

Creation in the Christian Tradition

Christian belief and thinking: the Bible

There are two creation stories in Genesis: Genesis 1:1–2:3 and Genesis 2:4–24

Genesis 1 presents a God who creates and sets the outworking of creation in place – almost throwing out creativity

Genesis 2 focuses on the story of tension between God and the people created. This God who willed others to relate to also encounters the cost of such free relating, as the people created begin to make their own choices.

Stories of Genesis give us images – they do not have to be read as science

Being clear about this can free us up to enjoy these ancient tales of a God who creates people then deals with them having a mind of their own.

Scientists like Jennifer Wiseman (see below) show how faith and scientific understanding can mix.

Note the image of God in verse Genesis 1v26: what might this mean?

No-one has seen God – so what similarities and differences do we think there are between people and God?

God loves? Does God also eat? This can make for an open and speculative discussion about what God is like, in which all opinions can be offered.

Psalm 8 speaks of the special place people have within God's creation.

The Psalmist "thinks" about the place of people in creation and, in doing so, invites us to think similarly. Such thoughts can turn to fascination, celebration – and also to our sense of responsibility.

Psalm 19 expresses the way God's glory is encountered through creation. It shows a picture of the sun and earth that has changed since Galileo. Looking at the image of verse 5, how is the sun like an athlete?

The psalm suddenly changes in verse 7: from talking about creation it moves to talk about God's law and teaching. The Psalmist connects the two – what connection can we see between these?

Creation: Staff engagement

How do we think of creation? Introduce the phrases "I create..." and "We create..." and ask colleagues to think how they would end these to make a statement.

Pick out specific aspects of creation that are to be celebrated. There are other things that show its 'shadow side', but reflecting on created goodness can provide opportunity for staff sharing of their own 'favourites'.

The questions activity can be done using one question (in which case – go for the first one) or displaying the questions around the room such that staff have to walk round finding one that prompts talk with others who have found their way to the same question.

It's a miracle anything exists at all. Think through the fullness and greatness of the universe and reflect on the different ways different people believe it came into being. Whether you believe it came about by chance or design, the end result is an amazing occurrence.

In Christian thinking the universe is personal. Reflect on the experience of letting loved ones have their freedom and spread their wings – how does it feel when we say 'Goodbye' to a child leaving home or allow a young child to walk to school by themselves. Striking the balance between loving protection and overbearing control is something parents – and those of us working with children – have to figure.

George Herbert's poem "Teach Me My God and King" is a prayer about some of the creativity we engage in as people, and how precious all this is – whether sweeping a floor or whatever else this may be – if seen as part of the outworking of God's creation.

Creation: Through the school

Whole school

You could encourage everyone in the school to think of a favourite part of God's creation. This could be a favourite place or a favourite animal. Children could aim to learn the favourite 'whatever' of 7 other people.

As you do this, you can reflect on the question "What makes my favourite?" and see if there are common reasons. For creatures, pets (or much wanted pets) are a common choice. For places it could be down to special times spent in that location.

The idea of creation and creativity can be prompted by asking: "What do I create?", "What have I created?". This could lead to looking at the way we care for that which we create – think of how things we or those we know have created are treasured

Worship

How do we give thanks for our food? We may do grace before dinner time, or may introduce this. Could the grace also be displayed – maybe through children's art work – where it is visible at mealtimes.

You could encourage children to remember one word, "Thank-you", as they take up their meals – possibly trying to remember to say it before the first mouthful.

The link below has graces and the idea of a grace cube.

In class

Think through the stages of the creative process: planning, materials etc. How do we take each step? What do we think and feel as we take them?

Think of God's creation – our world and universe – relating this to learning in science. Scientists such as Jennifer Wiseman (see article) give examples of holding these two ways of knowing together

Considering the story of creation and stages of days, children could imagine they were creating the world and think about the order in which they would do this. What would come first, or second...or last? How long would they take? What would creation sound like?

Church links

Harvest festival provides an opportunity to join with the church's calendar

Staff reflection

Be mindful of times when we are creating – whether it be a work of art, baking or drama in our life out-of-school, or the resource or display we prepare for teaching. Note the stages and the thinking that goes into this.

If you are minded to give thanks for this you might try homing in on one part of a creative process, maybe one you do particularly well, and contemplate with thankfulness the particular moment in creation.

Resources

Christian Aid: <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/getinvolved/harvest/index.aspx>

Graces: http://www.going4growth.org.uk/growth_in_faith_and_worship/prayer/grace-before-meals

Jennifer Wiseman: <http://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2014/september-week-1/blessed-endeavor.html>

Creation: Thinking theologically

God creates: Creation is, in some senses, a gift. It didn't have to happen.

However, the Bible does present an image of a God who relates to others, a God who is love – so maybe in some sense 'needed' creation.

Some forms of creation are as violent and imposing as the building of a motorway, moulding and changing raw material. Rowan Williams writes of how, the Christian tradition, instead of a God who "imposes a definition" we have a God who "creates an identity".

Williams notes the difference between Promethean myths of people struggling against gods and Christian belief, where there is a relationship of love and faith points us in a direction that is presented as natural.

In creation, God allows others in: there's an element of God 'letting go' in creation, a bit like the parent who drops their child off at a new flat or at college and has to let them be their own person. In the Genesis 2 story we're given a picture of a God who lets created people go their own way, even though this means disobeying.

God keeps in touch: the Bible presents a God who, having created, still knows and loves creation. In the ancient world of the Bible some myths presented a world of people and a separate place where gods dwelled. In the Bible, God is present with and close to people.

So Christianity doesn't teach of a God who leaves creation running. It also doesn't teach pantheism – where nature and God are identical. It presents us with the wonder, and mystery, of a God who is with us.

People matter: The Bible says people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and doesn't elaborate on what this means but, by asking what differentiates between people and animals, can we see some of the particular, special nature of humanity and the image of God?

People are of infinite value to God, and this is expressed throughout the Bible in readings such as Matthew 10:30-31.

The survivor of the concentration camps, Corrie Ten-Boom, used to say "No pit is so deep that God is not deeper".

Creation is good: Though there is a shadow side to creation that can baffle us, the Christian assertion is that God steps back at each stage and sees creation as good. This opens the way for us to celebrate all that is good in life and the world. Sometimes people talk as if the good stuff is somewhere else with God and the world is a bad waiting room. Christian teaching affirms all that is good – and harvest is a celebration of this belief.

Christianity is not about God working aside from, or even at odds with, this world, but God working with it.

We therefore need to care for all that God has created. In the creation stories, people are given 'dominion' or 'power' over creation (Genesis 1v26). Given the place in creation described in Psalm 8, we have a responsibility to care for creation. The Anglican Church's 5th Mark Mission "To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth". Language about creation being brought 'under control' (Genesis 1v28) is not about exploiting the world – we are charged with finding ways of lovingly making the best of it.