

## 5 - Discussion

1) The universe we glimpse on a starry night is huge. If the earth were the size of a tennis ball, then the next nearest star to our own sun (Proxima Centauri) would still be 156,000 miles away (real distance 4.3 light years). Distance and scale in the universe are often beyond comprehension. How does this affect our degree of wonder, or questions we might have about creation?

2) Alister E. McGrath says of our ancestors, "Might, many wondered, these silent pricks of light in the velvet darkness of the heavens disclose something deeper about the origins and goals of life?"

Were they right?

3) List different aspects of the natural world (e.g. sun, light, stars, moon, rain, oceans, rainbow etc.) and alongside each how they can be seen to reflect something of the character of God.

4) "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

Genesis tells us that God rested once his work of creation was finished (Genesis 2:1-2). There is a sense of completeness in these verses. Do you think that God is still actively involved in his created world, and if so where and how?

## 6 - Prayer

The focus for prayer is the physical world in which we live. Make a list on a piece of paper of those aspects of creation group members would like to thank God for, and a separate list of those areas where humankind has had a negative impact on the sustainability of the earth.

Cut these out and pass around the group to those who are happy to pray out loud (no pressure). Start with short prayers of thanksgiving; then bring to God the groups concerns for the world; finish by sharing the Lord's Prayer together.

# Study 1 - The Majesty of God

O LORD MY GOD! when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed:  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!

## 1 - Getting Started

In the Creation narrative of Genesis 1, God gives humankind an instruction to "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

We take this to mean we have been

gifted stewardship of the earth and its resources. So can the group think of ways in which we have both used and misused this gift. List them in two columns and discuss the implications of both good and bad.

Is it possible for individuals to make a difference? In what ways?

## 2 - Just a Thought

The story is told of a little ritual observed by Franklin D Roosevelt and the famous naturalist William Beebe. After an evening's chat the two men would go outside and look upward to the night sky. Gazing at the stars they would find the lower left-hand corner of the constellation of Pegasus. One of them would recite these words:

"That is a spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun."

Then they would pause and Roosevelt would add, "Now I think we feel small enough. Let us go to bed."

## 3 - Quotable Quotes

"If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe." (Carl Sagan)

How might we use this quote to start a conversation about creation and the Creator?

## 4 - *Between The Lines*

Psalm 19:1-4

"The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world."



C. S. Lewis said of Psalm 19, "I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world."

The created world and the heavens have always been a focus of fascination for human-kind. Whether it be discussing how they were created, humankind's place within them or writing myths and legends concerning the gods who dwelt within them.

In his book 'Surprised by Meaning' Alister E. McGrath says, "Our distant ancestors studied the stars, aware that knowledge of their movements enabled them to navigate the world's oceans and predict the flooding of the Nile. Yet human interest in the night sky went far beyond questions of mere utility. Might, many wondered, these silent pricks of light in the velvet darkness of the heavens disclose something deeper about the origins and goals of life?"

Perhaps the Psalmist was considering this when he wrote, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:3-4)

Perhaps humankind's fascination with the heavens has always at its core been a journey toward understanding of our place and value in creation.

With regard to creation the question has been whether God is physically present within the natural world (a belief system called pantheism, where God and nature are one), or simply and wonderfully discerned through its beauty and power.

Pantheism might seem a strange concept until you consider that early humans

saw the power of the elements as something beyond their understanding or control, and therefore in their weakness sought to deify nature.

It's worth looking briefly at the beliefs of the Celtic Christians (or more properly the early Christians in Britain) as they had a real sense of the presence of God in the everyday moments of their lives.

When Christianity found its way to pagan Britain, it took the belief system that it found and Christianized it. There was no longer a worship of nature for its own sake, but rather a sense that within nature could be seen something of the power, wonder and goodness of the Creator. So it became possible to gaze at the stars and listen to the sound of thunder or breaking waves and glimpse through them to the One who created all things.

Saunders Davies says of Celtic Christians, "for the Celt, creation is translucent; it lets through glimpses of the glory of God.'

We can perhaps see this reflected in the Psalmist's words and in the thoughts behind the first verse of our hymn, "Thy power throughout the universe displayed".

One of the most famous Celtic Christian prayers that we have is that known as St Patrick's Breastplate, which speaks of the presence of God in all aspects of life:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

The writer to Romans adds "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..." (Rom 1:20)

When you consider all the works that God's hand has made, as Boberg and the writer to the Romans did, is your soul moved to song, or do you find it hard to discern the divine through the window of the natural world?