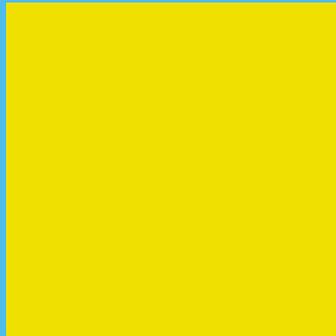


3



ENCOUNTER WITH THE
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES: VIDEO CLIP



Figure 3.1
The Video Clip

We see four friends, Lindsay, Sarah, Ariella and Michael, walking outside a classroom at school. Suddenly Lindsay gets a message. Her online order, a new dress, has arrived at her home. Sarah and Michael react irritably: does she really need so many clothes? Doesn't this contribute to the negative consequences of climate change? Shouldn't we all think more about our buying behavior and our (over)consumption? Ariella gets involved in the discussion and defends Lindsay: climate change is not Lindsay's fault. Ariella points to Christianity as the big culprit of the current climate crisis. Michael and Sarah are confused, how can Christianity be to blame for the climate crisis? And is this really the truth? Is it really true that Christians are responsible for all of this? Are today's Christian believers not interested in this problem? When the friends leave on a camping trip, they get an answer to all their questions...

3.2 CARING FOR OUR PLANET: TIME FOR ACTION?!

"Global warming is causing extreme weather conditions. Extremely hot and dry weather increases the number of natural fires."

"The rate at which Antarctica is losing its ice has risen sharply in recent years."

"Every year in the Amazon, an area the size of about one million soccer fields disappears from the forest. This accelerates climate change."

"If we do not take action against climate change, one-third of all plant and animal species on earth will become extinct within a century."

"The earth is sick and exhausted."

ASSIGNMENT. Read the statements above and answer the following questions:

Are you worried about climate change? Why do/ do you not? What worries you the most?

In what way do you try to take care of the earth?

Do you have any idea how the Catholic Church handles the care of our planet?



Figure 3.2
The Video Clip

3.3 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CARE FOR OUR PLANET

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Things are not going so well with the earth, environment, and climate right now. Humans have polluted the earth, and this has led to the current climate crisis. The climate crisis manifests itself, particularly in global warming. This warming has several serious consequences for man and nature, such as health problems, the extinction of animal species, water scarcity, the deterioration of available fertile land, natural fires, extreme weather conditions, conflicts between population groups, and so on.

For Christians, caring for the earth is very important. Christians believe that God created the earth. The earth is thus **God's creation** and Christians want to take care of all of His creation.

To better understand this, we are going to read **the story of creation**. This is a story from the book of **Genesis**, the first book of the Old Testament.



Figure 3.3
Image: © Ben White |
Unsplash

3.3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF GENESIS 1

[26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind **in our image, according to our likeness**; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[27] **So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them**; male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

[29] God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

[30] And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

[31] God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Source: *NRSV, Genesis 1:26-31.*

ASSIGNMENT. In the text, indicate verses

- **that you do not like;**

- **that surprise you;**

- **that you do not understand.**

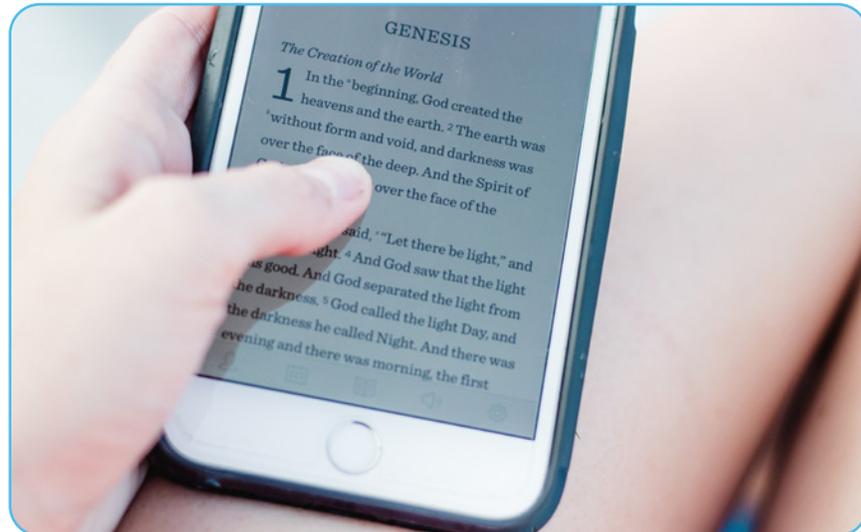


Figure 3.4
Image: © Jenny Smith
Unsplash

The story of creation is a very old text written a long time ago in a very different culture than ours. This story can be found in the book **Genesis**. This is the first book of **the Old Testament**. The Old Testament is more than 2000 years old. Although Bible stories were written a long time ago, they can still have **an important meaning** for us.

If we think about the relationship between man and nature, what can we learn from the creation story today? We will discover this step by step below.

3.3.3 ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

[27] So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:27.

ASSIGNMENT. In the Bible fragment, it is written that humankind was created in the image of God. What does this mean?

- Being created in the image of God means that man resembles God in physiognomy. You can see this, for example, in the painting 'The Creation of Adam' by the artist Michelangelo.
- Being created in the image of God means that man must take care of the earth as God would.
- Being created in the image of God means that man must reign over the earth. So man is in charge of the earth and can do with it what he wants. This is literally written in Genesis 1.

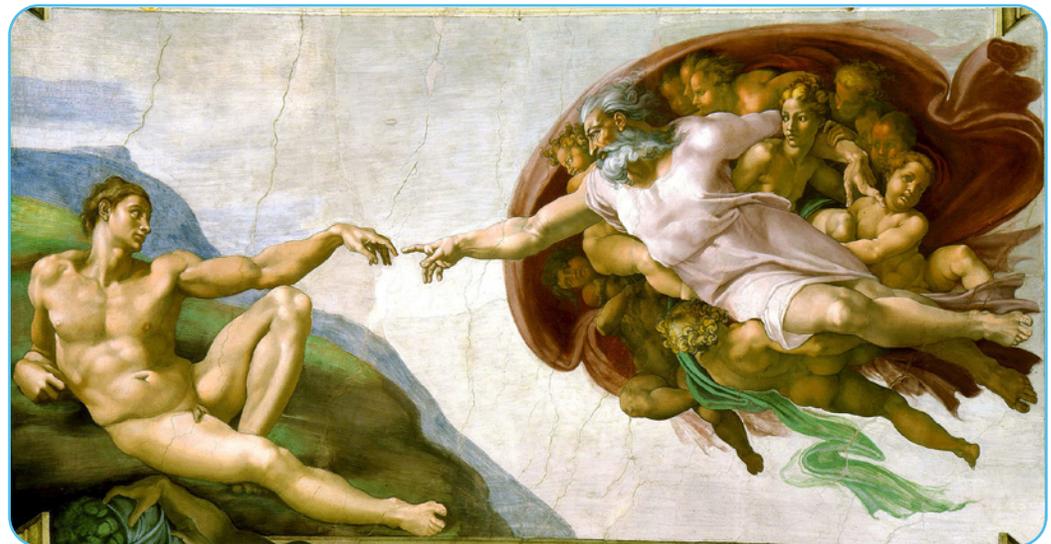


Figure 3.5
Michelangelo - 'The Creation of Adam'
Image: Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creation_of_Adam.jpg

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text below, and fill in the missing words.

care – responsible – symbolic meaning – reign – literally

If you read the Bible story in a literal way, it may indeed seem that man, as the one in charge, canover the earth and thus do what he wants with nature and animals. Yet this is not the message of the story. You should always look at the of every Bible story. This means that you must look and think beyond the words that are written down. Moreover, in Bible texts, you should not look for facts, but rather look at the images and symbols used to express a vision of God, the world and humankind.

Genesis 1 teaches us that man was created in the image of God. This means that man must for the creation of God, the earth, just as God would do. It means that man is for nature, animals and other people. Creation is a precious gift from God with which man must deal in a caring manner.



Figure 3.6
Image: © Noah Buscher
Unsplash

**3.3.4 MAN WILL
'RULE'. WHAT DOES
THIS MEAN?**

ASSIGNMENT. Below you can find the Bible story again. Indicate in the Bible story the verses that make it seem that man is allowed to rule over the earth.

[26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[27] So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

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[31] God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:26-31.



In the Bible fragment we can read that man must **'rule over'** creation. Important! This does not literally mean that man is allowed to be in charge of creation just like that! With the word 'rule' the story refers to the responsibility that man must bear towards all life on earth. So, we can better understand the word 'rule' as **'serve'**. Man is given the task by God to 'serve' the earth by taking care of life in creation: nature, animals and other people.

ASSIGNMENT. Do you think that humans today, as rulers, abuse the earth, nature and animals? Why yes/no? Is this an appropriate attitude?

ASSIGNMENT. “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Would he think so today? Why yes/no? What would you ‘recreate’ in the existing world?



Figure 3.7
© Li-An Lim | Unsplash

3.4 AND WHAT ABOUT CARING FOR OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS?

The story of creation does not only want to tell us something about how humans should deal with nature. Man, just like all plants and animals, is part of creation. So, the story of creation is not only about caring for nature and animals, it is also about **caring for others**.



Did you know that climate change has a major impact on human relationships? Climate change can lead to a shortage of drinkable water or food, health problems, extreme weather (heat, drought, torrential rains), and so on. Because of the consequences of global warming, the living environment of more and more people is under threat. This can lead to a source of frustration and discussion among people! **So, caring for the climate is also related to caring for each other!**

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.”

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (202)

ASSIGNMENT. Read the quote above. Do you agree with this quote? Why do you/do you not?

ASSIGNMENT. What can you personally do to take more care of the earth and of others?

3.5 GLOSSARY

Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism is the tendency to put the human being at the center of the universe and consider him as the only point of reference. In this view, man is seen as the culmination of creation and can therefore rule over the earth.

Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the First Testament. 'Genesis' is Hebrew for 'in the beginning'. This Bible book tells the story of creation, the Fall, and the history of Israel. Genesis contains stories of faith and does not aim to give a factual or historical account of the creation of the world.

The story of creation

The story of creation is a very old text written a long time ago in a very different culture than ours. The story of creation can be found in the book Genesis. This is the first book of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is more than 2000 years old. Although Bible stories were written a long time ago, they can still have an important meaning for us.

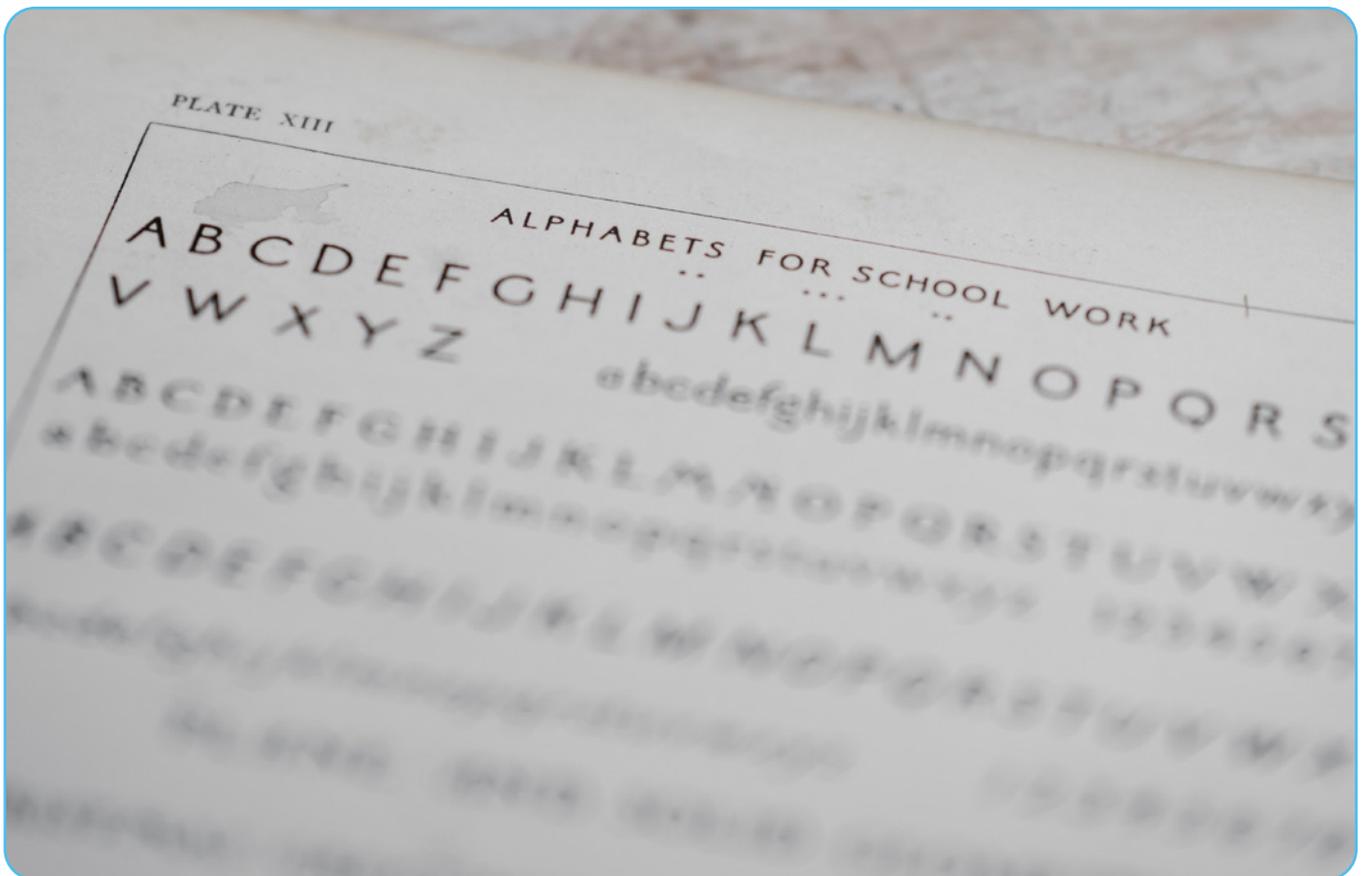


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

3.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1. SCHOOL

We can see the back of a classroom; you can see a movie playing about climate change, the bell rings and the students get out of the classroom.

Teacher (while the students are leaving): Everyone, don't forget to be on time for our camping trip! The bus leaves on time!

We see four friends (playground/hallway): Lindsay, Ariella, Sarah and Michael. Lindsay gets a text message: the package she ordered online has arrived at her house.

Lindsay: Yes, yes! My new online order has arrived! I hope this new dress will look good on me!

Lindsay's friends look bewildered and irritated by her.

Sarah: Wow, Lindsay, did you order new things AGAIN? Do you really need all that stuff? We just saw a movie on climate change...

Lindsay: Oh, come on! Don't be such a buzzkill. I really need it, you know.

Michael (sarcastically): Yes, you really need the same dress in three different colors.

Lindsay: Michael, you should shut up, you know. You should be happy I don't call the fashion police on you. They would put you in jail for all the weird clothes you are always wearing.

Sarah: Do you hear yourself? Michael is totally right. The Earth is sick. It is exhausted by our consumerist society. More and more people, people like you, have more and more needs! And a lot of conflicts in the world are a consequence of a struggle for resources.

Ariella: Hey guys, calm down. You're right, but don't be so hard on Lindsay. Climate change is not only her fault. Do you want to know who we really have to blame for all this? It is mostly the fault of Christians! Christians like you, Michael and Sarah. Christians believe they can rule over the Earth, according to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

Sarah: What? That is not true!

Ariella: It is true! Christians believe that humans are the only creatures made in God's likeness. They believe that God gave His creation, the entire Earth to them. Being the only creature made in God's likeness, Christians think they own the Earth! And because of all their consumerist behavior, we now all have to bear the consequences including many conflicts between peoples, nations and continents.

Michael: What?

Michael and Sarah look confused. They don't know how to react.

Lindsay (smiling): So, we agree that I'm not cancelling my online orders. I'm not the one to blame, haha!

Ariella: You know what? We should do more for the environment. It could also stop many conflicts in the world. It is time for action!

2. HOME ARIELLA (after school)

Next, we see Ariella going home/at home watching a climate strike on TV. Here you can also see a quote on a sign of one of the protesters: Climate change? Blame Christianity! (in this way, there is also this polarizing element visible in the video). Ariella is inspired by this protest on TV and she is preparing to join a protest by making signs and a T-shirt (slogan on the T-shirt: Climate Justice Now!).

3. NEXT DAY: CAMPING TRIP

The next morning, we see the students leaving for a school camping trip. Ariella is wearing the T-shirt she made. The students get on the bus and arrive at a place that looks like a forest/camping place where they set up their tents.

Lindsay (teasing): Sarah, what do you think of my new dress? Doesn't this dress look great on me?

Sarah (a bit frustrated): yeah, I especially hope your new dress survives this camping trip, you know we're going for a long hike, right?

We see the students take a walk in the forest, suddenly they arrive at a kind of treehouse/nature looking house where two people are sitting (=Adam and Eve lookalikes). These two people welcome the students.

"Adam": Hello young friends! Welcome to our Garden of Eden, what brings you here?

Michael: Hello! Thank you for welcoming us. We are on a camping trip and stay here a bit further, we are out hiking today.

Ariella: Hi! You live here in the middle of nature?! So quiet and peaceful!

"Eve": Thank you! We really like living in this place. We are happy with everything nature has given us. We live in perfect harmony with nature. And even more, we have respect for all of nature around us. We let the trees live and grow without touching them, as we were told to do.

"Adam" (pointing at Ariella's T-shirt): And I can see you are also interested in taking care of our environment?

Ariella: Yes I am! Actually, we were talking about this yesterday, how the climate deserves more attention! And also that the guilty must take their responsibility, like Christians for example!

"Adam": Can you explain to me what you mean exactly?

Michael: Yes we were discussing this. Is it true that Christians are to blame for the destruction of nature and the climate? And are the cause of a worldwide conflict on natural resources?

Ariella: Yes. Is this true? Because I read that the book Genesis in the Bible says that human beings have a special role to play on Earth because humans are created in the image of God. Because of this, Christians believe they can rule over the Earth which has led to all the current ecological problems!!!

Michael and Sarah look sad and confused.

Michael: What does this really mean, being created in God's image? And what does this have to do with the human responsibility for the Earth?

Sarah: Is the Christian tradition really one of the most important causes for today's environmental crisis and all conflicts connected to it?

"Adam": Ok, let's put an end to all this confusion and let's get our facts straight, shall we?

The children nod.

"Adam": First of all, Christians do believe that God created the world.

"Eve": An important aspect of the Christian faith is the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. We can indeed read this in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. However, being created in the image and likeness of God does not mean that Christians believe that human beings can just rule over the Earth and exploit it!

"Adam": It is the opposite: being created in the image of God implies a responsibility. The Earth is not just a possession of human beings, it is a gift from God.

Michael: So... We are all responsible for taking good care of the Earth?

"Adam": That's right, Michael.

"Eve": Just to be clear: the world is in no way human property. It is the other way around, because in the Christian tradition, we believe that human beings are responsible for taking good care of the Earth, and of each other!

5. IN LINDSY'S HOUSE

We see the four friends in Lindsay's house (living room). They are clearing all the packages, some stuff goes to aid organizations, some clothes go to Lindsay's closet. Lindsay herself is on her smartphone canceling her next orders.

Ariella: Okay, sorry for everything I've said. I do understand now that we all need to take care of the earth, we should not point our finger at one person or group.

Michael: Don't worry, everything's okay! It was an interesting and fun camping trip!

Lindsay: See, I've already cancelled three orders. [she sees a red dress on her smartphone] Oh but I really need this red dress, so I'm going to order it!

Sarah (showing three different red dresses of Lindsay and smiling to Lindsay): Are you sure? Seems to me that you already have a lot of red dresses in your closet (Sarah winks to Lindsay).

Lindsay: Hmmm, you win! (She cancels the red dress). But hey look, these pants are truly beautiful!

Sarah, Michael and Ariella start laughing.

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