Responding to the Cry of the Earth: Steps Toward a Franciscan Renaissance (2026)

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Acknowledgements

For their assistance over the years, I want to thank Janet Fedders, Blair Matheson, Tim Higgins, John Hebenton, Christopher John, Jon Sweeney, Bishop Celso Franco de Oliveira, Charlie McCarron, Susan Pitchford, Masud Syedullah, Nicole Hanley, Carol Tookey, Gordon Kubanek, Bettie Sommer, and Asha Lynne Golliher, as well as four colleagues who have passed away – Emmett Jarrett, Martha Reeves (aka Maggie Ross), Ted Roszak, James Hillman, and Darrell Posey. Also, I am very grateful for the dedicated work of John Brockmann, editor of *The Franciscan Times*, and of Rick Bellows who provided the wonderful photographs for this Reflection**. Lastly, I also want to thank Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee, a teacher of Sufi mysticism and spiritual ecology. His new book, *Remembering Earth: A Spiritual Ecology* (2026), will be published after this Franciscan Reflection is completed. I haven't read it yet, but descriptions by the publisher and Emergence Magazine suggest that while we represent different religious traditions, we're following a similar spiritual path.

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Janet Fedders, former Minister Provincial, Province of the Americas

Golliher's Reflections explore the deep critical issues facing our times and calls for a Franciscan Renaissance in response. This work is a soul challenging bid for solid spiritual grounding and it is not just for Franciscans, although The Third Order Society of St. Francis has already embarked on this journey.

Part of the appeal here is that Canon Golliher steps away from his title and his noble accomplishments in the field and at the United Nations. He becomes "just Jeff", with his arm on our shoulder, telling us not that everything will be alright, but that we've some soul-work to do and we'll do it together.



Reflections is a breath-taking work clearly directed by the Holy Spirit. Although born in the Spirit, it is the specificity therein that makes it so accessible, as Golliher talks of unwrapping, of deep remembering and of the sometime worrisome problem of linguistics.

We have all by now accepted the concept of colonization in one form or another as part of the disaster facing us. For many of us, what is happening hasn't so much surprised us as it has led us to deep agony and grief beyond description. Pairing grief then with Simplicity and Humility seems impossible, a task beyond our Franciscan understanding, and yet inherently something Francis would call us to. Golliher takes us there. And we find ourselves with him, ultimately, in the Sacred Tree of Life. These are "reflections", yes, but also certainly an incursion into parts of our experience that we often avoid, but must explore and discern in these difficult times.

Tim Higgins, former Minister Provincial, Province of Europe

In these days, in our time, the familiar reference to the planet as 'terra firma' is uniquely misleading. Jeff's reflection is uncompromising in holding us in that space where crisis and hope are in tension. In risking his own vulnerability by telling something of his personal and mystical encounter, we are able to enter a sacred space. In such a space the cry of the earth can be heard. Bit by bit Jeff opens us to identify the fruit and crisis of our contemporary devotion to a fertility cult: the god of growth. The corruption of markets that manufacture insatiable disappointment and addiction flourish and rely upon poverty of soil and spirit.

But rather than anger and despair, Jeff connects us to the routes for deep change. He leads us to discover for ourselves the essential transformation of life and soul that alone can overcome, rather than be overcome. A practice of stillness and encounter, some form of 'being present' to the divine promises and is able to liberate our Being with grace to respond. He gives some insight into the

practice of the Jesus Prayer as one way to 'give grace a chance' and engage with hope and purpose.

In his well earthed style, Jeff keeps me engaged with the journey of Francis, the saint whose call and charism addresses our own times with urgency and radical Gospel-life that catches me in a deep and soulful fashion.

Has there even been a time when this gospel life is more desperately and tangibly real and hopeful?

Blair Matheson, Executive Director, Franciscans International

This latest reflective work from Jeff has touched a raw space (of grief and fear) in my spirit where I am longing to know how to begin "digging and changing" because as Franciscans this is part of our call: to prophetically provide some pathways and bridges by leading the way "in these perilous times."

There is also an exciting aspect to these words because they challenge the assumed structures and norms which we fall into so easily, and Jeff recognises the profound need for change in ourselves and by example in others. "Our slowing down and stopping endless self-centred inner dialogue" can lead to an ecological transformation/conversion as we listen to our "sacred centre" where we coexist in the spiritual realm with God.

Revealing the two truths, Jeff first acknowledges that we want our destructive impact on mother earth to change, but secondly, we truthfully only want the minimal change on our own lives so we can keep living like we do. What does this mean for how we live out our Rule and Principles in relationship with our shared home with Mother Earth?

Jeff speaks of embracing "unwrapping" as a means of decolonising, of a spiritual awakening leading our focus to others, including our shared home and the "damage between peoples".

This timely call is not only words on a page or a screen but a challenge for humanity, for leadership and for a wholehearted response to make every minute, every hour of everyday count towards the renaissance of our Franciscan charism and values, acknowledging the huge positive potential they have for this shared home, Mother Earth.

Read, weep, call out, take courage and slow down, as together, we as Franciscans welcome the transformation we are being called to.

Bishop Emeritus Celso Franco de Oliveira (Brazil), TSSF

Peace and All Good. For some time now, I have been sensing a certain drift away from Franciscan ideals among us in Brazil. At first, there was great enthusiasm, mainly because those ideals went hand in hand with the Liberation Theology of Gustavo Gutierrez, Helder Camara, and others. I cannot conceive of Franciscanism in Latin America without a focus on a liberating Christology. What we have is a formal Franciscanism, punctuated by meetings and lacking prophetic signs. Perhaps we need to return to the Franciscan sources bequeathed to us by William of Ockham and Duns Scotus,

who – inspired by Francis of Assisi – defined poverty based on the actions of the Nazarene. These testimonies from the past rejuvenate us and invite us to a broader understanding of that poverty, taking the poor as our theological and hermeneutical point of reference, for it is from the poor that indignation springs, and it is from them that the Crucified One is born.

Francis of Assisi calls us to orthopraxy, and never to a closed ecclesiastical system; after all, Jesus preached the Kingdom, but what came in its place was the Church. We long, therefore, to be witnesses to visible "Prophetic Acts" taking place among us as signs that point us back to the "footsteps" of Francis. May we clearly perceive our lack of ability to dream -- for at times, immersed in models that are already ineffective and repetitive, we drift away from the Franciscan 'autopoiesis" that energizes the mission. I therefore believe it is urgent to establish a provincial group that can facilitate the exchange of ideas not only on what it means to be Franciscan, but also on being a Franciscan focused on Franciscan praxis – and how this praxis relates to our social reality here and now.

The Purpose of These Reflections

We, Franciscans, realize that we are living in a perilous time. Our climate and ecological emergency is very real, with global consequences. And we hear from scientists that humankind has never faced anything like this before. How can this be true? Our crisis today is largely the result of the pride and greed (two of the "seven deadly sins") shown by wealthy nations and corporations in their profit-driven exploitation of the sacred fabric of life. But now, this crisis has been magnified by the rise of authoritarian governments – some of them tied to Christian Nationalism, a post-modern expression of colonialism – as well as the possibility of AI (Artificial Intelligence) being used as one of their tools (see Pope Leo XIV's first Encyclical Letter, 2026). The authoritarians downplay, or even deny, anything to do with the reality of the climate and ecological crisis and the solutions to it on which our sacred Earth depends. Yet, the cry of Mother Earth can still be heard within our souls. How do we respond to that cry? Among Franciscans, the transformation we need points directly to our charism – *penitence as the conversion of life*. The Holy Spirit will lead us in this transformation, requiring us to respond with faith, loving-kindness, forgiveness, eco-justice, human rights, gender and racial justice, and a deep respect for the whole fabric of life.

Aware of the challenge before us and that nearly 50 years ago, in 1979, Pope John Paul II named St. Francis "the Patron Saint of Ecology," Brian McLaren (a Core Faculty member of the Center for Contemplation and Action) and Patrick Carolan (2023) recently proclaimed that "*It's Time for a Franciscan Renaissance*." Here and in other writings, e.g., McLaren (2021), we are encouraged to consider four primary characteristics of the Order's spiritual vision, all with spiritual roots in the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare, that we, the church, and the world desperately need. As he explained, the world needs this vision because the

tradition of the Order is grounded in a deep respect for *ecology, nonviolent action, inclusivity, and interfaith values*.

I believe that McLaren and Carolan are right. Their prophetic words echo the Spirit whispering the profound meaning of our charism within our souls. These Reflections explore some critical spiritual issues that the possibility of a Franciscan Renaissance raises for members of our Order. For example, are we willing to discover, within ourselves and in our life together, what a Franciscan Renaissance asks of us in this perilous time? And are we willing to do what needs to be done to make that Renaissance happen?

These Reflections invite us to look at the challenge we face. Much of it is written in a personal, rather than academic, way from the perspective of spiritual friendship. First, I'll share a personal experience that helped me become more aware of the depth that this challenge goes within the soul, followed by some thoughts on finding "solid spiritual ground." One focus will be on how discernment and deep remembering help us integrate contemplation and action. I'll illustrate this with some group discussions within our Order and across the global church in which people shared their understanding of and feelings about our global predicament. Then, we'll remember the life of St. Francis as he was transformed by the Spirit of God, including his struggle with the reality of death. The lives of St. Francis and St. Clare exemplify the depth of the path we must follow if we want a Franciscan Renaissance to happen in our time. Fourth, we'll reflect on the pivotal importance of working through grief and the necessity of discernment and deep remembering. The fifth section focuses on our often unintentional, but still deceptive use of words that we must discern in our search for solid spiritual ground. In the final section, we'll weave it all together by exploring three existential-ecological questions in our life together: Do we really know where we live? What do we see? Who are our neighbors?

My overall purpose is to explore some of the spiritual challenges that we face today, while encouraging us to transform the possibility of a Franciscan Renaissance into a lived reality. David Wallace Wells (2019), the well-respected environmental writer and journalist, described the severity of our planetary crisis and the practical challenges before us as "unthinkable" for most everyone, at least in Western culture. His insight does not mean that it is literally and completely beyond the realm of all human insight and reasoning. Instead, it points to the larger significance of some scientific facts that have moved beyond the normal "boundaries" of thought that modern Western culture is willing to perceive. Very recently, Jeremy Lent (2026), the founder of the Deep Transformation Network, has woven together essential dimensions of a life-affirming civilization that we need to put into practice globally. All this suggests that a Franciscan Renaissance today is needed even more than we might imagine. Here, in the way of St. Francis and St. Clare, we will simply follow the path of Christ, being faithful to the Spirit who leads us in the direction that we need to go.

The spiritual depth of our challenge has captured my attention for many years. But one of the main catalysts for it, which led to a turning point in my life, centered on a visit to the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. I rarely talk or write about experiences of this kind, but given the circumstances of our lives now I will, with the sincere hope that it will be helpful. Keep in mind that this reflection is not intended to be about me. It's about all our lives together as Franciscans.

About twenty-five years ago, I was attending a United Nations meeting in Rome concerning one their major post-Earth Summit initiatives. I was a contributing author to the United Nations Environment Program's post-Earth Summit (1992) vision statement for protecting biodiversity and cultural diversity (Golliher, 1999). One day, during a break in the meeting, I unexpectedly decided to go by bus to Assisi. I had been prompted during the meeting by a sudden inner awareness that I could not explain. The next day, I went to the Basilica and immediately sat in meditation near the tomb of St. Francis. It was winter, and very few



visitors were there. After a while, I heard these words suddenly spoken from an unknown, but spiritual source, "*what are you waiting on, get on with it*." In that moment, the scientific part of my mind questioned whether the words were coming from outside me or from within, but there had been no sensation in my ears. All I really knew for sure was that the voice was not mine. It was a deep voice, spoken in a very kind and honest, but clear and direct way. It was a mystery, and I was shaken. I continued meditating for a few minutes, and then quietly searched the Basilica to see if anyone else was there -- someone who might have spoken those words. I found no one. Then, I walked into town, quickly got something to eat, and retreated to my hotel room.

Sitting in the room alone, one of the first things I noticed was that I was very quiet within myself – very little inner dialogue, i.e., talking to myself. Normally, that usually happens only when I'm meditating. After a while, I began to ponder what the words I heard meant and the reasons why their impact on me was so profound. No ongoing or major problems in my personal life came to mind, except possibly my tendency to overwork. I knew that what happened in the Basilica went deeper than that. I tried to be clear-minded and discerning as much as I could. Then, unexplainably spontaneous, but gentle tears began to flow from my eyes. The tears kept flowing, hour after hour, through the night. Many of my emotions involved profound grief, anger, and fear about the future for climate and ecological reasons. I had been aware of my concerns for a long time, but now I realized that they went considerably deeper within my soul than I had realized. Much of it involved personal

experiences of terrible ecological and cultural exploitation as well as my knowledge of scientific research on global climate patterns and habitat destruction, to which I had devoted much of life.

Gradually, I began to understand that I was now in a process of emptying myself of painful experiences and memories that I had been carrying within me for years – not to forget them, but to let them be a better catalyst for change. It helped when I remembered a few similar self-emptying experiences (known as *kenosis*). Self-emptying can be experienced in different ways, but the heart of it involves unwrapping ourselves from worldly powers, while giving ourselves to the will of God. At those times, I have heard myself saying inwardly to God, "*I can't do this on my own*" as I put my life into God's hands. I was saying those words that night.

As the hours passed, I realized even more clearly that a large part of my grief was for all God's creatures suffering and dying as a result of human pride and greed. That's when my unwrapping helped me to understand that grieving is not separate from love, but a deep expression of love. And I remembered, as I often do, the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Nazis-resisting Lutheran minister, who said that we must resist worldly powers, so that our lives can become a genuine 'life together," as our Creator intended. By the time the sun began to rise in the morning, I discerned even more. *I realized just how deeply our Franciscan charism — penitence as the conversion of life — goes both into our souls individually and into our life together as Franciscan followers of the Way of Christ*.

Several years later, I was attending a Franciscan gathering at a local monastery in the region of New York where I live. When I arrived and walked through the door of the monastery, I began to look at the many beautiful Franciscan images on the walls. Then, I saw a close up photograph of Padre Pio who was holding up one of his hands, showing the stigmata. My attention focused on the image for a few seconds. Suddenly I felt the tears beginning to flow from my eyes once again, the same as it happened in Assisi. I quickly found the nearest bathroom where I could be alone. Again, the tears flowed for several minutes. I wasn't embarrassed or anything like that. But if someone had seen me and asked, I would not have known what to say or how to explain it. And I remembered the words heard in the Basilica, *"what are you waiting on, get on with it."* But this time, I more clearly realized that what "*get on with it*" means in practice is to "*have faith – don't give up or give in to the world.*"

The Process of Unwrapping: Discernment and Deep Remembering

Now, more than ever, is the time for us to take steps towards making a Franciscan Renaissance real. A crucial step is to unwrap ourselves more intentionally, individually and together, from the worldly powers. From a contemplative point of view, this is how Henri Nouwen (2013:139), in his classic book *Discernment,* describes our shared predicament*:*

"*Living in the midst of a demanding, pulling and pushing world makes it difficult to remember who we are in God and how to live this divine life here and now. Our identities are so wrapped up in the structures and spirit of the world that we live as though we are who the world says we are …"*

Each in our own ways, we know what Nouwen means by "wrapped up in the structures and spirit of the world." And we've had our own experiences of "unwrapping." Activists and philosophers might use words like "decolonize," rather than "unwrap," but the essential meaning is basically the same. Regardless of the words we use, this spiritual process can take place wherever we live. Why? – because the Spirit of God can be found everywhere, just as all our lives are woven together as part of God's sacred fabric of life. "Unwrapping" is part of the process of "spiritual awakening," which can happen more than once in our lives. The penitential heart of our charism isn't something we necessarily experience only once, and then we're free. Instead, we learn and relearn, spiritually speaking, to experience Humility, Joy, and Love by following Jesus's teaching (Matthew 18:2-4) to "be like a child" every day, faithfully. But as St. Paul (1 Corinthians 13:11) reminds us too, to "be like child" does not mean being "childish." We know this, but as human beings the temptation to forget is profound. As Nouwen put it, the world wants us to *"live as though we are who the world says we are."*

The process of unwrapping involves asking ourselves two essential and usually very personal questions. First, is the path we're following now actually on solid spiritual ground? We, as Franciscans, might be surprised at that question, which could indicate that we need to reflect more deeply. In church settings, the words "solid spiritual ground" generally refer to living on a foundation of faith in God, supported by consistent spiritual practices, worship, and teachings. Increasingly, however, people have begun to realize that the urgent question is whether how we "actually live" truly embodies the meaning and values of solid spiritual ground. Similarly, people are asking whether the path we're following actually takes into account our shared home as part of Mother Earth? Answers to any of these questions may or may not be as obvious as we might think. On the one hand, our standard spiritual teachings, as stated in words, can be well established and true; and on the other hand, how we put those teachings into practice, i.e., how we live our faith, can raise unexpectedly thorny questions that need discernment. Keep in mind that this is an issue for those of us who are already involved in community activism, human rights, eco-justice and climate justice, just as it is for those who are primarily contemplative. Also, keep in mind that discernment and deep remembering are crucial aspects of both contemplation and action, which, as Merton (1968) explained, must be integrated in our life together.

For those reasons, we must focus on forms of discernment and deep remembering even more. Generally, what we mean by "discernment" is clarity in understanding and making good judgments based on what is morally right and wrong. The word is also used in the

context of making decisions in the church about the spiritual path we might want to follow, including decisions about Ordination and Profession in Holy Orders. It also refers to discerning often subtle issues about the differences between what is real, what is illusion, and what is delusion –- especially in our lives as we actually live them. In other words, it relates to decisions and judgments relating to nearly every part of our lives.

Again, the process of unwrapping, discernment, and deep remembering often go hand in hand. Existential philosophers such as Voegelin (1978) have described the meaning of "deep remembering" as the equivalent of the Greek word *anamnesis,* which means remembering within the soul, more than within the ego. Contemplatives might be familiar with deep remembering as an outcome of silent prayer and meditation (Ross 2014, 2018), especially when we slow down or stop our inner dialogue, i.e., our incessant inward talking to ourselves. For that reason, the process of remembering involves unwrapping our egos from the "principalities and powers" and all colonizing influences in our lives that would like us not to remember. This can be a challenging task that requires us to focus on discernment and remembering in ways that draw up our contemplative side, while we are also engaged in active, in-the-world dimensions of our lives. In reality, effective community action depends on individuals and groups unwrapping. Given our perilous global predicament, we might tell ourselves that discernment and deep remembering are not enough or can't be done quickly enough to bring needed change to the world. That suggests an unfortunate unwillingness to unwrap enough so we can effectively challenge the worldly powers as they exist inwardly and outwardly.

So how can we begin? I'll give a "close to home" example that takes us to the heart of the matter, individually and in our life together. Through my work over the years with the Episcopal Church, the Anglican Communion, and the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis, I have led many discussions about the climate, ecological, and political crisis and our responses to it. In group settings those discussions took place in several countries on different continents, and we would discuss it in personal, often emotional, but always critically minded ways. We also took into account scientific reports, first-hand experiences, and personal responses to possible future outcomes, difficult as they can sometimes be to consider. In the spirit and practice of liberation theology (Freire 1992), we would reflect for a few hours, listening, and sharing together.

One truth that emerged from the discussions is that we all want change in ourselves and in the world, recognizing the profound need for that change. We're generally aware of the ecological devastation that has been taking place, and we're aware of the present and future consequences. There was no serious denial. Instead, profound grief, anger, and fear were clearly evident in the discussions. Yet, at the same time, efforts to imagine the scale of possible future devastation created a desire for caution about the future for a majority of

people in the discussion. We began to realize a humbling, somewhat confusing, and unsettling fact: *on the one hand, we definitely want our destructive impact on Mother Earth to change, but, on the other hand, we somehow want only enough change so that our lives -- as we live everyday -- will remain basically the same.*

Individuals would try to explain this or justify it in personal ways, based on their life histories and experience. For example, we want positive change soon in the lives of people who are experiencing injustice, starvation and drought, habitat destruction, and exploitation. And we want the lives of the next generation, all our children, to be free of economic and political exploitation and of catastrophic possibilities. And, we want those children to have the same kind of "good life" that we seem to have now. More generally, the assumption is that, for many different reasons, the change that needs to happen is in the lives of others, but not so much in our own. Yet another assumption is that adjustments are good, but major individual and social transformation isn't really necessary – except for the problems of corporate greed and political domination. Our wrapped up, colonized minds are telling us – once we're aware of it - that, yes, we want change, but somehow without substantial change. Following this stream of thoughts, a majority of Franciscans present in the discussions realized, in a way that was disheartening for them, that the spiritual integrity of our charism – *penitence as the conversion of life* – seemed to be in doubt.

This outlook on life is, in many ways, what anthropologists would describe as "ethno-centric," i.e., seeing the world through the lens of one's own culture, rather than the larger visions of diverse cultures living in different parts of one sacred earth. Generally, however, we all gradually realized that as sincere and critical-minded as we wanted to be, much of our thoughts seemed to add up to a form of avoidance. As discussions unfolded even more, members of the groups realized that they were not yet standing on solid spiritual ground. Silence would fill the room for a minute. Then, we would often remember reading about times of deep transformation in the life of St. Francis, when with the help of the Spirit of God, he unwrapped himself from the worldly powers of his own culture -- we will reflect on this later in this reflection. In effect, all these discussions raised issues that illustrate why Wallace-Wells (2019) wrote that our current global predicament is experienced as "unthinkable," at least in our current context. Basically, that's precisely the realization that group discussions brought to the surface of our awareness -- *It was an emerging awareness that we are standing at a turning point.* Whenever that realization emerged, it was always an unsettling and deeply penitential moment for us all.

Frequently we continued to reflect even more on what the group discussions were telling us about ourselves. Points of view were more simple and yet more complex than it seemed, and each of us had our own perspectives. For example, wanting change without substantial

change in our lives could be one possible expression of common-sense combined with grief and fear about the future. But it could also suggest denial and/or delusion about our planetary crisis. Usually, we weren't entirely sure, but it's likely a combination of both.
Yet, as Franciscans we want to be true to the light of our charism, each in own our ways., and we all often struggle within the limits that our egos are willing to go. In a manner of speaking, we were struggling with the meaning of the words heard in the Basilica: "*What are you waiting on – get on with it*." We might realize the truth of it, while pondering the meaning, which is a healthy sign. Especially in these perilous times, each of us must be asking something like this in the depth of our souls, "*Who are we really*?" Often, we tell ourselves that we're waiting for effective government leaders to take actions, while assuming that our individual contributions would be inconsequential. Then, upon further reflection, we might realize that we're possibly being unintentionally complicit in the destruction of Mother Earth – and then ask ourselves where disempowering ideas like that really come from? Occasionally, we might take it a step even farther, attempting to justify a lack of action, by saying that all we need to do as Christians is to follow our basic spiritual teachings. But again – this can't be emphasized enough -- the issue is not our teachings, including our Rule and Principles only as they're written. The crux of the matter is *how we put them into practice*. This principle of *praxis* is true for all Christians, regardless of our church or denominations, just as it is for people of all faiths and cultures. In the following sections of this reflection, we'll examine this more closely – the process of unwrapping ourselves from a demanding, pulling, and pushing world, so we can make a Franciscan Renaissance happen.

Finding Solid Spiritual Ground: The Example of St. Francis

It is always helpful to remember the experience of St. Francis in his journey of spiritual unwrapping and decolonizing himself from the worldly powers. He lived nearly 850 years ago, during the time of early feudalism when the majority of people had a poor, largely rural, agricultural existence. Their lives were ruled by wealthy landlords. They were also subject to the remnants of the Holy Roman Empire trying to regain and defend its territorial dominance through the Crusades. Growing up in the small, relatively wealthy town of Assisi, St. Francis struggled with that way of life. History teaches that he was a "failed Crusader." But a turning point came. Then, the Spirit of God filled his soul, telling him to "rebuild my church." Eventually, in a symbolic and soulful act of unwrapping himself from the worldly powers, he removed his bourgeois clothes in the marketplace of Assisi, left his town and family, and began to rebuild the church in San Damiano. And, in a bold act of faith and courage, he visited a Muslim leader as a sign of cultivating spiritual friendship and peacemaking. Closer to the end of his life, he wrote the "Canticle of the Creatures." All of these and many more events in the life St. Francis planted and nourished the seeds



of the Franciscan *charism* in all our souls for generations to come.

The sacred story of his life and of the life of St. Clare is a foundation of our Franciscan heritage. As much as Western civilization has changed over the last nearly 850 years, the underlying and basic assumptions of that culture may not be as different today as we might assume. We all know from the history of our Order that the decolonization process is plainly evident in lives of our predecessors, which is where our life together today has its roots. People have realized that while the historical "colonial era" is over in some ways, new forms of colonialism have emerged; for example, "settler colonialism" has been replaced by "extraction colonialism," along with the rise of authoritarian governments across the world. In other words, the reality of "empire" is still at work. This means that the "decolonization" of our nations, cultures, religions, of ourselves and of our life together must be given very high priority. To do this, like St. Francis, we must unwrap ourselves from the worldly powers which directly leads us to what Susan Pitchford (2025), a member of the TSSF, recently called the "paradox of poverty." Helping us to understand the paradox, she would ask us to think of Jesus's teaching in the Beatitudes: "*Blessed are the poor … Blessed are those who mourn … the persecuted.*" If we take Jesus seriously, our initial response would be confusion. Does this mean that it's good to be poor, to mourn, to be persecuted? Our colonized minds work against our realization of the truth of it, offering us all kinds of temptations to ignore it. These temptations -- usually disguised as "common-sense," as seen from a colonized point of view – are often expressed in our response: "*I'm so busy. I really don't have time*, *not even to think much about it*."

Nevertheless, now is the time to contemplate the deep spiritual roots of our common humanity. For example, the writing of two very different writers, Nouwen (1972, revised 2010) in "*The Wounded Healer*" and Halifax (1982) in her book "*Shaman: The Wounded Healer*," describe transformational processes in ways that illustrate the deep spiritual roots shared by sacred Indigenous traditions and Christianity. Unfortunately, our shared spiritual roots are not discussed very often. We are not accustomed to discussing our deeply transformative experiences in public. They seem too personal. Although across diverse cultures the "wounds" can take many forms, we witness them more publicly today in widespread experiences of profound "grief" – in effect, "wounds" -- which are the direct result of ecological destruction and economic exploitation. We'll consider that more deeply in the following section.

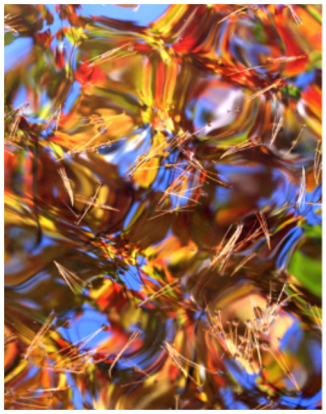
A profound, personal testimony concerning our shared spiritual roots came to the surface near the end of the earthly life of St. Francis when he wrote the "Canticle of the Creatures." Today, we remember this Canticle well, because it emphasizes our relationships -- our kinship -- with the whole sacred Earth. This was and still is a pivotal gift to the church and

humanity. As Sweeney (2018:99-100) writes about St. Francis and the Canticle, "… *in this song, he expresses his wonder and belief in the wildness and expectancies of nature as part of God's plan for human life. This marked the true dividing point – the first real signpost – for what has become the modern understanding of how earth and heaven join together. This text is why St. Francis has long been the patron saint of environmentalists, and of all and any who care about creatures and creation*."

According to Fr. Daniel Horan, O.F.M (2017), who explores the meaning of the Canticle in an article titled "*Embracing Sister Death*," its deeper meaning is rooted not only in kinship relations with all creatures, but also in St. Francis's resolution of a long struggle with his fear of death and dying. As Horan explains, "*Francis's understanding of death within the context of God's creation was a capstone discovery that completed a lifelong process of conversion and seeking God. And at the center of his ability to make peace with his own mortality was his fraternal worldview of creation.*" St. Francis wrote it near the time of his death, when he was becoming blind and struggling with a fear of death that he struggled with throughout his life. Yet, the words and personal significance of the Canticle suggest a turning point, the fulfillment of a spiritual vision that has a pivotal meaning for the path of a Franciscan Renaissance today. Let's see why this is the case – here is the Canticle as translated by Sweeney (2018:99-103).

Most High, almighty, good Lord God,
to you belong all praise, glory, honor, and blessing!
Praised be you, O my Lord and God, with all your creatures,
and especially our Brother Sun,
who brings us the day and who brings us the light.
He is fair and shines with very great splendor:
O Lord, he signifies you to us!

Praised be You, Most High, for Sister Moon and the Stars,
you set them in the heavens, making them so
bright, luminous, and fine.



Praise be you, O my Lord, for our Brother Wind,
and the air and cloud, calms and all weather
by whom you uphold life in all creatures.

Praise the Lord for our Sister Water,
who is very useful to us and humble and precious and clean.

Praise the Lord for our Brother Fire,
through whom you give us light in the darkness.
He is bright and pleasant and very mighty and strong.

Praise the Lord for our Mother Earth,
who sustains and keeps us,
and brings forth the grass and all of the fruits and flowers of many colors.
Praised by you, O my Lord, for all who show forgiveness and pardon one another for your sake,
And who endure weakness and tribulation.
Blessed are they who peaceably endure,
For you, Most High, shall give them a crown.

Praise be You, O my Lord, for our Sister Bodily Death,
And the death of the body from whom no can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
but Blessed are they who are found walking
by your most holy will,
For the second death shall have now power
to do them any harm.

Praise to you, O my Lord and all blessings.
We give you thanks and serve you with great humility.

Horan discusses three sections of the Canticle, which I'll draw upon here. The first section establishes what he calls "filial relations" ("Sister" and "Brother") that tie all Creation to humankind and God. Through Creation, God is made present to us; and through Creation, St. Francis praises God. As Horan continues to explain, this relationship goes well beyond any assumptions about dominance, control, and even "stewardship," as it's commonly understood today. In the second section, St. Francis focuses on the need for reconciliation, solidarity, and peace, in part because of a power struggle between the mayor and the bishop that had emerged in Assisi at the time. Francis was the peacemaker. Based on sections one and two, the third and final section of the Canticle, rooted in self-emptying, is filled with hope and reveals Francis's transformative view of death.

On the foundation of St. Francis's vision in the Canticle, we must take it a formidable step farther by taking into account the ecological significance of the meaning of death today -- the

high extinction rates and levels of habitat destruction in the sacred fabric of life. Climate and ecological destruction on this scale was not part of the world that St. Francis inhabited. Yet, the crucial point is that his vision is rooted in a kinship-based, relational existence that St. Francis understood as the living expression of the sacred fabric of life. The possibility of a Franciscan Renaissance in the world today depends on our faith and willingness to deepen and strengthen that kinship-based vision even more. As we shall see in the next section, a large part of our challenge involves working through and responding to profound experiences of grief – echoes of the cry of Mother Earth -- that people are increasingly experiencing across the world.

Grief in Perilous Times and its Relation to Simplicity, Humility, Love, and Joy

As we read in the previous section, one of the major challenges in finding solid spiritual ground involves working through a range of difficult emotions. Grief is often at the top of the list, which is usually interwoven with anger, fear, courage, despair, and denial. I highly recommend an important and timely book called "*Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church*" (2020) organized and edited by Rev. Hannah Malcom, an Anglican priest in the Church of England. Representing a wide diversity of cultures and regions of the world (North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, the Pacific and more) many authors share their own contemporary perspectives on grief. In the Preface, Malcolm points to a recent *"explosion in the number of people reporting grief, anxiety, and traumatic stress as a result of increased extreme weather events, the loss of flora and fauna, or a growing awareness of the existential threat that climate breakdown represents."* Because the church has only begun to address this fact of life in a focused way, her book encourages all of us to take steps urgently in that direction. We also understand Malcolm's collected work on grief and courage in the context of our needed Franciscan Renaissance. It includes several examples of unwrapping from colonialism, discerning more deeply, and finding solid spiritual ground as interwoven steps in following the Way of Christ.

Going deeper, I want to focus on only one of the many great chapters in Malcolm's book. The title of this chapter is: "*When Man and Woman were Soil: A Latin American Decolonial and Intercultural Perspective on Creation, Spirituality, and Environment Grief*," by Maria Alajandra Andrade Vinueza, a sociologist and theologian from Ecuador. Vinueza discusses Indigenous spirituality as the basis for her exploration of colonialism's impact and our need to unwrap from it, especially in relation to the process of lament. She begins with the creation story in the Book of Genesis together with holistic Indigenous sacred stories about our origin. Vinueza (in Malcolm 2020: 42-43) summarizes it this way:



"In the beginning, human beings were one with nature. They were soil. They were interconnected. They knew that they depended on each other. This is what the Creator of the world created. This is how it was supposed to be. Then, something happened that broke this fragile balance. For the indigenous inhabitants of Alrya Yala, evil came from the Eastern seas, Spanish caravels full of swords, Bibles, and greed. Colonialism brought death and the exploitation of people and nature. Indigenous populations – who knew the living world much more intimately than any doctor or scientist coming from the 'Old World' – were called 'savages,' 'barbarians,' and 'uncivilized' … Creation, as a living being, 'has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth' right up to the present time (Romans 8:22, NIV). In Latin American and the Caribbean, the impact of colonialism and modernity is present today in the damage to the environment, but also in the damage between people. This is the bigger environmental crisis of all times, generated by the only living species that is capable of destroying itself' … A theological explanation to this crisis can be found in Genesis 3, when human beings tried to be equal with God."

Vinueza then asks, "*Can our wounded spirituality be truly healed now?*" – *in effect, Can we become "wounded healers?* Her answer is yes, but there are "no shortcuts" for "*patching up problems to feel less guilty or satisfy the ego*." Her honest, personal, and insightful discussion then outlines six basic steps we must take to effectively lament, a process that "some Christian traditions have embraced … as unavoidable aspects of Christian life." These are the six steps. (1) We must "*recognize and name the damage that human creatures have made to their environments … seeing, observing, listening attentively, without giving explanations, reasons and excuses, in a non-defensive way*." (2) The second step builds on the first, where "*we give ourselves space to address pain properly*" and "*see with the heart*." (3) "*We must give ourselves a true space for grief and lament, in respectful silence or in cries of despair*." This can be done individually or in groups, "*as the destruction to the environment is caused by both individual actions … as well as collective actions*." (4) Step four involves "*true repentance*," which is the "*turning point that marks a difference between past and present*." (5) Then, we move towards "*radical change and restitution, as no and life-giving change will ever come about without a spirit of restorative justice*." (6) The final step involves "*restoring forgiveness, without which the process would not be complete. The capacity of nature to regenerate is a gift of grace: it keeps hope alive and reminds us that God's forgiveness is always available when there is true repentance and commitment to life.*"

Let's consider this from a Franciscan perspective, especially in situations when our grief can seem distant from Simplicity, Humility, Love and Joy (four of our Franciscan Principles). We often assume, mistakenly, that these Principles have little relationship with grief, so we might decide to ignore them. Nevertheless, their meaning must be carefully discerned. As Malcolm writes in her Preface, "*the embrace of grief as an ecclesial calling does not mean we*

should only feel sadness, or that sorrow is more holy that joy. But it affirms that we are disciples of 'the man of sorrows,' well acquainted with grief. Let us listen to our teacher."
This is often difficult because our emotional responses can be truly overwhelming, especially given the severity of the global crisis. When our grief is like that, our minds often resist or recoil from grasping the spiritual significance. In effect, we choose escape, rather than engagement, which might tempt us to turn away from the Cross. This can be true whether we experience catastrophic environmental events in our own lives, in places where we live, in places we are visiting or know about, where our friends or distant loved ones live, or in parts of the world that we know little about. If we resist realizing what's going on, then we ignore hearing and responding to Mother Earth's cry for help. Nevertheless, as uncomfortable and unsettling as this can be, if we persist in engaging the struggle, especially with a focus on Simplicity and Humility, we will be moving closer to the solid spiritual ground that we need and to the truth about our shared life together. We will also find the Simplicity, Love and Joy that are manifestations of the Holy Spirit's living presence within us and signs of our charism.

Unwrapping from the Worldly Powers and the Meanings of Words

Now let's circle back for a moment, reflecting on what we've covered so far, so we can remember how easy it is to become distracted by seemingly "ordinary" aspects of our lives. Think of how language is routinely used and misused and how we perceive the meanings of words, including religious words. Issues around this are so commonplace, familiar, and taken-for-granted that we usually don't recognize them for what they are. That's one of the ironies of the spiritual path. *But it is vital that we recognize this tendency towards unintentional deception and self-deception. If we don't, we will turn away from the process of unwrapping and ignore or concede our lives to worldly power.*

In this regard, the work of some European analysts of linguistic meaning and cognition, such as Garvin (1964), Mathiot (1982, 1984) and Eco (1975), can be very insightful. They helped to further an intellectual tradition that was shaped, in part, by Nazis resisters and propaganda decoders during WWII. In effect, they understood that one crucial key to the unwrapping of ourselves from the worldly powers is to discover not only the official meaning of words as they appear, for example, in dictionaries, but also in how they function in our lives; i.e., in how we interpret and use them, putting their meanings into practice (for better or worse). Those "functions" often work unconsciously in service of the forces of empire and authoritarian regimes. Let's think of words like "faith," "church," "truth" and "justice" – all good and important words -- but their meanings can be put to deceptive uses, intentionally and unintentionally, especially in propaganda driven, authoritarian times.

In his own way, St. Francis was probably aware of our tendency towards seemingly "ordinary" deception and self-deception; for example, when he warned his Franciscan

siblings about relying too much on "Study," one of our Principles. Again, the issue isn't our Principles, but how we put them into use. I discussed this previously in "*The Franciscan Forms of Service: Hopeful Reflections in a Perilous Time*," (Golliher 2022), but want to point to the issue again because it is so crucial.

I don't believe St. Francis meant that we should never read anything or retreat from intellectual interests. Rather, he was warning us about the tendency for our egos to overly identify with official principles, opinions, or teachings, rather than focusing on faith and realizing that the Spirit really wants us to learn to think for ourselves in Spirit-filled, discerning, creative, kind, non-opinionated ways. In the church, one frequent temptation is to form mental, emotional, and even social relationships with Christian teachings as if we were saluting or pledging allegiance to an institution -- whether it be the church, the Franciscan Order, or any organization including governments. Based only on that quick example, we can understand that the heart of St. Francis's warning about Study is not a rejection of any Christian teaching. Rather, it is an honest acknowledgement of how our egos and identities, influenced or partially shaped by the principalities and powers, can lure us in directions that actually lead us away from solid spiritual ground. – even with regard to traditional religious teachings.

Let's consider one of the church's foundational symbols found in the Gospel of Matthew (16:18) where Jesus says, "*upon this rock I will build my church*." "Rock" is the English translation of the Greek word "*petra,"* referring in this context to Christ. Jesus is also described as "the Cornerstone," upon which the church was/is founded. In both cases, the imagery of the rock suggests confidence in genuine spiritual stability and strength; that is to say, "solid spiritual ground" – which is true. But that's not the issue here. Unless we take into account how we put our teachings into practice, we might assume that only by believing in this teaching as it is written, we're already living on solid spiritual ground and there's nothing more to discern. Yet, if the meanings of those words *as we actually live them* are ignored, assumed, or taken-for-granted, as if there's nothing more to consider, then we can easily create a self-deceiving and precarious dilemma for ourselves, all of humanity, and for Mother Earth.



Here's another basic example. What does the word "church" mean in the passage from Matthew? Does it mean the physical buildings in which Christian worship takes place? When St. Francis heard the divine words "rebuild my church," did God only mean to rebuild dilapidated buildings? Or does "church" possibly mean both the building and members of the church, which is more customary? The

immediate answer to both questions is yes, but that's not the whole story. Are we saying that they are sacred? Again, the answer is yes, and even that is not the whole story. Because we're "members of the church," are we elevating our sacred status, perhaps unconsciously, above all our Brother and Sister kinship relations in the whole of God's Creation? Would that be a form of self-serving idolatry? I don't believe St. Francis would have elevated his own self-image in that way. His "rebuilding" of the church pointed to a deeper, kinship-based vision of the fabric of life, in which the usual meaning of "church" was unwrapped from the worldly powers. From a Franciscan perspective, a justice and righteousness based (Christ at the right hand of God in Amos's vision) discernment of the word "church" points directly to the whole of "*God's creation on Earth in a process of renewal*" (Golliher 1991)

We might tell ourselves that regardless of how we use the meaning of the word "church," it is still closer to God than other religions or institutions. In that use of the word, to "believe in" can function as an expression of "us versus them' allegiance, rather than actually living our faith as Jesus intended. Just to be clear, let me say again that I do not believe that the main issue is the written content of any of Biblical or official ecclesial or Franciscan teachings. Rather, the issue involves deceptive and self-deceptive ways we might be tempted to "use" those teachings for self-serving and/or politicized reasons, without being aware of it. This has always been a slippery issue in Christian history, as it is for people of all faiths, especially when the forces of empire, colonialism and propaganda are at work.

Again, the process of discerning and recovering solid spiritual ground in our lives relates to deep remembering in our minds, hearts, and souls. We can begin to perceive the meaning of this in Christ's own words spoken in the Holy Eucharist, "*Do this in remembrance of me*." Often, we hear the words, while not realizing the possibility of a crucial spiritual process that can unfold within and among us. That process most often happens when we slow down or prayerfully stop our usually constant inner dialogue (talking to ourselves all the time). Then, we can begin to unwrap ("self-emptying" or *kenosis*) from the worldly powers. Silent meditation or saying the Jesus Prayer helps us to "remember" in the way that Jesus meant, so we can put our faith into practice more deeply. *And that takes us directly to remembering our life together, our kinship relations with the sacred fabric of life in the presence of God*. Here, the word "practice" relates to the Greek word "*praxis*," as it is encouraged in liberation theology (e.g., Freire 1979). How we put our beliefs into practice is paramount and should be nurtured by a process of critical reflection and discernment by individuals and within groups. We might assume that deep remembering, *anamnesis*, is more inward oriented, while praxis is more outward oriented, which can true, but expressed in different ways in diverse cultures. Nevertheless, as discernment, remembering and praxis unfold together, they become interwoven threads in the fabric of our lives. Freire also said that the meaning

of words like "hope" can also be elusive depending on our usage. Specifically, "hope" that is not at least partially guided by factual reality can be an illusion of hope, in effect, "wishful thinking."

Responding to the Cry of the Earth: Three Key Questions

Now, we'll move toward our conclusion, weaving together all the issues that we've considered so far. We'll ask ourselves three key questions: (1) *Do we really know where we live?* (2) *What do we see?* (3) *Who are our neighbors?* These are basic, but critical questions that people everywhere must ask if we want to genuinely care for the sacred fabric of life. In a different context, I previously raised these questions in a chapter of a book, published in Canada, called "*Partnership as Mission*" (Gray and Maybee 2023). The title of my chapter was "*The Mission and Hope of Eco-justice: A Franciscan Perspective*." Through discernment and remembering – that is, as our gradual unwrapping for the worldly powers takes place -- the answers we give will deepen. They will reveal an increasingly decolonized awareness, a process on which a Franciscan Renaissance depends. Let us reflect briefly on each of the questions. Keep in mind that if answers to the first question seem beyond our awareness and/or experience, then it can be very helpful to consider the second and third questions. The three questions are interwoven.

Our First Responsibility: Do We Really Know Where We Live?

In our "modern" world, when someone asks us where we live, the routine, spontaneous answer that we usually give is the name of a town, city, or our street address – the kind of answer we give when a postman, government official, or traffic cop asks us that question. Our answer would be found on official maps, our driver's license, and tax documents that governments have created for us. These are the seemingly "correct" answers that we've learned as culturally "competent" members of society – answers that the worldly principalities and powers want us to know without thinking and require us to give.

However, from a spiritual point of view, that kind of answer has very little, if any, relation to the most basic living reality of our existence – our 'shared home" on Earth. Knowing that Westernized, colonized minds think of the Earth through official maps of political boundaries, the philosopher Korzybski (1994) pointed us, with a touch of irony, in the right direction when he wrote, "*the map is not the territory*." The spiritual starting point for knowing where we live is rooted in the Biblical creation story and the Tree of Life. Actually, the Sacred Tree is an originally Indigenous, but nearly universal symbol, understood as the "Sacred Center" of our existence. The Sacred Center can't be found on a map. Instead, it represents, in a holistic way, the interwoven relationships that make up the whole fabric of life. In modern times, this "whole" has been called "the web of life" (Humboldt 1884) and "Gaia" (Lovelock 1995).

In the modern Western world, even the idea of the Tree of Life as the "Sacred Center" illustrates why Wallace-Wells considered so much of our global climate and ecological crisis to be "unthinkable" for a majority of people. Especially in our perilous time, that is one reason why we must unwrap ourselves from the worldly powers -- if we want to respond to the Cry of the Earth genuinely and effectively. To unwrap is to realize that within the fabric of life, interrelationships are based on kinship (such as the "Sister" and "Brother" relations of St. Francis) and part/whole principles, rather than us/them dichotomies that divide and separate human existence. Just as the Whole exists everywhere, including the sacred principles that constitute the existence of the Whole, so can its Sacred Center – symbolized by the Tree of Life -- be found "here," 'there,' and "everywhere." The Sacred Center is the Cosmic Center. The lived meaning of the Sacred Tree usually takes us into realms of awareness that are not routinely expressed in words. Yet, in Franciscan art and sacred stories, the lived meaning of the Tree of Life in our existence is a central symbol. As Franciscans have understood it, the Cross on which Jesus was crucified was transformed into the Tree of Life at his resurrection.

Increasingly in the Western world, we are moving in the direction of losing touch even more with the sacred depth of the Sacred Center's meaning. One among other reasons is that our lives are shaped more and more by the worldwide web and social media, rather than the sacred web of the fabric of Life. Over thirty years ago, William Irwin Thompson (1991), an eco-philosopher, similarly suggested that American culture was on a path that is "replacing nature," as it actually exists and lives, as a result of the values associated with consumerism and emerging technologies. Even considering the actual existence of the Tree of Life and the Sacred Center in our lives feels "unthinkable." In a manner of speaking, that feels justifiable within the boundaries of "reason" within dominant cultures. Yet, what is really going on is that the colonized working of our minds is reluctant to recognize or experience it.

For those reasons (as mentioned before), when reflecting upon the Sacred Center it is good to focus on unwrapping ourselves from the worldly powers by prayerfully entering into inner silence -- with the faithful understanding that the Holy Spirit is always calling us, always with us, even when we might think otherwise. The Spirit always hovers over the sacred Tree of Life. Sometimes, people experience it with the Spirit calling each of us by name and saying, *"I love you; do not be afraid."* In the sacred traditions of many Indigenous peoples, the spiritual presence of the Tree of Life is found within us and throughout the fabric of life, woven together by the Spirit with threads of living light. If we take into account the modern holistic-ecological principle (Dubos 1981) "*think globally, act locally*," we will understand that our lives, seen from a local perspective, are also part of our lives globally, just as our lives globally are part of our lives locally. The sacred Tree is found deep within our souls and at the cosmic heart of our life together on this sacred Earth. In his Preface to

the writings of Bonaventure, Ignatius Brady (1978:xvi) of the Collegio de Bonaventura, said this about the Cross and the Tree:

> *"... to know Christ and him crucified is a gift of the Spirit, a gift however which can be fostered ... by frequent nourishment at the Tree of Life, by constant meditation on him, who is himself that Tree in his life, his teachings, his death, his glorification."*

We also remember from the Creation story in the Book of Genesis that it was at the Sacred Tree where God gave us our very first responsibility and duty: "*to care for the Earth*." This is the existential and moral bedrock of our lives – given prior to the Ten Commandments -- that in relatively modern times we have, tragically and sinfully, distanced from our awareness. Apart from the ancient patriarchal overlay to the Creation story – which is the human "Fall" being attributed to the temptation of Eve (Matthew Fox, 1983) -- the reason for our spiritual blindness is more accurately found in 'the seven deadly sins" working though the influence of "the principalities and powers." Those destructive forces would have us believe that the fabric of life is there for us to exploit as property and transform into commodities, rather than a living presence on which our life together depends.

Our pilgrimage of life is to remember, restore, and heal the damage we have done.

Part of the Holy Mystery is that, through spiritual practices, we can rediscover (remember) the sacred Center within ourselves, regardless of where we live and our cultural upbringing and identities. In the Western world, the Biblical story of Creation emphasizes that the whole Creation is God's, not the property of humankind; and we have the God-given responsibility to care for our shared home. No other moral and existential principles could be more basic, yet when a large majority of people routinely think of "where we live," the sacred story rarely comes to mind. That's the impact of Western colonization.

The Question God Asked of Amos: What Do You See?

In discerning and remembering where we actually live – as part of the interwoven fabric of life – with the Sacred Tree at the Cosmic Center, it's helpful to actually look, listen, smell, and perceive the presence of the fabric of life in very immediate ways. Again, it's not just "out there." It's everywhere, inwardly and outwardly, and we are part of it. For me personally, it's easier to do this when I'm in the countryside. Yet being in cities can just as revealing in different ways. Let's consider the testimony of Amos, the Biblical eighth century prophet of social justice. Amos lived during a time that was in important ways like ours -- there was a large divide between the poor and the wealthy, just as "foreigners" and the poor were treated with disrespect. In the Book of Amos (7:7), he describes how God gave him a vision of existence that includes the throne of God with justice and righteousness at its foundation, including a pivotal question spoken to him:

> *This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall*

built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said to me, "Amos what do you see?"

With the plumb line measuring justice and injustice, what Amos discerned was a world out of balance. If Amos could see our world today, it would be considerably more out of balance than in his time, but the reasons for it are essentially the same. Today, exploitation -- often in the name of freedom and democracy -- overrides kinship relations among God's creatures. Today, according to the worldly powers, the "moral compass" has become Wall Street, rather than God's plumb line. As Amos (5:24) said, when the plumb line is out of balance, "*Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness with an ever-flowing stream*."

If we want a Franciscan Renaissance to become a reality in our lives, then how we answer the questions "*Do we know where we live?"* and "*What do we see?"* is crucial. Do we remember that "where we live" is the fabric of life with the Sacred Tree at the cosmic center, or do we overlook that and then see the world as Wall Street's "moral compass" would like us to see it? The looming moral and spiritual challenge here is that, given our God-given responsibility to care for Creation, we have the capacity to bring the plumb line back into balance. To fulfill that responsibility depends on our willingness to live in respectful relations with the sacred fabric of life and take actions based on peacemaking, community building and organizing, and eco-justice.

In our world today, fulfilling this responsibility, especially in authoritarian times, is comparable to crossing the Red Sea. Yet, as the voice in the Basilica said, "*what are we waiting on, get on with it*."

As we gradually begin to "see," like Amos, we realize how immensely sacred the fabric of life truly is. We all need to be more spiritually embodied (not wrapped up in the worldly powers) so we are genuinely present locally, rather than being "here" in the flesh, while our minds and soul are somewhere else. When we see rivers, are we aware of the pollution they contain? When we see farmland, are we aware of harmful pesticides customarily used in industrialized agriculture? When we see the tall buildings in urban areas, are we aware of the hungry and homeless on the streets? Are we aware of the recently dreadful increase in catastrophic flooding and wildfires as a result of climate change? And what about migrants and refugees – do we know the terrible conditions of their lives and their fears? Are we aware of corrupt government systems that allow harmful practices to continue, despite scientific knowledge of their impact on human and ecological health? We need be involved in local activist initiatives – for example, working with friends and neighbors, youth and civic groups, as well as eco-justice, human rights, and religious organizations -- to protect our shared fabric of life. All these examples are reasons why walking on solid spiritual ground reveals the living reality of our Franciscan charism -- "*penitence as the conversion of life*."

As a conclusion to these Reflections, let's remember the Biblical foundation of our Christian faith in the Two Great Commandments of Jesus: "*to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves"* (Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:29-31, Luke 10:25-28). As in all spiritual teachings, to follow the Way of Christ depends on our willingness, working together, to put our faith into practice more deeply, especially through the Two Commandments of Jesus. The opportunity to recover even more of their true meaning helps us to realize that our "life together" actually includes the whole fabric of life. This is very basic spiritual wisdom as radical as it might seem in parts of the Christian Church. Yet, large parts of humanity have been willing to ignore and forget this ancient wisdom as a result of the political and economic indoctrination of dominance.

That tragic sin makes it all the more important for us to remember this: Based on the prophetic vision of Amos and the Way of Christ, the two Great Commandments of Jesus are traditionally placed at the right hand of God as the foundation of justice and righteousness. In practice, loving-kindness, forgiveness, and justice should be our guide as we live our lives guided by their vision. Jesus's teachings about loving-kindness was and is clarified in a direct and specific way when he says, "*you cannot serve God and wealth*" (Matthew 6:24). Otherwise, we fall prey to authoritarian interpretations of the holy scriptures that encourage us to believe that our neighbors and their land can be exploited in the name of God and profit, and that "countries" can be transformed into "Fatherland" or "Motherland" ideologies of empire building. Think of it this way: Are migrants and refugees really "them" rather than "us" in a world divided between "us versus them?" Or do we all have a "life together" in the sacred fabric of life? The life of St. Francis contradicts what are misleading, divisive, and false teachings through his clarity about kinship as our spiritual relationship within the fabric of life. We are all neighbors; we are all sisters and brothers.

I hope for the reality of a Franciscan Renaissance, and I keep remembering the words heard in the Basilica: "*What are you (we) waiting on, get on with it*." One dimension of their meaning suggests what we need to hear in these perilous times – Mother Earth is crying, and the world needs healing, justice and transformation so the whole of God's sacred earth can be healed and thrive. As Franciscans, we already know that our charism -- *penitence as the conversion of life* – is a sign of our continuing transformation in the Spirit of God. The crucial point is that each and every day, with every thought, action, and breath, we can put our charism into practice, like St. Francis and St. Clare showed us. As Jesus said, "*Take up your cross, and follow me*."

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