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The Resurrection of Jesus and Physical Creation

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Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was once asked by a critic why he so often mentioned atoms and molecules when he talked about Jesus. His answer: I am trying to formulate a Christology that is large enough to incorporate the full Christ because Christ is not just an anthropological event but a cosmic phenomenon as well.

What does he mean by this? Essentially that Christ came into the world not just to save human beings and reshape human history, but to save and reshape the earth as well.

Christ came to save the world, not just the people living in it. We see the deep proof of this in the resurrection. Jesus was raised from death to life. A dead body was resurrected and that, clearly, has a dimension that goes beyond the mere psychological and spiritual. There is something radically physical in the resurrection. Simply put, when a dead body is raised to new life the physical structure of the universe is being altered, atoms and molecules are being rearranged. Thus, Jesus' resurrection is about more than simply new hope being born inside of human consciousness. It is also about a change in our planet.

Granted, the resurrection is about human hope. Without belief in the resurrection there is no horizon and no promise beyond the asphyxiating confines of this life. The resurrection opens us to possibilities beyond this life. It gives us a meta-future. But it gives a meta-future to the world, our planet, as well. Christ came to save the earth, not just those of us who live on it, and his resurrection is also about the future of this planet.

The earth too needs saving. How? From what? For what?

If we take scripture seriously, we see that the earth is not just a stage upon which human beings get to work and play, something that has value only in relationship to us. Like humanity, it too is God's work of art, God's child. Indeed it is the matrix, the mother, the womb, from which we all spring. Ultimately we, human persons, are only that part of God's creation that has become self-conscious and we do not stand apart from the earth and it does not exist simply for our benefit, like a stage for the actor, to be abandoned once the play is over. Physical creation has value in itself, independent of us.

Scripture challenges us to recognize this, and not just so that we can insure ourselves a continued supply of air, water, and food by better save-guarding the integrity of creation. Scripture asks us to recognize the intrinsic value of the earth itself. It has value in itself, apart from us, and it is destined to share eternity with us. It too will go to heaven.

Moreover, like us, it is also time-bound, mortal, subject to decay, dying. Outside of an intervention from the outside it has no future. Science clearly teaches this. The laws of entropy tell us that universe is running down, the sun is burning out, all energy is finite. The earth's days are numbered, counted. It will take millions of years, but finitude is finitude. There will be an end to the earth as we know it. Like us, it too will die. Outside of something being offered to it from the outside, it has no ultimate future.

This is what St. Paul refers in the Epistle to the Romans when he tells us that creation, the physical cosmos, is subject to futility and, like humanity itself, is groaning and longing to be set free from its bondage to decay so as to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Epistle to the Romans assures us that earth, our planet, will enjoy the same future as we will. In the resurrection it too is given a new possibility, transformation and an eternal future.

But what will this look like? How will the earth be redeemed? It will be redeemed in just the same way that we are, through the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection brought into our world a new power, a new arrangement of things, a new hope, and something so radically novel that it can only be compared to what happened at the initial creation when our universe first started. At the dawn of creation the atoms and molecules of this universe were made

out of nothing, ex nihilo, nature took shape, and its reality and physical laws held sway from then on - until the resurrection of Jesus. Something new happened then, radically new, and that event (which in its core contained a radically physical component) touched every aspect of the universe, from the soul and psyche inside of every man and woman to the inner make-up inside of every atom and molecule.

In the resurrection of Jesus the very atoms of the universe were rearranged. The laws of physics were somehow stunningly altered and because of that our planet now too has the possibility of eternal life.

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