

Possible Motivations for Christians to Preserve Creation

Chrześcijańskie motywacje ochrony stworzenia

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Abstract: Three different aspects are presented that can motivate people to work for the preservation of creation. All three motivations are closely linked to Christianity, so that Christianity could become the key to solve the global problems. The three motivations are 1) the admiration and the praise of creation, 2) the personal relationship with the God of Christianity and 3) the planet Earth is precious because of Jesus Christ. The third motivation results from the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every suffering and death of every human being and every other living being gets its meaning, value and redemption through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is explained using the keywords enabling, participation, solidarity and resurrection. This salvation event took place on this planet and the Creator of the universe became a human being, a creature of this planet. Through this, all human beings, but also all the other living beings on Earth and even the entire planet Earth are sanctified in an extraordinary way. In this way, all living beings on Earth and the entire planet have an inalienable dignity and a supreme value that is established, defended and restored by the Creator of the universe.

Keywords: ecotheology, Christology, preservation of creation, incarnation, religion and ecology, Christianity and ecology

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawione zostały trzy różne aspekty myśli chrześcijańskiej, które mogą stanowić źródło motywacji do pracy na rzecz ochrony stworzenia. Wszystkie te trzy motywacje zostały ściśle powiązane z chrześcijaństwem, tak aby mogło ono stać się kluczem do rozwiązania problemów globalnych. Są to: 1) podziw i uwielbienie stworzenia, 2) osobista więź z chrześcijańskim Bogiem i 3) stwierdzenie, że planeta Ziemia jest cenna ze względu na Jezusa Chrystusa. Trzecia z tych motywacji wynika z faktu wcielenia, śmierci i zmartwychwstania Jezusa Chrystusa. Wszelkie cierpienie, śmierć każdego człowieka, a także każdej innej żywej istoty zyskuje swój sens, wartość i odkupienie właśnie poprzez cierpienie, śmierć i zmartwychwstanie Jezusa Chrystusa. Wyjaśnia się to za pomocą słów kluczowych: umożliwienie, uczestnictwo, solidarność i zmartwychwstanie. Owo wydarzenie zbawienia miało miejsce na naszej planecie, a Stwórca wszechświata stał się człowiekiem, stworzeniem tej planety. Dzięki temu wszyscy ludzie, ale także wszystkie inne żyjące istoty, a nawet cała

Ziemia, zostają w niezwykle sposób uświęceni. Dlatego wszystkie istoty żyjące na naszej planecie wraz z nią samą posiadają niezbywalną godność i najwyższą wartość, ustanowioną, strzeżoną i przywróconą przez Stwórcę wszechświata.

Słowa kluczowe: ekoteologia, chrystologia, ochrona stworzenia, Wcielenie, religia i ekologia, Chrześcijaństwo i ekologia

Introduction

Our planet Earth is only a “tiny speck of dust in the sea of stars” (May 2020, 180); for our Sun is only one of hundreds of billions of suns in the Milky Way, and our Milky Way is only one of about 2 trillion galaxies in the entire universe (Conselice et al. 2016). Nevertheless, there is no second Earth – at least not within our reach! Colonisation of the other planets of our solar system will never be a substitute for our living on Earth; no matter how much one may think about it, as e.g., Rappaport and Corbally (2023a, b) do. This blue planet is our home, our only home in this universe.

Yet life on Earth is threatened in many ways. The current, multiple threats to our blue planet are caused by humans – starting with the constant threat of nuclear war, continuing with ubiquitous pollution and ending with global climate change. The solution to these problems, however, cannot consist in reducing the human population or even abolishing humanity, as some critics would have us believe. This is because intelligent living beings have a special significance and a special value for the Creator of the universe, because it is only with them that He can communicate consciously (May 2023, 24). And we, human beings, are the intelligent beings on this planet, the culmination of evolution, the daughters and sons of God, “who have the first fruits of the Spirit” (Romans 8:23).

Just as the current threats to life on Earth are caused by humans, humans also hold the key to the solution. I am convinced that we humans could avert the current threats to life on Earth if we were truly committed to the preservation of creation. The decisive factor here is motivation. If we humans have a motivation that really grips us deeply and inspires us, we can achieve extraordinary things. I am not alone in this optimism. Looking back to the past, Winslow (2022, 1) trusts in “humanity re-claiming its inter-relation with all creatures in a world family while exercising the free will to partner with one another on a spiritual level in accomplishing God’s good and wonderful eternal ideas for the next step in human spiritual development toward earth’s physical evolution.”

Studies show that people with a greater interest in spirituality and religion have a greater willingness to engage in environmental stewardship and the preservation of creation (Omoyajowo et al. 2023). For these people in particular, the selection and unfolding of suitable

motivations could help them to become even more committed to the preservation of creation. Today, Christianity is the largest religion on Earth with around 2.3 billion members (Hackett and McClendon 2017), so that Christianity could become the key to solve the global problems (Hollinghurst 2022). Consequently, in this essay I would like to look at three aspects that can motivate Christians to work for the preservation of creation. As a result, this article has necessarily a markedly theological character. The three motivations are:

- 1) Admiration and praise of creation.
- 2) Personal relationship with the God of Christianity.
- 3) Planet Earth is precious because of Jesus Christ.

The degree to which the respective motivation is specifically Christian and how familiar the person must be with Christianity increases from the first to the third motivation. All three motivations are equally valid for all major denominations of Christianity – Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants – as they only touch on truths of faith that are common to all major denominations of Christianity.

1. Admiration and praise of creation

The first motivation for the preservation of creation arises from the contemplation of its beauty. This motivation is accessible to all people, regardless of which religion or worldview they belong to. However, this motivation becomes much deeper and stronger if one belongs to a religion – such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam – that is convinced that this world and the whole universe was created by an intelligent supreme being.

In this world, one sees again and again an exuberant abundance, diversity and beauty. Evolution has brought forth an exuberant abundance and beauty of the most diverse living beings on our small planet. There are probably a total of 9–11 million different species of living beings on planet Earth today (Chapman 2009; Mora et al. 2011). And throughout Earth's history, perhaps 180 million different species of animals have existed on our planet (Rödder et al. 1993, 220). Another vivid approach to this diversity is to go out into nature and notice how many very different creatures interact with each other in the place where you are standing. It is worthwhile to look consciously at the diversity of animals, plants, etc. in this place: The bacteria and fungi in the soil, the different plants that are the food for many different animals – from insects to mammals – and in the middle of it all, us, the humans.

Through its exuberant abundance and beauty, creation becomes the first self-communication of the Creator (May 2023, 28–29). “Ever since the creation of the world God's

eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been seen and understood through the things God has made” (Romans 1:20) – see also Loke (2022). “Creation is a hymn of praise to the Creator, and creation for this reason alone possesses value and is worthy of protection.” (May 2020, 175). This self-communication of the Creator in the exuberant abundance and beauty of nature is hidden to the vast majority of living beings on this planet, since their existence is completely absorbed in the tasks of maintaining and transmitting life. In contrast, we humans can direct our gaze to something that lies outside the preservation and transmission of biological life. Our reason can glimpse something of the reality of God in the contemplation of creation. “In this way, creation itself becomes an invitation to his intelligent, rational creatures to enter into dialogue with him, the Creator. This creation, which emerges from the intra-Trinitarian dialogue of the triune God, becomes the invitation and the starting point of the dialogue between God and human beings.” (May 2023, 29).

Somewhat more profoundly, creation exists to praise the Creator (Marlow 2022, 495). Numerous passages in the Bible and the Qur’an speak about creation praising the Creator (Sadowski and Ayvaz 2023, 156–157). Every kind of living being is like an instrument or like a sound in this praise song of creation to the Creator (Francis 2015, 85). Every species that dies out makes the song of praise a little poorer (May 2020, 182).

The call to praise our Creator is especially for us humans; for, in my view, one of the essential reasons we humans exist is to praise God our Creator. And it is precisely the contemplation of the beauty of creation that leads human beings to praise the Creator (May 2020, 175). “The research results of the natural sciences make us realise the magnificence, uniqueness and superabundance of the creation that surrounds us. Without intending to do so, they allow us to glimpse, through eyes of faith, character traits of the Creator. Thus, even through the modern natural sciences, creation’s hymn of praise to its Creator secretly resounds.” (May 2020, 181).

2. Personal relationship with the God of Christianity

The second motivation for the care of creation presupposes that the person believes in a God who seeks a personal, loving relationship with him. This personal, loving relationship between God and human being is the central theme of Christianity; for good reason Jesus Christ taught his disciples the Lord’s Prayer when they asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1).

“For every human being, the living, honest and personal relationship with the God of Christianity could become an extraordinary driving force in the fight against injustice and environmental destruction” (May 2021b, 243).

This statement, which is perhaps surprising at first, becomes understandable when one looks at what the actual cause of injustice and environmental destruction is: it is man’s insatiable longing for happiness and fulfilment. Every human being longs for a happiness and fulfilment that this world cannot give. Christianity knows that these longings are ultimately directed towards communion with God. However, our societies direct these longings towards material things and consumption. As long as a person tries to fill these longings with material things, he/she will always suffer lack and want to have more and more. Other people are no longer experienced as fellow creatures with their own dignity, but either subjected to the desires of this person or perceived as obstacles, or competitors, on the path to the happiness of this person. With such an inner condition, injustice and environmental destruction are unavoidable, and sharing with other people is very difficult because one suffers lack oneself.

This person will undergo a fundamental change when he/she becomes existentially aware within himself/herself that he/she is unconditionally loved by God and that this love of God is the truly decisive thing for his/her life (May 2021b, 244):

- As the love of God fills more and more of that person’s heart, it becomes easier for him/her to realise that he/she does not need certain things in order to be happy. Therefore, it is easier for him/her to let go and renounce consumption.
- The person will discover more and more in the poverty-stricken human being (e.g. of the Third World) his/her sibling with whom he/she wants to share more and more of his/her wealth.
- And the person will discover more and more in creation the overflowing love of the Creator, to which the person will respond more and more protectively.

In this way, Christianity can empower people to share with others and reduce their standard of living to a level that is compatible with our resources.

3. Planet Earth is precious because of Jesus Christ

The first two motivations for preserving creation can be recognised and understood fairly quickly. This makes them easily accessible to many people. The third motivation, to preserve creation and protect this planet, requires that one has delved deeply enough into the most fundamental and central truth of faith in Christianity: 2000 years ago, here, in a rather

insignificant place on this speck of dust in the universe, the transcendent Creator of the universe became an integral part of His own creation. And here this immortal Creator, by His own free choice, allowed Himself to be killed by His own creatures and died. His death was not a play, for He had made Himself a part of His own creation. And on the third day He rose from the dead. He died and rose again to pave the way for us humans into fulfilled transcendence with Him and His and our Father. And He died and rose again to show that the whole creation, not only this planet, but the whole universe will be redeemed and completed “through Him and with Him and in Him!”

Other authors also hold that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on planet Earth has a central significance for the entire universe: Deane-Drummond (2008b, 62) explicitly includes the entire cosmos in the redemption through Jesus Christ. Kim (2021) also argues that the one incarnation of God in Jesus Christ on planet Earth is sufficient for the redemption of the entire universe, even if there should be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe.

This is the true dignity of planet Earth: here the transcendent Creator of the universe has become an integral part of His own creation. Here the ultimate overcoming of the barrier between transcendence and immanence has taken place. Here the Creator has spoken His unconditional yes to his creation “to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). This planet is “holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). Here God became one of his creatures: a human being, a specimen of our species. Thus we, the representatives of *Homo sapiens*, become “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Both we, human beings, and our planet, Earth, receive our true dignity from Jesus Christ, for God the Father “set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:9–10). And through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, all suffering and death in this creation receives its meaning, its value and its redemption. Yes, all suffering and death, every suffering and death of every human being, every animal, every plant, every fungus, every eukaryotic protozoan and every prokaryotic protozoan, receives its meaning, its value and its redemption through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. If there were any suffering or death in this universe that did not receive its meaning, value and redemption through Jesus Christ, there would be something profoundly meaningless in this universe; and then one could with good reason question whether God is really love or whether God exists at all. These questions are asked by

modern theologians on various occasions (Aguti 2017). Against all these doubts, one can set the firm faith conviction documented in the New Testament that all suffering and death in this universe receives its meaning, value and redemption through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This statement of faith raises two questions:

- 1) How does the existence of the absolute remoteness from God, what we call “hell”, fit in with this?
- 2) How does the suffering and death through Jesus Christ get its meaning, its value and its redemption?

The answer to question 1) is: Just as a person can decide of his own free will against the love of God, he can also accept or reject the offer of Jesus Christ to give his suffering and death meaning and redemption. A person who decides of his own free will against the love of God (whatever that may mean in concrete terms) logically chooses remoteness from God, and thus hell after his biological death. A person who rejects the offer of Jesus Christ to give meaning to his suffering and death must live with the meaninglessness of his suffering and death in this life, because neither suffering nor death can be completely avoided. I do not want to reflect on the question of whether rejection of Jesus Christ’s offer of meaning automatically implies rejection of God’s love, or at least predisposes one to this. At this point, I would like to trust in the merciful love of God, which seeks and finds ways to salvation where there seem to be no more ways. It is not for nothing that God became man in order to be very close to every human being. And it is not for nothing that Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist in order to be able to come even closer to us (May 2023, 32)!¹

The answer to question 2) in relation to humans alone would fill books. May (2024) makes a few attempts at an answer related to humans. And then the whole thing extended to all living beings... With the following keywords I would like to indicate the directions of possible answers: Enabling, Participation, Solidarity and Resurrection:

- **Enabling:** This keyword particularly concerns suffering and death during evolution, in the history of the Earth, because all the suffering and all the death of living beings was either necessary or unavoidable so that humans could emerge on the path of evolution

¹ There is an important difference between the denominations here: While Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans believe that Jesus Christ is present in bread and wine during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the Reformed do not (Blanco Sarto 2018; Langer and Radlbeck-Ossmann 2010, 222–223; May 2024).

(Ruiz Soler and Núñez de Castro 2017, 63; Sollereeder 2016). Only the human being was and is a living being worthy of the incarnation of the Creator of the universe. To put it another way, all other living beings lack essential qualities that humans have; and therefore, the transcendent Creator of the universe could not or would not become a creature in them.

- **Participation:** Every suffering and death of every living creature is participation in and imitation of the suffering and death of the incarnate Son of God (Miller 2011, 93; Deane-Drummond 2008a). Through the fact that the living creatures suffer and die just like the creator who became a creature, a new, unexpected connection and connectedness with the creator opens up.
- **Solidarity:** While “participation” looks from the creature to the Creator, “solidarity” looks from the Creator to the creature. Our God, the Creator of the universe, is not the eternally happy, eternally unmoved, eternally never suffering cold God of the philosophers. Our God suffers, our God suffers with us (Schaab 2007; Casadesús 2023, 123; Buitrago Rojas 2018, 45–59; Johnson 2020). Even before God presented himself to Moses as the Eternal Being with the well-known phrase “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14), God presented himself to Moses as the Eternal Co-sufferer in which he said: “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey...” (Exodus 3:7–8). This compassionate, solidary God became man in Jesus Christ. For example, Rabie-Boshoff and Buitendag (2020) interpret Jesus as the suffering partner of a suffering creation. Jesus made himself vulnerable and submitted to suffering out of solidarity with the suffering creation, and in particular out of solidarity with suffering human beings. Jesus lived this solidarity with suffering and dying human beings and other living beings “to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). Jesus’ death shows that God is not indifferent to both human suffering and the suffering of other living beings, but suffers with his creation (Murphy 2016, 115–116; Miller 2011, 90, 93; Vélez Caro 2012).
- **Resurrection:** The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead involves for human beings the promise of eternal communion with God in transcendence, for which the Revelation of John uses the image of the “holy city”. For all the rest of creation, there is the promise of transformation and consummation with God, for which the image of

“a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1) stands (Deane-Drummond 2008a; Russell 2008; Francis 2015, 100; O'Halloran 2018; Hausoul 2021; May 2021b, 241–242). All non-human living beings will also find their fulfilment and completion in God, but this can and will look different from what we humans do (Edwards 2010, 165–166; Francis 2015, 243; Casadesús 2023, 127).

The bottom line is: this great work of redemption through Jesus Christ did not happen in the world of fairy tales. It is not just a pious legend. It is a real event that took place at a real time – 2000 years ago – in a real place. That real place is planet Earth.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16). I am convinced that our admiration for nature and the entire planet Earth would increase enormously and our efforts to protect the environment, the climate, the living world, etc. would be much greater if we made a small specification of the rather abstract word “world” and read the Bible text thus: “For God so loved the planet Earth and everything that lives on it that he gave his only Son...”

4. Possible objections

An anonymous reviewer of the manuscript raised some objections, which in particular relate to the third motivation “The planet Earth is precious because of Jesus Christ”. I am very grateful for these objections and would like to discuss them here, as I believe that some readers may also have these objections.

4.1. Objection: “There is criticism of Darwinism”

There is indeed scientific criticism of Darwinism, or Neo-Darwinism. However, this criticism is not directed against evolution itself, because the fact that there has been an evolution from simple to complex living beings over geological time periods is confirmed time and again by an overwhelming wealth of research results from biology, geology and palaeontology – see, for example: Campbell and Reece (2002), Freeman and Herron (2003), May (2024). The analysis of the credibility of the different parts of the theory of evolution carried out by Brink et al. (2017) distinguishes three different parts of the theory of evolution:

- 1) The historical evolution of living beings in geological times. According to Brink et al. (2017, 462), this part “is strongly beyond reasonable doubt”.
- 2) All living beings have descended from a common ancestor. According to Brink et al. (2017, 466), this part “is at least beyond reasonable doubt in a weak sense”.

- 3) Evolution can be satisfactorily explained by the fact that random mutations are subject to natural selection. Brink et al. (2017, 467) give this statement much less credibility.

Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, there are once again calls for an extension of the theory of evolution, as biology and related natural sciences have made important advances in knowledge in areas such as developmental biology, molecular biology, behavioural biology and palaeontology, which are crying out to be adequately considered in the theory of evolution. The articles by Kutschera and Niklas (2004), Laland et al. (2015), Futuyma (2017), Müller (2017), Barton (2022) and Brown and Hullender (2022), for example, are expressions of this struggle for an “extended synthesis” of evolutionary theory.

4.2. Objection: “Some Christians reject evolution”

In the beginning, the theory of evolution was generally rejected by the Christian churches; but today all major Christian churches accept evolution as the way in which God created the abundance of life on Earth – see, for example: Blancke (2013), Collado González (2014), Van Dyk (2013), Chan and Ecklund (2016). Nevertheless, there are still some Christians today who ignore the overwhelming abundance of evidence in favour of evolution and reject the theory of evolution (Peters 2018, 21). These opponents of evolution are a vocal but small minority within Christianity, and many of them belong to certain Protestant groups, such as the American Evangelical Christians. However, “by no means are American evangelical Christians unilaterally allied with the likes of creationism and Intelligent Design. Francis Collins, Director of the US National Institutes of Health and hero among evangelicals for founding Biologos, defends good science: ‘No serious biologist today doubts the theory of evolution to explain the marvelous complexity and diversity of life.’” (Peters 2018, 23).

4.3. Objection: “There were no five mass extinctions, but only one global flood”

The anonymous reviewer claims that decades of geological research show that there were not five mass extinctions, but only one global flood. Similar claims are repeatedly made by creationists. I myself am a geologist and palaeontologist and I have to say: this is not true! There is no geological evidence of a single global flood! It is true that in the last 600 million years mostly a much larger part of the Earth was covered with water than today, but that was long before the first humans appeared and there were numerous transgressions and regressions (Andel 1994, 178–189). A very spectacular sea level rise was at the end of the last ice age, because in the last 15,000 years the global sea level has risen by about 100 metres (Andel 1994,

83). However, this sea level rise was not a global flood catastrophe, because even during the fastest rise in sea level, about 12,000 years ago, almost a thousand years passed before sea level had risen by 24 metres (Andel 1994, 81).

The anonymous reviewer's claim that there were not five mass extinctions, but only one global flood, touches the very foundations of geology and palaeontology, because we recognise the geological periods by their fossils. Every period has its own fossils. And this was recognised long before Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution: In the 1790s, the English surveyor William Smith recognised, during his work for a ship canal for transporting coal, that different strata contain different fossils; and that it is therefore possible to recognise, even over long distances, which strata are of a comparable age and to which geological age a stratum belongs (Morton 2001; Torrens 2015).

Building on these fundamental observations, geologists and palaeontologists – like myself, for example – have been developing an ever finer and more precise framework of sequences of fossils called “biostratigraphy” for more than 200 years. And in doing so, we repeatedly find that the same fossils occur together in the strata. In this framework of sequences of fossils, the five mass extinctions are the most prominent and longest-known elements, because they each changed the fauna in a striking way (Jablonski 1991; Andel 1994, 371–386; Racki 2019). What is important is this: Always the same chronological sequence of different fossils is found! Trilobites have never been found together with dinosaurs or dinosaurs and humans together!

Creationists – such as Morris (1980) – claim that there is one place in the world that would prove that dinosaurs and humans lived at the same time: the Cretaceous strata of the Paluxy River in Texas (Dott 1982, 269; Branch and Scott 2013, 2–3). There are dinosaur footprints next to structures that at first glance look like the footprints of giant humans. However, detailed investigations showed the following: While the dinosaur footprints have the typical characteristics of footprints in a wet mud and are therefore genuine, some of the “human” footprints had been subsequently carved into the rock by people living there – as a source of cash income during depression years (Dott 1982, 269). The other specimens of the alleged giant “human” footprints are in fact dinosaur footprints – some of the prints were deformed by movements of the dinosaur foot, others are washed out by weathering (Branch and Scott 2013, 3).

4.4. Objection: “Evolution is not a motivation to preserve creation because of death and mass extinctions”

The anonymous reviewer pointed out that biological evolution inevitably implies death and that there have been mass extinctions in the history of the Earth. This could be taken as reasons to do nothing about the destruction of the environment and the extinction of species. Therefore, evolution would not be suitable as a justification for the preservation of creation.

I agree that the evolution of complex living beings and the death of the individual are inextricably linked (Clark 1998). Natural selection prevents multicellular living beings from being immortal, because a species of immortal multicellular organisms would quickly reach the limits of its ecological possibilities (Passarge and Horsthemke 2009, 10). In order for a multicellular species to survive and evolve, the individuals of this species must die at some point.

There have been several major mass extinctions in the history of the Earth – see, for example: Jablonski (1991), Andel (1994, 371–386), May (1996), Racki (2019). The last major mass extinction was at the end of the Cretaceous period and wiped out all dinosaurs, among others. “The dominance of dinosaurs prevented the further diversification and evolution of mammals. Only after the extinction of the dinosaurs were the mammals able to develop their present diversity and importance. If this asteroid had passed the Earth, dinosaurs would probably still dominate the world now and the most highly developed primates would not be humans, but the prosimians!” (May 2021a, 25).

I am convinced that only those not familiar with Earth’s history and biodiversity would dare to use evolution and Earth’s history as counterarguments against environmental stewardship. A look at the history of Earth shows us how long it took for the biodiversity that exists today to develop. It also shows us how fragile ecosystems are. And finally, it shows us that it took several or even many millions of years to overcome the damage caused by a mass extinction. In my opinion, all these observations are very good reasons in favour of environmental stewardship and the preservation of creation.

4.5. Objection: “Could God only incarnate as a human being?”

The anonymous reviewer raised the question of whether it was absolutely necessary that humans existed to allow God to incarnate on Earth. In order to answer this question adequately, we must realise which of our characteristics distinguish us from animals, but are similar to the characteristics of God:

We are intelligent, we are self-aware and think about ourselves, we ask about the meaning and purpose of life, we ask about good and evil, we have free will and we can communicate with each other about all of this.

These characteristics distinguish us humans from all other living beings on this planet. If we then look at how Jesus Christ behaved during his time on Earth, we see that Jesus Christ constantly sought dialogue with us humans (May 2023, 30–31). However, if dialogue with his creatures is so important to God, the Creator, then it would make no sense for God to incarnate in a being that is not capable of intelligent dialogue at all.

4.6. Objection: “Jesus Christ only saved and sanctified human beings”

Even though humans have a special significance for God, Jesus Christ’s salvific action does not only concern humans, but the whole of creation. The biblical passages Romans 8:19–21 and Revelation 21:1 testify to this. More and more theological publications are also explaining that Jesus Christ’s salvific action concerns not only humans, but all of creation and especially animals – see, for example, Deane-Drummond (2009), Edwards (2010), Russell (2012), Florio (2015), Francis (2015), O’Halloran (2018), Hausoul (2021), May (2021b) and Casadesús (2023).

4.7. Objection: “Nature was already precious before the incarnation of Jesus Christ”

I completely agree with the anonymous reviewer when he points out that nature (and the entire planet Earth) was precious even before the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. For example, the first motivation “Admiration and praise of creation” is independent of Jesus Christ and therefore also valid for Jews and Muslims.

Nevertheless, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ increases the value and dignity of nature and the entire planet Earth in an unrivalled way. I tried to explain this in the chapter “Planet Earth is precious because of Jesus Christ.”

Ever since the first Christians, the incarnation, life, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been of central importance to Christianity. For this reason, the Old Testament and the history of the people of Israel have been interpreted from the perspective of Jesus Christ since the earliest Christians. In the Christian understanding, only Jesus Christ gives the Old Testament and the history of the people of Israel their full meaning. Repeatedly and in various ways the writings of the New Testament show that the incarnation, life, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ on planet Earth is the central event of history – not only of human

history, but of the entire history of the whole of creation, i.e. the entire cosmos. As examples of this, I would like to refer to the following passages in the New Testament: John 1:1–18, Ephesians 1:3–10, Galatians 4:4 and Hebrews 1:1–3. If the incarnation, life, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the event that gives the whole of history its meaning and centre; then it may also be said that the incarnation, life, suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the event that gives human beings, all living beings and the whole of planet Earth its unrivalled value and dignity.

Conclusions

In this essay, I have tried to identify reasons that can be used to motivate people to work for the preservation of creation and the protection of planet Earth. I have identified three different motivations, each of which presupposes a different level of religiosity in people who want to understand and embrace these motivations.

The first motivation, admiration and praise of creation, presupposes little religiosity in individuals, since the exuberant abundance, diversity and beauty can be seen with their own eyes. However, although the beauty of creation can be observed again and again, by all appearances this motivation is too weak to move many people to decisive and committed action. Otherwise, humanity's efforts to preserve creation would already be much more decisive.

The second motivation for the care of creation presupposes that the person believes in a God who seeks a personal, loving relationship with him/her. All Christians who take their faith seriously are predestined for this motivation. Already today, personal friendship or love for God is for many Christians the motivation and source of strength for their commitment to justice and the preservation of creation. There is certainly still a lot of untapped potential here, because a large proportion of Christians live their Christianity essentially as a system of ethical norms and not as a personal relationship with a "you". I am convinced that the more people develop a personal love relationship with the God of Christianity, the more people will actively work for justice and the preservation of creation.

The third motivation requires a great familiarity with the Christian faith, because it builds on the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. By repeating the truths of faith documented in the writings of the New Testament in the words of the scientific worldview of the 21st century, the extraordinary significance and cosmic scope of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is again brought to mind. This event took place on this planet and the Creator of the universe became a human being, a creature of this planet. Through this, all

human beings, but also all living beings on Earth and even the entire planet Earth are sanctified in an extraordinary way. In this way, all living beings on Earth and the entire planet have an inalienable dignity and a surpassing value that is established, defended and restored by the Creator of the universe. Against this background, Revelation 11:18 makes a lot of sense: "... your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, [...] and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

How great the potential of this third motivation is to motivate people to care for creation can only be guessed at. Admittedly, the fact that familiarity with the faith truths of Christianity is necessary limits the number of people who can be approached. On the other hand, this approach offers a genuinely Christian justification of the sanctity and dignity of planet Earth and the living beings on it. In this way, Christianity can provide a viable alternative to other, non-Christian justifications of the sanctity and dignity of planet Earth and the life on it. Moreover, basic truths of Christianity can be proclaimed in this way in a way that still makes people of the 21st century sit up and take notice. Especially in Christian circles, this concept could considerably increase the willingness to work for the preservation of creation.

In summary, Christians have many good reasons to work for the preservation of creation. Already almost 2000 years ago, Paul the Apostle recognised that we Christians have a special responsibility for creation: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Romans 8:19). Through our participation, we Christians can contribute to the fulfilment of the hope of the whole creation: "...for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:20–21).

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