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This short paper addresses the question of how Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) shows the world to be sacramental.

To begin with, Hopkins has a *sacramental understanding of life*. He sees God as present beneath the surface of matter, things, events, and encounters, and drawing him deeper into the mystery of God's Presence.¹ In other words, God is in all things.² Accordingly, in perceiving the world with a sacramental eye, Hopkins writes in his poem, "God's Grandeur", that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God".³

Furthermore, Hopkins realizes that *God's presence is hidden*. Nevertheless, God reaches us through matter, through one another – in fact through all Creation.⁴ Hidden in sacramental signs, the grace of God may be found and received, and God worshipped.⁵ Fittingly, Hopkins' translation of St Thomas Aquinas' hymn, "Adoro te", begins with: "*Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore, Masked by these bare shadows, shape and nothing more, . . . (emphasis mine)*"⁶

¹ S. Cyprian's Clarence Gate, "Corpus Christi 2005". <<http://www.stcyprians.org.uk/hom/homily-cc-2005.html>> (3 September 2010).

² Ibid. Note: A book written by Gerard W. Hughes is entitled *God in All Things: Earthing Our Spirituality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003).

³ Ibid. A sacramental understanding of life allows one to acknowledge something deeper below the surface of things. Indeed, one touches on what normally "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1Cor 2:9, NIV).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. Based on the Eucharist, the extraordinary fact at the centre of reality is as follows: that because God is particularly and really present in the Bread and Wine, God is invisibly, particularly and really present everywhere. Focussing on God in the particular helps one to recognise God in the general.

⁶ Ibid.

With a sacramental understanding of life, Hopkins understands that *the world is not junk* to be discarded at some future time; rather, it has been redeemed and visited by the incarnate Christ.⁷ As the redeemed, we are to be, indeed we are, immortal diamonds.⁸ Some of Hopkins' most magnificent lines capture this thought. In "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection" he writes:⁹

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond, is immortal diamond.

Hopkins' sacramental vision of the world around us¹⁰ plummets new depth through two related features of his poetic expression: *inscape and instress*.¹¹ These allow him to exceed the depth of evangelical devotional poets.

Inscape is the innermost being, or uniqueness, of each created thing or person.¹² In other words, it means the particular features, or distinctive and essential inner quality of something, which make it different from any other.¹³

⁷ John H. Armstrong, "Gerard Manley Hopkins and the New Heavens and New Earth" (December 5, 2009). <http://johnharmstrong.typepad.com/john_h_armstrong_/2009/12/gerald-manley-hopkins-and-the-new-heavens-and-new-earth.html> (3 September 2010).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Paul Mariani, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008), reviewed in <http://imagejournal.org/imageupdate/164_090218.htm> (3 September 2010).

¹¹ Nancy E. Hartsock, "Dangerous Beauty: The Poetry and Life of Gerard Manley Hopkins" (May 2006), <<http://www.eastern.edu/academic/cas/depts/english/PDF/writing/Nancy%20Hartsock%20dangerous%20beauty.pdf>> (3 September 2010). According to Hartsock, "the Ignatian invitation to enter the Gospels through imaginative prayer . . . was a natural exercise for Hopkins, fuelling the development of his concepts of inscape and instress" (page 11).

¹² Ibid., 11; Crossref-it.info, "Inscape and Instress", <<http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/187/Inscape-and-instress>> (3 September 2010).

¹³ Ibid.

Instress, on the other hand, means the experience (how it is received into the sight, memory, and imagination) a reader has of inscape.¹⁴ It is the understanding, as well as emotional or spiritual response, demanded by the intrinsic quality of a created thing.

Accordingly, Hopkins believes that his task is to express images that will pin the inscape down for readers, so they can recapture his experience and perception (which is instress).¹⁵ For him, *poetry is the best language for carrying inscape*, creating poetic channels through which Christ could be seen, known, and adored by His people.¹⁶ In other words, poetry – through symbolism and metaphor – condenses an unseen reality into human words. And so for Hopkins, the poetic words address, reveal, and praise God and thereby become sacramental words because of the reality in them.¹⁷

Moreover, in his poetry, Hopkins is able to contemplate down-to-earth objects such as trees, streams, flowers, and landscapes and see the very presence and energy of God.¹⁸ To him, visible beauty is a reflection of the invisible beauty of God.¹⁹ In short, *all of nature is sacramental* – being the visible sign of an invisible, creative energy that reveals the Creator.²⁰ This sacramental view of nature is central to Hopkins' poetry, and is derived from the Ignatian Exercises.²¹

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hartsock, "Dangerous Beauty, 12.

¹⁷ John H. Armstrong, "Gerard Manley Hopkins: How Poetry Can Express Nature and Incarnation Sacramentally", (December 4, 2009),

<http://johnharmstrong.typepad.com/john_h_armstrong_/2009/12/gerald-manley-hopkins-how-poetry-can-express-nature-and-incarnation-sacramentally.html> (3 September 2010).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hartsock, "Dangerous Beauty, 12.

Finally, in Hopkins' poetry are *glimpses of the incarnation*, that is, where the divine inhabits the earthly. For instance, his two poems, "God's Grandeur" and "Spring", hint at the divine presence in nature. In this context, McFague suggests that the Creation can indeed be understood as God's self-expression, formed in God's own reality.²² "In a monotheistic, panentheistic theology, if one is to understand God in some sense as physical and not just spiritual, then the entire 'body' of the universe is 'in' God and is God's visible self-expression."²³

In summary, this paper has addressed the question: How does Hopkins show the world to be sacramental? The response lies in that Hopkins has a sacramental understanding of life and recognizes that all of nature is sacramental. He realizes that while God's presence is hidden, the world is not useless. Hopkins believes, therefore, that the poet's task is to *perceive* (inscape) and *express* (instress) the sacramental and incarnate uniqueness of creation through the language of poetry.

²² Sally McFague, "Imaging a Theology of Nature: The World as God's Body", in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, eds. Charles Birch, William Eaken and Jay B. McDaniel (New York: Orbis Books, 1990, <<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2324>> (3 September 2010).

²³ *Ibid.* McFague adds that "this body, albeit a strange one if we take ours as the model, is nothing less than all that exists."

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Gerard Manley Hopkins is considered to be one of the greatest poets of the Victorian era. However, because his style was so radically different from that of his contemporaries, he was largely overlooked during his lifetime. He also reviewed poetry for the London Times and wrote one novel and an essay on Longfellow, which were never published. This concern for art, language, and religion in Hopkins's extended family had a direct effect on the Hopkins children. Hopkins's sister Millicent (1849-1946) was originally interested in music but eventually became an "out-sister" of All Saints' Home, an Anglican sisterhood founded in London in 1851. She took the sister's habit in 1878.