

A Personal Ecological Conversion

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The Book of Genesis opens with poetic verse of the Creation account:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

And God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

Gen. 1:1–19 (RSVCE2)

This Creation chronicle clearly declares the world in which we breathe, where we see with the light of the sun, where we hear melodies of the wind rustling through the trees, is indeed a *sacred world*.

There is a repeating rhythm in these verses — “God said: ‘Let there be’...‘And so it happened’...‘God saw how good it was.’” God speaks a life-giving, creative word and delights in how good it is.

Pope Francis writes in the opening paragraphs of his Encyclical “*Laudato Si’*: On Care for Our Common Home”¹:

1 “*LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore*” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, St. Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”. [1]

2. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

I’m reminded of a time in Santa Barbara, CA, during the mid-1970s, when I had a profound conversation with Grandfather Semu Huaute, a Chumash healer. We were walking on the land when he told me: “We walk on God’s altar, the trees are his candlesticks, worship.”

Suddenly, St. Francis’ *Canticle of Creation* took on a whole new meaning for me.

Franciscan theology reflects the experience of St. Francis who saw all creation having its source in the creative, fruitful word of God. A Franciscan vision calls for a respect for all creation, and a deep sense of responsibility for the whole created order. It is indeed a *sacred world* upon which we need to tread softly....

The renowned Franciscan scholar, Fr. Zachary Hayes, OFM, wrote:

Power, control, greed, manipulation, and all the ways in which we seek to use the world of nature ought to be moderated by a sense of respect and responsibility. The world is not only a physical system that will deliver things into our hands for our physical enjoyment. It is also the matrix for our moral and spiritual development.²

The time is now for each of us to develop a personal *ecological conversion*; to develop a profound respect for and deep sense of personal responsibility for the whole created order. “To walk softly upon the earth,” according to Navajo wisdom.

This same world wherein God still delights and sees how good it is.

1. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*: On Care for Our Common Home
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

2. Zachary Hayes, OFM, "Spirit and Life", Vol. 2, 1992, p. 101