



I suggested that we humans need to imagine ourselves in that cosmic context. Instead of seeing ourselves as king of the world, standing at the tip of the pyramid of being, we need to see ourselves first of all as creatures within the circle of life. One man in the audience gave a poignant response. He said, "All my life, I knew that's where I belonged, at the top. If you take away that triangle structure, I don't know where I am anymore." Clearly this is a very existential, deep down issue. It's not a simple thing but a question of identity.

**elliott:** I read some of Bernard Lonergan, and he uses the phrase 'intellectual conversion.' You argue that we need an ecological conversion. Could you talk a little bit more about what that would look like?

**johnson:** Pope John Paul II was the

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Theologically, we ask the question - how does God relate to this suffering and death? In my earlier work I tried to go down the route of theodicy, or justifying the ways of God in the face of evil. It never felt totally truthful or convincing. At this point I have stopped trying to do a theodicy. I acknowledge the (the mystery of iniquity), the depths of which cannot be plumbed. And turn to the cross.

The Danish theologian Niels Gregersen coined the phrase “deep incarnation” to signify that when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), a solidarity was forged between God in Christ not only with human beings but with all creatures of flesh who suffer and die. The incarnation reaches down into the very tissue of biological existence itself, and the cosmic dust of which all earthly matter is composed. With this connection in view, the cross of Christ becomes an icon or sacrament of God’s presence and care for every suffering creature. No animal dies alone.

What difference does this make? In one sense, none. Animals die anyway. Christopher Southgate is a British theologian who’s struggled with this question, arguing that it makes all the difference in the world that an animal is not alone in its suffering, just as it does with us humans. In Christ God is present with that creature, with deep love and the promise of something more. Since the risen Christ is also “the firstborn of all creation” (Col 1:15), there is a future for all the struggling and the dead. From a faith perspective the situation can be biologically wretched, but still hopeful.

Some nowadays are using the word “cruciform” to describe nature in its continual suffering among sentient creatures. Deep incarnation forges a profound link between the crucified God and the suffering world. The idea carries into the evolving world an insight of Karl Rahner that the most radical thing Christians believe is that God became material.

But we keep slipping away. Christ is risen, He’s divine, He’s the son of God, but what is at the essence of what we’re saying about Christ? That comes back

to my mind as we do all of this, because it’s bringing God just back into solidarity through Christ with all the living and dying throughout the ages.

**nuelle:** Are people arguing that the world is supposed to degrade, that the world is supposed to be used up, that it doesn’t matter because it will all be remade at the end of time?

**Johnson:** Such an apocalyptic view is abroad in some fundamentalist Christian groups. I recall the Secretary of the Interior James Watt, who served in the Reagan administration. His responsibility was to protect public lands, but let many tracts of forest out for logging.

