1. Introduction: Scope and Method

In recent decades extreme weather events, such as unprecedented summer heat with sultry nights, frequented with drought or torrential rainfalls, shortened spring and fall seasons, and the like, are frequently reported. Undeniably, climate change and global warming are realities around us. Apart from climate changes, various other symptoms of environmental crisis have also been visible across the entire surface of

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Earth.\(^1\) The air is rapidly being polluted with fine particulate matter which causes great danger to vulnerable adults and children, causing many respiratory diseases. Given all the signs of environmental degradation, some scientists are predicting the coming of the sixth extinction period which would wipe out all human beings and many other species from the Earth.\(^2\) The cry of our planet gets louder, desperately urging us to respond in specific and concrete ways to avoid further ecological damage.

Pope Francis’ latest encyclical \textit{Laudato Si’} (LS, hereafter) is the Church’s official response to present environmental issues.\(^3\) The encyclical is concerned with the immensity and urgency of the challenge we face now and acknowledges that this environmental crisis has been partly inflicted by “our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God endowed us” (LS, 2). As a result of humans’ plundering of the Earth, the Earth has become “among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor” (LS, 2). Thus, Francis urgently demands that we “rethink the goals, effects,

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\(^1\) For example, an increase of ultraviolet radiation due to the continued depletion of the ozone layer, the water crisis, pollution of soil and air, destruction of forests and fisheries, and loss of biodiversity, to mention but a few.


overall context and ethical limits” of all human activity (LS, 131).

To rethink and re-examine all our activities and their consequences and implications on the Earth includes a fundamental anthropological inquiry of our identity. Who are we, human beings, in the universe which encompasses uncountable galaxies, stars and planets as well as various forms of living organisms and mysterious matters? This questioning entails another query of what would be the right relationship that we build with God, with creatures, with our fellow human beings, and with ourselves, in order not to repeat the same violence that we have done to the whole planet.

Without a radically new understanding of human identity and its right relationship with the environment, it is impossible to take hold of the present environmental crisis and to provide sustainability for our lives on the Earth. The environmental crisis is a spiritual and religious crisis which is deeply related to our conceptions of God, human beings and nature. Thus, the encyclical calls for a global ecological conversion fostered by an environmentally sound spirituality (LS, 216-221).

Pope Francis finds such spirituality in the living examples of St. Francis of Assisi (Francis, hereafter). As a Franciscan I believe that

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5 The term “ecological conversion” was used first by John Paul II in his General Audience Address, January 17, 2001. A fuller explanation of this term appeared in the Common Declaration of Environmental Ethics by John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I, published in 2003. Pope Benedict also emphasized the importance of ecological conversion in his major social encyclical Caritas in Veritate, and in his World Day of Peace Message of January 1, 2010. Cf. Neil Ormerod / Cristina Vanin, “Ecological Conversion: What Does it Mean?”, Theological Studies 77 (2016), 328-352, esp. 148. The article, presented by N. Ormerod and C. Vanin, is one of the latest scholarly works which discuss about the topic of ecological conversion mentioned in Laudato Si’. The authors proffer an analytic explanation of ecological conversion, mostly relying on the general framework of the conversions identified by Bernard Lonergan and extended by Robert Doran.
6 St. Francis of Assisi is frequently mentioned in the Encyclical. See the articles 1, 10, 11, 12,
Franciscan tradition has insights and wisdom to respond to the ecological crisis. Specifically Francis’ conversion process would enlighten us as how to cultivate an ecologically motivated consciousness with the necessary attitudes, in short, a new praxis. Francis experienced a series of conversions in his life. Francis’ conversion experiences were shaped by his encounters with the crucified Jesus, lepers, his religious brothers, poor neighbors, church authorities, animals and all the creatures he had met throughout his spiritual journey. All these encounters drew him more deeply into God. His genuine conversion in Christ led Francis to live a life of “integral ecology”, which was manifested through his care for the vulnerable, his joy and generous self-giving, and his simple and harmonious living with all creatures (LS, 10). In this sense, Francis’ conversion can be named as ecological conversion which Pope Francis urges us to embrace in LS. For this reason, Francis’ conversion experiences can guide us on the way to ecological conversion.

What I aim to do in this article is to show how the conversion process of Francis can foster the ecological conversion and cultivate concrete and specific ecological ethics. For this purpose, I have sorted through all the articles referring to ecological conversion in LS, and identified the follow-

66, 87, 91, 125, 218, and 221 in *Laudato Si’.*


8 I. Delio et al., *Care for creation*, 171.

9 In the Encyclical, “an integral ecology” is defined as a harmonious living with creation through our lifestyle and our ideals. It is to be expressed as “disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption”. This term appears in LS, 10, 11, 62, 124, 137-162 (esp. 156, 159), 225, and 230.

10 Cf. Keith Warner, “Franciscan Environmental Ethics: Imagining Creation as a Community of Care”, *Journal of Society of Christian Ethics* 31 (2011), 143-160. Warner adequately argues in this article that the Franciscan understanding of incarnation and the Franciscan vision of Trinity have special potential for environmental ethics by inspiring individuals to great love for creation as a manifestation of God’s revelation in and to the world.
ing four elements from them as the most important components of ecological conversion: (1) Right relationship with God: A conversion from a misguided anthropocentrism to an adequate anthropology; (2) Right interpersonal relationship: A conversion from individualism to solidarity; (3) Right care for creation: A conversion from exploitation to co-existence; and (4) Right relationship with self. All these four elements are found in Francis’ conversion experiences. From a series of conversion that Francis experienced, four distinctive elements are recognized: (1) A movement from climbing up to going down; (2) A movement from exclusion to inclusion; (3) A movement toward extending love to all creatures; and (4) A movement toward embracing death. I will align these two sets of four elements to present how Francis’ experience can deepen and widen our understanding of ecological conversion and inspire us to undergo our own ecological conversion. The scope of Franciscan spirituality that this article deals with is to be limited to the life of Francis and his writings because the main focus is given to the conversion experiences of Francis. What follows is an orderly presentation of the four elements of ecological conversion in the subsequent four subsections. Each subsection is to have an additional subdivision which introduces a parallel element from the conversion experiences of Francis.
2. Ecological Conversion and
St. Francis of Assisi’s Conversion

2.1. Right Relationship with God: A Conversion from a Mis-guided Anthropocentrism to an Adequate Anthropology

The argument that modern anthropocentrism is deeply related to the environmental crisis has, for quite some time, already been brought up in the public domain.\textsuperscript{11} Aligning himself with this trend and throughout his encyclical (e.g. LS, 115, 119), Pope Francis also points out various harms caused by anthropocentric attitudes toward nature and, furthermore, underlines the need for an adequate anthropology. “There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (LS, 118). In opposition to the current technocratic culture, that is, the excessive anthropocentric culture, Pope Francis proposes to build up a new ecological culture as “a distinctive way of looking at things, a way of thinking, policies, an educational program, a lifestyle and a spirituality which together generate resistance to the assault of the technocratic paradigm” (LS, 111).\textsuperscript{12} Thus ecological conversion requires a shift away from an anthropocentric worldview. This conversion leads to a new understanding of humans and of their roles and place in nature, as well as to a new understanding of God.

\textsuperscript{11} “The term anthropocentrism can be used to refer to worldviews and attitudes, to intrinsic value, or to moral status and significance.” Anthropocentric attitudes have been derived from the traditional claim that humans have dominion over nature due to their superiority to nature, with regard to intrinsic value or moral status that only humans possess. See Clare Palmer, Katie McShane, and Ronald Sandler, “Environmental Ethics”, \textit{Annual Review of Environment and Resources} 39 (2014), 419-442, esp. 423.

\textsuperscript{12} N. Ormerod / C. Vanin, “Ecological Conversion”, 342.
Nevertheless, no scholarly consensus has been reached in theological and ecological circles regarding humanity’s place and role in relation to nature. The deep ecologists would deny any benefit from human intervention in nature. They have criticized the traditional biblical concept of stewardship because the idea of stewardship presupposes a superiority of humanity over nature, a separation of humans from the rest of nature, and a perception of nature as human resources.  

Pope Francis seems to suggest a “moderate anthropocentrism”, which grants a special place and role to human beings in the order of creation since they, as *imago Dei*, take a special and responsible role for creation. However, this responsibility does not entail any kind of manipulation, mastery or exploitation of nature (LS, 118). Rather, it comes with accountability for what has been entrusted to humanity. Francis’ conversion experience is characterized by a radical movement from anthropocentrism to theocentrism. This movement of transformation would provide a better insight for ecological conversion.

A new understanding of God is also required for ecological conversion. Eco-theologies have protested against a traditional view of God which supports the rigid hierarchical schemes of the order of creation, while favoring a panentheistic or Trinitarian understanding of God. Pope Francis also draws our attention to a relational and communal understanding of

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God (LS, 238-240). This view on God can be enriched by Franciscan spirituality, specifically Saint Bonaventure’s treatise on the Trinity, which is referred to in LS, 239.

The first element found in Francis’ conversion is a movement from climbing up to going down, which corresponds to a shift from anthropocentrism to panentheistic theocentrism. An exploration of this first movement would help us to get a better understanding of ecological conversion and furthermore, motivate us to enter into the first step of ecological conversion.

2.1.1. A Movement from Climbing Up to Going Down

In Francis’ conversion experiences, there is found a radical change of his orientation to life from “climbing up” to “going down”. This radical change was instigated by his encounters with the crucified Jesus at the church of San Damiano. The crucified Jesus opened the saint’s eyes to see God who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:7). Francis met the God who ‘bent down’ to be a human on account of His love of humanity (cf. Hos 11:4). With this encounter, he geared his life downward to be with Jesus, to be like Jesus, and to be another Jesus. Before his conversion, however, Francis oriented himself to climb up to the social ladder as everyone else did. It was an upward movement to get power, domination, control, and monopoly — typical constitutives aspects of anthropocentrism.

Francis lived on the threshold of the twelfth century when Western Europe experienced extraordinary economic and demographic expansion, accompanied by a social upheaval that coincided with a rise of the new middle class. This new class shook the stability of the hierarchical society
rooted in the feudal system. As a son of a middle class wealthy merchant, young Francis strived to climb up the social ladder. His goal was set to attain knighthood by amassing military achievements. At the age of twenty one Francis ambitiously participated in the war against Perugia, his neighboring town, in 1202. However, the victory was to go to his rivals. As a result, Francis was imprisoned with his fellow townsfolks. After a year of imprisonment, he was ransomed and returned, but his first exposure to warfare left a profound effect on Francis. No section of his biography gives any detailed report on his personal experiences at the battlefield. Nevertheless, one could easily guess that he must have witnessed a massacre and was involved somehow in killing his enemies. The horror of the war would have lingered with him during a period of two years of severe sickness following his return home from the prison. This terrible experience must have made young naïve Francis doubt his orientation to life. Would it be worth climbing up the ladder of success relying on warfare and violence? But he did not know any alternatives to reach his goal. After his recovery, Francis set out on another journey to participate in a war by joining the army of Pope Innocent III in Apulia. Unexpectedly, this journey was aborted by his vision in a dream in which Jesus questioned him why he was abandoning the Lord for a servant.

17 The world around Francis was marked by hierarchy, fixed order, perfection and anthropocentrism. Earth was considered as the center of the cosmos, and the human was the center of the Earth and the master of nature. Cf. Ilia Delio et al., *Care for creation*, 12-13.
He did not know the full meaning of the vision yet, but he returned to Assisi, changed completely. What he had enjoyed before did not satisfy him anymore. He turned around from where he was. And he stopped all the efforts to climb up to the social ladder.

However, his downward movement began in earnest with his encounter with the crucified Jesus at San Damiano. For the first time, he started to understand the mystery of incarnation in a new and realistic way. God chose to be a human who belonged to the last rung of the social ladder upon which Francis was once eager to climb up. Francis understood God’s incarnation as the divine will to reveal the best way to establish peace in the world. Wherever there is anyone greedy to possess more, there is no peace. Peace in the world comes neither with war nor with violence. It is only possible for those who are to be like Jesus who possessed nothing, for those who will to be on the bottom of the social ladder. By doing so, they admit the absolute sovereignty of God and can enjoy his divine providence which makes war and violence unnecessary. With this realization, Francis stopped his struggle for power, wealth, domination and possession. His downward (going down) movement, which Jean François Godet-Calogeras names “the radicalism of servant-hood”, became his fundamental orientation in life. Francis’ conversion was manifested in his giving up the totality of the inheritance from his father’s wealth. Since then, Francis’ imitation of Christ took a form of

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22 St. Bonaventure writes of this: “His soul melted at the sight, and the memory of Christ’s passion was so impressed on the innermost recesses of his heart. From that hour, whenever Christ’s crucifixion came to his mind, he could scarcely contain his tears and sighs, as he later revealed to his companions when he was approaching the end of his life.” Bonaventure, “The Major Legend of Saint Francis”, in *FA: ED Volume II: The Founder*, 534.


24 Some scholars consider Francis’ relinquishment of his family identity and of his economic status as an essential moment in his conversion process. Renouncing his claim on all things,
being poor and a servant in any circumstances. Francis’ letter sent to his religious brothers clearly reflects this:

We shall never desire to be above others, but we shall rather be servants and subject to all human creature because of God.

His Earlier Rule also discloses his conviction explicitly:

Similarly, all the brothers in this regard should not hold power or dominion, least of all among themselves. For, as the Lord says in the Gospel: The rulers of the peoples have power over them, and their leaders rule over them (Mt 20:25); it shall not be like this among the brothers (cf. Mt 20:26). And whoever among them wishes to become the greater should be their minister (Mt 20:26) and servant. And whoever is the greater among them should become like the lesser (cf. Lk 22:26).

His eyes were fixed on the crucified Christ. He found joy only when he could identify himself with the poor Christ, as his story about perfect joy marvelously witnesses. Francis’ choice of being poor is not just the

Francis began to enjoy all things as gift. Cf. M. Dennis et al., *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, 30.

25 Francis’ imitation of Christ was manifested in the forms of taking the words and actions of the historical Jesus seriously and of applying them radically to his own life. Cf. M. Dennis et al., *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, 34.


27 The Earlier Rule, also called the Rule without a Papal Seal, was submitted by Francis to Pope Innocent III for his approval in 1209 or 1210. This rule was revised and redacted several times until it was officially authorized by Pope Honorius III in 1223. The rule with the Papal Seal is called the Later Rule. Cf. FA: ED Volume I: The Saint, 63 and 99.


practices of asceticism. His voluntary poverty expressed his ardent will to stop all kinds of competition and violence to appropriate more goods than others as means to achieve security, power and happiness. His mendicant life and radical detachment from material goods and pride announced to his society a possibility of being liberated from the slavery of greed.\(^{30}\) He willed to continue the process of this liberation, which originally began with the incarnated God. His lifetime effort to be liberated from his greed for power and possession reached a point of total surrender when he handed over control of the Order to those who had a different vision to his.\(^{31}\)

Consequently, Francis resisted any form of accumulation. He shared everything with those who were in greater need. By his choice, Francis preached to his contemporaries that everything belonged to God and all the goods on earth were made to be shared, to be given and received. Therefore, in God’s plan, everyone and every creature would enjoy divine providence.

Francis’ conversion gives an example of the de-anthropocentric lifestyle which puts all trust in divine providence which provides everything for all. This trust makes competition and exploitation for domination unnecessary. Instead of climbing up to get more, Francis chose to go down and to let down whatever he had in order to be like God who incarnates

\(^{30}\) Today it would be hard to find any spiritual merits in Franciscan’s voluntary begging, but in the time of St. Francis, begging was understood as a radical form of poverty and as an expression of complete trust in divine providence. Thus it was considered as a necessary component of an apostolic life, a life lived in imitation of Christ. Cf. Stephen R. Munzer, “Beggars of God: The Christian Ideal of Mendicancy”, Journal of Religious Ethics 27 (1999), 305-330.

\(^{31}\) For Francis’ final struggle to keep the Order in accordance with his original vision, and eventual surrender, refer to the following articles: Lewis Ayres, “Francis and the Dark Night of Creation: A Meditation on Foolishness and Discernment in St. Francis of Assisi”, New Blackfriars 71 (1990), 244-253.
Himself in his own creatures for the love of them. For Francis, God does not stand alone on the top rung of the ladder of ontological hierarchy. Rather, God is in relationship with his creatures. God is love and this love has overflowed in creation, in the incarnation, in the Passion and everywhere. This understanding of God urged Francis to go down to find God in all that exists.

Later, St. Bonaventure would explain Francis’ understanding of God with language of the Trinity. Bonaventure’s Trinitarian theology emphasizes the infinite love and goodness of God. For Bonaventure, the Trinitarian God is another name for divine love. “God is tri-Personal because God is love and interpersonal relationship is necessary for the perfection of love.” Bonaventure understood all of God’s activity, that is, creation, incarnation and redemption as the work of the Trinity, the work of interpersonal relationship within three Persons. God is in a constant communion and relationship. This Trinitarian perichoresis provides the theoretical foundation for an ecological understanding of God and creation. Perichoresis destroys the rigid hierarchical schemes of the order of creation. All that exists is a reflection of the Trinity and a book that tells about God.

2.2. Right Interpersonal Relationship: A Conversion from Individualism to Solidarity

Pope Francis highlights a dimension of interpersonal relations in our efforts to mend ecological damages. “If the present ecological crisis is one

small sign of the ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships” (LS, 119). “A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. […] Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society” (LS, 91). These comments point out that social justice issues are deeply intertwined with environmental issues because both are related to the structures of oppression and environmental discrimination.35

First, ecological injustice is found in the unequitable sharing of the goodness of creatures.36 The haves of the first world have a disproportionate control over the resources of the earth, whereas the have-nots have limited access to the resources and hardly have a chance to partake in decision making processes about those resources even in cases where their fate and future are involved. The equitable distribution of the blessings of creation is indissolubly linked with economic justice (LS, 93, 94).

Another dimension of ecological injustice lies in the fact that the poorest suffer the most in this human-caused ecological crisis.37 *Laudato Si’* repeatedly draws our attention to the disproportionate impact of environmental destruction on the world’s poor. Who are most affected by environmental disasters caused by pollution and climate change (LS, 20), by bioaccumulation of toxins in the food chain (LS, 21), and by lack of

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36 M. Dennis et al., *St. Francis and the Foolishness of God*, 113-114.
drinking water (LS, 27-31)? These disasters threaten mostly the poor as well as animal and plant species that “cannot adapt” (LS, 25). Thus Pope Francis challenges us to hear “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS, 49). The environmental crisis also generates injustice for future generations. Without a proper intervention to halt the crisis, they will inherit a home with polluted land, water, and atmosphere, a planet scarce in resources (LS, 159-160).³⁸

On the other hand, the modern economic structure favoring a distinct role division between producers and consumers also hinders governments from establishing policies for environmental protection. For instance, in the developed countries, the most influential agents of the ecological crisis are not citizens but rather corporate companies. For a greater profit, these corporate entities continue to exploit ever larger areas of the planet. They constantly thwart global and local actions to stop their exploitation of nature by all means, including lobbying parliaments, funding political parties, and manipulating media not to inform the public of environmental concerns.³⁹

All these facts underline the uncomfortable truth that at the core of ecological crisis lie our greed — sustained by a competition-based economic system, and patterns of unbridled production and consumption. Therefore, ecological conversion calls for re-examining our social structure and system and for recognizing our sins and failures in living out social justice. All of us need to experience “heartfelt repentance and desire

³⁸ For intergenerational justice, see Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam, *Creation in Crisis*, 343-344; and Clare Palmer et al., “Environmental Ethics”, 425.
to change” (LS, 217), which might be fostered by exploring the second element of Francis’ conversion.

2.2.1. A Movement from Exclusion to Inclusion

The second element of Francis’ conversion is a movement from exclusion to inclusion. Through his conversion, Francis overcame his inner boundaries between likes and dislikes, as well as social divisions between insiders (friends) and outsiders (enemies). This movement can be found in the stories about his encounters with lepers and with the Sultan.

First, the encounters with lepers opened a new dimension to his conversion. This episode is another which demonstrates that Francis’ conversion was gradually reaching its maturity. Even after he heard the voice of the crucified Jesus at San Damiano, Francis did not know what God exactly wanted of him. While he was searching for the will of God for three years, he stayed with lepers. In medieval Europe lepers were outcasts from the society. Francis used to avoid them as far as he could. But he was changed enough to embrace them and to take care of them, as his testament states:

While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterwards I lingered a little and left

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41 I. Delio et al., *Care for creation*, 49.
the world.

What would have led him to experience such a transformation? Francis’ understanding of the incarnation as an extreme expression of God’s love directed him to overcome his revulsion of lepers and to embrace them. And he shared peace with them through a kiss. He identified Jesus, the incarnated God, in the person of a leper whom he had most dreaded. This experience helped him to go beyond all the boundaries which hindered him from finding God in them and to transcend all the levels of social divisions. Francis was fully convinced that God loves all people to the extent that God wills to empty Himself and to be like human beings. For Francis, God’s love was a tangible reality, which led Francis to imitate it as much as he became love. Thus, Francis’ life was to be a living example of universal and inclusive fraternity. His contemplation on God’s love was channeled into his humble and respectful attitude towards all. His desire to be a mirror of God’s love to anyone found no exception, even for enemies.

Francis’ meeting with the Sultan Malik al-Kamil at Damietta reveals a maturity in Francis’s conversion toward universal fraternity. Several historical resources inform us of this meeting. The historicity of this

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44 Damietta was a city in the north of Egypt, besieged by the Crusaders in 1219. At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Pope Innocent spotted Damietta as the primary target for the Fifth Crusade in order to barter it for the return of Jerusalem. For more detailed information about this, see Galen K. Johnson, “St. Francis and the Sultan”, *Mission Studies* 18 (2001), 146-163, esp.148.
45 Francis’ meeting with the Sultan happened in 1219. This incident was first told by Bishop Jacques de Vitry in his letter of 1220 and later in his book on the history of the crusading movement (1223-1225?). Thomas Celano, the first biographer of Francis, also mentioned it (see “The Life of Saint Francis: The First Book”, 55-57 in *FA: ED Volume I: The Saint*, 229-231). One can also find a report of the same event in St. Bonaventure’s biography written between 1260 and 1263 (“The Major Legend of Saint Francis”, 9:7-9 in *FA: ED Volume II:*)
event is assessed differently among Franciscan scholars.\textsuperscript{46} Notwithstanding, it is still worth delving into this incident. Galen K. Johnson informs us that Muslims were considered to be unbelieving profaners for the medieval conscience.\textsuperscript{47} It is not sure, as A. L. Hoose states, how different Francis’ views on Muslims would be from his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{48} We also do not know with what intention Francis went to Damietta, for martyrdom or for converting Muslims. However, what we can tell with confidence is that his encounter with the Sultan affected him deeply. Chapter Sixteen in the Earlier Rule reveals Francis’ vision of mission to the Saracens and to other non-believers.\textsuperscript{49} This chapter is believed to be added later when the Earlier Rule was revised and completed in 1221, which is a year later than his return to Italy from Africa. Thus Francis vision of mission expounded in this chapter is likely to reflect what he experienced at the meeting with the Sultan. It is more probable when we consider that his vision of mission to the Saracens was very unusual among his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{50}


\textsuperscript{46} Adam L. Hoose underlines that Francis neither criticized nor rejected crusading and warfare, and that he went to the Muslims to convert them to Christianity. Therefore, Hoose does not see anything unusual in Francis’ meeting with the Sultan. See Adam L. Hoose, “Francis of Assisi’s Way of Peace?: His Conversion and Mission to Egypt”, \textit{The Catholic Historical Review} 95 (2010), 449-469. Gerard Pieter Freeman gives a similar evaluation based on his research on medieval spirituality. He argues that it is difficult to find any deviance from medieval spirituality in Francis’ visiting of the Sultan. See G. P. Freeman, “Francis of Assisi and the Sultan: Deviance and Normalization”, \textit{Religion and Theology} 23 (2016), 57-75.

\textsuperscript{47} G. K. Johnson, “St. Francis and the Sultan”, 148. In this article, Johnson introduces some terms that the papal documents of the crusade period used to designate Muslims, such as ‘enemies of the Cross of Christ’ ‘dogs’ ‘the most wicked lot of warriors’ ‘a wicked people’, and so forth. It is obvious that all these terms carry an explicit tone of mockery and derision.

\textsuperscript{48} A. L. Hoose, “Francis of Assisi’s Way of Peace?”, 469.


\textsuperscript{50} A. L. Hoose, “Francis of Assisi’s Way of Peace?”, 469.
As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Sar- Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every creature for God’s sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God, [...] 51

The same instruction appears also in the Later Rule (1223):

I counsel, admonish, and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble, speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming. 52

Francis, in the Earlier Rule, also reminds his brothers of Jesus’ commandment to love enemies:

All my brothers: let us pay attention to what the Lord says: Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you for our Lord Jesus Christ, whose footprints we must follow called his betrayer a friend and willingly offered Himself to His executioners. 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 will possess eternal life because of what they bring us. 53

Francis often admonished his brothers neither to carry any attitude of

superiority, nor to judge others. Wherever they go, they should radiate their love for others, whether they are friends or enemies, without any discrimination or distinction. This universal fraternity can be lived only through poverty, through the heart being freed from any claim for power and domination over others. For Francis, “to take what does not belong to us, to claim it as our own, and to use it for personal advancement” was considered sin.54 Francis perceived the goods of the world as a gift given by God’s gratuitous love. No one can claim ownership over them. Francis lived out this truth. He was humble enough to receive goods freely, and to share them whenever there was need. Francis’ transformed life gives a positive witness to ecological conversion from individualism to solidarity.

2.3. Right Care for Creation: A Conversion from Exploitation to Co-Existence

In the article 12 of Laudato Si’ nature is defined as “a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of this infinite beauty and goodness”. To restore the Earth is not possible unless we recognize the sacredness of creation and become advocates for a wounded creation.55 A new way of perceiving nature has been proposed. First, the Gaia hypothesis opens a new perspective to see the Earth. J. E. Lovelock, who first propounded this theory in the late 1980s,56 proposes that the Earth as Gaia should be seen as “a complex entity embracing the bio-

55 M. Dennis et al., St. Francis and the Foolishness of God, 114-115.
sphere, the atmosphere, the oceans and the land; in their totality, these elements constitute a cybernetic or self-sustaining system that provides an optimal physical and chemical medium for life on this planet." Thus, on the Earth, life and its environment are so intrinsically interconnected. From this view, human good cannot be considered as separate from the good of other species.

From the circle of eco-theology, another theological foundation has been offered to recognize the sacredness of creation. It is a panentheistic view on God who is in everything without everything being God. In accordance with this view, the Earth can be considered no longer as an object for human exploitation (LS, 82). Nature has its intrinsic value as creation which reflects the creator God (LS, 69). Humans are rather part of this nature.

Overall, ecological conversion requires a radical change of our perception of nature. Hall’s inquiry of the place of humanity in nature is very relevant to this theme. Hall argues that humanity is neither superior to the rest of creation, nor simply identical with it. But humanity exists alongside all the other members of nature, in solidarity with them, yet also

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58 *Laudato Si’* also emphasizes the interconnectedness of all the components within the ecosystem. “It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected. Time and space are not independent of one another, and not even atoms or subatomic particles can be considered in isolation” (LS, 138).
63 D. J. Hall, “Stewardship as Key to a Theology of Nature”, 142.
Laudato Si

Here metanoia is to affirm our own creaturehood which shares mortality, limitations of power, needs for air, food and water with the rest of creatures. This recognition does not exclude either our distinctive individuality or our unique responsibility towards nature (LS, 80).

A new perspective on nature requires us to make a just relationship with nonhuman entities, including ecological systems as well as all other species. It is reported that we humans consume 25% of the net primary plant production, use over a third of the terrestrial surface of the earth for agriculture, and have fully or overexploited 87% of the world’s fisheries. This is a violation of distributive justice. We need to find a way to make more resources available for other species.

The third element of Francis’ conversion experience would provide us with a new way of perceiving nature. This new way eventually guides us to find ways in which we could reduce negative impacts that our individual and social activities have created upon nature.

2.3.1. A Movement to Extend Love to All Creatures

The third element of Francis’ conversion is his movement toward extending his love to all creatures. Francis viewed the diversity of creation as an expression of God’s creative love. His vision of nature was expressed by his concrete ethical behavior. He tried not to harm any living beings and to treat them with proper respect. Francis’ vision of nature is found in his masterpiece, the Canticle of the Creatures, as well as in the

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64 D. J. Hall, “Stewardship as Key to a Theology of Nature”, 139.
65 D. J. Hall, “Stewardship as Key to a Theology of Nature”, 129-144.
66 D. J. Hall, “Stewardship as Key to a Theology of Nature”, 141.
legendary stories telling of his intimate relationship with animals and plants.

The Canticle of the Creatures reveals Francis’ care for creation in a most excellent way. Franciscan scholars argue that this song was composed in three different stages. Verses 1-9 were written first while he was recuperating from a serious illness in 1225. Then verses 10-11 were added later after Francis heard of a quarrel between the bishop of Assisi and the mayor. The final addition of verses 12-13 was supplemented on his death bed in 1226.

The first nine verses of the Canticle praise God the Most High who created and cares for creation. Francis calls for the sun, the moon, the stars, wind, water, fire and earth to praise the Most High. Surprisingly, in this Canticle, human beings are not at the center. Rather, Francis stressed that no human is worthy to mention God’s name (verse 2). This reflects Francis’ deep sense of his unworthiness to stand before God. This is not self-disgust, but acute knowledge of his inability to fulfill God’s commands to love, as L. Ayres states. His sense of unworthiness, inspired by the Spirit, pushed him to let go of any attitude of superiority over any creature and to call all creatures his brothers and sisters.

69 St. Francis of Assisi, “The Canticle of the Creatures”, in FA: ED Volume I: The Saint, 113-114. The Canticle of the Creatures is Francis’ last piece of work, and originally referred to as the Canticle to Brother Sun. See L. P. Prior, “Francis of Assisi and a Cosmic Spirituality”, 186. It seems to be likely that biblical imagery used in Psalm 148 and Daniel 3:57-88 may have inspired Francis, as K. Warner argues in his article, “Franciscan Environmental Ethics”, 151.
71 Regarding this incident, see “The Assisi Compilation”, 84 in FA: ED Volume II: The Founder, 187. The second section of the Canticle speaks about the importance of reconciliation, solidarity, and peace.
72 L. Ayres, “Francis and the Dark Night of Creation”, 245-246.
73 Francis’ awareness of his unworthiness is regarded as an ecological humility which is a desirable quality of ecological ethics to remedy the present environmental crises. See M. Dennis et al., St. Francis and the Foolishness of God, 110.
All the creatures that Francis invited in his Canticle share a common fate with human beings in that they are also contingent and dependent. They are subject to, obedient to the Most High that works in and through them. Therefore, Francis’ choice of titles ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister’, as Eric Doyle explains, reflects how he understood his relationship to creatures, their relationship among themselves and the relationship of everything in the universe to God. God is the universal father of all his creatures. Francis contemplated God in creation. Reading the Divine in creation, Francis felt oneness with all God’s creatures.

Legendary stories of his commanding the birds to praise God or his preaching to fish and flowers emphasize that Francis valued every species and discovered God in them. The presence of God in all creatures makes them interconnected, but this interconnectedness does not necessarily deny the individuality of each creature. Francis paid attention to this individuality which preserves the diversity of life. Francis commanded the gardener “to leave the edges of the garden undisturbed, so that in their seasons the green of herbs and the beauty of flowers may proclaim

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77 T. Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis”, 21:58-61; 29:80-81 in FA: ED Volume I: The Saint, 234-236, 250-251. See also Roger D. Sorrell, “Tradition and Innovation, Harmony and Hierarchy in St. Francis of Assisi’s Sermon to the Birds”, Franciscan Studies 43 (1983), 396-407. In this article, Sorrell denies any possibility of historicity of these legends. According to traditions of medieval asceticism, sainthood should be accompanied by abilities to restore the paradisiacal relationship between a saint and his/her environment. Thus, Sorrell argues that legends related to Francis might have been shaped to emphasize his sainthood.
78 Ilia Delio introduces the term “haecceitas”, used by Duns Scotus, in order to explain Francis’ respectful attitude toward nature. Haecceitas (thisness) describes the unique dignity of each creature. Each created being, whether it is a human person, a tree or a bee, has a distinct “thisness” that distinguishes it from other similar creatures. See I. Delio et al., Care for creation, 51.
the beautiful Father of all”.

T. Celano writes of Francis: “Who could ever express the deep affection he bore for all things that belong to God? Or who would be able to tell of the sweet tenderness he enjoyed while contemplating in creatures the wisdom, power and goodness of the Creator?”

The legend of the wolf of Gubbio also reveals that Francis saw each creature as having intrinsic dignity. The legend indicates that Francis showed his mercy even to animals. Francis attempted to extend Christian almsgiving not only to the human poor, but also to other creatures when they are in great need.

At the heart of a Franciscan eco-theology, Dawn M. Nothwehr argues, is the awareness that all created things image God in some way. Since Christ is the image of God, all creatures have something in common with Christ. As the fourth Gospel emphasizes: “All things came into being through the Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being” (Jn 1:3). Francis’ love of creatures is integrally related to his experience of Jesus Christ. Francis perceived Christ present in all of material reality. Whenever he saw creatures, he also saw Christ in them. Phil Hoebing considers Francis’ view of nature as panentheism. In panentheism, dis-

Distinct from pantheism, “all things are imbued with God’s being in the sense that all things are in God”.

Francis recognized intrinsic value in all creatures because each creature reflects its Creator in a way. He showed due respect for creature and believed that humans ought to respect their value. In this sense, John Mizzoni argues that Francis witnessed to a new biocentric worldview which we now are to develop.

2.4. Right Relationship with Self

Pope Francis states: “No one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself” (LS, 225). Conversion is an ongoing process to be an authentic self. In integral ecology, this authentic self is understood as an ecological self, a self which is interwoven with the web of life and interdependent with human and non-human components of nature. Thus, ecological conversion calls for the death of the self-centered ego. The selfish-self refuses dependency on others. The isolated self desires to exert itself through power and control over others. In order to be a true self, we should learn to overcome the deeply entrenched individualism which makes us separate from the web of life, the family of

88 John Mizzoni, “Franciscan Biocentrism and the Franciscan Tradition”, Ethics & the Environment 13 (2008), 121-134, esp. 121-122. Unlike some Franciscan scholars, Andrew Cunningham (a historian of science) completely denies any possibility to connect Francis to environmentalists or to call him a patron of nature. He put it: “St. Francis would not have recognized any modern terms or concepts [such as] ‘environment’ and ‘ecology’, which are crucial to the existence of a domain of concern, or a science, or a discipline, of ecology. […] These concepts and this vocabulary would have been alien to Francis and his contemporaries.” See, A. Cunningham, “Science and Religion in the Thirteenth Century Revisited: The Making of St. Francis the Proto-Ecologist: Part 1: Creature not Nature”, Studies in History and Philosophy of Science 31 (2000), 613-643, esp.635.
90 I. Delio et al., Care for Creation, 176.
91 I. Delio et al., Care for Creation, 90.
creation.

This new understanding of self opens a space to look at life and death in a different way. Physical death is also accepted as a part of the cycle of life. It is not an aimless, meaningless end of life. Death is understood as returning to the primal energy, to the original goodness from which everyone came.\textsuperscript{92} In this sense, death gives a certain orientation to life. \textit{Laudato Si’} also draws our attention to the eschatological dimension of life and death.

Even now we are journeying toward the sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, toward our common home in heaven (LS, 243).

In the meantime, we come together 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).

Francis went on a journey to find his true self. He often prayed with this question: “Who are you, O Lord, and who am I?”\textsuperscript{93} Throughout his prayer life, Francis’ understanding of himself changed. The fourth element of Francis’ conversion would guide us to a way to discover our true self.

2.4.1. Francis’ Conversion to Embrace Death

Through his conversion experience, Francis rediscovered himself in the space of God, in the space of the universe which is an extensive web of life. In this space, he could recognize himself as a little brother to all.

\textsuperscript{92} Mary Judith Ress, “Latin American Women: ‘We are leaving behind patriarchal constructs and pushing toward something new’”, in \textit{Eco-Theology}, 86-94, esp. 92.

He knew that he could not be “above others or apart from others but deeply related to others because he and all creation shared in the same primordial goodness that flowed from the heart of God”. Francis strived to live out this realization through his concrete actions. He continued to let go of self for the sake of God and of others. He tried to die to himself so that Christ may live in him. One can say that his life was a death to a selfish ego. Francis’ lifelong process of conversion finally led him to a new understanding of death. In his death bed, Francis added the final two stanzas of the Canticle of the Creatures, praising God for death.

Praised be, my Lord, for our sister our bodily death,  
from which no living man can ever flee.  
Woe to all those who die in mortal sin,  
and blessed they who in your holy will are found,  
for in no way will they by their second death be wronged.

So praise and bless and thank my Lord,  
and be subject to him with great humility.

In this song, Francis welcomes death as a fellow creature, which means that even in death, he sees the presence of God. Recognizing death as his fellow creature, Francis rejects the power that death executes over him. It is no more an object to fear. Likewise, by calling death a “Sister”, Francis accepts death as a being, a reality which no one should

94 I. Delio, Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St. Francis, 32.  
deny or avoid. Death gives us an opportunity to be human in the first place. Death makes creatures of us all since death is the common denominator of creaturehood.97 When he welcomes death, Francis finds himself in an infinite web of time. He introduces a new way of being in a spatial and temporal web of life. His universe is ever expanding both in horizontal and vertical scopes. Therefore, death is not the end of our existence. That is why Francis expresses an eschatological hope of life after death in this song. Though he embraces the inevitability of death, he views death not as the end of life, but as a source of hope. This hope transcends the worldly limits of our finite experience. Death will open to us the door to participate in the resurrection of Jesus. Francis lived his life with a full vision of the web of time and space. His vision was fixed on the Creator of this web and always searching for Him in everything that he encountered. This is part of the secret of his humility since he knew well how small he was in this web of life and death.

In this vision of Francis, Mizzoni discovers a clue to make sense of the sixth extinction period that environmentalists have predicted to come. The sixth extinction may wipe out most of the species that have ever existed on earth.98 Francis would say that the second death gives us an opportunity to participate in the cosmic community. Francis, welcoming death as his sister, tells us that the world will not go into a complete extinction, but be moved by Christ and to Christ so that God may be all in all.99 Perhaps Francis understood that Jesus’ rise from his death anticipated the future of humanity and the cosmos itself. The death of Jesus is not the end of cosmic history but the beginning of union and fullness of life

99 I. Delio et al., Care for Creation, 91.
for all humanity and creation. Therefore, for those who participate in the death of Jesus, death becomes the passage into life’s fullness.

All considered, Francis’ conversion experience opens us an extended and infinite space in which we can be free from the false self and find our true self, interconnected to every net of the web, yet still very distinct.

3. Conclusion: Toward Ecological Virtues

As the life of Francis witnesses, those who experience ecological conversion would undergo a process of transformation and be led to have ecological responsibility. They will be strongly motivated “to live out universal fraternity” (LS, 228), “to make a selfless ecological commitment” (LS, 211), and “to care for creation through daily concrete actions” (LS, 211). Caciuc calls this series of ecological attitudes, “ecological consciences”. Those who have developed an ecological conscience have “the sense of responsibility and of solidarity between the individuals so as to preserve and improve the environment.”

Correspondingly, an ecologically oriented self would cultivate “ecological virtues” (LS, 88). Pope Francis underlines that only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment (LS, 211). Virtues are formed by practices over time. Continued practices dispose one to act in certain ways. "Laudato Si’ lists a number

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100 I. Delio et al., Care for Creation, 91.
103 Compassion, prudence, and simplicity are recognized nearly universally as eco-virtues by ecological virtue ethicists, while greed, wastefulness, and gluttony are recognized as harmful vices. Cf. V.-T. Caciuc, “The Role of Virtue Ethics”, 123.
104 Steven Bouma-Prediger, “What Kind of Person would Do Something like That? A Chris-
of concrete practices which will eventually lead to ecological virtues, including: avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights and the like (LS, 211). Furthermore, what is also urgent is to do voluntary restraint from exploitation of the resources of nature, and to change patterns of production and consumption for the sake of the greater good for all that exists. Williams Rees and Mathis Wackernagel have proposed the idea of an ecological footprint to measure the impact of consumption and waste on the earth. The ecological footprint helps us to calculate how much impact that individual and social choices create upon nature.

Furthermore, ecological commitment should not be limited to the personal domain. Our concerns need to be extended to future generations (LS, 22). We, as a community, are to participate in developing policies to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide and other highly polluting gases and to find renewable energy sources which can substitute for fossil fuels (LS, 26), to protect biodiversity (LS, 37), to establish a legal framework to protect the environment (LS, 53), and to educate people to place common goods over their private property (LS, 93), and to cultivate a “culture of care” (LS, 231). All these efforts will do good to the Earth and to human-
ity in a concerted manner. Nevertheless, we should remember this: As Francis’ conversion was guided and empowered by the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, our ecological conversion would be the same. It is necessary to be present to the Spirit to follow his promptings which lead us to be an ecologically converted self. There is an additional reason to listen to the Holy Spirit, God’s Sophia. No matter how much we endeavor wholeheartedly to take care of the Earth, there will always be a limit in our efforts. We may lose the way somewhere in the universe, and disappear completely from the Earth unless we pay attention to the guidance of Sophia. Now is the time to listen to the advice of Sophia since she knows all, as the Book of Wisdom tells us: “Send her forth from the holy heavens, and from the throne of your glory send her, that she may labor at my side, and that I may learn what is pleasing to you. For she knows and understands all things, and she will guide me wisely in my actions and guard me with her glory” (Wis 9:10-11).
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Abstract

This article attempts to get a deeper understanding of ecological conversion, which Pope Francis’ latest encyclical *Laudato Si’* calls for, through the lens of St. Francis of Assisi’s conversion process. The encyclical points out that the present environmental crisis has been inflicted by our human beings’ irresponsible abuse on nature. Thus, *Laudato Si’* urges to rethink all human activities and their consequences and implications on the Earth. It demands a fundamental inquiry of anthropological identity and of our right relationships with God, creatures, and our fellow human beings, as well as with ourselves. In other words, the encyclical appeals to a global society that ecological conversion is the first and foremost requirement for any political, legal measures for environmental protection.

St. Francis of Assisi experienced a series of conversion in his life. His genuine conversion in Christ led him to live a life of an “integral ecology”, which was manifested with his care for the vulnerable, his joy and generous self-giving, and his simple and harmonious living with all creatures. In this sense, Francis’ conversion can be named as ecological conversion. Therefore, to analyze the conversion process of St. Francis of Assisi can shed light on the ecological conversion and foster the cultivation of concrete and specific ecological ethics.

Ecological conversion which *Laudato Si’* refers to in several articles has four important components: (1) Right relationship with God: A conversion from a misguided anthropocentrism to an adequate anthropology; (2) Right interpersonal relationship: A conversion from individualism to solidarity; (3) Right care for creation: A conversion from exploitation to
co-existence; and (4) Right relationship with self. These four elements are also found in Francis’ conversion experiences, in which the following four distinctive elements are recognized: (1) A movement from climbing up to going down; (2) A movement from exclusion to inclusion; (3) A movement toward extending love to all creatures; and (4) A movement toward embracing death.

By aligning these two sets of four elements, it is revealed how St. Francis of Assisi’s conversion experience can deepen and widen our understanding of ecological conversion and inspire us to undergo our own ecological conversion.

First, ecological conversion requires a shift away from an anthropocentric worldview. This conversion leads to a new understanding of humans and of their roles and place in nature, as well as to a new understanding of God. St. Francis of Assisi’s conversion experience also shows a radical movement from anthropocentrism to theocentrism. His orientation of life was radically changed from “climbing up” to “going down”, by his encounters with the crucified Jesus at the church of San Damiano. As a result of this conversion, St. Francis of Assisi lived a de-anthropocentric lifestyle which puts all trust in divine providence. This trust makes competition and exploitation for domination unnecessary.

Second, ecological conversion presupposes a right relationship with nature and with other human beings. It is because environmental issues are deeply intertwined with social justice issues. Therefore, ecological conversion calls for re-examining our social structure and system. St. Francis of Assisi’s conversion is characterized by a movement from exclusion to inclusion. He overcame his inner boundaries between likes and dislikes, as well as social divisions between insiders (friends) and outsiders (enemies). He perceived the goods of the world as a gift given by
God’s gratuitous love, so that no one can claim for the ownership over them. His transformed life witnesses to ecological conversion from individualism to solidarity.

Third, ecological conversion requires a radical change of our perception of nature. St. Francis of Assisi’s conversion experience provides us with a new way of perceiving nature. As the Canticle of the Creatures displays, St. Francis of Assisi overcame any attitude of superiority over creatures and embraced all creatures as his brothers and sisters. The awareness that all created things image God in some way is at the heart of a Franciscan eco-theology. Francis perceived Christ present in all of material reality.

Fourth, ecological conversion is an ongoing process to be an authentic ecological self. This self is interwoven in the web of life and interdependent with human and non-human components of nature. In order to be a true self, it is necessary to overcome the deeply entrenched individualism which makes us separate from a web of life, a family of creation. St. Francis of Assisi rediscovered himself in the space of God, in the space of the universe which is an extensive web of life, through his conversion experience. In this space, he was freed from the false self enough to embrace his own death as his sister.

The life of St. Francis of Assisi was adorned with ecological virtues which are for us to cultivate in order to overcome the present environmental crisis. His conversion process also points out how important it is to listen to the Holy Spirit who guides us to live an ecologically-oriented life and to re-direct the present environmental crisis to the integrity of creation in accord with God’s plan.

Key Words: *Laudato Si’,* St. Francis of Assisi, Ecological Conversion, Anthropocentrism, Theocentrism, Individualism.
본고는 교황 프란치스코의 최근 회칙 「찬미받으소서」가 요청하는 생태적 회심에 대한 보다 깊은 이해를 얻기 위하여, 아시시의 성 프란치스코의 회심 과정에 비추어 회칙이 말하는 생태적 회심을 바라 보고자 한다. 회칙은 현재의 환경 위기가 인간이 자연을 무책임하게 착취한 결과로 일어난 것임을 지적하며, 자연에서 이루어지는 인간의 모든 행위와 그 결과들을 재고해 보도록 요청한다. 이는 곧 인간으로서의 우리의 정체가 무엇인지, 그리고 하느님과 피조물, 동료 인간들 그리고 우리 자신과 우리가 맺는 적절한 관계가 무엇인지에 대해 근원적으로 재검토해 볼 것을 요구하는 것이다. 달리 말해서 회칙은 환경 보호를 위한 모든 정치적, 법적 조치에 앞서 생태적 회심이 필요하다는 것을 온 세상에 호소하고 있다.

아시시의 성 프란치스코는 그의 전 삶을 통하여 여러 번의 회심을 체험하였다. 그리스도와의 만남을 통하여 회개한 그는 약한 이들을 돌보며, 기쁨과 관대한 나눔을 실천하고, 모든 피조물과 더불어 단순하고 조화롭게 살아가는 ‘통합 생태론’의 삶을 살았다. 이런 의미에서 프란치스코의 회심은 생태적 회심이라고 부를 수 있다. 따라
서 아시시의 성 프란치스코의 회심 과정을 분석하는 것이 생태적 회심의 의미를 밝히고, 구체적인 생태적 윤리를 장려하는 데 도움이 될 수 있다고 본다.

『찬미받으소서』는 여러 조항에서 생태적 회심을 언급하고 있는 데, 그것을 읽어보면 회칙이 말하는 생태적 회심은 다음과의 네 가지의 요소로 이루어져 있다. (1) 하느님과의 온바른 관계: 그릇된 인간중심주의에서 온바른 인간학으로의 회심, (2) 온바른 대인관계: 개인주의에서 연대성으로의 회심, (3) 피조물에 대한 온바른 돌봄: 착취에서 공존으로의 회심, 그리고 (4) 자신과의 온바른 관계. 이 네 가지 요소들은 성 프란치스코의 회심 체험에서 발견된다. 성 프란치스코의 회심 체험에는 다음의 네 가지 요소들을 발견할 수 있다. (1) 오름에서 내림으로의 변화, (2) 배제에서 포용으로의 변화, (3) 모든 피조물에게 사랑을 전하는 것으로의 변화, (4) 죽음을 끌어안는 변화.

『찬미받으소서』에서 언급된 생태적 회심의 네 가지 요소와 성 프란치스코의 회심 체험에서 발견되는 네 가지 요소들을 나란히 놓고 살펴보면 성 프란치스코의 회심 체험이 생태적 회심에 대한 이해를 심화하고 우리가 생태적 회심에 이를 수 있도록 영감을 준다는 것이 드러난다.

첫째, 생태적 회심은 인간중심주의적 세계관에서 벗어날 것을 요구한다. 생태적 회심은 인간을 새롭게 이해하며, 자연 안에서 인간의 위치와 역할을 재고하고, 하느님에 대한 기존의 이해를 체신하도록 우리를 이끌다. 성 프란치스코의 회심 체험이 인간중심주의에서 신중심주의로의 철저한 변화를 보여 준다. 그가 성 다미아노 성당에서 신자가에게 못박히신 그리스도를 만남으로써 삶에 대한 그의 태도는 “오름”에서 “내립”으로 완전히 변화되었다. 이 회심의 결과로 성 프란치스코는 하느님의 섬리에 정직으로 의존하는 반-인간중심주의적인 삶을 살았고, 하느님을 온전히 신뢰하는 그의 삶은 지배를
위한 경쟁이나 착취를 불필요하게 만들었다.

둘째, 생태적 회심은 자연 및 동료 인간들과 올바른 관계를 맺을 것을 전제한다. 사실 환경 문제는 사회 정의의 문제와 깊이 연관되어 있기 때문이다. 따라서 생태적 회심은 우리 사회의 구조와 조직을 다시 검토해볼 것을 요구한다. 성 프란치스코의 회심은 배제에서 포용으로의 변화를 보여 준다. 그는 자신의 호불호의 경계를 극복하였고, 친구와 원수 사이의 사회적인 경계도 뛰어넘었다. 뿐만 아니라 그는 세상의 재화를 하느님께서 무상으로 주신 사랑의 선물로 여겼기에 누구도 그것에 대한 소유권을 주장할 수 없다고 생각하였다. 그의 변모된 삶은 개인주의로부터 연대를 추구하는 생태적 회심의 모습을 보여 준다.

셋째, 생태적 회심은 자연에 대한 인식에 있어서도 철저한 변화를 요구한다. 성 프란치스코의 회심 체험은 자연을 인식하는 새로운 길을 열어 준다. “피조물의 찬가”에서 잘 드러나고 있듯이 성 프란치스코는 인간이 다른 피조물에 대해 갖는 우월 의식을 극복하였고, 그들을 형제로, 자매로 끌어안았다. 모든 피조물이 어떤 식으로든 하느님의 이미지를 반사한다고 믿는 것이 프란치스칸 생태 영성의 핵심이다. 성 프란치스코는 모든 물질적인 실재에서 그리스도를 발견하였다.

넷째, 생태적 회심은 진정한 생태적인 자아가 되어가는 지속적인 과정이다. 이 생태적 자아는 생명의 그물망에 깊이 결합되어 있는 자연에 있는 모든 구성원들과 상호 의존적이다. 그러므로 참된 생태적 자아가 되기 위해서는 생명의 그물망, 곧 모든 피조물의 가족으로부터 우리를 분리시키는 고질적인 개인주의를 극복해야 한다. 성 프란치스코는 그의 회심 체험을 통하여 하느님의 시공간에서 자신을 바라보고, 생명의 그물망인 우주적 공간에서 자신을 인식하였다. 이 공간에서 그는 자신의 죽음마저 자매로 여길 만큼 거짓 자아로부터 자유로워졌다.
우리는 또한 성 프란시스코의 삶에서 현재의 환경 위기를 극복하기 위해 우리가 키워 가야 할 다양한 생태적인 덕들을 발견할 수 있다. 나아가 성 프란시스코의 회심 체험은 생태지향적인 삶을 살고 현재의 환경 위기를 하느님의 계획에 따른 창조질서를 보전하는 방향으로 나아가게 하는 데 있어서 성령께 귀를 기울이는 것이 얼마나 중요한 것인지지를 가르쳐 준다.

▶ 주제어: 「찬미받으소서」, 아시시의 성 프란시스코, 생태적 회심, 인간중심주의, 신중심주의, 개인주의.