

The Canticle of Sir Brother Sun, a Guide to Conversion¹

As a member of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, the idea of conversion, penance or *metanoia*, is essential to the way I and other members of the Third Order understand our Franciscan life together. This value of conversion was identified as the particular charism of the Third Order in the 1982 Commentary on the TOR *Rule*.² I would like to examine Francis' work, *The Canticle of Sir Brother Sun*³ from this viewpoint of conversion. Written in 1225, the year before his death, *The Canticle* is a symbolic expression of Francis' entire spiritual vision, gained from the experience of his life's journey. I see this literary masterpiece not only as a beautiful poem and inspiring hymn of praise but also as a profound challenge and guide to conversion. I think *The Canticle* can guide our human journey of conversion on three interconnected levels: in relationship to persons, to the rest of creation and to God.

A Christocentric Hymn

Before looking at these aspects of conversion, I will first examine some of the symbolic language of *The Canticle* in order to show how it expresses Francis' spiritual vision.

³Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
 especially Sir Brother Sun,
 Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
 and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.⁴

Franciscan scholars such as Ilia Delio and Seamus Mulholland have already pointed out that *The Canticle* is a Christocentric hymn, Sir Brother Sun of the title being a symbol for Jesus Christ,⁵ Who, the Prologue to the Gospel of John tells us, is the light coming into the world (John 1:9). Jesus Himself says in John 8:12 that He is the light of the world and in John 9:5 that as long as He is in the world, He is the light of the world. As the creature with Whom the Most High is 'especially' praised, Sir Brother Sun occupies a special place between creation and the Creator. As

¹ First given as a talk for the Symposium, *Franciscan Ideals and Influence*, in Westminster Cathedral Hall on 9th December 2009, celebrating the eighth centenary of the Papal approval of the 1209 *Rule* of the First Order of Saint Francis.

² Carney, M., and Hargan, T., *Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis: American-English Commentary* (Washington DC, Franciscan Federation, 1982) p. 36.

³ Also commonly known as *The Canticle of the Creatures*.

⁴ Francis, *The Canticle of Sir Brother Sun*, 2-3, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 113.

⁵ Delio, I., *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 2003) p. 18 / Mulholland, S., *Duns Scotus and the Canticle*, paper presented at the Franciscan International Study Centre (Canterbury, England, Dec 2005) p. 12.

the One Who 'bears a likeness' of ' the 'Most High', in radiance and splendour, He is, 'the image of the invisible God' as in Colossians 1:15. As the One 'through Whom' God gives us light, Brother Sun can be recognised as the truth that enlightens our minds (Jn 14:6), the Mediator (1Tim 2:5) between God and creation.

Trinitarian Symbolism

As well as being Christological in its symbolism, I am convinced *The Canticle* is also Trinitarian. At first sight, this Trinitarian symbolism may not be apparent to us, since there are no threes in sight here and no mention of Father, Son or Holy Spirit. However, I am going to show how the cosmos itself as presented in *The Canticle* reflects an essential feature of the Trinity, that is unity in diversity. First, it will be necessary to show that the 'Most High', to Whom this hymn is addressed is a title Francis used to refer to the Trinity and then to show that Francis understood the Trinity as unity in diversity. Christian doctrine acknowledges God as three distinct divine Persons, Who are One essence, a paradox we could describe as unity in diversity.

'Most High' = The Trinity: I have concluded that 'Most High' in *The Canticle* refers to the Trinity because other writings of Francis refer to the Trinity, as 'Most High', 'Lord' and 'Creator'. The Trinity is Most High in *The Earlier Rule* (ER XXIII, 11 and XVII, 16-17), in *The Praises of God* (PrG 2-3) and in the *Letter to the Entire Order* (LtOrd 1,52). The Trinity is Lord in the ER XVII, 17, the PrG 1-3 and *The Testament* (Test 14). The Trinity is also described as Creator in the ER XXI, 2 and XXIII, 11. Therefore, Francis was addressing the Triune Creator in *The Canticle* as 'Most High' and 'my Lord'.

I am now going to speculate, based on his other writings, as to what he understood by the Triune Creator. Many of Francis' writings feature the mystery of God as 'Three in One' or 'Perfect Trinity and simple Unity'.⁶ His references to the Trinity also reveal Francis' profound appreciation of this mystery. First I'm going to look at his understanding of diversity in God and then of unity.

Diversity: Francis writings reveal his distinct ideas of the qualities and roles of each of the divine Persons. Van Asseldonk has summarised it briefly, as follows:

'The Father is always the principle and end of the action; the Son is always mediator, sanctifier, life-giver; the Holy Spirit is always the invisible agent of the Father and the Son, being sent by them.'⁷

⁶ ER XXI, 2; XXIII, 11 / LtOrd 1, 52.

⁷ Asseldonk, O. Van, 'The Spirit of the Lord and Its Holy Activity in the Writings of Francis', *Greyfriars Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1991, p. 148.

The Persons of the Trinity work together but in diverse ways. In *The Earlier Rule*, chapter 23, Francis wrote:

'Father ... through your holy will...and through Your holy Son ... with the Holy Spirit You have created everything...'⁸

Here we see that the Father's initiative is the origin of creation, He creates 'through' the Son and 'with' the Holy Spirit. So all three Persons are differently involved in this action of the Trinity.

Unity: Francis highlighted the unity of these diverse Persons in surprising ways. Although the Persons are seen to be differently involved, he emphasised that the entire work of the Trinity belongs to all three Persons. He did this by sharing roles or titles we would normally assign to a particular Person among the whole Trinity. There is an example of this in *The Earlier Rule*:

'...the Most High and Supreme Eternal God
Trinity and Unity
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Creator of all
Saviour of all...'⁹

Here, the whole Trinity is 'Saviour', which is normally the Son's title. Then, in the opening of his paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer:

'O, Our Father most holy:
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler and Saviour'¹⁰

Here, the Father is 'Redeemer' and 'Saviour', usually the Son's attributes, and the Father is also 'Consoler', whereas this name is normally associated with the Spirit as Paraclete in the Gospel of John, which was a strong influence on Francis.¹¹ Francis' concept of the Trinity reminds me of the three Musketeer's motto, 'All for one and one for all'. Each Person shares It's particular work and properties with the whole Trinity. Bearing in mind this idea of unity with diversity in the Trinity, I will now turn back to *The Canticle*.

Unity in diversity in the creatures of *The Canticle*: The creatures of *The Canticle* in stanzas 3-9 reflect the Triune Creator because of their own unity in diversity.

³Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,

⁸ ER XXIII, 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 81-2.

⁹ ER XXIII, 11, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, pp. 85-6.

¹⁰ *PrOF* 1, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 158.

¹¹ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7. / Francis, *A Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 2; ER XXIII, 5. / Van-Khanh

has demonstrated the extensive influence of Johannine Christology in Francis' writings: Nguyễn-Van-Khanh, N., *The Teacher of His Heart: Jesus Christ in the Thought and Writings of St. Francis* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 1994) pp. 219-224.

Who is the day and through whom You give us light.

⁴And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

⁵Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

⁶Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

⁷Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

⁸Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire.
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

⁹Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.¹²

Their unity is understood in Francis' repeated reference back to their common source, 'You, my Lord'. Francis addresses them as 'Brother' and 'Sister', thereby indicating their unity as members of one cosmic fraternity. The diversity of creatures in this unity is represented in the different properties of each: 'Sister Water' is 'humble', 'Brother Fire' is 'playful', *etc.* These diverse goods reflect the One source of all goodness. We could also notice that the four elements: fire, air, earth and water, the ancient constituents of all life of which Francis speaks in *The Canticle*, like the Persons of the Trinity, share their particular attributes for the good of all. 'Brother Fire' lights the night, 'Brother Wind' gives sustenance to all, 'Mother Earth' sustains all, 'Sister Water ... is very useful' to all. Their interdependence weaves them into a cosmic unity. Therefore, I think the texts I have examined so far make clear how Francis' idea of the Trinity as unity in diversity is reflected in the cosmos of *The Canticle*. The symbolism of this hymn represents an ideal of creation reflecting the Trinity and thus returning all its glory through Christ the Mediator to the Creator.

Interpersonal Conversion

Having examined *The Canticle's* symbolic language, I will now look at the model for human conversion which this hymn presents to us.

¹² CoC 3-9, FA:ED, vol. 1, pp. 113-4.

¹⁰Praised be you, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.¹³

Human beings do not enter this picture of cosmic harmony until stanza 10. Indeed, according to *The Assisi Compilation*, one of the early hagiographical sources for his life dated somewhere between 1244 and 1260, Francis did not include us in the original poem, except to say that none of us was worthy to mention God's name. Then, some time later, a quarrel between the bishop and the podestà, the mayor of Assisi, prompted Francis to add this exhortation to conversion.¹⁴ Even then, in

contrast to the other creatures, Francis did not refer to humans as Brother and Sister but as 'those'. Why would he do this? Perhaps addressing the bishop and the podestà he wished to bring to their attention that they were not living in fraternal unity as the Creator intended. Perhaps he realised how all our human divisions take us away from God's image. There is evidence for this insight most particularly when we turn to Francis *Fifth Admonition*, addressed to all humanity, which says, '...all creatures under heaven serve, know and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you.'¹⁵ If we look at our war-torn world today, it seems true that our human diversity leads us more often to division and hostility than natural balance and interdependence. Fear and lack of understanding of others who differ in mind or body give rise to prejudices such as: racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, religious hatred. As well as fuelling local acts of aggression, such thinking can lead to larger-scale movements that seek to impose uniformity and exclude those who differ.

On the basis of the exposition of Francis' writings I have just engaged in, I suggest that what Francis is saying in *The Canticle* is that the divine image in humanity, the image of unity in diversity, is thus distorted by sin, so we are not yet fully integrated into the cosmic fraternity it presents. However, rather than lamenting our lack of harmony, Francis presents us with a radical way of rebuilding fraternity. His solution begins in the human heart with the directions which we see in stanza 10: 'Give pardon for love of God' and 'endure in peace'. Francis' formula for interpersonal conversion is founded on Jesus' teaching, 'love your enemies' (Mat 5:44). Giving pardon, for Francis, is proactive. It is not only a response to an enemy who asks forgiveness. It requires us to regard and treat others as friends, even while they are persecuting us. Francis made this clear in his, *Letter to a Minister*, where he wrote:

'You must consider as grace all that impedes you from loving the Lord God and whoever has become an impediment to you, whether brothers or others, even if they lay hands on you. I wish to know... that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned - however much he could have sinned - who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord...'¹⁶

Crucially, at the start of Chapter XXII of the *Earlier Rule*, Francis pointed to the example of Jesus, Who called Judas 'friend' even as Judas was betraying Him. This is the whole basis for Francis' notion of giving pardon as loving one's enemies. He wrote:

'Our friends, therefore, are all those who unjustly inflict upon us distress and anguish, shame and injury, sorrow and punishment, martyrdom and death. We must love them greatly for we shall possess eternal life because of what they bring us.'¹⁷

¹³ CoC 10.

¹⁴ *The Assisi Compilation*, 84, in: Armstrong, R.J., Hellman, J.A.W. and Short, W.J. (eds.) *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 2, *The Founder* (NY: New City Press, 2000) p. 187.

¹⁵ *Adm V*, 2, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 131.

¹⁶ *LtMin* 1-12, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 97.

¹⁷ *ER* XXII, 1-4, *FA:ED*, vol. 1, p. 79.

At first sight, the words and insights of Francis of Assisi written in the 13th Century may not appear to impact on our lives and our world today. However, I would argue that the words and insights of Francis have powerful things to say to our world. For example, if all persons in conflict were more ready to give pardon, to make allowances, seeing the other as friend rather than enemy, our human differences would find their resolution much more often in unity than in division. From this ideal of giving pardon, enduring in peace would necessarily follow. It would mean living in total acceptance of the other as friend, with all the things about him/her that cause us to suffer, not retaliating with violence in any form. When, by our words and actions, we felt called to peacefully challenge destructive attitudes and behaviour, for the good of the other, we would 'endure in peace' whatever persecution might result. In a less-extreme, everyday form, enduring in peace could mean simply accepting a difference from ourselves in the other person which is not wrong but feels uncomfortable to us, rather than forcing him/her to become more like us first. It could even lead us to praise God for this difference, as contributing to the richness in diversity of the whole creation. This is an attitude based on the common good in God's plan for creation above the comfort of oneself. I also find this sort of vision in Francis attitude to the elements in *The Canticle*.

⁶Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
 and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
 through whom you give sustenance to Your creatures.¹⁸

There is something in this stanza which strikes me as unusual. Supposing I met you out on the street on a typically-British dull, dank and grey day and said to you, 'Alleluia! Praise God for this cloudy weather!' You would probably have looked at me with some surprise and puzzlement, perhaps asking yourself, 'What is she getting at? Is she slightly mad?' But, as we can see, Francis himself praised God for all kinds of weather, including the cloudy kind. Why? Because all kinds of weather sustain all creatures - and he's right! The clouds in our sky may not suit us but they do carry water that will help keep some other living things somewhere alive. My Brothers and Sisters from hot countries, for whom rain is a precious commodity, may well thank God for clouds but how do we in Britain appreciate cloudy weather? Leaving aside freak weather events which endanger life, such as the flooding in Cumbria of November-December 2009, cloudy skies generally tend to make us feel gloomy, longing and sometimes praying, for finer weather to suit our own plans. We might occasionally pray for rain if we need it for our gardens. Francis' praise for Brother Wind expresses a different outlook. All kinds of weather sustain all creatures. His is a universal focus, on the good of all creatures rather than personal convenience. I know this challenges me to look

¹⁸ CoC 6.

again at my own perspective on the world. So how would it touch me if I were to translate his stanza about Brother Wind in terms of my own interpersonal conversion? Let us say, for example, that I sometimes find it hard to get on with my Sister Mary Penitentia of the Made-Up-Name. I might try to recognise that my Sister Mary is a gift from God for the good of the whole Community. The very things about her that upset me could be the same qualities that are sustaining others. Can I, then, learn to praise God for all the aspects of my Sister, as Francis thanked God for all the faces of Brother Wind? It could be a challenge at times! However, I have noticed among my more experienced Sisters, that the way they speak about each other often shows a deep knowledge and acceptance, without condemnation, of all the particularities and peculiarities of each person. Their example shows me that it's possible to develop, over time, a genuine appreciation of each other's uniqueness. As one Sister pointed out to me recently, "It's not the same way we all go mad". Such deep acceptance of each other is probably formed over years of living together in community and learning to 'endure in peace' when necessary. So, what I have been exploring here is the powerful message I find in *The Canticle*, that giving pardon and enduring in peace can lead the human part of creation back to unity in our diversity, reflecting our Creator.

Ecological Conversion

As well as being a model for interpersonal conversion, I think *The Canticle* provides direction for human beings in relation to the rest of creation, pointing us towards an ecological conversion. I would like to focus on the stanza concerning 'our Sister Mother Earth' in this context.

⁹Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
 who sustains and governs us,
 and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.¹⁹

Francis names three qualities of Mother Earth which deserve attention: She sustains us, governs us and produces a variety of life forms.

Firstly, to recognise that the Earth sustains us may seem obvious but why, then, do we human beings continue to do irreversible damage to our own life support system? Perhaps our increasingly urban, isolated and technological living environment causes us to lose touch somewhat with our relationship to the natural world. Perhaps we forget that everything about the way we live has an effect on the rest of life on the planet. Francis' recognition that the earth 'sustains' us as a mother her children should lead our human societies to limit themselves to sustainable development which our Mother Earth can sustain so that she can continue to sustain all forms of life.

¹⁹ CoC 7.

Similarly, as Francis says, Mother Earth 'governs us'. To follow Francis in submitting to the governance of the earth, we would do well to recognise our radical dependence on the fragile ecosystems of our planet. What follows from this is respect for the integrity of the Earth's interdependent web of matter and life. This would make us consider the long-term consequences before altering the balance of natural systems for short-term profit. For example, Conservation International have stated: 'the burning and clearing of tropical forests contributes approximately 20 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and fuels climate change.'²⁰ Let us hope that the world's governments will act now and in the future to protect the Earth and her most vulnerable inhabitants from man-made ecological disaster. But what can we do individually and locally? Respect for the Earth is also related to Francis' ideal of enduring in peace as accepting the differences of others. It can mean valuing and respecting the different forms of life with which we share our planet, whether they suit us or not. Allowing them the conditions for their life, where possible, may involve compromising on the ideal conditions we would like to enjoy. An example of this could be leaving an area of our gardens for wild plants and the wildlife they support, when we might prefer to see a neat lawn and flowerbeds throughout, or maybe our neighbours would! Decisions for the life of other species often entail a degree of enduring in peace on our part. We may choose to find ways to redefine our lifestyles more in terms of our needs than our wants in order to avoid buying products that destroy the natural environment for living creatures. Such lifestyle decisions help to preserve the integrity of Earth as of a mother who sustains and governs us.

Francis' third characteristic of Mother Earth is that she 'produces various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.' If I may extend Francis' description to include the animal category, the word, 'various' can remind us of the rich biodiversity in the vast numbers of living species on the planet. Scientists are informing us that our world today is in a biodiversity crisis. The diversity of species is being depleted by human activity at a rate higher than ever in earth's history.²¹ According to the American National Wildlife Federation, 'Every **day**, an estimated 100 plant and animal species are lost to deforestation . . . A conservative estimate of the current extinction rate indicates that about 27,000 species a year are being lost.'²² The interdependence of species means that if one is lost, the destruction can snowball, causing overall impoverishment of ecosystems that ultimately threaten their very ability to support life.²³ An effect has been observed in Nature whereby the greater the

²⁰ Conservation International, *Stabilizing Climate*, [internet] available at:

<http://www.conservation.org/learn/climate/Pages/overview.aspx>, 2009, screen 3, accessed 12/11/09.

²¹ [internet] available at: <http://www.webofcreation.org/Earth%20Problems/species.htm>, screens 1-5, accessed 12/11/09.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

biodiversity in a given area, the greater the plant productivity, the greater the stability and resilience of the whole ecosystem.²⁴ This indicates the dangerous error of eradicating species based on what is apparently useful to ourselves. In *The Canticle*, Francis gives room to fruits and herbs, which we would regard as food, and flowers, which, on the whole, are less consumable but look nice.

Thomas of Celano, in his second life of St. Francis, dated around 1245-1247, also recounted an interesting detail. Francis told the brothers when cultivating a piece of land to leave a patch for wild flowers to grow and give glory to God.²⁵ This shows a non-utilitarian approach to nature. To Francis, all creatures gave glory to God simply by existing. Therefore, he valued the diversity of life, allowing it to flourish. So we could learn from Francis attitude in today's ecological crisis to live more in harmony with the earth's biodiversity. The United Nations has designated 2010 as the Year of Biodiversity so this could be an ideal time for small initiatives in our local environment.^{26 27}

I have mentioned how three qualities of Sister Mother Earth: sustaining, governing and producing variety, point us toward an ecological conversion. The last stanza of *The Canticle* names the virtue by which we can effect this change. It exhorts us to serve the Lord, 'with great humility'. Humility is derived from the Latin word for earth, '*humus*' and can, therefore, carry a sense of being close to the earth, as well as becoming lesser in relation to the other and having a true image of oneself. Each of these shades of meaning are relevant to our eco-conversion. Humility can make us aware of our connection with and radical dependence upon Mother Earth. Genesis 5:1 calls one of our first parents 'Adam', a name which means, 'that which is from the fertile soil'. The Earth sustains our lives, as Francis wrote in *The Canticle*. As the Ash Wednesday admonition reminds us, our bodies are destined to return to the earth from which they and other living things came. The same virtue of humility can rid our outlook of the subtle pride that sees other creatures only in terms of how well they serve us. It can also help us see ourselves as we really are - complementary and unique in relation to others and part of God's rich design of creation.

The Canticle: An Itinerarium

²⁴ Mulholland, S. (Jan.-March, 2007) 'Causes, consequences and ethics of biodiversity', *Franciscan Environmental Philosophy*, Canterbury, Franciscan International Study Centre, pp. 1-2.

²⁵ Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of A Soul*, (2C), 2, 165, in: Armstrong, R.J., et al., eds. (2000) *Francis of Assisi Early Documents*, vol. 2, New York, New City Press, vol. 2, p. 354.

²⁶ Lane, R., 'Buying into Biodiversity,' *New Scientist*, 12 September 2009, p. 24.

²⁷ Some practical suggestions are available in the article by Mary Colwell in *The Tablet* of 11th November 2009, available online at www.curlewmedia.com. More information about the biodiversity issue is available at www.webofcreation.org, which has links to other related sites.

Bonaventure explained in the Prologue to his *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, (*The Journey of the Mind into God*) how Francis' vision of the six-winged seraph was the inspiration for this great work. He wrote that the Crucified seraph showed him both the goal of the human journey into God, which was union with God through Christ, and the way to reach it by 'six stages of illumination'.²⁸ Based on my reading of *The Canticle* so far, I propose that a similar claim could be made for this text. We could support this claim as follows: Sir Brother Sun, Who represents Christ the way, gives us the light of truth by which we see both the goal of creation and the way towards it. The goal is presented in stanzas 3-9: all creatures serving God and each other, reflecting the Triune Creator by their unity in diversity. This is God's will for creation and those who do God's will are blessed, as stanza 13 reminds us: '...Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will...!'

The Canticle is also pointing the way to this goal, which is for each human heart to be reconciled in humility with its own frail, dependant, contingent creaturehood and with every other creature. This happens as a self-centred view of life opens up to loving appreciation of God's creation in all its variety, to which the whole *Canticle* gives expression. Such conversion requires giving pardon and enduring in peace; loving those who cause us to suffer because they are our brothers and sisters created by God. Thus, the creatures of *The Canticle* invite us humans into a cosmic fraternity in communion with the Creator, as revealed by Sir Brother Sun.

Conversion in Relation to God

Even Francis' personal example in writing *The Canticle* can challenge us to conversion in relation to God. According to *The Assisi Compilation*, he composed this hymn in praise of Sir Brother Sun and the Creator of all creatures when he himself was virtually blind, could not bear the Sun's light and could not sleep due to mice running all over him.²⁹ This shows that the focus of Francis' vision was much bigger than himself and his own comfort. The same source says Francis wrote *The Canticle* because human beings do not praise God as we should for all the creatures on which we depend for life.³⁰ The self-transcendent far-reaching insight of his *Canticle* suggests to me that, even in the darkness of physical blindness, Francis had the light of truth. I would say he had the inner light of Sir Brother Sun, that light which had come into the world and which enlightens all people (John 1:9). In this light, he had seen the way to turn from a self-centred to a universal

²⁸ Bonaventure, *Itinerarium Mentis In Deum*, Prologue, 2-3, P. Boehner, and Z. Hayes, eds., vol. II, *Works of St. Bonaventure*, (St. Bonaventure, NY, Saint Bonaventure University, Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002) p. 37.

²⁹ *AC* 83.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

vision. He could now appreciate the world from the viewpoint of the Creator, Who, as Genesis 1:11-25 repeatedly tells us, made living things 'of every kind' and 'saw that it was good.'

¹²Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.³¹

He could even give thanks for the approaching 'Bodily Death' and the 'infirmity and tribulation' of his long illness leading to it. He saw death not as the enemy of life, but as 'Sister', part of what it is to be a creature, recognising that all good in creation comes from and must return to its divine source. In this spirit of reconciliation, there was no aspect of creation or creaturehood, whether helpful or painful, with which Francis was not at peace.

Therefore, in the light of all I have discussed, I think *The Canticle* can guide our journey of conversion to God. Inspiring the virtue of humility, it challenges us to convert our way of being in creation from, 'all is for me' to, 'I am for: *'Deus meus et omnia'* - 'my God and all'. In fact, I would say the final stanza of *The Canticle* summarises the ideal stance for the human person in creation:

¹⁴Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks
and serve him with great humility.³²

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³¹ CoC 12.

³² CoC 14.