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For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



Abstracting Grace - further adventures in Art Theology Part Five

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Blog Series: Re/Kindling Creativity and Imagination

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Tags: contemplation | creativity | Green | Art Theology | Hildegard

How do you read? Do you read different books differently?

There is a way of reading I learned called *lectio divina*. The words are Latin and mean: sacred reading. Christians date *sacred reading* back to the 6th century, and say Benedict of Nursia created it.

Other faith traditions do something similar and date it even further back. It's a way of entering contemplation. (Contemplation is another word for prayer, intimate, heart focused prayer).

What is contemplation? Savoring.

They say you should do this kind of reading with sacred text, sacred scripture.

I do it with poetry... or other writing that enters me into heart knowing. I do it with texts that are sacred to me.

Most often poetry.

First I read the poem or text. Just once, I read it all the way through without stopping. It is our initial meeting. Taking it all in, getting to know it.

Then I read it a second time, this time slowly, listening closely. I pay attention to what word or phrase grabs my heart. What resonates? sparks? provokes?

I read it the same way I eat a delicious meal, chewing it slowly in my heart. Savoring. Letting the flavors envelop and soak into my whole being. Paying attention to what seasoning, what note, stands out. Naming what is most prominent.

I read it again, a third time. This time I sit within the word or phrase that most deeply lands within me. Dwell in there. What is the invitation that lies within this word or phrase? Why is it stirring my heart? What is hidden within the resonance?

Sometimes, I read it over and over, and over, and over again... until I find you.

Finally, ponder how will I live in response to the invitation?
How will I live deeper in love with you? This the invitation extended from the wordless place of knowing. Journal and paint a response.

enter into knowing, knowing I feel in every fiber of my being.

Lectio with Hildegard of Bingen's idea of Greening

Translated and explained by Heinrich Schipperges and John Cumming:

The Invitation =
How is greenness radiating in the structure of my life?

Greenness
Hildegard of Bingen constantly refers to the fundamental creative power of the life-force as "greenness." This radiating green vitality (*viriditas*) shines through and from the structures of the world and in the juice of each single organism (*fulgens in opere hominis*). In this way it gives biological and cosmic forces a common purpose, bringing them into ethical consensus, as it were. The heavens and the earth and all its beauties are essentially products of this basic green vitality.

Initially, greenness (*viriditas*) is experienced quite naturally. We perceive it in a very basic way as the revivification, sprouting and blossoming of external nature. In this context we experience simply what growth and development, sprouting and flourishing mean if all goes well: they imply a strong and healthy life, or "essential greenness," to adopt Hildegard's term. In all the varieties and several beauties of the natural world we see a thousand different forms of greening in stalks and leaves. This greenness originates in the four elements: earth and fire, water and air. It is sustained by the four qualities: by dry and moist, by cold and hot. This green lives in fire,

shimmers in water, moistens stone, and takes particularly refreshing effect in the atmosphere from which "the grasses in the early morning suck up their greenness as greedily as a lamb its milk" (PL 1249 B). Green is the light which, once it has been urged forth, thoroughly drenches and then bakes all things in this world in the sun's fire until their variegated colours and qualities reach the point of golden maturity.

A tree is a prime example of this process. The function performed by a tree's sap falls to the soul in a human body. Its powers or abilities enable it to unfold or develop its form just as the tree does. Its intelligence (*intellectus*) is like the green of branches and leaves; its will (*voluntas*) is like blossoming; its spirit (*animus*) is like the fruit in preparation; and its reason (*ratio*) like the fruit come to fruition or maturity. Finally, its good sense or purposive reason (*sensus*) is like the ultimate form of the tree extending and spreading out to its full height and width. Accordingly, in all these manifestations and expressions, the soul is "the body's inner framework and shaping support" (Sc

1, 4). Consequently, not only flesh and blood are green, but everything to do with the vitalizing power of the body that we might include in the concept of "soul." A woman becomes fruitful in the greenness of her blood, where her life-giving primordial impulse becomes evident (*viriditas floriditatis feminae*). Yet this greenness is a reflection, a symbolic representation of the truly primordial vitality, the ultimately primal power, which lies hidden in the ground of eternity. This brilliant green spectrum of possibilities pours forth from the natural order, and grows ever denser and richer as it emanates from the glowing core of the fire of eternal life, from whose mysterious green depths it trickles into the embryonic forces of the cosmos, into the vital forces that empower and shape the generations of humanity, and into the "tender greenness" of the Incarnation.

"There is a power that has been since all eternity," says Hildegard, "and that force and potentiality is green!"

Accordingly, *viriditas* is the supremely illuminative principle of the natural driving-force, the life-force that is always purposively directed toward healing and wholeness. Love, too, is the breath of the same vital green power that sustains all life's greenness. The Holy Spirit gives human beings the green and open space where they are capable of responding in the Word, and of dedicating themselves of their own free will to the joint enterprise of creation. The Spirit purifies the world, scours away all guilt, and heals all wounds and sadness. The Spirit ignites and inspires us and everything as it makes its way through our

There is some bigger work, greater than the one or any one person.
Oneness →

What does mean by healthy? This needs to be opened up, there is healing in sickness.

Oneness "common purpose"

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Greenness
is like
Grace
pouring
onto us
all
we choose
how long we
lie in
the sun.

horribly alienated reality; yet throughout the whole expanse of history it requires nothing in return but a fresh, green, and vitalizing response to its encouragement.

For Hildegard, green is not a mere colour but a basic attitude and purposive intent. It is the permanent inflowing and outflowing of *viriditas*, the symbol of sound existence.

Ultimately, physical health is a lasting and continuously effective outpouring of this greening power from the inexhaustible fountain of life's living light. This conviction allows Hildegard to praise the *viriditas nobilissima* (most noble greenness) that is rooted in the sun,

shining like the dawn, radiating its brightness, in an eternal cycle whose ultimacy and complexity the human mind can never fully grasp (S 108). It is greenness, shining in the motion of the cosmos and in the wheel of history; it is the vitalizing ground of all life laid down and tilled by the creative hand of God (*viriditas digiti Dei*). God planted the wonderfully illuminated and illuminative creation in evergreen freshness. It is the fragrant breath of greenness that leads our spirit too into the broad expanses of the world, exhaling wisdom to be inhaled by our hearts together with the very joy of being alive (S 137).

Finest green of all greens showing,
From the sun's strength ever growing,

Enclosed in everlasting love,
Fed from a boundless source above,

Embraced by mysteries divine
That all our earthly thoughts outshine.

Like each new dawn, renewed delight,
To all the world a gift of light,

Like the sun's flames ever glowing,
Noblest, greenest green now flowing.

(S 109)

"A person is what his deep desire is. It is our deepest desire in this life that shapes the life to come. So let us direct our deepest desires to realize the Self."

- The Chandogya Upanishad
The Eknath Easwaran trans.

The Tree of Jesse
from Scivias Codex,
12th century
MS. A.9.2, fol. 4r
University of
Tübingen

First I took it in and highlighted everything that immediately pulled me close.

Reading it a second time I marked out pieces that distracted me and made me cringe. Circled in red all that resonated in my heart. (I do this with people too).

Then, sink into what most deeply reverberated:

“This radiating green vitality (viriditas) shines through and from the structures of the world and in the juice of each single organism.”

radiating

green

vitality

shines

through

from

structures

of the world

in juice

each

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organism.

radiating

green

through and from
structures

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juiciness

each single organisms

juices.

The third time I read it through, I sit in the invitation,
the invitation held in what vibrated most strongly within my heart:

How is greeness radiating in the structures of my life?

Greeness radiating in the structures of my life?

What is *this* greeness?

Looking over my life I can see it, even in the structures I now abhor.

When I think of it radiating today...I keep thinking of the Chandogya Upanishad,

“A person is what (their) deep desire is. It is our deepest desire in this life that shapes the life to come. So let us direct our deepest desires to realize the Self.”

What is my deepest desire?

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