

June 30, 2020

God's Grandeur

BY GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844-1889)

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.*

*And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

Last week in one of my posts I mentioned that many creative and intelligent people do not consider themselves to be believers in God or believers in any kind of metaphysical possibilities and in my opinion, this is because of what is proposed to them to believe.

Jesus is quite clear in teaching that the Kingdom of God is at hand not in the heavens and that it is here on earth that we encounter who many of us call Christ

Much of the conventional Catholic world has been socially distancing for years, isolating themselves from contamination by persons who do not conform to predetermined categories or designations.

I think of them as living in Catholic bubbles, little terrariums of fantasies and follies that keep them amused and unchanged by anything human, anything that has any complexity or ambiguity about it, just absolute certainty as to

their own righteousness and superiority and dusting a lot because nothing ever moves in them or their world.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a person who suffered a great deal in his relatively short life because, I think, he had a profoundly human sacramental imagination which did not allow him to separate and divide and categorize himself or the world he encountered around him. He struggled with all kinds of guilt probably associated with his sexuality and his poetic gift which also gave him pleasure both complex and ambiguous realities in his life and subject to great manipulation by those living in the bubbles.

As a teenager he sought to control his feelings with extreme acts of penance. Once he went without water until his tongue turned black and he collapsed and another time he went without salt until he once again collapsed.

He was a very smart fellow and he came from a very smart family, his father a poet and an extremely successful insurer of ships and cargos.

In the Britain of his day religion was a paramount issue, the Anglican Church of England to which the Hopkins family belonged was the "faith" of the intelligentsia and cognoscenti.

Catholics were considered to be far down on the pecking order but Catholics at Oxford University in the distinct minority but there, nonetheless, began a movement out of the stuffy categories of moral righteousness and doctrinal correctness bringing the Catholic faith into the light of day with serious academic study, debate, and research as we might hope to believe could happen in our time because Hopkins' poem leads us with words to an encounter with Sacred Grace all mover this life of ours.

Read more of his poems or more about him.