

# Quest For Eden: The Restorative Nature Of The Creative Impulse

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Good Morning. It's a privilege to have the opportunity to share with you as students and teachers not only of this college and seminary, but also as students and teachers of the Kingdom life. Our theme is Creativity and the Arts. I particularly appreciate the opportunity to share on the topic I've selected for this morning, an ongoing work in progress, which I call Quest For Eden: The Restorative Nature Of Creative Impulse.

## Introduction

I begin by inviting you to enlist your imagination, and to join me in a garden, lush and vibrant with teeming plant and animal life, pulsating and surreal in its sound and color. We hear a Voice thunder on the scene, echoing throughout the cosmos in what must be the mother-tongue of God, undulating through the garden:

*“Let us make human beings in our own image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth” (Genesis 1:26-27 from The Message by Eugene Peterson).*

God breathes into common dust, and Adam awakens to greet his first day. Eve is drawn from his bone and blood, and the ImageBearers take their first walk through the garden, beginning their Edenic reign. The father and mother to all who live, regardless of culture, faith system or worldview – begin their journey to populate the world with the ImageBearers that will spill forth from their love, just as they spilled forth from the Trinitarian love within God.

We know the meta-Story from there. A choice is made, an adoration turned within, which results in a rift that tears the very fabric of the cosmic tapestry - that shatters the image within to a million shards. No sooner does the birth of the created order occur, than repair and redemption must enter the picture.

I take you with me back to the beginning of the meta-Story, the story that rules them all, because I believe that we as human beings, the broken ImageBearers of Eden, are looking for our home at every turn, remembering toward heaven, hungry for its restoration yet delirious in our vision of where we've come from and where we're going to.

The first verse tells us that God created. Play and work become indistinguishable, as the created order spills from the waterfall of God's imagination and administration. God's first recorded impulse according to the human story (C.S. Lewis tells us that this may be the only story we'll be told for now), is the creative impulse. Whether you create with plants, paints, melodies, numbers, spreadsheets, words or with people, you and I cannot escape our buried sacred lineage – we reflect God's impulse to create. That same creative impulse resides in the culture as well, the surest manifestation of the broken image deposited in us by the creator. We are questing, on a primal and instinctual adventure, to return to Eden, and to re-create the wholeness of the garden. Yet because of our fallen-ness and self-absorption, the broken ImageBearers look solely to their senses for aid; we look to our taste and we feast on food, we look to our touch and we explore the limits of sexuality, we look to our hearing and immerse ourselves in sonic escapism, we look to our vision and we indulge our minds.

Your neighbour is questing for wholeness in the world, your bank clerk is looking for rightness in the world, and your human family is literally dying for Eden's truth to expose itself in the world. Yet, it is those ImageBearers who have turned their gaze to God, who are free to speak the thousands of languages of the soul that God has put into humankind, who must rejoice in the truth within the culture, reject truth's

distortions, and help the community recover its sense of Eden, centered in a living relationship with our Creator through the new Adam, Jesus Christ.

## The Elements of Creativity

I would like to deposit today, four elements that I would like to see enhance your journey of personal and corporate discovery as you consider the topic of Sacred Creativity in the coming months. These four elements, drawn from the creation elemental tradition of early Celtic Christian spirituality, I denote by the names Earth, Wind, Fire and Water. Earth will speak of Integration, Wind of Innovation, Fire of Inspiration and Water of Interaction. Each of these elements expresses a facet of human need that I believe to be indispensable to the thriving of the creative spirit in the ImageBearer, and without which we find our unique languages of the soul progressively silenced by the dark corruptions inherent to the slumber of humanity surrounding us.

I qualify what I'm about to say by noting that my intention is to deliver thoughts that speak both to the purely Christian artist, the Christ-worshipping creative, but also to the manward-living creative spirit. I believe eternity is indeed residing in the heart, that Eden is in the heart, of EveryMan. Every ImageBearer, aware of their sacred lineage or unaware, is questing to return to its eternal state and home. In other words, what we need is what we *all* need, and what we *all* need comes from God in its purest form. I begin with our need for Earth.

### Earth

Earth speaks of Eden's *Integration*. Integration between God and I, between you and I, and between I and myself. The creative spirit, in order to thrive, quests for the Edenic state where God looks us full in the face, and we without shame and with joy, look Him full in the face in return. The creative spirit, with tentacular grasp, hungers for the ideal state of perfect friendship and human intimacy this side of heaven, yet often is convoluted by broken histories that we bring to biblical communities, creating frustrated and angry idealists out of those God intended to be spiritually jubilant realists. The angry and *disintegrated* artist withholds worship and its creative enflashing; the prayerful artist breathes worship in and out as its very air.

*Integration* speaks of *Authenticity*. Creativity pouring from the realities of real-world and real-time living, that does not elevate an ethereal and disconnected worship, but rather a blood and bone journey with God that sounds with both earthly and otherworldly tones. Earth speaks of creativity rooted in real human experience, not lost in lofty PollyAnna. My wife is the little girl, we say in our home, holding this helium-filled balloon, and keeping it from escaping its tether to the precious gift of my 21<sup>st</sup> century time, place and purpose. Be authentic, be honest, be who you are, and say "it" (whatever "it" may be), rooted in the multiple creative languages of the soul that God put uniquely within you.

### Wind

Wind speaks of *Innovation*. Innovation in its raw state, is the offering of that which is fresh and new, not because it is new to God or to someone else, but rather because it is flowing for the first time from us. Stretched between a world that regards the most recent and startling as the holy grail, and a Church that regards ancient traditions as the only valid form of sacred expression, the creative spirit must win the day by being true to God, true to itself, true to the community and true to the culture, welcoming fresh ideas, historical process and unfinished themes into its creative products. Instead of promulgating simple answers in the world, truly innovative creativity recognizes that the most beautiful answer may be found in the asking of an even more beautiful question.

*Innovation* speaks of *Opportunity*. When the moments to breathe a fresh wind of poet air into the world arise, the creative community must fling its vocabulary into the pot, and allow the Holy Spirit to make simple words, strokes and colors the seeds of redemptive force in the culture. The Kingdom creativity community carries on a dialogue with the world, calling it to be who it was made to be; it does not carry on a monologue with the world, continually telling it what it is not. We must seize every opportunity to explore the world that the Magi saw in the stars – a world poised for revelation and a new day ahead.

## Fire

Fire speaks of *Inspiration*. It has been said that insanity is to the artist what garlic is to Italian food. I would say it differently. Inspiration is to the artist what water is to fish – It the only reasonable environment in which it will survive. Eden's colors, before the dark hues of independence, pride and opinion-exertion entered the scene, must have been the only choice of environment for God to place the Image-bearers, His sub-creators, within. Even in a broken world, groaning for the children of God to take to their place so it's pre-fallen image can be awakened to shine forth again, we still encounter the rugged beauty of the African terrain, hear the visceral turn of a word or phrase or forest sound, feel the thunder of an approaching storm, or bask in the scintillating warmth of the winter sun and are enflamed with transcendent joy. If that is the power of a fallen world to inspire, what will Eden's colors and sounds be like when our eyes and ears and minds are clear, and it's birthplace beauty is restored? I can only imagine. You and I can only create out of that fired and fueled imagination.

*Inspiration* speaks practically of *Integrity*. Integrity is when the inside world connects, without filtration or skewing, with the outside world. What connects you, what inspires you, may be the vision of a torrid waterfall, a smell of an old leather-bound book, the serenity of a well-tended garden or the taste of a perfectly grilled, seasoned and presented steak. What "connects" me may be an aged and amber-hued painting, or a sentence mothered to perfection. What inspires you, is what connects you, and restores your healthy and integrated dialogue with God, with others and with yourself. A poet was once asked why she wrote poetry. "Because I must," answered the poet. "It is my only way of processing the world I encounter." What inspires you, is what connects you, and by your art will connect me, to Eden's glory once again.

## Water

Water speaks of *Interaction*. Community is the inexorable need built into the ImageBearers, the sub-creators of the universe, for each other. It is the hunger for interaction and interplay together that finds its beginnings in the *perichoresis*, the mutual indwelling of the Trinity, the circular dance of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God, holding community within His breast, within His singular nature, places progeny in the earth who cannot escape their need for someone to experience their unique view of the world.

Scythian farmer/warrior/horsemen in Russia, found recently in burial tombs over 2700 years old, are clad along with their horses in golden vestments and breath-taking jewelry, articulating their penchants, perspectives, personal and corporate views of the world. We must co-exist, not because we have to, but because something in our nature tells us we must. The creative spirit must learn how to fight, in the way of Jesus, for such sweet co-existence. The greatest aberration in EdenChild's original condition is when we shun interaction, and even remove by murder another ImageBearer. The film *Minority Report* states that murder is the most fundamental rift in the human fabric that joins us all. The book of Genesis laments this dysfunc condition more violently than any other condition expressed in the created order of community. Isolation and bitterness wars against, distorts absolutely and pollutes incrementally, the creative spirit.

*Interaction* speaks of *Community*. The Kingdom creative spirit is longing for the brotherhood of man to arise again, and thrills to see it take place, whether within the Church, within the walls of a crumbling tower in New York City, or within an arena at a U2 concert. Likewise, the creative heart's greatest searing is when in the face of the tumble that is human relationships, it shuns its own growth and runs to safer, more isolated and lonelier pastures.

## Conclusion

We are ImageBearers. Therefore, you are creative, and I am creative. Our mediums are different. The soul languages we speak are unique to us, be they numbered as three or three thousand in each of us. The next time you see, hear, touch or smell something beautiful, remember that what you love about the art before you, be it a painting or a person, is that it reminds you of Eden, it recalls you to Zion, it refreshes what will be once again. And the next time you put your hand to a medium, be it pen and paper, metal strings and amplifiers, or a human life, remember that you are an EdenChild, an ImageBearer filled with the love of your Creator, inviting others to experience Eden through the earthly lens of your creativity.

Cheers to the reconciliation of man to God, and to the creative tools He has put in your hands.