

Anthropocentrism or Physiocentrism?

Discovering different aspects in biblical texts
and reflecting on them theologically

The natural world as *environment*?

The english word ‚environment‘ ethymologically derives from the middle french

‚*en*‘ – *in*

‚*viron*‘ – *circle, round*

‚*environ*‘ – *around*.

(“Environment.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environment>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2023.)

It holds a perspective of something standing in the center, being the most important thing: *mankind*.

Criticising the concept

Environment implies that...

... ignores that...

Criticising the concept

Environment implies that...

- the whole world surrounds the human being.
- the human is placed at the centre.
- the surrounding world is considered as something "available" and subordinated to the human being.

...ignores that...

- the whole natural world exists *together* with human beings.
- the aspect of interconnectedness and interdependence is crucial.
- a postulated hierarchy of mankind has to be discussed.

The term *environment* (german ‚Umwelt‘)

- The term has been used in various contexts since the 19th century and forms the basis for talking about the environment in an ethical sense.
- It is only since the 1960s, when there has been a shift from optimism about the future, faith in science and technology to concern about the threat to the environment, that an "environmental consciousness" and the first beginnings of an "environmental ethic" have emerged.
- Individual intellectuals had already grasped the problem earlier...

Ethics of life, creation and nature

Ethics of life and nature (in a general sense)

- Several drafts even in the 1920s (without the term)
- e.g. H. Dreisch, M. Scheler. A. Schweitzer

Creation ethics (in a specific theological sense)

- Only isolated approaches
- For a long time little awareness of responsibility also towards non-human "fellow creatures"

Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)

"Schweitzer viewed the technical progress and cultural development at the beginning of the 20th century with deep concern. In addition to the tremendous increase in knowledge and skills, he had to realise that modern man was becoming more and more ethically and spiritually atrophied. Schweitzer saw the danger of increasing inhumanity looming in all areas. He recognised that the future of humanity depends on whether we succeed in finding a sustainable foundation of ethics that bridges all ideological-religious and cultural differences between peoples. He discovered this foundation in the "reverence for life" - a new sense of humanity that feels responsible for all life on this earth."

Deutsches Albert Schweitzer Zentrum, <https://albert-schweitzer-heute.de/ueber-albert-schweitzer/ethik/> (Abruf vom 03.08.2022)

Reverence for life

"I am life that wants to live,
in the midst of life that wants to live."

Turning away from Christian anthropocentrism and its
negative consequences?



Albert Schweitzer,
1875-1965

Environmental crisis as a consequence of faith in creation?

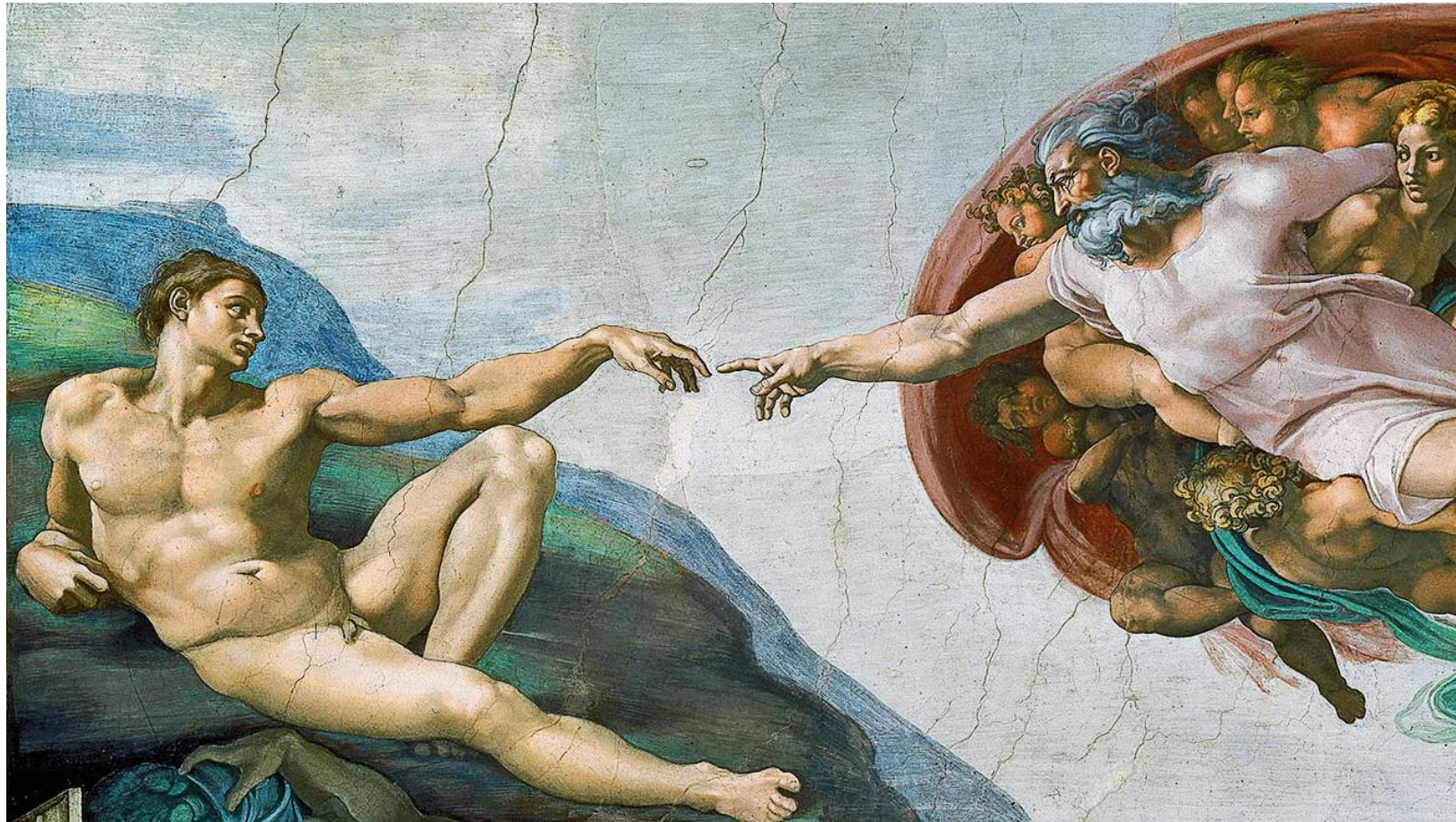
- In the 1970s, a discussion raged in the USA and Europe around the thesis or accusation: "Christian faith is to blame for the environmental crisis", because natural science as an achievement of Christianity makes it complicit in its out-of-control effects.
- Christian theologians like Eugen Drewermann call the destruction of nature the "heritage of Christianity".

Environmental crisis as a consequence of faith in creation?

In fact, historical roots for the environmental crisis lie in commonly accepted characteristics of the biblical message and Christian theology:

- A separation between Creator and creation (as in Genesis, for example) enables the profanation and objectification of nature.
- The biblical mandate of God to rule "legitimises" the exploitation and destruction of nature. In man's special position on God's side, he becomes the ruler of creation (Gen 1; Ps 8)

 Christianity's opposition of man and nature



Men's position on God's side becomes prominently illustrated in „The Creation of Adam“ by Michelangelo (Sistine Chapel, Vatican)

Anthropozentrism or Physiozentrism

„The message of the Bible is anthropocentric...“

(read worksheet 1)

Could the above statement also be questioned on biblical grounds?

Read the biblical texts and answer these questions:

- Is anthropocentric or physiocentric thinking expressed here?
- Is a special role ascribed to the human being here?
- If so, how should it be carried out concretely?

Biblical texts

- Gen 1,1-2,4
- Gen 2
- Psalm 8
- Psalm 104
- Job 38
- Rom 8, 18-25

Final thoughts

- Dominion over and responsibility for nature must not be separated from each other, as has happened in modern times. The image of God (Gen 1:26-28) obliges us to take responsibility for creation before God.
- Man and nature are both part of God's creation, in whose mission the responsibility for the preservation of creation is founded (theocentrism / responsibility before God).
- We must learn to understand the environmental crisis as the result of an inappropriate treatment of extra-human nature and other parts of humanity (children, blacks, women, indigenous people..) by elites who have been defined into nature and strive to overcome dualisms such as those of nature and history, nature and culture, nature and humanity, creator God and creature world. Panentheismus can be helpful in this as a basis for new models of thinking (see J. Moltmann, God in Creation, 1985).