

Contemplating Creation

**Contemplating Creation**  
**Sunday, October 10, 2021**

*Praise the Lord from the earth,  
Sea monsters and all deeps;  
Fire and hail, snow and clouds;  
Stormy wind, fulfilling God's word;  
Mountains and all hills;  
Fruit trees and all cedars;  
Beasts and all cattle;  
Creeping things and winged fowl;*

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
For God's name alone is exalted;  
God's glory is above earth and heaven.*

—Psalm 148: 7–10, 13

*This week's Daily Meditations focus on creation as a source of inspiration for contemplation and action. Fr. Richard shares about how "seeing" or perceiving God in nature forms the basis of an incarnational spirituality:*

Creation spirituality has its origins in Hebrew Scriptures such as Psalms 104 and 148. It is a spirituality that is rooted, first of all, in nature, in experience, and in the world as it is. This rich Hebrew spirituality formed the mind and heart of Jesus of Nazareth.

Maybe we don't feel the impact of that until we realize how many people think religion has to do with ideas and concepts and formulas from books. That's how we were trained for years. We went away, not into a world of nature and silence and primal relationships, but into a world of books. Well, that's not biblical spirituality, and that's not where religion begins. It begins in observing "what is." Paul says, "Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible essence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things" (Romans 1:20). We know God through the things that God has made. The first foundation of any true religious seeing is, quite simply, *learning how to see and love what is*. Contemplation is meeting reality in its most simple and direct form unjudged, unexplained, and uncontrolled!

If we don't know how to love what's right in front of us, then we don't know how to see what is. So we must start with a stone! We move from the stone to the plant world and learn how to appreciate growing things and see God

in them. In all of the natural world, we see the *vestigia Dei*, which means the fingerprints or footprints of God.

Perhaps once we can see God in plants and animals, we might learn to see God in our neighbors. And then we might learn to love the world. And then when all of that loving has taken place, when all of that seeing has happened, when such people come to me and tell me they love Jesus, I'll believe it! They're capable of loving Jesus. The soul is prepared. The soul is freed, and it's learned how to see and how to receive and how to move in and how to move out from itself. Such individuals might well understand how to love God.

**Reference:**

Adapted from Richard Rohr, "Christianity and the Creation: A Franciscan Speaks to Franciscans," in *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology*, ed. Albert J. LaChance and John E. Carroll (Orbis Books: 1994), 130–131.

**Story from Our Community:**

*As a small child I was fascinated by the creation stories. My family was blessed to live in many different places and to know different people and cultures. I learned early on that, while there is so very much good and beauty in the world, there is also pain, poverty and heartbreak. I know these are not what God wants, not my God or anyone's God. —Shirley S.*

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**The Dance of Life**

**Monday, October 11, 2021**

***Indigenous People's Day***

*Father Richard views Francis of Assisi (1182–1226) as a prime example of someone who discovered within himself the universal connectedness of creation. Francis addressed animals and nature as spiritual beings who are part of reality's harmony. [1] Today, we share wisdom about tuning into creation's harmony from Sherri Mitchell (Penobscot), an attorney and activist for environmental protection and human rights.*

Every living thing has its own creation song, its own language, and its own story. In order to live harmoniously with the rest of creation, we must be willing to listen to and respect all of the harmonies that are moving around us. . . .

We must tune in to our ability to see beyond the physical reality that surrounds us, and awaken to the vast unseen world that exists. Then we

can begin to see beyond sight and to hear beyond sound. We see the underlying structures that support our world, and life begins to take on new shape, new meaning. When we live as multisensory beings, we find that we are able to comprehend the language of every living thing. We hear the voices of the trees, and understand the buzzing of the bees. And we come to realize that it is the interwoven substance of these floating rhythms that holds us in delicate balance with all life. Then, our life and our place in creation begins to make sense in a whole new way. Our vision expands to see the overall order of our path, and our hearing tunes in to a whole new source of information. . . . When we merge our internal rhythms with the rhythms of creation, we develop grace in our movement, and without thought or effort we are able to slide into the perfectly choreographed dance of life.

I remember my first moment of conscious engagement with this dance. . . . It was a warm early-summer day and I was seated in a meditative state in my back yard. . . . As I was sitting there, I noticed a tiny ant crawling across a blade of grass. As I watched the ant move along, his little body began to light up. Then, the blade of grass that he was walking on lit up. As I sat there and watched, the entire area surrounding me began to light up. . . . I sat very still, quietly marveling over this newfound sight, afraid to move and lose it. . . . While I sat there breathing with the world around me, the firm lines of my being began to fade. I felt myself expanding and merging with all that I was observing. There was suddenly no separation between me, the ant, the grass, the trees, and the birds. We were breathing with one breath, beating with the pulse of one heart. I was consumed by this achingly beautiful and complete sense of kinship with the entire creation.

### **References:**

[1] Richard Rohr, "Christianity and the Creation: A Franciscan Speaks to Franciscans," in *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology*, ed. Albert J. LaChance and John E. Carroll (Orbis Books: 1994), 133.

Sherri Mitchell, Weh'na Ha'mu' Kwasset (She Who Brings the Light), *Sacred Instructions: Indigenous Wisdom for Living Spirit-Based Change* (North Atlantic Books: 2018), 6, 7–8.

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## Sensing Nature

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

*Fr. Richard explores how a creation-centered spirituality offers a natural openness to the type of sensing that comes from contemplation:*

Creation spirituality reveals our human arrogance, and maybe that's why we are afraid of it. Maybe that's why we're afraid to believe that God has spoken to us primarily in *what is*. Francis of Assisi was basically a hermit. He lived in the middle of nature. And if we want nature to come to life for us, we have to live in the middle of it for a while. When we get away from the voices of human beings, then we really start hearing the voices of animals and trees. They start talking to us, as it were. And we start talking back. Foundational faith, I would call it, the grounding for personal and biblical faith.

I have been blessed to spend several Lents living as a hermit in nature. When we get rid of our watches and all the usual reference points, it is amazing how real and compelling light and darkness become. It's amazing how real animals become. And it's amazing how much we notice about what's happening in a tree each day. It's almost as if we weren't seeing it all before, and we wonder if we have ever seen at all. I don't think that Western civilization realizes what a high price we pay for separating ourselves from the natural world. One of the prices is certainly a lack of a sort of natural contemplation, a natural seeing. My times in the hermitage re-situated me in God's universe, in God's providence and plan. I had a feeling of being realigned with *what is*. I *belonged* and was thereby saved! Think about it.

So, creation spirituality is, first of all, the natural spirituality of people who have learned how to see. I am beginning to think that much of institutional religion is rather useless if it is not grounded in natural seeing and nature religion.

We probably don't communicate with something unless we have already experienced its communications to us. I know by the third week I was talking to lizards on my porch at the hermitage, and I have no doubt that somehow some communion was happening. I don't know how to explain it beyond that. I was reattached, and they were reattached.

When we are at peace, when we are not fighting it, when we are not fixing and controlling this world, when we are not filled with anger, all we can do is start loving and forgiving. Nothing else makes sense when we are alone with God. All we can do is let go; there's nothing worth holding on to, because there is nothing else we need. It is in that free space, I think, that

realignment happens. Francis lived out of such realignment. And I think it is the realignment that he announced to the world in the form of worship and adoration.

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**Story from Our Community:**

*Many years ago, in early AA, I began to believe that there is a little bit of God in everyone and everything. If I treat every interaction like I am interacting with God, I probably won't hurt another person and might be of maximum service to God and my fellows. This principle applies to everything I try to do. I believe that the incarnation happened at creation and that God put himself in everything, including all of nature. — Allan Y.*

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**Sacred Circles**

**Wednesday, October 13, 2021**

*God is an infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. —Alain of Lille, *The Rules of Theology**

*Father Richard views the Trinity as a mutual “circle dance” of love and communion. Many mystics understood the circle as a more appropriate geometric shape than a pyramid to describe the shape of God and reality. In the conference “The Shape of God: Deepening the Mystery of the Trinity,” Richard said:*

Those of us who grew up with the common Trinitarian notion of God probably saw reality, consciously or unconsciously, as a pyramid-shaped universe, with God at the top of the triangle and all else beneath. We like the pyramid. Knowing the line of authority or the pecking order can take away our anxiety. But this is exactly what the Trinity is not—the early fathers of the church said that the closest metaphor we can get for God is a circle dance of communion. It's not hierarchical, monarchical, or a pyramid.

[1]

*The following passage from Rev. Dr. Randy Woodley, a theologian and Cherokee descendant, describes the power of understanding life through the symbol of the circle:*

One model of understanding our relationship to everything is a simple symbol used among Native Americans: the circle. The harmony way of living is often referred to symbolically as a circle or a hoop. . . . Perhaps you remember when you were a child and an adult said something like, “OK, kids, gather around” or “Let’s get in a circle,” or simply, “Circle up.” Circles are found in nature; perhaps that’s why we are so comfortable imitating the pattern. . . .

The circle has no beginning and no end, so one can enter at any place or stage. The circle can explain stages of life, values, and different people groups. Circles can explain the seasons, how they all continue on to create harmony and balance.

Life is a sacred circle. When we gather in a circle, the praying has already begun. When we gather in a circle, we communicate with each other and with Great Mystery, even without a word being spoken. [2]

*In a previous book, Randy Woodley further described the symbolism of the circle for Native peoples and the earth itself:*

The circle or hoop as a symbol of life is found in nearly all Native North American tribes. The symbol is a powerful representation of the earth, life, seasons, cycles of maturity, etcetera. The symbolism of the circle is one of the oldest in North America, having been found in various parts of the country in ancient petroglyphs. It is included in Native American traditions. Many of the ceremonies, such as Sundance, Powwow, Native American Church, and Ghost Dance, are fashioned intentionally in a circle. In observing the outdoors, you will find that a circle is a common and natural shape. Trees, rocks, whirlpools, tornadoes, flowers, etcetera all bear a common resemblance to circular objects rather than triangles or squares. In general, right angles do not naturally occur in nature without assistance from human beings. [3]

### **References:**

[1] Richard Rohr, *The Shape of God: Deepening the Mystery of the Trinity* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2004), [CD](#), [DVD](#), [MP3 download](#).

[2] Randy Woodley, *Becoming Rooted: One Hundred Days of Reconnecting with Sacred Earth* (Broadleaf Books: 2022), 63–64. Book available on January 4, 2022. Used with permission.

[3] Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Eerdmans Publishing Company: 2012), 88–89.

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**Creation-Centered Prayer**  
**Thursday, October 14, 2021**

*In a conference on Franciscan mysticism, Fr. Richard reminded the audience that the presence of God is available in all things and at all times:*

The spiritual nature of reality, and the material, the physical, have been one ever since the Big Bang. The incarnation did not just happen 2,000 years ago; rather, matter and spirit have been one since God decided to manifest himself/herself. . . .

Christ is everywhere. The entire planet is anointed and messianic, if you will. All bears the Christ mystery. The whole point of going to communion in church is to sacramentalize the universe. We're not only in communion when we go to communion. We're always in communion when we learn this. We're in communion driving to church. We're in communion walking up the steps of the church. We're in communion at the bathroom break. We're in communion when we're in nature.

*Franciscan sister José Hobday (1929–2009), a personal friend of Richard's and a beloved presence in the early years of the CAC, was a Seneca elder, an author, and a storyteller. She writes of how she learned to "pray always" from the Native American spirituality of her mother, which honored this sense of being in constant communion and harmony with God in all things.*

My mother prayed as a Native American. That meant she saw living as praying and praying as living. She tried to pray her life. She expressed her prayer of gratitude, for example, in the way she did things. She told me many times, "When you stir oatmeal, stir it slowly so you don't forget that oatmeal is a gift and that you don't take it for granted."

She made a prayer out of the way she stirred oatmeal. Doing things prayerfully. That reflected her approach to prayer. She always did that. She even did it in the way she walked. She taught me and my brothers to walk with our hearts high and to walk softly on the earth because the earth is our mother. . . . As we walked, she said, we should be ready to enter into every movement of beauty we encountered. . . .

So, what things have I learned from Native American spirituality? First, to make my prayer creation-centered. Indians pray as relatives of the earth. They consider the sky their father, the earth their mother. The sun can be a

brother or a sister. This makes you a creature with a relationship to creation, not someone above it or better than it. . . .

In our prayer, we might very well reflect on . . . creatures, and their relationship with creation. That is what Native Americans have done. It has not only kept them in touch with creation, but with the Creator as well. [1]

### References:

[1] José Hobday, *Stories of Awe and Abundance* (Sheed & Ward: 1995), 12, 13.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Franciscan Mysticism: I AM That Which I Am Seeking*, disc 1 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2012), [CD](#), [MP3 download](#).

### Story from Our Community:

*For the last 40 years, I have had the gift of working with people who are profoundly Deaf, who communicate in Sign Language. I have learned that they think in pictures, not words. This has opened up for me a whole new way of experiencing God's creation and God's relationship with each of us. I feel such a connection that is almost impossible to put into words. —*

Barbara

Contemplating Creation

### Reverencing Creation and the Creator

Friday, October 15, 2021

*For Fr. Richard and the Franciscan tradition, the incarnation is at the heart of a creation-affirming spirituality. We meet God in creation because we meet God everywhere! Instead of a barrier to the spiritual life, creation is a doorway. People who live in deep and harmonious relationship with nature have always known this. Sarah Augustine, a Tewa woman from New Mexico, writes:*

Conversation with [Indigenous elders] has helped me to glimpse existence from an Indigenous cosmology and provided me a perspective about the nature of reality, which really begins with insight on the nature of the Creator.

Romans 1 states:

This is because what is known about God should be plain to them because God made it plain to them. Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been

clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made. So humans are without excuse. (Verses 19–20, Common English Bible)

This Scripture is consistent with an Indigenous worldview—that the nature of the Creator is evident in the creation. What does creation tell us about God’s divine nature?

Indigenous Peoples have been accused of animism—that is, worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. But really, the basis of Indigenous spirituality is reverence. The Diné (Navajo), my relatives from New Mexico and Arizona, “do not worship the Sun, or the sun bearer, as supposed,” Steve Darden, my Diné mentor, instructed me. Rather, they express reverence for the Spirit of Life, the Creator, by finding elements of the Creator’s nature in the Sun—faithful, unfailing. Giver of Light. Giver of life. . . .

Reverence is deep respect. The Creator is evident in creation, which surrounds me. I can see it and experience it with my senses. I am part of it. Humility is acknowledging that I am not separate from creation; I am a part of a web of life. I have been taught that this mutual dependence is a gift. Life is a gift. [1]

*For Franciscan sister Ilia Delio, the universe is an overflowing expression of divine love and creativity. She seeks to help us to recover a sense of the sacredness of creation. In a recent book, she wrote this poem/prayer, which reflects a deep reverence and respect for creation:*

Creation flows from the fountain fullness  
of creative energy,  
*Springing* from a creative and dynamic Source of Love.  
Relational, personal, generative, communicative  
Love  
Spilling over on the canvas of space-time;  
Creation is like a song  
That flows in the most beautiful of harmonies.

What could possibly account for such  
Creative beauty bubbling up  
Into life?  
Could it be  
The Beauty of Life itself,  
A Divine community of Love? . . . [2]

## References:

[1] Sarah Augustine, *The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery* (Herald Press: 2021), 190, 192.

[2] Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey* (Orbis: 2021), 51.

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Barbara H.

## Laying Hands on Mother Earth

*Steven Charleston is a member of the Choctaw Nation and an Episcopal bishop. In his book Ladder to the Light, he offers practices drawn from the meeting point of his Christian faith and Native American spirituality. Here he adapts a practice known as “laying on of hands.”*

In order to receive the exchange offered by Native American tradition, we must put down the idea that the earth is nothing more than a vast accumulation of natural resources. Instead, we must see the earth as a living presence. We must recognize the interrelatedness of all life and begin to actively engage in protecting and learning from all our relations. . . .

They call it a laying on of hands. In many faith traditions, when prayers of healing are offered, people place their hands on the patient. I have decided to do that for someone, and I am inviting you to join me. The patient is our Mother Earth. She is struggling to recover from the effects of toxic poisoning and exhaustion. I am going to intentionally lay my hand on her and say, “Thank you, Mother, for all you have given us. Be healed of all that harms you.” It is only a symbol, but symbols have power. Please share my invitation. If every person on our planet went outside to lay hands on the earth and ask for healing, it might inspire us all to act, to work, to give for the sake of our Mother.

[Experience a version of this practice](#) through video and sound.

