

CHRISTIANITY AND CREATION

It must be nearly two years since this group has been used. A small group of us managed to meet a few times and then lockdown! As I guess has happened to many groups, attendance has stopped and contributions have ceased. So I ask myself "is there actually any need for a specifically 'Christian' Environmental Concern group? In what way (if any) can Christians relate to environmental issues in a distinct way? Here are some of my thoughts and any other contributions would be very welcome:

THE IDEA OF RULE

I read an article on climate issues recently from a Christian perspective which made some interesting points. As I expected, he made the assertion that humankind is to "rule" over Creation. This is not a very helpful term even though it can be found in the book of Genesis - I do not know how this would have been interpreted when written, but it seems to me that the idea of 'rule' has implications that can be abused when in the wrong hands. "We can do with the planet what we like because we are in charge". The concept of 'power' that has been associated with the idea of 'rule', though Christian, seems to have been embedded in our Western culture and grossly abused. Connected with "Rule" we have the concept of "Power".

THE IDOL OF POWER

One of our greatest idols is the idol of power which we have not only used to our advantage but also attributed to God in a detrimental way. The dying of Jesus on the Cross is enough to show us that true divine power is not unilateral coercion but could be better associated with loving influence. Here, a new power is in operation when Jesus said concerning his dying on the Cross "If I be lifted up I will draw all people to myself". Who would have thought that a man having not even the power to swat a fly from his face could be said to have power 'to draw all people' to himself? As has been said, there needs to be a switch from the "love of power" to the "power of love" if we are to attain a more appropriate view of the Christian idea of rule.

STEWARDS

Maybe for this reason many have changed the term "have power over" to "being stewards of" Creation. This word "steward" is a better term but still open to abuse if we do not unpack it a bit more. If we are going to extract a distinctly Christian idea we need to return to the Cross once again. Jesus downward trajectory to the Cross has been described by Paul as 'self-emptying' (Kenosis) resulting in servanthood to God and man. Then, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul appeals that this same mind of serving others should be also in us. Elsewhere, Jesus who demonstrated his servanthood by washing the disciples' feet, also said "let he who is greatest be as one who serves". If servanthood is the term Jesus gives us as to his relationship to humankind, then we can see servanthood in a dignified light.

GOD IS HUMBLE

Furthermore, if I ask "why did Jesus take this position of servanthood?" I come to the conclusion that in so doing he was showing us what God is really like. "Humility is at the heart of deity". This was not just a purposeful act of goodness but, deeper still, a revelation that God is humble. Would it be too farfetched for me to say that the highest expression of God in relation to Creation would not be to 'rule over' in its corrupted sense but rather to serve Creation?

SERVANTS OF CREATION

This to me *is* a distinctively Christian element. We are not to use Creation for our own ends.

Neither are we to worship Creation - but we *are* called in Christ's name and as a reflection of God's nature to serve Creation in a way that is consistent with God's idea of power. I do not say that the practice of serving Creation, if at all (!), is exercised exclusively by Christians but where it does happen, we can be sure it is so counter intuitive it can only come through the revelation of the humble Servant of the Cross.

THIS IS RIDICULOUS

I'm sure there are those who say such a notion is ridiculous - "am I, a noble human created in God's image to demean myself in the service of a garden worm?" I would answer "Precisely because you are made in God's image this is to be the case!" This does not negate the ideas of stewardship or even power but simply calls for another interpretation that runs counter to the world's idea of power. I would even go as far as to say that if we do not return to the spirit of humility (Origin: humus = ground) in spite of all our promises and intentions we have failed to get to the root of the matter. It is not enough for us to say we are to rule or be stewards over Creation. We have to interpret and demonstrate what this means in the light of the Christian revelation of the Cross.

THE SAME STUFF

Let us for a moment put aside big ideas of being 'Made in God's image' and 'ruling over Creation' and consider these things: Are we not all intrinsically connected to all of Creation due to the fact we are all made of the same stuff - the same basic building blocks of particles and energy? In that very basic sense we are all equal. Continuing with the worm, the worm's eye view of me is as valid as my view of the worm (If worm's have eyes!).

THE INCARNATION

We are told that 'God became flesh and dwelt among us'. In order to become human would not that imply that God would have to actually take on the very building blocks that all of Creation has in common with man? If I am correct then the scope of God's saving act in Jesus, in becoming a man, must extend beyond us to *all* of Creation! Indeed, Paul says "All of Creation has been groaning ... waiting for the revelation of the people of God". Why? Because we are all connected. Perhaps this is why Francis of Assisi is referred to as Brother of Creation - he is known to have called the sun 'Brother Sun' and the moon, 'Sister Moon'. He did not allow his being made in the image of God to rule over Creation to elevate him unnecessarily and rob him of the connectivity which is ours with God's world. Remember, "We are of the dust and to the dust we shall return". This is not a distinctly Christian approach to Creation. In fact Buddhists, who do not believe in a Creator, have a great sense of connectivity with everything. However, I would say the incarnational/redemptive viewpoint marks out the Christian view of connectivity as distinct in that we include the idea of God. But in what way is the Christian idea of God involved in the mutual connectivity of all Creation?

This leads to my final thought in what was meant to be the introductory section! I will have to continue another time with other ideas which make the Christian viewpoint distinct but this fits here. It has to do with our view of God. The Deist would say that God created the universe then left it to run on its own. A Theist would believe that God has not left things to run on their own but is still involved with the running of the Universe - but to what extent? Common terminology in the scriptures and our hymns and songs could lead us to believe that God is up there somewhere keeping an eye on things and will intervene if things get 'hairy'.

I disagree with this on two points - and I would draw my conclusions on the principle of the

incarnation and a return to what we mean by power. First of all, I do not believe that there is one happening, however small, neither is there or has there been any moment in time where God is not and has not been intimately connected with all that happens. Nothing can exist without God's involvement from the biggest decisions in COP26 to the turning of our worm in the soil. "If this is so", I hear, "then why do things go horribly wrong". For some explanation we have to now refer to our idea of power which is not unilateral coercion but lovingly persuasive. Love and freedom go hand in hand. God will not force Boris Johnson not to renege on his promises but will seek, I'm sure, through love and our love-filled prayers, to persuade him to carry through with what he has promised. This is how God operates. God is not only humble but passionately involved, aching and longing for us all to make decisions that further the beauty and goodness intended for our relationships with one another and with our world. To me this makes much more sense than sitting back relying on some random passages in Revelation that God will 'sort it all out in the end'. This is probably the biggest deception that is responsible for believers to remain passive when urgent prayer and involvement are required!

To sum up: Yes there are distinctions which become clearer when define our terms. We are servants, we are connected and our incarnational God is passionate that we are involved in all our relations which includes how we relate to our planet. I will continue another time ...