the Cathars explicitly denounced the redemptive potential of creation and sought to separate themselves, physically and spiritually, from what they perceived to be the corrupt influences of materiality. For the Cathars, matter only mattered inasmuch as it was an obstacle to, if not an outright betrayal of, the divine goodness found in spiritual realms when the imprisonment of the flesh was transcended. Francis, for his part, resolutely proclaims that God's original declaration regarding the goodness of creation found in Genesis 1: 31 has not been totally erased by the tragedy of sin.

What is perhaps most striking about the approach Francis takes towards the Eucharist is the link he identifies between the practice of reverential humility and the ability to discern the redeeming presence of God in the world. Just as the Lord descends from on high to dwell in lowly bread and wine, so too should the faithful humble themselves as they encounter Christ in the sacrament of the altar. Humility in the

presence of the elements transformed by the spirit of the Lord fosters humility before all of God's creatures. Grounded in this humility, Francis is free to embrace the reality of the material world and enter into a relationship with creation on its own terms and praise the Creator. Liturgical worship, where Francis and his brothers encounter the humility of God in the Eucharist, becomes a privileged *locus* for celebrating the universal salvation offered in Christ. In his *Exhortation to the Praise of God*, written on a wooden panel in a hermitage chapel, reverent humility in this Eucharistic setting erupts in a call for all the creatures of the earth and heaven above to laud the Lord, for he is good, and worthy of praise and honour. As the Lamb of God, sacrificed for salvation, Christ is worthy of all glory.⁵ Another liturgical setting, the Divine Office, evokes *The Praises to Be Said at All the Hours* in which Francis urges all creatures to praise and glorify the Lord God Almighty, together with the Lamb who was slain.⁶ This divine offering makes salvation known to the entire world, and even the fields and all that dwells within them should take heart and be glad, for redemption is at hand.⁷

For Francis, the world around him revelled in the in-breaking of God's grace. He responded to this initiative by inviting his brothers in the *Cantic of the Creatures* to discern the intrinsic humility of creation, follow this example and praise the Creator. Quite rightly much has been said over the years about this unique Umbrian hymn, written not in Latin but in the regional dialect. Francis composed the initial part of the celebrated work in the midst of intense physical suffering. He wished "to write a new *Praise of the Lord* for his creatures, which we use every day, and without which we cannot live. Through them the human race greatly offends the Creator" (CA, 83). We are fortunate to possess this early witness, as it draws back the curtain surrounding the intentions of Francis and confirms his humility and longing to right the wrongs done to God's handiwork. Not only are human beings dependent on the elements throughout the day, but they are guilty of insulting the very source of life by taking advantage of the other creatures that populate their world. Instead of claiming the Pauline freedom of the children of God so as to free creation from the frustration, bondage and decay equated with sin, people further the original oppression by abusing the material world. This is not the path to reconciliation.

What Francis proposes in the *Cantic of the Creatures* is quite breathtaking. First of all, the creatures of the world surrounding the brothers are not objects but subjects in a wide-ranging network of relationships, marked by gendered equality and a shared, mutual source of vitality and life. The sun is a brother, so too are the wind and fire.

The moon and the stars, the water, the earth and even death are sisters to humanity. This sibling structure is not dominated by an overbearing, distant *pater familias* but is brought into existence and sustained by an all-powerful, good Lord who delights in creatures useful and desirable, beautiful and strong. Secondly, as siblings, creatures other than human beings have a certain agency that Francis intimates and imitates. While men and women have fallen desperately short of their vocation to lead creation to redemption, their creaturely brothers and sisters continue to heed the Creator and offer numerous examples of humble, salvific service. Through them and with them the Most High is praised, and humanity is reminded of what it means to be in a humble relationship of service with the divine. God created the sun to give light to the day, and this brother continues to do so, as Brother Fire for his part lights up the night. The moon and the stars, sisters one and all, filled the evening sky at God's pleasure and are still there to see in their clear and precious beauty. People cannot but trust Brother Wind, in the company of Sister Earth and Sister Water, to sustain life through the fruits of the field that are nurtured in all kinds of weather. Even death is welcomed as a sister, who has her natural place among siblings. Similar to his experience of the Eucharist, this encounter with his brothers and sisters in the midst of suffering moves Francis anew, and recalls the importance of redemptive service through their humble, manifold offerings to humanity. Not surprisingly, he concludes the *Cantic of the Creatures* on this note, "Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility."⁸

BIOGRAPHIES OF FRANCIS: IL 'POVERELLO' AND THE HOPE OF CREATION

Thomas of Celano (1185/90–1260) was the earliest writer to perceive the saint's sibling relationship with creatures as the embodiment of the Pauline hope for all creation:

"Fields and vineyards, rocks and woods, and all the beauties of the field, flowing springs and blooming gardens, earth and fire, air and wind: all these he urged to love of God and to willing service. Finally, he used to call all creatures by the name of 'brother' and 'sister' in a wonderful way, unknown to others; he would discern the secret of the hearts of creatures, like someone who has already passed into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."

(1 Cel., 81)

The delight Francis finds in the world around him stands in stark contrast to the earliest days of his conversion when he gazed unmoved at the beautiful fields and vineyards of the Umbrian landscape (1 Cel., 3). It would not be until he had renounced his patrimony before Bishop Guido and was thrown into a ditch filled with snow by thieves outside town that Francis would rejoice in nature and raise his voice in praise of the Creator of all (1 Cel., 16). Celano would later remind his brothers when they gathered for the Divine Office that the reason for their founder's change of heart was the new-found love he experienced for the source of life.⁹

What Francis would discover in the wake of his conversion was the incredible witness offered by creatures to those such as him who were seeking the will of God in their lives. He was initially ignorant of the salvific role of creatures but changed from what some might consider a simple, sentimental fondness for creatures to recognition of their agency when he was preaching to a flock of birds near Bevagna (1 Cel., 58). While travelling, Francis caught sight of many birds of various types and, moved with emotion, ran to speak with them. What happened next surprised even Francis, for when he greeted the birds with his accustomed salutation, "The Lord give you peace," he sensed they were listening, as they remained still instead of flying off. Conscious that the flock was, in fact, a willing congregation attentive to the Word of God, he reminded them of the incredible benevolence the Creator showered upon them. The birds responded to this sermon in a manner befitting their divinely apportioned nature, and Francis blessed them as he departed. After noting Francis's remorse at not preaching to the birds earlier, Celano writes that from this day forward Francis implored all animals, and even inanimate creatures, to praise and love their Creator. Indeed, in their obedient response, the poor preacher found a reminder of his need to invoke the name of the Saviour.

Other accounts of Francis among creatures highlight the salvific compassion of the saint. Emblematic of one who is already counted among the children of God, Francis displayed an ear for the suffering creatures he encountered as he wandered the world, preaching the Gospel; it is as if he could hear the groaning of those who were in bondage. This image comes into focus on a number of occasions when Francis is presented with animals who are held captive. Once, when offered a rabbit caught in a trap, he enquired as to why he, Brother Rabbit, allowed himself to be caught. Taking this small brother into a warm, motherly embrace, Francis caressed and then freed him. Such tenderness was clearly attractive, and the rabbit was quite rightly

reluctant to leave. A fish offered to Francis at the lake of Rieti was also drawn by this tenderness. After admonishing this brother to avoid capture in the future, Francis released him back into the water, but the fish continued to frolic alongside the boat until sent on his way with a blessing (1 Cel., 60–1). Concern for the sufferings of his fellow creatures caused Francis to remove worms from the road lest they be trampled upon and place honey or fine wine out for bees so they would not die in the winter cold (1 Cel., 80). He was especially fond of sheep, since Jesus Christ is referred to as a lamb in the Scriptures. Celano says the saint once groaned aloud when he came across a lamb surrounded by goats. Calling to mind how Christ was once surrounded by the haughty, Francis delivered the animal to the care of the cloistered sisters of San Severino. Eventually the wool shorn from the rescued lamb became a welcome tunic for Francis (1 Cel., 77–8).

Celano's incredibly rich and compelling portrayal of *il poverello* as sibling to all creatures is furthered by Bonaventure (1221–74), whose biography notes that Francis was their humble companion in nature and grace (LM, 9:4). It was the ecstatic excess of Christ's love, brimming over into tenderness, which initially moved him to dismount from his high horse to kiss the leper and likewise later enlarged his heart to embrace all the creatures of the earth as his siblings. His willingness to bend to their needs called forth an equally humble response from creatures. On one occasion, he consented to undergo the fiery scourge of cauterisation to save his eyesight. To the amazement of the attending physician, he directly addressed the glowing-hot iron instrument used in the procedure and implored Brother Fire to be gracious and courteous. After the doctor burned a track from ear to eyebrow, Francis confessed that he felt neither the heat of the medical tool, nor any pain in his seared flesh. Mimicking perhaps St Lawrence, Francis exclaimed that the doctor could repeat the intervention if his flesh still required cooking. The story concludes with the note that the God of creation desired that creatures be subject to the will and command of Francis, who was in perfect harmony with God. Further instances of creation responding to the divine mandate by offering him wine from water when thirsty, music without instruments when he was sad and light in the midst of darkness when travelling led Bonaventure to ask his readers to appreciate the incredible ministry of creation:

Consider that at his nod, that man of admirable purity and great virtue tempered the heat of fire, changed the taste of water, brought

comfort with angelic melody and was led by a divine light, so that, in this way, it might be proved that the entire fabric of the universe came to the service of the sanctified senses of the holy man.

(*LM*, 5:9)

Creation's ministry to Francis is nowhere more evident than in prayer. Chapter 9 of the *Major Life* begins with a sweeping paean of praise to the contemplative, uplifting power of creation. Creatures stoked the flames of the saint's love for God through their delightful witness to divine reason and purpose. Drawn to the beauties of the world around him, Francis beheld within them the beauty of his Beloved and ascended through the consideration of creatures upwards to the source of his desire. With a vocabulary dripping with sensuality, Bonaventure portrays a man who savoured the divine goodness flowing in every creature and, with a keen ear for the spiritual, heard within their power and activity what almost seemed to be a celestial choir. To take a proper part in this choir, Francis could count on the assistance of various siblings, such as Sister Cricket, who roused him from his cell at Santa Maria degli Angeli (*LM*, 8:9–10). For eight days, a liturgical octave, the cricket responded to the saint's invitation and appeared among the brothers, so that they might be moved to praise the Lord Creator with their sister. A flock of birds, and a raven in particular, welcomed the saint to La Verna and convinced him to stay awhile with the wonderful melody of their singing. A falcon formed such a bond of friendship with the newcomer that the bird could discern when to awaken his friend for the nightly Divine Office and when to let him sleep through to dawn, thereby allowing Francis the opportunity to regain his physical strength in the face of illness. While this falcon knew when and how to foster the celebration of the Divine Office, the same does not hold true for all his feathered siblings. In a story found in Bonaventure but not in Celano's various hagiographical accounts, Francis castigated a group of birds in the marshes of Venice. In a sense, these sisters were the victims of minorite clericalisation; they impeded their brothers who were trying to fulfil their clerical responsibilities by chanting the canonical hours (*LM*, 8:9). It was a different story when the friars had no books, were not obliged to pray the Divine Office and were taught by Francis 'to praise God in all and with all creatures' (*LM*, 4:3).

While Bonaventure takes pleasure in relating how creatures delighted in serving Francis and inspired prayer, he also echoes Celano's insight into Francis as the manifestation of the Pauline hope for cosmic reconciliation. Drawing on a story from the earlier

biographer's *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, the Seraphic Doctor recounts the multiple misfortunes of the people of Greccio, who were completely subjected to the mercy of the elements (*LM*, 8:11). Hailstorms devastated their wheat fields and vineyards year after year, and, if that were not enough, wolves ranged over the countryside devouring animals and beasts alike. As a witness to this devastation in his hermitage in the environs of Greccio, Francis was moved to intercede. Laying the blame for the violence of the physical world squarely at the feet of the local populace, the saint called them to sincere repentance with the promise that they would once again experience the natural bounty and harmony of creation if they heeded his warning. The people responded with enthusiasm; they were then reconciled to the world around them to such a degree that the fields flourished anew, people and beasts were at peace, and the hailstorms punishing neighbouring fields either dissipated or changed direction at the Greccio boundaries. Bonaventure notes, "the beasts that had rebelled against fallen humankind" (*LM*, 8:11) were brought into a proper relationship with the divine that mirrored the rapport Francis shared with God.

BONAVENTURE OF BAGNOREGIO: A THEOLOGY OF CREATURES AND THE COSMOS

Bonaventure's understanding of the unique relationship between Francis and animals emerges from his reflections as a young theologian in Paris. As was customary for aspiring masters of the thirteenth century, he was required to write a commentary on the ponderous collection of theological source material labelled the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. One question posed by Peter Lombard regarded the obligation to love irrational creatures.¹⁰ While his mendicant counterpart, Thomas Aquinas, spent precious little time on this issue and emphasised why these creatures are not to be loved, Bonaventure appealed to the experience of Francis in nature as the entry point into consideration of love and the nature of human interaction with animals.¹¹ With his customary flair for nuance and distinction, he resolves the opposing opinions by acknowledging that irrational beings cannot be loved in the same manner that human beings love each other and God, but that men and women are obliged to love irrational creatures since they are created to praise God and foster the salvation of humanity. It is natural affection and piety, best understood here as tenderness, which from the time of prelapsarian Eden moves a person to love animals and other

creatures. Bonaventure turns to the image of Francis to underscore that this expression of love, which draws a similar response from the beloved creatures, is inextricably linked to conversion:

To the degree that a person is reformed and returned to the state of innocence, he will find animals are peaceful in his presence and they will be moved by piety towards him. We read that St Francis experienced this kind of tender piety towards creatures because in a certain way he had recovered [the state of] innocence.¹²

What is striking here is the impact of human action on animals and, by way of comparison, on all creatures. If men and women respond to the Gospel and are reformed by grace, they will in kind foster the ultimate restoration of creation. The eschatological expectation of Romans 8: 18–27 comes into clear view now in Bonaventure's theological reflection. The desire for salvation is universal and proper to all created realities that God has brought into being, and divine assistance is at hand to bring their longing to fulfilment, "because every creature seeks to be saved, although it cannot do so by itself, and most of all that creature, which seeks to be beatified... And because the desire of nature is not in vain, where nature is deficient, God supplies a gratuitous influence."¹³ Whereas rational creatures are ordered directly to God, the relationship between irrational creatures and God is mediated by men and women, who are responsible for ensuring that all other creatures remain faithful to our original, intended relationship to the Creator.¹⁴ The burden of responsibility for creation's restoration falls squarely on the shoulders of sentient beings; they play a singular role in the salvation of other creatures, and, as Francis demonstrates, conversion is essential to this ministry of reconciliation. To the degree that sentient beings are reformed by the influence of grace, other creatures are restored to their original nature as witnesses to the Most High. There is a profound sense of mutuality in Bonaventure's reflections, since he posits that within the process of human restoration other creatures are released from the subjection they suffer due to no fault of their own, and are thus freed to render praise and to accompany the sons and daughters of God back to their mutual Creator.

Bonaventure's identification of Francis as something of a new Adam with the animals in Eden, which is rightly depicted in medieval frescoes and stained-glass windows of Francis preaching to the birds, is best appreciated by examining the Seraphic Doctor's insight into the status of animals before and after the fall from grace. In a fascinating, albeit rarely cited, segment of the *Commentary on the Sentences*,

Bonaventure delineates the original nature of animals and their relationship to humanity when responding to a query about the divine purpose behind the creation of creatures.¹⁵ While God intended animals to be ordered to humanity, it is crucial to recognise that the present state of affairs is hardly what the Creator intended. The birds of the air, the fish in the sea and all the other creatures spread across the earth had a fourfold purpose in the original state of innocence. At one and the same time, in tandem with the trees, they confirmed human dignity through obedience, offered beauty to the terrestrial home of humanity, provoked wonder in the wisdom of the Creator through their diversity, and moved people to love God by acting according to the rectitude of their nature and likewise loving in accord with the Creator's commands. To those who disdain animals because of their cruel behaviour, Bonaventure states that the sin of humanity, pure and simple, corrupted creatures.

Now of course, things have changed, and the fourfold purpose of animals is interpreted in the light of human indigence. Animals are meant to provide us with food, clothing, service and solace. Whereas the previous focus was on companionship in Eden, the emphasis shifts to instrumentality and human need. Yet an echo of the original harmony is still perceptible to those who listen and contemplate the circle of life, which Bonaventure considers a cosmic poem, "As animals follow each other in succession, they adorn the universe like a most beautiful song, in which one syllable follows another."¹⁶ Francis heard the chorus of creation,¹⁷ and Bonaventure composed his theological reflections with a keen ear for this melody.¹⁸ When summarising the major tenets of theology for student friars in the aptly named *Breviloquium*, or *Brief Word*, Bonaventure appeals to the musical motif to explain the course of the cosmos. Just as a person is unable to appreciate the loveliness of a song without following it from beginning to end, so too the beauty of the world is imperceptible to those who do not understand how divine wisdom generates, orders and governs the universe.¹⁹ Close attention to the natural world allows humanity to heed the praise that arises from every being, both animate and inanimate, for all creatures sing of their Creator. One would have to be deaf not to hear them.²⁰

In the richly textured, symbolic language of Bonaventure, every creature is then a syllable in a song, or a vestige of God, a word in the Book of Creation, a rivulet flowing from the fountal Goodness, or a seed sown into the fecund fabric of the world.²¹ These multiple modes of expression disclose the perfect work of the Triune God, who is Artisan,

Author, Almsgiver and Agronomist. Indeed, everything that has being, visible and invisible, emanates from the divine source as the gracious handiwork of the Father who, through the Son and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, fills the universe with signs of power, wisdom and providence. From the celestial spheres to the rocks and flowers of the field, from the birds of the sky to the fish in the depths of the sea, from the angelic hosts to married couples with children, the goodness and beauty of the Trinity are displayed. All of creation is both a sacrament mediating the presence of God in a tangible fashion and an illuminated text narrating and depicting the wonders of God, who created all things through the Eternal Word, Jesus Christ. Bonaventure notes that creatures reflect the divine on at least one of three levels: vestige or footprint, image, or similitude.²² Since creation is the free operation of the Trinity, all beings display a vestige of the threefold essence, power and presence of God. Images, for their part, are sentient beings who reflect the Father with their capacity for memory, the Son with the power of intelligence and the Holy Spirit by virtue of the will. The most intimate expressions of the Triune God are the similitudes, that is, the children of God, who are transformed by the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. To these individuals belong the stewardship of creation and the burden of restoring all their fellow creatures, which have been subjected to futility by sin through no fault of their own, to their original, pristine nature as intended. For Bonaventure, this journey of reconciliation is made foremost in the company of Christ, through whom all was created, for in the transfiguration on Mount Tabor the mediator between God and creation reveals that even rocks, plants and animals are restored in him.²³

ROGER BACON AND DUNS SCOTUS: REFLECTIONS ON GRACE AND GLORY IN THE NATURAL WORLD

To care for creation and embark on the journey into God requires close attention to the natural world. Two British friars, Roger Bacon (1214–94) and Duns Scotus (1266–1308), give voice to the Franciscan fascination with the myriad reflections of divine agency and purpose in the materiality of the earth. Writing from Paris at the request of Clement IV, Roger Bacon proposed in his *Opus Majus* a thorough, even radical re-organisation of the academic curriculum that promoted a serious engagement with the sciences. Often promoted as a forerunner of modern scientific method and considered by some to be an anti-establishment troublemaker, Bacon understood his project rather as a

necessary preamble to the proper reading of Scripture. Gazing around the university and beyond to the widespread pulpits of Christendom, Bacon noted the poor quality of biblical studies and the pitiable preaching of his fellow mendicants. Lost to most brothers was the simple appeal to Scripture, commendation of virtue and condemnation of vice that characterised the preaching of Francis. One glaring cause behind this despicable situation was an inability or unwillingness to take the text seriously at the literal level before seeking out the spiritual meaning. Scripture speaks of the multitude of creatures brought into existence by God, and it is incumbent upon the theologian to know the literal nature of these beings, both in the particular and universal, in order to read and interpret the Scriptures as God intended on the spiritual level:

In addition, we see that the literal sense rests in the knowledge of the nature and properties of creatures, so that by means of appropriate adaptations and similitudes the spiritual meaning can be drawn out. Saints and ancient sages alike set forth this view, and this is the true and genuine manner of explanation which the Holy Spirit taught.

It is therefore necessary that a theologian know creatures well.²⁴

To have this excellent knowledge of creatures demands a rigorous, disciplined examination of the natural world by religious people. Religion, according to Bacon's appeal to Cicero, is taken from the Latin, *relegere*, which means 'to re-read'.²⁵ Philosophy, broadly understood under the rubrics of linguistics, mathematics, optics, experiential comprehension and ethics, assists the aspiring theologian to read anew the Book of Creation and thus, understanding the truth of what is examined, approach the Creator through created realities as diverse as a magnificent rainbow and the Troglodyte race in the depths of distant Ethiopia. Together with this concern for creatures comes an emphasis on geographical location.²⁶ Each specific place of God's good earth generates a specific actuality, and a diversity of places produces a variety of material, animal and human realities throughout the world. While the celestial wonders of the night sky certainly proclaim the majesty and beauty of the Creator and elicit reverence, specific places on earth must also be studied and understood if we are to comprehend the sublime depths of the Bible and make our way on the road back to God. Appealing to the peripatetic imagery dear to Franciscans, Bacon notes that material roads signify spiritual roads, and that material or corporeal places, which terminate motion by providing a reason to stop, signify spiritual places.²⁷ There are no more important places in

the world to stop and study than those found in the Holy Land. Quoting Jerome, Bacon continues, "He will have a clearer insight into the sacred Scripture who has contemplated Judea with his own eyes."²⁸ Of course, not everyone can make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, but a discipline like astronomy, as a subset of mathematics, together with knowledge of languages and a close reading of travel accounts, clarifies the location, climate, aesthetics and utility of such places as Jerusalem. Guided by a firm grasp of the literal sense of the specific place mentioned in the Bible, those who re-read the world can henceforth delight in the spiritual sense of the Scriptures, that is to say, in the divine peace proffered to those who enter the Jerusalem on high.

Duns Scotus, who spent time at the universities in Oxford and Paris, mirrors the preoccupation with the particular in his celebrated doctrines of "thisness" (*haeccitas*). Simply put, Scotus underscores the gratuitous, generous and artistic power of God by accentuating the "thisness" of every individual creature and the positive knowledge of the divine derived from every being. It is important to call to mind that in the Scotistic vision of reality, creation is not tangential to divine desires but came into being due to God's wilful longing to become united with the cosmos in the Incarnation of the Word in the singular Jesus Christ. The order of grace anticipates or precedes the order of nature such that God preordained the cosmos to grace and glory in the assumption of nature by the eternal Son of God.²⁹ This means that from all eternity the human nature of Christ was predestined to be glorified and united with the Word. The theological consequences are stunning, since Scotus can then maintain that the Incarnation is due to the eternal goodness of God, not humanity's temporal need for a redeemer after the fall from grace in Eden. Just as God foresaw the Incarnation, so too were the divine co-lovers preordained for glory. These men and women were to be accompanied by other creatures that could assist them in loving the Creator. While there is a certain inequality of charity, in that God's desire for humanity preceded that for other creatures, Scotus does hold that God loves all that exists, including, for example, an individual tree. There is then a wonderfully beautiful, intensely volitional dynamic in the Subtle Doctor's reflections on God's relationship to all created beings, given the contingency of the world. Everything that exists is due exclusively to the liberality and expansive love of the Creator, who chose to craft the ultimate, irreducible reality or *haeccitas* of each singular creature.³⁰

ANGELA OF FOLIGNO: A WORLD PREGNANT WITH GOD

In the summer of 1291, a devout widow of Foligno departed on a pilgrimage to Assisi, where she entered the upper basilica. To the consternation of her companions and nearby Franciscans alike, Angela (1248–1309) collapsed in an anguish-stricken heap on the pavement of the church, uttering words of wonder and love. Moments earlier she had contemplated an evocative stained-glass window – still visible today – depicting Christ presenting Francis to the world just as Mary offered Jesus. Angela soon found in the evangelical vision of Francis a path for her own life's calling, which included a keen sense of God's presence in the world. One day, when she was preparing to receive communion after confessing her sins, God offered to console her, and, as Angela recounted:

"in a vision I beheld the fullness of God in which I beheld and comprehended the whole of creation, that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and everything else. And in everything that I saw, I would perceive nothing except the presence of the power of God, and in a manner totally indescribable. And my soul, in an excess of wonder cried out, 'This world is pregnant with God!' Wherefore I understood how small the whole of creation is – that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and everything else – but the power of God fills it all to overflowing".³¹

What Angela experienced and recounted is what generations have come to know: the created world is groaning, to cite St Paul, and yearning to burst forth and give birth to a marvellous manifestation of divine power. It is not surprising that her eucharistic vision followed on the heels of her decision to confess her sins, for Francis marvelled at the humility of God present in the material world and likewise responded with a commitment to do penance. Celano saw in Francis the fulfilment of the Pauline eschatological hope, and the young Bonaventure noted that the conversion of Francis freed nature to return to original innocence. Once opaque to humanity, whose eyes were darkened by fear and suspicion, creatures were called forth from the shadows by Francis and rendered transparent in the light of God's grace, and set free to reclaim their divine birthright as brothers and sisters to humanity. In this sacred exchange initiated by God in Francis, men and women rediscovered their place in the cosmos and, in the company of other creatures, revel in the goodness and beauty of the Creator. As

unique, individual expressions of the Master Artisan, every creature deserved the reverential respect that Bacon and Scotus articulated in their reflections on the magnificent, glorious elements of the material world. Angela looked upward and beheld Christ offering Francis to the world, and she, together with others through the centuries, beheld in Francis an example of how and why all creatures are to lead back to God. The life and legacy of Francis remains a forceful reminder that the role of God's children is not only to be humble caretakers or stewards of creation, but indeed to be courageous liberators of their brothers and sisters in the mutuality of compassionate concern that the Creator intended from the beginning and desires at the end.

Notes

- 1 Jim Morrison, Ray Manzarek, Robby Krieger and John Densmore, 'When the Music's Over', *Strange Days*, Elektra/Asylum Records, 1967. I would like to thank Ms Katherine Wrisley and Dr John W. Daniels, Jr at Flagler College for their bibliographical and editorial assistance with this chapter.
- 2 *A Letter to the Entire Order*, *FAED*, vol. I, p. 117.
- 3 *Test.*, *ibid.*, p. 125.
- 4 *Admonition I*, *ibid.*, pp. 128–9.
- 5 *Exhortation to the Praise of God*, *ibid.*, p. 138.
- 6 *The Praises to Be Said at All the Hours*, *ibid.*, p. 161.
- 7 *Office of the Passion*, *ibid.*, p. 149.
- 8 *Canticle of the Creatures*, *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 9 Thomas of Celano, *Legend for Use in the Choir*, *ibid.*, no. 8, p. 322.
- 10 Bonaventure, *Commentaria in Quatuor Libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, in *S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia* (Quaracchi, 1887), vol. III, pp. 621–4.
- 11 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, 1947), vol. II/II, pp. 1287–8.
- 12 Bonaventure, *Commentaria*, vol. III, p. 622. Translations from the Latin are by the author unless indicated otherwise.
- 13 *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 161.
- 14 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 384 and vol. III, p. 623.
- 15 *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 383–4.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 383.
- 17 *LM*, 9:2.
- 18 Bonaventure, *Commentaria*, vol. I, p. 786.
- 19 Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, ed. Dominic Monti (Saint Bonaventure, 2005), pp. 10–11.
- 20 Bonaventure, *The Journey of the Soul into God*, ed. Philotheus Boehner (Saint Bonaventure, 1956), pp. 49–51.
- 21 Bonaventure, *Sermon 22*, in Timothy J. Johnson (intro., trans. and notes), *The Sunday Sermons of Saint Bonaventure* (Saint Bonaventure,

- 2008), pp. 272–3; Bonaventure, *Commentaria in Ecclesiastes*, c. 1, q.2, *Opera Omnia*, vol. vi, p. 16; *LM*, 9:2; Bonaventure, *The Minor Life of Saint Francis*, vol. ix, p. 5; Bonaventure, *Sermon 11*, in *The Sunday Sermons*, p. 157.
- 22 Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, p. 97.
- 23 Bonaventure, *Sermon 16*, in *The Sunday Sermons*, pp. 216–17.
- 24 Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon* (Eliborn Classics edition), ed. J. H. Bridges (London, 1900), vol. 1, p. 175.
- 25 Roger Bacon, *Moralis Philosophia*, ed. E. Massa (Zurich, 1953), pp. 32–3.
- 26 Bacon, *Opus Majus*, pp. 300–2.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 183–4.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- 29 Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio III*, d.7, q.3, in A. Wolter, ‘John Duns Scotus on the Primacy and Personality of Christ’ in D. McElrath (ed.), *Franciscan Christology* (Saint Bonaventure, 1980), pp. 146–59.
- 30 Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio II*, d.3, nos. 172, 175, 187–8, in M. B. Ingham, *Scotus for Dunces* (Saint Bonaventure, 2003), pp. 162–3.
- 31 *Angela of Foligno, Complete Works*, trans. and intro. P. Lachance, pref. Romana Guarnieri, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York, 1993), pp. 169–70.