



What is our Christian vocation within Creation?

How we see God shapes our Actions

Opening Prayer:

God the source and destiny of the Cosmos

Author of creation:

In wisdom you brought forth all that is,

to participate in your divine being,

and to change, adapt, and grow in freedom.

You make holy the matter and energy of the universe

that it may delight you and give you praise.

We thank you for gathering all creation into your heart

by the energy of your Spirit

and bringing it through death to resurrection glory;

through the One in whom all things have their being,

Jesus Christ, your Wisdom and your Word. *Amen.*

Bible Study: (10 - 15 min.)

Genesis 1:1-4, 27

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

John 1:1-4, 14

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of the people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."

Two people read aloud each text, pausing between for silent reflection.

Group discussion:

Notice parallels between the opening of the Gospel of John and the opening of Genesis:

Both open with the phrase: “*In the beginning...*”

- Genesis: Creation is by God’s act of speaking, “*Let there be light.*”
- Creation is in the “*image of God.*” “*So God created humankind in his image...*”
- John: Creation is through the “Word.” “*What has come into being in him (the Word) was life, ...*”
- Themes of Light and darkness:
- Genesis: “*the light was good,*”
- John: “*The life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*”

These parallels are a clue to the reader of John’s Gospel that in telling his story of Christ, John intends to begin at the real beginning. Creation is implicated all through his Gospel. This is a story about the creation of all things.

Video Presentation: (15 min. with ~ 20-30 minutes of discussion)

<https://youtu.be/Z49rLhQAGwA>

The Creation Story in the Gospel of John

Questions: (5-8 min.)

If God can be incarnate in the world, does that make a difference in your perspective of yourself, others, and the natural world?

Do you feel “at home” in the world? Is that a feeling that belief in Jesus’ incarnation gives us?

The shortcomings of a human focused lens on the world

Questions: (5-8 min.)

John 3:16 says, “*God so loved the world...*” Have you understood that primarily about people, or of all creation?

What does God’s salvation mean for you? Is it about personal redemption or do you see salvation as part of God’s salvation for all creation?

Three areas for reform of Christian Theology and Spirituality

What we say of God: God is all present.

What we say of Ourselves: We can experience God in all things.

What we say of Christ: Seeing the Universal Christ

Watch, “*The Universal Christ*” by Richard Rohr

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcoN2K5alkU>

Questions: (5-8 min.)

Can you recall an experience or discovery of God awaiting you within yourself, within others, within creatures of nature, in the natural world?

Have you ever viewed photographs, paintings, or scenes from a film that moved you to see God in all things?

Christian Action for Creation Care

Questions: (5-8 min.)

Thomas Berry says, “*The Great Work before us...is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves. We were chosen by some power beyond ourselves for this historical task.*”

[The Great Work, Bell Tower, 1999, p. 1]

Do you agree with this? Do you believe God has bestowed on us the ability to fulfill this role?

Closing Prayer:

Called to be God’s partners in the care of the planet

Bountiful God, you call us to labor with you in tending the earth:

Where we lack love, open our hearts to the world;

where we waste, give us discipline to conserve;

where we neglect, awaken our minds and wills to insight and care.

May we with all your creatures honor and serve you in all things,

for you live and reign with Christ, Redeemer of all,

and with your Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

Annotated Bibliography

Christ: From the beginning of creation: – Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 1; John 1:1-18, 1 John 1, Hebrews 1

The revelation of the Risen Christ as universal and eternal was clearly affirmed in the scriptures and the early church when the euphoria of the Christian faith was still creative and expanding. It is telling that this vision is put forth right at the beginning of these seminal epistles and the Gospel of John.

Jim Antal, Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change, N.Y., Rowman & Littlefield, 2018

Even more than an environmental problem, climate change is humanity's greatest collective moral crisis. Antal, a denominational leader for the United Church of Christ bears prophetic witness to test our resolve. He offers recipes for hope and prescriptions for action by our congregations on every page. [A six-part synopsis and study guide are available at www.stbenslososos.org/climate-church-climate-world-a-study-guide]

Thomas Berry, The Great Work: Our Way into the Future, New York, Bell Tower, 1999

One of the most eminent cultural historians of our time presents the culmination of his ideas and calls for us to experience creation as a source of wonder and delight rather than a commodity for our personal use. The imperative for us to move from being a disruptive force to a benign presence is the Great Work, the most necessary and ennobling work we will ever undertake.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, New York, Harper & Row, 1960

Teilhard de Chardin - geologist, priest, and major voice in twentieth-century Christianity - probes the ultimate meaning of all physical exploration and the fruit of his own inner life. An essential companion to his The Phenomenon of Man, this work "will be one of the few really inspiring books that will be remembered after the dust of the century has settled on many of its companions." - Commonweal

Prophet and Mystic of Creation: On Retreat with Thomas Merton, by Kathleen N. Deignan and Learn25.com, 6 Conferences on two DVD's

Sr. Kathleen Deignan, is Professor of Religious and Environmental Studies at Iona College, N.Y. In these conferences, you will unearth the significance of the natural world for Merton's own experience of God. You will discover his intimate rapport with creation as the body of divinity—at once veiling and unveiling the God he so longed to behold. Weaving together word and song, Sr. Deignan's conferences will lead you steadily closer to a fresh look at Merton as a creation mystic and ecological prophet.

Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner, Pamela Wood, Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth, Cincinnati, Ohio, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007

The authors combine good science with solid theology and practical applications, displaying the genius of the Franciscan tradition in lively dialogue with today's environmental crisis...a profound theology of our medieval Catholic heritage that can help put 'our Sister Mother Earth' at the forefront of religious concern in the 21st century. An excellent tool for parishes, schools, and study groups.

Pope Francis, Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home, Encyclical Letter, Catholic Church, 2015

Laudato si' (Praise Be to You) is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. In it, he critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take "swift and unified global action." Francis says that instead of viewing humanity as having "dominion" over the earth, we must see that everything is interconnected and that all of creation is a "kind of universal family".

Elizabeth Johnson, Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love, London, Bloomsbury, 2014

Johnson, a distinguished Professor of Theology at Fordham Univ., N.Y., combines erudition and theological reflection to provide a theology of creation that integrates an understanding of evolution with a belief in the presence of God's love and grace in the world. With pastoral passion and ethical commitment, she encourages us to take up our common responsibility for the earth, its environment, and all its living creatures.

Jurgen Moltmann, Ethics of Hope, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Fortress Press, 2012

One of the foremost religious thinkers of our time, Jurgen Moltmann has shown how hope in the future decisively reconfigures the present and shapes our understanding of central Christian convictions, from creation to New Creation. This long-awaited ethics of hope is a realistic assessment of the human prospect, as well as its imperatives, from one who stakes everything on God's promise to rescue life from the jaws of death.

Christine Valters Painter, Earth, Our Original Monastery: Cultivating Wonder and Gratitude through Intimacy with Nature, Notre Dame, IN, Sorin Books, 2020

Painter invites you to begin the journey of contemplative living by focusing on the image of Earth as your original monastery – the place where you learn your most fundamental prayers, participate in each day's liturgy of praise, and experience the wisdom of the seasons. She explores monks, mystics, and saints who have experienced the goodness of the Divine in nature and invites you to find solace and spiritual revelation in the wonder of God's creation.

Richard Rohr, The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation, New Kensington, PA, Whitaker House, 2016.

Drawing from Scripture, theology and the deepest insights of mystics, philosophers, and sages throughout history, Fr. Rohr presents a compelling alternative to aloof and fairytale versions of God. Rohr makes accessible and practicable the Christian tradition's most surprising gift... God as community...as Friendship...as Dance.

..... Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi, London, Hodder, 2014

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar, draws on Scripture, insights from psychology, and literary and artistic references, to weave together an understanding of the tradition as first practiced by St. Francis. Rohr shows how his own innovative theology is firmly grounded in the life and teaching of this great saint and provides a perspective on how his alternative path to the Divine can deepen and enrich our spiritual lives.

..... The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe, New York, Convergent, 2019

Rohr sees Christ everywhere and not just in people. Christianity finds its root and its destiny in all things, all matter, and in all creation. He reminds us that the first incarnation of God is in Creation itself, and he tells us that 'God loves things by becoming them himself.'

Leah D. Schade, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas, editors, Rooted & Rising: Voices of Change in a Time of Climate Crisis, New York, Rowan & Littlefield, 2019

The editors draw together stories from people of a wide range of different faith perspectives about how they keep themselves encouraged and hopeful in a time of climate crisis. There is lament, but there is also courage, resilience, and action. This is a book about personal stories and testimony, about witnessing to what we love, what we yearn for, what we mourn, and what we are fiercely committed to protecting.

David Toolan, At Home in the Cosmos, New York, Maryknoll, 2001

In the spirit of Teilhard de Chardin, David Toolan unites the spiritual with the scientific in a stunning new way. By accenting the positive idea that our evolutionary cosmos is filled with promise he shows how a Christ-centered, incarnational faith provides the most appropriate setting for contemporary scientific cosmology. The result is a fresh basis for an ecological ethic – in effect, a new social contract with nature.