

## PRAY IN PRAISE OF THE SACRAMENT OF CREATION

(To be recited from some high vantage point)

‘O SACRAMENT MOST HOLY, O SACRAMENT DIVINE

ALL PRAISE AND ALL THANKSGIVING BE EVERY MOMENT THINE’. (Repeat 3 times, accompanied by dance and music of choice.

### EXPLANATION

In the times of ‘Benediction’ and now at the end of an hour of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, typically but not always before the celebration of Mass, Catholics for generations have been used to reciting this prayer of praise. It invites them to celebrate the ‘Real Presence’ of Jesus in the ‘Blessed Sacrament of the Altar’.

### WHY EXTEND THIS PRAISE TO CREATION?

God by definition is beyond all our human reasoning, thoughts and capacities to know.

The word ‘God’ cannot be used to describe a being or an object or a cause alongside others within the whole range of human experience – by definition. Rather by ‘God’ we use a name to describe or mean ‘Being’ or that which ‘Is’ – ‘Isness’ or ‘Being’ itself which underpins or over-arches and underpins, surrounds (metaphorically speaking ) all that is or exists as beings alongside other beings. So we speak our thoughts necessarily cloaked in paradox, metaphor, parable. The way to ‘know’ God is recognised by all the world’s mystics and contemplatives as being by the language of the heart not the head. Before religions (5000 years old at most), the spirituality of humanity for tens of thousands of years witnessed to the ‘presence’ of the Divine in the whole of nature. Indigenous peoples preserve this spirituality even today. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism all reflect that spirituality by regarding in their different ways creation, nature as the ‘first book of revelation’. The world’s religious traditions witness to both the ‘apophatic’ – the negative or even totally silent contemplative way of witnessing to the Divine and the ways of reasoning and thinking expressed in using words – the ‘kataphatic’ ways.

With all that in mind, we can attempt to offer descriptions in metaphor, imagination, dance, song, poetry, art aiming to tell the ‘story’ of the relationship between ‘God’ and creation – all that is. To describe a close ‘relationship’ is in no way to reduce ‘God’ to ‘being’ identifiable with ‘creation’. That would be pantheism – God and creation indistinguishable – the same. No. But to say God has an exceedingly close relationship with matter, with creation can be described as ‘pan-en-theism’. God ‘present in’, closely engaged in creation – enough that we can intuit a ‘presence’ however hidden.

Christians speak of ‘sacrament’ as something we can see, experience and describe which carries an inward ‘meaning’ or presence which by ‘seeing through’ we can ‘see into’. So the seven sacraments are said to be ‘outward signs of inward grace’ They signify, make visible the love and presence of God. In the case of the ‘sacrament’ of the Eucharist, Christians ‘see through the outward signs of bread and wine, into the ‘inward grace’, the activity of God pouring love upon us. Hence the words of the prayer of praise: “O Sacrament most holy, O Sacrament Divine’ directed at the ‘Real Presence’ of Jesus in the ‘Blessed Sacrament.

Christian theology has long used the word ‘sacrament’ to describe not just the seven sacraments but by extension Christ as ‘the sacrament.’ A theology is emerging under the impact of the science of evolution and the insights provided by both astro cosmic and particle physics, that wants to stress the sacramentality of the whole of evolving created matter. The Muslims sum up their instincts of

the closeness of the Divine to the human by saying that 'Allah (God) is closer to us than our jugular vein'. The emerging new theology wants to similarly describe the closeness of the Trinity to creation, by describing creation as 'a sacrament'. It is an outward sign of the inward grace or the eternal outpouring of the love of the Triune God. Hence it speaks in popular parlance of 'The Universal Christ' really present in all creation – in hidden ways. It follows that we are part of a Christ or Divine-soaked universe, of the Divine being as so 'in love with' creation that in increasingly patent ways, what is covert and hidden and could be described as a 'Divine-Human' dialogue or love story, in the logic which reflects both our stumbling grasp of the Divine nature and the reality we experience of human existence, we arrive at the full disclosure of that 'incarnation' of the Divine always present in creation, as the birth of the man Jesus - the fullest expression of that incarnality of the Divine. Hence what Christians have traditionally described as the 'Incarnation' of God entering the created matter of our flesh and blood once and uniquely, can more fittingly be described as incarnation into visible, tangible humanity finally and as template or model of what it means to be human 'out of' that prior and ineluctable incarnation of the universal Divine Christ, always present in all creation. What has been hidden but discernible as a Divine incarnality in the whole of creation as sacrament, has now become a touchable, breathing human-being – Jesus, the Christ.

HENCE

Therefore It seems fitting now to offer the prayer of praise for the 'Real Presence' of the Triune God in the cosmic 'Sacrament of creation'. We celebrate the hidden presence there of the Creator (Father), the Universal Christ (the Son) and the Great Spirit (the Holy Spirit). The Trinity has been 'present' in every micro second of time, in every micro-particle of matter and energy since the moment of creation in an evolutionary process for 13.8 billion years – as constant creator, sustainer and preserver. If God's gaze wavered, creation would cease to exist. If the ever-flowing creative dance of the Trinity ever faltered, creation would cease to exist.

If Christians are devoted to the 'Real Presence' of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, then they should be equally devoted to that prior 'real universal presence' of Christ, Word and Spirit in creation. This today is particularly necessary since it is apparent that the gift of God's creation (and therefore the gift of the Presence of Christ in all creation) is at risk of disfigurement brought about by our blind and unjust despoilation of the planet.

Moreover in times of a decline, at least in the West, of Christian religion, its worship and practice, accompanied at the same time by an increased appreciation of nature and an eco-spirituality aiming at the need to protect and preserve it, teaching children and adults to regard creation as the prior sacrament or sign of the immensity of God's love, might just act as a spur and incentive to re-discover and appreciate the importance and place of the seven traditional sacraments. Children might better understand the sacraments - the Eucharist - if they could accompany parents, grandparents, guardians and teachers outside into the world of nature and sing and there perhaps dance in praise of all that is:

'O SACRAMENT MOST HOLY, O SACRAMENT DIVINE

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NOT A NEW INSIGHT.

These quotations could be multiplied many times from across the world's religions and philosophies

"In every living creature, there is a trace of the Trinity." (St Thomas Aquinas)

“We are not just made by God, but of God.” (Juliana of Norwich)

“In beautiful things, St Francis saw Beauty itself and through His vestiges imprinted on creation he followed his Beloved everywhere.” (St Bonaventure)

“Love every little leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery.” (Dostoevsky)

David Jackson (Feb 2022)