The living earth

Contributions to the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures

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CONTENT

EDITORIAL

The Canticle of the Creatures by St. Francis of Assisi is considered the earliest literary testimony in the Italian language and is one of the best-known texts of the Franciscan tradition. In 2025, we are celebrating the 800th anniversary of this important song. Together with the Fachstelle Franziskanische Forschung Münster, the Franciscaans Studiecentrum of the University of Utrecht and the Johannes-Duns-Skotus-Akadmie, Franziskaner-Helfen organized a conference in Bonn to mark the occasion.

You are now holding in hands the proceedings of this two-day event, in which the majority of the contributions have been compiled in writing. What cannot be presented in textual form is the actual genre of the Canticle of the Creatures, the music: although only the text has survived today, St. Francis and his brothers probably sang the "Cantico delle creature". The conference took this into account by interrupting and supplementing the speeches with musical interventions.

St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures is also considered an outstanding work of literature. Novelist, poet and essayist **Ulrike Draesner** takes up this literary aspect in an impressive way. Her essay "m'illumino d'immenso – an animal encounter" sheds light on the many facets of language and explains how language can be used to express what is generally considered unspeakable.

The texts of the Old Testament, for example the Psalms, already use a language that makes the agency of non-human creation visible: it is not only people who praise God there; the sea, the rivers and the mountains also join in the praise (cf. e.g. Psalm 98). In their contributions, **Trees van Montfoort**, **Debora Williger** and **Johannes Roth** refer to texts from the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition and show how these ancient testimonies can be the basis for a paradigm shift in our time.

As you have come to expect from our Grüne Reihe Magazine, you will again find decidedly Franciscan perspectives in this issue. For example, **Stefan Walser** takes up an idea from the medieval Franciscan theologian Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, which he links to the more recent theological concept of "deep incarnation". **Johannes B. Freyer** describes the Franciscan foundations of the relationship between humans and the world, and **Niklaus Kuster** gives an introduction to the structure and history of the Canticle of the Creatures at the beginning of this issue. At the end of his text, the tenor of all the contributions becomes explicit: singing the Canticle of the Creatures means relearning the ability to live together and thus treading the path to universal fraternity of all creatures.

CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES[1] (ANCIENT ITALIAN)

Altissimu, onnipotente, bon Signore,
Tue so' le laude, la gloria e l'honore et onne benedizione.
Ad Te solo, Altissimo, se konfane,
e nullu homo ène dignu Te mentovare.

Laudato sie, mi' Signore, cum tutte le Tue creature,
spezialmente messor lo frate Sole,
lo qual è iorno et allumini noi per lui.
Et ellu è bellu e radiante cum grande splendore:
de Te, Altissimo, porta significazione.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora Luna e le stelle:
in celu l'ài formate clarite e preziose e belle.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per frate Vento,
e per aere e nubilo e sereno et onne tempo,
per lo quale a le Tue creature dài sustentamento.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sor' Acqua,
la quale è multo utile et humile e preziosa e casta.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per frate Focu,
per lo quale ennallumini la notte:
et ello è bello e iocundo e robustoso e forte.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora nostra matre Terra,
la quale ne sustenta e governa,
e produce diversi frutti con coloriti flori et herba.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per quelli ke perdonano per lo Tuo amore
e sostengo infirmitate e tribulazione.
Beati quelli ke 'l sosterrano in pace,
ka da Te, Altissimo, sirano incoronati.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora nostra Morte corporale,
da la quale nullu homo vivente po' skampare:
guai a quelli ke morrano ne le peccata mortali;
beati quelli ke trovarà ne le Tue santissime voluntati,
ka la morte secunda no 'l farrà male.

Laudate e benedicite mi' Signore e rengraziate
e serviateli cum grande humilitate.

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[1] Paolazzi, Carlo (2009): Francesco d'Assisi. Scritti, Grottaferrata (Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas): 121-123.

CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

Most high, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.

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 which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which 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 Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us
and who produces varied fruits with colored 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, they shall be crowned.

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

CELEBRATING THE CREATOR WITH ALL CREATURES. ST. FRANCIS' "CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES" AS A POETIC CREDO

Niklaus Kuster OFMCap

With the "Canticle of the Creatures", St. Francis of Assisi established Italian literary history.[1] St. Francis' song has been presented in a variety of artistic forms for 800 years. Sung, danced and interpreted in all world languages, it has inspired the design of musical compositions and church windows, popular songs, sculptures, lyrics, plays and meditative paths as well as gardens and parks for centuries. In the summer of 2015, Pope Francis used the ancient poem to launch his urgent appeal to all of humanity to avert the ecological and social collapse of the world.[2] In its universal openness to all people and living beings in the world's "common home", the letter breathes the spirit of the mystic of Assisi, whose song was incorporated into the title and text of the encyclical letter. Few songs enjoy such popularity, wide distribution, diverse interpretation and lasting topicality after centuries. The following article is dedicated to the origins of the Canticle of the Creatures, its message and spirituality. The composition is deeply inspired by the Middle Ages and yet its spiritual message has a validity that transcends time.[3]

The Late Work of a Mystic

The short poem, which is referred to as "*Laudes creaturarum*" in the oldest manuscript, is a late work by the mystic from Assisi. The composition of this song was preceded by decades that the former luxury merchant spent largely in nature. His disinheritance in the spring of 1206 also marked a break with the urban middle-class way of life. From then on, he and his companions entered cities and houses - human-made stone worlds of art - only as day laborers and itinerant preachers. They spent the nights and longer eremitic periods outside the settlements in lonely places, at country churches, in hostels and leprosariums, on islands or on mountains, where friars set themselves up in huts or caves around a small oratory.[4] Far from any romanticism, Francis lived in this way for two decades, exposed to both the beauty of creation and the harshness of the climate and weather in all seasons. His companions remind us that along the way he recognized his brothers and sisters not only in people, but in all creatures. *The Mirror of Perfection* explains why the crested lark became *il Poverello's* favorite animal with a deep bond in the natural community of creation and in common worship: "Sister lark has a hood like the friends of Jesus and is a humble bird, for she walks contentedly along the road to find a grain, and even if she finds it among rubbish, she pecks it out and eats it. As she flies she praises God very sweetly, like good Religious who despise earthly things, whose minds are set on the things of heaven, and whose constant purpose is to praise God. Her plumage resembles the earth".[5] It was not only animals that Jesus spoke of in the Gospel, but all creatures that the wandering friar learned to perceive with watchful eyes and to treat with love. The first biographer also states: created by the same Creator and nourished by the same "sister Mother Earth", Francis "called all creatures 'brother and sister'"[6]. The fruit of this way of life, which found its home in creation, is a mysticism of nature that Thomas of Celano describes as a contemplative, emergent transparency of the world:

[1] Kapp (1992): 7-12, in the section on the beginnings of Italian literature refers to the Canticle of the Creatures as its "foundation document". - [2] Pope Francis (2015). - [3] The following explanations condense and update KUSTER (2020): 37-61. - [4] All the important early Franciscan places in central Italy are described in Freeman (1998). - [5] Cf. The Mirror of Perfection (MP – Sabatier Edition) 113. - [6] On nature mysticism and the special connection between the saint and the world of birds: Schmucki (2000): 67-77; and Schmucki (2008): 3-34.

“In every work of the artist he praised the Artist; whatever he found in things made, he referred to the Maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the hands of the Lord and saw the life-giving reason and cause behind all things that are pleasant to behold. In beautiful things he saw the Beauty itself; all things were to him good. 'He who made us is the best', they cried out to him. In his foot-prints imprinted upon things, he followed the Beloved everywhere”[7].

In the Canticle of the Creatures, twenty years of wandering flow into an overall picture. During his last two years, Francis condensed his own view of God, the world and human into a credo that is as poetic as it is dense in content: a synthesis of his experience of the world and his faith.

Song of a Blind Man

Young people singing the Canticle of the Creatures around a campfire and art lovers looking at it in glowing church windows rarely suspect the drama that led to the creation of this work. St. Francis composed the original version after long weeks of inner and outer darkness. Sick and weakened, he spent the spring of 1225 at San Damiano in the care of some companions and the sisters of St Clare. Suffering from trachoma, his inflamed eyes could not even bear the light of a fire. The Canticle of the Creatures was written as a song of liberation from this dark time: housed in a lightless hut, beset by mice and without the poet being able to see what he was singing about. Brother Leo, one of the most trusted companions, describes the circumstances in which the Song of Creation was written: in the spring of 1224, when Francis “was very ill with an eye disease and was staying in a small cell made of straw mats near San Damiano, the Minister General ordered him to get help and treatment”. However, as the wet season did not yet permit the long journey to the papal court in Rieti for treatment, Francis spent over fifty days “in darkness inside the house in his cell. His eyes caused him so much pain that he could neither lie down nor sleep […]. In the cell made of mats […] there were so many mice running around here and there, around him and even on him, that they prevented him from taking a rest; they even hindered him greatly in his prayer.”[8] Leo's memoirs make clear the misery in which the long-suffering mystic found himself. Even the animals he treasured as companions in his wandering life and in quiet hermitages, and whom he called his siblings[9], became a torment to him. One night, the sick man, who was struggling with himself, was finally surprised to experience God's new attention and regained inner clarity. The following morning, he said to his companions: I want to “give thanks to God the Father, to his only Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. In fact, God has given me such a grace and blessing that he has condescended in his mercy to assure me, his poor and unworthy servant, still living on this earth, that I would share his kingdom. Therefore, for his glory, for my consolation, and the edification of my neighbor, I wish to compose a new 'Praises of the Lord’, for his creatures. These creatures minister to our needs every day; without them we could not live.”[10] The story goes on to describe how Francis set about writing poetry and taught his brothers verse and melody. Brother Pacific, who was an award-winning singer, was henceforth to go through the world with a few pious and spiritual friars to preach and sing the praises of God. Francis himself called this praise the 'song of Brother Sun', because it is “the most beautiful all creatures, the one which, better than all the others, could be compared to God.”[11]

The praise to the Creator breathes the rediscovered happiness of a person who, after a long period of spiritual and physical darkness, experiences the attention of his God anew and embarks on the further pilgrimage of his life with strengthened trust.[12]

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[7] 2 Celano 165; 1 Celano 80-81. - [8] Legend of Perugia (Per) 43. / The Assisi Compilation 83-84. - [9] The first biographer goes into this in detail: 1 Celano 88, and 2 Celano 165-171. - [10] Legend of Perugia (Per) 43 / The Assisi Compilation 83-84. - [11] Ibid. - [12] On the context of the song's origin: Kuster (2016): 82-96, and in detail: Dalarun (2015): 25-40 with an in-depth discussion of the sources.

Sources of the Canticle of the Creatures

The first source of the Canticle of the Creatures is of an existential nature: a place of life that had been sacred to *il Poverello* since the time of his religious vocation. The original version of the *Laudes creaturarum* was composed in the spring of 1225 in San Damiano: in a place where the sisters of St. Clare had been living together with a small community of brothers for fourteen years[13] and met with them several times a day to pray before the icon cross of the "Poor Christ"[14]. The harmonious interplay of sisters and brothers around this small country church reflects *in nuce* the fraternity that Francis also discovered in creation and the cosmos: each verse with a brother is followed by one in which a sister is addressed, resulting in perfect harmony in the six verses of the original version: *frate Sole* plays together with *sora Luna* and the stars, *frate Vento* with *sor' Acqua* and *frate Focu* with *sora matre Terra*. Anyone entering the little church of San Damiano today will see two modern stained glass windows to the right, one of which depicts the three female creatures together with Clare and her sisters, the other the fraternal creatures with Francis and his companions.

The harmony experienced there encompasses heaven and earth, the stars and everything that lives on "Mother Earth" in a cosmic and universal expanse. In San Damiano, sisters and brothers praised God with psalms and biblical canticles. These also flow into the mystic's song of creation. The poet adopts elements from Psalms 18, 95 and 148, the "Song of the Three Men in the Fiery Furnace" (Dan 2-3) and key motifs from the creation account (Gen 1:1-31). The poet's vision extends beyond the sources of the Jewish Bible to a genuinely Christian view of the world and God. The Canticle's numerical symbolic structure provides the first faint hint of the profoundly subtle composition: its 33 lines remind medieval people of the earthly years of Jesus' life. Nine hymns play with the symbolic number of the Trinity (3x3). "In freely rhythmic and assonantically bound line prose", the song is divided into ten verses in the final version: "10 is the number of perfection".[15] Biblical sources and medieval number symbolism allow the nature mystic to shape his rich life experience in creation, in the interaction with brothers and sisters and in the waning of his strength into a song that proves to be a mature credo of his life.[16] In order to decipher this, we need to take a closer look at the selection of the creatures sung about and shed light on the overall composition of the song.

A Subtle Basic Composition

The final version of *Laudes creaturarum* is divided into ten units: a four-line canticle, eight stanzas and a two-line farewell. The leitmotif running through the song is praise: the canticle begins with "Altissimu..., tue so' le *laude*". The cry "*Laudato si*', mi' Signore" opens each of the following eight verses, which celebrate the Creator "with and through" his creatures. The short farewell is addressed with "*Laudate* et benedicite mi Signore" to all people who hear or sing this song. The basic tone of the song is one of astonished, grateful and joyful praise, as expressed in the biblical psalms in *Hallelu-jah* (Praise YHWH).

In a first version of the song, the chorus is followed by six verses that include seven types of creatures.[17] The first two verses name the sun, moon and stars. They provide the fundamental rhythms of time on earth: the alternation of day and night, the months and the seasons. These stanzas sing of a cosmic and earthly world that knows light and dark, change and constancy in a great harmony. Francis mentions three types of creatures "in the heavens": they point beyond the earthly world to God. For him, the sun in its radiance of light is a "symbol", as is the softly shining presence of the moon in dark

[13] On Clare's community in San Damiano, her life and her profile: Schmies (2011). - [14] On the icon that plays a central role in the vocation story of the Poverello and that becomes the center of Clare's community: Kreidler-Kos / Kuster (2018). - [15] Kapp (1992): 8-9. - [16] Dalarun (2015): 90, emphasizes that this song emerged from a dramatic inner struggle: "prima di essere un canto, il poema umbro è un dramma". - [17] A detailed description of the following sections can be found in: Kuster (2016): 114-124. On the number seven in the original version: Dalarun (2015): 47-54.

times and the stars, which are "luminous, precious and beautiful" and stand for eternity and infinite expanse. After the number three, which describes the cosmic world and symbolizes God's greatness, four verses are dedicated to the earthly world. To describe this in his dense song of creation, Francis chooses the four primal elements: according to medieval doctrine, the entire world - plants, animals and humans - is made up of air, water, earth and fire. They all breathe, feed on the earth, need water and contain energy. In the Middle Ages, four became a symbolic number that also allowed the earthly world to be described geographically, chronologically and psychologically: four are the wind directions and regions of the world, the seasons and human characters. From an Italian perspective, they can be assigned to each other as follows:

Element	*Season*	*World region*	*Characters*
Water	Winter	North (Europe)	Melancholic
Air	Spring	West (The Sea)	Sanguine
Fire	Summer	South (Africa)	Choleric
Earth	Autumn	East (Asia)	Phlegmatic

The animals do not appear explicitly in the Canticle of the Creatures because all creatures are included in the song with the four primal elements: "*tutte le Tue creature*", as the Canticle calls them collectively. The mineral world, the animal world and humanity are made up of water, air, fire and earth. Francis rearranges the classical order of the earthly primordial elements and adapts them to his biblical model. The long chant from the book of Daniel is condensed. The climatic and weather conditions, which take up a lot of space in the song of the young men, are integrated into the verse of wind and air. The result is a harmoniously beautiful song with six main verses and seven original creatures. Seven is the number of all creation, which is God's work (Gen 2:1-2). The song becomes a poetic credo against the backdrop of contemporary trends that dualistically separate a good world from a bad one. In their penitential sermons, Cathars who had immigrated to the Spoleto Valley also separated heaven from earth, soul from body and the spiritual from the sensual-natural. Il Poverello's Canticle of the Creatures professes the wholeness of the created world: No one can enter heaven if he does not love the earth, and no soul will be free if it despises the body. And no one can please God if he treats his creation without love.

The beautiful and good wholeness of the creation of heaven and earth gains extra color through the subtle interplay between brotherly and sisterly creatures - of which the earth is also the mother. Created by the same common father, all beings form a single cosmic family. In it, the strong sun - masculine in all Romance languages and therefore a brother - plays together with the gentle night stars moon and stars - sisters in Romance languages. The sibling-like interplay continues in pairs: brother wind and sister water, brother fire and sister mother earth.

Jacques Dalarun points out that the Canticle of the Creatures also addresses questions of power in the verse on Earth.[18] The verse on earth surprises with the statement that it "*sustenta e governa*": Sister Mother Earth nourishes and governs. In Francis' view, a radically fraternal world can tolerate only the rule of God, the Father of all living beings, and not human power. When people take on leadership responsibility, they should be guided by the service of the earth: it makes life possible and nourishes, sustains and promotes it. Although humans are dependent on it, the earth subordinates itself and serves all creatures from below. Accordingly, Francis calls the brothers responsible for provinces or the whole movement "servants and ministers" ("*ministri et servi*").[19] Jacques Dalarun speaks of the "Franciscan revolution" with regard to the

[18] Dalarun (2015): 55-58. - [19] On the early Franciscan view and practice of power: Dalarun (1999): A modern understanding is outlined by Dienberg (2016), Arens (2017) and Gurciullo/ Strino (2018).

earth and motherly caring brothers, which radically understands leadership as service: “maternal government as a counter-model to the dominant male rule of the time”.[20] A first addition, which the mystic added to his song in San Damiano, is explicitly about humankind and his most impressive way of proving itself to be a daughter or son of God.

Humankind in Creation

The six stanzas of the original version are expanded in two ways. According to the Perugia collection of texts, the human verse is said to have been composed in the spring of 1225 in the face of fierce conflicts between Bishop Guido II and the new podestà of Assisi, Oportulo di Bernardo.[21] The verse on death, which unusually appears as a “sister” and becomes part of the praise, was composed by Francis in the last months of his life, according to Brother Leo's testimony. The overall composition is given an impressive human part in the choir with the seventh verse, which celebrates the Creator. The eighth verse opens up the world celebrated in the song to God's new creation. In this dense poetry, the view expands from the overall view of heaven and earth to man, who remains a pilgrim in this world and is on his way to his true and eternal home. This has been the teaching of the Middle Ages since Augustine.

Every creature sings of the Creator in its own way. The sun does so figuratively with its radiance, filling the world with life and color. The moon and stars speak of God's silent presence even in dark times. Wind and weather bear witness to his concern for the sustenance of all creatures. The water sings of his precious refreshing service to life, the fire of his powerful joy even in the night and the earth of his vital imagination that brings forth life in abundance. Humankind has the unique opportunity to experience God's love personally and to make it personally visible. He does this most impressively when he loves “carried by God's love” even when human love is tested, be it through guilt, illness or stress and inner tensions. People who forgive with the power of God's love, who overcome weakness and endure tensions, who maintain peace despite disappointments and crises, show most clearly whose son and daughter they are. The human verse finds support in the Beatitudes of Jesus, wherein he calls peacemakers and non-violent people “sons and daughters of God” who “inherit the land” (Mt 5).

Sister Death and the New Creation

As good and beautiful as creation is as a whole, it cannot be God's final world. The human verse addresses an earthly reality that knows worry and illness, suffers from the experience of guilt and fragile relationships, sees peace endangered and life as transient. The verse on “Sister Bodily Death” rounds off the song in a way that is both serious and hopeful. The personification of death is a stylistic device that appears frequently in literature. In the high Middle Ages, death was also assigned male roles: he is depicted as a reaper, ruler of the underworld, horseman or warrior, as a bearded skeleton or shaggy faun, hunter, thief, murderer and robber, knight and king.[22] St. Francis stands out with a female image. While Johannes von Tepl's “*Ackermann aus Böhmen*” (Man from Bohemia) from around 1400 denounces death in an argument, the dying friar greets his “*sorella morte*”: leaving his loved ones behind, he follows death like a companion on the rest of his journey.[23] She knows how dying people from the created world find their way to the face of God. The earthly world, with all its beauty, hardships and transience, reminds us that people are pilgrims in it. In the end, what remains is the transition into the light or into self-chosen darkness and loneliness, the “second death”.

[20] Dalarun (2015): 55-58: the Parisian historian literally speaks of “la maternità relativa nella fraternità assoluta: tutti assolutamente fratelli, ma anche, cambiano ruolo per un tempo determinato, madri dei fratelli, di cui si prederanno cura come fossero loro figli. Questo è il modello di governo prospettato fa Francesco, un governo materno agli antipodi del dominio paterno. L'unico autentico Padre è nei cieli, la madre invece è sulla terra, quella madre-terra che nutre in quanto governa e governa esattamente dando nutrimento” (57). - [21] On the person of this mayor and the conflict: Fortini (1959): 289-298. - [22] Guthke (1998). - [23] The first biographer of the Poverello describes Francis‘ dying, who welcomed “Sister Death”, in the Memoriale: 2 Celano 217.

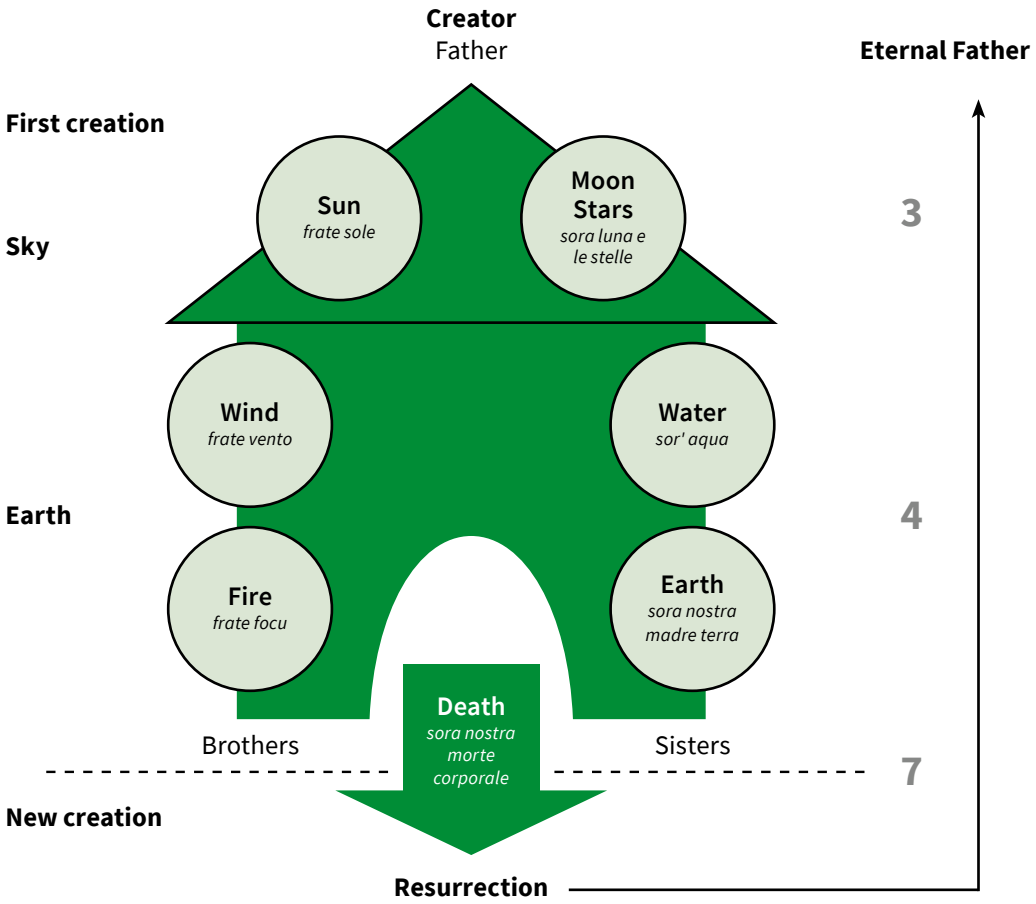

Fig. 1: Overall composition of the Canticle of the Creatures.

The Canticle of the Creatures sees Sister Death standing at the exit of the House of Creation. Francis may have already sensed that death would one day accompany him sisterly into eternal life during the crisis at San Damiano, which gave rise to the original version of the Canticle of the Creatures. The sisters of St. Clare stood by him through weeks of deepest darkness. Human closeness gave the long-suffering man support until his soul found new light at the end of the tunnel. When Francis had to leave his companions behind a year and a half later, he confidently greeted his sister Death, who would take him by the hand and accompany him into God's new world. This deep faith could be based on the experienced closeness of people who had traveled dark paths and on the repeated experience of God's love.

The Canticle of the Creatures as a Christian Credo

The number seven in the original version speaks of the wholeness of creation, in which no one who does not love the earth gains heaven. In the end, heaven is reached by those who accept God's will, even when they are dying, and who move from this world into the eternal world with confidence. The fact that Christ himself has opened the way is subtly hinted at in the final composition with 33 verses of the Song of Creation: the Middle Ages see the Messiah returning from this world to the Father after 33 earthly years of life. 33 years span the human path of God on earth: they begin with the birth in Bethlehem and end in the Passion and Easter events in Jerusalem. Jacques Dalarun

recognizes a faint hint of the incarnation of God on earth in the movement that can be seen in the seven verses of the original version. Francis begins with the most distant creature, which stands for God's greatness and radiance. The movement of the song descends from the sun via the moon and stars through the air and water to fire and earth, the lowest creature that carries everything. Brother Leo, the likely editor of Codex 338 of Assisi, colored the text of the Song of Creation, which is densely written in black ink, with red ink in a single place: in the initial L of the verse on Mother Earth. Parisian historian Dalarun, an expert on medieval manuscripts, assumes that the fine red line is a subtle reference to the Incarnation: God comes into the world in his Son, enters humanly into their history and Francis follows his "footsteps on earth".[24]

Theo Zweerman recognizes another subtle sign in a Christogram that the poet could have placed in the Canticle of the Creatures. Medieval poetry loves to play with this compositional finesse, just as the visual arts used it in the arrangement of frescoes, triptychs, panel scenes, capitals and reliefs on church portals. The Dutch researcher compared the three titles of God in the first line of the song with the corresponding answers of man in the final verse and found that they form an X and an I: the Greek initials for Jesus and Christ[25].

Leonhard Lehmann supports this thesis by pointing out that the Canticle of the Creatures prepares for the Christ symbol with the two initial vowels *A(ltissimo)* and *O(nnipotente)*[26]. In art, the Christogram is often flanked by an A and Ω: Signs for the Son of God, who has been at work in creation since time immemorial (alpha), embraces it through all time and will lead it into a great unity at the end (omega). When Francis sees the whole of creation as the work of the Father shaped by Christ, held together and also reconciled in the end, he shows himself to be deeply inspired by the Bible. In the Church's evening prayer, New Testament canticles are sung every week, which point to Christ's mission of creation, history and consummation. In Philippians, Paul is convinced: "All that is in heaven, on earth and under the earth will confess: Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2). The Ephesians hymn has the church singing: "In advance [Alpha] God chose us to become his sons and daughters in Jesus Christ. At the end of time [Omega] he will unite in Christ all things in heaven and on earth" (Eph 1).

Heaven and earth united in Christ, human beings chosen as sisters and brothers through the Son of the Father and all creatures reconciled in praise of the Father at the end: it is the biblical spirituality of early Christian canticles that subtly weaves through Francis' C*anticum creaturarum* according to this reading. For 33 years, God himself lived in the earthly world through his Son, in body and soul. Through Jesus' birth, his life and death and his resurrection, the earthly world is affirmed and the eternal world is made accessible.

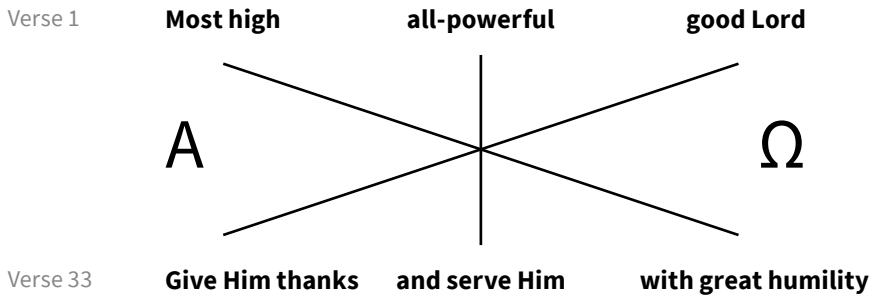

Fig. 2: Christogram in the Canticle of the Creatures.

[24] Dalarun (2015): 92-93. - [25] On the Christogram as a subtle compositional element in the writings of Francis and Clare: Zweerman / Van Den Goorbergh (2009), Zweerman (2005), Van Den Goorbergh / Zweerman (2001). - [26] Lehmann (1989): 254-257.

Universal Fraternity

In his social and environmental encyclical *Laudato si*, Pope Francis explicitly refers to *il Poverello's* song of creation. The title phrase "On Care for Our Common Home" already evokes the image of the medieval composition, which marks the roof with the sun, moon and stars and the earthly habitat of the house of creation with the primordial elements.[27]

In the awakening bourgeois culture and the new money economy, Francis of Assisi already recognized the first dark sides of ruthless profit, pleasure and utilitarian thinking. Having left the Bernardone clan, he moved outside the city walls and from then on lived as a wandering mystic in nature, where he experienced kinship with all living beings and shared the common habitat. The modern concept of ecology also speaks of the common home (*oikos*). St. Francis of Assisi saw this as being inhabited by humans and animals as brothers and sisters. No life should be extinguished unnecessarily and no creature should be banished from its habitat. Every living being points beyond itself to the mystery, the power and the artist who brought the world into existence and keeps it alive. Just as insensitive handling of art hurts the artist, destructive treatment of creatures hurts the Creator.

Pope Francis recognizes an ecological opportunity of Christian spirituality in the fact that it conveys a holistic and deeper "understanding of the quality of life" and a "contemplative lifestyle that is capable of deep enjoyment, free of the obsession with consumption" (LS 222). St. Francis of Assisi was not appointed patron of ecology by John Paul II in 1979 as a politician or entrepreneur, but as a mystic with a tender love for every creature and a visionary view of the wholeness of creation.[28] It is not new rules and a new way of thinking alone that will lead the world out of its social and ecological crises; a new ability to relate is needed.[29] The encyclical "Laudato si" addresses this profound dimension when it speaks of inner conversion in the final sections. This "calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness." First, this includes "gratitude" from the "recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works" (LS 220). In addition, modern people must relearn "the capacity for living together and communion", both interpersonally without borders and then also universally: "Jesus reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that this makes us brothers and sisters." In relation to the whole of creation, this leads to "a universal fraternity". This leads people to "love and accept the wind, the sun and the clouds, even though they are not under our control" (LS 228). The papal letter concludes its spiritual chapter with a motif from the ancient Doctor of the Church, St. Basil. It calls on all the faithful to unite to "take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast" (LS 244).

Pope Francis shares the holistic view of his role model Francis from Assisi and mystical religions. They question any modern anthropocentric approach to power. The Pope also points out the error "in viewing other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination". If "nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. (...) Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus" (LS 82). Pope Francis confirms and concretizes the vision of universal fraternity in 2020 in the second Franciscan encyclical "*Fratelli tutti*", which again refers to Francis of Assisi.[30]

[27] See Fig. 1. The house structure of the medieval composition is sketched and drawn in Kuster (2016): 121. - [28] John Paul II., November 29, 1979. - [29] Kuster (2016): 202. - [30] Pope Francis (2020).

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M'ILLUMINO D'IMMENSO – AN ANIMAL ENCOUNTER

Ulrike Draesner

Giuseppe Ungaretti's Mattina – morning (also: morning prayer) – is my favourite short poem and my favourite untranslatable poem.

Don't know it?

Yes, you do. You've just heard it, in its entirety:

M'illumino
d'immenso

That's it. Two lines consisting of one word each. How full they are. Should I attempt a translation? But how? How to capture the wonderful grammatical circularity of "Immensity illuminates me/I illuminate myself with immensity"?

L'immenso appears to pose the biggest translation problem. The sound of it, its resonances, the suggestion of *mens*, as in mind, but also menses, and hence blood, sexuality, the creation of life; the "imm" of immersion leaping, in one elegant movement, across the word boundary to the "ill" of "illumino". To illuminate, to en*light*en oneself by scooping light into – or letting it flow through – the mind and body. But in translation, everything is displaced: in the Italian the mind is there but not there, one of the M's migrates much more subtly, from immenso to illumino, while morphing along the way into a double L. M as in the fine yet all too often stumbling, bumbling German word "Mensch", human being. We'll come back to this later.

Ungaretti's poem says: I let the immenso in. This immenso, that mirrors the first-person ending of my verb. Is it bending towards me?

So that I can open myself. The homophony "bridges" us. But I must play my part too: m'illumino.

It (immensity) – is always there. The text begins with it, through the "o" that is shared by the inflecting "I" and l'immenso, and it ends with this inflecting *and* first-person O.

Language is an immense fence

Language determines how we perceive the world. Not everything can be expressed through language, but everything we know (in the narrow sense of the word) is expressed in language. Ludwig Wittgenstein popularized this concept in the proposition "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" from his *Tractatus-logico-philosophicus* of 1921. Thoughts are linguistic. Language shapes our perception. There have been numerous investigations into this topic, such as the instructive studies on the way Russian and English native speakers perceive the colour blue. Russian has two separate words for the lighter and darker ends of the blue spectrum respectively, голубой (m) [galubój] for "light blue" and синий (m) [ɕʲínʲij] for "blue". The two colours are regarded as distinct categories rather than shades of each other. Scans of their brain activity showed that Russian test subjects were also neuronally faster at distinguishing the different hues.[1] The brain becomes programmed by the speaker's (first) language and its categories. The world is obedient (the brain insists on this and constantly arranges it to fit our learned logic, so

[1] https://www.pnas.org/doi/abs/10.1073/pnas.0701644104; last accessed 25.7.2024
From the abstract: English and Russian color terms divide the color spectrum differently. Unlike English, Russian makes an obligatory distinction between lighter blues ("goluboy") and darker blues ("siniy"). We investigated whether this linguistic difference leads to differences in color discrimination. We tested English and Russian speakers in a speeded color discrimination task using blue stimuli that spanned the siniy/goluboy border. We found that Russian speakers were faster to discriminate two colors when they fell into different linguistic categories in Russian (one siniy and the other goluboy) than when they were from the same linguistic category (both siniy or both goluboy). Moreover, this category advantage was eliminated by a verbal, but not a spatial, dual task. These effects were stronger for difficult discriminations (i.e., when the colors were perceptually close) than for easy discriminations (i.e., when the colors were further apart). English speakers tested on the identical stimuli did not show a category advantage in any of the conditions.

that it doesn't end up upside down, like the sense datum the eye sends to the brain).

Language organizes, builds stages, helps to shape our brain architecture. Language windows close phylo- and ontogenetically, a single linguistic world-view becomes increasingly dominant over the course of our socialization. Multilingually educated people enjoy more freedom in this respect, but may pay for it with more problems: their languages begin to elide, nothing seems to "keep its feet on the ground", the tone – like the heart – is never in one (the right) place. You can see how my own language suggests images, metaphors and scenic terminology to me as I attempt to express my thoughts.

Language is an immense scoop

All that glitters is not gold. Just as well, otherwise we would have Midas hands. All that glitters can be anything: glitter particles, junk, a fragment, a piece of the world jigsaw. Language scoops up the world for me. Gives it to me, covers me in it, offers me spaces to move in within this world. And is so big, so rich that it's easy to overlook what it *doesn't* scoop up.

As a writer, I am preoccupied with what *isn't* scooped. How do I make audible the voices of those rendered speechless by violence? Who have ceased to speak because in order to do so you need to believe in the possibility that someone might be listening. That they won't constantly interrupt you. Otherwise, you are condemned to silence: you can no longer open yourself. You fall back into yourself.

Fall, if you're lucky, into communication with animals.

The knowledge deficit we come up against here is shaped by legend. Or so say some. People who live with animals have a different experience. Let me tell you a story about this: because it is only by connecting lived experience and the limits of language, only by trying to communicate in a realm between human language, lexical language (our various national vocabularies) and body language, only by opening myself to this – in the sense of Ungaretti's m'illumino, whose very grammar makes clear that there can be no enlightenment without my active participation – that I can allow to happen what could, to use Donna Haraway's terminology, be called an interspecies encounter. An encounter based not on Homo sapiens' hubris, but his displacement, not on dominance, but a shared physicality, if not corporeality. As a creature, a creaturely being, a critter – as an inhabitant of this planet, on which I am sharing this moment, this place, with animal X.

The unknown

In an essay published in 1974, the American philosopher Thomas Nagel pondered the question: What is it like to be a bat?

What does it feel like, so to speak, from the inside? To hunt your prey by echolocation, for example? Nagel argues that the bat's inner experience cannot be replicated by scientific methods such as electroencephalography, for example. In his view, models will always be models: they will never match the dimension of physical experience. Between the bat and ourselves lies an unbridgeable gulf. And the same goes for other animals apparently closer to us. A swallow, for instance. A horse.

A dog.

In essence, Nagel is arguing that our body shapes our reality in a manner that also constitutes a barrier to empathy and projection. The body of a dog is different from my body. The dog lives in a world where things appear more blurred than in mine. Where he sees nothing, or "less", in colour, but can smell much "more" (exactly what remains vague). He can smell that I'll wake up with a sore throat tomorrow. He can be trained to smell if I have cancer, he can smell how I'm feeling, and he will comfort a crying friend by putting his head in her lap.

Now if Nagel's argument were correct, it would also have to apply in reverse. That is, from dog to human. That may be so in a general sense. But the interesting part is the area in between. Where projection based

on a recognition of otherness hits the mark. And an "understanding" really does occur. Because the physical difference is mixed with kinship. Because although no logical method of measuring empathy and projection exists, the phenomenon itself does.

And the dog knows this too. Look, I say in my hominid projection loop: the dog can project. And so he can, naturally he can: as a dog in a canine-human encounter with me.

Nagel, of course, being the scientist that he is, is talking about knowledge, not imagination. But isn't using our imagination – as accurately as we can – the crux of our communication with animals, with other creatures of this planet? Imagination based on intuition, experience, mutual familiarization, consideration and movement towards the other?

We have long put our trust in knowledge. And now it seems we are waking up and rubbing our eyes in amazement: Oh, is the planet that sensitive? That small. And that broken already.

Nagel's reasoning is as wrong as it is correct. Certainly, I can't escape my own humanness. It determines what I imagine to be the inner experience of a bat, or my dog. Her visual impressions are blurred, but only by my standards. Not by hers. To her, they are "normal": "her world" is what's good enough for her purposes. Already, the picture is becoming more complex. I may not be capable of knowing, but I can certainly feel. Vicariously. I know what my own eyesight is like: not inadequate, even though I can't see ultraviolet. I can imagine the contours of a landscape by smell. I can see it in my mind.

In other words, I translate. I have to be actively aware, actively mindful of this loop. This is the first crucial step towards the dismantlement of hierarchies: of the thoughtless, too-ready recourse to speech – from a human-only perspective.

Living with an animal provides a constant demonstration of whether my assumptions are right, half-right or completely wrong. I am learning – my ideas are schooled by the lived experience of communication.

Which brings me to the second step. It is very simple and at the same time difficult for someone who has already learnt (been taught) that animals are "different", understood as livestock, numbers, objects. And that people/humans can't communicate with them, or only through violence (beating).

I must, no, I may, unlearn this.

Francis of Assisi, according to the stories we are told of him, had unlearnt it to an admirable degree. Fairytales and legends often feature characters who are able to communicate with animals. They do so using human language, otherwise the story wouldn't be understood. But we have to interpret this language as a metaphor, at least as far as the animal is concerned. Which is not to say that such communication doesn't happen.

But how does it, if not through verbal language?

Let me give you a few examples of interspecies communication.

A communication that can be thought of as something like a transfer of energy.

I was four years old and had a pet rabbit. He was young, black, and almost taller than my arm. He lived in the kennel, and was a great comfort to me. He ate carrots out of my hand, he let me stroke him and pick him up, he listened to me.

As long as I don't know that a thing "can't happen", then it can. In summer 1966, an eagerly awaited but, as it turned out, positively ghastly cousin from Canada came to stay with us for a couple of weeks. She was eight superior years old and took no notice of me. I told the rabbit my tale of woe. And although he never scratched me, or anyone else for that matter, he scratched her forearm to pieces. It was a long and bloody incident. And a consoling one from my perspective.

I was convinced that he did it for my sake.

Such an idea can be easily dismissed as a child's

superstition. Why, though? The assumption (the rabbit simply scratched, there is no connection) is as impossible to prove as my childish belief. Yet we are conditioned, the rational, logos-based episteme that we inhabit suggests to us that the child was wrong. But how can we know that the energy transfer I experienced emotionally and cognitively doesn't exist? That I hadn't succeeded in passing on some of my aggression to the rabbit?

We call what the child perceives a "magical world" and think we "know" better. Yet we can't say what "souls" are, we don't understand how families are connected or how memories can pass between family members across the generations. We don't even understand how we are bound together within our own species, beyond the visible aspect. The pandemic brought home to us that we all breathe the same air. And what it feels like when we don't have enough close contact with each other, can't smell and feel each other, and only see half a face.

Our brains deteriorate.

Our sadness grows.

Research into intergenerational memory confirms this phenomenon of transference and connectedness beyond our own milieu, our own body. We are beginning to rethink. Including in relation to other critters – other earth beings, dependent beings. At the same time, we would prefer to deny our reliance on "others". The Darwinian shock (you are an ape) runs deep. But what are we afraid of? Donna Haraway and many others have attempted to retell this story. Ursula LeGuin's theory of fiction eschews the heroic narrative of the spear-wielding strongman: instead, she sees humanity's first cultural achievement in the invention of the bag, which allows us to gather things and carry others (human or animal). Furthermore, it creates a space of chaotic but not uncontrolled communication: inside a bag all manner of things, large and small, like and unlike, rub up against each other. If we are to open ourselves – m'illumino – we must have no fear of this encounter and its inherent de-hierarchization. No fear of sharing that same category: *animal*.

German is a modular language. It invents words and concepts by gluing existing lexical material together. Let me introduce my second animal story with the German words

"Vorsicht" ("caution" or literally "foresight") and "Mitsicht" ("empathy" or literally "co-sight").

When I bought my German pinscher from a breeder in North Rhine Westphalia in 2001, I asked the man if any of his customers had ever returned a problem dog. The breeder replied with irony and warmth that this had never happened, but that he had once taken a dog back of his own accord. Out of sympathy! With the dog.

And the problem?

Oh, the breeder said, the dog was more intelligent than the owner.

Four months later, I'm alone in the flat with my adolescent pup. She has reached puberty and knows exactly what she's not allowed to do. She is almost fully grown, gangling and frisky. She knows me well by now, and I her. I am sitting at my desk at the end of the room, the door behind me is open. Suddenly I am aware of being watched. You know the feeling: you can just tell, even without eyes in the back of your head. You feel the energy. I turn around, and there's the dog with the yellow bathroom sponge in her mouth. Looking at me, tentatively wagging her tail. Then I realize what's going on here. The sponge is taboo. She has fetched it from the bathroom and planted herself in the doorway, staring at me. She can't risk a gentle bark, otherwise it will fall out of her mouth. My dog is playing a game that she has thought up herself. And that I, as a social animal like her, understand. We don't need words. I am supposed to chase her. So I do; I tell her off in such a way that we both know I don't really mean it. We enjoy ourselves tearing through doorways, round and round the flat. Eventually I retrieve the sponge and we have a laugh together, that is, she joins me, panting and laughing, and I stroke her, panting and laughing, and the sponge is tidied away again. For next time.

How can this be? Let me list the cognitive abilities necessary for this game. They are skills that animals, including dogs, are not credited with, yet they were in evidence here:

- Inventing a game
- Putting it into action
- Thinking and planning ahead
- A sense of how she needs to behave in order for me to behave as the game requires
- AND the ability to distinguish between at least two planes of reality: real life and fiction, a "real" chase, so to speak, and a pretend one.

That afternoon I realized that my dog was capable of fiction.

The German words Nachsicht ("leniency" or literally "after-sight") and Umsicht ("circumspection" or literally "all-round sight")

are metaphorical concepts that lead me to the last chapter of my presentation, before I return to Ungaretti's "l'immenso" at the end. First, let us venture once again, apropos wings and paws, into the realm of projection, which doesn't only apply to interspecies communication of course. The English poet Michael Hamburger, in a text of that non-"standard" coherency we call "poetry", takes us into a world that, instead of summoning the logo-intelligence of the eye, relies on the wisdom of the ear.

Michael Hamburger was born into a Jewish family in Berlin-Charlottenburg in 1924. In 1933, the Hamburgers succeeded in emigrating from Berlin to London via Edinburgh, where Michael's father, a paediatrician, retrained in order to practise in the UK. Michael went to Oxford in 1941 to study German and French before serving in the British army from 1943 to 1947. He took up writing and taught German at London and Reading universities until 1984. He initially became best known as a translator, notably of Friedrich Hölderlin and Paul Celan, but also of his friend W.G. Sebald. Hamburger, who died in Suffolk in 2007, wrote his own poetry in English. He was a thinker, critic and language enthusiast. A gentle man who had a large garden, cultivated apples – and listened to blackbirds.

Conversation with a Blackbird

'Will you please, will you please, will you please'
He begins, and I wait for more
Which comes, indistinct, unemphatic.
'Keep away' I think I make out
Or 'let things be'
May or may not have heard:
The vowels are blurred,
The consonants missing.
Oh, and the rhythm is free
After that courteous request.

Translated, my answering whistle says:
'Be more explicit. Our kind can't endure
Things unsure, songs open-ended.
To be kept guessing is more
Than we can bear for long.'

Does he laugh? 'Please, please, please, please, please'
Is the reply. Then coloratura, among it these phrases:
'We repeat, don't complete.
Mysteries, mysteries. Improvise, weather- wise.
Now I dip, now I rise.
Vary it. Don't care a bit
If it's indefinite.
Now I sit, twitter. Now I flit.'

Hamburger's poem is about the processes of listening, projection and imagination. The English blackbird answers the English poet's words in English. The ear knowingly hallucinates, but only partially. It translates sound based on similarities, turning it into meaningful words. It translates emotion, knowledge and proximity in a particular place, at a particular time, into something that can also be understood lexically.

To repeat my core concept: translation needs to happen. Someone is standing there, the "I" of the poem, listening to the blackbird's song. Perhaps the blackbird is sitting on its song perch, in August, practising

subsong, also known as whisper song or babbling.[2]

Hamburger's human "I" takes the liberty of entering into a dialogue. What do I understand? Imagination operates obliquely. I hear what I'm allowed to hear. I'm not a blackbird, but I am a living creature, part of this space-time. We both have eyes, ears, blood, a heart. We feel fear, a sense of belonging, hunger and thirst. We grow weary, we dream. You see me, I see you. You hear me, I hear you. "Let things be". The vowels are blurred, the consonants missing: a distorted language of sounds emerges, a beak-shaped language that humans have always translated for themselves. We see this reflected in bird names, sparrow, spadger, spuggy, especially when coloured by dialect. We have given birds sayings or names imitating their calls: cuckoo, curlew, peewit, chiffchaff. We are connected. Dependent upon our connectedness.

Hamburger's "I" takes the opposite approach: he sits there in his linguistic cage, waiting, allowing himself to be touched. The poem exposes what happens when we speak: a mixture of "I" and "the other". We circle in acts of understanding between semantics, emotion and imagination. But our imagination doesn't run free: we tune in to what we expect to hear or what makes sense to us personally. Thus, the poem has the bird speaking about what humans imagine birdhood to be like: We repeat, don't complete. This only works in English, including the rhyme: a German blackbird would say something different. Vary it a bit. Repeat and repeat, with displacement. That is a poetic principle: we call it a rhyme or a strophe.

Now I dip, now I rise.
Vary it. Don't care a bit
If it's indefinite.
Now I sit, twitter. Now I flit.'

"Flit" means to fly away, depart, vanish in an instant. To die. Etymologically, it comes from the proto-Germanic, i.e. reconstructed verb *flutjan-, to float. To flow, be in motion.

The *Conversation with a Blackbird* is not just a dialogue, but a conversation in the literal sense: a reversal and transformation of the "I". Communication across a boundary to the being that moves faster than we can see/comprehend. One that moves differently from us, has a body that flies, a throat that twitters. That has a shorter life, a heart that beats (in our terms) incredibly fast. That shares a moment and a space with us, but experiences it differently. That, in its otherness, speaks a twittery language to its own kind – but also for us. In whose auditory space we are integrated.

Perhaps interspecies communication can be thought of in this way: as overlapping circles of indirect referentiality, a *displaced* sharing of time and space. Partial similarity, but distorted. Guided by the possibility of a translation that entails transmission to human language and hence transformation, but is not arbitrary. One that is based, at its best, on a conscious alterity coupled with a subliminal connectedness (one that has to be found and felt). And that, when we do feel it, opens up the possibility of an otherness of being.

M'illumino d'immenso

Indefinite, I flit.

I perish in the face of the infinite. Or: I am moved by it. Both Ungaretti and Hamburger are seeking a linguistic liminality. They seek it as a way of

[2] The term *subsong* denotes a form of vocalization, usually relatively quiet, produced by songbirds. It differs from the territorial song of the respective species and is also used by non-singing species to mark their territory. What we hear is the chattering of juvenile birds not yet competing for nesting sites or females, or of adult birds outside the breeding season. Subsong generally consists of calls and series of babbling sounds, and may contain imitations. It has a highly individual character. Subsongs were long neglected by avian research. Yet they are particularly beautiful: the birds are engaging in family chatter, babbling, experimentation, throat lubrication. Subsong is a melody behind the melody, a melody in parts, in the making, on the way to something new. Half ecstasy, half joy. Ornithologists believe: "It may be a way of trying out vocabulary." Without realizing it, we are observing poetry.
It was a long time before we, i.e. humans, discovered subsong. It didn't fit with our notion of animals as creatures of instinct. Subsong is a piece of animal freedom.

"dealing with" the concept of infinity. Hamburger approaches the inconceivability of the infinite through the bird's otherness of being. Ungaretti constructs a grammatical circle: two words that are actually four, two words beginning with "i", the double consonants "l" and "m", also close to each other phonetically, the final o – the undulation of the sounds, the influx of light audibly and visibly rendered through language. And both poets describe a process: two agencies are involved. One arises from the other. It is not a higher authority called God, numinosum or muse that illuminates the "me"; rather, the "me" illuminates itself by participating in the vastness-beyond-my-imagination. That may manifest itself in a blackbird.

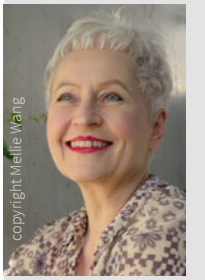
Both poems are about a self-effacing "I". One that melts down to an "m" or becomes a waiting ear in Hamburger's case. It must become permeable, surrender a part of itself in order to absorb immensity (and perhaps also to bear it). But that would introduce a heaviness to the text that is alien to "illumino". Illumino is radiant, radiant with the melody of i u io, moving down the throat; reading the poem aloud, you almost swallow it, that immenso. The encounter with animality, with nature, with that which is bigger than us brings about, as Hamburger's sounds suggest, a lightness of heart. A bright i: twitter, flit, sit, bit, dip.

Interspecies contact is good for us. Walking the dog, playing with the dog. Listening to the blackbird. Being present, sharing.

I-sounds, up and down the scale: "i"s – but no "l".

L'immenso.

Look, there it is, perched on the garden fence.



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THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES AS A TESTIMONY TO THE AGENCY OF NON-HUMANS

Trees van Montfoort

According to the thesis of this article, the Canticle of the Creatures can contribute to a necessary paradigm shift in theology, because Francis uses the language of the Psalms, in which non-humans also have agency. The non-human reality plays an important role in many biblical texts: non-humans are also capable of acting on their own initiative. For modern western people, these texts are difficult to understand because this society has lost the sense of seeing nature as independent beings. This is an important cause of the ecological crisis. With the help of pre-, post- and extra-modern insights into subjectivity and personhood, we can rethink this in a new way.

1. Creation Sings: The Psalms[1]

I'll start with the language of the Psalms. In the Psalms, creation is the most important motif for thanksgiving and praise to God. This praise comes not only from human beings, but from all creatures: "Let the sea roar, and all that fills it, the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap in their hands, let the hills sing together for joy." (Psalm 98:7-8) Creation appears in two ways: as a witness to the greatness of God and as a bearer of God's praise.[2]

Creation Bears Testimony to God's Greatness

We see creation as a witness to God's greatness in Psalm 19, for example: "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, their voice is not heard." (Psalm 19:1-3) Creation bears witness to God's majesty. It does this without words, simply by being there. While God begins his creation with his breath, the spirit that carries the spoken word, the response of creation needs no words. The human voice is subordinate.[3]

In Psalm 104, the earth is described as an ecosystem in which everything is interconnected and dependent on God: "You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills, giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst. By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches. From your lofty abode you water the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth" (Psalm 104:10-14). It is God who gives nourishment to all living beings (27-28) and God's breath that gives life to everything. At the end of the psalm, the psalmist rejoices with God over all His works, ending as it began: "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" (36). Psalm 104 paints the most vivid portrait of the whole of creation as a community of creatures. Each has been given its place in the world by God and is cared for by God. Humans are merely one of the creatures; God is of central importance.[4]

Psalm 104 gives us humans a humble place in the midst of the enormous diversity of living beings. Food comes from the earth and from God, with no opposition between the two. There is still no hint of our western dualism that divides God and the earth.[5] There is likewise no separation between the act of creation and that of its preservation. God allows the earth to be fertile and gives the breath of life, then, now and in the future.

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[1] The first and third sections are partly taken from Montfoort (2025): 101–108; see also Jong/ Hoogerwerf (2024): 154–183. - [2] Horrell (2010): 49–55. - [3] Primavesi (2011): 181–183. - [4] Bauckham (2011): 10. - [5] Horrell (2010): 51.

Creation Praises God

Creation, which itself praises God, is a recurring theme in the Psalms. It is also a key motif in Deutero-Isaiah; for example, there are texts such as this one: "Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it!" (Isaiah 44:23). In many psalms, there is a call to the whole earth - and sometimes also to the heavens - to rejoice and praise God.[6]

Psalm 148 contains the most extensive hymn of praise in the Psalms, if not in length, then in terms of its scope. It starts in heaven. "Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights".[7] The inhabitants of heaven - angels, the sun, moon and stars - are called upon to praise God, for God has given them their place. Then comes the earth and the subterranean. The psalm offers a vivid picture of the cosmos, from the heavens above to the earth below[8]: "Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds!" (Psalm 148:7-10)

Only then do the people come, from kings to young women. As part of the earth, people are joyfully invited to take part in this gigantic song of praise of the entire cosmos. The people of Israel are given a special place in it - mind you, Israel, not humanity - because Israel is close to God. In this psalm, heaven and earth form a double choir that encompasses all living beings. Much of the psalm can be found in the song of praise of the three young men from the Book of Daniel (Daniel 3:51-90). This hymn of praise probably influenced the Canticle of the Creatures, as Francis sang it every Sunday morning.[9]

The idea that mountains can praise is difficult for modern people to imagine. Since the Enlightenment, we have become accustomed to seeing everything non-human as a thing, and only humans have agency. In adaptations of the song of praise from Daniel, the original text is often adapted to make it more acceptable. The biblical text reads: "Bless the Lord, mountains and hills; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever." One hymn[10] translates these words as follows: "Mountains and hills throw back loudly the echo of joy, to his glory". The image describes a landscape in which the echo of a song reverberates. Mountains and hills themselves do not praise (anymore). Who are those who truly praise? Only people?

Even plants are no longer subjects in the song just quoted. Animals, by contrast, have a voice or, rather, they make noises. Clearly, we can imagine animals as singers of praise only if they are similar to us humans. There is much to be said for translating the text more literally. It is precisely because nature presents itself here in a completely different way to what we are used to that these psalms can mean so much more for eco-theology. All of living and non-living nature praises God, simply by being there. The babbling of the rivers, the rustling of the trees: both can sound like clapping and rejoicing, but even the soundless celestial bodies and the silent plants are parts of creation that praise God. We humans belong to this great whole, or more precisely: to the earth's biosphere.[11]

Psalms are poetic texts; they are full of figurative language. These passages are also metaphorical;

[6] Psalm 66:1-4; 69:35; 96:1.11-12; 97:1 and 98:4-9. A variation of this is the call to all that has breath to praise God in Psalm 103:22 and 150:6. In the New Testament, this idea appears in Philippians 2:10 and Revelation 5:13. - [7] When the Bible says "heaven and earth", it does not mean the hereafter and the present life or God and us; rather, it refers to everything that exists, the entire universe, the great and the small, the far and the near. - [8] It is important to remember how people in the early Middle East imagined the cosmos: a flat earth, with water around and below it, the dome of the sky above with the sun, moon and stars, and water behind this dome of the sky, which sometimes came down through openings in the form of rain. God and the angels still live above this heavenly water. - [9] Speelman/ Freeman/ Eijnden (2010): 12. - [10] The hymn of praise of the three young men is included in the Dutch songbook of 2013 in two versions, 154a and b. - [11] The call is a grammatical form, comparable to a call to one's own soul: "Praise the LORD, my soul" (Psalm 103:1 etc.), which means the same as: "I praise the LORD." Johnson (2015): 276: The fact that the psalmist calls all creatures does not mean that this call to the creatures is necessary to hear their praise of God. They already do this by being there, without the need for a human being.

human images are used for non-human reality. Nature is not just a metaphor for the human world. In pre-modern times, people had fewer concerns about non-human subjects. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), for example, ascribes feeling, desire and imagination to everything that lives, albeit to varying degrees, and regards the respective behavior as clear evidence of this.

2. The Canticle of the Creatures

Francis's understanding of the Psalms was still in this sense:[12] for him, non-humans are independent beings, subjects like humans, not objects. We have lost this concept in modern times.
Praised be you, my Lord, through all your creatures [...] *per sora Luna e le stelle:* - Sister Moon and the stars [...] *per frate Vento e per aere e nubilo* - Brother Wind and air and clouds [...] *per sor'Acqua,* - Sister Water [...] *per frate Focu,* - Brother Fire [...] *per sora nostra matre Terra* - our Sister Mother Earth.

Creation as a Gift

Many versions translate the Italian per as 'for'. At the beginning of the Dutch version of the Green Bible[13], there is such a translation of the Canticle of the Creatures: "God be praised for our sister, the moon, and for the stars"[14]. German versions also do this. In 1994, Robert Haas wrote the refrain "Praise be to you, Lord, with all creatures, praise and glorify the Lord!". Each verse begins with "For sister sun", "For brother moon and the many stars" and so on.[15] Kathi Stimmer-Salzeder wrote (2001): "From the bottom of my heart I want to give thanks for Brother Moon and the stars".[16] Norbert M. Becker wrote: "Praise be to you, O Lord, for Brother Sun. Praised be you, O Lord, for the moon and the stars."

This interpretation fits with the many songs in which God is thanked for what he has given us. That's not a bad thing, is it? The conviction that the created world is a gift from God is valuable, but not in the sense of a gift that, once given, can be used by the recipient as they see fit. In modern times, the view has emerged that the world belongs to humans, can be controlled by humans and exists only because of them. The idea that we thank God in the Canticle of the Creatures for something that has become our possession supports the idea of human control over nature. It also fits into the economic-technological paradigm in which new business models and improved technologies promise to solve the ecological crisis.[17]

At the time of Francis, the world was seen as finished. Everything existed for the glory of God; angels, not humans, were the highest creatures. It was not until the Renaissance that the idea emerged of active human supremacy that could change the world.[18]

In the Bible, too, everything exists for God's glory. God gives the earth to people and the other inhabitants to use as a living space, as a common home, but it remains God's possession. In this biblical sense, the Canticle of the Creatures expresses gratitude for the light of the sun and for the "earth that sustains and governs us and produces forth varied fruits". The translation of per as "for" shows the aspect of gratitude but raises the suspicion that the creatures are regarded as the property of humans or at least are deprived of their own agency.

A Hymn of Praise to Creation, Creation as a Reference to God

Other, often more literal translations translate "*per*" as "through": Lord be praised through our sister moon and through the stars that you have formed. "Through" can have two slightly different meanings here. The first is that the moon and stars are a means of praising God. God is praised by means of the moon and stars. This is similar to what we find in

[12] Speelman (2017): 15 „Het is dus niet zo dat Franciscus de schepping oproept de Heer te loven, en dat de schepping dat vervolgens doet: zij doet dat allang, zij het in stilte! Franciscus lijkt deze stille lofzang te horen" (translated: So it is not the case that Francis asks creation to praise the Lord and then creation does it: it has been doing it for a long time, albeit in silence! Francis seems to hear this silent praise). - [13] Groene Bijbel. - [14] „God zij geloofd voor onze zus de maan en voor de sterren". - [15] https://www.evangeliums.net/lieder/lied_sonnengesang.html, last accessed on November 20, 2024. - [16] https://www.evangeliums.net/lieder/lied_gelobt_seist_du_gott_des_lebens_sonnengesang.html, last accessed on November 20, 2024. - [17] Pope Francis (2015). - [18] Bauckham (2011): 36.

the Psalm adaptation, which translates "Praise the LORD, you mountains and hills" as "Mountains and hills throw back loudly the echo of joy, to his glory". The moon and stars themselves do not praise (anymore). Are those who really praise, the people? The Liedboek 2013, the hymnbook of the Dutch Protestant Church, contains a version that reads: "Be praised, source and giver, for your song in all that lives [...] I sing to you and sister moon and all the stars around them"[19] This is a very interesting solution to the problem of translating per. It is "I" that praises God and the moon and the stars. God and the creatures stand side by side, but are not on the same level, for in everything that lives is God's song. But can we say that the moon and stars (and wind and water) are alive? It would be better to say that God's song is in everything that exists. One could say that God is reflected in his creatures. It is not only the sun that is a symbol of God; this also applies to the other creatures, and this gives them their dignity.[20]

Connectedness with Fellow Creatures - Job

In the Neoplatonic philosophy of Francis' time, creatures are merely references to God. Francis, however, was not philosophically trained.[21] He experienced nature with his body and his senses, writes Willem Marie Speelman, and for him the non-human creatures are brothers and sisters. He speaks to the birds as he does to his brothers:[22] "Birds, my brothers, you should praise your Creator profusely and always love him, for he has given you feathers for clothing and wings for flying and everything else you need."[23] Not only humans, but also animals can represent Christ.[24] St. Francis composed the Canticle of the Creatures when he was very ill and hopeless and was aware of how vulnerable people are and how connected they are to other physical beings.[25] This connectedness comforts us in difficult times. In this respect, Francis resembles the biblical Job.

In the Bible book of Job, creation is addressed at length, especially in the final chapters.[26] In the surprising answer that God gives Job at the end, the focus shifts to the importance of non-human creation. Why does God answer in this way? According to traditional explanations, God shows his power here. He humiliates Job and silences him. The animals described in such detail are then basically of no significance themselves. But Job is humiliated. Job is invited to turn his gaze outwards. He experiences the world and God as *tremendum et fascinans*, great and fascinating. He is lifted up as part of a much larger whole, humble and self-confident at the same time. Everything has found its place in the extraordinary revelation given to Job. Francis finds consolation in a similar way.

Creation Give Praise

Are creatures limited to passively reflecting God or are they themselves active? Can the word per, translated as "through", be interpreted as "by"? 'Praised be you, my Lord, by sister moon and stars' means that the moon and stars praise God. Kurt Rose recognizes the activity of the creatures: "*Praise also bring the stars, brother moon, the friend of the night. Look how brother wind nimbly sings praise from the clouds, a thousandfold heavenly song, all creation praises the Lord! And the beautiful sister water praises with rain, stream and spring.*" He gives the Canticle of the Creatures the title: "Lord, the creatures praise you".[27] This adaptation emphasizes an aspect that is of great importance in today's ecological crisis.[28]

First Conclusions

I conclude that per has several aspects: the aspect of gratitude (for), the aspect of praise for creation, in which God is reflected (through/means) and the aspect of the creatures' own activity (through/by), which, as in the Psalms, praises God. This ability of creatures to act is in harmony with the Psalms.

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[19] „Wees geprezen, bron en schenker, om uw lied in al wat leeft [...] Ik zing voor u en zuster maan en alle sterren om haar heen" Liedboek 2013, Lied 742. - [20] Speelman (2023): 201-202. - [21] Ibid: 5. - [22] Ibid: (2010): 5. - [23] 1Cel58, quoted by Speelman (2010): 8. - [24] Speelman (2010): 6. - [25] Ibid: 13-14. - [26] Montfoort (2025): 112-121. - [27] https://www.evangeliums.net/lieder/lied_herr_dich_loben_die_geschoepfe.html; last accessed on November 22, 2024. - [28] The Church Fathers considered the relationship between God and the world to be mediated by humans. In the Psalms, the creatures do not need this mediation. Speelman (2023: 203) translates per as 'through', where God is the source and goal of the Canticle of the Creatures.

3. Paradigm Shift

In modern times, we have lost the understanding of the subjectivity of non-humans that Francis still had. This is an important epistemological cause of the ecological crisis. The environmental crisis is more than just a sequence of practical problems that we could solve by customary means. Our practices are connected to technological and economic systems. Practices stem from beliefs, and beliefs are based on practices. Change can start with practices or/and beliefs, but it will always affect both.

Anthropocentrism and the Technocratic Paradigm

The historian Lynn White accused the Christian churches of their anthropocentric theology; their human-centered interests had degraded nature to a commodity. He wrote: "Christianity, especially in its western form, is the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen [...] Christianity has made it possible to exploit nature in an attitude of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."[29]

Francis of Assisi was a shining example for White, with "his belief in the virtue of humility not merely for the individual but for man as a species. Francis tried to depose man from his monarchy over creation and set up a democracy of all God's creatures."[30] I think this could definitely put us on the path to a different paradigm.

Pope Francis writes something similar in *Laudato Si'*. He cites the "techno-economic paradigm", the dominant idea that humans can control all of reality with the help of technology, as the deeper cause of the ecological crisis. A small group of people appropriates the right to subjugate other people and nature for the maximization of profit. He defends brotherhood and sisterhood with all our fellow creatures, because all living and non-living beings have their own value before God.

Subjectivity of Non-Humans

With the help of postmodern insights into subjectivity and personhood, we can reconceptualize the subjectness of non-humans. In post-humanist philosophy, the human being is no longer the measure of all things. Any opposition between person and thing is suspended, just as in today's natural sciences. Michel Foucault's post-structuralism, for example, relativizes the human being as a subject: people are not autonomous individuals, but are constantly influenced and shaped by their environment. (The French word "*sujet*" means subjugated.) Marx and Freud had already asserted this in their own way.

In contrast, animals appear to be more subjective and individual than previously thought. The behaviorist idea that animals are merely driven by instincts has been refuted by behavioral research as outdated. Primatologist Frans de Waal has proven beyond doubt that so-called typical human behaviors also occur in animals. Animals also show self-awareness, a sense of justice and empathy.[31] In the animal rights movement, animals are regarded as persons. Plants are much more different from humans than animals, which is why they are considered the lowest form of life, says neurophysiologist Stefano Mancuso.[32] They do not resemble humans or animals, do not have an indivisible organism with organs and no central command center (brain), but are divisible, have a structure like the Internet, and possess a kind of swarm intelligence. According to Mancuso, plants have more senses than humans. In the social sphere they are similar to humans: they can orient themselves, communicate with each other and recognize family. If being a person means orienting oneself, acting and developing and thus distinguishing oneself from others, we can also attribute this personhood to plants. If something like receptivity and individuality is sufficient to be a person, the boundary between thing and person shifts even further.

[29] White (1967): 1205. - [30] Ibid: 1205. - [31] Waal (2016). - [32] Mancuso/ Viola (2015).

In New Zealand, the Whanganui River was granted official status as a legal entity in 2014.[33] This was at the instigation of the Maori. As a result, a conflict over the interpretation of a treaty from 1840 was finally resolved. The British thought they were the owners of this river. They took advantage of the fact that the Maori did not know the concept of ownership because they regard nature, like people with whom they live in relationship, not as property. The river as a legal entity is a compromise between these two opposing world views. Guardians were appointed to look after the interests of the river.

Philosopher Bruno Latour shows how the strict separation of nature and society and the sharp dividing line between humans and non-humans came about without ever working.[34] Almost everything earthly cannot be separated into either nature or society, either human or non-human. There is no longer any nature that is not influenced by humans. Moreover, humans are also part of nature. People, animals, plants, rivers, clouds, houses, associations, laws, tools, all are connected as actors in networks and influence each other. We need a "parliament of things", he said.[35]

4. Conclusions

These insights from before, after and outside the modern era support the horizontal model of being fellow creatures that speaks from most of the Psalms of praise. Within the Bible, the model is a counterweight to the dominion of humans from Genesis 1:28 and the idea from Psalm 8 that everything lies at the feet of humans.

Every Creature Praises God in its Own Way

Every creature praises God in its own way, they do not need a voice to do so. A beech tree lives to the glory of God by growing and communicating in the way that suits it, which may be a little different from other beech trees. A frog honors God by croaking, but also simply by its existence. Nature does not need humans to sing its praises. Our fellow creatures can teach us to praise without words, as Richard Bauckham says: "It is distinctively human to bring praise to conscious expression in voice, but the creatures remind us that this distinctively human form of praise is worthless unless, like them, we live our whole lives to God's glory. […] In fact, it is much more obvious that other creatures can help us to worship God than that we can help other creatures to."[36]

Epistemology: Kinship instead of Domination

The knowledge that is highly valued in our culture is one-sided. It is geared towards domination, based on a large gap between people and the rest of reality. Eco-feminist theologians, such as Sölle, McFague and Gebara, assume connectedness or, even better, kinship, as a source of knowledge. Everyone and everything lives in a web of relationships. I am totally dependent on plants for food; even without animals, humans could not survive. Compassion is the necessary prerequisite for the acquisition of knowledge. Without an awareness of kinship and therefore also compassion, this strong feeling of sympathy for the suffering of others, I cannot understand the world and become alienated from the earth; I do not know from where my food comes and who I am at all.

Sallie McFague raises the question of how Christians can love nature.[37] She extends the commandment to love our neighbor to the whole of nature. In order to love nature, we do not need to look for a spectacular, distant landscape. Our own garden, plants on a balcony or a nearby park carry more weight because we have a direct relationship.

The Canticle of the Creatures as a Performance

The Canticle of the Creatures, when translated correctly, contributes to this necessary paradigm shift in theology because Francis uses the language of the psalms, in which non-humans also have agency. As noted earlier, this concept is difficult

[33] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being; last accessed on November 26, 2024. - [34] Latour (2008). - [35] Latour (1993). - [36] Bauckham (2010): 150, 154. - [37] McFague (1997).

for modern people to understand. The western separation between nature and culture hinders the view of what is essentially at stake. Scientific information about the state of the earth is not enough to restore our connection with the earth. We need to develop other ways of engaging with the earth, through the humanities, politics, art, philosophy, religion and ethics.[38] In an attempt to let non-humans have a say, Bruno Latour organized an event where not only countries and organizations, but also oceans and mountains were represented.[39]

The Canticle of the Creatures is not a theological treatise, but a song.[40] It helps us to sing what we cannot yet say.

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INDIGENOUS JEWISH CONCEPTS OF FELLOW CREATURES AND SHARED ENVIRONMENT

Deborah Williger

Plant physiology teaches us that energy is lowered when structures grow. Plants "lignify" when energy sources such as plant sugars are converted into cell wall components. In Jewish communities, a dogmatic approach also fosters a climate of spiritual rigidity and an insistence on soulless formalities. Since the Jewish Enlightenment, traditional, Kabbalistic knowledge has been largely ignored even by the Jewish majority. Yet it can be said that much of Jewish tradition is based on indigenous knowledge. Knowledge acquired from spiritual closeness among humans, animals and nature. Talmudic, open-ended, processual thinking is the original, indigenous teaching of the rabbis. The Hebrew Bible, the Psalms, the Talmud and the Midrashim contain countless indigenous narratives from their own tradition with the potential to provide impulses for our current actions to protect our shared environment. According to the Mishnah: Revelation was not given to Moses as חָרוּת (*charut*: inscription), but in חֵרוּת (*cheirut*: freedom) (Pirke Avot 6.2).

Healing the divine world - Tikkun Olam

The term "environment" reflects our anthropological self-image. People are at the center, and the environment is around them. The cultural evolution of our world has taken place from the making of tools to the use of vehicles and the development of thinking tools (computers).[1] Only the immediate use of "healing tools" can repair the wound that our system of excessive growth is inflicting ever deeper into creation. We live in a shared world and our task is to become fellow creatures. Without a spiritual reconnection to the gift of life, alienation from nature will increase and individual consciousness will disappear from society.[2] Good action is able to collect scattered light and energy again. Bad human action fills "divine light" with darkness. Everyone should contribute according to their abilities, even if it is just by giving the gift of a smile. We should act truthfully, peacefully and justly. This process is called "Tikkun Olam" (healing the divine world). The desired unity of light, the "repaired world", will outshine everything that has gone before, as in the Japanese Kinzugi, when a repaired vessel with gold-plated bands first attains value and beauty.

Indigenous Jewish knowledge

In the Torah, midrashim, or narratives, are often communicated with a name. For example, the master builder Bezalel built the tabernacle in the desert. Bezalel means "Shadow of God". Boundaries become blurred when viewed in shadow. Transcendence becomes possible as soon as boundaries become permeable and transitions are created: then truth breaks through. In the twilight between day and night, in the gray, truth flashes at the apex, at the border to the light. After the fratricide, Cain bowed his head. The liar Jacob wrestled at dawn with the all-too-human and divine truth, demanding the blessing for himself at eye level. He was Israel, upright, "*anti tropos*" (from the Greek: directed against): an *anthropos* or human being. He would try to come to a peaceful agreement with his brother.

Jewish anthropology: living in the image of God

In order to achieve a paradigm shift in theology, it is important to detach ideas of creation in the "image of God" (Genesis 1:23-28) from their usual anthropo-egoistic interpretations of the text and to develop an understanding of a more just relationship among humans, animals and nature. Modern and traditional

[1] Lüke (2006): 32. - [2] Horkheimer/ Adorno (2013): 11.

theology has interpreted “God's image” in such a way that it elevates humans above creation. The belief adopted from anti-theologies of the body that body and spirit are in opposition also supports a humanistic value complex in Jewish thought, which sees the ideas of God's image, soul and infinite value united exclusively in the human being. This gives rise to dualisms between humans and animals, between humans and nature, and even between humans and their own nature, which place the spirit above the body.

Adam as God's sheep

The verb “*memshala*” (Gen 1:16), which in modern Hebrew also means “government” and is translated as “to rule”, offers an approximation to the biblical concept of rule in Genesis: “The sun rules by day and the moon and stars rule by night.” This form of ruling has nothing to do with hierarchy or oppression; demarcations are not necessarily divisive.

Around 1000 years ago, rabbinical scholars, the Masoretes, laid down the vocalization and punctuation marks for biblical consonant writing. This linguistic convention still applies today. The Masoretic definitions may have resulted in differences in meaning compared to the original text. If the same three consonants of the verb “kabash” קבש (Gen 1:28), which to this day is translated as “to rule, oppress or occupy”, are not read Masoretically but as “*kewes*”, a completely different sense of the word emerges:[3] “*kewes*” is translated as “sheep”. Williger argues that when a sheep is revealed as the verb root in the language of the biblical shepherd people, this plays an etymological role. She therefore retranslated the verse: “Be fruitful and multiply on the earth and 'sheep' it.” Sheep, here as a verb creation from sheep with the task to “be like sheep or like shepherds”. Sheep are still regarded today as pioneering animals for new pastures, as they have so-called golden hooves with an optimum ratio between body weight and hoof contact area. They distribute their manure evenly over the surface, gently trample down the soil, compact the sward without damaging it, make it resistant and ensure that the roots are connected to the soil water and the plants are nourished. The verse would then also fit perfectly to the context. For in the Garden of Eden in chapter 2 of Genesis, Adam is instructed to cultivate and guard the garden, i.e. to use and tend it, like shepherds their flock of sheep. Williger's discovery of the sheep in the Hebrew obviates the need for today's reinterpretations with benevolent notions of rulership.

Similarly, the second verb in the same verse, “*rada*”, does not necessarily contradict peaceful settlement. Literally translated, it means “to tread (on)”, “to dominate” or “to subdue” the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea and the animals of the earth. Depending on how the preposition ב (*be*) is translated, the local, temporal, causal or modal meaning that can be read from it changes. Even an early rabbinic interpretation relativizes a one-sided interpretation of the verb.[4] The rabbis can imagine the passive verb form ירדו (*jeradu*) and link it to Adam's “righteous” behavior (Adam as the human species; plural). If Adam acted in God's image, they would ascend, otherwise they would still descend below the animals. The rabbis relativize the interpretation of the verb. Adam are part of creation and likeness. Not only Adam (human beings) belong to it, but also the whole of creation. Seidenberg reads this tradition as follows: if we expand our idea of God’s image (*tselem Elohim*) to include all of creation, we may be able to express it more fully.[5]

The “bagel theory” of the origin of the world

According to the Kabbalistic interpretation of the Bible, humans are not the crown of creation, but the divine sphere in the origin of the world, “*Keter*” (Hebrew: crown). In infinite grace (*Chessed*), God withdrew into and out of infinity (Ayn Sof) into Godself and thus created space and time for creation.[6] The process of creation resembles a maternal act of becoming, when the feminine creates space for new life within itself. A creation out of nothing

[3] Williger (2019): 105–128. - [4] Genesis Raba. - [5] Seidenberg (2016): 17. - [6] Green (2004).

into nothingness, like the "primordial dough" poured into the hole of a bagel. This process is called "*Zimzum*". *Zimzum*, it is said, was triggered by an irritation, like a "giggle in the universe". How this irritation came about remains a mystery. The trigger for the so-called Big Bang is equally unknown. Unlike "giggling in the universe", the term "big bang" has a powerful and masculine connotation. After the Big Bang, mass continues to expand in the universe to this day. Time and space became measurable as a result.

If we do not close our minds to the realization that the biblical creation narrative does not contradict the theory of evolution, but rather "fits in" with it, this offers the possibility of interdisciplinary understanding. According to the creation narrative, creation, like evolution, is a process. The earth itself

Evolution

Beginning of the world:
The Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago

Since then → Expansion of the universe with the creation of space and time.

Creation of the Earth 4.6 billion years ago
and the primordial oceans.

The first building blocks of life – 3.8 billion years ago
Amino acids in the oceans
or impacts on Earth from asteroids.

Emergence of species: 550 million years ago
Bacteria, plants on land,
animals in water
Dinosaurs develop and die out again.

Mammals and 50 million years ago
primordial forms of
humans evolve.

This Cenozoic continues to this day and Homo sapiens continues to evolve to this day.

The evolution of all living things in countless variations and interrelations continues.

The moral evolution of Homo sapiens needs the support of commandments and laws.

Creation

The days of creation could span 13.8 billion years:

Beginning of the world: Irritation or giggling in the universe leads to **Tzimtzum** (= withdrawal of God – generation of time and space for the Creation)

1. day of the Creation: time – light and darkness,
2. day of the Creation: space – firmament
   In the beginning was Tohu-wa-Bohu – it was desolate and empty, the earth was covered with shallow seas,
3. day of the Creation: water, primordial animals in the water, land; plant life ,
4. day of the Creation: steady rhythms, seasons through the influence of the heavenly bodies, sun, moon and stars,
5. day of the Creation: animals in the water and in the air,
6. day of the Creation: land animals and genus Adam = primordial humans,
7. Sabbath = day of rest – without conclusion → development continues to this day.

The primordial human genus Adam (male and female primordial human beings were created at the same time, Gen 1:26) should behave well, i.e., according to God's example and work on and guard the Creation (Gen 2:15).

Then there is the development of Isha, the social and cultural side of Adam and thus to modern humans. Humans now descend from humans – bones from my bones, flesh from my flesh.

Growing awareness pulls humans away from nature, from animals.
Humans become mortal = the genus Adam receives life (Chawa = Eve). It is the task of the human mind and body to bring people and nature into balance.

brings forth further stages of development and the last day of creation, the Sabbath, is not brought to an end. It is not followed by the usual formula "and there was evening and there was morning" as on the first, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th day. Creation therefore remains a "work in progress" to this day.

Adam, the earliest humanity, undergoes a development in chapter 2 of Genesis analogous to the theory of evolution. To this day, no one knows when and how this evolutionary quantum leap took place. Was it just a little quantum leap, a completely fluid transition that is still ongoing, or a mutation? According to the Hebrew Bible, God took a side of Adam. This side had potential for development. It was the other side, *isha* to *ish*. Isha is the feminine, fertile side of Adam. Adam's first cognitive abilities are now supplemented by social abilities. Recent archaeology proves that homo sapiens was already widespread on the African continent around 300,000 years ago and that ever since, humans have descended from humans. The Bible says: flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones.

Chawa, mother of all living creatures

The Kabbalah says that everything newly created comes from the "red", *Adom*. In consonantal writing, this is also Adam. Adam is created from blood (*dam*) and earth (*adama*), from organic and inorganic building blocks of life. The primal humanity "Adam" was a whole. In Genesis chapter two, the focus is on the socio-cultural development of Adam. It continues the narrative of Adam's creation from the first chapter. This view contradicts the notion that there are two independent creation narratives. Reducing Adam to a first man, from whose rib a first woman originates, is a narrative for children that negatively serves gender hierarchies. There is no mention of "Eve" (Chava) in the Garden of Eden. She is mentioned only in the third chapter of Genesis during the expulsion from paradise. Chava (from *chaim* = life) is the mother of all living things. When united with life, Adam and all living things became mortal and the cycle of life and death began.

Creation 2.0 - in Hebrew, Noah means "to rest"

The biblical story of Noach, Noah (Christian), Nuha (Muslim) or Noh (Yezidi) gives us another important eco-theological example. Nebi Noh is the one who mediates between old and new times. The Hebrew Bible says that Noah acted in God's image. He walked in God's ways. Noach had chosen a "*tzadik we tamim*", a "righteous and non-violent" life. Immediately before the Noach narrative, it was said that from now on a human lifespan could be 120 years. But then it is said twice of Noah that he lived to be 600 years old until he became a father. This could point to the superhuman effort required to refuse moral decline. Noah thus points beyond his own time, in contrast to how most interpretations of the Bible have been understood to this day. Noah means to rest in Hebrew; this meaning is lost in translations. Strength lies in rest. The retreat to the ark meant a year of rest, regeneration, purification, a sabbatical year. The Noahides withdrew from the environment into a shared world.

If we view the ark as the inner self of every person, then the different animals could symbolize the different inner voices. The point is to live in permanent balance with our longings, drives, needs, desires and cravings, even with the "wild animals" within us. This is possible only if we are very careful not to neglect any living need, suppress or even kill one off. Creation would not have survived a war inside the ark. Those of us who have cared for animals know that we must give them our full attention. It is vital to prepare the right food at the right time and in the right quantity. We must bend down to feed them. Seeking balance and inner equilibrium creates peace with ourselves and others. When the waves have calmed down, we can open ourselves, our ark, again and continue on our way.

The Noahides lived as righteous people, while around them the world sank into a chaos of self-centeredness, violence, destruction and cruelty to animals. Body parts were torn from animals while they were still alive and eaten raw. There were no

commandments. The great flood, Mabbul, would devour this evil creation, humans and animals (Gen 6:13). The Noahides heard God's call. Calling in Hebrew is kahal. Kahal reflexively means to gather together. Kahal is the root word for kehilah (congregation). The Noahides answered the call because they did not live on bread alone. They had a spiritual connection to the divine presence. With the call, they also gathered all the animals into the community. Not just one pair, but seven pairs of each of the herd animals were taken onto the ark. That was far-sighted. Otherwise the sacrifice after the rescue would have already wiped out one species. An "archic" community and not a "hier-archic" one ensured the survival of the species. The Noahides can be regarded as our "archetypes of biodiversity". They preserved the biodiversity of the earth.

A ship-like ark is a "child's play" version of the salvation from Mabbul, the great flood. Could a small ship really have saved the Noahides and the entire animal world from destruction? The Hebrew word for ark is *teva*. The original meaning of *teva* is box. A box opens up unexpected dimensions of abstraction. The Noahides must have already been in covenant with God. How else could creation 2.0 have survived in its immeasurable diversity if not in a kind of "treasure chest". Today, *teva* spelled in a different way is nature. It says in the Torah: "From then on, free-living animals were to flee from humans". This new fear of humans was intended to protect them from a violent death (Gen 9:3). Where can animals flee to today?

Noachids as our archetypes of biodiversity

In the new world after the flood, rules were to apply from then on. The Talmud mentions seven Noachide commandments (Sanh 56b). These include a commandment to protect animals from torment (Shab 128b) (Num 22:28; Deut 11:15; 25:4).[7] Animals are to be treated with compassion (Baba Mezia 32b) and their lives are to be respected (Deut 25:4).[8] According to the rabbis, inconsiderate behavior towards animals and their needs is wrong (Zeva 116a).[9] This first rule set limits on greed. Only the righteous should eat meat. They would preserve their gentleness. Good treatment of animals was directly linked to human welfare. Animals are also representative of all the weak who need our compassion. The covenant with Noah, with the Noahides, the animals and God was a contract, an agreement that imposed clear restrictions on human behavior.

After the flood, animal sacrifices became a "holy" (special) act and service. The biblical word for temple sacrifice (Hebrew: *corban*) has the same Hebrew root as the word "*carov*", meaning "closeness". The spiritual level of the sacrificial rite promised that people could draw closer to God. For this spiritual closeness to God, those willing to sacrifice were prepared to give up their material possessions. Those who possessed little sacrificed little, such as women who sacrificed doves. The Bible verse "You shall not eat flesh with blood in it" (Gen 9:4) means that an animal had to be killed before being sacrificed. Meat should be cooked. Unity of ritual and ethics.

Immediately after the destruction of the temple, the cult of animal sacrifice was abolished by the rabbis and transferred to the abstract. Bulls were now to be offered "with the lips", i.e. through prayer - prayer replaced the temple sacrifice. In the Roman province of Judea, the temple cult degenerated from 63-70 C.A. into a "barbecue" for pilgrims from the surrounding area. For the Talmudic sages, the consumption of meat was merely a concession to human weakness. It occupies a low moral level. A return to the "fleshpots of Egypt" was seen as a step backwards and a turning away from God. Precisely because of the consumption of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, it is still important for Jews today to adhere to the religious dietary rules that help us to effectively limit our greed. Not everything that is edible should be eaten. By drawing boundaries, most animal species are considered unsuitable for consumption and are thus protected - including pigs, which are physiologically similar to humans. There could be a

[7] Landmann (1959): 46. - [8] Berkowitz/ Katz (2016): 69. - [9] Nachmanides (1976): 271.

cannibalism taboo behind the ban of pig consumption. As early as 900 years ago, the Jewish scholar Maimonides demanded that "people should have mercy, find the just measure and not fall prey to a greed that harms creation"[10]. The paradisiacal nutritional ideal for humans and animals is a vegan diet. In Genesis, only seeds and fruit were designated as food. After India, Israel has the most vegans in the world today and a huge range of vegan food is available. Even in industrialized countries, there have long been alternatives to meat consumption. We no longer have to eat animals.

Today, some 2,000 years after the abolition of temple sacrifices, people should learn anew to offer sacrifices in order to honor God's presence in the midst of our shared world. However, they would certainly no longer be animal sacrifices, but would have to become "greed sacrifices". Dare to be more spiritual. Let us unite and renew the Noachide covenant. The moral evolution towards fellow creatures and the world around us goes beyond the relationship that people develop with life, to the covenant of all living things in following God.

The new covenant

Before Mabbul, it was said that God wanted to destroy all people because the human community was "fundamentally" bad. Noah, however, was a righteous man even before the flood. So not all people could be bad, as we would say today, due to their genetic disposition. But after the flood, God promises to make a covenant with people and to spare them in the future because they are bad "already from their youth" (Gen 8:21). This means a change. Not genetic disposition but people can become bad through external influences which means they can also become good.[11]

At a mountain pasture, a cow was walking at eye level with me. Completely unexpectedly, we looked each other in the eye. Her gaze screamed of the eternal imprisonment of all creatures. I was suddenly overcome with great compassion. At the same time, I was struck by the infinite comfort in her eyes, which touched me deeply. Compassion for my own being, for all creatures connect us and gave me hope. The dualistic power differential between humans and animals, jugularism[12], is a world view that is firmly established in global society and is also shared by Jews and the majority of people. Systemic violence is socially legitimized and not classified as cruel by a majority. Jugularism is present in supposedly civilized cultures. In the United States and Israel, there is industrial shafting that is in no way inferior to the contempt for animal life present in the Western slaughter industry. We allow close to two million land animals to be slaughtered in Germany every day. Of these, it is proven that around 10%, i.e. 200,000 animals die miserably because the legally prescribed anesthesia and slaughter technology fails or is used improperly.[13] Can we seriously believe that this immense violence has no effect on our souls? We humans repress the realization that animals, like us, have emotional, suffering and cognitive abilities. This denial of knowledge prevents the extension of justice to all creatures and the recognition of animals as subjects of our own principles of life. Jugularism ends only when love of life and the capability approach are also considered valid for animals. Relationships can deconstruct boundaries. Humans have the ability and therefore the obligation to build bridges to animal life.[14]

"*Hineni*" - humility and commitment in following God

Our society has undergone a secular development in the last 100 years (from the Latin: saeculum). Nothing seems to be sacred to us anymore. Moderation is seen only as a material dimension. "Becoming whole", being healthy and allowing life to be perfect and "holy", recognizing and respecting it: these are all connected. In Jewish tradition, God's presence sanctifies places, for example. Otherwise they are "abandoned to God". God's presence in the burning bush transformed the place where Moses stood

[10] Maimonides (1965): 19. - [11] Gabriner (2016). - [12] Williger (2019): 105–128. - [13] Federal German Government (2012). - [14] Agamben (2004): 77.

into holy ground, "*adama kedosha*". Moses was to take off his shoes; being naked reduces distance. In the Garden of Eden, God called out to the Adamites: "Where are you? What is your moral location Adam? Will you follow God's example?" They replied, "We heard your sound in the garden and we were afraid because we were naked and so we hid." A cowardly excuse. Adam was ashamed. Their growing intellect led them to distance themselves from God and nature. Animals remained shamelessly naked. The human task on this side of Eden was to overcome the distance between spirit and body, between humans and nature.

This seemingly simple question "Where are you?" receives a much more profound answer later on in the book of Genesis. God puts Abraham to the test and says to him: "Abraham"; Abraham replied: *Hineni*, "here I am" (Gen 22). Abraham was prepared to subordinate his blood relation to his son to his "elective kinship" with God. *Hineni* is a geographical positioning, but also an existential one. "I am here", wherever and however you find me, absolutely focused, completely present. And even more: "I am here" with everything I have, with everything I am and can be. It's the kind of response we offer only a few times in our lives: when we promise ourselves to someone we love, not knowing what the future will bring; when we look into the eyes of a newborn and promise we will never let them down, and when we promise ourselves to be all that we can be. *Hineni* is the strongest expression in Hebrew for human humility, mindfulness and readiness.[15]

Today we live in an age that is the antithesis of *Hineni*. But paradoxically, the testimony of *Hineni* to a life of duty and responsibility to others is what brings out our deepest being. Humanity longs for connection with life, for a strong connection with something greater than itself. This is why even the generation blessed with the freedoms offered by a modern democracy should embrace the testimony of *Hineni*.

At Sinai, the assembled people respond to the revelation of the ten commandments: We will act and we will hear, "*Naase wenishma*". The term "en-tender process"[16] describes this biblical path to knowledge, Acting first, then understanding means process thinking. Knowledge develops from action, it grows in the creative process. This approach is natural for children and artists. Progress through practicing. This contradicts the usual classical Greek ideas: understanding first, then action. Dualisms can be overcome in the en-tender process. The distance to things, to ourselves or to other living beings becomes understanding in the en-tender process through approaching (Spanish: tender) and understanding (Spanish: *entender*), approaching again and understanding more and more, and further to understanding and mutual respect and finally to connection. Connections mean commitment, which brings about responsible action.

Radical compassion for our fellow creatures - interreligious action

In 1999, Buddhist teacher Geshe Ugyen Tseten Rinpoche explained: "*Mahakaruna*, the Great Compassion, is an attitude of mind that extends equally and without exception to all living beings and is based on the realization that all living beings wish to achieve happiness and avoid suffering. Moved by this realization, Great Compassion consists in the wish that all living beings may indeed achieve happiness and be free from suffering, and in the effort to take responsibility for achieving this goal." [17] Albert Schweitzer's insight fits in with this: "I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live." Hillel also quotes in the sayings of the fathers: "If I am not for myself, who is for me, but if I am only for myself, what am I, and if not now, when?" (Pirke Avot 1.14). There is the chemical law of nature: free radicals "rot" together. This should be a model for us. The current environmental crisis now requires radical compassion and consistent action for an "archaic" community and against jugularism.[18] Radicalism (from

[15] Cardin (2022). - [16] Williger (2019): 105–128. - [17] Ugyen Tsetsen (1999). - [18] Williger (2019): 105–128.

the Latin *Radicula*), the radicle, the embryo and compassion, or in Hebrew "*rachamin*", which comes from "*rechem*" meaning the womb, belong together. Radical compassion means life, the growth of hope into action. Compassion in Arabic also comes from the root "womb". Christianity knows the Samaritan, the stranger, who is the only one who shows mercy and acts (Luke 10:25-34). God's compassion unites in itself the paternal and maternal, i.e. parental, principle of responsibility and care. Acting through radical compassion leads to the renewal of the archaic covenant and repairs the disturbed "server" to divine presence with our reality. Compassion unites people of all religions. Their concern for the preservation of cultural and biological diversity, also in solidarity with the secular, gives rise to the hope that the whole planet will become an ark. Action that is *b`tselem* creates a network of "ark gardens". Biotope stepping stones and a connection with the world at eye level will bring about healing.

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"WHAT IS HUMANKIND?" - RELIGIOUS COUNTER -DESIGNS TO ANTHROPOCENTRISM: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Johannes Roth OFM

"What is humankind?" – is the title of this contribution to the symposium. It is also a quote from Psalm 8. What is humankind in creation? What role do humans play? What is their relationship to creation? That is what this article is about. It will attempt to present a Christian perspective on the anthropocentrism of our time and our world.

When Christians speak the words of Psalm 8, they are locating human beings in creation and in the presence of God. In this psalm, those praying confess that the order of the cosmos is a pointer to the power of God. When man contemplates creation, especially the heavens and the stars, which were worshipped and regarded as deities in the ancient Near East, he wonders what significance he himself has in the face of this great work. He does not see himself as the center, but as part of creation. "*What is humankind that you are mindful of them, human beings, that you care for them?*", says verse 4 of Psalm 8. This question is basically rhetorical and is not answered directly in the psalm. But the question itself is worthy of attention because man reflects on his role in the great creation. In this verse, the transience of man becomes clear. Man sees himself as one of many. The difference between God and man is expressed in the two terms "little man" (*Hebrew: enosh*) and "son of Adam/child of Adam" (*Hebrew: ben adam*). While "little man" often - especially in the Book of Job and the Book of Psalms - refers to the little man before God, the term "son of Adam/child of Adam" refers to transience and humanity as such (cf. Psalm 90 in particular). The statement about man's lowliness is contrasted with God's actions. God does not leave people to their own devices, but is always compassionate and benevolent towards them. Through this divine care, people are lifted out of the whole of creation. In the following verse, their special position is explained: "*You have made them a little lower than God; you have crowned them with glory and honor.*" (Ps 8:5) In the ancient Near East, people were defined as slaves of the gods. Therefore, it was not humanity as such but only the king who was regarded as the image of God. In contrast, in the Psalm this idea is democratized: all people are God's representatives on earth. Thus, by the will of God, they are granted a divine and royal dignity, completely independent of their own merit and performance. Moreover, people are even crowned with glory and splendor. In Hebrew, these attributes are actually given only to God (cf. Ps 21:6) or a king (cf. Ps 45:4). Man is, so to speak, a king by the grace of God. He rules over nature.

But what kind of dominion is granted to the essentially powerless human being?[1] One answer could be the following: "Man is given unrestricted dominion over the body of the world."[2] This is how Benno Jacob, one of the most important German-Jewish biblical scholars of the last century, commented on verse 28 from the first creation narrative in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1:1-2:4a). In his commentary from 1934, he translates this verse as follows: "*And God blessed them [= humankind, JR] and God said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over all the animals that roam the earth.*" (Gen 1:28) Humankind receives this great promise from God, who created the world. The first creation narrative makes it clear that the world would not exist without God's

[1] Cf. Steiner (2021): 14f. - [2] Jacob (1934): 61.

action. In the Hebrew Bible, this is also reflected in a linguistic peculiarity, as the verb "create" (*Hebrew: bara*) is used only in connection with God as the subject. This underlines the fact that only God is the creator of the world and not humans, even if they sometimes see themselves as such.[3] The verse quoted above is in the context of the creation of human being and also the resulting commission. On the sixth of seven days of creation, the time has come: after day and night (day 1); heaven (day 2); land, sea, fruit trees and plants (day 3); the two great lights - the sun and moon, which are not yet named as such because they were worshipped as deities in the ancient Near East - and the stars (day 4); the animals of the water and the air (day 5), the animals of the land and humans are created before God completes his work and rests on the seventh day. The sixth day stands out because it contains the longest description at eight verses (Gen 1:24-31). In contrast to the other works of creation, man explicitly receives a mandate from God, the "mandate to rule" over the entire creation. But what does this mandate entail and what does it mean?

To answer this question, let's take a closer look not only at Gen 1:28, but also at the two previous verses (Gen 1:26-27). There it says: "*And God said: Let us make mankind in our image (Hebrew: selem), in our likeness (Hebrew:* demut*), so that they may rule (Hebrew:* radah*) over the fish in the sea, over the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. God created mankind in his own image (Hebrew:* selem*), in the image (Hebrew:* selem*) of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them: Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue (Hebrew:* kavash*) it and rule (Hebrew:* radah*) over the fish in the sea, over the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*" (Gen 1:26-28) In the revision of the German translation, a few changes have been made: Thus, radah is now translated as "*walten*" (rule) and no longer as "*herrschen*" (reign). In addition, the dative "you" is omitted from the imperative form "subdue them" (*Hebrew kavashah*), especially as it does not appear in the Hebrew text either.[4] These two changes make it clear that the so-called "dominion mandate" of man is meant in a more non-violent way than previously assumed and as propagated by various translations and tradition. The beneficiaries of man's service are not only humankind, but the whole of creation. For a long time, these verses were regarded as legitimizing man's sometimes brutal exercise of dominion over creation. Pope Francis is not wrong to say that we have ruined creation and that the hut has long been on fire.[5] As early as the mid-1970s, exegetes such as the recently deceased Norbert Lohfink[6] and Erich Zenger[7] have pointed out that these verses need to be viewed in a more nuanced way.

The translation and meaning of some Hebrew words can be a possible key to understanding man's "mandate to rule". They describe, on the one hand, the function of man in creation (*selem, demut*) and, on the other, God's mission to man (*radah, kavash*).

Let us first look at the function of man in creation and the two words *selem* and *demut*. Man is created by God as his image (*selem*) and likeness (*demut*). The word "as" makes it clear that this is a functional statement and not a pure description of the relationship between God and man. The emphasis is on the fact that man's relationship with the earth and other creatures is intended by God. Man should behave towards creation to the best of his knowledge and conscience as God would. This should be the standard, even if man is not God, but his representative.

The ancient Near Eastern background is again revealing here: in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the king was the image of the creator God on earth and his task was to protect the order of life against enemies. The king can be compared to a shepherd who leads, guides and protects his flock. The Old Testament

[3] Cf. Steiner (2021): 14. - [4] In German, "Unterwerfen" is a reflexive verb that actually requires a dative. - [5] Cf. Pope Francis (2020). - [6] Cf. Lohfink (1974): 137-142. - [7] Cf. Zenger (1983).

text emphasizes that man is not the image of God because of special tasks, such as being 'king', but simply because he is human. Furthermore, not only the king, but all people are described as the image of God.[8] Erich Zenger summarizes this as follows: “The Creator God enables ('image of God') and commissions ('be shepherds') people to exercise the shepherding office in his place for the protection and promotion of life.”[9]

In the midst of his heavenly court, God decides to create man in his own image and as his representative in the world he has created. This means that he is a living statue. It embodies God, the Creator, in his creation. The Hebrew word *selem* (“image”) actually means a representative portrayal in the literal sense. This is similar to the ancient Near Eastern idea that the statues of a king stand for the power and rule of the conqueror in the conquered land. Although man is similar to God, he cannot be equated with him. He is the image of God as a human and is authorized to “rule” over the animals. The God-likeness thus results both from the relationship with God and from the relationship with the environment. In God's creation, human beings are the representatives of God. Furthermore, as living beings, they have the mandate and the task of ruling like a creator who makes life possible - in other words, like God, but not as God.[10]

Let us now look at God's commission to man, which is expressed in the two verbs *radah* and *kavash*. Both have a wide range of meanings. For example, *radah* can mean “to rule”, “to tread down” and “to oppress”, but also “to care for”; *kavash* can be translated as “to tread down”, “to subdue” and “to humiliate”, but also as “to care for”. Both verbs therefore have a similar meaning and share the connotation of “to tread down”, but also “to care for”. Creation lies proverbially at people's feet. The decisive question here is whether human dominion can exist at the expense of creation, of which they are a part. Humans are to become the image of God, the Creator of the world, and not the destroyer of creation. In both Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 1:28, the Hebrew word *radah* is used when God decides to create man. This expresses the power exercised by human, made possible and transferred by God. As the giver of life to creation, God places humankind in relation to himself:[11] *“And God said: Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule (radah) over the fish in the sea, over the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*” (Gen 1:26)

The two verbs “to rule” (*Hebrew: radah*) and “to subdue” (*Hebrew: kavash*) are indeed an expression of dominion, but probably more of a domination of humans over animals than an exploitative dominion that knows no boundaries and is determined by violence. Humans are given the task of “gaining and exercising dominance over the animals in order to develop the habitat of the earth, which is shared with the animals, as a habitable habitat and to use it for themselves. The mandate to dominate therefore in no way legitimizes the unrestricted exploitation of nature.[12]

But how should man carry out this mission from God? The Book of Wisdom sheds light on this. We therefore broaden our view beyond the primeval history (Gen 1-11) to other biblical texts. This is always advisable because it makes little sense to look at individual verses in isolation. In the Book of Wisdom 9:2-3 it says: “i*n your wisdom you have fashioned man to have power over all the creatures you have made, to govern the world in holiness and righteousness, and to mete out justice with an upright heart.*” Schwienhorst-Schönberger puts it this way: “Man will fulfill his mandate to rule only if he exercises rule as God does: in holiness and righteousness. However, it is precisely this dimension that is already implicit in Genesis 1:26-28. As the 'statue of God', man is commissioned to rule over creation.”[13] A tyranny and exploitation of creation is therefore not in the spirit of God, who has seen his creation as good and blessed it.

[8] Cf. Löning/ Zenger (1997): 146–148. - [9] Zenger (1983): 95. - [10] Cf. Steiner (2021): 15. - [11] Cf. ibid. - [12] Wöhrle (2009): 187. - [13] Schwienhorst-Schönberger (2010): 225.

However, it also becomes clear that the relationship between humans and animals is asymmetrical in the order of creation, as "only" humans were created in the image of God. However, this does not justify violence or exploitation. In the second creation narrative (Genesis 2:4b-25), the relationship between humans and animals is described in more detail: "*Then the Lord God said: The Lord God therefore formed every sort of wild animal and all the birds of the air, and he brought them before the man to see what he would name them. Whatever the man called each living creature, that was the name that it would bear. The man gave names to every type of animal, all the birds of the air and all the wild animals, but the man could not find anything that was like him.*" (Gen 2:18-20)

Animals are meant to help humans, even if they are not their equals. Humans also give animals a name. The relationship between humans and animals is designed to be positive and peaceful, even if the naming can be seen as an exercise of dominance under certain circumstances. This positive relationship is affected by God's consequences for the serpent's misconduct: "*The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you will be the most cursed of all the animals and of all the wild beasts. On your belly you shall crawl and you shall eat dust for all the days of your life. I will establish hostility between you and the woman, between your line and her line. Her offspring will crush your head and you will bruise his heel.*" (Gen 3:14-15)

However, it is not only the relationship between human and animal that is clouded in Genesis 3, but also that between God and man. Man is expelled from the Garden of Eden as a result of his behavior. In the primeval history (Gen 1-11), however, this is not to remain his only transgression and disturbance of his relationship with God: in Genesis 4, Cain kills his brother Abel, in Genesis 6-9 the flood is a consequence of misconduct and in Genesis 11 the tower of Babel is built. The point is always that man wants to expand and increase his dominion instead of being content with what he is actually meant to have.

Creation is designed by God as a common home or common living space. In addition to the two creation narratives, this becomes particularly clear in Ps 104. Creation is divided into different areas to which humans have only limited access. The area "between the mountains" (Ps 104:10-12) and the "trees of YHWH" as well as the "high mountains" (Ps 104:16-18) are reserved for animals. The cultivable mountain land (Ps 104:13-15) is shared by humans and animals, whereby humans can use it only during the day (Ps 104:20-23). The sea is also excluded as a habitat for humans and is reserved for animals (Ps 104:25f.). Moreover, it becomes clear that humans and animals are dependent on the life-giving God (Ps 104:27-30). There is no hint here of human supremacy.[14]

Lastly, I refer to Pope Francis' encyclical "*Laudato si*". This was published in 2015 and is therefore also celebrating a small anniversary this year, albeit a significantly smaller one than St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun. The title of the encyclical makes literal reference to the Canticle of the Sun. The subtitle "On care for our common home" clearly expresses the role of human beings. In section 67, Pope Francis writes about the role of humans in creation: "We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting,

[14] Cf. Uehlinger (1991): 66.

overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. 'The earth is the Lord's' (Ps 24:1); to him belongs 'the earth with all that is within it' (Dtn 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me' (Lev 25:23)."[15]

In conclusion, it can be said that humans should preserve their concern for the environment and their fellow creatures, as it is laid out in God's creation: not as a violent dominion and creator, but as a careful reign and fellow creature, similar to Isaiah's vision of peace (cf. Isaiah 11:1-9). Then calf and lion graze together and are led by a little boy, the child plays in front of the viper's hole and stretches out his hand towards it without anything happening to them. It would be nice if humankind could make a contribution to this.

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[15] Pope Francis (2015): 67.

DEEP INCARNATION IN FRANCISCAN STYLE

Stefan Walser OFMCap

The Canticle of the Creatures by St. Francis invites us to admire creation and to take responsibility for the world around us. However, the *Cantico delle Creature* is only one particularly prominent source from the wealth of Franciscan tradition. The following contribution is a tentative attempt to link classical ideas of Franciscan theology with very current theological discussions that go under the heading of *deep incarnation*. The basic idea is that the exclusive event of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ radiates out to an inclusive, universal appreciation of the entire material world.

Creation and incarnation

Creation and incarnation describe a parallel movement. In spatial metaphorical terms, it is the movement from "above" to "below". The earth, with everything that is in it and that lives on it, makes people of faith think of a creative divine origin. For 2000 years, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, together with the centurion under the cross, has made people believe: "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39). Both creation and incarnation describe a movement of affection and revelation of God. In addition to creation, the humiliation and *kenosis* of the Son of God, who as "a child is born on the wayside and laid in a manger"[1], is central to Franciscan spirituality. A Franciscan attitude to life attempts to follow this path of *kenosis*, of "being less", of devotion to the little ones, of burying oneself in this earth.

A much-discussed question in medieval theology was: Why does God do this? What motivates him to become small and turn to humans as a human being? Classically formulated, the question was: *Cur Deus homo?* A broad strand of scholastic thought, personified in Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), argued that God's good creation needed to be restored by a sinless man, Jesus Christ, after the fall of man. The Franciscan tradition, however, places the emphasis somewhat differently and goes on to ask whether something so unreservedly good - the incarnation of Jesus - could be motivated by something as abysmally evil as sin. Franciscan tradition counters: no, love alone is suitable as a divine motivation for both creation and the incarnation. Johannes Duns Scotus (1265/66-1308) therefore pointedly states: Christ would have become man even if Adam had not sinned![2]

Love as a motif for the incarnation of God also shines through clearly in Francis and Clare of Assisi. In the Rule of St. Francis from 1221, it says: "We give you thanks because, having created us through your Son, by that holy love with which you loved us, you decreed that he should be born, true God and true man, of the glorious and ever blessed Virgin Mary [...]"[3]. A poetically condensed and extremely profound formulation can be found in the biography of St. Clare, where at one point Jesus Christ is mentioned with the small addition: "*quem amor humanavit*" ("whom love made human.")[4] This is precisely Franciscan incarnation theology: love humanizes. It humanizes itself in Jesus of Nazareth and it humanizes all those who say with Clare: "The Son of God has become our way."[5]

Deep Incarnation

More recent theological reflections on creation emphasize a nexus between creation and incarnation. God did not just create the world out of love and send his Son into the world out of love. In the incarnation of God, God immerses himself in the world and connects deeply with the material world. God is not limited to the form of a single human being (*homo*), Jesus of Nazareth. In him, he takes on the whole of humanity (*humanitas*). But that is not

[1] Officium Passionis, Fifth office. - [2] Cf. Johannes Duns Scotus (1884): III Sent. d. 7,4 (303). - [3] Rule of 1221, Chapter 23. - [4] Clare Life 5,6. - [5] Clare Testament 5.

all: in his incarnation, God takes on worldly, physical, organic substance, he allows himself to enter into the humus that he himself has created and unites himself with it. These considerations are summarized under the term *Deep Incarnation*.[6]

One specific bible passage is often quoted at this point. In the Prologue to the Gospel of Saint John, it says: "And the Word became flesh." (John 1:14) So Christmas is not just about God becoming human, and certainly not about God becoming male, but about his becoming flesh, about in-carnation.[7] This was important to Christian theology, especially Franciscan theology, from the very beginning. God did not disguise himself as a human, he did not take on a human-like angelic form, a "false body"; he became "flesh" and affirmed the conditions of the flesh, including decay, suffering and death.

Danish theologian Niels Henrik Gregersen (*1956) writes: "Deep incarnation thus presupposes a radical embodiment that reaches into the roots (*radices*) of material and biological existence as well as into the dark sides of creation, the *tenebrae creationis*."[8] The anthropologically familiar idea that humanity is sanctified through the incarnation of God is cosmologically expanded in the idea of *deep incarnation*: "For as we have seen, the point of incarnation is that the eternal God in Christ has so conjoined himself to the material world that the bodiliness of Jesus (and in him all material life forms) will forever be united with God."[9] From this, it is easy to derive consequences for creation theology and animal theology.[10] The concreteness and universality of the idea of *deep incarnation* may sound unusual or even provocative at first. In my opinion, it takes nothing away from the uniqueness of the God-human person of Jesus Christ. On the contrary: it rather enhances him when his *kenosis* is conceived right down to the depths of material creation. Incidentally, the idea is not new. Pope John Paul II wrote in his 1986 encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* on the mentioned verse from the Prologue of St. John: "The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is 'flesh': the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The 'first-born of all creation', becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is also 'flesh' and in this reality with all 'flesh', with the whole of creation."[11]

God and the dirt (Bonaventure)

In the course of his studies on deep incarnation, Niels Gregersen makes a discovery that surprises him. In the writings of the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221-1274), he finds central motifs of a *deep incarnation theology*.[12] In the *Breviloquium*, for example, he reflects on the path of God's incarnation and writes: "Because the *first man*, the ornament of the whole visible world, was created on the sixth and last day to give the world its completeness, the *second man*, the perfection of the newly created world, in whom the first and the last, 'God with the dust of the earth', unites, should appear at the end of time."[13] In the phrase "God with the dust", St. Bonaventure takes up a Christmas sermon by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, which succinctly summarizes the incarnation event in the formula: *Deus cum limo*[14] - God and dust, God and clay - literally: God and dirt unite. This idea is also theologically interesting in that God, who created man from dust (Gen 2:7), connects with man in his incarnation right down to his original substance "dust". Bonaventure expresses the idea of the universal connectivity of all being with Christ in a sermon in this way:

"Christ, as a human being, is connected with all creatures:
he exists with the stones,
he lives among the plants,
he senses with the animals
and understands with the angels."[15]

[6] Cf. Edwards (2019); Gregersen (2015); Dockter (2023): 110–113; Enxing (2024): 2–24. - [7] Cf. Gregersen (2023): 683–713, 703; Enxing (2024): 2-24, 4f. - [8] Gregersen (2015): 225–252, 225f. Emphasis added. - [9] Ibid: 250. - [10] Cf. Enxing (2024). - [11] John Paul II (1986): No. 50. - [12] Cf. Gregersen (2016): 247–261; Gregersen (2023). The following references in Bonaventure are taken from these articles. - [13] Bonaventure ([3]2017): IV,4 (162f.). - [14] Bonaventure (1891), 245. Cf. Gregersen, The God with Clay. - [15] Bonaventure (2008): serm. 16,12 (217).

The incarnation of God is a "multi-layered"[16] event. Christ has truly accepted the whole of creation, which is groaning and suffering the pains of childbirth (Rom 8:22). The Church Fathers, too, already make it clear that only that which has been assumed can be healed. Gregersen emphasizes that *deep incarnation* and *deep suffering* belong together. Christ suffers with the creatures, with suffering humanity, also with suffering nature. He not only *knows* pain and death, he *feels* with the creatures.[17] Gregerson writes: "Incarnation cannot be skin-deep only, confined to the physiological body of Jesus of Nazareth, but must reach into the depth of matter, both in its splendor and in its disintegrative effects."[18]

At this point, many (old and new) Christological questions arise that cannot be explored here. It is certainly "tempting" in a double sense to combine medieval Franciscan theologies with 21st century concepts. However, the brief sketches of a "deepened" incarnation theology in more recent times show a fundamental affinity to Franciscan motifs. Scenically condensed in the celebration of the Nativity in Greccio in 1223, the contemplation of the Incarnation takes on an iconic status in Franciscan spirituality. The hagiographic descriptions of this event not only tell of a festive community of humans and animals - the ox and donkey were present and alive - but Thomas of Celano (1190-1260) also reports: "The forest rang with the voices of the crowd and the rocks made answer to their jubilation."[19] Apparently, on that night when the Creator appears as a small child, an inner connection between all the created elements can be felt. In this there is an obvious connection to the Canticle of the Creatures, which was composed only a short time later. Creation theology and incarnation theology resonate here. Francis invites us to praise the Creator of all things, who has united himself with his creation in Christ. The fact that the spiritual contemplation of creation and incarnation, of the Canticle of the Creatures and the nativity scene results in a very concrete shared responsibility for all creatures and for this world, which became a place of God through Jesus' birth, is also a core element of Franciscan spirituality, which always knew how to combine mysticism and politics.

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[16] Gregersen (2016): 254. - [17] Cf. Gregersen, The God with Clay, 688f., 706f. - [18] Ibid. 689. - [18] 1 Celano 85, 8.

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ENVIRONMENT OR SHARED WORLD? THOUGHTS ON A FRANCISCAN PRO-VOCATION

Johannes B. Freyer OFM

Do you ever talk to your plants?

The following statement from a garden blog invites you to talk to the plants: “Many people think that people who talk to plants are strange, to put it mildly. But you will laugh: these people are doing just the right thing. It has been proven that plants love it when you talk to them. They then thank you with good growth, are less likely to be attacked by pests and diseases and thrive magnificently all round. There is also a benefit to you when you talk to your plants: they are patient, listen to you and don‘t talk back. All the more reason to talk to your boxwood Benni or your palm Penny. [...] For a long time, biologists were convinced that perception would not be possible without nerve cells. However, this is incorrect. A few years ago, researchers discovered that plants can communicate and even process sensory impressions. To do this, plants have various receptors that react to light, touch or even chemicals. The receptors are stimulated when you stand near the plant and talk to it.”[1] If you have an animal, dog, cat or even a canary, you are surely talking to it and receive more or less understandable feedback. As a plant or animal lover, you will probably say that they are part of your life, perhaps even something like a partner or companion.

St. Francis of Assisi is often said to have spoken to animals. Francis’ sermon on birds is famous[2], and has been depicted time and again in art. This is not a romanticized anecdote from the life of the saint. Anyone familiar with the story of the bird sermon and the life of St. Francis may be disappointed at first. This story is not that unique. The ability to speak with animals is a typical hagiographic wandering topos for medieval saint legends, which is also attributed to other saints. Examples include the desert father and abbot Anthony, Saint Macario and Saint Cuthbert. Even Saint Martin of Tours is said to have spoken to animals. This wandering tale that saints can talk to animals picks up on the idea of the Church Fathers that in paradise the relationship between creatures was so empathetic that people could even talk to animals. It was only through sin that humans lost the right words or language to communicate with all creatures. If there are now people, like Francis, who find the right words to communicate with animals and all creatures, it is because in their lives they have succeeded in restoring the paradisiacal situation of loving and reconciliatory interaction with one another. People who are reconciled with themselves, with their fellow human beings, with other creatures and above all with God find the right words, the language that serves mutual understanding. The story of the wolf of Gubbio is an example of reconciled interaction with one another and with animals;[3] there are many others that tell of Francis' dealings not only with animals, but with all creatures. For example, in the so-called Fioretti, the little flowers of St. Francis: a collection of stories about the life of Francis that originated in the 14th century, but were rediscovered only during the Romantic period. These shaped the image of Francis with a penchant for sweet animal romanticism.

Together with the famous Canticle of the Sun, these texts were not simply flowery stories about the father of the order. Rather, the accounts are part of a comprehensive educational model through which the listener was taught values for the Franciscan lifestyle. The highlight of these stories is the Canticle of the Sun, written by Francis himself, which sings of the brotherhood of all creatures.

[1] Garden blog “Samenhaus”: https://www.samenhaus.de/gartenblog/mit-pflanzen-sprechen?srsltid=AfmBOooRCZlDA2_WviQMY924NjcuSynqvfpnKhhlDLHR_VUHc99fswqq; last accessed on 12/10/2024. - [2] 1 Celano 58; Cf. De Marzi (1981). - [3] Little Flowers of St. Francis (Fioretti) 21.

This fraternity is now practiced in a number of concrete behaviors using Francis as an example. It is said that Francis showed mercy to animals and other creatures. The original Latin text uses the term "*misericordia*", which means having a heart for those in misery. As a human role model, St. Francis therefore had a heart for the creatures who were in misery, no matter what. In his testament, Francis himself tells us that his exit from the world, his personal conversion, began when he overcame himself to show "*misericordia*", mercy, to the outcast lepers.[4] He shows this mercy to the suffering creation. Again, the message seems clear: mercy, concern for people in their poverty and concern for the maltreated natural world are directly related. Pope Francis also expresses this connection impressively in his encyclical *Laudato si*.

Mercy is closely linked to compassion. Compassion stands in contrast to violence. Compassion is a considerate way of dealing with others. Compassionate action does not allow harm to come to another creature or attempt to repair it. Following the Franciscan doctrine of virtue in our stories, mercy and compassion are allied with reverence as an expression of respect, prudence and peacefulness. Accordingly, the fraternity of all creatures is promoted by mercy, gentleness, compassion, respect, prudence and peacefulness. These are the values that are proposed both for social interaction between people and especially for interaction with creation.

Thomas of Celano, a contemporary, eyewitness and the first biographer of Francis, wrote about him that he grasped the secrets of creatures with the keen eye of his heart in a unique and unusual way for others and therefore called them brother and sister.[5] Thus, filled with the spirit of God, he did not refrain from glorifying, praising and extolling the Creator and Controller of all things in all elements and creatures. The Canticle of the Sun and the legends are therefore anything but the poetry and pious tales of a romantic. These texts are in the truest sense of the word a pro-vocation, a calling out in favor of a different way of life. Sun, wind, water and other creatures are an urgent invitation to see them with different eyes and to take a correspondingly different lifestyle seriously. A lifestyle that does justice to the dignity of the human creature and the fraternity among all creatures.

Poetry and teacher narratives thus present Francis in a sympathetically haunting way as a spokesperson for the creatures. Furthermore, these teachers' stories form the framework of an educational program that postulates the fraternity of creatures initiated by Francis as the fundamental motif of a spirituality of asceticism. This spirituality of asceticism advocates a simple lifestyle and "*usus pauper*", the frugal use of things. Simplicity, frugality and voluntary Franciscan poverty are a concrete rejection of covetousness. For it is human covetousness, greed for money, the insatiable urge for more, wasteful recklessness and, today, the delusion of consumption-oriented growth models that are exposed as the greatest danger to nature and mankind. The theological tradition of the Franciscan schools does not identify Adam and Eve's sin as disobedience. Rather, it is their greed for more that led Eve and Adam to disobey God's commandment. This exposes greed as the original human sin. An asceticism of simplicity and frugality is then the remedy against this original sin, humankind's greed.

This asceticism of simplicity and frugality[6] does not support a prevailing materialistic and utilitarian model of life that depletes resources, but is oriented towards the common good. This good serves both the individual and the community. Creation is part of this community. The well-being we are looking at is not just one-sidedly focused on economic growth and monetary profits, but on a comprehensive well-being of life, which includes a livelihood, a secure job and prosperity as well as health, community and a sense of belonging. The well-being of creation also plays a significant role in the concept of the common good. These, too, are the thoughts of a Friar Minor from the Middle Ages, Petrus Johannis Olivi. In this respect, the harmful influence of a strong anthropocentrism is avoided in favor of the insight into the earth as our common "*oikos*", our home.

[4] Testament 1–3. - [5] Cf. 1 Celano 85. - [6] Cf. Freyer (2023).

From a theological perspective, this common house of creation has a prominent position, as creation is the concrete place in which the Word of God became incarnate. According to the Gospel of John, it took on the flesh of this earth. Taking up the theological insight of Paul, who sees everything as created in the image of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ is perceived in creation by analogy. This means that creation is sanctified in its materiality, as it were. This theological perspective reminds us to recognize a Christological dimension of holiness in every creature. We are thus repeatedly confronted with the question of what is sacred to us humans, what is worth something to us in the truest sense of the word? Values that are sacred to us require care, concern, prudence and protection. These days, the very real question is: what is the climate worth to us? Ultimately, the climate is worth our lives and those of future generations.

Recognizing the value of holiness in nature, which is our habitat, led the Franciscan tradition, which was particularly interested in the natural sciences and experimental science in its Oxford school, to ally science with wisdom.[7] From a Franciscan perspective, recognizing the importance of wisdom in science means combining ethical and technical aspects and considering the resulting possibilities on the basis of virtues.[8]

The focus here is on typical Franciscan virtues: humility, or rather *humilitas*. *Humilitas* is a Latin term that is etymologically linked to humus, the soil. *Humilitas* is understood as belonging to the soil on which we stand. We are not above the creatures, but rather close to the humus of the earth and part of this humus. That is to where we will return, as it says in a verse from the Ash Wednesday liturgy. Creation can then no longer be seen merely as an environment that is subject to humans. Instead, it will become human's fellow-world.

The Oxford Franciscan school, which is interested in the natural sciences, provides us with a "technical virtue": mindfulness, which guides the creative, life-enhancing use of procedures and devices. Technology is not used as a means of mastering nature, but as a service to life. This is complemented by a didactic virtue: the subject orientation of epistemological and scientific questions. Nature is not treated as an object of subjugation and exploitation, but rather as a subject with intrinsic value. Finally, a purposeful virtue: orientation towards the "*bonum*", the good, towards what is good for humanity and creation in favor of the fruitful diversity of life. This integration of wisdom into science is also linked to a critique of the system from an eschatological perspective. The here and now of human action becomes alternative, "competing" with the announcement of a better future intended by God, which is already announced in the present and challenges us to an alternative lifestyle and action.

With a view to such a better future, some building blocks for possible models of an alternative approach to creation can be identified from the Franciscan tradition, as intended by Pope Francis in his encyclicals "*Laudato si*" and "*Fratelli tutti*", for example. Cultivating the self-image of viewing the earth as an oikos, as our common home, is at the heart of this. We must understand people not merely as the counterpart of an environment that is at their disposal, or even as its head. Rather, we are co-inhabitants of a common home that we share with other creatures. What surrounds us here on earth is therefore more than a surrounding world; it is our shared world. In the conception of the world as an oikos, the habitable house, there are two important areas, already from the Greek root of the word, which, brought into balance and on an equal footing, ensures a sustainable and future-oriented design of the house: the economy and the ecology. Both terms contain the root word oikos, house. Our house has a future only if the economy, our actions, go hand in hand with ecology, our responsibility towards the environment.

This self-image corresponds to the Franciscan attitude of universal fraternity, which refers to the

[7] Cf. Freyer (2020): 179–199. - [8] Cf. Freyer (2002): 337–351.

natural "blood relationship" of the humans with all creatures. A fraternity that historically called for the interconnectedness of economy and ecology in the social organization of society and strived for a universal reconnection in the "bonum" and the common good. In the common good, which strives not only for the benefit of the individual, but for the well-being of the whole. This self-image includes rediscovering nature as creation. Nature is not simply an inanimate resource placed at the feet of humans. Nature, in its own aesthetic, is a living being that has been given to us as a place of creative design. We should not forget that humans are creatures which are not necessary for the continued existence of this planet. But we need this planet for our continued existence. This world has its own creative power, which we can gratefully accept, but which we destroy through our exploitative attitude of appropriation for our own profit. Recognizing nature as a fraternal creation means taking it seriously in its own dignity and treating it with respect.

It was not until many centuries later that the theologian, philosopher and physician Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) took up these thoughts of St. Francis of Assisi again with his ethics of "reverence for life". Schweitzer wrote about this ethic: "It occurred to me that ethics that only have to do with our relationship to other people are incomplete and therefore cannot possess complete energy. Only the ethics of reverence for life can do this. Through it we come to relate not only to human beings, but to all creatures within our reach, and to be concerned with their fate in order to avoid harming them and to be determined to help them in their distress as far as we are able." From this realization, Schweitzer was able to formulate the well-known sentence: "I am life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live."[9]

This insight into the fraternal togetherness of all creatures, which can be found in Francis and the movement he initiated, as well as in Albert Schweitzer's writings, arose against the background of a spiritual and religious attitude to life.

From a completely different perspective, namely on the basis of the latest scientific studies from Harvard University and elsewhere, we are presented with a complementary set of facts. These extend and supplement the classical theory of evolution of the "survival of the fittest", which goes back to Darwin. The theories of evolution based on a struggle for survival, of "eat and be eaten" and "survival of the fittest" are becoming questionable. These theories have not only profoundly shaped our world view and social concepts, such as social Darwinism, but also our economy. Competition, rivalry and the strongest prevail. Scientific studies now indicate that symbiosis, i.e. relationships between living beings from which all sides benefit, has promoted evolution. Cooperation between living organisms as a fundamental phenomenon has given rise to biodiversity, among other things. Without such forms of cooperation between organisms, life would not have been able to develop. From the scientist Martin A. Nowak, Professor of Mathematics and Biology at Harvard University[10] - he works on the mathematical description of evolutionary processes, including the development of cooperation and human language, as well as the dynamics of viral infections and human cancer - comes from the evidence that life has conquered this planet not through fighting, but through networks.

We should not confuse the two perspectives, but the Oxford Franciscan School teaches us to bring spiritual wisdom and science into exchange with each other and to learn from them. Both wisdom and science now point us to togetherness, connectedness and commonality as guiding principles that strengthen life. However, this must first become so firmly established in our consciousness that it can lead to coherent action.

A Franciscan view of creation provokes a necessary change in consciousness and a resulting change in lifestyle. According to Francis, the Franciscan way of life began with "leaving the world"[11], of the established models of thought and an economic order that was already growth-oriented at the time,

[9] Cf. Schweitzer (1990): 328–353; Schweitzer (2020). - [10] Cf. Nowak/ Highfield (2011). - [11] Cf. Testament 3.

which dismantled the solidary design of a shared environment shared by all creatures. This is why the Franciscan perspective does not view nature as an environment available to humans. Rather, it perceives creation as a living fellow-world, which has an intrinsic value that does not depend on human need and use.

Taking a fraternal view of creation, like Francis, requires a change of consciousness. This begins with the modification of our language. As we can read in Ulrike Draesner's article in this issue, language determines how we perceive the world. Not everything is linguistic, but everything we know (if we use this word in the strict sense) is linguistic. Ludwig Wittgenstein popularized the figure of thought with the sentence "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" ... Thoughts are linguistic. Always. I can also turn this sentence around: Language is thought (and more). It shapes what we perceive."[12] We should take a closer look at this in our context. Even when we talk about sustainability, we always mean our "environment". The term "environment" refers to the entirety of the natural habitat shaped by us humans. We are and remain the hub of the world, the center to which everything is assigned, or should we rather say, to which everything is available. Environment is a strongly anthropocentric term. The challenge of the ecological crisis, which threatens the diversity of life, seems to be raising the necessary awareness to take a more sustainable view of the environment. However, the term "environment" belies the fact that not much has changed in terms of the beneficial behavior of humans. Concern for the environment does not necessarily focus on the future of nature, of all creatures, but rather on maintaining our western standard of living through a somewhat more careful use of resources. However, a dilapidated house is not stabilized by giving it a green coat of paint. The term "sustainability" has long since been hijacked by a neoliberal economic theory of constant growth, whatever the cost, including life. Talking about the environment does not acknowledge its intrinsic value. As such, the environment is and remains at the mercy of mankind.

Of course, it can be argued that even the Christian tradition sees human beings as the crown of creation. However, this creation, at least in the Franciscan theological tradition, is not anthropocentric, but christocentric. This is evidenced by the christological undertone of the Canticle of the Sun. Spiritually, the proclaimed universal brotherhood and sisterhood becomes clear only in the christological relationship of the whole of creation. But how then, and with what words and concepts, do we speak of nature and creation in a pluralistic world in order to promote a necessary change of consciousness?

According to Heidegger, the world in which we live is first of all "co-given" or in "co-existence".[13] It is also given and exists independently of us. Nature, things and creatures share the same existence, albeit in different ways. Everything that exists is "co-existent". The world, nature or, as we say, creation is more co-world and shared world than environment. The term "shared world" refers to the social environment in which we humans live and also encompasses non-human nature in its independence and intrinsic value. This term comes much closer to the Franciscan vision of universal brotherhood and sisterhood than talking about the environment. We can also communicate with those who belong to our shared world. The relationship with our world enables mutually creative communication. The dual meaning of communicating is intentional in the Franciscan-influenced talk of creation. The relationship with creation has, as it were, a sacramental character. Those who talk to the plants and animals in their environment approach the sacredness of life. Recognizing creation, nature, as our fellow world changes our perspective, transforms our consciousness and thus initiates a change in behavior that promotes an authentically sustainable and fruitful lifestyle. With this symposium, we don't simply want to celebrate and honor 800 years of the Canticle of the Creatures. We also want to recognize it for what it is: a pro-vocation, an insistent invitation, "*vocatio*", for the benefit, "*pro*", of the world around us.

[12] Cf. the article by Ulrike Draesner in this issue. - [13] Cf. Heidegger (2006).

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