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Permaculture in Practice: Francis gives us a chance for hope

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Posted: Saturday, April 6, 2013 7:00 am

By **Nate Downey**For The New Mexican | [0 comments](#)

Everyone knows that the new pontiff's choice of "Francis" for a papal name was a good idea. Not only is Saint Francis d' Assisi the patron saint of the Royal City of Santa Fe (and we're so cool!), but Francis was also an ecologist, an animal lover,

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and a good example for folks who'd like to maintain a respectful relationship with God's creation. Given the dangerous levels of climate change here in our little corner of the cosmos, let's pray the "Francis" choice wasn't just smart marketing. Let's take the "Frank" message exactly as that: a frank and honest sign that one of our most conservative institutions is about to take Earth stewardship seriously.

Fortunately, if Francis were to take a deeply ecological stand, a brief exegesis of John indicates he'd have decent Biblical backup. One example comes from a reinterpretation of the ancient Greek word λογος, found three times in John 1 (v.1): Εν αρχῃ ήν ὁ λογος καὶ ὁ λογος ήν προς τὸν Θεόν καὶ Θεός ήν ὁ λογος.

Of the 40 translations I found online, each translates as λογος, "the Word," but in ancient Greek, "logos" can also mean "law," "thought," "logic," "ratio," and "relationship." Let's leave aside the logical question about "the Word" existing "at the beginning" when no one would be there to speak or listen. Since John is about the relationship between God and humanity, and since the idea of a "relationship" seems to be, simultaneously, the most preternatural, all-important, and interesting concept of all, I prefer this version:

"In the beginning was relationship, and relationship was with God, and relationship was God."

Unsurprisingly, my translation fits well with permaculture philosophy. Relationships are critical when we apply permaculture's principles of cooperation, synergy, redundancy, edge, microclimates, diversity, and unlimited yields. The "relationship" idea is also at the genesis of Bill Mollison's tome, *Permaculture*. He writes that permaculture starts with a three-fold ethic where you can't have one without the others. The ethics, Mollison says, are "care for planet Earth, care for people, and reduce your consumption." The inherent relationship between these ethics is this: if we don't care for God's creation, we won't exist, but if our basic needs are not met, we cannot care for the planet; therefore we need to do both. However, if we don't reduce our use of natural resources, we're all heading to our

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last supper anyway, so we'd better do all three.

To protect our planet for future souls, we'll need all hands on deck, so if Rome decides to become a major player on James Hansen and Vandana Shiva's team, I'm all for it. And in case anybody up there's listening, if the Church actually steps up big time with an enlightened ecological world-view, I solemnly swear to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from the top of Monte Sol. Who's with me? Horns and harps will be welcomed, too!

Nate Downey is the author of Harvest the Rain (Sunstone Press, 2010) and the president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. You can contact him through his company website, www.permadesign.com.

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