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# Hopkins and Francis on the State of the World: A Poet's Reflection

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institutions might devote resources to places like the Center for Sustainability at St. Louis University and encourage faculty to produce scholarship that leads to action like *Healing the Earth*, a free textbook on ecology published by the International Jesuit Ecology Project at Loyola University Chicago (see story, p.10) Finally, schools might sign and pursue plans with in accord with the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment. As of April 2016, 12 Jesuit schools had already done so.

In conjunction with such local activities, Jesuit colleges and universities can also pursue ecological justice through faithful citizenship-based support for policies to address climate change. This step was taken by College of the Holy Cross, Fordham University, Le Moyne College, Loyola University of Maryland, and University of San Francisco in April 2016 when they signed onto an amicus curiae brief submitted to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia offering faith-based support for the Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan. Furthermore, schools might support Catholic Relief Services' climate change policy work by founding CRS Ambassador chapters like those at Boston College, College of the Holy Cross, Fairfield University, Loyola University Maryland, and University of Scranton.

## Conclusion

The world is charged with the grandeur of God, and "Laudato Si'" has the potential to inspire people of faith and goodwill to better conserve the grandeur of our common home. As resourced institutions of higher education rooted in Catholic mission, Jesuit colleges and universities have a particular opportunity – and responsibility – to share and act on the first encyclical on ecology from the first Jesuit pope.

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# Hopkins and Francis on the State of the World: A Poet's Reflection

By Paul Mariani

**It was a Jesuit** priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins, who wrote some of the great Franciscan poems of all time, so that he and Pope Francis, a Jesuit who took the name of Francis, share that link in common. It follows, then, that Francis should begin "Laudato Si'," his letter to the world, fittingly delivered on Pentecost Sunday 2015, by quoting from St. Francis' "Canticle of the Creatures":

Praise be to you, my Lord,  
through our Sister, Mother Earth,  
who sustains and governs us,  
and who produces various fruit  
with colored flowers and herbs.

And so he begins his encyclical, "On Care for Our Common Home," with Francis, reminding us that "our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us." And so, in the name of the church, in the name of our shared humanity, Pope Francis reminds us that the very earth "cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."

Hopkins, who loved God's creation much as St. Francis did, wept over what humans were doing to

the English and Welsh countryside and – by extension – to the entire world. Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do. You have showered them with love. You have given them this beautiful world, both on the cosmic as well as on the microcosmic level, if they only had ears to hear its music and the eyes to see what is there before them, if they would only take the time to look.

But look at what? Hopkins's poems tell us what is there before us, just as Fr. Francis did and Pope Francis has been doing. "Look at the stars!," Hopkins urges us in "The Starlight Night,"

Look, look up at the skies!  
O look at all the fire-folk sitting in  
the air!  
The bright boroughs, the circle-  
citadels there!  
Down in dim woods the diamond  
delves! the elves'-eyes!  
The grey lawns cold where gold,  
where quickgold lies!  
Wind-beat whitebeam! airy  
abeles set on a flare!  
Flake-doves sent floating forth at  
a farmyard scare!

This is Van Gogh's "Starry Night" in a language rinsed and refreshed, words with a sense of deep wonder and awe behind them. Do

you hear it? Can you see it? Get up from your chair and go out behind your house on a clear dark night, where you can actually see the stars, and let their immensity and beauty surround you, he tells us. It's all free and there for the taking, he urges us on with nine exclamations in seven lines.

And the stars: stars as fire-folk, as bright boroughs, as circle-citadels. Or – in a reversal – diamond delves, elves' eyes, quicksilver gold: stars like the white underside of poplars shining in the night sky. All that energy and life, like a flock of spooked doves suddenly lifting from the earth. And behind those millions of stars, behind those untold millions of gold pieces, is something even greater: the Creator of it all, the Father and "Christ and his mother and all his hal-lows." A taste of heaven there for the asking.

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God," Hopkins wrote that same month. Charged, that is, with an electric energy coursing through it, instressed upon us, revealing a beauty and majesty that would "flame out, like shining from shook foil," lightning-quick in its dazzle. Or it would dawn on us slowly, gathering "to a greatness, like the ooze of oil/ Crushed," that rich yellowgreen oil from olives crushed in a press, their translucency reflecting the world about them in each tiny drop, because "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things." And because, in spite of what we have done to our world, the Holy Spirit, like a mother dove brooding over its young, cares about us, shining out like the dawn each day, a phoenix rising again, "with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."



The beautiful serene snow blankets the entrance to Gonzaga University. Photo by Matt Weigand.

Why are we here, the poet asks? To burrow lice-like into some giant wheel of cheese, surrounding ourselves with the fat of the world until death takes us? Or are we here to recognize what we have been given – air, water, light, nourishment, knowledge, friendship, art – and thus give praise back to our Creator. “Glory be to God for dappled things,” Hopkins sang, for the kaleidoscopic variety and freshness in all things,

For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings...

For if the world is charged with the grandeur of God, then we are charged with acknowledging that grandeur, since we are the only creatures consciously aware of that beauty and so of praising the Creator of Brother Sun and Sister Moon. For where else, Hopkins tells us as he witnesses the terrible effects of strip mining which leaves huge brow-like slags to scar the earth for generations after. How else can the earth cry out in its hurt? What other “eye, tongue, or heart else, where/ Else, but in dear and dogged man?” Man, so dear to his Creator, and yet so “selfbent” on himself “that he would strip “our rich round world bare,” without a care for those who come after. Earth with those monstrous slagheaps for eyebrows, not unlike that massive methane leak in California’s Aliso Canyon. Methane in the air we breathe, lead in the water we drink, waste everywhere. The poor, the poor everywhere, without work, their dignity stripped from them, “Udenizenized, beyond bound/ Of earth’s glory, earth’s ease,” he wrote late in his too-short life. The unemployed no longer a viable part of the commonwealth, and no one to share that care. This, he warned us, was to weigh those about us down with a hangdog dullness, a dullness which would morph to despair and then rage, turning those hangdogs to man wolves, whose packs would infest the age.

*Paul Mariani is University Professor in the department of English at Boston College. His is the author of seven books of poetry and multiple biographies, including Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life (2008) and, most recently, The Whole Harmonium: The Life of Wallace Stevens (2016). He is also author of a memoir, Thirty Days: On Retreat with the Exercises of St. Ignatius (2002).*

## A STUDENT’S POETRY

### Earth Day Pledges

Remember Earth Day?

Yeah me either but at one point we all pledged to take care of the earth around us, to do our darndest to pick up trash and plant more trees. Yet I went to the top of a mountain, imagine it won’t you? The rolling hills, trees, birds, and critters letting us so graciously enter their homes as we trample through to the top. We come to a point where you see the top, excited you climb the ridge and what do you find?

No mountains. Only rubbish.

A coal mine sits just behind that mountain, the beeps and explosions periodically interrupt your thoughts as you look around at no mountains, no the beasts that used to reside here have long since been conquered by humans.

Layer by layer.

Rock by rock they disassembled the mountains. Remember those earth day promises when they showed us all that stuff our parent’s screwed up? WE screwed up now. I sat on this mountain and looked at what was left of its brothers and sisters, a little mound there and a little rock here.

Nothing worth seeing.

### Haikus:

I have a dream, one  
Where my kids see the mountains  
Majestic, beautiful

Hiking all day, all  
Night. Top of mountain, no top  
No nature, where did it-

Flying high in the  
Skies. Humans should know beauty  
Like a bird; freedom

*Megan Trainor is a junior at Rockhurst University working towards a degree in English with minor in journalism. She hopes one day to travel and explore the world either alleviating some of the burdens others face or shedding light on them through her writing.*