

1-1-2016

Augustine's Trinitarian Sacramental Sensibilities, Influence, and Significance for Our Imperiled Planet

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Published version. "Augustine's Trinitarian Sacramental Sensibilities, Influence, and Significance for Our Imperiled Planet," in *Augustine and the Environment*, edited by John Doody, Kim Paffenroth, Mark Smillie. New York: Lexington Books, 2016: 141-164. [Publisher link](#). © 2016 Lexington Books. Used with permission.

NINE

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Though the term "sacrament" is usually associated with rituals during which materials used, words spoken, and actions in which the faithful engage are understood as conveying the presence and gratuitous activity of God, "sacramental" has been applied more broadly to convey the belief that the invisible presence and attributes of God are manifested by the visible creation. Reflections on the world as revelatory of God were prominent in the sermons, writings of Christian prelates, and theological literature of the patristic and medieval periods.¹ Grounded in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible,² some theologians described the world as a "book" through which God is self-revealing. Whereas few people during these times were able to read the Bible, the "book of nature" was readily available to all people.

Among the patristic theologians who urged contemplating the physical world through which attributes of God can be discovered were St. Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–216)³ and St. Athanasius of Alexandria (295–373),⁴ who focused on God's governing power; St. Ephrem the Syrian (303–373), who wrote poetically about God's mercy and creative artistry,⁵ which the faithful should be able to discern and express gratitude to God; and St. Basil of Caesarea (329–379), who reflected on God's wisdom and skill by having ordered all things together, as revealed by the harmoniously functioning universe.⁶ St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

introduced a unique approach to examining the world for its sacramental quality. Grounded in his deep faith in God, he used his five senses to discover traces of the Trinity—God the Creator, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—in and through the sensible world. It was profoundly sacramental from his perspective—filled with signs of God that the faithful should recognize. My examination of his reflections constitutes the first part of this chapter.

The second part focuses on St. Augustine's influence on prominent theologians during the medieval period who elaborated on the sacramentality of God's creation from a Trinitarian perspective. Among them are Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141), St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217–1274), and St. Thomas Aquinas (1224/5–1274), whose reflections varied in breadth, depth, and details. One significant difference is the importance of using the five senses that Hugh of St. Victor and Bonaventure emphasized, while Aquinas dwelled on the visual sense as the stimulant to perceiving God through the world. With St. Augustine's, their perceptions of the sacramental quality of the world have significance today as the rate of species extinction accelerates, ecosystems are degraded and destroyed, and threats to the biosphere loom.⁷

Thus, the importance of reflecting on the sacramentality of the world constitutes the third part of this chapter. Into this mix I introduce an approach shared by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*, the first encyclical dedicated to the human-Earth relationship,⁸ and suggest a method through which people who believe in God may develop their sacramental sensibilities. Hopefully, faith-filled people will discover within this variety of views on the sacramentality of creation the motivation to strive individually and collectively to halt impediments to the flourishing of the Earth community.

ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO'S TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

St. Augustine encouraged his followers to adopt a sacramental attitude toward the physical world because it gives testimony to "the ineffably and invisibly great, the ineffably and invisibly beautiful" God.⁹ He came to this conclusion only after having shed the "vanity" of philosophers¹⁰ who do not approach the created world from a faith perspective and could not, therefore, find God through God's creation:

I was no longer in that vanity! I had passed beyond it, and by the testimony of the whole creation I had found you, our creator, and your Word, who is God with you, and who is one God with you, through whom you created all things.¹¹

In his commentary on Psalm 26, he wrote:

Let your mind roam through the whole creation; everywhere the created world will cry out to you: "God made me." Whatever pleases you in a work of art brings to your mind the artist who wrought it; much more, when you survey the universe, does the consideration of it evoke praise for its Maker. You look on the heavens; they are God's great work. You behold the earth; God made its numbers of seeds, its varieties of plants, its multitude of animals. Go round the heavens again and back to the earth, leave out nothing; on all sides everything cries out to you of its Author; nay the very forms of created things are as it were the voices with which they praise their Creator.¹²

When Augustine became a Christian, he concluded that the beauty of the physical world reflects God's wisdom. In *Confessions* and *City of God*, he scoffed at philosophers who do not seek and find this ultimate truth about the universe. Only through faith in God, the architect of the world, can its harmonious beauty and the wisdom it manifests be understood.¹³ He also expressed his belief that the "sensible and visible effects" that God created signify the divine presence while remaining distinct from them:

[T]o reveal Himself in them, as He Himself knows it to be fitting, but without appearing in that substance itself by which He is, and which is wholly unchangeable and more inwardly and more mysteriously sublime than all the spirits which He created.¹⁴

Reflecting on the refrain in Genesis 1, "and God saw that it was good," Augustine emphasized his Trinitarian view of the sacramental creation:

[T]he assertion of the goodness of the created work follows the act of creation in order to emphasize that the work corresponded with the goodness that was the reason for its creation. Now if this goodness is rightly interpreted as the Holy Spirit, then the whole united Trinity is revealed to us in its works.¹⁵

He continued:

[The] visible and tangible signs . . . signify the invisible and intelligible God, not only the Father, but also the Son and the Holy Spirit, from whom are all things, through whom are all things, and in whom are all things.¹⁶

For Augustine, all created works "manifest a certain unity, form, and order in themselves." Each is "some one thing, as are the natures of bodies," each is "shaped according to a determined form, as are the figures and qualities of bodies," and each "either seeks for or maintains a certain order, as are the weights and arrangements of bodies." When we "perceive the Creator through the things which have been made, we ought to recognize Him as the Trinity of which a trace appears, as is fitting, in the creature."¹⁷ He insisted that the highest origin of all things, their most perfect beauty, and their most blessed delight is the Trinity.¹⁸

As Carol Harrison describes when examining Augustine's teachings, the world is "a sacrament which veils, and yet, for he who rightly uses and accepts it, reveals its source and reality."¹⁹

Augustine was confident that humans have been endowed with a limited capability to know God through the world's diverse constituents. Paraphrasing Romans 1:20, he wrote: "Since the creation of the world, the invisible attributes of God, his everlasting power also and divinity, are seen, being understood through the things that are made."²⁰ He reasoned from his faith perspective that the ability of the human person to see and understand God to some extent through the physical world is assured by the presence of the image of God in the human soul.²¹

Integral to Augustine's thinking about the sacramentality of the world is God's active but "hidden" governance of it. God works providentially through the created world, he taught, by having established the innate functioning of all terrestrial and celestial entities and by acting through voluntary beings to enable them to recognize God's "hidden" providence in and through created works in relation to one another.²² Rejoicing, he prayed and gave thanks to God:

Let him who sees this, either in part, or through a mirror, or in an obscure manner,²³ rejoice that he knows God, and let him honor Him as God and give thanks. But let him who does not see, strive to see through His piety, and not raise captious objections through his blindness. For God is one, yet a trinity. Nor are the words: "From whom all things, through whom all things, and unto whom all things," to be taken in a confused sense, nor as meaning many gods, but "to him be the glory forever. Amen."²⁴

Thus, one of the greatest theologians in the Christian tradition emphasized the sacramental character of the world through which we can experience God's presence and know God in three manifestations. Augustine was confident that each of us has the ability to open to God's presence and God's character, beginning with our senses and proceeding to study the world. Our response to divine self-revelation is to give glory to God through our expressions of gratitude, our prayers, and our actions.

Furthermore, Augustine at least implicitly stimulates thinking from a Trinitarian perspective about the functional relationality of God's creation—of living and inanimate creatures relating constructively to one another to constitute a unity. When professing belief in the perfect interrelationship of the Father/Creator/Power, Son/Word/Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit/Goodness, one vital way of giving glory to God would be striving to perfect our relationships with other creatures for our mutual flourishing. The memory of our emergence with and from other species, an understanding of our relatedness to them in the cosmological-biological continuum, and the realization of our dependence on them, water and air

for our health and well-being should lead us to resolve to live constructively with them within shared ecosystems and the greater biosphere.

INFLUENCES ON HUGH OF ST. VICTOR, ST. BONAVENTURE, AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Many medieval theologians reflected on the sacramentality of creation, including St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), who underscored the importance of the bodily senses for the growth in spirituality;²⁵ Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), who envisioned the “fiery power” of God hidden in all creatures;²⁶ and St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), who urged the faithful to work assiduously to gain knowledge of God by studying the world.²⁷ But Hugh of St. Victor, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas were most heavily influenced by St. Augustine's Trinitarian approach to encountering and thinking about the world as revelatory of God. They urged the faithful to use their senses as the first stage toward encountering traces of the Trinity in the world, and they anticipated that the faithful would respond with gratitude, deepen their faith, and change their behavior.

HUGH OF ST. VICTOR

Reflection on the sacramentality of creation achieved intricate heights in the works of Hugh of St. Victor, an Augustinian monk who professed his vows, taught at the Abbey school in Paris, and eventually became its master. There he began the tradition of mysticism that made St. Victor famous throughout the twelfth century. His efforts show the strong influence of Augustine's practical teachings on the contemplative life to which Hugh blended the theoretical teachings of pseudo-Dionysius.

For Hugh, knowledge about the world serves as an introduction to contemplating God. He provided in *De tribus diebus* detailed examples of how various attributes of God can be perceived by studying God's many creatures.²⁸ He began his meditation with Romans 1:20:

“From the creation of the world the invisible things of God are seen, having been understood through those things which were made.” The invisible things of God are three: his power, wisdom, and goodness. From these three all things proceed; upon these three all things rest, and by these three all things are ruled. For power creates, wisdom governs, goodness preserves.²⁹

God's invisible power, wisdom, and goodness are manifested respectively through the immensity of creatures, their beauty, and their usefulness, Hugh explained. The immensity of creatures consists in their multitude and greatness. By multitude he meant many diverse kinds of creatures,

and by greatness the creature's weight as well as the amount of space the creature consumes. He dissected the various aspects of creatures that point to God's power, exclaiming throughout his amazement at the incredible strength required to produce any one type of being out of nothing. Yet he considered his exclamations inadequate given "the size of the mountains, the lengths of rivers, the spaces of fields, the height of heaven, [and] the depth of the sea."³⁰

Hugh elaborated extensively on the beauty of creatures through which God's wisdom can be perceived. Their beauty can be found in their "arrangement, motion, appearance, and quality" that he explored:

Their arrangement is seen in their composition and order; their order is found in place and time and propriety. Motion is fourfold: local, natural, animal, and rational. Local motion is forward and backward, to the right and to the left, up, down, and around. Natural motion is found in increase and decrease. Animal motion is seen in the senses and appetites. Rational motion is found in actions and plans. Appearance is the visible form which is discerned by the eye, such as the colors and shapes of bodies. Quality is an interior property which is perceived by the other senses, such as a melody in sound by the hearing of the ears, sweetness in savor by the taste of the mouth, fragrance in scent by the smelling of the nose, or softness in a body by the touch of the hands.³¹

He insisted that the beautiful world attests to God's wisdom:

Anyone able to investigate these could find in them the marvelous light of the wisdom of God. Would that I could as subtly see them and as competently tell of them as I am able ardently to love them. For I am delighted, because it is very sweet and pleasant frequently to deal with these topics in which the senses are educated by reason and love is roused by emulation.³²

Education of the human senses should enable the delighted observer to "cry out in awe and amazement" with the psalmist:

How great are your works, O Lord! You have made them all in wisdom.³³ You have given me delight in what you have made, and I shall exult over the works of your hands. How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are exceeding deep.³⁴

For Hugh, foolish persons will not know God from the physical creation, and stupid people will not understand their sacramental quality. Only spiritually inclined people are able to perceive the wisdom of God from the beauty of creation:

This whole sensible world is like a book written by the finger of God, that is, created by the divine power, and individual creatures are like certain characters invented not by human judgment, but by divine choice to manifest and to signify in some way the invisible wisdom of God. But just as when unlettered people see an open book, they see the

characters, but do not know the letters, so foolish people and natural human beings, who do not perceive the things of God, see the external appearance in these visible creatures, but do not understand their inner meaning. But those who are spiritual persons can judge all things insofar as they consider the beauty of the work externally, but grasp within them how much the wisdom of the creator is to be admired.³⁵

When referring to spiritually inclined people, Hugh appears to have meant those who approach the world rationally from a monotheistic faith perspective, as Augustine had taught.

Hugh urged contemplating the physical world to find "the marvelous rationality and wisdom with which all things have been composed."³⁶ The rationality and wisdom of God are demonstrated by the harmony of diverse beings that constitute the cosmos, by riverbeds that "glue the earth together," and by the neural structure of the human body.³⁷ He marveled at God's wisdom that is perceivable in the endowment of fruit vines, vegetation, wild animals, and metals in different regions, which makes them unique;³⁸ in the sequence of day and night to enable toil and rest, the four seasons for refreshing life,³⁹ and in the position of the sense organs on the human face.⁴⁰ He delighted in God's wisdom that is apparent in the motion of streams, sprouting plants, the sensual appetites of irrational animals, and the ability of humans to act rationally.⁴¹

The comparative appearances of things underscore their wondrous qualities—a whale among fishes, a griffin among birds, an elephant among quadrupeds, and a dragon among snakes. All should be admired, regardless of their size, Hugh taught, because they demonstrate the wisdom of God. Even more marvelous are rare things that are not readily accessible to human beings, having been "hidden away in remote locations" by God.⁴² The "monstrous" and "ridiculous" features of creatures trigger questions that go beyond what is initially observable:

Why does the crocodile not move the lower jaw when it chews? And how does a salamander remain in fire without being harmed? Who gave the hedgehog spikes and taught it to roll in apples knocked down by the wind so that loaded down with them it squeaks like a wagon when it moves? And who taught the ant which, foreseeing the coming winter, fills its stores with grain? And the spider which weaves its webs from its innards to capture prey?⁴³

Their intriguing characteristics and activities are, he concluded, witnesses to the wisdom of God who, when creating the world, intended creatures to be the way they are and to serve specific purposes in the scheme of creation.

The colors of the sun, moon, stars, precious gems, and sprouting plants that please the eye are also attributed to God's wisdom.⁴⁴ So, too, are fragrances, sounds, sweets, and textures.⁴⁵ All senses have significance from Hugh's sacramental perspective, and he urged their training

to assure that they are applied appropriately toward experiencing God's presence and discerning God's character,⁴⁶ a task to which I turn shortly.

Moving to another attribute of God, Hugh perceived God's goodness as manifested in the usefulness of things. He discussed their utility for humans according to four dimensions—the necessary, the advantageous, the fitting, and the pleasant:

The necessary for each thing is that without which it cannot readily exist, such as bread and water in human nourishment, wool or hide in clothing, or any such garment. The advantageous is that which, though at times it produces more delight, life can still be lived without it, such as in human nourishment a cup of wine and the eating of meat; in clothing linen and silk and any other softer clothing. The fitting or suitable is that which, though it does not benefit its users, is appropriate to use, such as the dyes of various colors, precious stones, and other things of this sort. The pleasant is that which is not useful and yet is delightful to look at, such as certain kinds of plants and animals as well as birds and fishes, and the like.⁴⁷

Hugh provided two explanations for why God created things that are not necessary for humans: One is to serve humans in useful ways guided by the virtue of temperance. The other reason is moral—to enable humans to recognize in creatures “the sort of invisible good that they ought to seek” in the “superabundant riches of [God's] goodness.”⁴⁸

In *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*, Hugh considered the entirety of creation as a sacrament through which God teaches rational creatures that they must strive toward intellectual and moral perfection.⁴⁹ In *Didascalicon*, he urged pursuing knowledge about the world in order to be restored to the blessings that come from knowing and loving God, blessings that had been lost in “the Fall” of the human being as described in Genesis 3. By contemplating the orderly world that God created from a Trinitarian perspective—as manifesting the interrelatedness of God's power, wisdom, and goodness—the faithful should be able to discern how they ought to act in relation to other living and inanimate creatures as part of the process of being restored to intellectual and moral perfection.

Hugh of St. Victor's elaborations on Augustine's teachings about the sacramental character of the world have remarkable significance for today. Though his writings lacked reference to destructive human actions on other species and systems, any that were occurring during his time would tend to fall within his understanding of disorder that occurs when humans do not pursue knowledge about how the world functions and, therefore, how they ought to act in ways that are conducive to its functioning as a unity of interrelated and interdependent living and inanimate constituents. Those who act with the integrity Hugh urges would be aiming toward the intellectual and moral perfection that is essential to

address the continuing threats to the functioning of ecological systems and the biosphere of Earth.

ST. BONAVENTURE OF BAGNOREGIO

The sacramentality of creation was also a key topic for St. Bonaventure in *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*,⁵⁰ where he contemplated⁵¹ the physical world as the first step by which the human mind ascends to God. His reflections were grounded in Augustine's thinking with references to the speculative tradition of Christian theology found in pseudo-Dionysius and Anselm of Canterbury. They also converge with the religious awe that is awakened by God's wondrous creation as epitomized by St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Order of Friars Minor of which Bonaventure was a professed member and eventually the minister general.

In this masterpiece, Bonaventure meditated on the vastness of the physical world and perceived reflections of God's power, wisdom, and goodness. He identified all creatures as vestiges of the Holy Trinity,⁵² and he urged the faithful to use their five senses as entry-level tools for contemplating God.⁵³ Repeating an already familiar admonishment, he insisted that those who do not use their senses for this purpose are "foolish" indeed.

For Bonaventure, the natural world is "a ladder" by which the faithful ascend to God.⁵⁴ He emphasized the need to approach the world from a position of faith in God and to seek God's help—God's grace—in making the ascent. "We cannot rise above ourselves," Bonaventure asserted, "unless a higher power lifts us up." Nothing will come of the human efforts "unless accompanied by divine aid," he insisted. God's help is readily available "to those who seek it from their hearts, humbly and devoutly," by means of a dependent "sigh," and by fervent prayer.⁵⁵ Franciscan humility and a profound sense of dependence on God permeate this engaging and inspiring reflection.

Using a triadic structure, Bonaventure described the specific aspects of the physical world through which God's supreme power, wisdom, and benevolence shine forth. The bodily senses convey these perceptions to the interior senses, he reasoned, thereby enabling the human intellect to investigate the created world rationally, to believe fully, and to contemplate it theocentrically.⁵⁶

He dissected three characteristics that distinguish creatures—their weight, number, and measure:

Weight, by which they tend to their position; number, by which they are distinguished; and measure, by which they are limited. Thus we see in them mode, species and order as well as substance, power and operation. From these, as from a vestige, we can rise to knowledge of the immense power, wisdom and goodness of the Creator.⁵⁷

When reasoning about the nature of each type of creature, the human being may understand God's power, wisdom, and goodness as living, intelligent, purely spiritual, incorruptible, and unchangeable.⁵⁸

Extending his reflection to the properties of creatures that testify to God's power, wisdom, and goodness, Bonaventure considered the origin, magnitude, multitude, beauty, fullness, activity, and order of all things to one another. The origin of things in their distinction and embellishment proclaims "the divine power that produces all things from nothing, the divine wisdom that clearly distinguishes all things, and the divine goodness that lavishly adorns all things." The magnitude of things can be seen in their length, width, depth, and efficiency of operations. Their multitude is observable from the many diverse creatures that constitute the universe, their beauty from the variety of light, shape, color, and the diversity of beings, their fullness through their potential to emerge from matter, and their order to one another from the harmonious functioning of the universe.⁵⁹

The ability to recognize God's attributes from the works created requires openness to their sacramental quality, appropriate use of the human senses, and deep-felt honoring of God in response to God's self-revelation through the physical world. Bonaventure warned those who do not comply:

Whoever, therefore, is not enlightened by such splendor of created things is blind; whoever is not awakened by such outcries is deaf; whoever does not praise God because of all these effects is dumb; whoever does not discover the First Principle from such clear signs is a fool. Therefore, open your eyes, alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips and *apply your heart* so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise, love and worship, glorify and honor your God lest the whole world rise against you.⁶⁰

Through these warnings, Bonaventure underscored the physical world's sacramental character and, as Hugh of St. Victor urged, the need to train the human senses toward this end. While Bonaventure moved beyond sensible entities to higher levels of ascent to God, this beginning rung of the ladder to God must be cherished as an indispensable way toward knowing God, albeit incompletely, during temporal life.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

That the universe is revelatory of God is also integral to the systematic theology of Thomas Aquinas, though in much less emotive ways when compared with the reflections by Hugh of St. Victor and Bonaventure. Aquinas taught that each creature manifests God in some way, but the best manifestation of God's goodness and wisdom is the beautifully ordered universe of all creatures functioning in relation to one another as

intended by God when creating the world.⁶¹ God created distinct creatures and ordered them in relation to one another to achieve the good of the whole universe, Aquinas reasoned,⁶² and this mutual ordering of distinct parts to achieve its overall good most nearly reflects God's goodness.⁶³

For Aquinas, the relationship among creatures is understood as a hierarchical chain of diverse living and inanimate entities with each type finding its purpose in the other progressively up the chain by providing something needed by that creature for its sustenance. While some creatures exist for the sake of others, Aquinas explained, all creatures exist for the sake of the universe by contributing something essential to its perfection.⁶⁴ He valued this orderly functioning of all things in relation to one another as the ultimate and noblest perfection to be found in creatures.⁶⁵ That some things have instrumental value by existing for the sake of others while also having intrinsic value for the sake of the universe's perfection is not contradictory from Aquinas's theocentric valuing of the orderly creation that God lovingly sustains in existence to function with integrity.

Aquinas's thinking that corporeal creatures serve as stepping stones to knowledge about God was driven by St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 1:20 and Augustine's *De vera religione*.⁶⁶ Creatures take on the characteristics of sacramental signs of something holy,⁶⁷ especially divine wisdom and goodness, Aquinas taught.⁶⁸ They are sacramental signs in a sense similar to the scriptures that convey spiritual matters under the guise of written words.⁶⁹

Elaborating on Augustine's thinking in *De Trinitate* that a trace of the Trinity may be found in all creatures,⁷⁰ Aquinas held that the creature represents the person of the Father as its cause, the person of the Word as the form conceived, and the person of the Holy Spirit as loved and willed to be.⁷¹ While only a trace of the Trinity may be found in the human body, an image of the Trinity exists in the human mind, enabling the human being to transcend matter and encompass the physical world intellectually.⁷²

Meditating on God's works of creation played a pivotal role for the faithful, Aquinas taught. They can advance their admiration for God's wisdom in having created all the wondrous works that constitute the universe. They can grow in reverence for God's sublime power, a power much greater than the power of all the works God has created. They can be incited to love God's goodness for having provided the plethora of good, beautiful, and delightful creatures. They can attain a greater likeness to God, who contemplates all things in their entirety. Contemplation of the universe can also destroy errors concerning God, including the divinity of stars and forces of nature.⁷³ Thus, from Aquinas's perspective, a sacramental perception of the visible world can play an instructive role

in the life of the faithful. Appropriating this role can be helpful today when attempting to address the threats to the flourishing of Earth.

SIGNIFICANCE TODAY

When reflecting on the visible, sensible creation as revelatory of God and implications for us today, we must remember the vast differences between patristic and medieval theologians' understanding of the world and our current scientific worldview. They thought about the world as a divinely designed, geocentered, hierarchically structured organism with fixed species topped by humans—all of which have God-given purposes for existing, acting, and functioning harmoniously in relation to one another. Through the scientific lens of current quantum physicists, cosmologists, evolutionary and molecular biologists, and ecologists today, the natural world appears historically emergent, evolutionary, dynamic, holistic, and open to a future that cannot be predicted with accuracy. Living and inanimate (air, land, water) constituents of Earth are related, ecologically interdependent, and mutually affected by random occurrences constrained by basic laws of physics. Emerging late on the cosmological-biological "clock," humans are products of evolution, related to everything living and nonliving that constitute Earth, and radically dependent upon other species, the air, land, and water for their health and well-being. These findings prompt new ways of thinking about God in relation to the world and how humans should function as integral constituents thereof.

GLIMPSING GOD'S CHARACTER THROUGH THE WORLD

Particularly significant are opportunities to think about God as having initiated the cosmological process approximately 13.7 billion years ago, as continuously sustaining the universe in existence as it organizes and develops itself through an interplay of law and chance, out of which emerged myriad forces and bodies, and who calls all entities and the entirety of the universe to completion. Among them are intelligent beings that have the ability to reflect on their place in the universe and to choose to act in ways that are conducive to its flourishing.

When informed by basic contemporary scientific findings, the attributes of God's power, wisdom, and goodness favored by patristic and medieval theologians have new meaning and significance. God's power can be perceived as voluntarily self-limited through the freedom given to the universe to evolve at its own pace in expanding place and extending time and sustaining that freedom. God's goodness can be perceived through the seemingly endless potentialities with which God has endowed matter to develop and engrafted matter for all time by the incar-

nated Jesus the Christ. And God's wisdom can be perceived through the physical laws within which chance occurrences are operative as the Holy Spirit invigorates the universe to become itself in increasing diversity and emergent complexity, life, and consciousness with its fullness yet to emerge.⁷⁴

Other compelling and plausible attributes of God also surface when theological discourse is informed by the various sciences. Through the dynamic unfolding of the universe, God is perceivable as *empowering* the universe forward to develop itself; as incredibly *generous* by providing the possibility for the emergence of many diverse beings and forces over extending time in expanding space; as *freedom giving* through the ability of the universe to evolve and for entities to become out of many possibilities; as *humble* by allowing the universe with its diverse beings to emerge without interference and to play itself out in surprising ways amid considerable suffering, decay, waste, and death; as constantly and lovingly *caring* by sustaining the evolution of an internally self-sufficient universe of diverse beings; and as *patient* throughout the billions of years during which the universe expanded from a very infinitesimal entity to billions of galaxies out of which at least one planet evolving around a medium-sized, middle-aged star has produced a magnificent array of ecosystems with their varied biota—including *homo sapiens*, who have the ability to reflect on and respond to God's self-communication through the universe.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S PRESENCE

How can God's presence be understood when theological discourse on the sacramentality of creation is informed by the contemporary sciences? God's presence is continuously available for experiencing at every moment of the universe's unfolding by those who are open to its mediating quality. God's presence is accessible through flora, fauna, air, land, water, vistas, and other natural phenomena as the empowering ground of their emergent existence. Every natural being that is seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted triggers a sense of God's presence. Awe, wonder, amazement, fascination, astonishment, curiosity, and surprise are among the feelings precipitated initially in the person as an entry to thinking about God in relation to oneself and the sensed.

As the faithful move beyond the sensual to contemplate the connections of natural phenomena in rainforests, coral reefs, prairies, and other ecosystems, God's presence is experienced as they strive to know about the relationships among the constituents of ecosystems, to determine how they ought to relate to the more-than-human others that are encountered, and to choose to relate to them in ways that respect their distinctiveness as parts in the sustainable whole. God's presence is experienced

as persons act responsibly toward other constituents of Earth on all social and economic levels. God's presence is experienced as humans identify and overcome obstacles to sacramental envisioning of the physical world. In these moves beyond the immediate act of sacramental sensing, God remains actively present to all, relating to them according to their natures, energizing them as the sustaining ground of their ways of existing, functioning, developing, and responding according to their natures. The response of humans is to act reverently toward Earth and its varied constituents through whom God is present and self-revealing.

REVERENCING THE SACRAMENTAL WORLD

If the physical world is embraced as a medium through which God's presence is experienced and a glimpse of God's triune character is offered, reverence for Earth and its constituents is warranted as a way of responding to God. Of course, reverential behavior by Christians (and adherents of the other Abrahamic faiths) does not constitute reverence for Earth as sacred. From the perspective of the sacramentality of creation, Earth is not sacred, nor is the universe. God alone is sacred in the strict sense of the term. Reverential behavior is aimed ultimately toward God, whose presence and character are mediated by the sensible world.

To better experience God's presence and discern God's attributes, the faithful will cautiously encounter other animals, plants, land masses, and bodies of water, strive to know as much as possible about them, and recognize their relatedness to them within the ecological systems of which they are mutual constituents. The faithful will preserve species and conserve ecosystems so they can continue to function according to the natures of their constituents so they are able to mediate God's presence and character into the future. The faithful will react cautiously when other species threaten their health, domicile, and well-being, seeking constructive solutions that facilitate mutual flourishing. The faithful will limit their use of other components of ecosystems to assure their mutual sustenance, remaining alert and responsive to the poor and vulnerable whose sustenance is impeded. The faithful will identify and combat abuses of other species and systems that inhibit their ability to flourish and, thereby, to mediate the presence and character of God.

TRAINING SACRAMENTAL SENSIBILITIES

Hugh of St. Victor and Bonaventure are particularly helpful for tasking the renewal and growth of the faithful's sacramental sensibilities. Both theologians explicitly encouraged training the human senses to be open to the sacramental quality of the physical world. Given the widespread ecological degradation apparent in areas of the world where Christianity

is professed most prominently, training is undoubtedly needed to halt the loss of biological diversity, ecosystem degradation, and threats to the biosphere.

What does sacramental sensibility training encompass? At the outset, it presupposes belief in God as the ultimate source of the beginning and the continuing emergence of the universe, a belief that is basic to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Sacramental sensibility training also assumes written and/or practiced traditions of perceiving the physical world as a means through which God self-communicates. The above texts by St. Augustine, the theologians he influenced, and the others mentioned attest to a deeply embedded sacramental vision of the world in the Christian theological tradition. To attempt to train the sensibilities of anyone who does not adhere to these faith perspectives may be futile.⁷⁵

Beginning from these two presuppositions, the senses can be trained in five steps. The first is to be open to the sacramental quality of all natural entities that are encountered. Not one is seen, touched, smelled, heard, or tasted without reference to God's active presence or anticipation of revealing some aspect of God's character. Reactions of wonder, awe, astonishment, surprise, fascination, and curiosity over other species, vistas, and systems need to be related to God. Sacramental sensing should be practiced so biota and abiota are encountered consistently from a sacramental perspective. Throughout, emphasis is placed on striving to be open to the sacramental quality of natural systems and on practicing sacramental sensing skills. This training aims to condition the individual to anticipate God at every encounter with natural entities and to express gratitude for this entry level into experiencing the sacred.

Sacramental sensibility training moves subsequently to an awareness of self in relation to the subject sensed. In this second step, initial sensations from the sacramental encounter are geared toward wondering about oneself in relation to the sensible other, wondering about the greater reality within which oneself and the sensible other exist in time and place, and wondering about God, who continuously upholds and empowers forth the dynamic existence of all beings. Feeling small and humble within the greater reality before Ultimate Reality is encouraged. Demoning natural beings is avoided. Pausing before taking action becomes routine.

Wondering about self-other relatedness leads to the quest for information about the relationship of oneself to the sensible other and our shared creaturely relationship to God. Among the findings pursued in this next training step are basic scientific facts about the sensed: its needs to sustain itself; its interests in flourishing; its surroundings; its functioning in relation to the sensing self and others in its shared space; any competing needs, interests, and dependencies; actual human needs for the sensed to sustain oneself, family, and community; and the needs of the poor and vulnerable that are not met. More expansive findings to be sought in-

clude the relationship of the particulars about the entity sensed and the larger ecological setting that manifests God's presence and character more fully; the evolutionary history of their relationships, which conveys God's empowerment of beings to emerge and function; and the real or possible effects of alternative actions on the sensed, its surroundings, the larger ecosystem, and other human sensors now and into the future that could impede sensing God's presence and character. The need to know these relationships to the greatest possible extent is drilled so inquiry prefaces every response to an encounter with the individual of a species, a habitat, or a vista to assure that they can continue to manifest God's presence.

The ongoing degradation of the natural environment requires the fourth stage of training—developing the skill to recognize impediments to sensing God's presence and beginning to perceive God's goodness, wisdom, self-limiting power, generosity, freedom-giving, humility, caring, and patience. The manifestation of God's empowering matter and energy to diversify, to become more complex, to live, to behold, and to respond to God's self-revelation is impeded by human actions that deter diversification, complexification, and life's thriving. The manifestation of God's freedom-giving is stunted by human interference with the organization of ecosystems and the biosphere to develop and function. The manifestation of God's humility in allowing diverse beings to emerge with respect and without interference is defaced by self-serving and speciesistic manipulation. The manifestation of God's generosity is thwarted by human actions that degrade natural systems and extinguish species at incredibly rapid rates. The manifestation of God's providential caring is disrupted when components of ecosystems, the air, land, water, and biota are destroyed and their harmonious functioning for the good of the whole is prevented. The manifestation of God's patience is obliterated by human impatience propelled by the desire for short-term, self-centered gains that impede the ability of the poor and vulnerable to sustain themselves.

If training in sacramental sensibility is to be as thorough as possible, readiness to react negatively to ecological abuse is an indispensable fifth step. Among the negative reactions to ecological abuse that are to be solicited and encouraged during this stage of training are

Disgust for a blemished habitat;

Abhorrence of sulfur emissions across an otherwise blue sky, oil washed up on beaches and weighing down the wings of wildlife, silos of high-level radioactive spent fuel along a lakeshore, cattle grazing in an area that had been a lush rainforest, a highway through prime agricultural land;

Alarm when another species is endangered and polar ice caving forcing Indigenous people to flee their ancestral lands;

Lament for the extinction of yet another species and threats to the survival of future generations; and,

Intolerance for racial injustices and human health effects precipitated by ecological abuse.

All five dimensions of sacramental sensitivity training are essential. They are complementary. Together, they constitute a process that should prompt the discernment of a response and putting that response into action.

Especially poignant for this discussion is Bonaventure's thinking about the need to seek and rely on God's help when approaching the physical world. With Bonaventure, faithful persons can recognize the need for God's gift of grace that enables them to experience and know God. With Bonaventure, the faithful can chant: "We cannot rise above ourselves unless a higher power lifts us up." The faithful will recognize that nothing will come of the human being's efforts "unless accompanied by divine aid," aid that is readily available "to those who seek it from their hearts, humbly and devoutly." The faithful can do so by means of a dependent "sigh," a fervent prayer, and a grateful openness to God through the world.⁷⁶

Bonaventure's Augustine-influenced Trinitarian perspective resonates with Pope Francis. In *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*,⁷⁷ the first encyclical dedicated to the human-Earth relationship, the pope exclaimed that "the Trinity has left its mark on all creation" (§239). He continued with a focus on human failure to be open to reading Earth through a Trinitarian lens, pointing to Bonaventure's explanation:

[H]uman beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature "testifies that God is three." The reflection of the Trinity was there to be recognized in nature "when that book was open to man and our eyes had not yet become darkened."⁷⁸ The Franciscan saint teaches us that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key.⁷⁹

Referring subsequently to Thomas Aquinas for his understanding of the interrelationships of creatures that manifest the Trinity,⁸⁰ Pope Francis points to the human fulfillment that can result from opening to the reality of the "interwoven relationships" humans have with other creatures and living in communion with them:

The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend toward God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend toward other things, so that through the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfillment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in [all creatures] when they were created. (§240).

The theme that everything is related rings throughout *Laudato Si'*. Time and space. All living creatures—humans, other animals, and plants. Physical, chemical, and biological systems. Economic, societal, and political concerns. The plight of Earth and the plight of the poor. Everything is interconnected. Ecological problems have social, economic, and political dimensions that are highly complex and require a wider view of reality than any one way of knowing and acting can provide. The pope's advancing this web of relationships as a "Trinitarian dynamism" suggests a parallel with the interrelationship of the three persons in the Blessed Trinity that deserves deep reflection and the development of "a spirituality of . . . global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity" (§240). Developing a sacramental sensibility that can lead to a global solidarity can no longer be avoided. As Augustine and his eminent followers believe, God's abundant grace is available to all to begin the journey from plundering to reverencing Earth.

CONCLUSIONS

St. Augustine's Trinitarian reflections on the sacramentality of creation influenced medieval theologians to delve deeply into the human capacity to experience the presence of God and to begin to sense God's power, goodness, and wisdom. When informed by our current scientific understanding of the world, embracing the sacramental character of the world suggests a promising way through which the faithful can and should approach other animals, the air, land, water, and systems that constitute Earth, as means through which God's presence can be experienced and God can be perceived.

If, as Augustine and theologians inspired by him emphasize, the faithful open to the grace God readily offers and move beyond self-interests to recognize our interconnections with all living and abiotic that constitute Earth, our attitudes and reverential actions will be geared toward functioning in solidarity with them for our mutual flourishing. We will encounter other species, lands, waters, and air regimes with an openness to

their sacramental quality, learn about the subjects of our sacramental encounters in order to reflect more accurately on God's attributes and presence, preserve species and conserve ecosystems in their integrity so they can function and continue to manifest God's presence and character, react cautiously toward other beings when human life and necessities are jeopardized, identify and implement structural ways of relating to ecosystems and the biosphere that avoid impairing their functioning now and into the future, and combat forces that thwart the discernment of Earth's sacramental quality. Throughout, we will be especially conscious of the needs for the poor and vulnerable people and species, now and into the future, and avoid impeding their flourishing. With God's grace stimulating and working within us, we should make strides individually and in solidarity with others to address the loss of biodiversity; the destruction of forests, wetlands, coral reefs, and other ecosystems; and the emission of greenhouse gases that are forcing changes in the global climate which most adversely affect the poor and vulnerable now and in the future. Anything less would indeed be foolish!

NOTES

1. The patristic ("fathers" of the Church) theological period spans approximately 100–450 A.D./C.E., the medieval period covers various stages of theological emphases by Western and Eastern Christian theologians that span the years 500–1500, and the early scientific period roughly spans 1500–1750.

2. Especially Wisdom 13:1–9 and Romans 1:20.

3. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, trans. John Ferguson (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991) 2.2.5.1–5, p. 160. Though God transcends the created world and is "hard to catch" and "hard to hunt down," God draws near and is "close" by the exercise of "power that has enfolded all things in its embrace."

4. Athanasius, *Contra gentes*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 35, pp. 95–97. In *Contra Gentes*, Athanasius (295–373).

5. St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), VI.1, pp. 108–9.

6. Saint Basil of Caesarea, *On the Hexameron*, in *Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way, *Fathers of the Church* 46 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), Homily 1.7, p. 112: "The world is a work of art, set before all for contemplation, so that through it the wisdom of Him who created it should be known." He closed Homily 1 with this prayer:

Let us glorify the Master Craftsman for all that has been done wisely and skillfully; and from the beauty of the visible things let us form an idea of Him who is more than beautiful; and from the greatness of these perceptible and circumscribed bodies let us conceive of Him who is infinite and immense and who surpasses all understanding in the plenitude of His power. For, even if we are ignorant of things made, yet, at least, that which in general comes under our observation is so wonderful that even the most acute mind is shown to be at a loss as regards the least of the things in the world, either in the ability to explain it worthily or to render due praise to the Creator, to whom be all glory, honor, and power forever. Amen.

At the end of Homily 6, pp. 102–3, St. Basil wrote that the entire universe gives glory to God and humans should use their gift of intelligence to study God's creation:

May he who has granted us intelligence to learn of the great wisdom of the artificer from the most insignificant objects of creation permit us to receive loftier concepts of the Creator from the mighty objects of creation. . . . Truly, it is not possible to attain a worthy view of the God of the universe from these things, but to be led on by them, as also by each of the tiniest of plants and animals to some slight and faint impression of Him.

7. See my explorations of varied reflections on the sacramentality of creation by these theologians and others during the patristic, medieval, reformation, early scientific, and modern periods in "Acting Reverently in God's Sacramental World," *Ethical Dilemmas in the New Millennium II*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 2001), 37–90, and *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 65–102.

8. Signed on May 24, 2015, in Vatican City, issued to the public on June 18, 2015, and made accessible at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

9. Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. John O'Meara (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 11.4, p. 432. See also *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), 7.17.23, pp. 175–76, and 9.10.23–25, pp. 221–22; and *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 2.25, pp. 81–82.

10. Most likely Manichees and Neoplatonists with whom he had been engaged sequentially before converting to Christianity.

11. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.2.2, p. 182.

12. Augustine, *On the Psalms*, Ancient Christian Writers 29 (New York: Newman Press, 1960) 272.

13. Augustine, *Confessions* 5.3.5, p. 116, and *City of God* 11.4, p. 432. He distinguishes between the purviews of faith and the rational observation of the world. In *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 114, Carol Harrison points to Augustine's emphasis on the need for the faithful to actively search for God through the world.

14. Augustine, *Confessions* 3.4.10, p. 105.

15. Augustine, *City of God* 11.24, p. 457.

16. Augustine, *City of God*, An allusion to Romans 11.36.

17. Augustine, *The Trinity* 6.10.12, p. 214.

18. Augustine, *The Trinity* 6.10.12, p. 214.

19. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine*, p. 266. Harrison persuasively concludes that Augustine viewed the entirety of God's creation in the human mirror through which its Creator can be seen.

20. Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna, C.S. S.R. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 2.15.25, pp. 81–82.

21. Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, 11.5.8, pp. 326–28. The image of God is thought to be in the human by virtue of the rational soul, which Augustine teaches is nearer to God in its capacity to respond to God's call, to turn to God, to be formed/made beautiful by God, and, thus, to know God to some extent. Also see books 8–10, where he works out a way of defining the human as having been created in the image of God, and books 11–15, where he explains how self-knowledge as image can be turned toward God. He proceeds through various triads until he reaches memory, understanding, and will as the final definition.

22. With other theologians before and after his time, until Alfred Russell Wallace and Charles Darwin shared their findings about the evolution of species, Augustine adhered to the doctrine of fixed species—all types of creatures derive their basic characteristics from God at the beginning of creation.

23. 1 Corinthians 13:12.

24. Augustine, *The Trinity* 6.10.12, pp. 214–215, citing Romans 11.36; a unity composed of a distinction of persons is assumed.

25. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Selected Writings*, trans. G. R. Evans (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), Sermon 5, pp. 227–231. Reflecting on Romans 1.20, Bernard emphasized the indispensable role that the human body and its senses play in the human quest for eternal life with God. “Only through the body does the way, the ascent to the life of blessedness, lie open to us,” he taught, because they provide the initial input about God’s creation that enables the ascent to understanding God.

26. Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, ed. Matthew Fox, trans. Robert Cunningham (Sante Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1987), Vision 1.2.8, pp. 10–11.

27. Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, ed. John Meyendorff, trans. Nicholas Gendle (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 1.1.22, pp. 29–30. See also John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, trans. George Lawrence (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 119.

28. In “Reading the World as Scripture: Hugh of St Victor’s *De Tribus Diebus*,” *Florilegium* 9 (1987): 65–88, Wanda Cizewski suggests that this text might best be read as the contemplative end to Hugh’s *Didascalicon* in which he sets forth a program for studying a whole complex of the traditional arts. He prescribes a particular order that all humankind should follow as a means of relieving the physical weaknesses of earthly life and of restoring that union with the divine Wisdom for which the human being was made, and he teaches that the human’s immortal mind is capable of pursuing systematic study of all things, beginning with the visible.

29. Hugh of St. Victor, “The Three Days of Invisible Light,” trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., Marquette University, June 1996 (cited hereafter as “The Three Days”); quotations used with Fr. Teske’s permission.

30. Hugh of St. Victor, “The Three Days” 3.

31. Hugh of St. Victor, “The Three Days” 1.

32. Hugh of St. Victor, “The Three Days” 4.

33. Psalm 103:24.

34. Psalm 91:5–7.

35. Hugh, “The Three Days” 4.

36. Hugh, “The Three Days” 5.

37. Hugh, “The Three Days” 5

38. Hugh, “The Three Days” 5

39. Hugh, “The Three Days” 6.

40. Hugh, “The Three Days” 7.

41. Hugh, “The Three Days” 8.

42. Hugh, “The Three Days” 9.

43. Hugh, “The Three Days” 12.

44. Hugh, “The Three Days” 12

45. Hugh, “The Three Days” 13.

46. Hugh, “The Three Days” 4 and 12.

47. Hugh, “The Three Days” 14.

48. Hugh, “The Three Days” 14.

49. See Jerome Taylor’s introduction to and translation of Hugh of St. Victor’s *Didascalicon: A Medieval Guide to the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), especially his summation at pp. 29–30.

50. St. Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey into God (Itinerarium mentis in Deum)*, trans. Ewert Cousins, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 59–68.

51. Bonaventure used the Latin term “*speculatio*” (whose root *speculum* means “mirror”) to convey reflection, speculation, contemplation, and consideration. As customary in his use of certain key words, he often intends all of these meanings in a given instance.

52. Literally, footprints.

53. While the meditation on creation in *The Soul's Journey* correlates with Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of Brother Sun" in the sense of wonderment about creation and its signification of God, Bonaventure seems to be more captivated by the intelligible structure of creation and meditates extensively on it in conceptual terms rather than citing specific creatures.

54. Like Augustine and others centuries before, Bonaventure characterizes the universe sometimes as a mirror through which we pass over to God. Although he begins here with the material world as a ladder to God, he climbs up the ladder, leaving the sensible world behind to reach the intellectual state and finally to contemplating God. Some contemporary theologians find this approach problematic because it posits the physical world as valuable only instrumentally as a beginning step to God. For example, see Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 273, and H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 98–102. What these authors fail to recognize is the fact that theologians during the patristic and medieval period valued natural entities as capable of mediating God's presence and character by the very fact of their natures and functioning as intended by God. Furthermore, the ladder to God is grounded in the sensible world where the "climb" begins; thus, the world is indispensable to this task, as is an understanding of the nature and functioning of individual creatures.

55. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey* 1.1, pp. 59–60.

56. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey* 1.10, pp. 63–64.

57. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey* 1.11, p. 64.

58. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey* 1.13, p. 64.

59. Things have a "fullness" in the sense that matter is full of forms since God placed seminal principles (*rationes seminales*) in matter when creating the universe, out of which specific types of creatures emerge in the future. The equivalent of the contemporary understanding of evolutionary biology is not presumed by Bonaventure, nor is it presumed by Augustine, who taught the doctrine of seminal principles.

60. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey* 1.15, pp. 67–68, quoting from and reflecting on Proverbs 22:17.

61. For example, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.47.1.

62. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.39; also 44–45 and 3.69 and 144.10. See also *Summa theologiae* 1.15.2 and 1.22.1–2.

63. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.64. See also *Summa theologiae* 1.47.2. In #240 of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis refers to Aquinas's understanding of the interwoven web of relationships that constitute the universe that parallel the three persons of God.

64. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 3.112; also see 3.113 and 145, where he explains that the entirety of the orderly creation of diverse beings is ordered ultimately to the uncreated good who is God. As rational beings endowed with free will, humans are intended by God to will their use of all creatures for knowledge and sustenance of their bodies ultimately to God. See further *Summa theologiae* 1.47.2, 2|2.83.6 and 118.1 ad 1, and *Compendium theologiae* 173. In *Summa contra Gentiles* 1.92, he evaluates this limited human use of other creatures as "right use."

65. For example, see Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.44–45.

66. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2|2.180.4; see further 3.60 and Supp. 91.

67. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 3.60.4.

68. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 3.60.2.

69. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 3.60.4.

70. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.45.7.

71. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.45.7.

72. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.45.7.

73. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.1–3.

74. Especially see John F. Haught's theological approach to the future unfolding of the universe in *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993).

75. In *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) xiii, John Hart insists insightfully that people who are open spiritually to the sacramentality of a place are able to see the signs of the divine presence through it.

76. Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey* 1.1, pp. 59–60.

77. Signed on May 24, 2015, in Vatican City, issued to the public on June 18, 2015, and made accessible at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

78. Pope Francis references Bonaventure's "*Quaest. Disp. de Myst. Trinitatis*, 1, 2 concl"; consult the English translation of Bonaventure's *Disputed Questions on the Mystery of the Trinity* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1979).

79. Bonaventure may have been influenced by Augustine, who lamented the human limitations and self-centered tendencies to value other creatures and to know their purposes. As he wrote in *City of God* 12.4, humans are gifted with intellectual abilities, but our entrenchment in a part of the universe and condition as mortal beings prevents us from comprehending the universe in its entirety. Only God has this comprehensive ability. Nevertheless, he continued, humans should overcome their narrow-mindedness and self-centeredness as manifested by judging negatively some natural beings and forces that cause personal discomforts, consider the natures of things in themselves without regard to their convenience or inconvenience, their pleasantness or unpleasantness, their comfort or discomfort, and should praise God for all aspects of the physical world and never "in the rashness of human folly" allow themselves to find fault in any way with the work of the "great Artificer." For Augustine, humans must have confidence in God's overall design, God's continuing care, and God's purpose for all things that comprise the universe.

80. Pope Francis refers here to Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.11. 3, 1.21.1 ad 3 and 1.47.3.