

## 12) Creation

Traditionally, creation would not have its own chapter in theology 101, but rather would be a sub-category within the chapter on God - Creator. And even in more recent theological textbooks creation or “cosmology” would not come before humanity as its own independent theme. But given the crisis in our relationship as humans with mother earth, there has been a major rethink and urgency in focussing on creation as a very important and necessary chapter in Christian theology. This has also led to a re-reading of the bible and the discovery of an understanding of creation more inline with indigenous understandings than traditionally Western European ones.

What does a rereading of scripture beginning with the opening chapter of the bible and the Older Testament as a whole reveal about creation?

All life on this planet (earth and animals) is alive just like we humans are alive; and more than this: all life, just like human life, is invited by God into the creational process to participate in reciprocal and interactive communion with God and other life. To participate reciprocally requires love, and love requires freedom to choose love in order to be love.

While we as humans of western origin have treated the earth and the animals as passive, without choice, driven simply by the necessity of survival and without feelings like we humans have feelings, this is not how the bible images creation. The earth and its creatures are not just a “resource” to be used by us humans for our benefit without giving something back and without ensuring they are willing to give to us and be cared by us even when we take their lives to feed ourselves as part of the circle of life. How do we love each life as it needs to be loved and deserves to be loved as a special creation of God like we humans are so loved?

Freedom within creation also means the ebb and flow of mother earth, the cataclysms, the rhythms and cycles, the unexpected ruptures here and there, the behaviour of animals of all kinds on land, water and air... all of that is not programmed but freely the movement of creation like we humans move, vulnerable as we are and in need of food, water, protection and care to survive and thrive. This also means all life, human and non-human, is mortal and dies, but also is vulnerable to abuse. Either we care for each other or we suffer and die alone. Those who suffer may be neglected and abandoned or they may be cared for. The greater the cooperation and care, the stronger we become collectively and the better we evolve.

All life, not just human life, is invited by the creator to work together to flourish. This is God’s dream in creating the world. The goal is communion based on a reciprocity of love, a giving and receiving that serves our collective flourishing as vulnerable creatures who live, then die and make way for other life to be nourished from what goes back into the earth. While the bible speaks of resurrection into new life, with “spiritual bodies” (to be discussed in a later chapter),

it also tells us we are “dust of the earth” like all other life on earth to be released back into the ground to become nutrients for other life.

But we humans in particular have a power the rest of creation does not. We’ll focus on humans more fully in future chapters, but for now it is important to distinguish what we call “natural disasters” from human evil and harm. Natural disasters are not personal attacks by nature upon us humans, but part of the ebb and flow of a vast universe of which we humans are a small part. And because we are vulnerable as humans, we can be in the wrong place at the wrong time of these vast ebbs and flows of nature. Storms, floods, fires, earthquakes and the like are part of life in this universe and this is neither a judgement of God nor a personal assault of nature.

At the same time, however, the fact that our planet is warming ever faster and the earth is reacting ever more fiercely with “natural disasters” may suggest mother nature is upset with us and is not continuing to reciprocate love to us while we reciprocate abuse and disregard toward her. Mother nature is telling us we need to change or else things will get worse and she will continue to react. She cannot absorb all the abuse we are causing her and our relationship is continuing to break down. How will we collectively heal this relationship for our mutual welfare? How can I as a person do my part in my daily practice to treat mother earth and all creatures who depend on her as persons I love and cherish? We flourish together or we perish together. The ball is in our court as humans, for better or worse.

What do you think? Does reconceptualizing the earth and all creatures as persons like we humans are persons, with different capacities mentally, yes, but also with feelings and love as well as reactivity under threat, with needs and wants just like we humans have needs and wants, and vulnerable just like we humans are vulnerable, does this make sense to you? How is all life, not just human life also my neighbour whom Jesus calls me to love?

We pray mother nature may forgive us humans and be patient with us as we try to change (repent), so that the progressive shift in our climate is more gradual. May God help us and heal us.

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