

Protestant Theology: Environment – Discovering Anthropocentric and Physiocentric Aspects in Biblical Texts

Author

	Protestant Theology	Dr. Eva Jenny KORNECK, University of Education Karlsruhe, Germany
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Abstract

This session focusses at the history of theological environmental ethics. The students are sensitised to opportunities and tensions within either an anthropocentric or physiocentric worldview. They perceive the impact history of individual biblical texts within Christianity and their negative consequences. Working with biblical texts enables them to determine their own point of view.

Timescale

One lecture (approximately 90 minutes)

Key Terms

Anthropocentrism, Physiocentrism, Environment

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Key competences / Learning outcomes

- The students understand the problems of an anthropocentric Christian worldview.
- They develop their own opinion on the options for interpreting biblical texts.

References

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Picture Credits

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- "The Creation of Adam", Detail, Fresco from the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo, Vatican, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%27Adam%27s_Creation_Sistine_Chapel_ceiling%27_by_Michelangelo_JBU33cut.jpg (03.08.2022)



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Teaching Steps

Teaching Steps			
Phase/Time	Approach	Method	Social Form/ Tasks for students
10 min	Through the etymology of the term 'environment' (slide 2) students are made aware of the problems implicit in this concept. They are given the task of discussing these (slide 3). One way of presenting the results can be found in slide 4.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show slide 2 and 3 • discussion among students • collection of results on the board (plenary) • comparison with slide 4 	Small groups/Plenary
20 min	The students learn essentials about the emergence of (theological) environmental ethics and get to know a prominent early representative (Albert Schweitzer). The problematic nature of the Christian tradition of interpreting the "mandate to rule" (Gen 1:28) becomes clear.	PPT slides 5-11	Lecture
30 min	The students receive a text (worksheet 1) and read it. Then they work in groups on Bible texts (Gen 1:1-2,4; Gen 2; Ps 8, Ps 104; Job 38; Rom 8:18-25) reflecting the questions: 1) Is anthropocentric or physiocentric thinking expressed here? 2) Is a special responsibility attributed to the human being here? 3) If so, how should it be carried out concretely? Each group deals with one Bible passage (see above). Alternatively, each group can read and compare all the Bible passages. For the preparation of the teacher, the reading of Praetorius/Schottroff/Schüngel-Straumann (1991). Schöpfung/Ökologie: Wörterbuch der feministischen Theologie, ed. by E.Gössmann et al. Gütersloher Verlagshaus. P. 354-360 is recommended.	Reading worksheet 1 Work on different Bible texts considering the questions (slide 12-13)	First individual work, then in groups



20 min	The students present their observations on the different biblical passages. They show anthropocentric and physiocentric elements of the texts.	Presentation of the group results.	Plenary
10 min	The results of the work are reflected on together. An evaluation of different positions takes place. A final assessment and independent theological description of the position is attempted in the discourse. The impulses on slide 14 can be helpful, but the participants can also formulate their own final thoughts.	Final reflection Show slide 14	Plenary



Material and Texts

Worksheet 1:

Anthropocentric and physiocentric environmental ethics

The message of the Bible is anthropocentric: the ordering of the world solely "to man as the supreme work of creation" (A. Auer, *Environmental Ethics*, 1984), the key function of man for the redemption of nature ("eagerly the creation waits for the sons of God to be revealed", Rom 8:19). "There is not a single religion in the whole world that is anthropocentric to such an extent as Christianity." - this view underlies not only Auer's environmental ethics. "In contrast, the proponents of a "physiocentric" (K. M. Meyer-Abich, 1984ff) or "biocentric" environmental ethic (G. M. Teutsch, 1985, G. Altner, 1987ff) are fundamentally critical of the anthropocentric world view. The latter wants to protect nature for its own sake and not only humans from the harmful consequences of environmental destruction ("long-term self-interest" or "reciprocal altruism" of the consciously anthropocentric "evolutionary ethics"). Here, environmental protection should really be nature conservation and not just indirect human self-protection.

(Daecke, S.M. (2001). Umwelt, in: *Evangelisches Soziallexikon*. New Edition. Kohlhammer, p.1626)

Powerpoint Presentation (slides 1-14):

See attachment

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Glossary

Anthropozentrismus:

The term anthropocentrism is composed of the Greek word ἄνθρωπος (ánthrōpos) - "human being" and the Latin word centrum or the ancient Greek κέντρον (kéntron) - "centre". On the moral level, it means a world view in which man determines himself as the centre of worldly reality. Environmental protection, animal welfare etc. are only justified insofar as they are of benefit to man.

Physiozentrismus:

"Physiocentrism" forms the opposite term to "anthropocentrism". In this worldview, moral value is attributed not only to humans but also, in various forms, to the wider natural world.

Environment:

The term "environ-ment" refers to the animate and inanimate world surrounding human beings. It conveys a certain perspective in which it places the human being in the centre and regards the surrounding world as something "available" to the human being.

