

## **Duns Scotus As a Basis for a Franciscan Environmental Theology**

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At first sight it may not seem as if a thirteenth century metaphysician has much to offer us in relation to the formulation of a Franciscan approach to environmental theology. After all, Scotus was a distinctly complex and complicated philosophical and theologian thinker – what does Scotus say about care for the earth? Well, at the obvious level, nothing, but I believe that the two tenets of Scotus' thought which, while apparently different (one theological, the other metaphysical) can assist the Franciscan movement in providing a solid theological and philosophical base for its formulation of a distinctly Franciscan environmental theology. These two tenets are the Primacy and Haeceitas ('thisness').

The Scotus doctrine of the Primacy situates Christ at the centre of creation predestined to grace and glory before the Fall of Humankind is foreseen by God. Scotus arrives at this position through the assertion that God predestines Christ to grace and glory in respect of His will to be loved perfectly by a creature outside himself who can love Him with the same love with which He loves Himself. This creature is Christ. It may be worth pointing out here that perhaps we should stop using the title 'Christ' when speaking of Scotus and the Primacy. It has too many connotations of the emphasis on divinity, whereas in the Scotus conception what is predestined is the human nature of Jesus with which the Word unites itself fully. It is this human nature of Jesus which has the primacy over and in all other creatures. The term generally used to speak of this process is 'contingency'. Contingency means that whatever exists other than God is not necessary, so: it is not necessary that the human nature of Jesus exists, it does so through the free willed decree of God. Creation, since it is not necessary, it also a contingent. The human nature of Jesus has the primacy among all other things created, so perhaps, 'Absolute Primacy' is the incorrect term and we should just speak of the 'Primacy of the human nature of Jesus in creation', or the 'primacy of the human nature of Jesus among other contingent realities.'

This human nature holds the primacy among other contingents in relation to its perfection and as 'first-born' among all other created realities. This is true when it is considered that 'first' is a relative term and implies another outside or beside the first. 'First' when applied to the primacy of the human nature of Jesus in creation is strictly in respect of that nature among all others. This primacy in creation is not dependent on, nor is it occasioned by what Jesus would do historically: the primacy is, above all, a primacy of contingent being in and of love and grace among other contingent beings. So, it is through the free will of God that the creature Jesus exists as the perfect lover of the Trinity outside itself. I shall return to this.

The second tenet of Scotus' thought is a philosophical notion, his famous concept of haeceitas, (hey chay it tas) usually translated as 'thisness'. On first approaching this it can seem a daunting complexity, Scotus at his most subtle and obfuscatory best. Some regard it as Scotus being a philosophical pedant; or that he is engaging in self-indulgent philosophical word play. Nothing could be further from the truth. Scotus' haeceitas has profound theological, as well as philosophical, importance and significance and much to teach us today about the unique of the individual created thing. Haeceitas, put simply, mean that whatever exists contingently has a 'thisness' about it: a unique, unrepeatable, and ultimately undefinable 'ness' that is the real possession of that things as that thing individually. Already it is starting to sound complicated. Let me try and explain; haeceitas is the reality of a contingent thing as individual even within a species or genus that thing. So, for example: Seamus is a human person (species –Homo Sapiens), but Seamus is also a man (genus –Male). So Seamus is of the species Homo Sapiens in the genus of Male. Scotus is belongs to the species Homo

Sapiens, in the genus of Male. We both share fundamental of species and class, but both Seamus and Scotus possess a defining quality which makes Seamus and Scotus uniquely who they are as individual Male Human Persons, a 'Seamusness' or 'Scotusness' whereby Seamus is not Scotus and Scotus is not Seamus but uniquely and unrepeatably and individually Seamus or Scotus – their 'thisness' Seamus is THIS Male Homo Sapiens and not THAT.

If we then turn back to the primacy then we can speak about the uniqueness of the human nature of Jesus as an unique individual contingent among all other contingent things. It is THIS human nature which holds the primacy in creation and not THAT human nature, or, if we wish to give it a more spiritual tone: God reveals the fullness of Himself in THIS person Jesus and not THAT person, or Jesus is THIS human person and not ANY human person. So it is possible to unite Scotus's theological and philosophical thought into one reflection.

How then can this unity of the primacy of the haecceitas of the human nature of Jesus in creation provide the basis for a Franciscan environmental theology?

The primacy teaches that whatever exists does so because there is the human nature of Jesus which is prior in both grace and predestination to glory than all other created natures i.e. Creation was made for the human nature of Jesus united to the Word and not the other way round. Thus the primacy is a creational primacy and given this primacy all that exists does so in relation to it. Creation therefore has a sovereignty with the union of the Word with the human nature of Jesus at its head, and it has an existence, which, while as contingent as the human nature of Jesus, is nevertheless in fraternal relation to him so that the human nature of Jesus is 'first among the many brethren' of other created natures.

Creation and its rights are, therefore, determined by their relation to that which is prior in grace and nature, the created nature of Jesus, which, as its model determines all other created realities. The human nature Jesus in creation since it is contingent, has this primacy as pure gift from God and since all other created realities are in relation to this gift, their rights are also gift. They are not granted by other contingents (even the human nature of Jesus in creation) and that includes Humanity. Thus, men or women, cannot determine what the rights of creation should be – they simply are as created realities existing in relation to the perfection of created nature which is that of Jesus. Men and women because they are 'sentient' are not the lords of creation, but, in fact, its servant charged by God to tend it, honour it and guard it.

In the union of uncreated nature with the created nature of Jesus, necessity and contingency co-exist without detriment to the other, each existing in perfect relation to the other so that neither pre-existent Word or created human nature is destroyed or changed by this union. In the Incarnation, therefore, all other created realities are brought to their 'apex', their dingle, defining moment of existent which is the 'Jesus point' whereby pre-existence and existence are together as one person who lives out a life in history. Creation exists because there is a perfect nature which is its model, or to use a Bonaventurian term, its exemplar, all creation, regardless of whether it is animal, vegetable or mineral, even down to the small fragment of the constituent 'stuff of life' DNA is because there is a prevision of necessity and contingency existing as one in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

This is Jesus of Nazareth is unique, unrepeatably being who has his own 'thisness' and 'Jesusness' which does not derive specifically from the union of the pre-existent Word with the human creature that is Jesus of Nazareth, but which derives rather from the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is Jesus of Nazareth and not because he is the Word Incarnate. God could have, if he so wished, carried out his creative, redemptive purposes in another way, but what God could have done is not relevant, it is what God HAS done in the person of Jesus that is available to us. The Jesus moment is therefore the God-creation moment in a unique, unrepeatably, individuated way. The 'thisness' of Jesus is unique to him and mine is to me

and as creation's is to it. Thus whatever exists co-relationally exists uniquely and individually with its own unrepeatable, individuated 'thisness.' Hence, the rights of creation are unique and individuated and not determined by men and women but rather by the fact of their own existence.

Since other created realities stand in co-existent and co-relation to the primacy of the human nature of Jesus in creation, all other created realities constitute the 'body of Christ' as much as the 'mystical body', so that any persecution of the 'cosmic body of Christ' is as much a persecution as those perpetrated on the 'mystical body' which is the Church. This stands true because Christ is 'head of the body, which is the Church', in which case, if the 'headship' or primacy is applied to the cosmic body, then the entirety of the created cosmos is the body of Christ. The Church is the spirit of Jesus alive in all things, if this is true, then by applying the Franciscan conception of the primacy and haecceitas to this presence of Jesus we can arrive at the following conclusion.

Christ is present to each and every person coming into the world and enlightens them. This presence does not depend on a credal confession of Jesus' lordship – it is neither subjective to confession nor objective to the fact of Jesus' lordship, it is a truth which stands alone. Scripture attests to this primacy e.g. 'He is the first born of all creation'. 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world..' 'Christ is the head of the body, the Church' etc., since the Church is the spirit of Jesus alive in people, then all those to whom Christ is present and enlightens constitute the Church. The risen and glorified Jesus is present in creation as beginning, middle and end point i.e. the Jesus-moment is the reference point to all time and history, the Risen One, therefore, enlightens creation in his presence, the whole of creation is therefore the Church, the locus of the Risen and glorified historical Jesus.

Given this, the Scotist doctrine of the primacy and haecceitas are not doctrines which are little more than historical curiosities in the history of theology or metaphysics. They are vibrant, vital, important bases on which the Franciscan movement can formulate an approach to environmental theology and ethics on a solid theological, Christological and philosophical base rather than on naïve, romantic, idealistic notions of St. Francis 'loving animals and all creation.' This is not to say that Francis is to be taken out of the equation, quite the opposite, his place and role is crucial, but romanticism is not a solid base on which to ground a contemporary Franciscan theology of environmental care. The primacy of the human nature of Jesus and the haecceitas of this nature and all other created natures guarantees their right to be that which they are. So that whaling, the hunting of the tiger, the destruction of the rain forests, the mining of the earth to dust etc., attack the body of Christ in the sense of martyrdom.

Thus, a Franciscan approach to environmental theology is grounded on firm theological-philosophical and Franciscanological bases, and needs further development through the study of political theory, economics, anthropology, environmental ethics, ecology, socio-cultural studies- failure to do this means failure to accept redemption because the created nature of Jesus is not left behind at the Resurrection but is glorified in its transcendence of historical and existential limitations and is now at the heart of the Godhead. The Scotist doctrine of the primacy of the human nature of Jesus and the doctrine of haecceitas have much to teach the world – if only we can translate it and make it relevant and meaningful not just for Franciscans but for all those who seek the divine with a sincere heart.