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Canticle of the Creatures



Fonte: it.wikipedia.org

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In 2025 we celebrate the 800 anniversary of St. Francis' *Canticle of Creatures*^[1], a text that serves as a key inspiration for the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Over the centuries, it has been recognized as one of the most significant works in Christian literature. While earlier documents in the Italian vernacular exist, the *Canticle of the Creatures* (*CtC*), written in the Umbrian dialect, is often considered the foundational text of Italian literature not only for its linguistic value, but especially for its profound spiritual and cultural significance.

Many scholars regard the *Canticle* as Francis' most distinctive and personal work, as it vividly reflects his personality and deep appreciation for the rich diversity of creation. It faithfully conveys the core of his evangelizing message: an invitation for all creatures to praise the Most High ("Praise and bless"), a call to conversion ("Woe to those who die in mortal sin!"), and an exhortation to forgiveness and peace ("Those who give pardon... and endure in peace").

Francis also conceived the *Canticle* as an evangelizing catechesis in poetic form, written "for the edification of our neighbor." He desired that, after the friars' sermon, "they were to sing the *Praises of the Lord* as minstrels of the Lord"^[2]. His biographers recount that "when his illness grew more serious, he himself began to say the *Praises of the Lord*, and afterwards had his companions sing it" (CAss 83). In fact, the *Canticle* was composed to be accompanied by music.

Song of love and praise

Francis composed it in the spring of 1225, only a few months before his death, during a time of profound physical and spiritual suffering. He was blind, sick, and grieving. Yet, amid so much darkness, he trusts in the promise of eternal salvation he has just received in a vision, strengthens his faith, and begins to sing his song of praise.

The *Canticle* is not merely an expression of aesthetic admiration but a profound act of faith, a true song of love and praise. God is both its source and its ultimate destination. At its core, the *Canticle* is a prayer, a hymn to the Most High.

He highlights what, according to the understanding of his time, were considered the four fundamental elements of the sublunary world: earth, water, air, and fire. By focusing on the very essence of things, he emphasizes the divine wisdom that orchestrates the harmony of all that exists.

A holistic vision

As both an artist and a mystic, Francis perceived the profound unity of all creation, recognizing nature not as a mere resource but as a family. The same qualities he attributes to creatures in his *Canticle*, he also applies to the Creator in his *Praises of the Most High God*.

His vision is holistic and inclusive. He embraces even those elements that are often perceived as negative, recognizing them as part of a larger design. Even bodily death becomes a *sister* to him, because it opens for us the door to eternal life.

A counterpoint to materialistic logic

The *Canticle of the Creatures* stands as a profound critique of an economic system that commodifies every aspect of reality, prioritizes endless material growth, and reduces nature to a mere resource for profit. It invites us to shift from a paradigm of

domination to one of fraternity, from a world driven by greed to one animated by gratitude and care. For Francis, creatures are not mere objects for economic gain, but brothers and sisters, who “bear a likeness of God” and join humanity in a common song of praise. Each of them has a face and a role in the cosmic web of life.

Francis of Assisi does not see nature as a mere collection of resources to be exploited, but as a great family, where the sun, moon, water, and fire are our brothers and sisters, joining us in praising the Creator. His praise is not based on the usefulness of creatures to humanity but on their inherent dignity. Each, in its own way, “bears a likeness of You, Most High One.” (CtC 4). They are not passive elements in the background of human activity but active participants in the great symphony of creation, joining humanity in a harmonious song of praise to God.

A family where all are appreciated and needed

Francis humbly acknowledges that he needs the help that creatures provide. By joining in their praise, he rises above his own limitations and sense of unworthiness, for “no human is worthy to mention Your name” (CtC 2). Indeed, “all of us, wretches and sinners, are not worthy to pronounce Your name,”^[3] whereas “all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you.”^[4] Francis knows that only “our Lord Jesus Christ, [...] together with the Holy Spirit” can give thanks to the Father for us, “as it pleases You and Him” (ER 23:5). Within this dynamic, Francis praises the Father “with” all creatures (CtC 3) and “through” them (CtC 5-9).

As he prepares to meet Sister Bodily Death, he lies naked upon the bare earth, awaiting the ultimate embrace of his heavenly Father.

^[1] These paragraphs are taken from the article: Carbajo-Núñez Martín, «The Canticle of the creatures and sustainability: Listening to the cry of the Earth», in *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 38/1 (2025).

^[2] «Compilation of Assisi» [CAss] 83.

^[3] Francis of Assisi, “Early Rule” [ER] 23,5.

^[4] Francis of Assisi, «Admonitions», 5,2.

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