

Creation, Science & Faith

Jennifer Brown, 10 Feb 2019

Some theological themes to consider

1. The earth belongs to God, not us

- As creator of the world, God has the ultimate right to the earth. This is most clearly expressed in the opening verse of Psalm 24: “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it; the compass of the world and all who dwell therein.” (Psalm 24.1).
- Along with the acknowledgement that the earth and the life on it belong to God comes recognition of the fact that we are to be caretakers of the earth and its creatures (cf. Genesis 2.15).

2. The mutual flourishing of all creation

- We do not doubt that God continues to take an interest in the earth and its creatures, sustaining the existence of creation and providing for life on earth. God’s care for his creatures is beautifully expressed in Psalm 104.
- It can be argued that the creation narrative of Genesis 1 looks to the future, in that creation is an on-going activity that will culminate in the mutual flourishing and harmony of all creation that God declares to be very good (Genesis 1.31). In other words, the Genesis 1 creation narrative points towards the Peaceable Kingdom described in Isaiah 11.6–9 as what God has intended for creation from its beginning.
- As those who are made in the image of God (Genesis 1.26) and therefore represent God to the rest of creation, it is the responsibility of humanity to work towards this peaceable, mutual flourishing. Christians bear a particular responsibility for this, because in Christ we see the only true image of God (Colossians 1.15), uncorrupted by sin. The hymn to Christ of Philippians 2.6–8 tells us what it really means to be made in the image of God:

*“...though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.”*

- Rather than viewing being made in the image of God as conferring special status and privilege on humanity, we should imitate Christ, who did not cling to equality with God, but rather offered himself to serve beings lesser than himself.
- We are called to proclaim the good news to the whole creation (Mark 16.15). The best way to proclaim the good news to creation is to *be* good news for creation.

The role of science

1. Science gives us the tools to understand the world

The sciences have given us unprecedented ability to study the world and understand how individual organisms, species and ecosystems and climate systems function and impact on one another.

The technologies developed from scientific discoveries have, in some cases, led to environmental harm.

Science is also giving us tools to undo some of the damage that we have done (e.g. understanding how to limit and/or mitigate climate change; removing pollutants from soil and water; improve habitats for biodiversity)

2. Science as a Christian activity

- Science allows us to learn more about the Creator by understanding the creation. “Nature reflects the creativity of its maker” -Sir Isaac Newton.
- Psalm 19 begins, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” (Psalm 19.1). The second half of

the Psalm then focuses on the Law of the Lord (e.g. the Torah) as a means of gaining wisdom. In other words, both nature and scripture teach us about God. Science, as the study of nature, is therefore a valid means of seeking knowledge of God and seeking to serve him.

- Sir Francis Bacon said that science should be “to the glory of God and for the relief of man’s estate.” Science glorifies God by revealing and responding to the wonder of creation. Used properly, science gives us the means to relieve the suffering of others (“the relief of man’s estate”). This could be extended to include the relief of the estate of all sentient creatures. At minimum, we know that environmental degradation damages human health and wellbeing, so caring for creation will lead to the relief of human suffering, as well as benefitting other creatures.

Some questions to think about:

1. What is my theological understanding of humanity’s relationship with the rest of creation?
2. What am I already doing that makes a positive difference for the environment and/or other creatures?
3. What one additional thing can I do that will make a positive difference for the environment and/or other creatures?
4. How does my church celebrate the goodness of God’s creation?
5. What is my church already doing that makes a positive difference for the environment and/or other creatures?
6. What one additional thing can I help my church to do to make a positive difference for the environment and/or other creatures?
7. How might changing my thinking about creation change my understanding of God?