

CHRIST & HUMANITY'S COSMIC FUTURE



BIBLICAL & THEOLOGICAL
RESOURCES for HOPE in a TIME
of ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

SOME THEOLOGICAL PROPOSALS + GUIDING QUESTIONS

GOD, AS GRACIOUS CREATOR AND SUSTAINER, IS SOVEREIGN OVER ALL LIFE.

IT IS THROUGH OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL OTHER LIFE THAT GOD CREATES AND SUSTAINS US.

THEREFORE, HUMAN LIFE IS INTERCONNECTED WITH AND DEPENDENT ON ALL OTHER LIFE ON EARTH.

THE HUMAN SPECIES, LIKE ALL OTHER SPECIES, HAS A BEGINNING AND WILL COME TO AN END.

THROUGH THE INCARNATION OF JESUS CHRIST WE COME TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE OUGHT TO RELATE TO GOD
AND HOW WE OUGHT TO RELATE TO ALL THAT IS NOT GOD.

WHAT DOES THE HUMANITY OF JESUS TEACH US ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL OTHER LIFE ON EARTH?

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND CHRIST'S HUMANITY IN LIGHT OF THE PENDING CESSATION OF OUR SPECIES?

WHAT DOES THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TEACH US ABOUT BEING FULL PARTICIPANTS IN GOD'S WORLD?

THE ECOLOGICAL CHALLENGE BEFORE US

There have been five Mass Extinction events in the history of Earth's biodiversity, all caused by dramatic but natural phenomena. It has been claimed that the Sixth Mass Extinction may be underway, this time caused entirely by humans. Although considerable evidence indicates that there is a biodiversity crisis of increasing extinctions and plummeting abundances, some do not accept that this amounts to a Sixth Mass Extinction ... Humans are the only species able to manipulate the Earth on a grand scale, and they have allowed the current crisis to happen. Despite multiple conservation initiatives at various levels, most are not species oriented (certain charismatic vertebrates excepted) and specific actions to protect every living species individually are simply unfeasible because of the tyranny of numbers ... We reaffirm the message that the biodiversity that makes our world so fascinating, beautiful and functional is vanishing unnoticed at an unprecedented rate. In the face of a mounting crisis, scientists must adopt the practices of preventive archaeology, and collect and document as many species as possible before they disappear. All this depends on reviving the venerable study of natural history and taxonomy. Denying the crisis, simply accepting it and doing nothing, or even embracing it for the ostensible benefit of humanity, are not appropriate options and pave the way for the Earth to continue on its sad trajectory towards a Sixth Mass Extinction.

Cowie, Bouchet, and Fontaine, "The Sixth Mass Extinction: fact, fiction or speculation?"

ANTHROPOCENTRISM DEFINED

“It is a view of the world that evaluates the universe by human standards and values. Anthropocentrism is not in itself a complete belief system, but rather a view that can be seen interwoven throughout many different cultures. To a certain extent, all human thinking is naturally anthropocentric, and this should not come as a surprise. Human values and experiences are the only basis humanity has by which to measure and to understand the universe around them, and it is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate oneself from one’s own experiences and values.”

Grasse, “The Impact of Anthropocentrism on Christian Environmentalism”



TWO STORIES of CREATION

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness ...

Then God said, “Let us make humans 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.”

So God created humans in his image,
in the image of God he created them,
male and female he created them.

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.” 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. 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.” (Genesis 1:1-3, 1:26-30)

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no vegetation of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground, but a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ...

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17)

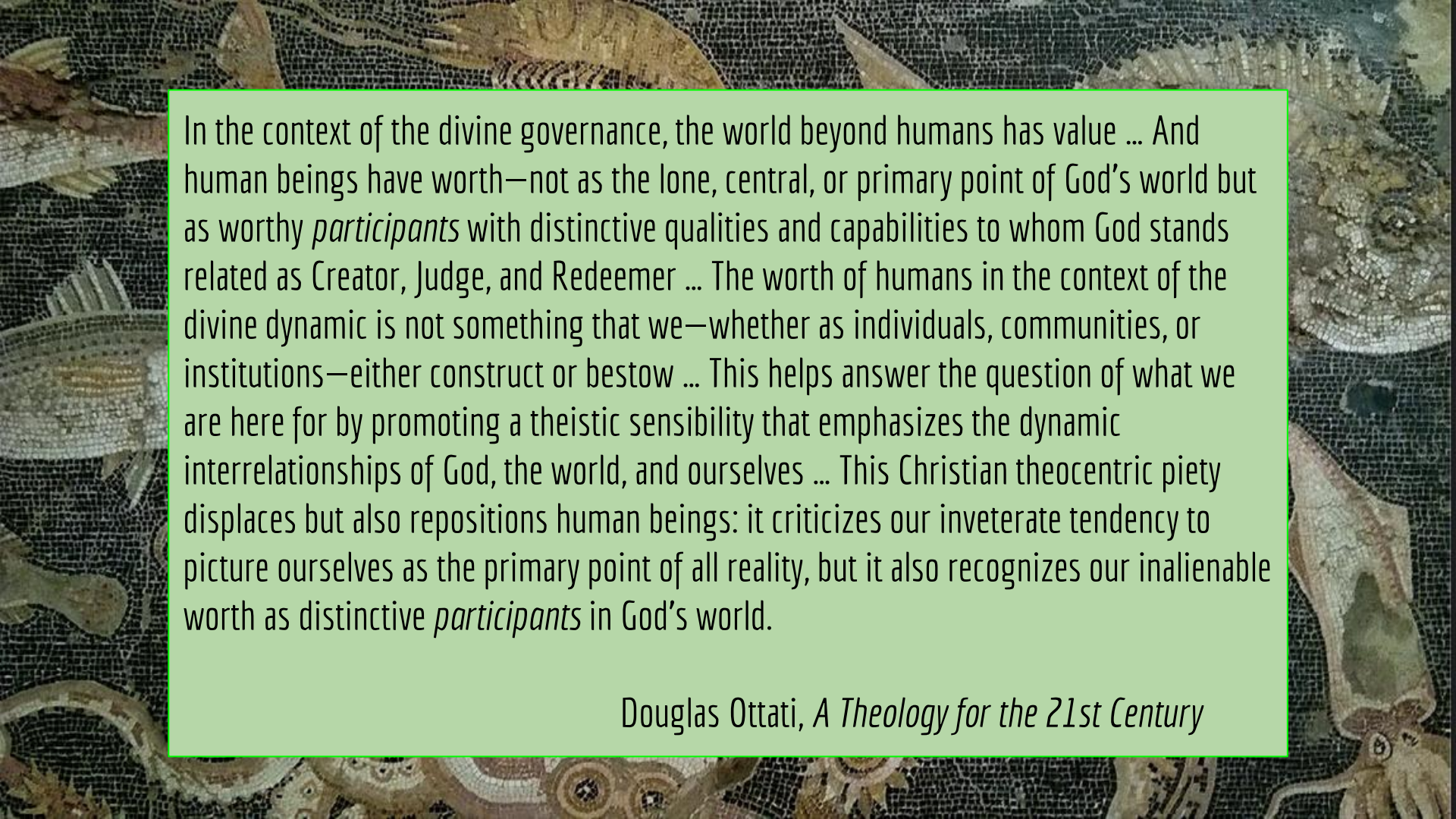
ECCLESIASTES & THE PSALMS

I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Ecclesiastes 3:18-20)

O LORD, how manifold are your works, In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, great and wide; creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. (Psalm 104:24-30)



In the context of the divine governance, the world beyond humans has value ... And human beings have worth—not as the lone, central, or primary point of God’s world but as worthy *participants* with distinctive qualities and capabilities to whom God stands related as Creator, Judge, and Redeemer ... The worth of humans in the context of the divine dynamic is not something that we—whether as individuals, communities, or institutions—either construct or bestow ... This helps answer the question of what we are here for by promoting a theistic sensibility that emphasizes the dynamic interrelationships of God, the world, and ourselves ... This Christian theocentric piety displaces but also repositions human beings: it criticizes our inveterate tendency to picture ourselves as the primary point of all reality, but it also recognizes our inalienable worth as distinctive *participants* in God’s world.

Douglas Ottati, *A Theology for the 21st Century*

THREE CHRISTOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

WHAT DOES THE HUMANITY OF JESUS TEACH US ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL LIFE ON EARTH?

Does Christ's Incarnation mean that humans are the privileged species?

HOW SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND CHRIST'S HUMANITY IN LIGHT OF THE PENDING CESSATION OF OUR SPECIES?

Is Christ's humanity eternal? If so, what are the implications of this for our life with God?

WHAT DOES THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TEACH US ABOUT BEING FULL PARTICIPANTS IN GOD'S WORLD?

How might we expand Christian discipleship to include reference to *all* creaturely neighbors, human and non-human?

FOR US AND FOR OUR SALVATION ...

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible ...

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried.

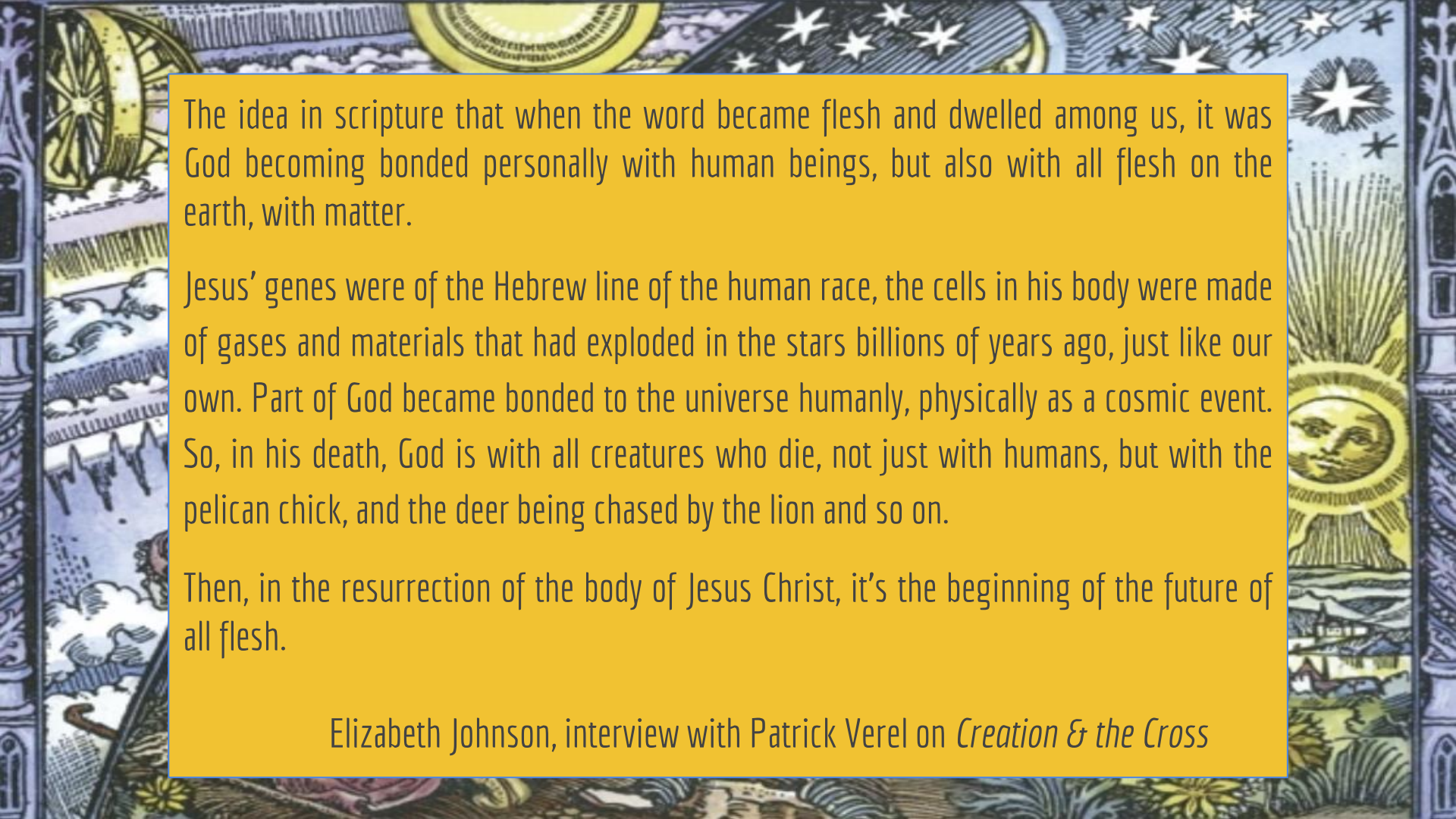
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end.



The Nicene Creed

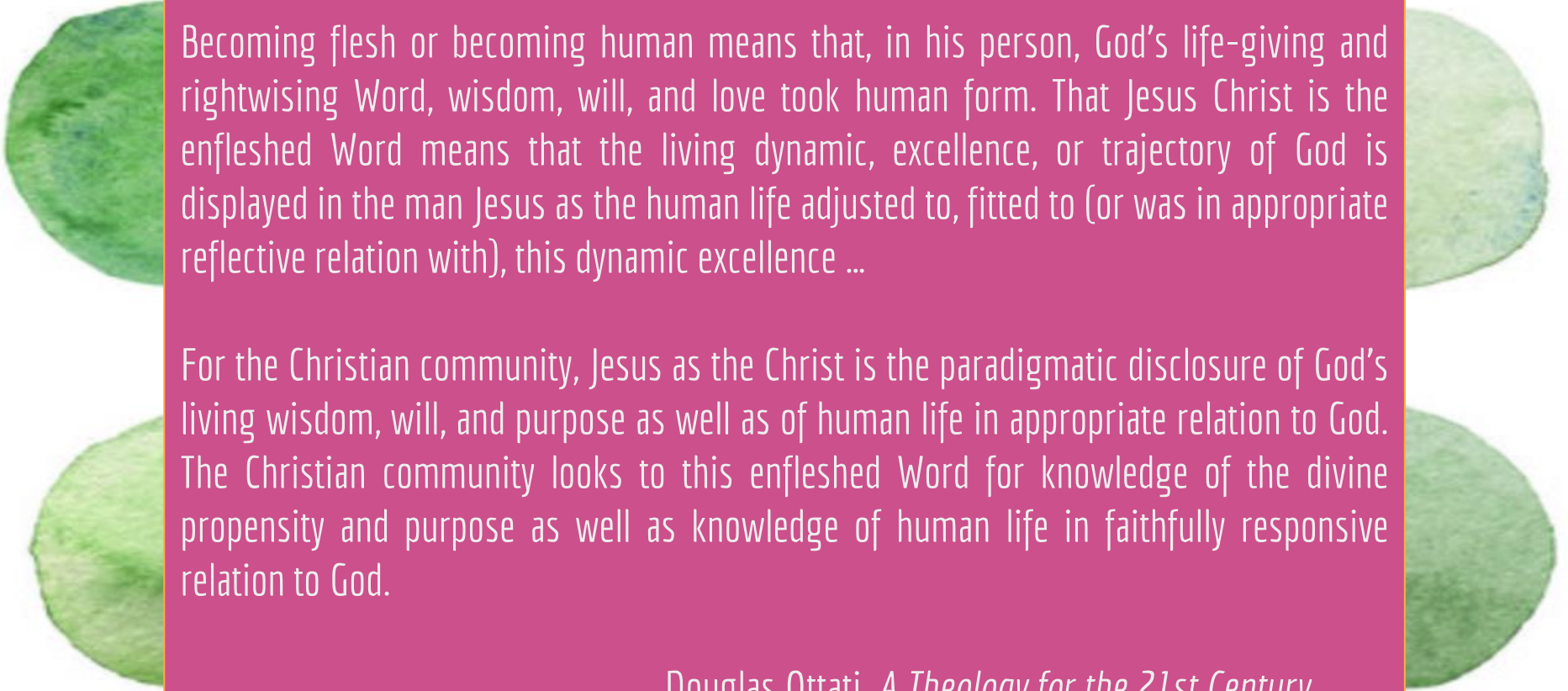


The idea in scripture that when the word became flesh and dwelled among us, it was God becoming bonded personally with human beings, but also with all flesh on the earth, with matter.

Jesus' genes were of the Hebrew line of the human race, the cells in his body were made of gases and materials that had exploded in the stars billions of years ago, just like our own. Part of God became bonded to the universe humanly, physically as a cosmic event. So, in his death, God is with all creatures who die, not just with humans, but with the pelican chick, and the deer being chased by the lion and so on.

Then, in the resurrection of the body of Jesus Christ, it's the beginning of the future of all flesh.

Elizabeth Johnson, interview with Patrick Verel on *Creation & the Cross*



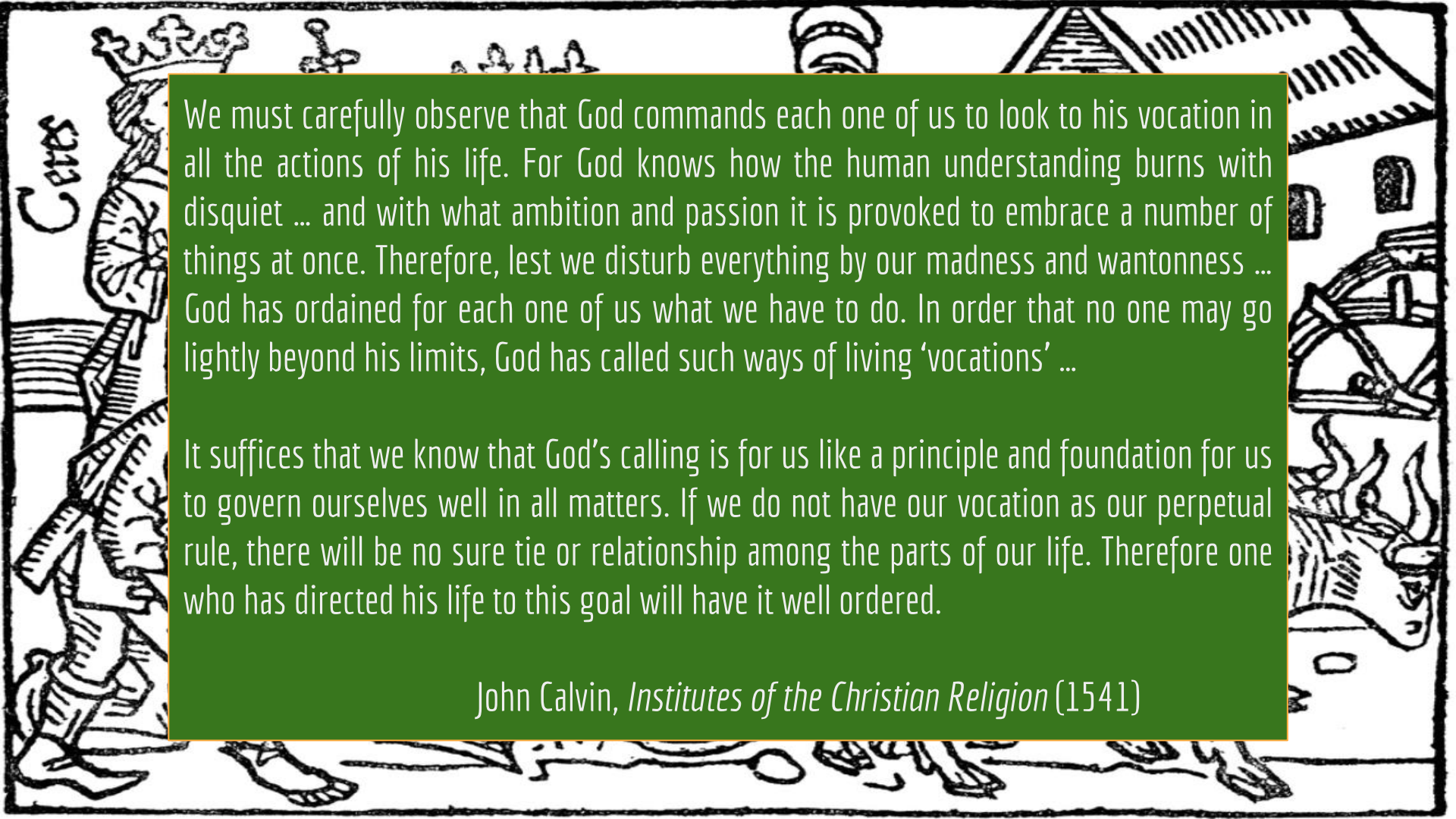
Becoming flesh or becoming human means that, in his person, God's life-giving and rightwising Word, wisdom, will, and love took human form. That Jesus Christ is the enfleshed Word means that the living dynamic, excellence, or trajectory of God is displayed in the man Jesus as the human life adjusted to, fitted to (or was in appropriate reflective relation with), this dynamic excellence ...

For the Christian community, Jesus as the Christ is the paradigmatic disclosure of God's living wisdom, will, and purpose as well as of human life in appropriate relation to God. The Christian community looks to this enfleshed Word for knowledge of the divine propensity and purpose as well as knowledge of human life in faithfully responsive relation to God.

Douglas Ottati, *A Theology for the 21st Century*

THE CHRIST HYMN

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited ... (Phil. 2:1-6)



We must carefully observe that God commands each one of us to look to his vocation in all the actions of his life. For God knows how the human understanding burns with disquiet ... and with what ambition and passion it is provoked to embrace a number of things at once. Therefore, lest we disturb everything by our madness and wantonness ... God has ordained for each one of us what we have to do. In order that no one may go lightly beyond his limits, God has called such ways of living 'vocations' ...

It suffices that we know that God's calling is for us like a principle and foundation for us to govern ourselves well in all matters. If we do not have our vocation as our perpetual rule, there will be no sure tie or relationship among the parts of our life. Therefore one who has directed his life to this goal will have it well ordered.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1541)