

## Facilitator theological notes

(...cont)

### Aspects of theology of creation

#### Introduction

The theology of creation provides important insights for considering learning and teaching. However, in dealing with theology of creation in this context, only relevant aspects of this extensive area of theology will be considered.

#### 'Original creation' [*creatio ex nihilo*] and 'continuing creation' [*creatio continua*]

Lutheran theology identifies two closely related but clearly distinguished areas of theology of creation. Both of these are significant in considering learning and teaching.

'Original creation' refers to the beginning of time when God created everything out of nothing [*ex nihilo*]. It emphasises that God is the creator of everything, separate from creation which was called into existence by the creative word of God. 'Continuing creation' emphasises that God has not withdrawn from creation but continues to work within it, caring for and protecting creation and creating new life so that creation continues. In this continuing creation, God operates through human beings as participants and agents in God's creative process [theology of vocation].

#### God is the creator

Many biblical passages speak of God as the creator [eg Genesis 1 and 2, Psalm 104, 19, 33, 95, 136, Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:9-13]. This understanding of a creator is not unique to the biblical material but is seen in different ways in many religions as Paul indicated in his speech in Athens. Some form of creator is also common to Australian Indigenous spirituality. However, the biblical material emphasises that God created out of nothing or brought order into chaos. God is the creator and is not to be confused with the creation since there is an absolute distinction between the creator and what was created. Creation is therefore totally dependent on the creator who called it into being through his creative word.

#### God's creation is 'good'

All that God created is 'very good' [Genesis 1:31]. It was 'good' because it was exactly as God had intended it to be. Even after sin marred what God originally created, it is still 'good'. Certainly God's good creation can be abused and perverted and we see the effects of sin also in the destructive fury of nature, but faith in God still allows believers to see the goodness of creation and the gifts God gives in creation. It is important not to develop dualistic thinking which sees creation as totally corrupt and no longer the means through which God continues to care for all which he created and through which people can enjoy the gifts of creation. God invites us to share in the joy and wonder of creation [Psalm 8, 104, 136:1-9].

#### Human beings are the high point of creation

Whatever understanding we may have of the process of creation [which is not the focus of the biblical material], the Bible emphasises that human beings are a special creation of God [Psalm 8:4-6]. In fact, they are seen as the climax or crown of God's creative work. Even though God cares for all of creation, including the sparrows [Matthew 10:29], human beings are unique and different from all other living things which God created. Genesis 2:7 speaks about the special creation of human beings: God formed the person from the dust of the ground and breathed God's breath [in Hebrew the word can be translated as 'breath', 'spirit' or 'wind'] into the person who became a living person. Therefore a human being is both dust [at one with the earth from which the person was taken and to which the person will one day return] and God's breath [spirit].

### Facilitator theological notes

(...cont)

#### **Human beings are created 'in the image of God'**

Genesis 1:26-28 emphasises the uniqueness of human beings in another way. Human beings [male and female] were created 'in the image of God'. While there is considerable debate amongst biblical scholars about how to interpret these words, there is general agreement that it does not mean that humans look like God [who is spirit] nor that it is seen in capacities such as reason, speech, or intelligence which can be seen to distinguish humans from the animal world.

From a biblical perspective, 'image of God' indicates that human beings are created for fellowship with God. They are able to know God, believe in God, love and obey God. Even though Christians recognise that through the advent of sin the image of God is now deeply fractured, Christians also understand that the image of God is gradually being restored in them by the power of the Holy Spirit as they grow in holiness [Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10].

The 'image of God' is also recognised in the responsibility which God has placed on human beings to be his representatives on earth to take care of creation [stewardship on behalf of God]. While human beings are given the responsibility to exercise control over the creation [Genesis 1:28] they are to take care of that creation [Genesis 2:15] and not exploit or misuse or abuse creation.

#### **Human beings are created as unique individuals**

Theology of creation teaches that each person is created as a unique individual with distinctive characteristics, gifts and abilities. Each person, therefore, has individual worth and value in the eyes of God. This value of the individual rests not only on God's creative work but also on the fact that Jesus has died for each person and that the Holy Spirit offers faith to each person and lives within each believer. This is the basis for realistic self-awareness, self-identity and self-acceptance.

While theology of creation emphasises the importance of each person, it also stresses that individuals are created for inter-dependence rather than independence. The importance of relationships will be considered in *Caring relationships encounter*.

#### **God continues to create and care for creation**

The Bible emphasises that God has not withdrawn from creation. He continues to work in it and preserve it [*'creatio continua'*] using human beings as his agents [the 'masks' of God]. The theology of creation does not see God like a clockmaker [*'theism'*] who set the world into motion and now allows it to run by itself. Theology of creation also recognises that God is present in disasters and tragedy [cf *Strength in weakness encounter*].

Lutheran theology sees that people operate in various areas of responsibility in the world such as the family, employment, society, government, the church, etc. [cf *Two ways God cares encounter*]. These areas are referred to as 'orders of creation' through which God continues his creative activity.

#### **Creation and sin**

As has already been indicated, all of creation has suffered through human sin. This has profoundly disrupted all relationships, those between the individual and God, the individual and other people, the individual and the rest of creation and also the individual within him/herself. The impact of this will be further explored in *Expression of freedom encounter* and *Caring relationships encounters*.

### Facilitator theological notes

(...cont)

#### **Creation and 'wisdom'**

The so-called biblical 'wisdom literature' provides some of the most profound insights into learning and teaching in the Bible. This literature is found in various places, but most clearly in the so-called 'wisdom books' of Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and particularly in Proverbs. In these writings, 'wisdom' is closely related to theology of creation. In Proverbs 8:22-36, wisdom is personified and she is portrayed as being involved in creation. [This can be compared with the way in which John speaks about Jesus Christ, 'the Word', being the agent of creation in John 1:1-18.]

The book of Proverbs states clearly the starting point for an approach to 'wisdom' [9:10]: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. The Bible recognises that since God is the creator of order out of chaos, becoming wise begins with the recognition of this fact. This leads to respect for God, confidence in God, worship of God and respectful submission to God. These attitudes enable a person to be in tune with God and they create a listening heart, open to God, through which God can provide insights that lead to wisdom. Being wise in biblical terms is to live in harmony with God and God's creation. It means respecting and using that creation as servants of the God of creation. It results in fitting into the cosmic order and also into the social orders such as family which God has created. Fearing God means to place oneself in reverent humility and trust under the instruction of God and so to live under God's will and purpose for creation.

The biblical concept of 'wisdom' recognises that wisdom grows out of the accumulated experience of people. It means valuing the past as well as being challenged by the future. It accepts that our understanding of creation will always remain partial. While we enjoy God's creation and can use all human ingenuity and expertise to investigate it and try to understand it, explain it and see God's plan in it, we can never do so fully. It also emphasises the importance of helping students to search for truth, recognising the interrelatedness of life and encouraging attitudes of wonder, mystery and celebration.

However, the Bible also emphasises that human wisdom apart from Jesus Christ is 'foolishness'. Sin has corrupted all of God's good creation, including the search for wisdom. Separated from 'fear of the Lord', wisdom becomes the opposite of what it should be and leads people away from God. Only God's revelation in Jesus Christ can bring all this back into true perspective. Paul outlines this clearly in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians. There is a clear link here with 'theology of the cross' and the recognition that ultimately true wisdom is the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of people.

#### **Jesus Christ and the 'new creation'**

Because of the broken relationships brought about by sin [cf *Expression of freedom encounter* and *Caring relationships encounter*], Jesus Christ became part of his own creation and suffered with humanity and the whole of creation: 'the Word became a human being' [John 1:14]. Through his miracles, Jesus demonstrated his creative power over creation in stilling the storm, raising the dead, healing the sick, etc. Jesus provides redemption for all broken relationships and in him a new creation has become a reality [Colossians 1:15-20]. In Christ, as God's new creation [2 Corinthians 5:17], Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as God's people in the world [Ephesians 2:10]. Through his death and resurrection, Christ initiated a new kingdom which is a foretaste of the end of time when there will be a new heaven and new earth [Revelation 21:1-4]. Through faith in Christ, sins are forgiven and finally God will be reunited with God's people in heaven.

However, the Bible teaches that until the end of this age all creation will 'groan' under the weight of the problems caused by sin [Romans 8:19-25]. But in Christ, Christians look forward to the new creation.