

# INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

A Franciscan Resource Book for Justice,  
Peace and Integrity of Creation

- Part 2: Specific Themes of Special Interest
  - 3. Integrity of Creation/Environmental Justice



Order of Friars Minor  
Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

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## **PART TWO**

### **THEMES OF SPECIFIC INTEREST**

As we said in the introduction to this section, this second part is composed of seven specific themes of great social and ecclesiastical importance at the present time. They could have been more but, not being able to make the book longer, we have selected these as the most apt and of greatest interest for living out our charism.

Each theme has a brief theoretical development that does not claim to be exhaustive but rather makes a presentation of the theme to stimulate reflection and action. This theoretical development of each theme is completed with the experiences and testimonies of friars from all over the world.

The theoretical part of each theme, having been written by a different author, can throw up some repetitions. However, we wanted to leave it this way because this section is not to be read at one sitting but rather each chapter should be consulted and worked on separately.

At the end of each theme or chapter a long questionnaire can be found. The reason, in effect, is to be found in its instrumental character. If these chapters are to be used for meetings on formation, both initial and on-going, or even in meetings of reflection with the laity, the long list of questions will better facilitate the group that is going to reflect.

Themes:

1. Option for the Poor
2. Peacemaking
3. Integrity of Creation / Environmental Justice
4. Life
5. Human Rights: Individual and Collective
6. Women and the Charisms of Francis and Clare
7. Dialogue: Ecumenical, Interreligious and Intercultural

### **3. Integrity of Creation / Environmental Justice**

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#### **OFM General Constitutions, Article 71**

*Following closely in St. Francis' footsteps, the brothers should show a sense of reverence towards nature, which is today threatened on all sides. They thus restore nature in its entirety to its status of brother and sister, useful to all people for the glory of God the Creator.*

#### ***From the life of Francis...***

Francis' profound love for God and for all God's creation is powerfully expressed in the *Canticle of the Creatures*. Celano says: "In every work of the artist he praised the Artist; whatever he found in the things made he referred to the Maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the hands of the Lord and saw behind things pleasant to behold their life-giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he saw Beauty itself; all things were to him good" (2Cel 165). Bonaventure adds: "Of all creation he made a ladder by which he might mount up and embrace Him who is all desirable" (LM 9:1).

Francis commanded his friars not to cut down a tree entirely; he told gardeners to leave a grass border around gardens; he said that honey and wine should be set out for bees in winter and he called animals brother. "For that original goodness that will be one day *all things in all* already shown forth in this saint *all things in all* (2Cel 165; italicized phrases are from 1 Cor 12:6). A bird once rested in Francis' hands (2Cel 167), a falcon announced the times to pray (2Cel 168), a pheasant grew fond of Francis (2Cel 170), and cricket sang its Creator's praises (2Cel 171). On Christmas he wanted extra grain and hay given to oxen and asses while corn and grain were being scattered on the roads to feed birds, especially larks (2Cel 199). Francis' companions "saw him find great cause for interior and external joy in all creatures; he caressed and contemplated them with delight, so much so that his spirit seemed to live in heaven and not on earth" (LP 51).

## Ecological Justice

Reflection on ecology has entered a new phase, definitively leaving behind the stages of simple conservation and preservation of nature. Now the environment is considered in its multiple relationships, embracing both the natural environment and human culture and society. In its integral perspective, social ecology highlights the possible interactions between all beings whether living or nonliving, natural or cultural. It offers us the basic elements necessary for reestablishing a dynamic balance in the whole ecosystem. It is within this search for a balance in the whole ecosystem that the question of ecological justice must be situated. Furthermore, the question of whether respect for human rights also includes the rights of the earth, and vice versa, needs to be asked. In other words, how is social justice linked to ecological justice? And in a Franciscan perspective, how does our commitment to justice and peace include safeguarding creation?

### *A. Some principles of a Franciscan “eco-justice”*

The Franciscan vision of life is both theocentric and at the same time global. Each living or nonliving being is part of a subjectivity (and not simply an object) and has an internal value, a mission. On the other hand it is a relative being: it is in permanent relation with its Creator and with other beings.

#### **1. The sacrament of the world**

One of the most significant marks of Saint Francis’ spirituality is his acute sense of the presence of God in creation and in human history. Every being, every thing is a gift from God. He exhorted his brothers to attribute nothing to themselves, to keep nothing for themselves, at all times and in every place to give glory to God for “the marvels that God does” in them and in the universe. “Let us return all goods to the most high and sovereign Lord God; let us recognize that all goods belong to him; let us give him thanks for everything, for all goods come from him” (*RegNB* 17:17-18; *Praises of God for Brother Leo*).

Everything speaks to us of God and sends us back to God. The universe in its unity as well as in its diversity is a sacrament of God, a “ladder” that leads us to the Creator (cf. *2Cel* 165; *LM* 9:1). “The whole world is shadow, way, vestige, it is the book written outside,” writes Bonaventure (*Hexaem.* 12, n.14). For Francis, as for Bonaventure, God is everywhere and at the same time he is nowhere. God is at the end of the road of conformity to Christ and of ecstatic contemplation. But he is also there, on the road, close to the one who searches for him, even in the depths of each creature and especially in our own depths. In every thing and in every event God is present. “God is intimately present to his creatures” (Bonaventure, *De scientia Christi*, q. 2, ad 11). The earth is sacred.

That extraordinary love that Francis brought to beings and things flows from this. He entered into a fraternal and respectful communion with all that lives and all that is. For this supremely Christian soul, loving the works of God and loving God was the same thing.

From this also flows that wonder, expressed often in canticles of praise and thanksgiving, before the diversity and the gratuity of the creation that finds its origins in

the superabundance of Trinitarian love. “For,” wrote Thomas of Celano “the Good that is the source of all things and that will one day be everything in all things, appeared already in this life, in the eyes of the saint, to be everything in all things” (2Cel 165). This aesthetic and religious vision is opposed to purely scientific and materialist conceptions of the world, in all their diverse forms.

## **2. The universe is a whole.**

Francis has an integral vision of life. The universe, created in harmony and for harmony is like a great family whose elements in their variety are interdependent and form a single universal fraternity. This conception of the unity of the world is profoundly rooted in the biblical vision of creation.

On the one hand, salvation history involves human history but also the entire cosmos in its openness to the divine promises: “ From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth” (Rom. 8:22). On the other hand human beings themselves were created from the earth and the name "Adam" (*Adamah*) reminds them of their terrestrial origins. And through “our sister bodily Death from whom no human being alive can escape,” they will return one day to the mother Earth who saw them come into the light, according to the eternal law of life of all creatures. Humanity is in communion with nature in life as well as in death. (cf. Gen 1-3; *Canticle of Brother Sun*).

This conception is opposed to the different philosophical metaphysics and religious fundamentalisms that put too much stress on the supernatural to the detriment of the natural.

In consequence, humanity should extend ethics and justice to nature, to all peoples who live on the earth, for in destroying the environment they destroy their own habitat. The goods of creation are not reduced to the economic interests of humanity alone; they are destined for the universal harmony of all beings. “God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31). The adjective “good” must be understood here in its global sense, all-encompassing, that is to say ontological, moral, vital, aesthetic, and not simply in the exclusive sense of an economic good.

## **3. Respect for otherness**

For Francis every thing and every human being had its intrinsic value, an “individuality” to be respected and loved. Stones, plants, birds of the sky, worms of the earth, lepers or beggars of the road... all God’s creatures had a right to existence and none of them belonged completely to us: they were “different,” “other,” distant and in consequence not subject to our domination. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus would develop this concept of the singularity of each thing in their doctrine of individuation. Following the example of their Father, they would consider every being in this world in its fertile and interior subjectivity, in its *haecceitas*, that is in what makes a being what it is and not something else. The ultimate reason for this singularity written in each thing is situated, as Duns Scotus said, “in the very will of God.” The otherness of creatures sends us back to the infinitely other that is God.

A Franciscan ecological spirituality brings us before the challenge of transcending ourselves to enter into the universal community of all beings. Taken in all its complex relationships with the universe, our life enlarges our sense of responsibility towards

ourselves and others. This requires an inclusive attitude towards all the beings that we meet on our way, including those of the natural world, and at the same time a contemplative look of wonder when faced with the diversity and the mysterious singularity of each one of them. An inclusivity without any appropriation, a solidarity that includes a profound respect for otherness.

Franciscan spirituality centered on an integral vision of life, on the dignity of the earth and the intrinsic value of each being in the universe, refuses to see the natural world and the human being purely and simply as capital to be exploited. We must distance ourselves both from an irresponsible sacramentalism that is disincarnate and deprived of all social impact, and from an idea of unlimited progress that the earth and its life systems cannot support.

### ***B. Ecological justice on a practical level.***

Three practical options roughly correspond to the three principles:

#### **1. Option for life and the interdependence of life**

a) “Be blessed, my Lord, you who created me” (Thomas of Celano, *Life of St. Clare*, 46). Before death Clare continued to give thanks to her God for the gift of life. Francis’ *Canticle of the Sun* was also a concert of praises and thanksgivings of the entire universe for the vocation to life: “Praised be you my Lord in all your creatures.”

Every being has a right to life. A wild turtledove, a small insignificant flower, a poor suffering woman, an old blind man, etc.--all have been called into being and participate in the same adventure of love. Francis had a predilection for the smallest and the humblest among creatures. “He picked up the worms on the path, for fear of seeing them crushed by passersby” (2Cel 165). On the paths created by humanity there is no lack of life-destroying passersby.

The Earth, as well as the human beings and animals who live on it, has a right to regeneration; it is subject to the law of the Sabbath, a time of rest necessary for renewal of life (cf. Lev 25:1-7; 19:9-10). God’s creation did not stop on the sixth day when humanity appeared. Humanity is not the end of creation; it is rather crowned by the seventh day, the Sabbath, where God rests and contemplates (cf. Gen 1-2). It is the Creator that is the principle and the end of all things. Every Franciscan is a prophet of life. In the name of the living God, they denounce the culture of death and seek to safeguard quality of life - of all life - and, in the desert of the world, become everywhere and always signs of regeneration and of hope.

b) They are just as attentive to the interdependence of beings. No being lives of and for itself. The survival of human beings, and especially of the poor, depends on the survival of the earth and of the quality of life of all the universe, and vice versa. Francis was conscious of the gifts of the earth through which human beings are fed. “Be praised my Lord, for our sister mother Earth who carries us and feeds us, who produces her variety of fruits, with variegated flowers and herbs” (*Canticle of Brother Sun*). For their part, human beings should take care of the earth and safeguard the variety of fruits, flowers and herbs. Monoculture to provide for the needs of the industrialized world, and thus the unlimited exploitation of the earth, brings death to the earth herself and also to the poor who see themselves systematically despoiled of their resources for life. Thousands and thousands of “landless” dying of hunger and thousands and thousands of hectares of

forests destroyed in Brazil and elsewhere on our planet are the disastrous consequences of this unilateral economic policy.

## **2) The option of living *sine proprio* (RegNB 1:1)**

In his concise way Francis exhorted his brothers to lead a simple, poor life in a spirit of self-giving: “Keep nothing of yourselves for yourselves.” (EpOrd 29) and to practice in daily life the renunciation of all superfluity and to be happy with the bare necessities: “In case of necessity, all the brothers, wherever they may be, may make use of all that may be eaten...In the same way, in case of necessity, all the brothers are to use, as the Lord gives them grace, everything of which they have need” (RegNB 9:2,16-20; cf. RegNB 15).

This Franciscan poverty is not just individual. It is also social and brings with it a prophetic dimension. In renouncing property and taking the option of living poorly among the poor, Francis rejected the economic and political system of his time. His option of living in poverty translates on the practical level into an option for the poor. It is in contrast, on the one hand with the feudal mentality centered on the possession of lands and the exploitation of peasants, and on the other hand with the consumer society introduced by the new social class, the bourgeoisie.

Returning one day from Siena, Francis met a poor man. Because of his illness, Francis was wearing a small cloak as well as his habit. He saw the destitution of the poor man and could not hold himself back: “We must” he said to his companion, “give his cloak back to this poor man, for it belongs to him” (LM 8:5). The option of living *sine proprio* must be linked to charity, without which poverty makes no sense. For Francis appropriation is a real obstacle to fraternal love. It arouses in us the will for domination over others. The story of a novice who, driven by the desire to possess, lacked respect for others is an example of this intrinsic link between poverty and fraternity (cf. LP 70, 72-73). The temptation to dominate the earth leads us to dominate others, especially the poor and helpless. The accumulation of riches by some people brings with it as a consequence the impoverishment and even the destruction of others. Francis warns his brothers to be on their guard against this danger: “The brothers, wherever they may be, in a hermitage or in some other residence, are to take care not to appropriate for themselves any place or enter into dispute with anyone whatever in order to claim it.” (RegNB 7:12).

Marx brought out the link between the exploitation of workers and that of the earth in the system of capitalist production when he wrote in *Das Kapital*: “All progress in capitalist agriculture is progress not only in the art of exploiting the worker, but also in the art of despoiling the soil; all progress in the art of increasing its fertility for a while, is progress in ruining the durable sources of fertility [...] Capitalist production only develops the technique and the combination of the process of social production while at the same time exhausting the two sources from which all wealth comes: the earth and the worker” (K. Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, book 1, section 4, c. 13, §10 [Marx-Engels, *Werke*, vol. 23, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1962, 529-530]). Ecological justice and social justice are inseparable.

## **3) Being artisans of peace**

Respect for life and the otherness of every being means also a responsibility for peace. Not only to be peaceful--that is to say living at peace in one's own house--but also

building peace in the midst of a society characterized by violence and injustice. Leaving the walls of the town of Assisi, a symbol of power and glory, Francis and Clare wanted to break the chains that imprisoned the hearts of people within their society in the vicious circle of selfishness and distrust. They came down from the heights in order to be with the most humble and little ones, with lepers and the beggars in the street. They wanted to make peace with the world and with the whole of the universe. The cloister of the brothers is the whole world where each of God's creatures has its dwelling place (cf. SC 63); there are no high walls, for the brothers have nothing to defend apart from the dignity and fraternity of all beings. "Whoever comes to them, friend or enemy, thief or brigand, must be well received" (RegNB 7:13).

Francis did not forget that peace between people is only an aspect of universal reconciliation between human beings and the earth, and between these and their Creator. He added a paragraph on forgiveness between people in his song of creation: "Praised be you, my Lord, for those who pardon for love of you." Love is still possible despite all the shadows of death that oppress us. When all the arguments of reason do not suffice to bring peace, there are no other paths to follow apart from that of forgiveness. It is forgiveness that gives back to love its clarity and recovers the dignity of the person. Conscious that arms do not reestablish peace and that they cause not only death to human beings but also the radical destruction of the environment, the brothers go about the world denouncing every attack on the integrity of creation and through nonviolence witnessing to the mercy of God and working for universal reconciliation.

Ambrose Van Si OFM

### *Examples from the lives of the friars ...*

Protecting the integrity of creation has always been at the heart of the Franciscan spirituality, but in recent years issues of environmental justice have moved away from a romantic notion of care for plants and animals to a more urgent concern for the promotion of human rights and social justice. In Latin America in particular, the right to settle and take care of the land is increasingly seen as a vital first step to empowering the poor and overcoming the oppressive structures of society. Across the continent and beyond, friars are living alongside the poor, developing creative ways of protecting the environment and promoting the self-sufficiency of indigenous communities.

Sadly it is still rare to find friars who are able to dedicate themselves entirely to this kind of work. One exception is JIM LOCKMANN (U.S.A.) who has a doctorate in ecology and worked to promote methods of sustainable development near the city of Belem in the Amazon basin. His speciality is the biological study of local tree species, trying to learn more about the trees which will contribute most to a long-term preservation of the environment. The area in the northeast of Brazil is extremely poor, inhabited by displaced families who were forcibly moved into the region by the military. Consequently they know nothing about their new habitat and have no financial or educational support from the government to help them take care of their new environment. It usually takes only about five years for a small community to cut down all the trees and take everything out of an area of land, thus being obliged to move on to another site. Lockmann lives with a community of workers, helping them to develop a longer term view of their environment. "Life is very hard for these people," he says, "and it takes time to gain their trust. But after a while they come to see that they can

build a better future for their children.”

Lockmann is carrying on a tradition begun by JOSI MARIANO DA CONCEIÇÃO VELOSO --the 18th century friar now widely revered as “the father of Brazilian botany.” He was born in Vila Sao José, in 1741, the son of Portuguese and Brazilian parents and entered the Order on 11 April 1761. Working closely together with members of local indigenous tribes, he spent almost a decade researching and cataloguing more than 2000 plant species. His research also focused on the study of farming and the rural economy, forest conservation, zoology, mineralogy and local dialects; his legacy serves as an inspiration for countless Brazilian friars who have worked for environmental justice in the region since then.

Today, RODRIGO DE CASTRO AMÉDÉE PÉRET is developing new and creative ways of carrying on this work, empowering poor farmers to defend their rights and protect local species of plants and crops. One particular initiative which he has pioneered in Minas Gerais state, **Brazil**, is the setting up of seed banks. Volunteers collect, cultivate and distribute seeds from many different local trees and plants, thus lessening the farmers' dependency on foreign, hybrid seeds and trying to reverse the trend of turning over vast tracts of land to monoculture production of coffee, wheat, soybeans and other cash crops for export. Through his work in the St. Francis of Assisi Agro-Ecological Nursery, Rodrigo and his team enable small farmers to provide for their families while at the same time preserving the long-term stability of the environment. High priorities at the nursery are research into the management of soil and water resources and the reversal of soil erosion. Volunteers also carefully catalogue the pharmaceutical properties of local trees, fruits and natural herbs that were once used effectively for the treatment of many types of illness, thus ensuring their reintroduction into the regional ecosystem.

Similarly while in **El Salvador** GEARÓID FRANCISCO Ó CONAIRE dedicated much of his time and energy to encouraging local people in the use of ancient bio-energy techniques and herbal remedies for illness and disease. Why? Because teaching them to make better use of the natural resources at their disposal means empowering them to understand more about the illnesses that affect them and therefore lessening their dependence on doctors and large pharmaceutical companies. It also means protecting a part of the local culture, providing people with cheap and easily obtainable remedies which they can produce and administer at home. But Francisco's work for environmental justice does not end there. He's taken his campaign for a clean water supply for his parish of San Bartolo right up to El Salvador's National Assembly. A joint committee of friars and community leaders petitioned legislators and campaigned on local radio stations as well until action was taken to improve the water supply to the shantytown on the outskirts of San Salvador. Francisco has also joined with the United Ecology Groups of El Salvador (UNES) to stop the destruction of the El Espino natural forest and ecological reserve-- the “last lung of El Salvador” as it has been called. The preservation of El Espino is an opportunity not only to save more than a million trees but to stop a clear violation of the human rights of all, particularly the five hundred families who are threatened with eviction if the urbanization project goes forward. The friars have frequently been criticized for interfering in political life. They have even received death threats from former military death squads that have now reorganized into vigilante groups at the behest of wealthy landowners in the region. Some of the Central American friars are determined to continue with their advocacy work; they believe that

environmental justice is one of the keys to empowering poor people all over the world.

As a cofounder of the coalition SAVE M.E. (Samar Alliance of Vigilant Endeavors for Mother Earth), JOSI CALVIN BUGHO put his life on the line by joining friars PASTOR ALTA and ALBERTO BALDO alongside the parishioners of Tinambacan, Northern Samar, **Philippines**. Their struggle has focused on the fight to block the quarrying of a tree clad limestone formation essential to sustainable ecological diversity for the parish community. A recent inter-Franciscan campaign against the 1996 APEC Summit in the Philippines highlighted the ongoing need to look at environmental degradation from a more inclusive social justice perspective. In a heavily industrialized area of **Poland**, the Franciscan community has established ECOSONG, a music festival that helps to bring hope to an area filled with vestiges of fifty years of inefficient state rule.

In Makarska, **Croatia**, JURE RADIC (1920-1990) of the Franciscan Province of Split founded a sea museum in 1963 after years of scientific research into the flora and fauna of southern Croatia and the Adriatic Sea. He also collected numerous seashells from the around the world and began an impressive herbarium and paleontological collection. As a liturgical professor, scientist and Franciscan friar, he believed deeply in the need to safeguard God's creation. To help raise awareness of such issues he also founded the so-called Mountain and Sea Institute which organizes many scientific conferences and works together with other international scientific institutes.

On the border separating **Mexico** and the **U.S.A.**, JOE BAUR, LUIS BALDONADO, LIZ CUMMINS have worked together with other lay leaders on the project, known as SWEEP or Southwest Environmental Equity Project, to try and block legislation allowing companies to dump toxic wastes without cleaning up the sites. Many of these toxic waste sites are located in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods along the U.S.-Mexican border. The residents are not told of these dangers involved and most lack the political power to influence the location of the sites. The rates of cancer and other diseases are often much higher in these areas than in the general population. SWEEP continues to bring church leaders from Phoenix to visit families in Nogales, Arizona, where the spread of cancer and other diseases has been firmly documented. Incorporating issues of social justice into the more traditional "green movement" is a noteworthy example of SWEEP's Franciscan essence.

In Appalachia, Kentucky, **U.S.A.**, MAYNARD TETREAULT has been a leading advocate for the local population in their struggle for environmental justice. Set off from the rest of the United States by the Appalachian Mountain chain, the people of Appalachia have often been left to fend for themselves against large mining interests. Strip mining has led to the degradation of much of Appalachia's once pristine ecosystem and the dependence of such a large percentage of the local population on the coal industry has led to social and economic problems as well. Maynard and others are working to provide the region with more sustainable industry and to protect the natural resources so abundant in the area.

In an impoverished Hispanic community in Oakland, California, **U.S.A.**, KEITH WARNER has worked to raise awareness of the interdependence of environmental degradation and poverty throughout the world. "People won't care about tropical rainforests in Brazil or Micronesia," according to Keith "unless they have a sense of the

connection with their local situation.” Rural people, he says had a greater understanding of stewardship of the land. Today, with the tremendous dislocation of people from rural to urban areas, people have lost that connection to nature. Keith believes that by giving urban people a sense of nature's gifts through small steps such as community gardens, recycling and the planting of trees, a more practical and holistic environmental ethic can be attained. Recently, the city of Oakland initiated a campaign to combat the disposal of used motor oil into the city's sewer system--a very common practice in the neighborhood of St. Elizabeth Friary. In an effort to promote motor oil recycling, Keith built a model street in the back of St. Elizabeth Church where local children could witness the impact the disposal of motor oil was having upon the entire San Francisco Bay area. “In a poor community such as this composed of El Salvadorans, Mexicans and many undocumented aliens, the city government simply does not have the respect, structures and language capacity to confront the problem,” Keith says. “The people of the neighborhood fear the government, particularly the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and have little time for the environmental concerns which preoccupy wealthy northern Californians.”

All too often political and economic concerns take precedence over environmental issues and the rights of the local populations. Amidst the political turmoil in Israel, former Custos of the **Holy Land**, GIUSEPPE NAZZARO, tried to combat plans to confiscate huge amounts of land near Bethlehem for the construction of a vast luxury tourist complex. Since 1967, more than 60% of all land in the region has been confiscated and declared a military zone by the Israeli government. Bethlehem is now almost totally surrounded by Jewish settlements and bypass roads. Tour buses move swiftly in and out of the town, discouraging contact with the local Christian community. In an already explosive political context, the further confiscation of land will mean the loss of livelihood for several thousand families, the destruction of much ancestral land of the Palestinian people and greater opposition to the fragile peace process.

In other countries where political transformation has taken place, there is a growing sense of environmental justice. In **South Africa**, for example, the apartheid system of past governments meant that huge swathes of land were put aside for profitable nature reserves and Afrikaner settlements while tribal homelands and shantytowns for the black majority were left in a state of total neglect. One project aimed at helping the black communities to combat deforestation by planting quick-growing groves of eucalyptus trees is now seen to have badly backfired on the local environment. In a country known for its shortage of water, a grove of 100 eucalyptus trees can absorb over 50,000 liters of water daily, thus transforming the surrounding areas into a virtual desert. Until his recent death, CRISPIN CLOSE was pioneering efforts to cut down the groves of these trees and replace them with indigenous local varieties of trees that are grown from seed.

In other countries across the globe, friars are promoting the preservation of indigenous plants and ancient farming techniques as the best way of supporting small farmers in the struggle against governments eager to turn over vast areas of land to profitable monoculture farming. In **Papua New Guinea** friars have protected the increasing monoculture farming of the oil palm plantations. The trees are cultivated for their clustered fruit whose flesh and seeds yield the oil to be sold on foreign markets. Once again the ecological diversity of the region and the livelihood of the local people are threatened by this type of non-sustainable development.

The Atrisco Environmental Learning Project (AELP) is a nonprofit, after-school and summer program located at Holy Family Parish in Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S.A., JACK CLARK ROBINSON, pastor of Holy Family Parish, helped established AELP as a practical way of addressing the rapidly transforming family life and structures in the surrounding Hispanic community. Children, teenagers and grandparents come together for the construction and maintenance of a shade garden and greenhouse. As Project Director BERNADETTE ORTEGA points out: “By sharing in the care and nurturing of our garden, young and old alike come to learn more about the bounty nature can provide and the need to nourish the indigenous traditions that made the South Valley of Albuquerque such a fertile place prior to industrialization. AELP allows economically and socially disadvantaged youth to become intimately involved in a positive, self-esteem building, educational program while addressing some of the neighborhood's social and cultural concerns. The ultimate goal of our program,” says Bernadette, “is to expose children to the basic philosophies of respect, caring and compassion. In developing these basic human values, we believe the children will learn to have respect for themselves, for their environment and for each other.”

### **General Constitutions**

Article 9: 1 & 4. The brothers' chastity involves an “undivided heart,” through which they “ponder the things of God” (1). The brothers “should look upon all creatures humbly and devoutly, aware that they all were created for the glory of God” (4).

Other references: articles 20,1-2, 127, 3 and 131,1.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the biggest threats to the environment that your city faces? your country? the world?
2. What have you personally done in response to #1 above? What has your local community or provincial fraternity done?
3. Does your local community recycle whenever possible?
4. Are questions of environmental justice reflected in your apostolic work (daily tasks, conversations, preaching, etc.)?
5. Many people regard St. Francis as an outstanding ally in their efforts for environmental justice. Do you encourage this? In what way?
6. In your apostolic work, do you ever use ecological examples to reinforce the fact that all peoples on this planet are interconnected? Have you ever used the *Canticle of the Creatures* in public prayer to reinforce this fact?
7. Do you feel that you personally and your community have sufficient sensitivity to, and knowledge of, ecological problems? Do you regard the participation of franciscans in actions and movements in the area of ecology as being adequate?
8. What would you criticize in your life and that of your fraternity regarding sensitivity and responsibility for ecology: excessive use of energy, destruction of materials which could be recycled? Do you not think that each one of us likewise is guilty of consumerism and of so-called “development”?
9. From the point of view of an option for the poor, what steps could we take towards a more effective responsibility in the area of ecology?
10. Do you believe that today's consciousness regarding ecology demands a new reading of *The Canticle of The Creatures*? Your fraternity could hold a reading of this prayer in common, with a commentary from the point of view of the theme of this chapter.