



Some Christian and Jewish Perspectives on the Creation

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Abstract:

This volume is the third of a trilogy on environmental issues. Building on the data and interpretations of the earlier two, this volume represents a culmination of an attempt to understand both the facts and the basis for a Christian and Jewish response to the environmental “crisis.” The essays, although written from diverse theological perspectives, (Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox Christianity) display a remarkable though not total theological convergence. This convergence presents humanity with an opportunity to present a reasonably united position on issues of great environmental concern.

Table of Contents:

Dedication	
Foreword.....	i
<i>Creatio ex nihilo</i> : Promise of the Gift Remembering the Christian Doctrine of Creation in Troubled Times	
Reinhard Hütter	1
An Orthodox Theology of Creation	
Fr. Bryan Eyman and Sister Marijo Ryan.....	14
A Jewish Perspective on the Creation	
Rabbi James S. Diamond.....	34
A Catholic Perspective on the Creation	
Fr. Robert Brungs, SJ.....	47
A Word from our Creator: Rediscovering Nature and Nature’s God	
Father Bert Akers, SJ.....	71
Discussion: Sessions 1 – 7.....	83
Participants	213

Dedication:

The ITEST Board of Directors and Staff dedicate this volume to Professor Robert W. Bertram on the occasion of his 70th birthday and his retirement from The Lutheran School of Theology – Chicago.

As he moves into retirement, Dr. Robert Bertram can look back on a distinguished pastoral and scholarly life – one, however, we are confident is not at even a significant pause. Bob earned his doctorate at The University of Chicago. He has taught at Valparaiso University, Concordia Seminary and Seminex in Saint Louis and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Throughout his years of service to God and to the church, Bob has sought to articulate in dialogue with others the *catholic* substance of his *Reformation* heritage as Good News in the contemporary world. ITEST has been blessed in having Professor Robert Bertram as its Vice-Director since its founding in 1968.

Bob, from your brothers and sisters -- AD MULTOS ANNOS!

Foreword:

This volume is the third of our trilogy on environmental issues. The term environmental is used rather broadly to describe issues treated in the first volume. We began the trilogy in March of 1990 with a discussion of *The Inner Environment: Clinical Research, Health Care Delivery and Economics* . In October, 1990 we considered

many of the standard environmental concerns and problems in *The External Environment*. This third volume, building on the data and interpretations of the earlier two, represents a culmination of our attempt to understand both the facts (as best they are available) and the basis for a Christian response to the environmental “crisis.”

In the Summer 1991 issue of *Science and Religion News*, Oliver Barclay, Editor, *Science & Christian Belief*, remarks:

... a prominent person in the U. K. asked recently: Why have Christians so little distinctive to say on environmental issues?” He expected us to have distinctly *different* things to say. Our practical aims may be just good sense on which we want everyone to agree. Even so, we should be doing more to stress the particular theological foundations of our stance. They distinguish us from the New Age positions on the one hand and a purely pragmatic position on the other. Good resolutions and common sense will fall in the face of financial pressure if there is no moral and theological undergirding.

In the light of Barclay’s remark, I quote from Reinhard Hütter’s essay:

It seems to me that the present ecological crisis makes it more difficult to reappropriate the genuine perspective of the Christian doctrine of creation in a reformulated *theology of creation*, since the temptation to put theological reflection into the service of the obvious is almost overpowering. The result all too often is a reactive bandwagon theology: after environmentalists, scientists, politicians, philosophers etc., have pointed out and have very convincingly made the case for the ecological crisis, theologians would finally – always being the last – also join the choir in order to offer a *theology for or of* the meanwhile obvious ecological crisis. . . .

Rather, I would like to claim that the Christian doctrine of creation makes a very specific point: it reminds us – in the context of the ecological crisis – of both God’s *promise* for our life and the *claim* upon our life inherent in the fact that the world is the creation of a gracious God who has not abandoned it but rather is present in it, and even more, is deeply involved in the story of God’s people toward a definite future for all humankind and all of creation. In other words, the primary concern of a *theology of creation* is not the creature but the *Creator*, since in God’s activity alone is rooted both the promise and the claim inherent in *creation*.

That remark of Hütter’s in fact describes much of what transpired in this Workshop. The focus was primarily on God, not, however, dismissing the environmental context of our concerns.

It is clear that the essays, although written in complete independence of each other, display a remarkable theological convergence. It must be noted, however, that that convergence would certainly not extend to all Christian and Jewish theological positions. Nonetheless, the convergence is real and is important. It does present us with the opportunity to present a reasonably united position on issues of great environmental concern. Clearly, the essays and discussion do not at all rely on New Age romanticism nor on “hard-headed economic conclusions.” They rely instead on God’s generous gift of creation and redemption. To paraphrase Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*: not a bad position, that.

Father Brian Eyman presented a grand synthesis of the theological richness of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Reinhard Hütter discussed particularly the Lutheran theology involved in *creatio ex nihilo* -- creation out of nothing in terms of theology, doxology and ethics. Rabbi Diamond discussed a Jewish – according to Diamond, four Jews, six positions – perspective on creation based largely on the creation accounts in Genesis. Father Brungs presented a Catholic perspective based on the sacramental and covenantal aspects of *creatio in Christo* – creation in Christ. As was mentioned above, considering the diversity of the four approaches, the theological convergence was noteworthy.

It is impossible to summarize briefly the discussion that flowed from the essays. It ranged from difficult theological considerations of the Fall to a brief discussion of the population issue to a call for a concern for beauty in human technological enterprises. We Christians must bring to all human concerns and problems the one thing that is our burden and our treasure: we are, as members of the covenant community – the presence of Christ in our world. If we are not, He is not among us. It is we who, in the last decade of the twentieth century, must think His thoughts, share His life and His love. More, we must be the ones who bring those thoughts, that life and love into the streets and fields and forests of the world. We carry in our union with Him the answer to the world's environmental ills. We must *show*, not just talk, the way to live in Christ, seeking beauty in an ascetical life.

Perhaps the best way to conclude this Foreword is to use the quotation from St. Athanasius that I used very near the end of my essay:

Like a musician who has attuned his lyre, and by the artistic blending of low and high and medium tones produces a single melody, so the Wisdom of God, holding the universe like a lyre, adapting things heavenly to things earthly, and earthly things to heavenly, harmonizes them all, and, leading them by His will, makes one world and one world-order in beauty and harmony (*Contra Gentes*, 41, p. 26).

Robert A. Brungs, SJ
Director: ITEST
July 7, 1991