

Franciscan Ecological Wisdom

God is Being Itself

Wednesday, May 20, 2020

The Franciscan philosopher and theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), whom I studied for four years in seminary, wrote that “God first wills Christ as his supreme work.” [1] In other words, God’s “first idea” and priority was to make the Godself both visible and shareable. The word used in the Bible for this idea was *Logos*, which was taken from Greek philosophy, and which I would translate as the “Blueprint” for reality. *The whole of creation*—not just Jesus—is the partner in the divine dance. Everything is the “child of God”—no exceptions. When you think of it, what else could anything be? All created beings must, in some way, carry the divine DNA of their Creator.

Without a sense of the inherent sacredness of the world—in every tiny bit of life and death—we struggle to see God in our own reality, let alone to respect reality, protect it, or love it. The consequences of this ignorance are all around us, seen in the way we have exploited and damaged our fellow human beings, the dear animals, the web of growing things, the land, the waters, and the very air. It took until the twenty-first century for a pope to clearly say this, in Pope Francis’ prophetic document *Laudato Si’*. May it not be too late and may the unnecessary gap between practical seeing (science) and holistic seeing (religion) be fully overcome. They still need each other.

Franciscan mysticism has an *incarnational worldview*, which is the profound recognition of the presence of the divine in literally “every thing” and “every one.” It is the key to mental and spiritual health, as well as to a kind of basic contentment and happiness. An incarnational worldview is the only way we can reconcile our inner worlds with the outer one, unity with diversity, physical with spiritual, individual with corporate, and divine with human.

What we see in Franciscan mystics, again and again, is a joyful and unitive consciousness that intuitively and experientially grasps what Duns Scotus called “the univocity of being.” By this, Duns Scotus meant that we can speak with *one consistent and true voice* about a rock, a tree, an animal, a human, an angel, and God! They all participate in the one same state of Being to varying degrees, and *Deus est Ens*, he often wrote: “God is Being itself.” This eliminates any clear distinction between the sacred and the profane, because Christ existed in matter from all eternity (Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 1:3–11), ever since God decided to materialize and reveal who God is through creation. It is summarized on our Franciscan coat of arms by the Latin phrase *Deus Meus et Omnia*: “My God and All Things!”

Gateway to Action & Contemplation:

What word or phrase resonates with or challenges me? What sensations do I notice in my body? What is mine to do?

[1] Scotism entry, *Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (Burns and Oates: 1975), 1548. Duns Scotus identified Christ as “*summum opus Dei*.”

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), 18, 21–22; and Richard Rohr, “Franciscan Mysticism: A Cosmic Vision,” *the Mendicant*, vol. 5, no. 4(October 2015), 1, 6.