

## SF 1.6 Practicum – Contemplating God in Creation

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**Imago Dei – Being created in the Image of God imbued humanity with characteristics we share imperfectly and in part with God. God designed that these characteristics would allow humanity to observe and to seek God through creation [Ps 19]. While humanity lost much of our created resemblance with God at the Fall, there yet remains aspects that draw us to God.**

### **A) A Guide for Contemplating God in Creation (Natural Revelation)**

For the Christian believer it is clearly evident that God has infused all of creation with his presence and goodness (see Bible references listed below in part C). Both Scripture and the testimony of millions of thoughtful and observant people throughout the ages speak undeniably to the witness and accessibility of God through the spiritual door of nature.

This was especially true for the early Celtic Christians, from whom we can learn a few things about how to enjoy and be taught through the gift of God's creation. The Celts had a cultural and Pagan religious background which was fundamentally in touch with creation. When they became Christians, they saw their world through different eyes of faith, and observed with wonder how God had left His witness through creation. Though their Pagan faith practices needed to be abandoned, they kept the sense of awe and wonder in the fabric of the natural world.

For the Celts, there was never any doubt that the visible material world and the invisible spiritual world were one interrelated reality. They did not separate the sacred from the secular as modern thinkers do. In every way the visible and the invisible were interwoven as surely as the air we breathe and the food we eat come to give our bodies life.

The Celts believed that the presence of the invisible and the spiritual could be so palpable to a person that they called these moments "thin places". These 'thin places' were considered as 'sacred space' for it is there the visible world, which we experience through our sight, taste, touch, hearing and smell, becomes interpenetrated by the invisible world. These 'thin places' or 'sacred spaces' are the places we can meet with our eternal, infinite, and inscrutable God in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Awe, grandeur and mystery mark these moments.

For the Pagan these sacred places were geographical and were marked with structures to enhance the sense of awe. For the Christian these places of sacred encounter are not geographical, instead they are intersections between God's Spirit made evident in creation connecting with God's Spirit residing in us and enlivening us. Such intersections may be more available than we suspect where God is imminent [a reachable immediate occurrence]. If we are attentive and patient, God is very generous in his desire to connect with us in our space and time.

It is important to understand that the spiritual reality contains both Godly and ungodly aspects. Just because something is spiritual doesn't mean it is good, and evil lurks there for the unwary searcher. The spiritual reality Pagan initiates experience and the desire to control or manipulate for their own benefit is inherently evil. On the other hand, God always intended that the material world and the spiritual world would intersect and allow a place where God and humanity could meet.

The following is an exercise, which may help the Christian become more open to the opportunity to encounter God in creation through the indwelling Spirit within.

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### B) Exercise: Contemplating God in Nature

This exercise is really quite simple and involves three movements: prayerful engaged, attentively observational, and quietly attuned. This is not a “new-age” thing; this is something the early church engaged in as a means to come closer to God using the created order He established for us. God created nature for our benefit and enjoyment, and purposed us to us to care for. Since God is Spirit and doesn’t require a material creation in which to exist. However, humanity is physical and requires the material world in which supports our existence. Because creation was made for us and we were made for it, it is understandable that we would have a natural affinity toward nature.

- Remember and pray, Psalm 19:1 *“The heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.”*
- Quiet yourself in prayer and acknowledge God’s presence in and around you. Allow a sense of wonder to grasp your heart as you witness creation as though through God’s eyes. Don’t merely look for what you already know; look instead for what God may reveal to you.
- Speak your desire to be with God, to go deeper relationally with Him, and to receive whatever God has for you. Release any expectations and invite the Spirit to free you to enjoy this experience and to be present and guide you.
- Take a walk and be fully present in what you notice as you walk. Be sure to simply be attending to where you are and what you are seeing - not the *next* thing, but the *current* thing. Be present in the moment.
- Allow something to draw your attention, perhaps going back to a view you noticed earlier and has retained your attention. Look on it for a time solely to take it all in (also hold, smell or touch if it is appropriate). Simply take a long and loving look what is before you. Allow the thought that all you see was made for you to grasp your heart and mind.
- Feel free to ponder prayerfully the Bible quotes listed below. As you do so, notice the particulars of what you are experiencing in nature, and jot down what they are, how you see them, what you notice – this is one way the Spirit communicates with us.
- Once done noticing, read over your notes, and then look at the scene prayerfully open to whatever “thought” the scene has presented for you. Don’t force it and be patient. Don’t be upset if there is no *message*. Allow your heart to become sensitized to God’s created order. Don’t attempt to assign a message or impute an application, but just engage the moment and let it rise naturally.
- If the experience has spoken something to you, what do you hear? How do you feel about it now? What is God placing upon your heart or your mind at the moment? Do you sense a revelation from God... where He is allowing you to experience an aspect of creation that is new to you? If so, what would you like to do with what you’ve received?
- If nothing has really happened or you haven’t noticed God having spoken to you through this experience, don’t be discouraged. Ask God if something is keeping you from sensing His presence. Remember the Spirit resides within all believers and desires to lead you into His Truth, so simply return to your enjoyment of the moment and express your gratefulness to God. In either case, jot down your thoughts, feelings, and responses. Be aware that prayer in this context is an act of worship. Press into God and thank Him.

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### **C) Scripture References to God's Revelation in Nature**

*(All verses in RSV translation)*

#### **Romans 1: 20**

Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

#### **Genesis 1:31**

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

#### **Isaiah 6:3**

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

#### **Psalms 19: 1-4**

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

#### **Psalms 29**

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name; worship the LORD in holy array.

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, upon many waters.

The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Si'ron like a young wild ox.

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness, the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the LORD makes the oaks to whirl, & strips the forests bare; in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

#### **Psalms 96:11-13**

"Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord, for the comes..."

#### **Isaiah 35:1-2**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

#### **Luke 19:40**

He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.

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