"A THEOLOGICAL PHENOMENON"

Comments and Reflections on Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Essay on Gerard Manley Hopkins

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It is interesting to note that, of the many books and articles published about Gerard Manley Hopkins, one of the more perceptive was written not by a literary critic but by a theologian. Hans Urs von Balthasar (the Swiss theologian who died before being formally invested with the cardinalate to which Pope John Paul II had named him) has a chapter on Hopkins in Volume Three of the seven-volume work The Glory of the Lord, a Theological Aesthetics. The quality of Balthasar’s treatment may already be glimpsed from his opening paragraph:

... Hopkins ... administers a great inheritance in a way at once unique, sovereign and pregnant with future implications. It is the English inheritance, which this ... convert, with a finely discriminating mastery, brought home to Mother Church when he trod the path from Oxford, beyond Newman’s Oratory, into the novitiate of the Jesuits. Formed through and through by the English spiritual tradition, he retained not only in his choice of a religious life but also in all his aesthetic decisions, an astonishing independence.

Balthasar quotes from a letter of Hopkins to Bridges: “The effect of studying masterpieces is to make me admire and do otherwise.”

Yet independent as he was and transcending his more immediate intellectual lineage, Hopkins, like everyone else, was affected by influences of various kinds. Balthasar dismisses with one sentence the influence of Hopkin's homelife and early youth—perhaps not fully realizing how important the childhood environment is in the shaping of a mind. ("The artistically very gifted boy, who came from an artistic family, early began to draw, to make music, to write poetry.")

What Balthasar does emphasize and develop at length were four major influences, three of which are widely discussed by critics and biographers, namely, Oxford, Scotus, and Ignatian spirituality. Balthasar mentions a fourth: the "English" countryside.

I. OXFORD

Hopkins entered Balliol College, Oxford, in 1863 when he was nineteen. It was of course to be expected that he would come under the influence of those teaching at Oxford at the time. One was Matthew Arnold. Another was Walter Pater, who was Hopkin's tutor. But it was not just the immediate present that influenced Hopkins. Oxford was the gateway that brought him in contact with a vast cultural tradition that extended from the ancient Greeks and Romans (his reading was in the classics), to the rich English literary tradition, especially Shakespeare and Milton, to the contemporary Victorian era of his own time. From that mid-Victorian era, Hopkins must have caught what Balthasar calls the "magic" of the notion of beauty:

Nowhere in Europe had the word beauty such a magical sound as in the England of that time; nowhere else had the Platonist and Epicurean antiquity so immediate a presence; nowhere else had the Dante of the Cansoniere and the Vita Nuova, the world of the Troubadours and the Florence of the quattrocento awakened to such a life as with the English pre-Raphaelites. All that in continental symbolism—from Flaubert and Baudelaire to Maeterlinck and d'Anunzio—was set aside in a very programmatic and polemical manner, was in England bathed in the ancient and medieval tradition. . . .

Newman's Grammar of Assent (says Balthasar) "cannot be
understood apart from this tradition of the place of the imagination in thought."

But influenced as he was by this Victorian cultural atmosphere, Hopkins (says Balthasar) transcended it. He "passed by the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries; behind them there rose up for him Milton, Purcell and Shakespeare, and behind them Duns Scotus."

From all this, Hopkins inherited an essential trait in the British genius that Balthasar calls the "preference for the particular" over the universal. Which explains much of his poetry, and also his preference for Scotist philosophy and theology rather than the Thomist.

There was however one great element in the Oxonian atmosphere that Hopkins must have breathed in which Balthasar does not mention, except perhaps by implication and in passing. It was the great Christian revival in the Church of England that had been started by the "Tractarians" three decades earlier. Of that revival the greatest figure was Newman, who had left Oxford in 1845 upon his conversion to the Catholic Church. Hopkins was an infant when that happened, but Newman's influence was still alive in Oxford twenty years later when Hopkins was an undergraduate there. When Hopkins himself decided to become a Catholic, it was to Newman that he wrote, and it was Newman who received him into the Church. His conversion severed all ties to all that had been dear to him (including his family who resented his conversion) but Hopkins found a haven as a teacher in Newman's school in Birmingham. And it was from there (as Balthasar does mention) that he entered the Jesuit novitiate on 7 September 1868.

Balthasar mentions one further aspect of Oxford influence: a rigoristic trait that a Jesuit scholar has called "crypto-Jansenist." Balthasar cites Christopher Devlin, S.J. (who edited Hopkins's Sermons and Devotional Writings): Hopkins "belonged to that type of nineteenth-century convert who had brought with him into the Church a certain Kantian-Victorian and crypto-Jansenist hero-ideal and thereby excoriated himself in self-laceration."

It may have been that rigoristic trait, for example, that impelled Hopkins to destroy his literary compositions upon his entry in the Jesuit novitiate. And it may have been the same rigoristic
attitude that kept him from writing poetry during the first six years of his Jesuit life.

But one wonders whether this rigoristic "crypto-Jansenist" trait should be blamed alone on Oxford and the Kantian and Victorian influences. After all, Hopkins came from a family in which the legacy of Calvinist Puritanism could not have been entirely dead. Nor, after his conversion to the Catholic Church, was rigorism absent in his new co-religionists. There was (and has been until the eve of Vatican II) a rigorist "crypto-Jansenist" trait in English (and Irish) Catholicism, a trait that was also brought across the ocean to North America.

II. THE "WILD" COUNTRYSIDE

Balthasar is one of the few who mention an obvious and all-pervading influence upon Hopkins's sensibility: namely, the natural beauty of the countryside. Balthasar almost becomes poetic in describing this influence: "... It will be helpful to go back behind all his experiences of upbringing to an almost primeval experience that characterizes Hopkins both as poet and [as] man and touches his reader very directly. From the poems, the diaries and letters, there breathes everywhere, uniquely and unmistakably, the English countryside: woods, hills, green upon green, always a strong wind, driving clouds, the closeness to the sea, the moors and highlands with quick flowing brooks and heather, the surge of the waves, islands wild and yet with a Southern mildness."²

But there is a difference between Hopkins and the poets of the Romantic and post-romantic eras. Balthasar had already hinted at this in the phrase "almost primeval." He defines it further: "But it is no cultural landscape, not at all a romantic or mythological landscape, but as it were a primeval landscape. The word wild is everywhere, and is literally meant..." Balthasar cites the poem ("Inversnaid") about "the gloomy brown mountain stream rushing down between heather and dripping fern":

² Balthasar mentions the English countryside, but much of Hopkins's nature poetry was actually written in North Wales.
What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wilderness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wilderness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

If the present-day Environmentalists were looking for a patron saint, they have one in Hopkins!

This “wildness” is usually (as Balthasar says) literally meant, describing actual landscape that does present a wild appearance, with no interference from human hands: as in the stanza quoted above, or in the “brute beauty” of a bird's flight; or in the “true Arcadia of wild beauty” that Hopkins mentions in a letter to Coventry Patmore. But there are times when the notion of “wild” or “wildness” acquires a metaphorical or even a symbolic meaning. Balthasar says that the notion “enters even into the loftiest Christian utterances: as when Mary is described as ‘worldmothering air, air wild’ and Christ’s advent in the great shipwreck poem as ‘sealed in wild waters’.”

Hopkins of course was not the only British poet who loved the “wilderness.” One is reminded of the lines from Walter Scott:

O Caledonia, stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!

One is also reminded of much in Shakespeare. A poetic temperament is easily engendered in those who are fortunate to grow up close to nature and in beautiful surroundings. No one who has been to Assisi will wonder how St. Francis could have been such a poetic saint. Is it possible to grow up in a place of natural beauty like Assisi and not be a poet? Hopkins was born in Essex but grew up in London, but he came in close contact with nature at Oxford and especially later on at St. Beuno’s in North Wales. Which made it so difficult for him, later on, to live in the “ugly” manufacturing cities to which his Jesuit superiors assigned him. And it is an indication of the kind of man he was, that he accepted those assignments willingly and tried his best to exercise his priestly ministry among humble people living in squalid surroundings.
III. SCOTUS

Hopkins became acquainted with the works of Scotus when he was a student of scholastic philosophy in the Jesuit scholasticate at St. Mary's near Stonyhurst (1872-75). At that time, only Scotus's philosophy must have interested him. Later, as a theological student at St. Beuno's and in his later life as a priest, he found himself attracted also to Scotus's theological ideas.

Quite apart from those ideas, two things served as a bond between the 19th century Jesuit and the 13th century Franciscan: both were British and both Oxonians. Born and bred in Scotland (hence the name) John Duns Scotus studied at Oxford before going to Paris. Later he returned to Oxford to teach, where he wrote out the first draft of his lectures. He later revised them when he lectured at Paris and finally at Cologne where he died in 1306.

Whether Hopkins adopted the entire Scotish philosophical system (the univocity of being, the "distinctio formalis a parte rei," etc.) is not clear. What is certain is that he found Scotus's attitude identical with his own. For Scotus gave emphasis to the individuality and uniqueness of things, an attitude attractive to Hopkins who focused attention on the "inscape" and "instress" of individual beings. Hopkins found attractive the Scotist doctrine that beings have their individuality prior to their existence, even as mere possibles. All this he found more satisfactory than the Thomist focus on universals and the doctrine that "quantified matter" is the principle of individuation, without which a nature remains generic and unindividuated.

Balthasar quotes from Hopkins's "dense" essay "On Personality, Grace and Free Will": "Self is the intrinsic oneness of a thing, which is prior to its being and does not result from it ipso facto; does not result, I mean, from its having independent being."

Balthasar also alludes to the Scotist influence on Hopkins's view of Creation and the Incarnation. "God's utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world. This world then is word, expression, word of God. Therefore its end, its purpose, its meaning, is God and its life and work to name
and praise him.” This view is at the core of what Balthasar calls Hopkins’s “sacramental poetry.”

In passing, it is interesting to note how a modern theologian like Karl Rahner, proceeding from different premises, could arrive at the same conclusions as Scotus regarding the Christian mysteries of Creation, Incarnation and Redemption.³

Balthasar does not mention one doctrine to which both Scotus and Hopkins were deeply committed: the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That doctrine had been believed by the faithful since the earliest times but had later been questioned by some theologians and theological schools. It was Scotus who first publicly defended the doctrine at Paris. It became a principal element in Franciscan teaching, as it was among the Jesuits after them. Jesuit scholastics, like St. John Berchmans, made a vow, signed in their blood, to defend the doctrine. That was when it was still debatable. In Hopkins’s time the matter was no longer controversial among Catholics after Pius IX’s dogmatic definition of 1854.

IV. IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY

Concerning the influence of Ignatian spirituality upon Hopkins, there is a certain ambivalence in Balthasar’s treatment. In one way this is to his credit, as in dealing with such complex matters as spirituality and a person’s psychological make-up, simplistic affirmations are bound to be superficial. At the same time this ambivalence is somewhat odd. On one hand, Balthasar (himself schooled in Ignatian spirituality as a former Jesuit priest) recognizes in Hopkins a response in the highest degree to the very high standards demanded by his vocation. On the other hand he makes the amazing statement that “Hopkins and Ignatius do not look one another full in the face.” We will return to that point at the end of this article.

That Hopkins responded in a high degree to what his vocation

3. For example, the view that only the Divine Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, could become incarnate precisely because He is God’s utterance, as against the view of many theologians that any of the three Divine Persons could have become incarnate.
demanded (as he saw it) is obvious from reading his life. This, despite three great obstacles that must have rendered that response difficult: one concerned his poetry; a second his life; a third, what St. Ignatius would call “desolation.”

1. HIS POETRY

Moved by a mistaken sense of the incompatibility between poetic writing and his vocation, Hopkins (as we have mentioned) destroyed his poems before entering the novitiate. And during the first six years of his Jesuit life he refrained from writing poetry. That self-imposed silence finally ended when a chance remark by the Rector served as a catalyst for the volcanic explosion, “The Wreck of Deutschland.” But there remained the problem of publication. Balthasar does not mention the celebrated incident of the Jesuit editors of The Month refusing to publish the “Deutschland”; but it was that rejection that convinced Hopkins that his poems could not be published under Jesuit auspices. And if not under those auspices, then he must not publish at all, at least not in his lifetime. To the insistent urgings of friends that he publish anyway, he was adamant. “You say truly that our Society fosters literary excellence. Well then, it must be left to look to its own interests.”

Hopkins became convinced of a further fact: that the Society of Jesus did not desire to promote literary brilliance and the fame that derives therefrom. “Brilliance does not suit us,” he said. He mentioned examples. Edmund Campion could have been a great literary figure, “but his eloquence died on the air, his genius drenched in his own blood.” Bourdaloue was at the time reckoned the greatest Jesuit orator and Suarez the greatest theologian. But Bourdaloue was “severe in style” and Suarez “without originality or brilliancy; he treats everything satisfactorily, but you never remember a phrase of his . . .” Even the Jesuit saints — Ignatius, Aloysius, Berchmans — lived “ordinary” lives. “I quote these cases” says Hopkins “to prove that show and brilliancy do not suit us, that we cultivate the commonplace outwardly and wish the beauty of the king’s daughter, the soul, to be from within.”

Hopkins had to accept what must be difficult for any great
writer: the realization that his works, no matter how brilliant or profound, would remain unknown and that he himself would live and die in obscurity. He did not rebel against that fate. He accepted it as part of the sacrifice “without reserves” demanded of him by God. The Jesuit vocation, he said, “puts before me a standard so high that a higher can be found nowhere else.”

2. FAILURE

Balthasar mentions a second problem. Not only could Hopkins’s poems not be published, but he himself was in his own eyes a failure. He was “booted” from place to place and assigned the humblest ministries. “Fortune’s football” — Hopkins called himself. He loved the countryside and was assigned to ugly industrial cities. He had a talent for profound speculation and scholarship and was given lowly teaching assignments. Hopkins was content to accept this humble and laborious lot as part of the “sacrifice without reserves” demanded by his vocation. But if subjectively he did not complain, objectively considered in itself, this was a waste of valuable manpower whose talents were never exploited to the full. Perhaps the Jesuit superiors of those days (themselves perhaps of mediocre talent) never realized what a highly talented man they had in Hopkins. They saw him merely as an “odd” or “eccentric” person with little usefulness for practical things. Or if they did recognize how talented he was, that recognition embarrassed them. They did not know how to employ those talents.

One is reminded of an analogous case. It is amusing to read of one grouchy Rector in Germany complaining to the Roman authorities that Peter Canisius was wasting his time trying to write theological books when in fact he was “not a theologian.” Canisius has since been declared a Doctor of the Church, and precisely for his theology.

In Hopkins’s case, the biggest irony of all was the fact that a scholar who had graduated from Oxford with the highest honors was considered not sufficiently talented to be admitted to the highest degree of membership in the Jesuit Order, namely the Profession of four solemn vows. It was the custom in those days to give the essential program in theology in three years
after which the scholastics were ordained priests. Only those were admitted to a fourth year of studies who showed signs of being able to pass the final gruelling two-hour oral examination (before a board of four examiners and a presiding referee) which was the normal requisite for the Profession. Hopkins was ordained after three years with no further studies after that. Balthasar alludes to that fact briefly: "But even his career in the order was one of ever more fundamental failure: he was a joke, an oddity: because of his Scotist leaning, even with his great speculative gifts he could not continue his studies beyond his priestly ordination."

The Jesuits (like the Church after Vatican II) have since become more liberal and less narrow-minded in their interpretation of what is meant by adequate theological knowledge. But Hopkins lived in nineteenth century Britain when the Catholics (and especially the Catholic authorities) were extremely narrow-minded — as Newman found out in his dealings with the hierarchies of England and Ireland.

3. DESOLATION AND CONSOilation

Balthasar mentions an "inner tragedy" that made Hopkins's life as a priest difficult. To begin with, his poetic inspiration had begun to fail. The exuberance amid the "wild" beauty of North Wales that had produced those wonderful poems had given way to barrenness. The ugliness of the industrial cities to which he was assigned was not conducive to poetic composition. Even when he was assigned for a while to Oxford and later to Dublin, he no longer had the same facility of composition as before. Some profound sonnets (called "terrible sonnets" by critics) were indeed composed. Hopkins said they were "written in blood." He felt like "time's eunuch" unable to generate poetic progeny. One of the "terrible sonnets" begins "No worst, there is none!" In another he begs God to end the drought: "Send my roots rain!"

But Balthasar is sufficiently discerning to see that Hopkins was undergoing something deeper than lack of poetic inspiration. He does not use the term, but it seems to have been what is ordinarily described as a "dark night of the soul," a feeling of
alienation from God. It is the kind hinted at in the cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." Ignatius Loyola calls this a state of "desolation." Particularly painful to Hopkins was the feeling of alienation from Jesus Christ whom he loved deeply, more than any other being: "The only person that I am in love with, seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly . . ."

There were indeed moments of consolation when God seemed near, but those moments could not be translated into poetry: "and when he [Jesus Christ] does [stir my heart sensibly] I cannot always make capital of it; it would be sacrilege to do so."

On that point Balthasar makes an astute comment: "It is the problem between divine consolation and poetic inspiration. The first could overflow into the second, but the poet did not will it, particularly when such consolation became rare." Balthasar adds that the "ligature" between divine consolation and poetic inspiration may sometimes exist, as in the case of John of the Cross. It was the unsureness of that ligature that (Balthasar says) Henri Bremond failed to perceive in his book on Prayer and Poetry, a book that Balthasar characterizes as "superficial."

Balthasar however does not advert to another possibility that may have been at the bottom of Hopkins's dryness both in poetry and in prayer. The state that Hopkins describes (a feeling of constant tiredness, of physical exhaustion, of inability to pursue intellectual effort over a long period, a feeling even of "madness coming") may point to a physical ailment. Modern medical science might have been able to diagnose it as a case of low blood pressure or anemia or pulmonary tuberculosis or something similar. The fact that Hopkins died at a relatively young (45) age seems to point to physical ill health that, in the state of medical science of those days, may not have been recognized early enough to prescribe a remedy.

V. "APPROPRIATELY THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE"

Balthasar appreciates Hopkins's poetry from the viewpoint not of a literary critic but of a theologian. He considers Hopkins's poetic language as the "absolutely appropriate theological language."
The core of Balthasar's treatment on this point may be seen in progression in the following three passages. The first deals with "reading" (Hopkins's word) all of nature "in relation to their center" which is Christ, the Word of God incarnate. Balthasar says:

The fact that all natures and selves are fashioned and determined for Christ, who is both their ultimate inscape and instress, means that there is no other possibility of reading them objectively and understanding them than in relation to their center in which they are integrated. . . .

A second passage goes farther. It deals with how Hopkins "reads" that nature: not in the Latin tradition of universal concepts, but in the "English tradition" of the particular, the individual, the unique. Balthasar says:

It is precisely the duty of the one who ascends to Christ in faith, hope and love to interpret all the forms of God's revelation in Christ throughout the universe, and this task is achieved by Hopkins the poet. For what has to be interpreted is not concepts (of "universal" abstract truth) but images (of the unique, personal, divine-human truth), and his poetry is the absolutely appropriate theological language, and Hopkins brings the great English tradition back into the Church by his own creative achievement.

The third passage goes farther still. It deals with Hopkins's "sacramental poetry" based on the ability to see in nature a "symbol" of the divine:

For our understanding of the way the mystery of God takes form in the world, the concept of the sacramental is at hand, which certainly contains within itself the power of the "symbol," while it goes far beyond it; the form of the image is a likeness to the primordial form in that it has the 'stress' of the latter in itself:

sacramenta continent quae significant.

5. Ibid. 391.
6. Ibid. 393-94.
Although the term "sacramental poetry" is not peculiar to Balthasar (others have also employed it) he is perhaps the first to use it with rigorous theological correctness. To Hopkins's poetry as "the absolutely appropriate theological language" Balthasar pays the following noteworthy tribute: "The unprecedented character of Hopkins's language is a theological phenomenon and can be understood only in this way." 7

That is somewhat ironic. That high theological tribute from a world-famous theologian was paid to a poet whose theological knowledge had been judged by his superiors as inadequate and not quite making the grade!

What then did Hopkins see in nature that made his poetry "sacramental"?

First of all (says Balthasar) "there is the Christian's simple cosmic experience of God." Hopkins sees the world as "charged with the grandeur of God"; he gives "glory to God for dappled things"; the Holy Ghost "broods over the bent world"; and so on.

In particular Hopkins sees Christ everywhere. He is in the lightning; in the waves that engulf the shipwreck voyagers. The stars on a starlit night remind him of a field ready for the harvest in which the crop is Christ ("to glean our Savior"). The hills remind him of Christ's "world-wielding shoulder." And so on.

Balthasar does not mention what may perhaps be the most remarkable and explicit poetic expression of the doctrine on divine grace. In a poem that begins "As kingfishers catch fire," Hopkins speaks of Christ being present in everyone who is "just" — that is, in the "state of grace" or of union with God:

I say more: the just man justices
Keeps grace; that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eyes what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

7. Ibid. 392.
Moreover, as Balthasar says, "the transparency of nature to the mystery of salvation makes it equally as easy to look from the mystery into nature." As an example he cites Hopkins's poems about the Blessed Virgin Mary. "Mary is the kernel of unfallen nature; she is effective mediation to her Son; she is the atmosphere in which we live"; etc.

Finally Hopkins sees God in the men and women, old and young, among whom he has to exercise the pastoral ministry. He has great compassion for sinners returning to God. And on the other hand, an extraordinary "mimosa-like sensitivity" to the purity of the young and he could not bear the thought of their being defiled. He also has "a scarcely bearable insight into the heart; in human love he can catch an almost naked glimpse of the love of God."

"But the ultimate for Hopkins remains still his shipwreck poems," says Balthasar, "because here the foundering and shattering of all worldly images and symbols yield a final picture of the sacrament of the world: perishing and ascending to God. . . ."

"Foundering in God": that (says Balthasar) is the high point of the "Wreck of the Deutschland":

Man finds nothing more to cling to; not his longing nor reward nor heaven nor any of God's attributes, for beyond all that there is nothing but him alone: "Ipse, the only one."

It is on that note that Hans Urs von Balthasar ends his essay on Hopkins.

It might be relevant to add that that essay is in the same volume as essays on Dante, St. John of the Cross, Pascal, Hamann, Soloviev, and Peguy.

VI. HOPKINS AND IGNATIUS

We come at last to a point alluded to earlier, namely Balthasar's opinion that "Hopkins and Ignatius do not look one

8. As examples, Balthasar cites the poems "The Handsome Heart," "Felix Randal," "Brothers."
another in the face."

Presumably, what Balthasar meant was that Hopkins was not sufficiently Ignatian in his thinking and his attitudes; these were not altogether in conformity with the teachings of the founder of his Order, St. Ignatius Loyola, as contained in the Saint’s book on *Spiritual Exercises*. Here is the passage:

But how far he is in all of this Ignatian, it is hard to say. The *Exercises* were for him the breath of life, an ever fresh occasion for self-examination and conversion, an occasion too for the most daring speculation, which, however, betrayed more interest in Scotus than in the father of his order. Hopkins and Ignatius do not look one another in the face.⁹

In the first place it should be said (for the sake of those not sufficiently acquainted with the literature on Jesuit spirituality) that the “Spiritual Exercises” are not merely a book. The book is merely a guide to what really is an experience. Essentially, it is a 30-day “retreat” during which a person is engaged in prayer and meditation under the guidance of a director who in turn is guided by the book, written by St. Ignatius originally in Spanish and translated into many languages.

Furthermore, Jesuits (as well as members of many religious congregations, not to mention bishops, priests and many lay persons) make an annual retreat (eight days in the case of Jesuits) during which the principal meditations of the Spiritual Exercises are again performed. Hopkins’s spiritual diaries included his reflections during these annual retreats.

With that as a preliminary note, let us take up Balthasar’s opinion that Hopkins and Ignatius “do not look each other in the face.” Can that be true?

In our opinion the contrary is the case: Hopkins, we think, was thoroughly Ignatian in his thinking and in his attitudes. To illustrate that, let us limit ourselves to two considerations.

First: the way that Hopkins accepted whatever assignments were given him, even those that by normal standards he might have been tempted to consider beneath his intellectual capacities.

Both by talent and by temperament he could have been a university professor. Instead he was assigned to humble ministries among the poor in industrial cities. He did get back to Oxford for a brief period, but only as one of the priests to say Mass and hear confessions and perform other pastoral duties in the Jesuit church of St. Aloysius. He did get finally a university assignment, to teach Greek. But again, it was in a “dilapidated” college in Dublin where much of his time and energy seems to have been spent laboriously correcting students’ compositions.

He did not complain. It is true that he refers to himself as “ Fortune’s football” booted from place to place. That may sound like the complaint of self-pity. It is unfortunate that the printed page (or the original manuscript) cannot reproduce the tone of voice and the person’s face when the remark was made. Hopkins was English to the core, possessed also of the Englishman’s sense of humor, and English humor likes to make self-deprecatory remarks.

The fact is that Hopkins accepted all his assignments, and tried his best to comply with the corresponding duties. To his friends who deplored the way he was being treated by superiors, he pointed out that his lot was no different from Christ’s. Christ also knew failure and saw the seemingly utter ruin of all his work.

Is that attitude not an application of Ignatian “indifference” and of the “third degree of humility”? 10

A second consideration was the way Hopkins, both as man and as poet, looked at all things. Is this not precisely the attitude inculcated by Ignatius in the “Contemplatio ad amorem”? 11 Ignatius asks the exercitant to consider how God is present and dwells (“habita”) in all things: “in the elements giving them being, in plants giving them vegetative life, in animals giving them sensitive life, in man giving him existence and vegetative, animal and rational life, creating him in his image and likeness, even making man a temple where God dwells (“haciendo templo de mí”).

Further, Ignatius asks the exercitant to consider how God is not only dwelling in all things as in a temple but is actually

11. Ibid. nos. 230-237, esp. 235 and 236.
“working” in them. Even in the Spanish original he uses a Latin phrase: “id est, habet se ad modum laborantis” (God acts as if he were laboring within each creature).

What is Hopkins’s “sacramental poetry” but a thoroughgoing application of this Ignatian attitude towards all creation, an attitude that in Hopkins had become second nature.

That in his “daring speculations” concerning the Exercises Hopkins is using Scotist categories is obvious. Does that prevent him from being also Ignatian?

Chesterton says that the most profound beliefs and attitudes of a person are not those that he explicitly mentions or defends, but those that he takes for granted. Far from not seeing eye-to-eye with Ignatius, Hopkins saw all things with Ignatian eyes.