**CARING FOR CREATION**

*a cultural, spiritual, and human conversion*

On the occasion of the Season of Creation 2023, Vatican Radio *interviewed*

Br. Massimo Fusarelli, OFM, Minister General. We publish an extract.

*In his message, the Pope invites everyone to listen to the call to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice and to put an end to this senseless war on Creation.*

I can truly see the reality of these words of the Holy Father in my travels to visit brothers and sisters throughout the world; in the different continents, I feel the grave reality of this **environmental and climatic injustice**, which is then a human injustice because everyone pays the consequences. It seems to me that this "integral" perspective is the most innovative of **Laudato Si'**, which encounters so much resistance at so many levels and in so many contexts, because we are not capable of this cultural conversion, which for us Christians is also religious, of considering man and the environment as part of this one creation willed by God. **The senseless war against creation is therefore a senseless war against man**, and vice versa.

*The Pope also invites us to listen to the earth again, because we are part of it and not its masters.*

We know that a certain secular world has "accused" the Bible of creating this mentality, namely that man would be the ruler of creation. Instead, we Christians have read Genesis more deeply: God has asked us to be **guardians** of creation, guardians of a reality that does not belong to us. As a Franciscan, I would like to say that St Francis discovered that nothing belongs to us, but **everything is a gift from God**. It seems to me that this is a great journey of **cultural, spiritual and human conversion**that awaits us and that we must undertake.

*As you said, we are co-workers in the preservation and development of the nature and biodiversity of the planet and of human life on it.*

Human life and all forms of life in the environment, in the biodiversity of the planet, are part of an integral and integrated system: **if we harm one part of it, we harm everything**. This is truly a profound change! You said 'co-workers in conservation': I would say that we are really the protagonists in the care of creation. For us Christians, this has to do with eschatology, with the fact that the environment, creation, is not an end in itself, it is not closed in on itself, but it is open to the last day, it is open to the perfection that God is going to give to the whole of creation. And we are in this great journey. For us Christians, then, it is a **conversion that is also theological**, anthropological, and ecological, but we propose it to the world, beyond all faith, as a great key for reading and interpreting reality.

*"Hearing the cry of the earth", what does that mean to you?*

**Hearing the cry of the earth** is an exceptionally beautiful expression and it makes us feel that the earth, the creation, is a reality, it is a living thing, and it is not just something that we use, it is a living reality we must interact with in a harmonious relationship and therefore feel part of this whole. Between June and August, I was in eight countries in **Africa,** and I saw whole areas of agriculture abandoned because it is no longer convenient for the farmers to cultivate (I also found this in some European countries), because the conditions are not favourable, because you can get the same thing in another way, because you know that these products will not be properly sold. Listening to the cry of the Earth also means continuing to protect and cultivate the Earth and the creatures that inhabit it, so that our life and **our passage on the Earth becomes more harmonious and more human**. I am going to be in the Amazon soon and I think I will see this even more, but I have been in California and even there the **climate change** is evident, and it really touches from within the ways of human presence in our reality. The Pope is not crying out because it is fashionable, but because it is really urgent and when you visit the world you can see that.

*Pope Francis never tires of repeating that we are called to embrace anew God's original and loving plan for creation as a common patrimony to be shared with all our brothers and sisters, and to do so with immense joy.*

To welcome anew God's original and loving plan for creation means that creation did not happen by chance - for us Christians, of course - it is something that really comes before us. I always wonder how we can share our reading of reality with those who have no religious reference but who are amazed by the beauty of creation. **Creation really is an opportunity for evangelisation!** God's original and loving plan is imprinted in creation as a dynamic, evolving element; it is not just something to be conducted, but something to grow. I think that speaking of this original project as a common patrimony to be shared with all puts us in this dimension: medieval Christian thought spoke of a power of God imprinted in creation, which **for us Franciscans, in our philosophical and theological reflection, has taken on the face of Christ.**This immense building site of creation, of the universe, is not just for itself or for some, but for all. And this, is another great conversion to be made, too.

*St Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Creatures is the most sublime praise of all divine creation.*

Francis of Assisi wrote the most important part of the Canticle of the Creatures when he was blind and could no longer see creation. It is therefore an interior vision that he matured of creation **in the light of faith**. In the Franciscan theological vision, **Christ is the model**, he is the archetype to whom all creation looks, from whom all creation comes and to whom all creation returns. To truly **harm creation**, then, is to put our hands in this project of God, it is to stop recognising this profound presence; we reduce creation to a matter of exploration, exploitation and use. We are masters, not custodians. **Francis of Assisi stands before creation with an attitude of praise** and thanksgiving; for us believers it is always a Eucharistic attitude. We do not take creation just to use it: first, in biblical logic, we bless God, who is Father, for the gifts of creation. We give them back to him, they do not belong to us, they are given to us, they are entrusted to us, and we participate in God's work. Clearly, anything that tarnishes, if not breaks, this great 'mirror' that is creation, not only does not allow us to see the reflection of God, but also does not allow us to read our own life as the mystery that it is, crying out for something more than survival or biological integrity, but yearning for something more that we call soul, spirit, eternal life. If we accept that there is this openness and that we are not all closed in on ourselves, then we can save creation. This is what Francis tells us with his praise.

8 September 2023