

“There is Only a Single Life in all Living Things”:

Medieval Ecological Contemplation in John of Hildesheim’s *Speculum fontis vitae*

Introduction

The theme of ecological contemplation sounds very appealing to our modern ears, given the steady rise of an ever greater and ever more urgent ecological awareness not just within the realms of economics, politics, and science, but also within the realms of philosophy, theology, and spirituality. With the case of humanity’s lasting impact on the environment nearing a dangerous precipice, a point of no return we are told, becoming ecologically conscious is no longer a matter of alternative off-the-grid lifestyles accessible only to the few, but truly a responsibility to be shouldered by each human individual for the good of all creation. Indeed, Pope Francis has called for an ecological conversion, which makes any argument for ecological sustainability not just a matter of economics or political powers but, perhaps more importantly, a matter of the soul. The act

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of returning to simplicity, natural rhythms, integrity, and spirituality is, hence, the ecological path forward that this paper contemplates.

In her study on ecological activism in the context of secular spirituality, Lois K. Daly speaks of two contrasting approaches when it comes to discussing humanity's relationship with nature, namely, an anthropocentric one and a biocentric one. Anthropocentrism assumes that human beings are fundamentally different from all other creatures, they can choose their own goals and learn to do what it takes to achieve them. On the other hand, biocentrism calls into attention the interdependencies among all forms of life. It sees the living planet as something to be cherished for its intrinsic value, not for its utility. In this case, humans are seen as a part of nature and not set apart from it.¹ Whereas Daly sees these two approaches as radically opposed to each other, the Christian ecological sensibility does not. Proof of this comes not only from recent papal pronouncements and other official texts that are published by the Holy See² but also – and this is the real contribution of this paper – from ancient ecological texts.

One such text is by the fourteenth-century German Carmelite scholar John of Hildesheim (c.1310-1375), called *Speculum fontis vitae* (“The Mirror of the Source of Life” – hereafter, *Speculum*).³ Read from an ecological perspective, the text envisages a middle way between the truth that humanity is called to be the custodian of creation and the other truth that the rest of creation is our common home to which we all belong. As Pope Francis appeals in his encyclical *Laudato si'*, an “integral ecology [...] takes us to the heart of what it is to be human,” which is why we are “called to care for all that exists.” To care is to “feel intimately united with all that exists,” and, hence, to prevent ourselves from becoming “masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on [our] immediate needs.”⁴ It

¹ See Lois K. Daly, “Ecological Activism,” in *Spirituality and the Secular Quest*, ed. Peter H. van Ness (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 446-447.

² Pontifical Academy for Life, “*Humana Communitas* in the Era of the Pandemic: Untimely Reflections on the Rebirth of Life,” 22 July 2020. <http://www.academyforlife.va/content/pav/en/the-academy/activity-academy/humana-communitas-in-the-age-of-pandemic---july-22-2020.html> (accessed on 2 July 2021).

³ The original manuscript is preserved in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford: Ms. Laud. lat. 49, f. 167v-176v. A transcription of the original Latin text as well as an English translation were edited by Frank Schaer from the Department of Medieval Studies at the Central European University, Budapest, and can be accessed online at <https://the-orb.arlima.net/encyclop/culture/philos/fonsintro.html>.

⁴ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (24 May 2015), n.11, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 107, no.9 (2015): 851-852.

is precisely with this call to ecological integrity in mind that this paper proposes the *Speculum* as a source for new contemporary contextualisations of medieval sensibilities.

Constructing a Profile of John of Hildesheim

John (of Hildesheim), not to be confused with the famous preacher Johannes Rehes, the Augustinian Canon also from Hildesheim who later joined the Premonstratensian monks in Magdeburg,⁵ was a Carmelite theologian and writer who was born presumably between 1310 and 1320 in Brühl, a quarter in the city of Hildesheim, and died in 1375 in Marienau (present day Coppenbrügge), Germany. Little is known about his life. As a boy, he attended the Latin School *Andreanum* in Hildesheim, under the tutorship of Johannes Corvus. Having entered at a young age the Carmelite priory of Marienau, the only Carmelite priory in Lower Saxony, where he took his vows, he then proceeded to study at the prestigious *Studium Generale* (college for advanced studies) of the Order in Avignon between 1351 and 1355 with (St) Peter Thomas (d. 1366) who was Regent of Studies there at the time. During this time, being the Procurator of the Lower German Province, he was instrumental for the foundation of a new Carmelite monastery in Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) in 1354. In 1358, he was sent to the University of Paris to read for a baccalaureate in Biblical Studies, which he completed in 1361. That same year, having left Paris, at the Provincial Chapter of Köln he was assigned to the monastery of Kassel where he would serve as prior and lector. Later, having been assigned to the priory of Strasbourg between 1364 and 1368, in 1366 we find him to be prior and *lector principalis*. A short trip to Rome in 1367 resulted in a private audience with Pope Urban V thanks to Luca de Penna, secretary to the pope. From a letter that Hildesheim sent to the chancellor of Emperor Charles IV, we know that he was invited to dine with the pope as well as attend to other duties that the *pontifex* had to carry out. Later on, after a short while in Speyer (after 1368) where he served as lector, he became the prior of his native monastery in Marienau where he would remain until his death on 5 May 1375.⁶

⁵ See Iohannes Busch, *Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de Reformatione Monasteriorum*, herausgegeben von der Historischen Commission der Provinz Sachsen, bearbeitet von Dr. Karl Grube (Halle: Druck und Verlag von Otto Hendel, 1886), 509, 515, 808.

⁶ See Helmut van Jan, “Johannes von Hildesheim,” in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, herausgegeben von der Historische Kommission bei der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1974), 10:554; Joachim Smet, “Jean de Hildesheim,” in *Dictionnaire de*

In the brief entry in the *Neue Deutsche Biographie* dedicated to John of Hildesheim, Helmut van Jan mentions only *en passant* the fact that our author conducted a lively correspondence with many leading men of his time, particularly at home where he often mediated between the Bishop of Hildesheim and the Duke of Braunschweig.⁷ Although it is true that our knowledge of him has largely developed only recently – mainly in the last few decades, through the crucial publication of his letters in 1957 (at least the codex found to be divided between the Staatsbibliothek of Berlin and the Bibliothèque Municipale of Arras),⁸ – we are able to appreciate more realistically the fourteenth-century social context that shaped our author’s life and treatises, as well as catch a glimpse of him in the first person, more so than in the otherwise formal language of his treatises. Based on these letters and papers, Rudolf Hendriks outlines his life in greater detail than any other author, second perhaps to Jacobus Milendunck (d. 1682) whose laborious study of our author is still preserved in manuscript form at the Stadtarchiv of Frankfurt.⁹ In so doing, we are able to construct a profile of the friar who was behind some of the most original writings in the Carmelite Order.

In his introductory study to the register of Hildesheim’s letters and papers, Hendriks points out that the letters reveal a man who was well connected to the upper social classes of his time, from bishops to dukes, to other nobles and elites, and even popes, giving us reason to believe that his family hailed from the same circles. Also, the fact that his father approved of him joining the Carmelite Order¹⁰ and did not force his son to defend the honour of his family crest in battle, which was all too common at the time, might possibly entail a religiously inclined upbringing, possibly even as a consequence of a tragic recent past that befell the family, according to Hendriks, due to “the constant strife over the occupation of the see of Hildesheim.”¹¹ Hildesheim even brought over some of his social standing to the religious life when he was sent by his provincial to the papal curia at Avignon in the latter half of 1353 to plead the case with Pope Innocent VI for the opening of another Carmelite priory. The priory in Aachen

Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique: Doctrine et Histoire, ed. M. Viller et al. (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974), 8:553.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 554.

⁸ Rudolf Hendriks, “A Register of the Letters and Papers of John of Hildesheim, O.Carm. (d. 1375),” *Carmelus* 4, no.1 (1957): 116-235.

⁹ See “Scripta et monumenta Jacobi Milendunck Carmelita,” Frankfurt am Main, Stadtarchiv, cod. C 47a-e.

¹⁰ See: Letters 23 and 35, in *ibid.*, 155-160, 203-204.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

was, indeed, founded only a few months after this papal audience with a decree issued by the pope on 4 February 1354.¹²

Hildesheim's work was mainly teaching Sacred Scriptures, in Paris, in Kassel, in Strasbourg, in Speyer, and then in Marienau. Interestingly, Hildesheim laments in Letter 37 (dated around Pentecost 1366) taking up office (the priorate), referring to his state in the very indicative adjectives “exacerbated” and “unfavourable.”¹³ Might it be the case that his reluctance to take up office, which he did nevertheless in order not to create problems for the newly-elected provincial, is indicative of the fact that his natural inclination was always his ministry as lector? If this is the case, and this is somewhat confirmed by the profound philosophical and theological expositions that are discussed in his treatises together with his original takes and sometimes even controversial points of view, then Hildesheim would come across as very much organised in thought and work.¹⁴ He was well-versed not only in the field of biblical studies but also in the Greek and Latin literature of the great classical poets and philosophers (Virgil, Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Ovid, Horace, Lucian) and of other ecclesiastical writers (Augustine, Jerome, Bernard, John of Salisbury, John of Altavilla), and, as we shall see further on, willing to discuss both mainstream as well as peripheral ideas in the theology and philosophy of his time, unafraid to address the pressing issues of his time.¹⁵ In fact, in his obituary, his life is remembered precisely in terms of his teaching career, and of having died while being “a most vigilant prior” of his “conventus natus” of Marienau.¹⁶ Joachim Smet sums up Hildesheim's

¹² Ibid., 126.

¹³ “Est et aliud, quod multipharie mestitiam michi multiplicat, et sauciate mentis intima radicitus exacerbat. Hiis enim, a quibus miseria conventus, quasi ex utero progenita prodiit, pro libito recipiunt quasi virtutum premia, et in eorum fecibus michi balnea, non naturalia sed infausta preparantur.” Letter 37, in *ibid.*, 207.

¹⁴ Hendriks demonstrates that Hildesheim himself had in mind the idea to publish the codex as a single volume, in the form of a *rapiarium*, that is, a collection of notes and sayings written down for later rumination. He comes to this conclusion on the basis of its coherent structure as well as the similar handwriting in both of its parts. More importantly, in Letter 46 (lines 62-65), addressed to a “most renowned compatriot,” Hildesheim says that he is preparing a new volume containing some of his letters and papers for the “glory of the land and simultaneously for the felicitous preservation of the people's memory.” Also, in a marginal note in Letter 43, he refers to that letter as “already being in the great volume.” Letters 43 and 46, in *ibid.*, 214, 221.

¹⁵ For instance, twice he reprimands Martinus de Praga, the Vicar General to the Bishop of Strasbourg, saying that “grave reasons and sentences are positively driving out the Mendicant Religious Orders, whose minimal jurisdictional subjects, both clerics and secular, live in depraved places in desperate need of reform.” *Ibid.*, 133 (translation ours).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

profile most succinctly as “a humanist of refined and carefully crafted language and of a profound literary and poetic thought.”¹⁷

The first scholar to compile a list of Hildesheim’s works was a fellow Carmelite, Arnaldo Bostius, who in *De Illustribus Viris Ordinis* (1475) mentions the following works: *Fons Vitae*, *De Antichristo*, *De Tribus Regis* (the attribution of “The Three Kings of Cologne” to Hildesheim is uncertain), *Contra Iudaeos*, *Contra Quemdam Turpia Pingentem*, *De Modernis Monstruosis Abusionibus*, *Liber Epistolarum LXXX* (more precisely, the “magnus volumen” or register in the form of a *rapiarium* published by Hendriks), and *Dialogus inter Directorem et Detractorem de Ordine Carmelitarum*.¹⁸ Throughout the centuries, as new discoveries have continued to be made, the list has also continued to expand and today includes further works such as: *Speculum Fontis Vitae*, *Sermones*, *Tractatus de Schismatibus*, *Chronicon Temporum*, *Opusculum Metricum*, *Acrostica*, and, lastly, *Legendae Abbreviatae*.

***Speculum fontis vitae*: Text and Contexts**

Within the context of the Carmelite 800-year-old spiritual tradition, in which the likes of such a text as Hildesheim’s *Speculum* are truly rare, Paul Chandler poses the tactical question of whether the text “is an eccentric and individual work without parallels elsewhere, or does it suggest new avenues of contextualisations for Carmelite spirituality in the 14th century?”¹⁹ It is, indeed, this very question that this paper sets out to explore.

The *Speculum* is divided into thirteen chapters or headings, and is composed of 141 succinct phrases, propositions, or even aphorisms, similar in form to

¹⁷ Smet, “Jean de Hildesheim,” 554. Hildesheim’s reputation as an accomplished humanist is endorsed by several other scholars. See Thomas Schauerte, “Johannes von Hildesheim,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. G. Dunphy (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 926.

¹⁸ See Arnoldu Bostius, “De illustribus viris ordinis beatissimae Dei Genetricis Virginis Mariae de monte Carmelo,” in *Speculum Carmelitanum sive historia eliani ordinis fratrum beatissimae Virginis Mariae de monte Carmelo, in qua S. Patris Eliae vita, elianorum acta sanctorum, catalogus antistitum, illustrium series virorum, qua doctrina, qua pietate spectatorum pie, fideque repraesentantur: Ac circa festum solennis commemoracionis novelli cujusdam hallucinationes dispelluntur*, ed. Danielem a Virgine Mariae (Antuerpiae: Typis Michaelis Knobbari, 1680), 2:892.

¹⁹ Paul Chandler, “Contemplation in John of Hildesheim,” paper presented at *The Second Seminar on the Contemplative Dimension of Carmel (14th-15th Centuries)* (Institutum Carmelitanum, Rome, 19 January 2013), 6. *pro manuscripto*. Chandler describes the *Speculum* as “a very curious work” and, while citing Frank Schaefer’s introduction to the work, discloses his inability “to say whether it corresponds with any particular genre.” *Ibid.*, 4.

other medieval *specula* aiming at summarising knowledge in a particular field in a single *opus*.²⁰ In certain ways, it also presents similarities to a slightly later literary genre, the *rapiarium*.²¹ Although a clear structure is perhaps lacking, it is rather evident that the text makes four essential points, a number which was very much symbolic of perfection in the High Middle Ages. We enlist them as follows:²²

A. Mirroring

Ch. 1 The Living Source

Ch. 2-4 Creation in its manifold conditions and relations

B. Bodily and spiritual sustenance

Ch. 5-7 Food for sustenance and for worship

Ch. 8 Death through sin and the consequent redemption narrative

²⁰ By way of example one can mention here the *Speculum Vitae*, an English poem explaining the Ten Commandments, the seven sacraments, and the seven deadly sins, written c. 1350-1375 and translated in verse from the *Somme le Roi* of Lorens d'Orléans. See Ralph Hanna ed., *Speculum Vitae: A Reading Text*. Early English Text Society Original Series, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Venetia Nelson (Somerset), *The Middle English Speculum Vitae: A Critical Edition of Part of the Text from Thirty-five Manuscripts*, 2 vols. (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1974). The original manuscript is preserved in the Wollaton Library Collection (Literary and Theological Medieval Manuscripts) at Wollaton Hall (WLC/LM/9, ff. 1-247).

²¹ *Rapiaria*, usually characteristic of the *Devotio Moderna* movement, are writings in the form of notes or quotations which capture succinctly the thought of the author. Ulrike Hasher-Burger notes that through this type of writing, the *Devout* sought to intensify their piety with the help of such personally compiled books (*rapiaria*) and to promote their spiritual growth with their help. *Rapiaria* include individual *puncta*, excerpts from books and sermons, prayers and songs that served the owners as an always accessible basis for meditation and spiritual growth. Song collections also had a function during meditation, but little is known about their practical application. See Ulrike Hasher-Burger, “Notation, Devotion, und Emotion in Spätmittelalterlichen Andachtsbüchern aus dem Kloster Medingen,” *Musica Disciplina* 55 (2010): 33-73. We have already noted, in the case of Hildesheim’s “magnus volumen” of letters and papers, his technique of compiling pithy texts for teaching and reflection. This is a typically mendicant form of composition, useful for friars’ preaching and pastoral work. Examples in the English vernacular are highlighted by Johan Bergström-Allen, *Promoting and Policing Religious Speculation: The Vernacular Literature of the Carmelite Order in Medieval England*, PhD Thesis, Université de Lausanne (2017), https://serval.unil.ch/resource/serval:BIB_A6D737498FBA.P001/REF.pdf.

²² The four essential points and chapter summaries are our own.

C. Bodily and spiritual qualities of life

- Ch. 9 The virtuous life prolongs life, vice shortens it
 Ch. 10 Some places are dwelt only by the incorruptible life
 Ch. 11 A living creature does not entirely cease to exist, even after death

D. Bodily and spiritual transformation

- Ch. 12 Vice transforms rational beings into beasts which detest inanimate life
 Ch. 13 Transformation in glory, resurrection of the body, as a consequence of a life lived in grace

Essentially, Hildesheim's *Speculum* aims at presenting the three aspects of natural life, namely, the physical, the rational, and the spiritual. The conceptual framework which, so to speak, encases the picture that Hildesheim is depicting of this life, is his insistence that there is one Life Source that is the giver of life. As this Source is infinite, transcendental, and omnipotent, it encompasses all that exists and is alive. In fact, the point of departure in the *Speculum* is a definition of the Life Source as intrinsically fecund in its perfection. The first statement in chapter one opens by saying that, "There is one sole omnipotent transcendent boundless intelligent Life Source, in its essence consisting in and of itself, of life and of what is alive" (§1). At the end of the *Speculum* the same reference to the uniqueness of the Life Source is reiterated, "There is only a single life in all living things, and it is perpetuated by the Life Source, each life form partaking of it according to its capacity" (§141). The first and last propositions thus appear to form an *inclusio* that encapsulates the rest of the text, which we are assuming is an elaboration of this one fundamental, initial, and concluding statement.

Furthermore, echoing John Scotus Erigena, who in his *Periphyseon* (IV, 9, 780B) considers man in terms of the foundational tension between the perfect creation of man and the consequences in him of original sin,²³ one cannot but

²³ "If you look more closely into the mutual relation and unity which exist between intelligible and rational natures [*intellectualium et rationabilium naturam*], you will at once find that not only is the angelic nature established in the human but also the human is established in the angelic. For it is created in everything of which the pure intellect has the most perfect knowledge and becomes one with it. *So closely indeed were the human and angelic natures associated, and so it would be now if the first man had not sinned, that the two would have become one.* [...] Moreover, the angel is made in man, through the understanding of angel which is in man, and man is in the angel through the understanding of man which is established in the angel. For, as I have said, he who has a pure understanding is created in that which he understands. So, the intelligible and

help notice that the *inclusio* of the *Speculum* is also part of the theological contrast that is created between the first and the last chapters, entitled respectively, “De vivi fontis intrinseca fecunda perfectione” and “De corruptibilis vivi diversa finali resolutione.” The former speaks specifically of “fruitful perfection” while the latter speaks of “corruptible dissolution.” It is our belief that these two opposite polarities constitute the methodological field of tension that is felt in the entire text, wherein Hildesheim struggles to bring together, on the one hand, the creative outpouring of life from the Life Source and, on the other hand, as Chandler puts it, “the existence of imperfect life forms, the harmful, poisonous, the monstrous, the perverse.” Again, Chandler asks tactfully, “How do they come to be, and how does one explain the strange interactions between humans and other forms of life?”²⁴ Hildesheim is hence showing that the Life Source is inherently perfect and consisting in itself and of what is alive, while that which is alive is corruptible and breaks down. What ultimately is and remains in itself is the Life Source itself and everything else remains only in it. Hildesheim writes, “It necessarily follows that every living thing has its life from this Source on such terms that no life form can exist that does not have its life from it” (§7). Between these two inclusive polarities, the *Speculum* presents itself as a theological narrative, so to speak, extolling the story of salvation which is unfolding before the contemplative gaze of the reader.

As a matter of fact, the narrative of the *Speculum* (similar to his *Chronicon Temporum*) is reminiscent of other codices of the time, like the *Annales Hildesheimenses* – which painstakingly argues that the historical roots of the Saxon House go back to the creation story recounted in Gen. 1, – as Hildesheim places the roots of creation in the Genesis narrative.²⁵ Chronicle writing in medieval Germany was a major turning point in eleventh-century Central European

rational nature of the angel is created in the intelligible and rational nature of man just as the nature of man is created in the nature of angel, through the mutual knowledge by which angel understands man and man angel.” See John Scotus Erigena, *Periphyseon: Division of Nature*, 428 (emphasis ours). Indeed, the distinction in the *Speculum* between the “intelligent” and the “rational” life further establishes the *Speculum*’s bond with Erigena. In §1 the Life Source is the “one sole omnipotent transcendent *intelligent* life.” Like in Erigena, in §11 we are given to understand that “intelligent” is a synonym of “angelic.” In §13 the “intelligent life” flows immediately from the first one (i.e., from the Life Source). In §15, in the first instant, the Life Source produced intelligent life, and through it produced corruptible life. Finally, in §19 we are given to understand it as a synonym of “spiritual.”

²⁴ Chandler, “Contemplation in John of Hildesheim,” 4.

²⁵ See: *Annales Hildesheimenses in usum scholarum ex monumentis Germaniae historicis recusi*, ed. Georgius Waitz (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1878).

historiography, as it created the first literary works that put man at the centre and apex of God's creation. This lent itself well to the later rise of the humanist and renaissance optimism towards humanity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Hildesheim lived precisely in the middle of this chrono-literary humanist revival, which, again, might explain why he chose to complement the *Fons vitae*²⁶ with the *Speculum fontis vitae*, starting with the same Genesis story that was commonly quoted at the beginning of such writings. As R. Graeme Dunphy comments, aspiring to completeness, the writing of *chronica, series, annales*, etc. became popular "partly because it satisfied the medieval penchant for amassing information, and partly because it so nearly reflects the pattern of salvation history that lies at the heart of all Christian thinking." In fact, chronicles did not only enlist genealogies and dates, but also narratives, and even cosmological surveys of the world, the *imago mundi*.²⁷ In this regard, particularly striking is the similarity between the underlying anthropological principle of Hildesheim's *Speculum* and an idea which is remarked upon in the eleventh-century *Annolied*, which reads,

God divided all His works in two.
This world is one part,
the other is spiritual.
Then God in His wisdom and skill
blended the two to make a single work,

²⁶ It still remains unclear to us whether the text referred to as *Fons vitae* in Bostius' bibliographical compilation of Hildesheim's works (as referred to earlier) is actually his or, if we are to go by Hendriks' opinion, it is by another author altogether, for instance, Solomon ibn Gabirol (also known as Avencebrol or Avicebron), b. 1021, d. approx. 1060, a medieval Jewish philosopher believed to be Christian well into the Modern age, whose *Fons vitae*, quite like Hildesheim's text here, ponders the cosmo-ontological implications of the Life Source and creation. See Hendriks, "Register," 120. For more on ibn Gabirol's cosmology, see Sarah Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Sarah Pessin, "Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicebron]," *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, last modified 23 September 2010. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-gabirol/>; (accessed on 17 March 2021). Ze'ev Strauss, "Meister Eckhart Reading Ibn Gabirol's *Fons vitae*," in *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies 2019*, ed. Yoav Meyrav (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020), 65-99.

²⁷ See R. Graeme Dunphy, "Historical Writing in and after the Old High German Period," in *German Literature of the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Brian Murdoch (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 2:208-212. Several medieval Carmelites are known to have written *chronica* and *annales*, including Jean de Venette (c.1307-70); Nicholas Cantilupe (d. 1441); Roger Alban (d. 1453+); Robert Poppleton (d. 1368+); Thomas Scrope (c.1400-91/2); Johannes a Leydis (fl. c.1465-1500); Poul Helgesen [Paulus Helie] (c.1485-1534).

the human being,
who is both body and spirit,
and, for this reason, is closest to the angels (2:5-12).²⁸

Therefore, sacred and secular histories meet and blend in “the first, perfect man” (§21). Against this backdrop, it can be argued that Hildesheim’s treatise can indeed be described as an exercise in natural theology wherein divine traces (*vestigia Dei*) in humanity can be contemplated.²⁹ This contemplation is only possible because “in the final stages of the process (of bringing forth life), the Life Source brought forth a rational creature whose bodily part was subject to dissolution but whose intelligent part was eternal” (§19). This rational creature (humanity), that is, “the sole life form endowed with reason, was produced by the decree, the senatorial decree, so to speak, of the three Persons” (§21).

Actually, not only in human beings, but “the Life Source which produced this first outflow [*emanationis prime*] poured life into beings [*esse vivum*] through the outpouring of itself” (§12). Like Hildesheim, Augustine and Bonaventure had purported earlier that we find divine signs or imprints (*vestigia Dei*) in all creation. “So, the outpouring must continue, for if it were checked [*restringeret*] for an instant, all created life would cease to exist” (*ibid.*). Everything surrounding us reveals the divine, or in Hildesheim’s terms, reveals the Life Source. Through a contemplative view of creation, one can behold as if in a mirror the Life Source itself.³⁰ In fact, Chandler sees in the text “a sustained effort to discover what is intelligible in the world and in human life, and to relate to its beginning and

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 215.

²⁹ “The doctrine that there are *vestigia dei*, divine traces in all things, maintained that the most perfect traces were caused by the *immanence of God in man*, like more definite footprints on damp sand, depending upon the capacities of the damper sand to take and retain better impressions. To make use of the *vestigia dei* doctrine we do not need to accept the assumption that the world and mankind are effects of God or that human capacities are actually revelatory of the nature of reality, but only need to acknowledge that there is something about our *self-understanding* which is *indicative* of what we conceive of as the *possibilities of reality*.” James F. Ross, “An Impasse on Competing Descriptions of God,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8, no.4 (1977): 244 (emphases in text).

³⁰ In an entirely different time and place, Russian Orthodox priest Pavel Florensky, in the early 20th century, would agree with such theological assessment of creation. In his seminal work *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, echoing and perhaps explaining more clearly the doctrine that all of creation is endowed with a divine trace, he writes, “This [mystical] relation to creation [Rus. *мвараъ*] became conceivable only when people saw in creation not merely a demonic shell, not an emanation of Divinity, not some illusory appearance of God, like a rainbow in a spray of water, but an independent, autonomous, and responsible creation of God, beloved of God, and capable of responding to His love.” Pavel Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in*

its end.”³¹ He places the *Speculum* in the wider context of the Victorine writers of the twelfth century who revived the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and his Plotinian and Neoplatonist heritage, thanks to whom the “ancient emphasis on the mystical dimension of the contemplation of the intelligible” was revived.³²

Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters, trans. Boris Jakim and intro. Richard Gustafson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 210.

³¹ Chandler, “Contemplation in John of Hildesheim,” 5.

³² *Ibid.*, 3. Chandler’s assessment of (Neo-) Platonism being “revived” close to Hildesheim’s time thanks to the Victorine School of Paris is only partially correct as it does not really underline enough the tension that was felt between Aristotelian theology, considered in Hildesheim’s Scholastic period to be the mainstream strand of Catholic theology, and Platonist theology, which was still considered peripheral yet very much significant at the time in mystical circles. Ernst Kantorowicz describes this context most vividly, “Plato’s rule over the mediaeval mind was sound; but it was noiseless. Plato was not greeted by any spectacular *entrée joyeuse* with a flourish of trumpets such as greeted Aristotle when he conquered and mesmerized the occidental mind in the thirteenth century; and when he finally made his official appearance in the Renaissance he was received, as it were, with the respectful and solemn silence which was essential to the hypostasis of the Logos. Moreover, Plato in the Middle Ages rarely exercised his power in a direct way through his own works. He was effective, in a refracted way, through the works of others, while he himself remained in the background or appeared in disguise.” Ernst H. Kantorowicz, “Plato in the Middle Ages,” *The Philosophical Review* 51, no.3 (1942): 314. Perhaps this could have been because until Hildesheim’s time, very few of Plato’s dialogues had been translated into Latin. *Timaeus* and fragments from *The Republic* had survived from the early Middle Ages. Later on, in the twelfth century, translations were made in Sicily of *Meno* and *Phaedo*. Around the same time, with the onset of small cathedral schools, such as in Chartres (Thierry and Bernard de Chartres) and on the outskirts of Paris (the Victorines) as well as, a century later, the Franciscan School, finding support also from the Carmelite School (both Schools being markedly affective and mystical), conditions became more favourable for Platonism, but then mainstream philosophy had already been established at the main European universities in Aristotelian conceptuality. In truth, notwithstanding the scarcity of Plato’s texts up to Hildesheim’s times, Raymond Klibansky’s monumental project in the twentieth century of compiling the *Corpus Platonicum* (consisting of both Plato’s dialogues as well as the vast number of commentaries) shows just how consistent Plato’s thought continued to be in all parts of the known Medieval world (the Arab Orient, the Byzantine East, and the Latin West). Rather than simply judging a view to be Platonic or Neoplatonist, Klibansky argues, in fact, that medieval Platonism is “neither the doctrine of Plato nor that of Plotinus or Proclus, but, based on Hellenistic thought, nourished by the religious experience, Christian, Jewish, or Islamic, of later centuries, and intimately fused with teachings from Stoic and other philosophies is, in fine, something new and individual, difficult to bring under a simple heading.” *Ibid.*, 315. Thus, a religious medieval Platonism is clearly at the heart of Hildesheim’s *Speculum*. While the text is cut off from mainstream Aristotelian theology, it visibly struggles to find a way of reconciling Platonism with orthodox religious doctrines. For a greater appreciation of the development of Platonism in the Middle Ages, see Jan A. Aertsen, “Platonism,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, eds., Robert Pasnau and Christina van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1:76-85; Étienne Gilson, *History of*

Here, contemplation becomes also “a path to true insight into reality, including self-knowledge, and insight into one’s true place in the universe.”³³

Thus, Hildesheim’s *Speculum* can be considered as a contemplative exercise pointing to this mirroring of the Life Source, the originator of all kinds of life, in creation. Through this exercise, the “integrity, unity, and indivisibility of every living thing” (§14) emerges as the manifestation of the “one sole omnipotent transcendent boundless intelligent” Life Source (§1). Intertextually speaking, describing this Life Source, or the Truth, in more detail but in similar holistic terms, Pavel Florensky would write much later, “The Truth carries in itself the whole fullness of the infinite series of its grounds.” In other words, the Life Source, or the Truth, as it “illuminates both itself and the whole universe,” is the “unity of opposites.” The Truth is always “answerable” and all the answers “are not linked to one another externally, but are woven into an integral, inwardly fused unity.”³⁴ For Hildesheim in the *Speculum*, as it is then reworded in Florensky, creation is this “living wholeness” emerging from one’s contemplative “attention to the actual objects of the external world.”³⁵ The Life Source “approaches us directly through phenomena, namely through appearances or forms which constitute our experience”³⁶ and which in turn elicit our approaching it. Through this contemplative perspective, one clearly perceives Divine Wisdom permeating and penetrating every living thing as reality’s principle of unity.³⁷ Positively, this unity is characterised by harmony as there are various strata or levels of reality and “every phenomenon reflects in itself all other phenomena.”³⁸ Therefore, this unity is both living and vital. It is realised, first, in the “aforementioned triple entity” of the Trinitarian Godhead which is “in essence, universally and ineffably one living thing” (§4), and which “necessarily follows that every living thing has its life from this Source” (§7).

Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 93-94, 97-105, 113-127, 139-152, 164-180.

³³ Chandler, “Contemplation in John of Hildesheim,” 3.

³⁴ Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth*, 33-34.

³⁵ Charlò Camilleri, “Pavel Aleksandrovič Florenskij’s Lectures on the Christian Worldview,” *Melita Theologica* 69, no.1 (2019): 96.

³⁶ Charlò Camilleri, “Pavel Aleksandrovič Florenskij’s Method of Discerning Spiritual Truth,” *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 17 (2013): 240.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Pavel Florensky, *At the Crossroads of Science & Mysticism: On the Cultural-Historical Place and Premises of the Christian World-Understanding*, trans. and ed. Boris Jakim (Kettering: Semantron, 2014), 114.

Divine Exitus: Mirroring in Creation

As the title implies, the text purports to be a mirror of the Life Source. The text therefore should be read in line within its proper *speculum* genre which, as Ritamary Bradley points out, “was very popular in the Middle Ages as a title for different kinds of work.”³⁹ In dealing with Hildesheim’s *Speculum*, one should keep in mind two points raised by Bradley on *Specula* in general, that firstly, “any adequate explanation of the title needs to account for the figurative sense of paragon, a sense which, unlike that of faithful reflector, is not at once perceived as a metaphorical implication of mirror,” and, secondly, that “those instances where the figurative sense combines with the literal must be explained, as in the double function of showing the world what it is and what it should become.”⁴⁰ It is precisely this second aspect which is mostly applicable to Hildesheim’s *Speculum* as the author contemplates creation in its here and now, what it is now, marked by imperfection, but also, in view of what it should be, he looks beyond to the ampler vision of salvation, whose economy starts in the bosom of the Life Source itself and draws rational creatures, rendered “wretched” (§66) by sin, towards perfection. As in 1 Cor 13:12, which speaks of the mirror as a shadowy reflection of reality, Hildesheim’s text attempts at mirroring the Life Source which is only partially intelligible. In so doing, he draws influence from the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles (both fundamental sources in the Carmelite Rule of St Albert of Jerusalem), as well as the mystical Platonic stream of Catholic theology, like Origen, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus Erigena, the Victorine School of Paris, etc.

The *Speculum* firstly contemplates the mystery of life in the tri-unity of God in Neoplatonist terms of fecundity, pouring, flowing, breathing and indivisible oneness:

In this primitive source of all things, which is eternally alive, is found the Father’s fecundity and the Father who begets the consubstantial and coeternal being of the Son (§2).

This Source, and the life that flows from it by the individual truth of each, together breathe a third living entity which is distinct only in Person and remains within (§3).

³⁹ Ritamary Bradley, “Backgrounds of the Title *Speculum* in Mediaeval Literature,” *Speculum* 29, no.1 (January 1954): 100. Here, the author gives an overview of the development of the *speculum* genre in the Middle Ages, especially from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, using Augustine as the pivot between the Greek epistemic sense of the term and the Patristic (and later Christian) figurative sense of the term.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

The aforementioned triple entity, notwithstanding that it is three in person, is in essence, universally, and ineffably indivisibly one living thing, or so to say, utterly one (§4).

It then almost immediately passes on to point out that the Life Source continuously outflows into beings. Without this outpouring, created life would cease to exist:

Because the Life Source necessarily exists and is alive, it necessarily follows that through its power it is possible for non-being and non-life to exist (§5).

The uncreated Life Source is of such fecundity that it is impossible for it not to bring forth a living being perfect like itself (§6).

It necessarily follows that every living thing has its life from this Source on such terms that no life form can exist that does not have its life from it (§7).

If there were no living things there would be no non-living things (§8).

Unless this Life Source were the unique, transcendent, triune, essential form of life, no created life of any sort would come forth from it (§9).

If this uncreated living entity were not threefold in Person, there would be no created life (§10).

From this primitive source of all life, which is to the highest degree living, issued in the beginning the external heavens, that is, the entire universe with all angelic and intelligent life (§11).

The Life Source which produced this first outflow poured life into beings through the outpouring of itself. So, the outpouring must continue, for if it were checked for an instant, all created life would cease to exist (§12).

The balancing act, referred to earlier on, between the (neo-)platonian cosmological conception of emanation and the more orthodox theology of creation can be appreciated in the kind of terminology that is used in the eleventh and twelfth propositions. Terms such as *emanavit*, *effluxum*, *influxit*, and *emanationis* certainly bring to mind the Plotinian theory of emanation wherein all life pours out from the One and Perfect Reality. This reinforces proposition six which states, “The uncreated Life Source is of such fecundity that it is impossible for it not to bring forth a living being perfect like itself” (§6). Notwithstanding, in such Plotinian cosmology, all that exists emanates, to a higher or lesser degree, by stages of imperfection or degradation such that at every descending stage of emanation, beings are more impure, imperfect and ungodly.⁴¹ Because

⁴¹ See Plotinus, *The Enneads*, III.8.2, IV.8.6, and V.1.6 in light of V.2.1, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson,

Neoplatonist emanation is necessary, albeit independent of the One's impassive will, speaking about the act of creation, the text subsequently adopts the more orthodox-sounding verb "produce" (*producere*), which makes explicit the wilful act of the Life Source and, hence, brings to the fore the Genesis narrative.⁴² In proposition twenty-one, the text finally establishes that the Life Source wilfully created all that exists by the Word:

Although the Life Source produced all the aforementioned life forms by the word alone; human beings, the sole life form endowed with reason, were produced by the decree, the senatorial decree, so to speak, of the three Persons (§21).⁴³

Hildesheim shows that created life, in turn, mirrors the triune divine life as every layer of life mirrors itself in another. Signs of this mirroring are given, to mention a few examples, in terms of: the inherent tendency of every living thing to rise rather than descend;⁴⁴ the interdependence of creatures;⁴⁵ in the dynamic movement of life in the process of emerging, living and dissolving;⁴⁶ and in the participation, on man's part, in the dominion (*dominium*) of the Life Source over all creation through his authority (*principatum*).⁴⁷

The fourth chapter, entitled "De producti vivi dominio vel prelatione," touches on the idea of ranking (*prelatione*) in creation. Previously, in the second chapter, we are told what this ranking is: at the lowest level of perfection is the purely vegetative life (§16); at a higher level of perfection is life brought forth from aquatic and airborne creatures which are sentient but subject to decay (§17); more perfect still are four-footed and land-dwelling life forms, who are also sentient but subject to decay (§18); and, lastly, the most perfect are rational creatures whose bodily part is subject to dissolution but whose intelligent part is eternal (§19). Despite this ranking of creation, we are also told that "any living

trans. George Boys-Stones *et alii* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 356-357, 519-520, 539-541, 549-550.

⁴² See Propositions §6, §16-§19, §21 and what follows in §28, §31.

⁴³ Because of the lack of capitalisations in the text, it is difficult to determine exactly whether "word alone" in this proposition refers to the Son of God as the Divine Logos, the Divine Wisdom alluded to in Prov. 8:22-31, "in whom all things were created" (Col. 1:16). Given the theological progression at this point in the text, we are assuming it is so.

⁴⁴ "That every living thing originates from higher causes is clear from the fact that it tends upwards rather than downwards, in contrast to non-living things" (§25).

⁴⁵ "Any living thing no matter how small, contains and partakes of life in an equally perfect way as the largest, so long as it can be considered alive" (§24).

⁴⁶ See Propositions §16-§21.

⁴⁷ "Although the first man lost full *de facto* dominion over the beasts, he did not on that account lose his *de iure* authority over every rational creature he begot" (§41).

thing, no matter how small, contains and partakes of life in an equally perfect way as the largest, so long as it can be considered alive” (§24). So, all living creatures participate in the perfection of the Life Source, each according to its capacity (§141). But we are also told that “a human being includes almost every specific perfection that any vegetative or sentient life form possesses or can possess” (§26), which is why he was given “universal dominion over all brute creatures” (§38). Before the fall, this absolute dominion meant that man’s relationship with the rest of creation was life-affirming, perfect even, in that “the Life Source did not allow him to feed off any animal that should be forced to give up its life so that man might eat” (§45). But because of sin, this absolute dominion was lost and the rightful place of man in view of the rest of creation is re-articulated when Hildesheim writes:

Since we find among creatures that creep, swim, fly, or walk, that some are in a position of dominance and overlordship, so to speak, over others, it does not seem altogether reasonable that human beings should not be altogether subject to some sort of dominance (§40).

Simplifying Hildesheim’s use of the double negative here, confusing as it may be, the *Speculum* suggests that it is quite natural and reasonable for man to be subject to some sort of dominance (§40) just as he is in authority over the human life he begets (§41). It is precisely this interplay between being in dominance and being subject to dominance that adds another layer to the mirroring being suggested in the text. The effect of this interplay is vital as it continues to strengthen the interdependence between creatures, as well as the dependence of all creatures on the Life Source.

Furthermore, it is also claimed that creatures in the lower ranks are perfected when consumed by creatures in the higher ones, “The more intimately a living creature is incorporated into the substance of a more perfect creature, the closer it comes to the original Life Source” (§72). One can notice in this claim the imprint of Thomism as well as Neoplatonism. Andrew Tardiff notes that in this view, “even though all creation is good (whether because it comes from God, or because being and good are convertible), there is a hierarchy of goods within it. Humans are higher than animals, and animals are higher than plants.”⁴⁸ Similarly, the mystical tradition speaks of the interior operations of the soul as ranked in that “the rational soul is higher than the sensitive, which in turn is higher than the

⁴⁸ Andrew Tardiff, “A Catholic Case for Vegetarianism,” *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 15, no.2 (1998): 213.

vegetative.⁴⁹ Mirroring being the core theme of the *Speculum*, as is suggested not just by the title but by its very content, the text seems to imply that the ranking of creation reflects, as if in a mirror, the ranking within the Life Source itself who is Father, Son, and Spirit, but who is nonetheless ontologically one and equal in essence.⁵⁰ Therefore, in this context, “ranking” – both in creation as well as in the Life Source – does not necessarily imply solely dominance but also harmonious interdependence and support. In fact, in this Plotinian mystical outlook, one can speak of “the interrelatedness of everything.”⁵¹

It is when this perfect, harmonious, co-existence was shattered because of sin that hostility between creatures arose, because their relationship became corrupted in imperfection.⁵² The actuality of our present brokenness – having been “transformed into beasts” (§114) – imposes on us the obligation to “repair our wretched state” (§66), i.e., figuring out the sense of being alienated from our true selves, of being in conflict with others and with creation, and, ultimately, of being estranged from the Life Source itself who, despite our sinful dispositions, continues to pour itself out (*continuat effluxum*) for us and our salvation. Therefore, healing this brokenness and disharmony, through Hildesheim’s emphasis on the integrity of all creation, its inherent participation in the perfection of the Life Source, and the benefit of a life lived in virtue,⁵³ the text seems to suggest that it is precisely in rediscovering our interrelatedness to all other life forms that the imperfection brought about by sin can be overcome. In other words, explicating Hildesheim’s Neoplatonist mystical outlook, we can say that “responding to the ontological profile of [the Life Source’s] anthropological divine kenosis is the phenomenological profile of [man’s] graced theodical journey of ascesis, contemplation, and salvation.”⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibid. 213. See for instance, John of the Cross, “The Ascent of Mount Carmel,” II.4.2, in *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1991), 159-160.

⁵⁰ The biblical undertones of this view seem to stem from 1 Cor. 8:6; Jn 10:30, 14:28; Eph. 2:6, 4:30.

⁵¹ Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*. Outstanding Christian Thinkers Series, ed. Geoffrey Chapman (London: Continuum, 1989), 12.

⁵² See Propositions §73, §114, §115.

⁵³ See Propositions §65, §86, §88.

⁵⁴ Glen Attard, *Closest to the Heart: A Mystagogy of Spiritual Friendship in Pavel A. Florenskij’s ‘The Pillar and Ground of the Truth,’* foreword by Robert F. Slesinski and afterword by Avril Pyman (Malta: Horizons, 2020), 187.

Divine Reditus: Redemption as Return

Not only does the *Speculum* touch on the idea of man’s return from his brokenness, but also suggests, quite originally in the context of the Carmelite tradition, a contemplative path for this through man’s relationship with sentient beings, understood here as the need to acquire an ethic for the care of creation. In so doing, the *Speculum* goes back to the creation narratives in Gen. 1-2 and contemplates the harmonious co-existence of creation before the fall of humanity. Between the fifth and seventh chapters, Hildesheim starts by re-thinking the purpose of food, both for our sustenance as well as for worship, observing that:

In making provision for the food of the first man who had perfect life, the Life Source did not allow him to feed off any animal that should be forced to give up its life so that man might eat (§45).

It does not seem that the perfect human race produced in the beginning by the Life Source was ever required to take, or ever did take, the life of any sentient creature in order to feed themselves or to furnish a sacrifice to God (§46).⁵⁵

Because of the sin committed by the rational, corruptible being it had produced, the Life Source destroyed all life on earth with the exception of the few passengers in the ark (§47).

As the elements and the things composed of them had lost their strength as a result of the Flood, the Life Source granted to man that he could take for his sustenance any vegetative, sentient, or moving living creature (§48).

In a state of incorrupt nature, the fruits of vegetative matter alone would have been sufficient sustenance for man; nor would it have been necessary for the plants themselves to perish in the process (§51).

As seen here, Hildesheim interestingly believes that only after the Fall, and its consequent aftermath leading to the mythical flood, was it conceivable and, indeed, permissible for human beings to put to death sentient beings for their own sustenance (cf. Gen. 9:1-4), and this as a way of coming to grips with one’s

⁵⁵ One must keep in mind that a vegetarian lifestyle – perpetually abstaining from meat – was required by the Carmelite Rule, which Hildesheim followed, before it was mitigated by Pope Eugenius IV’s bull *Romani Pontificis* in 1432 whereby the Carmelites, “out of human frailty and in some cases out of physical debility,” making them unable to observe so strict and severe a form, were granted permission to eat meat three days a week and, at suitable times, to remain and walk about in their churches and cloisters and their periphery. See Joachim Smet, *The Carmelites: A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel* (Rome: Carmelite Institute, 1975), 1:85-86; Carl Tobias Frayne, “The Flesh of Fasts and Feasts: A Study of the Monastic Diet in Theory and Practice (c. 1025–1525),” *Journal of Animal Ethics* 10, no.2 (2020): 115-134.

own perishable state (§66). One must note here the biblical and theological undertones regarding humanity's loss of the primordial state of innocence,⁵⁶ properly understood as the state of not being capable of causing harm and not being drawn into harm, as Hildesheim writes:

However, in the state of nature after the fall but before the flood the produce of vegetative and sentient matter would have been sufficient sustenance for man without these plants and animals being deprived of their existence (§53)

God mercifully granted that rational creatures might feed and clothe themselves from the flesh, hair, hide, and such like of creatures whose lives had been taken, so that they thus might be led each day to contemplate their mortality, since without these things they could not properly repair their wretched state which followed the loss of the good life through sin (§66).

If man were ever to return to his pristine state of innocence, every beast would lay aside its fierceness for him and become tame (§73).

The same logic is the reason for understanding Hildesheim's answer to why God permitted, after the fall, that humanity offer animal sacrifices in worship. Hildesheim argues that this was so only to induce humanity to the realisation that it, too, is subject to the law of death and corruptibility:

The reason that God ordained that an animal should lose its life as a scapegoat or as a sacrifice was that man might thereby contemplate that he rightly deserved to lose his own life for offending God through sin (§69).

The text brings back the ancient idea of the ritual's significance as it is the context where sacrifices are performed and wherein the reality of the life cycle is symbolically re-enacted in our human longing for purification, harmonisation, and perfection. In this way, as Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger explain, sacrifice, which essentially is "the act of giving up something in order to receive something of greater worth," functions as a paradigm of religious rituals. Moreover,

Sacrifice has even been identified as the origin of civilization itself in the classical works of modern sociology and psychology by Émile Durkheim and Sigmund Freud, and there is a certain sense in which all life – human and nonhuman, cultural and natural – might be regarded as a series of deaths and rebirths, that is, as a continuous process of sacrifice.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Etymologically, "innocent" derives from the conjunction of the Latin prefix *in-* (negative, privative prefix) and the verb *nocere* (to injure physically, hurt, or damage). See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 944, 1302.

⁵⁷ Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger, "Sacrifice and Substitution: Ritual Mystification and Mythical Demystification," *Numen* 36, no.2 (1989): 189. Moreover, with the rise of modern

Taking into consideration the fact that in the *Speculum* Hildesheim places perfection as the regulatory principle of action here on earth,⁵⁸ it is understandable that at this point in the text (ch. 8), the reader is led into the restoring of this divine ordering. The reversal of the killing of animals (both for the purpose of sustenance as well as for ritual sacrifice) develops in three stages: a new kind of sacrifice is inaugurated by the Incarnation of the Word of God which renders corruptible flesh good (§80); this act is continued by the supreme charity of the Son of God who gave himself up as food for man (§82); finally, it is brought to fulfilment in the resurrection of a “nobler, glorified, resurrected” body (§137). Hence, bodily life mirroring the spiritual life, the consequence of such a progression is the understanding of the spiritual life in eucharistic terms where God sacrifices himself by becoming our food to restore his perfection in us. In Hildesheim’s own words,

The word of God took pity on mankind and in the end of time took flesh of an incorrupt virgin, making good the corruption of the flesh which man had incurred by living in the flesh (§80).

The word of the Life Source, the Son of God, by the shame of the death he innocently endured brought back to life the human race which through its own doing had become dead through sin (§82).

It is the supreme act of charity and beneficence that the uncreated Life Source gave himself as food for man (§84).

human sciences, scholars have been inclined to see the sacrifice of animals as a substitute for suicide, murder, and deicide becoming “distinguishable from them only by a confusion of roles and a set of characteristic acts of substitution.” Smith and Doniger comment, “Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, in their *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* contended that ‘the very nature of sacrifice’ is ‘dependent, in fact, on the presence of an intermediary, and we know that with no intermediary there is no sacrifice.’ Among other intermediaries so crucial to, even definitive of, the sacrificial ritual (including the priest who acts as a buffer and guide between the sacred and profane realms) is the ritual victim. The victim represents or ‘becomes’ (and thus substitutes for) both the invisible divine recipient of the offering and the human being who makes the offering. “Through this proximity the victim, who already represents the gods, comes to represent the sacrificer [= sacrificer] also. Indeed, it is not enough to say that it represents him: it is merged in him. The two personalities are fused together.’ Every sacrificial victim, then, symbolizes both the god and the worshipper; every sacrifice is both an ersatz self-sacrifice and a dramatization of a deicide.” *Ibid.*, 189-190.

⁵⁸ See Propositions §70-§71.

One cannot help but recall St Augustine's words in *The Confessions*, "I am the food of the mature: grow, then, and you shall eat me. You will not change me into yourself like bodily food; but you will be changed into me."⁵⁹ This spiritual food imparts eternal life, lost through sin. In fact, "No man would ever have lost his bodily life if no man had lost his spiritual life" (§79). Moreover, "The reason all corruptible life decays is that it sustains its existence by feeding off corruptible nutriment" (§131).

In this light, the *Speculum* presents a eucharistic ethic in man's relation to bodily (and consequently spiritual) food. As noted by Chandler, "Originally no animal had to die that man might live: this is the aftermath of the flood. Food is not only a necessity, but its use reflects a hierarchy of order in the world – partly broken – and the choice of how and what to eat has a moral dimension: there are pure and impure foods, and virtuous ways of eating (ch. 6)."⁶⁰ This eucharistic ethic extinguishes an abusive relationship with the created order. In fact, certain propositions in the *Speculum* have to be understood in view of this eucharistic ethic of a less-perfect sentient creature being consumed and assimilated into a more perfect one, and in that way, willingly, coming closer to perfection in the Life Source. It seems that although Hildesheim echoes St Thomas Aquinas' idea that "the imperfect are for the use of the perfect even as in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection,"⁶¹

⁵⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.10.18.

⁶⁰ Chandler, "Contemplation in John of Hildesheim," 5.

⁶¹ *Summa Theol.*, I, Quaestio 96, art. 1 ad 4: "First, from the order observed by nature; for just as in the generation of things we perceive a certain order of procession of the perfect from the imperfect (thus matter is for the sake of form; and the imperfect form, for the sake of the perfect), so also is there order in the use of natural things; thus the imperfect are for the use of the perfect; as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore, it is in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be master over animals. Hence the Philosopher says (*Polit.* i, 5) that the hunting of wild animals is just and natural, because man thereby exercises a natural right. See also: *Summa Theol.*, IIa IIae, Quaestio 64, art. 7: "There is no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is. Now the order of things is such that the imperfect are for the perfect, even as in the process of generation nature proceeds from imperfection to perfection. Hence it is that just as in the generation of a man there is first a living thing, then an animal, and lastly a man, so too things, like the plants, which merely have life, are all alike for animals, and all animals are for man. Wherefore it is not unlawful if man use plants for the good of animals, and animals for the good of man, as the Philosopher states (*Polit.* i, 3). Now the most necessary use would seem to consist in the fact that animals use plants, and men use animals, for food, and this cannot be done unless these be deprived of life: wherefore it is lawful both to take life from plants for the use of animals, and from animals for the use of men. On fact this is in keeping with the commandment of God Himself: for it is written (Gen 1:29-30): 'Behold I have given you every herb . . . and all

observing that plants use the earth for their sustenance, while animals use plants, and man uses both, applying also the principle of proportionate good,⁶² he also seems to go beyond, contending that it is preferable to “[...] take the life of a vegetative rather than a sentient life form, because more perfect life is generated from the decomposition of vegetative life” (§75). Surely, unproportionate and abusive use of creation is deplorable in Hildesheim’s vision as this goes against life’s progression towards perfection in the Life Source:

No law or reason would permit that any living creature should have to lose its life to feed any other living creature unless, by its death as it provided sustenance and passed into another substance, it gained more perfect life (§70).

If it had the wit, every brute creature would hasten to offer itself as food for man, so that it might achieve a more perfect life in him (§71).

The more intimately a living creature is incorporated into the substance of a more perfect creature, the closer it comes to the original Life Source (§72).

No reason dictates that it is fitting that a living creature purely in sport or for its pleasure can or should turn what is animate into what is inanimate (§76).

It hardly seems fair that man should take the life of an animal that does not serve him for food when that animal has not attempted or does not have the strength to take away a man’s life (§77).

It is only through the cultivation of virtue that life becomes beautiful, holy, and more humane, whereas viciousness and pride alter life into an irrational, meaningless, and impassable existence (§114). The virtuous soul gradually discovers that her whole life depends on the Life Source as the life-giving principle of every creature that can ever exist (§12). At the same time, the virtuous soul, like a luscious tree, not only reverts back to its roots, finding herself firmly rooted in Divine charity, but contemplates the virtues as if they were its branches, leaves, and exquisite fruits, contemplating the Divine action in her. Hence, the contemplative soul is awakened already here and now to a heightened sense of union with the Divine through the beauty of His creation. Yet, this union of the soul arrives at its perfection in the eschatological future wherein God’s merciful grace passes through death and dissolution into a “nobler, glorified, and resurrected state” (§137) not subject to corruption anymore.

trees . . . to be your meat, and to all beasts of the earth’: and again (Genesis 9:3): ‘Everything that moveth and liveth shall be meat to you.’”

⁶² Tardiff, “A Catholic Case for Vegetarianism,” 212-213.

In terms of this apocalyptic expectation, Hildesheim's view points towards the cosmic redemption which will overturn the damages of the Fall. In Rom. 8:19-23, St Paul discloses this eschatological mystery onto which Hildesheim latches, in the following words:

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

Hence, the *Speculum* can be understood as a contemplative looking forward, which is not limited to the present condition. This contemplative gaze foretastes the eschatological fulfilment and liberation of the created order from the damage caused by sin. All of creation will partake in this redemptive transformation from a composite corruptible state to the simple spiritual state.⁶³

Conclusion

In the words of Dave Egan *et alii*, "Humans are an integral part of nature and they play a key role in determining, either consciously or otherwise, the condition of the environment in which they live."⁶⁴ Bringing a Medieval Carmelite text into the twenty-first century, we have proposed the urgent need to rediscover the spiritual, contemplative path if we ever hope to restore the conditions in which we live.⁶⁵ As a conclusion, deconstructing further a few key elements, we offer three particular reflections that highlight the timely relevance of this ancient text.

⁶³ "No composite living creature achieves a simpler existence unless it was resolved into its component principles formerly while alive. Every rational composite creature will retain its bare existence after stripping off what is bodily and corrupt" (§139-§140).

⁶⁴ Dave Egan, Evan E. Hjerpe, and Jesse Abrams, "Why People Matter in Ecological Restoration," in *Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration: Integrating Science, Nature, and Culture*, eds., Dave Egan et al. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2011), 1.

⁶⁵ One might also encourage the study of other medieval Carmelite texts for what they have to say about creation. For example, *De causis naturalibus* ("On Natural Causes") by Richard Lavenham, O.Carm. (fl. 1399). See Rondo Keele, "Richard Lavenham's *De causis naturalibus*: A Critical Edition," *Traditio* 56 (2001): 113-147.

In the first place, the text emphasises overwhelmingly the “integrity, unity, and indivisibility” of creation (§14). Speaking about the ecology of man in his address to representatives of the Italian Ski Instructors, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI once said:

In contemplating creation, man recognizes the greatness of God, the ultimate source of his being and of the universe. We should not forget that the relationship with creation is an important element for the development of the human identity and not even the sin of man has eliminated his duty to be a guardian of the world.⁶⁶

In this instance, the pope echoes all faith leaders and faith communities who agree that the proper place of humanity within nature – especially in light of the aggravating threats of poverty and inequity, climate change, and biodiversity loss – is to be its guardian.⁶⁷ Faith exists in its truest form when it cultivates values of compassion and care for the most vulnerable, be they humans, wildlife creatures, or the environment at large. In the concluding declaration of the last Faith for Nature conference (held in October 2020), entitled *Our Sacred Commitment*, the participants, mostly made up of faith leaders, representatives of faith communities, and academics, state most poignantly that while the way forward for a more environmentally sustainable future must be informed by scientific knowledge, an appreciation for the spiritual nature of our beings leads to a deeper sense of connectedness both within the natural world as well as within the human family.⁶⁸ In its most concrete terms, therefore, this connectedness must result in a concerted effort to implement the seventeen sustainable development goals set out at the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, which aim to end poverty and hunger in all its forms, promote in all parts of the world well-being, education, gender equality, sustainable management of wealth, energy, and production, and resolve to work for more peaceful and inclusive societies.⁶⁹ Such is the integrity of creation that is envisaged, an integrity

⁶⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *The Garden of God: Toward a Human Ecology*, ed. Maria Milvia Morciano (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 64.

⁶⁷ See Bartholomeos I, “Ospitare l’umanità in una terra abitabile,” in *Il dono dell’ospitalità: Atti del XXV Convegno ecumenico internazionale di spiritualità ortodossa*, eds., Luigi d’Ayala Valva et alii (Bose, MG: Edizioni Qiqajon, 2017), 39-52.

⁶⁸ See Dennis Kalob, “Faith for Nature,” *CarmeNGO* [newsletter of the Carmelite Order’s NGO at the United Nations] 14, no.2 (2021): 2-3.

⁶⁹ See “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” A/Res/70/1, United Nations Sustainable Development Department, 25 September 2015. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> (accessed on 1 April 2021).

by which to care for the well-being of all life forms as well as promote dialogue between faith, science, and economics for the good of all creation.⁷⁰

Moreover, Hildesheim's *Speculum* also makes a fine distinction between the naturally corruptible life (*corruptibile vivum*) that is produced by the Life Source through intelligent life and the good life (*bene esse vivum*) that was lost through sin. Hildesheim writes,

The boundless Life Source, which in the first instant produced intelligent life, went on to produce, through the ministry of intelligent life, all corruptible life forms (§15).

God mercifully granted that rational creatures might feed, clothe, [...] so that they might be led each day to contemplate their mortality, since without these things they could not properly repair their wretched state which followed the loss of the good life through sin (§66).

In Hildesheim's view, it was not decay and transience that sin brought about, but wretchedness (*miseria*), that is, the disruption of the once-harmonious relationship of humanity with God, with itself, and with creation. With its implication of the naturalness, indeed the goodness of the cycle of life – from its inception, to its maturity, and eventually to its passing and decay, ashes to ashes, dust to dust – the text sheds particular light on the beauty of the present moment. From a Christian perspective, the here and now is always lived in light of the theological paradigm of salvation being experienced already *today*, as it is so beautifully portrayed in the Gospel of Luke,⁷¹ but which will only be fulfilled in the *hereafter*. In a context that saw the afterlife as the only true fate of man, Hildesheim brings humanity back to this life, emphasising the point that it is only in the urgency that the transience of this life imposes on us and, hence, in living the virtuous life today, in accepting and integrating one's inner brokenness, in investing in eternal values, in going back to guarding rather than exploiting creation, in restoring one's lost harmony with God, with oneself, and

⁷⁰ Out of a greater concern for the integrity of creation, sensibility towards and discussion about good ethical practices of food production and consumption have significantly grown over the past few decades, and it is partly this sensibility that is the primary driving force for this paper. See Gregory Pence ed., *The Ethics of Food: A Reader for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002); Ben Mepham ed., *Food Ethics*. Professional Ethics Series (London: Routledge, 1996); Franz-Theo Gottwald, Hans Werner Ingensiep and Marc Meinhardt eds., *Food Ethics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010); Christian Coff, *The Taste for Ethics: An Ethic of Food Consumption*. International Library of Environmental, Agricultural, and Food Ethics 7, tr. Edward Broadbridge (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006).

⁷¹ See Lk 2:11, 4:21, 5:26, 12:28, 13:32-33, 19:5, 22:34, 22:61, 23:43.

with creation, that the eternal life will be possible tomorrow.⁷² In the vivid words of physicist Brian Greene:

From planets to stars, solar systems to galaxies, black holes to swirling nebulae, nothing is everlasting. Indeed, as far as we can tell, not only is each individual life finite, but so too is life itself. Planet earth, which Carl Sagan described as a mote of dust suspended on a sunbeam, is an evanescent bloom in an exquisite cosmos that will ultimately be barren. Motes of dust, nearby or distant, dance on sunbeams for merely a moment. Still, here on earth we have punctuated our moment with astonishing feats of insight, creativity, and ingenuity as each generation has built on the achievements of those who have gone before, seeking clarity on how it all came to be, pursuing coherence in where it is all going, and longing for an answer to why it all matters.⁷³

⁷² In his study on human behaviour under conditions of universal catastrophe, William L. Langer argues that in the fourteenth century, the Black Death or the “Great Dying” as the Germans called it, was a scourge such as man had never known before. It devastated society demographically and, therefore, also economically, psychologically, morally, and religiously. The Black Death wiped out at least a quarter of the population of Europe between 1348 and 1350 (proving to be the immediate context of Hildesheim’s own life and works, possibly even the *Speculum*), with the total mortality rate rising up to a third of the population over the next fifty years. Such a precarious state inevitably led to a radical shift in one’s philosophy of life which resulted in liberal use of liquor, carousing, ribaldry, lawlessness, depravity, crime, violence, and murder, in short, a complete abandonment of morality. Meanwhile, others reverted to extravagant religiosity, superstitions, and scapegoating. For a long time, the Black Death held all of Europe in an apocalyptic mood as “fear was the sovereign ruler of this epoch.” Man lived in constant dread of disease and imminent death. In fact, much of the art of time reflected a macabre interest in graves, death, and the fleeting nature of life. “Countless painters treated with almost loving detail the sufferings of Christ, the terrors of the Last Judgment and the tortures of Hell. Woodcuts and paintings depicting the dance of death, inspired directly by the Black Death, enjoyed a morbid popularity [...] Yet the dominant feature of the time was not its licentiousness but its overpowering feelings of guilt, which arose from the conviction that God had visited the plague on man as retribution for his sins. Boccaccio, a few years after writing his *Decameron*, was overcome by repentance and a sense of guilt verging on panic. Martin Luther suffered acutely from guilt and fear of death, and Calvin, terror-stricken by the plague, fled from each epidemic. Indeed, entire communities were afflicted with what Freud called the primordial sense of guilt, and they engaged in penitential processions, pilgrimages and passionate mass preaching.” See William L. Langer, “The Black Death,” *Scientific American* 210, no.2 (1964): 114-121. An obvious comparison that comes to mind is the contemporary situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in which Pope Francis has encouraged the faithful to let it prompt us to re-evaluate human priorities, particularly in: *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020).

⁷³ Brian Greene, *Until the End of Time: Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), 5.

The transience of this life and the drive for more, the wellspring of our joy and curiosity, as Maria Popova argues, is why we have somehow gone from bacteria to the genius of J. S. Bach, why we have sought to fathom the fathomless universe, why we learned to make fire, music, and mathematics.⁷⁴ For those who believe, the natural rhythm and passing of life and of this earth is clearly not a burden, not an imposition of meaninglessness, but the seat of the restless soul that aspires for goodness, integrity, and salvation here on earth, in time, but in view of eternity.

Finally, complementing his emphasis on the immediacy of action in favour of humanity and the natural world, at the heart of the text Hildesheim also hints at the adoption of a Eucharistic ethic, that is, the gift of self as a life-affirming mirroring of the Son of God (§84) in view of the eschatological perfect consummation of all creation in God (§137-§140). As Mark Godin points out, “Participating in the Eucharist is to take part in God’s work of renewing the life of creation.”⁷⁵ The Eucharist seeks to make people present to Christ and to each other. In other words, in it we learn who we are. A Eucharistic ethic is, therefore, a learned behaviour as we learn to locate our story in God’s story, to participate in it, each life form “according to its capacity” (§141). As a matter of fact, “in attending to the one in whom heaven and earth meet, coming to the point of incarnation, we come to a sacrament of difference, of meeting the other, so that the Eucharist is a sacrament of reconciliation – indeed, of *consummation*,”⁷⁶ that is, of attending to Christ and, consequently, to each other. Indeed:

Instead of consuming or subsuming the other, instead of having power over another in a way that destroys that other, we maintain one another’s flesh; we have touching which does not devour but nourishes. [...] If the Eucharist means attending to the presence of Christ, then it means a regard that is worked out in the flesh. This is the ethical act of communion - the breaking and remaking of the heart. [...] Attending to the presence of Christ happens when even the broken, weak ones can pass Christ to others.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Maria Popova, “Until the End of Time: Physicist Brian Greene on the Poetry of Existence and the Wellspring of Meaning in Our Ephemeral Lives Amid an Impartial Universe,” Brain Pickings, 21 February 2020. <https://www.brainpickings.org/2020/02/21/brian-greene-until-the-end-of-time/> (accessed on 1 April 2021).

⁷⁵ Mark Godin, “That the Sacrament is Always There: Towards a Eucharistic Ethic,” *Theology and Sexuality* 14, no.1 (2007): 54.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-56.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

The *Speculum* is underlined by the ethos of self-gift, care for the integrity of creation (human and otherwise), contemplation of the divine in the here and now in view of eternity, purification of the heart, and a resolute coming together with our different stories – moments which are all somehow enacted in the sacrament of the Eucharist. As the Word of God was made food for us so that we might be transformed in him (§84), so too are we consumed in Him so that in the end, when Christ “has put everything under his feet,” God may be “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28).

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