

Reverence and Gratitude as Important Links in the Circle of  
Love for God, Creation, and All Others

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The circular connection between our human vulnerability, reverence, gratitude and love of Creator, coupled with care for all in our global community, has been long understood by Indigenous peoples. This paper incorporates examples from historic and current literature and research with the hope that the Episcopal Church could more widely embrace ancestral knowledge and mimic its unique ability to persist. Native knowledge and resulting behaviors illustrate a view of how to live comfortably and gratefully, acknowledging a Creator and yet balancing all beloved community, creation care, and social justice in a continuous circular process; not treated as separate entities. To incorporate some of this valued knowledge leaders will need to increase ‘God Talk’ within congregations, to intentionally show reverence and express gratitude at Eucharist, and in prayers and actions of reciprocity to all others. These behaviors can mirror for those around us how to begin ‘cultivating epiphanies’, moments which bring the circle of humanity closer to God, all others and all creation beginning at very early ages, thereby instilling a deeper love and connection to all.

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Thank you for choosing to explore the ideas presented in this paper. It is a response to the December 2019 call for papers on “The Theology of Gratitude: Exploring the human expressions of the theology of gratitude while living in a complex world.”<sup>1</sup> A first step was to find a definition of Theology that combined well with Gratitude so I am using the description of Reverend Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas. Dr. Douglas defines Theology as; ‘God talk’ or “human beings talking about the meaning of God in their lives.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore a ‘Theology of Gratitude’ will be defined here as how we speak to others of our gratitude to God the Creator of All in our lives. This is an exploration into how gratitude, more intentionally incorporated into ‘God talk’ and into prayers for all creation, can be key to addressing the complex issues of climate change and justice for all others in the circle of life. It is necessary to heed the numerous calls from the past to grasp Native knowledge and mirror for others our faith, love of all others, and connection to creation before our global home becomes a garden un-tillable (Genesis 2:15)<sup>3</sup>.

Praying and communicating or having “conscience contact”<sup>4</sup> with God either quietly or aloud has been encouraged in many faith traditions yet sharing how and what individually we communicate to God often remains hidden; thought of as too personal to share. For this paper the terms God and/or Creator are used, yet Jesus, Holy Spirit, Higher Power, YHWH, Divine source/presence all apply. Publishing biographies or memoirs that boldly track life transitions/transformations has become common yet attribution that such events were thought to be divinely guided remains less prevalent.

<sup>1</sup> “Call for Papers: Theology of Gratitude”, *Episcopal Journal* 9 (11) (2019): 4

<sup>2</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, Theology methodology and the Jesus movement through the work of F.D. Maurice and Vida Scudder. *Anglican Theological Review* 102.1 (2020): 9

<sup>3</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Holy Bible*, Harper One (1989), Genesis 2:15.

<sup>4</sup> Anon. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services 2002), 8.

Rarely in daily interactions do many Christians identify how the choices they made or events which transpired throughout their lives were felt to be Spirit driven, or directed by a Creator. Even among other clergy I have found few willing to openly discuss feelings about or connections to the Creator in their lives. In 1986 author and Episcopal priest H. Boone Porter wrote that “Christian spirituality is the perception” and awareness of God being present “in all aspects of life.”<sup>5</sup> He continues “Today, although we are heirs of two thousand years of Christian life and culture, spirituality is scarcely recognized by most people as being any part of a so-called ‘normal life’.”<sup>5</sup> When speaking of faith, Dr. Diana Butler Bass mentioned that Irishman and Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney stated he found himself “woefully inarticulate” when it came to “discussing such matters.”<sup>6</sup>

Often those who produce biographies, non-fiction history, films, and novels suggest “seeing”, or construct, a divine guidance in a person’s life. The true story “The Perfect Horse” explains the life journey of one man as he and other U.S. soldiers rescued special stallions taken by the Nazis during World War II. Captain Tom Stewart, who enlisted in 1941 and then assigned to one of the last regiments of U.S. Cavalry, was instrumental in the rescue. At tremendous risk and through unusual events his regiment crossed into Nazis held territory and rode and hid these special horses until most reached safety; some horses were eventually shipped to the U.S. Stewart, who during the rescue bonded with one horse named Witez, after the war in 1949 chose to hitchhike across the U.S., and as the author writes “As if guided by a divine hand, his journey brought him.... To see his old friend Witez, who still recognized him.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> H. Boone Porter, *A Song of Creation* (Cowley Publications 1986), 129-130.

<sup>6</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks*, (Harper One, Harper Collins, 2018), 123.

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Letts, *The Perfect Horse*, (Ballantine Books, New York, 2016), 276.

This view of connection to the divine is that of author Elizabeth Letts, who put voice to what so many of us may feel about our own lives but don't say or even fear to share; that some event/change is as if it was "guided by a divine hand".<sup>7</sup>

In the chapter *A theological understanding of Christian practices*, Dykstra and Bass discuss the 1984 film *Tender Mercies*, calling the story one of "gift upon gift."<sup>8</sup> In the film 10 year-old Sonny, asks his step-father Mac "Do you feel different?" after both had just been baptized. Mac responds "Not yet" and they both laugh because "something has happened that is beyond mere feeling"<sup>8</sup> implying some divine presence.

In an example from a novel, Brian Doyle<sup>9</sup> presents a story, *Martin Marten*, designed to awaken the possibility of divine connectedness with all creation. The life of a young adult leaving his home in remote Oregon is paralleled with the life of a pine marten (forest mammal) also leaving its home. The two youngsters, who's lives intersect many times throughout the book, end up sitting on a rocky ledge together, without fear or aggression. Doyle posits: Is it due to Curiosity? Slight familiarity? Mystery? Different species? Respect? Reverence? Doyle answers these questions with a yes, and says "Reverence, not religious, perhaps not spiritual; perhaps we do not have a word for the way that they see each other with something for which we can only use the word *reverence*." Doyle continues "could it be that moments like that ... are why we are trying to find the right sounds and stories for the thing we know we cannot say?"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Letts, *The Perfect Horse*, (Ballantine Books, New York, 2016), 276.

<sup>8</sup> Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2002) 13.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Doyle, *Martin Marten*, (Picador, 2015), 282.

## *Reverence*

An inability to share, what we don't know how to say about our feelings of, or a Being beyond ourselves, yet which appears to have great influence in our lives, may be due to limited exposure to the virtue of reverence. John O'Donohue<sup>10</sup> mentions reverence as being a pathway to beauty and that we need to "discover the art of reverence"; recognizing we are "always in the presence of the sacred."<sup>10</sup> In his book *Reverence*, Paul Woodruff defines it as "the capacity for a range of feelings and emotions that are linked; it is the sense that there is something larger than a human being, accompanied by capacities for awe, respect, and shame; it is often expressed in and reinforced by; ceremony."<sup>11</sup> There are several identifiable categories of reverence which go beyond "treating the dead with due ceremony;"<sup>11</sup> reverence can also be seen in respect for places deemed sacred (manmade or natural), oaths taken, and in how we protect the weak and vulnerable in society; essentially how we humans are different from predatory beasts. These categories are prevalent in our faith tradition as well as in many Native American and other belief traditions.

The seemingly small amount of God talk we Christians are willing to share may be tied to our inability to see and/or our lack of awareness of reverence in our lives. Although not a Native American, nor do I consider myself an expert on Indigenous life, I have had several experiences with ceremony. As I seek a way forward to contribute to greater creation care, combined with my faith, my gleanings here are from personal life experiences, much reading, as well as research on an animal threatened in Michigan which is culturally important to Native Americans.

<sup>10</sup> John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The invisible embrace* (Harper Perennial, 2004), 31.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a forgotten virtue*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), 63, 97.

Academic research on lake sturgeon *Acipenser fulvescens* required the capture and injection of an identification tag into adults spawning in the apply named Sturgeon River each spring.<sup>12</sup> One day while working I scooped up some fertilized eggs and in examining them I experienced a powerful feeling of reverence, similar to when the Bread of Life is placed in my hand. Holding those eggs lead me to realize the vulnerability and sacredness of such creatures, but more so I felt my deep connection to all life and our Creator.

While not limited to religious experiences or acts, reverence can be connected and possibly learned in a faith community or other environment. In Native American spirituality, expressed by Reverend Steven Charleston (Choctaw Nation), Native Americans understand “As human beings we are vulnerable and need help”,<sup>13</sup> having the longest time period of any creature before reaching independence. “We understand that we are fragile and limited creatures, and we also understand that there is something greater than ourselves”.<sup>13</sup> Such a belief underscores the humility and willingness to express gratitude for all others and all creation seen in Indigenous peoples. Native Americans also show a deep respect for the dead and their burial sites, as well as for natural areas and organisms imbued with ‘spirit’, and they partake in many types of ceremonies; all categories mentioned by Woodruff as opportunities to develop reverence. Being humble and stating our gratitude for the earth and all that sustains us requires a sense of the sacred.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Auer, “Population Characteristics and Movements of Lake Sturgeon in the Sturgeon River and Lake Superior,” *Journal of Great Lakes Research* 25(2):282-293.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Charleston, *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus*. (Morehouse Publishing, 2015) p.50, p.18

Native Oglala holy man, Black Elk, when speaking about the earth, is credited as saying “She is sacred. Every step that is taken upon her should be as a prayer.”<sup>14</sup> Prayer is one of the ways in which we acknowledge the reverence or sacredness of an act, place, or another being.

### *Gratitude*

Many plants and animals, such as sturgeons, have cultural and spiritual value to Native People and are incorporated into tribal ceremonies and community life. Lake sturgeon, once thought to be near extinction in the Great Lakes, can attain lengths of nine+ feet, weigh over 300 pounds, and reach ages of 150+ years, yet they begin life, as do many organisms, as a tiny egg.<sup>15</sup> I was blessed to attend a ceremony among tribal members and watch as the community came together to release hatchery-reared lake sturgeon for reintroduction into a river.<sup>16</sup> All tribal members were invited and families received at least one small sturgeon in a pail to release into the river as ceremony ended. As each young sturgeon swam out into deep water it was blessed with words and sacred tobacco. This use of tobacco is common in tribal ceremonies or events as “The gift of tobacco is a spiritual gift, a means of conveying our deepest regard.”<sup>17</sup> Today those blessed lake sturgeon are swimming in the Great Lakes and, if and when harvested, the Creator and the fish will each be gratefully acknowledged by the tribal members for the gift of its life.

<sup>14</sup> Marie Therese Archambault, *A Retreat with Black Elk: Living in the Sacred Hoop* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1998) 41.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy A. Auer, “Form and Function in Lake Sturgeon,” in *The Great Lake Sturgeon*, eds. Nancy Auer and David Dempsey (Michigan State University Press 2014).

<sup>16</sup> J. Marty Holtgren and Nancy A. Auer “Re-envisioning State and Tribal Collaboration in Fishery Assessment and Restoration,” *Fisheries* (2016) 41(5): 244-257

<sup>17</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, (Milkweed Editions 2013), 238.

Gratitude comes easily on the lips of Native Americans who are continually aware of the need to acknowledge the Creator and the earth and they bless creation for most everything in their lives. While traveled in a car with a tribal member I heard prayers offered for the innocent life of an animal, unfamiliar with powerful machines, hit by a car and lying dead at the side of the road. Native peoples have shown me their concern and love and deep connection to all creation. At the 1997 National Summit of the Episcopal Church for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC), Bishop Steven Charleston, (Choctaw Nation) spoke.<sup>18</sup> The first words out of his mouth were “Now in the Name of that God and the Spirit around me, Amen.” He then thanked the many people who worked ‘behind the scenes’, cleaning, cooking, and people making music, and he asked God to bless them.<sup>18</sup> This differs from what is normally seen from many who are invited to speak at events and first acknowledge the organizing group or sponsor which invited them to give a presentation and later, if at all, thanked those ‘behind the scenes’.

Prayers of thanksgiving, which call on a Being beyond ourselves, are said at almost every circumstance in Native life. In her book *Wild Communion* Ruth Baetz<sup>19</sup> shared an observation made by Canadian attorney Rupert Ross, (from his 1992 book “*Dancing With A Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*). Ross had been surprised and deeply touched by a group of Native Americans offering a prayer prior to a court proceeding. At first skeptical of the prayers in a courtroom Ross wrote: “As I listened closely to both words and the commitment of the prayer-givers, however, I began to feel differently. Those prayers regularly recite our commonality as human beings struggling to find ways to work towards common goals.... (quote continues...)”

<sup>18</sup> Steven Charleston, National Gathering: Bishop Steven Charleston, *Homily* 1/1/1997, transcript of talk.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Baetz, *Wild Communion: Experiencing Peace in Nature*, (Hazelden Press, 1997), 36-37



....They ask for assistance in reminding everyone present of their good fortune to live on such a wonderful planet and with such wonderful gifts. They ask that we remember to treat each other, and the planet, respectfully.... .What I sense we are moved towards is a rededication of our minds and spirits. The day's activities will not just involve the business of the day's topic, but the growth of all people there."<sup>19</sup> Native Americans speak and pray openly in public and community locations showing little self-consciousness as prayers are such a natural and integral part of their whole being. My heart swelled with joy as I read this piece from Ross since it shows by example that Native prayers and gratitude can change the minds of others for the good of all.

#### *Building Reverence and Gratitude through Prayers*

Throughout the world it seems people who have lived intimately in a particular place for ages have a unique and special relation with these land or water-scapes and creation encountered there. Over time these communities develop a vision of their need for reciprocity between the earth and their own survival. They learned how to live with a 'take and give' respect for all creation and each other. Daniel R. Wildcat (Muscogee Nation) shares that "the ethical and moral sphere of life for many Indigenous peoples is not restricted to humankind, but is coextensive with the ecosystems and natural environments we call home."<sup>20</sup> This connection to creation is seen in many Indigenous prayers such as those offered by Kimmerer (Potawatomi Nation) who shares a collection of 14 Onondaga Nation prayers used in schools to begin and end each week with what are called "Words That Come Before All Else".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Baetz, *Wild Communion: Experiencing Peace in Nature*, (Hazelden Press, 1997)

<sup>20</sup> Daniel R. Wildcat, Just Creation: Enhancing Life in a world of relatives, in: *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry*, ed. Steve Heinrichs, (Herald Press, 2013), 297.

<sup>21</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 107.

In Kimmerer's 'Allegiance to Gratitude' chapter she shares prayers which are directed at a variety of specific beings such as Mother Earth, Water, Medicinal Plants, or Fish. The general summary of each is "For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greeting and thanks to the Creator. Now our minds are one."<sup>22</sup> These prayers, recited in unison end with "Now our minds are one" each time, "sending greeting and thanks to all members of the natural world."<sup>23</sup>

Such offerings and prayers, build a deep caring for all creation and all others and when said as a group, 'now our minds are one', builds connection among those present, much like the reverent act of oath taking, yet it is an oath taken to a being Beyond ourselves. Such community prayers are coupled with 'guidelines' for living, like an Honorable Harvest, a few of which are: "take only what you need", "sustain the ones that sustain you and the earth will last forever", and consume in a way that does justice to the lives that we take"<sup>24</sup> all showing deep respect and reverence which Natives have for the earth. Kimmerer shares a list of general 'guidelines' that may be included in an Honorable Harvest all of which show a balance for the 'take and give' of living. Yet it is not enough for us to care, respect and love the earth, there is belief that the earth loves back. "Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 183, 177, 124-125.

Episcopal liturgies do not include time to share such heart felt or fluid prayers as those shared by Kimmerer. In the sacred act of the Episcopal Eucharist we begin with the Great

Thanksgiving.<sup>25</sup> However year after year the words do not change and those words of thanksgiving are often stated in a quick, rote response, where congregants are asked to say the word “Thanks” only one time. The Anglican *New Zealand Prayer Book*,<sup>26</sup> in English and Native Maori languages, includes a section on Eucharistic Liturgy titled *Thanksgiving for Creation and Redemption*, as well as the *Benedicite Aotearoa*. In this benediction thanks are given for a wonderful array of earth features, plants, and animals. In the section, *Thanksgiving and Praise*, prayers are said for the earth and together participants state their thanks and praise for trees and crops, wild places and bush, as well as science and discoveries, among other earth centric topics. These Maori prayers and benediction show the deep and ancestral understanding of the connection to all life and the planet tied closely to their personal survival and faith tradition.

#### *Caring for All Creation*

In my last year of college I lead the student group ‘Students for Environmental Defense’ which organized Earth Day 1970 at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Our guest speaker, Stewart Udall, was a remarkable man who published and fought for earth justice while serving as the United States Secretary of the Interior for the nine years prior to 1970. In 1963 Udall wrote *Quiet Crisis* and in it stated “In recent decades we have slowly come back to some of the truths that the Indians knew from the beginning: that unborn generations have a claim on the land equal

<sup>25</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer*, (The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York. 1979), 361.

<sup>26</sup> *A New Zealand Prayer Book*, (HarperCollins edition 1997) 456, 63, 457, 477.

to our own; that men need to learn from nature, to keep an ear to the earth, and to replenish their spirits in frequent contacts with animals and wild land.”<sup>27</sup> Over 50 years ago people were not only concerned about the state of the planet but also acknowledging that Native Americans have a special accumulated knowledge that we all can and should learn from and apply to our lives to better care for the earth. After all this time of people speaking to the need for humankind to examine what Native Peoples across the globe know and what worked for them for hundreds of years, perhaps we could begin to do so more earnestly. Examining valuable Native knowledge in light of current global issues is needed to deeply impact how we can help our planet which is tied so strongly to caring for all others.

It was almost 30 years after the first Earth Day that the Episcopal Church held the JPIC Summit in Cincinnati, Ohio. More than 550 people from across the globe attended, and I was one. In a large field with sunshine and wind-blown garments we all moved in a circle dance with many Indigenous people and long robed Presiding Bishop Browning. After that summit a report was published and 18 recommendations were made for action by the Church; tenth on the list of actions was “Protecting God’s Creation”. The first sentence in this recommendation is: “We are recognizing and acknowledging the gravity of the crisis affecting All God’s creation as we know it and calling for significant response commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis.”<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Stewart L. Udall, *The Quiet Crisis*, (Adansonia Publishing, 1963), 15.

<sup>28</sup> The Right Rev. Arthur B. Williams, Chairman, JPIC Committee, “*The National Episcopal Summit Report*” Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation Committee 1997, 35 p.

A theology of gratitude must be linked to reverence and respect for the earth and all others. We need to humble ourselves and learn Native American practices which can lead us to productive actions on those recommendations made at the 1997 Summit. Perhaps then “Protecting God’s Creation” will become higher on the list of recommendations at future conventions and summits by uniting it with other titled recommendations of Human Dignity, Ecological Justice, Global Peace.

“The time has come for acts of reverence and restraint on behalf of the Earth. We have arrived at the Hour of Land,” wrote Terry Tempest Williams in her recent book of the same title.<sup>29</sup> In the chapter on *Effigy Mounds National Monument in Iowa* Williams points out that these mounds are regarded as sacred lands by at least 19 Tribes. She then outlines past government mismanagement and irreparable damage to the mounds and sacred artifacts, yet only recently has making reparations to tribal groups begun. The Episcopal Church has now also started the work of seeking restorative justice for Native Americans yet the work of the beloved community can’t be separated from justice issues, or creation care. Sustaining progress for all others as well as our earth and creation will only progress if we incorporate early teachings from Native life into the all these issues and move them forward as one objective.

We humans must humble ourselves, begin to see with new eyes, and with God’s grace practice the teachings of the ancients and wise elders. The God we worship and the God revered by many Indigenous peoples is the Creator of all and that All deserves our reverence and gratitude and thus will widen the ‘Way of Love’ for all. Seeing the link between a Creator

<sup>29</sup> Terry Tempest Williams, *The Hour of Land*, (Sarah Crichton Books, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016) p.358

and all creation is not a new approach in our Episcopal or other faith traditions. Jan Phillips<sup>30</sup> showing us how to see God at eye level states “Mystics and sages have long held that Divinity is within us, of us, that all life is One Life, imbued with the same sacredness, worthy of our reverence and adoration”.<sup>30</sup>

St. Augustine (as cited by Rohr<sup>31</sup>) also found this true and wrote “For what is now called the Christian religion existed even among the ancients and was not lacking from the beginning of the human race”.<sup>31</sup> Richard Rohr continues, “Did we think all native peoples living on earth for years and years were just “dress rehearsals for ‘us’?”<sup>31</sup> In the Bible Jesus says “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”<sup>32</sup> With such loving and strong messages from Christ I wonder why it remains so hard for us to embrace “all others.”

A broadening view of “the Incarnation of God in Jesus is that the Divine presence is here, in us and in all of creation”<sup>33</sup> and is being affirmed by others. We as a global civilization are being called to re-examine knowledge and beliefs long known to our ancient ancestors, and renew this understanding of our ties to others in our faith traditions so as to love and care for All. From Native American experiences and beliefs we can enhance our own contact with God as Natives have learned a way to find the voice of God inside us. Steven Charleston states

<sup>30</sup> Jan Phillips, *God is at Eye Level: Photography as a Healing Art*, (Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House), 136.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ*, (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, SPCK, 2019), 49.

<sup>32</sup> NRSV John 10:16

<sup>33</sup> Rohr, *Universal Christ*, 29

“We are listeners to the voice of God, speaking to us across all time and all history, through many of our own ancestors and the ancestors of other generations, teaching us what we need to know, welcoming us to learn more. The voice is within us, but it is also calling to us.”<sup>34</sup> All people are capable of learning how to listen for and share that voice, as Native peoples have.

Native writers, Charleston<sup>34</sup> and Kimmerer<sup>35</sup> speak to the need to give thanks for gifts from the earth but then go beyond that to reciprocity; where reciprocity means ...asking “not: What can we take? but What can we give to Mother Earth?”<sup>35</sup> Kimmerer continues “We humans have gifts in addition to gratitude that we might offer in return”<sup>35</sup> to a being beyond ourselves. This reminds me of what is commonly called ‘Paying it forward’, giving thanks for what is received or taken and then giving back in some positive contribution to the future of the Earth and our survival. It comes from deep feeling and connection to the earth, out of our true deep love.

To enter into reciprocity Kimmerer believes that “It is our uniquely human gift to express thanks, because we have the awareness and collective memory to remember that the world could well be otherwise, less generous than it is. But I think we are called to go beyond cultures of gratitude, to once again become cultures of reciprocity.”<sup>36</sup> She concludes by stating “We can do it through gratitude, through ceremony, through land stewardship, science, art and in everyday acts of practical reverence.” This speaks to what Diana Bass is suggesting that Gratitude become a ‘gift and response’.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Charleston, *Vision Quests*, page 59

<sup>35</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 190, 238

<sup>36</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, 189, 190, 170

<sup>37</sup> Bass, *Gratitude*, 170.

## *Teaching and Learning Reverence with Gratitude*

Humans may experience reverence in our church ceremonies of Baptism, Eucharist and Vigils; we may see it at events in our lives such as at funerals, at swearing in ceremonies, or other venues. Yet we don't often consciously identify experiencing reverence, nor do we purposely connect those events to God and All creation, let alone share them with others. To see significant gains in caring for our environment and 'Others' young and old alike need to see, hear and join our prayers for All Others and Creation in all life situations. For Native Americans reverence is ingrained at very early ages in words and actions of family and community members, what Charleston calls through a "chain of kinship."<sup>38</sup> He continues "The ethic implicit in a culture that understands family as a vast matrix of kinship is an ethic of sharing." A life lived in a "spirit of stewardship."<sup>38</sup> So it becomes clear this spirit can be learned through family and community contact and guidance. Others feel it can be a learned experience if the individual is made aware of reverent occurrences. Rud and Garrison<sup>39</sup> use the term 'Cultivating Epiphany' to begin establishing an awareness of reverence. Defined by them as seeing where "amidst the most banal and ordinary circumstance, one can have an experience that can be momentous and significant of the spiritual and the aesthetic."<sup>39</sup> An example comes from Annie Dillard as she writes after seeing a cedar tree in her back yard as charged and transfigured by sunlight she felt "I had been my whole life a bell, and never knew it until that moment I was lifted and struck"<sup>40</sup> calling such epiphanies 'catch it if you can' moments.

<sup>38</sup> Charleston, *Vision Quests*, 108.

<sup>39</sup> A.G. Rud and Jim Garrison, *Teaching with Reverence: Reviving an Ancient virtue for Today's Schools*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 75.

<sup>40</sup> Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, (Bantam Book, 1974) 35.



In our faith traditions we can build and grow awareness by perceiving ‘divine presence’ in our own cultivated epiphanies. Charleston explains that the traditional Native vision quest is “an act of placing ourselves in grace’s way.”<sup>41</sup> We need to imagine placing ourselves in situations where we hope to encounter God and then do so. Vision quests are one focused effort yet smaller attempts can place us in “grace’s way.” Turn off the television and take a walk and see what God has for you, linger longer in a special place, volunteer for something outside your comfort zone, then speak to others about what you have been graced with.

### *Conclusion*

In the Episcopal Church sharing the Eucharist is important to our liturgy and lives; it is a ritual that is regarded as sacred and to which we experience and show reverence. John O’Donohue suggests “real presence is the heart of the Incarnation and it is also the heart of the Eucharist”.<sup>42</sup> One portion of the Eucharist liturgy, which is key to our spiritual experience, is in giving thanks both *before* and *after* sharing the bread and wine, hopefully instilling a feeling of gratitude, and knowing a reciprocity of love follows. Since our faith emphasizes shared Eucharist, it places us in a position to allow for deepening human connections to God, all others and all creation. If we show our gratitude and reverence to God, all others, and all creation we will want to live within our means, taking only what we need, sustaining those who sustain us, as Kimmerer suggests in her informal guidelines to such events as ‘Honorable Harvest’.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Charleston, *Vision Quests*, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> John O’Donohue, *Walking in Wonder*, (Convergent Books 2018), 74.

<sup>43</sup> Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, p.183

“Because the Creator made everything that exists, and because everything that exists is made in love, the Messiah’s call to love encircles all of creation. When we love God with all our heart, we are loving the Earth. We are loving the seas and the sky. We are loving the four-legged creatures who are our kin, just as we are loving the winged creatures and those who swim. Nothing is outside the circle of love; everything within the circle of love is our relation” Steven Charleston.<sup>44</sup> This ‘Way of Love’, this way of seeing opens our hearts and unites our efforts for justice and creation care alongside the beloved community therefore improving outcomes for all.

Metanoia<sup>45</sup> begins with reverence and gratefulness fully expressed at the Eucharist, especially if the experience can be enriched with more spontaneous and heart felt words of gratitude and praise, and is shared with all others. Those in leadership need to absorb the teachings of our ancestors, and must mirror for all how to speak our gratitude and love, by expressing our ‘divinely guided’ experiences freely and with great gravitas for all we hold in our hands. Let us increase the amount of ‘God Talk’ with everyone we encounter and share the words and actions of our reciprocal gratitude, adopt more honorable life guidelines, and strengthen our circle of life by exhibiting how much we love God, all others and all creation; as this grows Jesus’ Way of Love.

<sup>44</sup> Charleston, *Vision Quests*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Metanoia – “a transformative change of heart”, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*