# Bible Study on Creation

## Comments from two groups meeting in Pasadena, CA, and from written submissions

## Genesis 1-2

1 The variety of creation and of God’s method of creating; interest in the detail

2 God’s pleasure in creation

3 Implication of the intrinsic worth of creation (rather than just its usefulness to us)

4 Need to consider the Lynn White suggestion that Christianity is responsible for abuse of creation (but Moltmann points out that this abuse issues from modernity; and creation is abused in the context of other religions)

5 Both attitudes to gender equality appeal to the chapters

6 God wanted the planet to be filled – has that now happened?

7 Genesis 2:15 sees humanity as designed (more literally) to “serve” creation – this nuances the idea of maintenance

8 Genesis 1:28 sees humanity as designed to “subdue” creation, which is not a project God has completed (animals will fight and eat each other) – this also revises the idea of maintenance

9 Closeness of God’s relationship with creation – breathing into the man’s nostrils

10 Importance of Sabbath

11 Animals can help humanity in connection with serving the land, but the man needed something else.

12 We are material beings, dependent on the world. We ignore that, thinking we are its masters.

13 Our spirituality is inclined to be dualistic (“soul care”), forgetting that we are material beings and our lives are lived out in the material

## Psalm 104

1 Bring the questions about creation into the context of worship. It’s an even more non-utilitarian view

2 Everything occurs because of God’s doing, yet people go out to their labor (thus it doesn’t all happen simply because of God’s doing).

3 God provides for all; God provides the basics. It’s about staples

4 There’s a recognition of patterns, cycles, and seasons

5 There are things that are of instrumental significance for animals – crags for the rock-badgers. There’s something here for all the animals

6 The water goes to the place God assigned to it. Contrast our deverting and in other ways controlling what happens to water.

7 So what degree of utilization are we allowed? When is enough enough?

8 Destruction isn’t all our fault; it’s part of the cycle of destruction and renewal that God brings about.

## Jeremiah 4

1 We note the connection between land, creatures, the health of the land, and the spiritual and moral condition of humanity (specifically of God’s people)

2 Because of apostasy judgment is going to come on creation, and the rest of creation is instrumental in bringing God’s judgment.

3 But there is the problem of the way people use this argument to suggest that hurricanes resulted from the approval of same-sex marriage. Does this only carry conviction if it comes as a warning before the event, not an interpretation afterwards?

4 Is it only prophets who can speak about creation like this? But does Pentecost mean all can prophesy?

5 The Old Testament doesn’t assume every natural disaster had this explanation. There is a need of prophetic discernment in this connection

6 What is the relationship between human sin and the existence of negative elements in creation (e.g., mosquitoes)? Are they there because of human sin at the beginning?

7 Here, the land that was fruitful is turned into desolation because of the disruption of people’s relationship with God. Creation suffers because of humanity’s sin.

8 The prophet’s interest in giving these warnings is to get people to repent so that the promises don’t have to come true

9 God doesn’t send total disaster. “I will not make a full end.” God contains the degree of the disaster. But this doesn’t give people reason not to worry about the disaster! Further, our own capacity to destroy the planet has so increased!

10 It’s not a simply natural disaster – the chapter incorporates much military imagery. Humanity is involved in bringing about the judgment. So there is an interweaving of nature, humanity, and God in the causality.

11 So God really is involved. God is coming. We take hold of the promise of God’s coming. We live in light of that.

12 Was it only Israel that God punished ecologically because of its disobedience?

## The Song of the Three Young Men

1 The inanimate creation can praise God! The importance f body language

2 We think of creation as inanimate (and thus we can simply use it) but rather our job is to join it, in praise

3 Instead, we are involving in stopping creation praising God. We make this song diminish by destroying rain forests, creating smog

4 We learn from nature how to worship

5 Even darkness praises God; so does the noise of animals

6 It’s difficult for us to join in creation’s praise because we are alienated from it

7 Why is *this* song the one to sing in the fire?

## Mark 4

1 It often seems as if the world is getting it and we aren’t. Here the disciples get the explanation and other people don’t.

2 The mustard seed story reminds us that things grow without our helping them. What’s the relationship between earth’s capacity to manage on its own and our obligation to help it (e.g., crop rotation) or its capacity to manage on its own and our capacity to ruin it?

3 We are part f this, part of the ecology

4 The rules in the Torah were there to help nature reach its potential

5 The agrarian nature of Jesus’ teaching presupposes our connection with the land

6 The story of the stilling of the storm again reflects the negative side to creation

7 It also points to God’s ongoing personal relationship with creation

8 God is in control of the elements.

## Romans 8

1 Humanity was given a task and failed to do it – that is why creation groans. The earth was put under humanity’s dominion, so it suffers either through our action or through our inaction

2 Creation is waiting on us (or on God?) for us to do our job

3 Thus creation is waiting for the revealing of us as God’s sons and daughters

4 We share in yearning, groaning, longing

5 What is creation destined to give birth to? Its own perfection?

## Colossians 1

1 The gospel was good news for the whole creation.

2 It should be good news for animals because you would think Christians would treat them better

3 In Christ all things were created. So the way we treat creation is the way we treat Jesus.

4 My treatment of creation relates to my attitude to God and my relationship with God

5 God was concerned though Christ to reconcile all things. Here is the final fulfillment of God’s purpose in relation to creation

6 There is a certain equality between humanity and the rest of creation.

7 The church carries on the ministry of Christ in reconciliation (we can’t even reconcile to fellow-Episcopalians/Anglicans!)

## 2 Peter 3

1 Notwithstanding Jeremiah’s comment about God not making a full end, 2 Peter speaks of destruction through flood and fire.

2 So can we do what we like with it? The passage doesn’t infer that! There are too many links between us and creation for this to be plausible.

3 An uncomfortable link – both creation an we are to be burnt (in our case, for refining)

4 Our moral action (not especially our ecological action) hastens earth’s destruction. Hating your brother affects creation

5 The day of God’s coming will arrive and there will be judgment; we need to be found faithful

6 Annihilation still doesn’t seem a likely end for the creation that God brought into being and saw as good. But 2 Peter uses the argument in a different way, in relation to people who think cyclically and think there is no reason for any form of hope

7 Nothing is ever going to get better

## What do we need to do

1 Consume less, travel less, use less energy

2 Grow our own food

3 Cut the size of all churches to 100 to cut travel; turn the parking lot into a vegetable garden

4 Eat less meat, even be vegetarian; stop having church BBQs.

5 Align ourselves with ecological reality – for instance, not building in flood plains or in chaparral areas because flood and fire are part of the ecosystem

6 Get experience of cultures that have not gone as far astray as us

7 Lower our standard of living

8 The church’s job is not merely to engage in advocacy but to be an alternative community, modeling what living with creation means so as to attract the world.

## Reflections on Interpretation

1 It was illuminating reading the passages in the order we did (Genesis, Psalm 104, Mark 4, Colossians 1) – it would have been hard work reading Paul first, because he is more abstract, and anyway he is building on the others.

2 Interpretation isn’t something we do once for all; it’s not over

3 There is a risk of anachronistic interpretation. Ecology and conservation are in our culture. But we do need to find answers to our questions

4 Some of us are Episcopalian, some are people who have left Episcopal Church and submitted ourselves to another Anglican province. This didn’t seem to make a difference to our interpretation in connection with this project

5 On the other hand, we need interaction with (e.g.) African Christians to help us see things in Scripture (which we can do within the USA).

6 We can’t go back to the situation when (e.g.) Southern California did not rely on water from the Colorado River, but we need to start from where we are in seeking to be more responsible with creation.

7 We need to read Scripture for new ways of seeing things – for instance, Scripture is less dualistic than we are

8 The relationship of praxis and thinking is tricky – do we need a revolution of thinking or a revolution of behavior? The two interweave

9 Do Christians have something distinctive to say about the creation question? Does the Bible? What do we make of the fact that the world is getting it and we aren’t? Or how far do we need to avoid being swept up by the “radical environment movement”?

10 It’s okay to use the Bible to support ideas that come from our contemporary world, but there is a risk of our stopping there. We also need to use the Bible to set the world’s ideas in anew context which may make a big difference to them, critique the world’s ideas in light of the Bible, and see new insights in the Bible that the world has not seen.

11 In my brief eight years of experience in a small American Episcopal Church, the Bible does not play a prominent role in the lives of parishioners. Most parishioners seem to have their own personal beliefs and ethics, and attempting to mine Scripture for ethical guidance in the world would not be something I would expect to see happen very often.

12 I would say that is also true at diocesan and higher levels. We make up our minds on the basis of convictions we have somehow come to and are prepared to attribute to the Holy Spirit but there is no serious testing of whether we are right in that attribution. They are so obviously true, there is really no need.

13 Theologically put, that means “the elephant in the room” in this discussion is the relationship between Scripture, reason, the creeds, the church’s tradition, our experience, and our culture.

14 But the point about having the Bible is to listen to is saying things that are different from what we are inclined to think

15 What is the status of the Deutero-canonical books in connection with our question? See Article VI: we don’t use them to establish doctrine.

16 Also we are inclined to think that where there is a difference between the way we interpret the Bible and the way people in (say) Africa interpret the Bible, we do it right.

17 Ecological problems are not a concern to any of the Episcopalians I know.