



Dear Friends,

Eco-spirituality is the theme of this month's *Mission and Spirituality News*. Each author has contributed their own insightful understanding of this pressing world issue. Pope Benedict has also produced a piece on the topic, not at my request, but he may have heard we were looking at it.

Pope Benedict writes: "I think, therefore, that true and effective initiatives to prevent the waste and destruction of creation can be implemented and developed, understood and lived, only where creation is considered as beginning with God."

Although the environmental vandalism of deforestation, air and water pollution, excessive mining and unsustainable consumption of energy are some of the critical ecological issues facing the planet today, they are not new. Past generations as they faced unprecedented social and industrial upheaval also struggled with environmental damage. What is new is the scale.

The poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins written, in the second half of the 19th Century, expresses his deep concern about the senseless destruction of nature and the loss of reverence for God glorified in His creation. Hopkins was responding to the ecological destruction as a result of, amongst other things, the Industrial Revolution and the dislocation of an agrarian society. In many of his poems, *God's Grandeur*, *Spring*, *The Windhover*, and *Hurrahing in Harvest* to name but a few he expresses his profound experience of God in creation: "*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.*"

"For Hopkins, beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder: it is also in what and Who are beheld. In Wales, on August 17, 1874, he recorded one such encounter with Christ in the universe: "*As we drove home the stars came out thick: I leant back to look at them and my heart opening more than usual praised our Lord to and in whom all that beauty comes home*" (*Journals*, p. 254).

In his notes on the *Spiritual Exercises*, Hopkins observes: "*God's utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, news of God*" (*Sermons*, p. 129)."

I am enthralled by Hopkins' language, his sprung rhythm and his God alive in all of creation. When I was a secondary school English teacher one of my favourite lessons was teaching Gerard Manly Hopkins' poem *Spring* to my senior class. In this poem Hopkins describes the way the earth unfolds with the beauty of spring. This 'spring' is also the reassuring Christian belief, 'that all will be well'. The light has consumed the darkness, hope has conquered despair and life is stronger than death.

Here is the poem.

Spring

Nothing is so beautiful as Spring —
 When weeds in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
 Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;
 The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
 The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
 A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden. — Have, get, before it cloy,
 Before it cloud, Christ, lord and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
 Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

Hopkins warns us to guard this state because sin has the power to destroy innocence: 'and sour with sinning.' The sin is the mistaken belief that we are god. The temptation is to believe that we are independent and accountable to no one but ourselves. In this darkness we can convince ourselves of the 'rightness' of our actions. The balance returns when we humbly appreciate that God is God and we are humans who need each other. It is in our relationship with God, with ourselves and others that we become stewards of the earth, not its masters.

In closing I would like to share with you the question that George Fisher, a professor of geology at Johns Hopkins, asks, "How do those of us living in the western world share resources with the other 90 percent of the Earth's population? These are scientific questions in part, because we need to know how the Earth works, but science doesn't tell us what we should do. Those are moral and ethical questions."

Lucky Winners in the July Bible Competition

Well done to the winners of the new Encyclopaedic Bibles with 200 colour pages of Bible facts and picture. The winners were Margaret Ryan, Elizabeth Mulrennan, Ted Mason and Dorothy Farrant.

Thank you to Catholic Mission for sponsoring this contest. Catholic Mission believes that every Catholic must have a solid knowledge of the Bible if they are to be able share their faith.

The most popular "favourite verse" was John 10:10: "I came that they may have life, life to the full."

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