

DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY

MODULE 1

LOOKING AT THE LAND

STUDY C: HOLY PLACES IN MY PERSONAL LANDSCAPE

INTRODUCTION

Social and economic power shape the way we relate to land and identity. But our relationship to land also is embedded in our spiritual environment. In mainstream American culture, our understandings about land are related to the capacity many of us have to own things or, at least, to call them “mine.” This is true whether we own the land on which our house is built, or whether we rent an apartment: in either case we claim it as “my space.” This same capacity to claim and own things is also at the heart of the Doctrine of Discovery. If we commit ourselves to repudiate the Doctrine and turn away from the violence it engendered, we will also need to reorient ourselves and find a new and different spiritual space in which the work of repentance—having a “new mind”—can take place.

Emotionally and spiritually, not all of our spaces are “equal.” In our stories and in our experience, we each have special places that feel set apart—different from the everyday space in which we spend most of our time. This idea of something being “set apart” is the very core of *holiness*. This exercise is based upon the conviction that exploring our own personal “holy places” can help to uncover the deeper spiritual points of contact where we can personally rewrite our relationship to land. And that, in turn, may help us find a new starting place—both for redefining our relationship to the Doctrine of Discovery, as well as to have a new starting place to create conversations and to plan joint acts of justice with our Native American sisters and brothers.

On the last page of this study, you will find a worksheet you can use for exploring your holy places. You are invited to make copies of the sheet and to use one copy for each of the holy places you want to explore. If you have already completed the exercise called “A Map of My Life” in the Toolkit, you may find your map a helpful place to begin to identify these sites. But even without that exercise, you can begin by identifying specific places in your

story that hold deep meaning for you. It may be helpful to create a meditative space where you can work on this project and assemble the materials: a wall, a large table, the floor of a room, or mounting each site report on a piece of poster board to make it portable. You also may want to create a journal of your experiences and reactions as you assemble your reports. Write a paragraph each time you have worked on the project. What did you do? How are you feeling and what are you thinking as the project evolves?

Immediately below, we have provided a process you can use for thinking about what you have discovered as you have worked on this project.

A DEVOTIONAL EXERCISE ON YOUR HOLY PLACES

When you have finished creating the reports of your personal holy places, you can assemble them together. If this project is being done in a group, you may want to share all the projects. The questions below may be helpful for exploring what you are learning.

1. Thinking only about your own personal holy places, how are they like each other? How are they different from each other?
2. If you are doing this project as a group, what are the common themes that appear among all the different holy sites of different people? What are important differences you see in the way individuals approach sacred space?
3. What are you (and your group) discovering about how your holy places define the other spaces in your lives? How do they affect your relationships with "real geography"? How do they help to shape your "interior landscapes"? How are they influencing your relationships?
4. How would you feel if another person laid claim to your holy place and said that because they own it, you could no longer claim it as "yours"? How would you react? What would you do?
5. If these special places somehow tie you to the goodness of God, how does God's presence change your relationship to them? How can you be a "good steward" of holy places?
6. What are you learning through this project? If you kept a journal, do you see yourself embarking on a journey as you work on the various

sites in your story? How is “the place” where you are now different from “the place” in which you found yourself when you began the project?

7. How does this project affect your understanding of the Doctrine of Discovery and its repudiation? Does the project change the way in which you might enter into conversations with Native American sisters and brothers?
8. Here are some quotes made by Native American persons. Reflect on them and discuss or think about how they relate to your study of personal sacred spaces. In what ways are these thoughts similar to your understanding of sacred space? How are they different? Do they encourage you to see your sacred spaces and land in general with a “new set of eyes”?
 - *Red Cloud, speaking at Wounded Knee soon after the massacre of 1890:* The white man made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they kept only one; they promised to take our land, and they did.
 - *An Oglala speaker, appealing to the 1889 Sioux Commission that allowed the United States Government to create new land cessions and allotted additional reservations:* I am an Indian and the Great Spirit has made me, and this land is the Great Spirit’s wife, and I am born from there, and my heart comes from there, and I am an Indian and I am standing on my own land.... I went with Red Cloud. We belong to his band, and we will not sell the land.
 - *Massasoit, seventeenth-century leader of the Wampanoag Confederacy:* What is this you call property? It cannot be the earth, for the land is our mother, nourishing all her children, beasts, birds, fish and all men. The woods, the streams, everything on it belongs to everybody and is for the use of all. How can one man say it belongs only to him?
 - *Luther Standing Bear, early twentieth-century Oglala Lakota leader and author:* We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, the winding streams with tangled growth, as “wild.” Only to the white man was nature a “wilderness” and only to him was it “infested” with “wild” animals and “savage” people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery.

A HOLY PLACE IN MY PERSONAL LANDSCAPE

My name for this place: _____

Do you have some photos of this place? Are there objects you associate with this place and your experience of it? If so, you may want to gather them around you as you work on this project. Consider including them alongside this report if you share it with others.

Jot down the names of some stories that help describe why this place was important to you:

Did you experience this place alone or with others? If others shared the space with you, did the place somehow shape your relationships with these people? If so, can you tell some stories about that?

If you experienced this place alone, how do you think it influenced the relationships in your life?

Our spiritual landscapes exist in a force field between good and evil. Are there ways in which this place helped you to experience goodness? Did this place deepen your relationship with God? Were there ways in which you experienced forces opposed to God and God's goodness in this place?

How did the holy "otherness" of this place affect the way you experienced places outside your sacred spaces?