

In Praise Of All Creation
by Charles Spencer, S.F.O.

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Article #18 of the *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* states: "Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which 'bear the imprint of the Most High,' and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship." The Franciscan concept of universal kinship among creatures, animate and inanimate, is one characteristic of our *Rule* which makes the Franciscan charism different from other Orders in the Church. In fact, so unique is this attribute, the Secular Franciscan Order is the only Order within the Catholic Church that has an article in its *Rule of Life* which addresses the integrity of creation.

In his *Canticle of the Creatures*, Francis of Assisi praises God for all of God's creatures, the sun, moon, and stars, all weather, fire, air, water and earth, each of whom he calls brother or sister. For Francis, every creature, human and non-human, animate and inanimate, were brothers and sisters, brought into being by the same Father. In this *Canticle*, Francis praises God "for, because of, in, with and through" all creatures. In other words, for Francis, each creature is a sign and reminder of God's presence. St. Bonaventure speaks of each creature reflecting the Eternal Word of God and bearing the "footprints" of the Trinity.

The Canticle of the Creatures
(1225)

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 human 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.

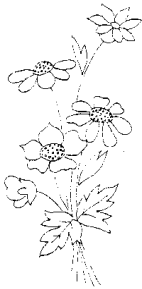
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister
Moon and *the stars*,
in heaven You formed them clear and pre-
cious and beautiful.

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 crea-
tures.



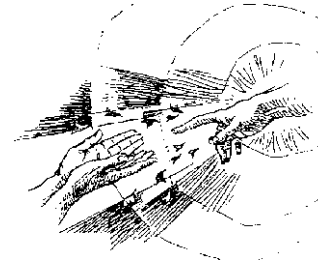
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister *Water*,
who is very useful and humble and precious and
chaste.

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 be You, my Lord,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.



Blessed are those who endure in
peace
for by You, Most High, 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.

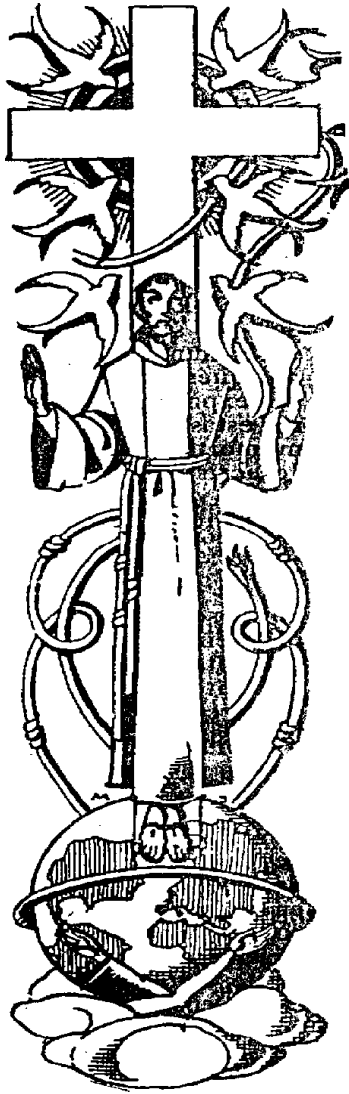
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for *the second death* shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

(As found in Armstrong, Regis J.; Hellmann, J. A. Wayne; & Short, William, J. (Eds.). (1999). *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents I: The Saint*, pages 113-114. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press.)

Franciscans recognize that all creation flows from God, thus, giving all expressions of life a divine nature. Through this understanding we are called to revere and respect all life, and to recognize all creatures as brothers and sisters as St. Francis did. The power and love of God as expressed through creation was so expressive to St. Francis that in humility he identified himself even with the lowly worm.

Upon publicly renouncing his inheritance, then walking out through the gates of Assisi, Francis walked into the hands of God. In living beneath the open sky in poverty, he committed himself to full cooperation and dependence upon the divine order and expression of creation. It was through this pure



and constant subjection to God in creation that he came to witness the divine presence permeating all created forms and space between them. Recognizing this presence as central to Franciscan spirituality, we follow in Francis' footsteps by strengthening our perceptions which enable us to interpret the language of creation, thus setting us free and making us rich as God is rich. Through these observations and the broadening of our awareness, the concept of coincidence is replaced with faith in providence: all things fall within God's providential wisdom and love. God is always expressing Himself to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. In addition to liturgy, sacraments, and prayer life, our relationship with God becomes both strengthened and more intimate through our association with the rest of creation. Thus, we come to understand the value of creation in nourishing our own spiritual needs and development. Also, through our active participation in bearing witness to His glory, we are made more responsive to bear witness to the injustices which undermine the integrity of His creation.

In respect to the infinite wisdom and purpose of God, we find it most appropriate not to place any form of life, apart from human life, above another, and simply to accept that what is born out of creation is born out of God. This stance frees us from our own prejudices of "good" and "not good" when looking at God's creation. Although it is easy to favour the insect over the tree, and the sunshine over a storm cloud, it is to more to our advantage to recognize our own poverty, realiz-

ing we have no way of knowing the full intent and purpose of God expressed through creation. In this detachment we are made free.

As society has become less dependent upon creation as an earth-based economy, and more dependent upon a market economy, we have become largely separated from creation by disassociation. As followers of St. Francis and especially as Secular Franciscans, "we are called to be *in* the world, though not *of* the world," rejecting wastefulness and materialism. We are called to be thankful for all that finds its way into our hands, and cognizant of the potential harm it may cause when we carelessly discard it.

As Franciscans, we are not only called to witness the glory of God in creation, we are also called to "strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship" (SFO *Rule*, article #18). This means that we must come to recognize our tendency to exploit creation in ways that we do not understand. Thus we are called in article #11 of the *Rule* to "seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying [our] own material needs," and to "purify [our] hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power." In this we find purpose and identity by walking gently upon the earth as St. Francis did. We are also called as peacemakers to stand up and bear witness to forms of exploitation and desecration, to "individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of [our] human lives and [our] courageous initiatives." In this, we are to "make definite choices in harmony with [our] faith," while "bearing witness" through our decision-making in the home, marketplace, and community (SFO *Rule*, article #15).