

Daily Meditations 07-20-22

What Aquinas & Hildegard Might Say about the Webb Telescope

Good morning.

We are meditating this morning on the further implications of the Webb telescope, what it's going to be bringing into our consciousness, to our awareness as human beings, as it goes about its work to learn more about the history of the universe, and the breadth of the universe, and clearly the beauty of the universe.

So I address those who are, if you will, a bit cynical about this latest invention, put together by so many scientists from many different countries, by invoking Thomas Aquinas and Hildegard of Bingen: what would their response to this be? I think they would be head over heels with excitement.

Let's just address Hildegard first. Her very first painting of the universe -- and she painted at least four paintings of the universe -- but her first was of the egg of the universe.

And here are some of the things that she says, in addition to saying that all science comes from God. She says

God has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else.

Of course, that's what an egg is, too, isn't it? It's thoroughly a mixture. An object, if you will, of interconnectivity, all of it serving the greater whole. She writes,

Oh Holy Spirit, you are the mighty way in which everything that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness.

That whole idea of relatedness and connectedness, being integral to the universe, as it is to an egg, is actually a postmodern scientific intuition. It's very much a part of postmodern science.

It's echoed by Meister Eckhart, who said, 150 years after Hildegard, "the essence of everything is relation." That is a lot of what current science is finding, as it goes into the microscopic, microcosmic world of beings, as well as the macrocosmic: it is all related.

She says,

With nature's help, humankind can set into creation, all that is necessary and life-sustaining. Everything in nature, the sum total of heaven and of earth, becomes a temple and an altar for the service of God.

And she paints Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and finally the moon. And the four winds. She says,

Oh, humans, when the stars and the creatures were being made, where were you? Did you ever give counsel to God concerning the making of these things?

And she says that God declares,

I am God above all things, and in all things--

panentheism therefore -- and God says to her,

Those of Heaven look to me and obey me according to that justice by which I have established them. They sound my praises. The sun, moon, and stars appear in the clouds of heaven according to their course, and the blasts of wind too. And the rain and the air run as it was established for them to run.

So she thinks that there are cosmic laws that the forces of nature obey. And she talks about the sun being with Christ, who is "the Son of justice," she says, having

...the lightning of burning love, and existing with such glory that every creature becomes illuminated by the brightness of His light.

When I first showed this painting to students and asked them their response, not telling them what Hildegard said, one said, "I see a nest."

...I see a nest, in this painting by Hildegard of the universe as an egg. And that is, it seems to me, a very deep lesson. That yes, the universe is our home. It is our nest, much bigger than Hildegard ever imagined. But, of course, our closest home and nest is Mother Earth, which is part and interdependent completely of the universe.

And all this echoes Thomas Aquinas' excitement about how "we shall be drunk with the beauty of thy house."

That is the universe, this universe that Hildegard painted as an egg, and we are seeing on our television sets and computers today, from its beginnings, earliest beginnings.

All this is meant to get us drunk, get us out of ourselves. Ex-stasis, ecstatic. Maybe this way, we'll work harder to preserve our nest, Mother Earth.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.