

CREATIO DIVINA

By Elise D. Garcia, OP

The ancient monastic practice of *Lectio Divina* has been rediscovered in recent years, inviting practitioners into a deeply reflective and contemplative way of reading sacred scripture. The practice, as structured by Carthusian monk Guigo II in the twelfth century, brings the practitioner through four stages, as steps on a ladder. Guigo named these *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation), with each step leading the practitioner successively closer into mystical communion with God. Through *Lectio Divina*, scripture is read with an open and reverent heart, leading to deep reflection on the meaning of God's word, prompting heartfelt prayer, and then surrender.

Over the ages, mystics and theologians alike have sought God's revelation not only in scripture but also in creation, God's original revelation. Thomas Aquinas writes, "Sacred writings are bound in two volumes—that of creation and that of Holy Scripture." His contemporary, Beguine mystic Mechtilde of Magdeburg, points to the moment of her spiritual awakening as "the day I saw and knew I saw all things in God, and God in all things." Scripture itself points to creation's powers of revelation: "From the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen" (Wis. 13:5).

Today, as creation groans from human devastation of Earth—through an extractive industrial economy that has exceeded the carrying capacity of the planet, massive extermination of species, and potentially catastrophic climate change—we are called to a radical change in consciousness. A key to this transformation is awakening to our inextricable oneness with and interdependence on all of creation in God's unfathomably vast, ancient, and unfolding Universe. Applied to the first volume of sacred Scripture, *Lectio Divina* might help awaken in us awareness of the sacred depth of being inherent in all creatures—and perhaps a more sentient communion with our Creator. Invited into a deeply reflective and contemplative way of "reading" the natural world, we might experience in every creature, and ourselves, the "numinous mystery whence the universe emerges," as Thomas Berry wrote.

The practice of "Creatio Divina" might begin with a mindful walk outdoors, attentive to the smells, the temperature, the feel of the air, the sounds, the sights of the natural world. Sooner or later, something will draw your attention.

A small flower under a tangle of dark green leaves drew mine. Scarcely visible under the canopy, its intricate beauty took my breath away. It was a passionflower—a "volunteer" that had sprung up in the vegetable garden, undoubtedly from seeds that found their way into our compost bin. I felt a hymn of praise rise in my heart, in gratitude to the Creator for the seemingly gratuitous extravagance that went into creating this small expression of life. Then a realization of the millions of years it has taken flowering plants to evolve on Earth and the exquisitely interconnected forces at work that wrought these particular tendrils, those symmetrical stamens, the fine purple and white radial filaments. Its genetic heritage is so much older than mine, yet we both trace our ancestry back, not millions but billions of years, to stardust. In that moment, I am held between breaths—in numinous presence.

There is no movement from one step to the next in *Creatio Divina*—it is all of one piece. Thomas Keating says the more ancient monastic practice of *Lectio Divina* also was more like this—no ladders or steps, instead "four moments along the circumference of a circle." It makes sense. "Everything that is in the heavens, on the Earth, and under the Earth, is penetrated with connectedness, is penetrated with relatedness," Hildegard of Bingen observed. The web of life is not linear.

As I take the next breath, and ponder our interconnectedness, relatedness, my thought in this place of great privilege is linked, with Ivone Gebara's, to the world of the poor, "of those who have no land on which to live and those who live on lands tainted by toxic wastes and nuclear radiation...and to the sacred body of the Earth, which is bought and sold and prostituted for the sake of easy profit and the accumulation of wealth by a minority."

Creatio divina! Grow in us. Awaken us to see, and know we see, all things in God and God in all things.

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