

THE FARADAY INSTITUTE

Theological and Biblical Imperatives on 'Why care for Creation?'

THE THEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

- **CREATOR.** Creation implies a Creator. See the story about Isaac Newton. It is what we believe/know about God as Creator i.e. his character that informs us about the character of God's Creation.
- **CREATION.** Just as a work of art reveals to some extent the character of the artist and just as the artist is revealed through their art so the Creator is manifest through what is created.
- **MYSTERY.** Nevertheless, there is always an element of mystery about every act of creativity.
- **MORAL IMPERATIVE.** Although an 'ought' does not necessarily flow from an 'is' it is not unreasonable to imagine that if God wills his own existence and the existence of his creation then to thwart or frustrate or impede his creating is to go against his will. Conversely, to prosper, to further and add momentum to his creating fulfils his own imperative as Creator to create.
- **CONTINUING CREATION.** The act of creation is not 'once upon a time' but a continuing act.

- ENERGY. The Creator is the source of the energy. See the example of the Spinning Top. N.B. Our current concerns about energy are to do with Climate Change and Pollution but this can lead to a negative attitude towards the use of energy. A theological understanding about the source of energy helps us to view it as sacred. Energy ultimately has a divine source and a divine purpose in sustaining God's creative action. This is why we should value it.
- GOOD. If God is good then what he makes is good. A theological understanding leads to a belief in the original goodness of creation, of the material world.
- GOOD BUT NOT PERFECT. The fact that Creation is good doesn't mean that Creation is either finished or perfect. Creation is a work in progress. See the image of a sculptor working with the grain of stone or wood imagining, anticipating, reacting, shaping.
- LOVE, FREEDOM, RISK. If God is love then freedom and risk follow. See the story of Beauty and the Beast, "I had to let her go because I love her." The risk is the possibility of resistance to God's creativity and the reckless exploitation of his Creation. The theological response of Love to resistance is redemption.
- REDEMPTION THROUGH NATURE. God through Nature (all that has been born and has breath) responds in a redemptive way. See God's Grandeur, the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins "Nature is never spent because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and ah bright wings." See the image of the Master Painter/Grandfather and his wayward Grandchildren.

- **DIVERSITY.** A Christian insight into God is that he is Three Persons in One. This plurality is hinted at in the Hebrew word for God 'Elohim' which is plural. It is explicit in the New Testament with the disclosure that God is to be known personally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For Love Eternal to be meaningful there must be a real mutuality of persons to give and to receive. If this is true it speaks of diversity within the Creator e.g. 'In his image he made them male and female'. The diversity within Creation is an expression of the diversity of the divine character. To damage and destroy diversity frustrates the purpose of the Creator; to encourage and to celebrate diversity is to be consonant with the diverse character of the Creator.
- **INTERDEPENDENCE.** If the Trinitarian insight is true then it speaks not just of diversity but also of interdependence within the Godhead. See the Gospel of John where the mutuality of the Persons of the Trinity is expressed by the giving and receiving of glory. That interdependence is reflected in Creation itself. Failure to realise the fragile interdependence of Creation is a failure to understand the character of the Creator.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CREATOR AND CREATION. Thus the Theological Imperative of caring for Creation is to be found in the characteristics of Creation's Creator such as Energy, Love, Freedom, Risk, Redemption, Diversity and Interdependence. I shall refer to the characteristic of Justice at the end.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IMPERATIVE

Engaging with young people made me rethink my attitude to Creation and sent me back to the Gospels with the question: “Did Jesus have anything to say about the Earth?”

- The central petition in the LORD’S PRAYER is for ‘the earthing of heaven’ i.e. ‘your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven’. (Mt 6;10)). Yet our liturgy does not always reflect this. But see example of Nairobi Cathedral.
- Jesus calls himself ‘Ben Adam’ translated as ‘SON OF MAN’, and the words mean ‘Child of the one hewn from the earth’. See conversation with the Chief Rabbi and ‘CHILD OF THE EARTH’.
- The UNIQUE COLLECTION of ‘Son of Man/Child of the Earth’ and ‘Earth’ sayings in the Gospels. See ‘Jesus and the Earth’ (SPCK) by the lecturer.
- When they lay ‘the Child of the Earth in the HEART OF THE EARTH’ (Mt 12; 40) the earth is shaken, darkened, and quakes again, (Mt 27; 45, 51 and 28; 2).
- Jesus, the Child of the Earth/Son of Man, has ‘authority ON EARTH to forgive sins’. The Earth that is cursed by humanity’s selfishness is renewed when humanity is FORGIVEN and restored.

- As the Son of Man/Child of the Earth Jesus has a central role in 'the RENEWAL (palingenesis) of all things' (Mt 19; 28). In other words, he does not subscribe to a Theology of Obliteration which can sometimes be found in fundamentalist versions of Christianity and Islam. See the correspondence between the Koran and the Bible about the earth and the role of the Child of Adam and the Child of Mary by the Muslim scholar Nariman Gasimoglu.
- As the Son of Man/Child of the Earth Jesus envisages a central role for himself in the future JUDGEMENT (Mt 25; 31). He says we will be judged on how we have treated him, the Son of Man/Child of the Earth, in his EARTHLY manifestations. The hungry, thirsty, stranger, sick, naked all relate to the victims of environmental calamities i.e. famine, drought, refugees, disease, destitution. PS See the statistics re the Thames Barrier.
- In the Prologue to the Gospel of John these themes found in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke find their fullest exposition. JESUS' relationship to and with the EARTH is expounded in the verse, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being".
- One of the ironies in the Gospel of John is when after the crucifixion Mary mistakes the Risen JESUS for the Gardener of Golgotha (20; 15). But she had seen a gardener, not the gardener of Golgotha but the Gardener of Eden. In Genesis 2; 8 it is God, the Gardener of the Earth, who plants the Garden of Eden.

These references to the Gospels prompts a further question as to what the New Testament Letters say about caring for Creation.

- Romans 8; 19 – 24. Creation that groans under the weight of humanity's sin waits to 'be set free from its bondage to decay' knowing that its own liberation is inextricably bound up in the redemption and liberation of the children of God through the Cross of Jesus Christ.
- Colossians 1; 16 "All things have been created THROUGH him and FOR him". Christ and not humanity stands at the centre of the Environment. His environment, not ours. Never has so much eco-theology been condensed into two such small prepositions.
- Hebrews 1; 3 "He sustains all things by his powerful word." Creation is a continuing act in which JESUS is the agent. He is also known as 'the exact imprint of God's very being'.
- Revelation 11; 18. "The nations raged, but your wrath has come , and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who DESTROY THE EARTH."
- Revelation 21 and 22. Fulfilling the vision of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel the River of the Water of Life flows from the Throne of God through the eternal City that has come down from heaven to earth. At the centre is the Tree of Life with its leaves for 'the healing of the nations'.

POST SCRIPT

One of the collection of Son of Man/Child of the Earth and Earth sayings is to be found in Luke 18; 1-8. It is a parable about justice in and on the earth. Jesus, who at the end of his life on earth was denied justice, identifies with the widow who comes to the authorities pleading, "Grant me justice" and is constantly dismissed. But she doesn't give up. It is about justice for the poor, the voiceless and powerless that comes eventually. And, "When the Child of the Earth/Son of Man comes, will he find faith (in the God of Justice) on earth?"

Lactantius a 4th Century North African Apologist defined justice as: "The whole point of justice consists precisely in our providing for others through humanity what we provide for our own family through affection."

The parable of the Cruise Liner.

A PRAYER

Holy Jesus

Child of Adam

Child of Mary

Come in Glory

And renew the face of the Earth.

Amen.

