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**Ecological Insights Revealed  
From the  
Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 – 2:18**

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**A Thesis  
In  
The Department  
Of  
Theological Studies**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**January, 2000**

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**ABSTRACT**  
**ECOLOGICAL INSIGHTS REVEALED**  
**From the Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:18**  
**Harry Morgan**

The global ecological crisis of today is a radical challenge for Christians as the physical world faces unprecedented environmental peril. According to the scientific evidence, the fragile chemical and biological complexities of our world are being permanently altered. This study interprets the two creation accounts found within Hebrew Scripture in order to elicit ecological insights for Christians of today. The analysis depends on the three exegetical operations suggested in Chapter 7 of Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, on Interpretation: 1) understanding the text, the object, words and author; 2) judging the correctness of the interpretation; 3) relevancy for Christians of today. The ecological insights revealed from the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives include: goodness of creation, image of God, cultivation and care of the natural world, interdependency and chaos and order.

## **Dedication**

**To those who reaffirm justice and celebration in the blessings of God's creation through their reflection, judgments and actions. Our home sustains life.**

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## **DEFINITION AND SCOPE OF THE QUESTION**

**Question: What ecological insights are revealed when interpreting Genesis 1:1 – 2:18?**

Individual and common experiences derived from our environment in endlessly complex ways can direct people along various paths of expression. It has been my experience that the environment is become increasingly degraded and that the relationships between ecosystems have been short-circuited in some cases. The positive scientific images of our planet travelling in space in conjunction with other bodies and the profound interconnection of all earthly creatures provide perspectives of this complexity and beauty. While not questioning the need for complex formulations, the simplicity of this truthful statement – good planets are hard to find – offers profound implications for Christians and non-Christians alike. It is not enough to encourage moral activism but to strive to better understand how God is involved in creation and how that involvement impinges upon the relations of humans to the natural world.

It is under the above brief personal sketch that the significance of my question arises. In trying to further understand more fully the human place within the natural world Christians are inevitably drawn back to the two creation narratives found in Hebrew Scripture. The primeval history within Hebrew Scripture offers a fundamentally interactive account of the relations among nature, humans and Yahweh. The chaos, order, and goodness sequence of the two creation narratives reflects this relationship with their Creator. Both the Priestly and the Yahwist



creation narratives are indeed creation-centered literature since they view the natural world as a divine gift and blessing rather than an object of worship or indifference. Both creation narratives point to a Creator that did not want just a world but a specific kind of environment.

The question to be investigated, “ecological insight” is defined as a sharp understanding of the complex and sequential relationships within our environment. “Revelation” is conceived as Yahweh’s pronouncement of his presence and purpose through his creative acts. Revelation is ultimately a relationship with the divine rather than the mere accumulation of facts about the divine. The two creation account authors’ literary responses of this uncovering are testimonies of their faith in Yahweh. “Interpretation” will be addressed later in this paper but can be defined as an explaining of the Priestly and Yahwist creation passages by means of questioning, gathering of information, judging the results and presenting the relevancy of work accomplished. It is by these three operations outlined in Bernard Lonergan’s 1971 work of Interpretation (Chapter 7 – *Method in Theology*) that I hope to show God’s love for all creation. The question will bring forth a keen understanding of the care of nature for today’s world from the testimonies of the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives.

In answering this question I will consult the *Genesis* commentaries of Vawter and von Rad, as well as C. Westermann’s two creation texts: *Creation* (1974) and *Genesis: An Introduction* (1986). These four texts provide a basis for the three

exegetical operations. I also reviewed contemporary authors who are committed to the protection of the environment: Berry, Clarke, Ruether, Fox and others.

This paper will not present the Priestly and Yahwist pre-literary stages of development of the various creation myths, although references to these myths are required for background support. I intend to move directly from the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives to the section of relevancy for today. Otherwise the task becomes far too cumbersome to manage effectively. I will not attempt to elaborate on the obvious significance that the two creation narratives have on other ecological notions found in Hebrew Scripture. Yet the reverse procedure will be used to give ecological meaning to the creation passages. This study contains some ecological statistics but does not enlist the plethora of scientific data that are readily available.

## **HISTORY OF THE QUESTION**

The evolution of thought about ecological insight must begin with the earliest data available to us. Notions of common mythology from our past have parallel imagery with the Creation stories. In the historical context this is quite striking for it supports and gives the impetus to the notions of common heritages, etc. The Priestly and Yahwist creation accounts are quite unique in that they were bound up with the history of mankind against a backdrop of environmental gods. The boldness of their reflection resulted in Israel's presentation of one, holy God – one source of all creation, who acts in ways that one can experience steadfastly and one can respond to personally. Through this relationship, the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives present ecologically significant connections between Yahweh, humans and the environment. In addition to purpose, peculiarities of style, language and prevalent views of the world – the two authors provide sequences and themes of chaos, order, goodness, blessedness, dominion, image, care and cultivation which can offer the theological and moral basis for Christian ecological thought.

Much material is available from the pre-Christian era. Examples of the range of potential material include the Greek philosophers who held the universe and all of its parts to be one living organism. Anaxagoras viewed our natural world to be “co-present with man”.<sup>1</sup> Greek philosophers helped move environmental mythology to environmental science. Exceedingly complex stages of thought centered around

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<sup>1</sup> Boas, History of Philosophy, p.346.

themes of unity, duration, decay and mysticism. Centuries later, with the arrival of Christianity, the Resurrection played havoc for some groups as the universal laws of their world were violated and competing ideas surrounding a two-fold universe emerged in many forms. The Stoics held to the conviction that environmental care rested only upon human knowledge. The Cynics abandoned the idea of care for the natural world and the Gnostics viewed matter as vulgar which paved the way for the early church to fix its creeds, doctrines and to accept the Hebrew Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

Ecological themes from the earliest beginnings of the church do include: Romans 1:19-25 where Paul points to order of the world; Matthew telling his listeners to trust in God only and give up the ceaseless quest for possessions and advantages; and Colossians 1:18-20 where it calls for cosmic reconciliation. During the early years of church history nuances of ecological insight continued in many ways. Origen's suspicions of the various forms of dualism of his day commanded him to state that the natural world was a divine gift and all creatures were derived from God's love. Augustine countered Pelagius' argument of human authority over the environment with the belief that if people were left to their own resources they would surely mess things up. Augustine, like Origen, viewed the environment to be a divine gift held in trust. Athanasius, moving against Arius, stated that worship of creation and its possessions was idolatrous.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Interpreters Bible, p.577.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.583.

Centuries later, during the high Middle Ages, technological innovations impacted upon relations between nature and humanity. The growth of nations, states and their bureaucracies placed heavy demands on people and their surroundings. The Church showed contemporary Christians the love of all creation through the efforts of Bonaventure, Francis, Hildegard and many others. Through the ensuing periods of Church history up to and including the present period, the care for the natural world within Church teachings developed in many directions under the linkage of Christian faith and one's perspective of one's surroundings. Environmental care was expressed in a variety of human endeavors, which included literature, religious naturalism, architecture and royalty. With the arrival of modernity and under its scientific and mechanical umbrella, the application of technology is having enormous implications for the natural world as well as the Church. While some Christians accepted the intellectual and physical comforts of science, others resisted its attempt to reduce the mysteries of the environment into neat formulae. Enlightenment brought reason, progress and some distrust of Church tradition.

Examples of the continual shifting of environmental thought are: 1) the return of the idea that humans alone can influence the environment – this idea recalls the Pelagianism of the 5<sup>th</sup> century and the humanism of the 14<sup>th</sup> century; 2) the Marxist notion that the creation accounts were only “spiritual fragrance”; 3) the “Mother Earth” notions conceived in terms of domination; 4) the commitment of Eco-theologians to the liberation of creation; 5) and the 1994 Catechism of the Church

(sections 337-349) which upholds the goodness of every creature and interdependence under the existence of the Creator.

From this very brief sketch it would not be unreasonable to assert that each passing generation within the Western world provided ecological notions to successive kin based in part upon the Genesis creation narratives. Furthermore, over the centuries, as the natural environment supported nomadic, agricultural, industrial and technological societies, the Christian era produced a formidable tradition of thinkers who viewed the creation narratives as a foundation for this divine gift of the creation.

### **SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY**

Anyone attempting to assess the import of a narrative must understand it sufficiently in order to move into a discourse with it in which one's understanding is subsequently amplified. Faithful pursuit of this growth can certainly take many avenues and does include existential experience, degrees of interest and personal and common disposition. The meaning of a narrative can shift from the general to the particular and return to the expanded general. The ecological voices of today's Christians have been inspired by this interaction of the two creation accounts of Hebrew Scripture. Growth through textual questioning and then understanding allows us to challenge our understanding of our living experiences. Through the process of interpretation there can occur revisions and corrections of environmental

thought as ecological insight deepens. Confrontation with ecological notions revealed from Scripture can last a lifetime.

Although the intent of this inquiry is limited to the two creation narratives, these two accounts stand in a broader authorial context of the first 11 chapters of Genesis and implicitly within the interpretative wholeness of the Bible. So, other scriptural passages, could demand our full attention if this scrutiny were to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, references will be made to this extra-Genesis material, for there is theological value in this unity with incalculable consequences sweeping across human endeavor and natural phenomena. For Christians of this day, the ecological messages found within the Christian Scripture can only be conceived against the background of the Hebrew Scripture, which are its source and context. In like manner, the indefinite stretch of history with its abundance of creation myths provided a similar traditional force for the Yahwist and Priestly creation orderings.

More specifically, this inquiry into ecological insight is limited to the whole Priestly creation account found in *Genesis* 1:2-2:4b and the partial Yahwist creation account of 2:4b-2:18. The inquiry depends as well on Lonergan's *Specialty of Interpretation* found in Chapter 7 of *Method of Theology* and will entail three general exegetical operations with particular undertakings within each operation. These operations are: 1) understanding the text, the object, the words and the author by applying composition and historical criticisms to address the ecological and theological question; 2) assessing my correctness based on the Genesis testimonies,

commentaries and recent writings within the ecology field. This practice can undoubtedly be an evolving process of unrestrained discourse and witness which has the ability to transcend ecological thought or environmental experience; 3) and reformulating the discovered biblical material into relevant ecological notions for faithful followers of Christ Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Eco-theology is a faithful message of explanation and conversion, which involves and depends upon a host of disciplines.

This inquiry will begin by presenting a general overview of the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives and elaborating the general structure of the biblical passages, the relationships between ecological meaning and religious imagery, and the faithful intentions and purpose of the authors regarding creation's place under Yahweh. The goal here is to discover ecological truths within the texts and answer such questions as: what sources did the authors use when writing their narratives?; what were the general views toward the natural world?; what was the author's purpose and setting? How the two narratives open up ecological understanding for their readers and can they allow insight in experiencing God's creation? Were the authors' passages authentic to themselves, their immediate community and to the whole created world? Did the authors portray God's saving love for nature and do any of these revealed ecological meanings hold opportunities for today's efforts? Certainly once authors present themselves to their world their text becomes past tense, yet they can provide timeless meaning, wisdom and purposeful direction. This kind of re-reading, understanding and knowing allows religious data from our Judaic tradition to help shape Christian ecological ideas of today. This overview is followed

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<sup>4</sup> Lonergan, B., chapter 7 in his Method in Theology



by a section that describes peculiarities of the author's scheme and ecologically significant nouns, verbs, adjectives and phrases, for such idiosyncrasies and words present authorial purpose and intention. The accumulation of this data will focus on creation's dependence on the Creator, the position of the environment and the context for care for this planet. Discernment of the logical patterns of word use will advance our knowledge of eco-theological issues and although not exhaustive, this section can offer solutions to today's ecological crisis. Nouns chosen by the Priestly and Yahwist writers reveal Israel's grasp of their God; verbs provide the necessary impetus by moving the sentences to conclusion; adjectives proclaim drama, emotion and imagery of the nouns and verbs; phrases can surface the author's viewpoints of his or her environment. To conclude the first exegetical operation, I will present a verse by verse interpretation for each account, and then, in a comparative section, highlight the differences and unite the similarities of the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives. The second operation of judgment will be based on the findings of data and my own understanding of this material. This will be an important effort for no intellectual or literary activity is an island, but via deep and real religious roots do the peoples of Israel extend their creative beliefs unto our setting of today. The third operation of this inquiry will restore the 52 verses under study in the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives into ecological messages for the Christian believer of today. By objectifying judgments, Christians can acknowledge challenges of faith and move into moral commitment based on authentic confrontation of meaning.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

This section will define major words used in this paper so that both the writer and reader can determine the precise significance and boundaries of the question to be addressed. It is agreed that some words have minor variations of historical meaning, while other words signal various degrees of meaning in different cultures at different times. Clarity of meaning is imperative when describing terms that have been built up over the ages.

Thus, the definition provided is to give order and orientation throughout this paper while recognizing the wider significance of contemporary language in all its various forms and criticisms. The terms defined are: ecology, environment, creation, insight and interpretation.

## **ECOLOGY**

The word *ecology* is derived from the Greek noun "*oikos*" (house) and significantly has the same Greek root as economics "*oikonomos*" (household manager).<sup>5</sup> The third and fourth syllables of the word ecology come from the familiar word "*logos*" which means "a statement or narrative at some length" or in short "to say". Thus it is derived that ecology is a significant discussion of the house. For the Greek philosophers, discussion of their "*oikos*" was not mere talk or commands, but a rational account of a perpetually changing world. *Logos* is depicted as the means of God's self-disclosure to the world; an evolving relationship.<sup>6</sup> The prologue of John's Gospel reveals the word as God's primary agent in creation with the titles "Son" and "*Logos*" used interchangeably.

The scientific view of "*oikos*" gradually became more comprehensive in the last 300 years and *ecology* developed a more biological stance by studying the interdependence between organisms and the natural world. *Ecology* later became a logical tool in areas of various studies, which today include human and cultural ecological research. The actual word itself, *ecology* was first offered by a German biologist, Ernest Haeckel in 1868, who viewed *ecology* as a body of knowledge concerned with the economy of nature, rooted in economics and evolutionary

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<sup>5</sup> Hult, A., *Ecology*, p.239

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.239

thought.<sup>7</sup> For Haeckel, it was a study of all complex interrelations referred within the conditions of struggle, thus *ecology* is understood as the science of the environment.

Recent interest in *ecology* within religious studies began in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century in two general ways. Firstly, *ecology* was viewed in terms of religious conservationism caused by experienced depreciation of the *oikos*. Some eco-theologians point to the Hebraic divorce between divinity and nature, gnosticism and the ascetic tendencies in Near Eastern religions as the key points of alienation between humans and nature.<sup>8</sup> The second general interest is through disciplines of religious studies, such as history and anthropology, which studies the creative role of the *oikos* found in many religious expressions.<sup>9</sup> Human societies obtain various religious ideas and images from the natural world. Although some historical negative attitudes towards *ecology* were given theological and philosophical bases, the eco-theologians of today view their *oikos* as a creative sacrament containing profound and insightful views for faithful Christians.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.240

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.240

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.241

## **ENVIRONMENT**

From a purely descriptive point of view and for our purpose, *environment* refers to everything that surrounds us, that being the sum of physical, chemical and biological conditions that govern the life of an organism. It is the setting in which a thing or a being develops and functions and denotes all known and not yet recognized factors of the external and internal spheres that would impinge and affect its nature. Analytically, we differentiate between human systems, physical systems, and biological systems.<sup>10</sup> Thus, if one considers the interacting components of both the external and internal spheres it is evident that the *environment* is exceedingly complex, blurred and certainly non-static. As such, the minute cellular wall or the enormous universe can be defined as an *environment* onto itself, but with a relational dimension implied. For our purposes, the physical *environment* has its ancient lineage in three broad areas which hold humans to be part of it, yet distinct: 1) the *environment* can be understood as being severely apart from humans and providing support for human endeavor; 2) the *environment* is where humans are forever bound to all of the environmental influences of time and space; 3) and humans are the central focus of the *environment* and interested only with the view that the setting is “our ecosystem”.

Since the 1960's the environmental field of study has been dominated by many dichotomies: anthropocentric versus a cosmic approach where ethical questions

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.281

are of import; dualism/holism where the community metaphor is debated; sciences versus social justification whereby religions can foster interdisciplinary studies.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to say that on the one hand, the very process of living transforms the *environment* lastingly as all creatures impose upon their *environment* characteristics that reflect their very existence. On the other hand, a creature's perception apparatus is shaped by environmental stimuli. For creatures, these perceptual experiences are continuously being altered and always intervene with the external *environment*.

## **CREATION**

In the deepest Israelite sense, *creation* can be defined as a divine decree which allowed both the setting (environment) and the foundation (hīstory) to come forth for a meaningful relationship between Yahweh and this decree. The Priestly and Yahwist notions of *creation* were understood in a completely different sense than the prevalent *creation* beliefs although there were some points of contact between ancient Israel's *creation* faith and the cosmological views of antiquity. By being one of Yahweh's acts, faithful Israel viewed *creation* in the context of their covenant by which the setting and the foundation were inseparable from its sacred story beginning with the call of Abraham. This cosmos environment and its history was seen in light of the revealed acts given to Israel and its community embraced this revelation within the saving activity of their Yahweh. Thus, the authors of Priestly and Yahwist narratives prefaced their series of sacred narratives with the *creation* stories. The

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<sup>11</sup> CCCB Publication; The Environment Crisis, p.17.

God of Israel was confessed as the God of Creation and their redeeming God is nothing less than the beginner of a new act of *creation*.

In similar manner, Christians convinced of the decisive character of God's human revelation in Christ Jesus understand the whole sweep and unity of environment and history in a christological perspective of new creative actions, under the sovereignty of the Creator.

Scripture presents the existence of the cosmos as the work of the Creator with some intent and purpose. The Hebrew word to create (*bara*) found in Scripture is never used for human production and only for divine activity.<sup>12</sup> Occurring 47 times in the Hebrew Scripture, *bara* is mostly used in connection with the physical earth and the cosmos.<sup>13</sup> Prior to Israel's testimony of Yahweh's historical plan meaning of life was found in a host of environmental cyclical patterns. Within this view nature was considered timeless in the psychological sense that it belonged to a cyclical pattern of mythology which had to be re-enacted yearly and constantly repeated.<sup>14</sup> In contrast the Israelites believed *creation* as a starting point of divine purpose.<sup>15</sup> The Bible takes for granted the wholeness of the earth and the universe (Exodus 20:4). *Creation* can be conceived to be the total sum of all reality apart from God – *creation* is everything which is not God.

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<sup>12</sup> Interpreters Bible, p.465

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.465

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.466

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.466

## **INSIGHT**

Beyond the commonly held definition of “keen understanding”, *insight* is an intelligible unity of data and symbols derived from various degrees of inquiry.<sup>16</sup> This, in short, is Lonergan’s definition and will be our definition for it reflects a unity of functions used for achieving greater understanding. *Insight*, which occurs in all areas of human knowing, is the grasp of the relationships derived from faithful questioning. The various modes of inquiry, which, for our present purpose, include words and phrases of a piece of literature, cultural and historical data relevant to the questioning, attention to one’s perspective of the inquiry and the Christian relevancy of the discoveries made in order to improve one’s understanding of the question. By being aware of one’s experiences within one’s environment the senses can provoke varying degrees of inquiry leading to varying degrees of understanding. This gradual increase of understanding leads to an ever-accumulation of *insights* and shapes how one reacts to others, to one’s environment and how one develops a disposition within various groups with common values. Dependent on how relevant the data, one can move closer to greater understanding and then to greater knowing. For the Christian concerned with the science of the environment, the accumulation of ecological *insights* can encourage one to verbalize and to act in a variety of appropriate manners in situations which demand Christian expressions of faith and common Christian endeavors. *Insights* by their very historical nature are open to the

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<sup>16</sup> Lonergan, B.- This is a brief definition of insight derived from readings throughout his Method in Theology, pp.10, 213-239



future and new human contexts. Furthermore, *insights* can forever self-correct for the individual and for groups with common experiences, events, language and rituals.

## **INTERPRETATION**

An important and necessary part of this thesis is to understand the ecological ideas revealed in the two creation accounts and how these ecological notions measure up to our Christian message of today. To answer this part of our inquiry, Lonergan's definition of *interpretation* will be accepted. Lonergan affirms that *interpretation* is understanding a text through a series of operations of faithful questioning and from the author's horizon the subject matter can be more fully fine-tuned, yet always limited.<sup>17</sup> For the interpreter, it is a capacity to ask a series of questions in order to understand the data, the meaning and hence the text. Undoubtedly the questioning of "what is meant by a text" can be endless but Lonergan provides a means to obtain satisfactory answers which in turn can be studied by others working in the same area of interest.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid – Lonergan's specialty on Interpretation can be found in his Method of Theology, chapter 7, p.153

## **THE PRIESTLY ACCOUNT**

The Priestly creation account is a principal source of ecological meaning for Christians of today as it provides the most convincing evidence to our thesis question. This section of the thesis will begin by providing a brief overview of the Priestly creation narrative, followed by interpreting the text with the hope that the readers of today will react in powerful and correct ways concerning ecological responsibility, awe for all of creation and most importantly in ways of authentic liturgy. For surely, if God revealed His word to all of creation then we must sharpen our understanding, connection and utter human dependency upon the earthly resources provided by our Creator. It is also important that this interpretation provide as exact as possible meanings of environmental morality to Christians. Sean McEvenue points out that the Hebrew Bible taught Jews an admirable and advanced ethic, an ethic whose basic principles have formed the backbone of the Western world – even though Israel was largely ignorant of the rest of the world.<sup>18</sup> The ecological principles provided by the Priestly and Yahwist creation accounts can have the same effect upon us when we too are largely ignorant of our own world and the universe beyond this planet. The environmental damage done during this century is global, exceedingly complex and arises from a matrix of conditions and determinants. Our ecological difficulties did not start at the outlet pipe or the net. There is inescapable evidence that the human hand is altering global climate and global bio-diversity, possibly for centuries to come. Although quite ignorant of these ecological processes, there is a growing

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<sup>18</sup> McEvenue, Interpreting the Pentateuch, p.16

recognition of a dynamic environment which functions as an integral part of the global biosphere. It is here where an ecological interpretation can deepen our contemporary respect for non-human life forms and perhaps lead one towards objectification. It is at this point where religious belief and very real and everyday living can be reconciled. The ecological notions recovered from this commentary will be further advanced in the conclusion section of this paper.

The actual dating of the Priestly narrative is in dispute although the exilic or post-exilic period is generally accepted by many biblical scholars. When reading the Priestly narrative one can appreciate a systematic and orderly story of creating His earth and His creatures. The author's use of vocabulary is not careless but it is categorically structured and technical. The Priestly creation account can be studied in this low-key manner as well as a hymn as the rhythmic sequence unfolds. This narrative was based upon oral and written material as the Priestly author used both data and passion in deliverance of his material.

The Priestly creation story talks about a raw environment moving through various stages of creating, severance, order and pairings until the climax of the creative process is presented on the sixth day when verse 31 declares "God looked at everything he had made and he found it very good". The Priestly creation narrative unfolds by the will of the creator by separating the physical world during the first three days of creation and then populating and assigning roles for the final three days. Days one, two and three prepare a habitual environment while days four, five and six

give descriptions of the planet's inhabitants. In repetitive language, the Priestly writer arranges his narrative into two sets of three: Day one corresponds with day four in that the first day's light was divided from darkness in order to rid itself of chaos so the bodies of light of day four may be assigned; Day two relates to Day five, by which the heavens were created by dividing the waters so that the Day five creatures could populate their domains; Day three is paired with Day six by the creation of life on land thus providing food for the Day six animals and humans. The initial three days of the Priestly creation account can be viewed as providing the basis for the final three days of creation. Many scholars claim the climax of the creation process is the sixth day, creation of human beings, by which Yahweh makes male and female. Yahweh blesses the pair and assigns earthly dominion to them. The first day involves light versus darkness; the second day separates the upper and lower waters; the third day separates land and sea with the creation of vegetation being the second work of the third day. Once the first three days of separation are complete the remaining three days is described as divine efforts of physical design, whereby the sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals and humans adorn the separations of the earth. Day six is the lengthiest of the Priestly creation narrative.

One can readily perceive the author's careful technical categorization by the use of pairing items. This idiosyncratic temperament of the author is exemplified by:

Verse 1	Heaven/Earth
Verse 2	Earth/Abyss
Verse 4	Darkness/Light
Verse 7	Water above/Water below
Verse 10	Earth/Sea

Verse 11	Plants/Trees
Verse 16	Greater light/Lesser light
Verse 20	Water creatures/Air creatures

Other peculiarities employed by the author include repetitions by which conceptions of creation are realized such as “Then God said” which is written nine times and stresses the author’s idea of creating the environment through the word. The phrase “God saw how good it was” occurs six times in chapter one and points to the author’s second conception of creating by action by which Yahweh sees his goodness of work expressed in the unfolding order of the environment. Two dominant Priestly motifs are the passage “let there be ... and so it happened” which expresses the whole power of God in opposition to the variety of natural gods of his day. Creation by separation is found within other creation narratives throughout the world.<sup>19</sup> The presentation of six days with six conclusions (evening came, morning followed) reinforces the structural importance the author placed upon his work and the recurring and deliberate arrangement of words points to deliberate control of text as well as a hardened determination to contrast his Yahweh from other gods!

The Priestly writer presents a number of words and phrases which, at the time of the ancient narrative, purported a declaration of faith and in this way possess enduring theological and ecological interest. The theological fullness of these words is scarcely understood let alone referenced in depth. For our purpose the words “create”, “dominion”, “blessing”, and the phrase “in the image of God” will be presented.

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<sup>19</sup> Westermann, Creation, pp.10-11

The Hebrew *bara* translates into “create” and is found frequently in Isaiah with references to creation (Isaiah 45:18-19, 51:9).<sup>20</sup> *Bara* is never used in the Old Testament with other than God as its subject thus an effortlessness of divinity is linked with “to create” and must be understood as a word without any analogy.<sup>21</sup> Creation can be understood as a willful act of Yahweh, who has gifted the whole universe. In Isaiah 41:20, the word “create” is treated in a soteriological sense and the essence of *bara* is the saving action.<sup>22</sup> According to von Rad, *bara* does not necessarily mean making something out of nothing but can refer to a re-making of something that already exists.<sup>23</sup> The Priestly author, presented Yahweh as one who creates effortlessly without being involved in a creative struggle within nature or against the innumerable deities battling each other. In this respect, the Priestly writer sharply distinguished the Creator from the overpowering environment of cosmological and theogonic myths, which consumed daily life. However history may have defined the environment, the Priestly author absolutely asserts God’s supremacy over creation.

Another ecological significant word found within the first chapter of Genesis is blessing, God’s provision of human need. Within verses 20 to 23, the newly created life is the object of passing life into the future. In the Priestly account, blessings were a command of abundance and vigor (to be fruitful and multiply) and in this way were conceived as a communication of life from God. Yet, our earth has lost

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p.39

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.39

<sup>22</sup> von Rad, p.47

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.47

about 25% of all of its life forms since the turn of this century and the ecological loss is only now coming to the forefront of the social agenda.<sup>24</sup> Should this 25% loss of abundance be communicated on a personal level, such as body vigor or financial loss then critical adjustments would certainly ensue. It is my conception that Yahweh himself blesses creation, although creatures too can bless by praying that Yahweh will bless. The blessing of earth can be discerned immediately when the past tense of the first two verses of creation are distinguished from the remaining positive material of his narrative. The confused, unordered form of space (*tòhù wà bòhù*) had no distinction of sea and land, heaven and earth until creative blessings intervened.<sup>25</sup> The Priestly writer testifies our environment is a location of both fruitfulness and order.

Ecologists of today certainly point to “dominion” within the Judeo-Christian tradition as the original initiative to desecrate nature and all creatures found within it. This notion will be further addressed, for the present purpose is to determine the author’s conception of dominion as precisely as possible. The Priestly author unquestionably viewed Yahweh as the supreme creator of all things, past, present and future, physical and unseen. Against the background of the Priestly writer’s day when absolute royalty ruled the day, when peoples of his world were slaves to the profound cosmological myths, the author reversed the notion of chaos by assuring humanity’s complete dominance (Hebrew verb – *radah*) over this aimless world. Seen in this light, it was to be dominion modeled on Yahweh’s dominion and

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<sup>24</sup> Nature, Dec.10, 1998, #396, Volume 6711, as given by World Wildlife Federation.

<sup>25</sup> Vawter, On Genesis, p.40.

not man's. The dominion written by the Genesis writer was a desire to rid nature of its mythological mystique and to free humanity and their environment from the bondage of superstition. Dominion implies power and freedom, tension and responsibility. Only the immature or ignorant person of today would point to this ancient notion of dominion to support extravagant rates of air pollution emissions or vacuum-like fishing methods. One can argue quite readily that this type of modern day dominion is anything but freedom and most certainly a form of bondage.

A centerpiece of Christian understanding of humanity is found with the anthropological phrase "in the image of God", which can be explained as "a duplicate compared to the original" - "to resemble Yahweh". Firstly, it can be admitted that the Priestly writer's intent is to encompass the wholeness of man without splitting the physical from the spiritual. This idea of wholeness would appear to be admitted, since it is generally accepted among scholars that the Priestly "man" in verse 26 is plural. The Priestly writer related the world as it was perceived back to its origin. It must be understood that there existed an indefinite stretch of Mediterranean history moving from the oral traditions up to the beginnings of the philosophical era (6<sup>th</sup> BCE) in which much discourse was acutely focused on "the beginnings of creation" ideas and humanity's relationship to this concept.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps it was the Priestly writer's process of relating God to the highest possible concrete reality that he understood – the human being. In this verse, man in His image was symbolically concrete, yet, of the highest order of life as opposed to other life forms. Other notions

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<sup>26</sup> Boas, History of Philosophy, p.351.



of the image of God have included the idea of the physical body only, in that due to the posture of man, erect and elevated to view all creation was “above” the rest of the earthly creatures; and the notion of the rational, intellectual substance of men and not the whole body.<sup>27</sup> The basis of these positions can be due to the fact that the Priestly writer immediately adds “Let him have dominion ...” so that man is made in the image of God, not because of the body but because of the intellectual power by which he dominates the other creatures of the earth who are subject to humanity by this power. Along the same lines, is the idea that a living man is doing the same as a living God who plans, decides and takes action. Only the description of the human being was available to the Priestly writer. I believe the phrase “in the image of God” could not have meant the physiological since, for the Priestly writer, it would have undoubtedly conflicted with his transcendental notion of Yahweh and the author’s desire to lift humans above superstition of the day. One can easily ascertain the dilemma of the Priestly author with such a term. The writer strove to assign humanity to be above nature and strove to rid his faithful readers of idolatry and worship of natural forces of the environment. He portrayed humanity in its wholeness with powers of thought and communication. The “image of God” concept was inextricably wrapped up with ideas of cosmogony and mysticism. Unquestionably by the use of this designation, the Priestly writer considered humanity to be the wonder of the world, similar to a parent’s concept of a child or the works of an artist. This particular wonder of creation is very imperfect and separated from Yahweh yet nothing can come between the relationship of humanity and its God as humanity

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.59

moves to and fro of its source.<sup>28</sup> It is worthy to note that Christian Scripture views Christ as the image of the invisible God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15), reflecting God's glory (Hebrews 1:3). However one construes the image of God – as reason or free will or some spiritual capacity – it is unquestioningly a relationship of the highest order with our Creator and His creation.

Finally, the Priestly writer displays a conviction that all events of nature and history have a beginning in the word of Yahweh. Yet the word is addressed to all listeners as opposed to specific addresses (such as Moses or the Israelite people to build the Sinai tent). C. Westermann presents a pattern of command in the following way:<sup>29</sup>

Introduction of the Command:	God said
The Command:	Let there be
Completion of the Command:	It was so
Judgment of the Command:	God saw that it was good
Time Sequence of the Command:	Evening came... the first day

In addition to the certainty of the Word, the Priestly creation account narrates creation also through action by the making of man in verse 26 and by the forming of the physical world through the birthing of environmental elements (sea, wind, land) all the while concisely separating new births from creative Word of God. Through studies done on ancient global creation stories (Mesopotamia, South Seas, and Central America) it is surprising that the same basic creative motifs constantly

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<sup>28</sup> Westermann, Creation, p.41

<sup>29</sup> Westermann, Creation, p.42.

recur.<sup>30</sup> The result being that it is a false assumption that peoples in all parts of the earth and across time produced unlimited diversity of creation ideas. There are four ancient creative motifs: 1) creation through making (action); 2) creation through generation (Egyptian); 3) creation via conflict (Babylonia); 4) creation through the Word.<sup>31</sup> Thus the Priestly narrative combines these motifs minus the conflict motif although some people may view the past tense of Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 as engagement. In this sense, the whole Priestly material is of positive ecological substance. The following verse-by-verse interpretation will suggest the quality of this relationship between creation and Yahweh is based upon His absolute freedom of presenting creation as he saw fit and creation's response to Yahweh acts.

### ***ECOLOGICAL COMMENTARY – GENESIS 1:1 – 2:4b***

#### **Day One**

The creative divine action “in the beginning” implies an organized and purposeful universe at the will of the universe's Creator as opposed to a chaotic identity by which this Creator plans to reduce into some kind of ecological order. It is understood the Priestly author may be describing in verse 2 the contemporary myths of nature and this representation will be addressed later on in the Priestly and Yahwist comparative section. Verse 1 seems to warrant a few environmental comments. Firstly, the Priestly writer was endeavoring to present the all-inclusive, the totality and unity of his macro universe as he conceived it to be. Secondly, the author presents God as the source of divine creation, thus the idea of a creation “ex

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<sup>30</sup> Westermann, Creation, p.39.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, Creation, p.39.

nihilo” is provided by the author. Finally, the author’s worldly environment, as understood by him was the result of this divine action as opposed to the divine word as provided throughout the other passages of the Priestly creation narrative. This environment setting, when read as a separate sentence, belongs to God and can be trusted with a purposeful future, a consistent pattern and with an intelligent source. Although dated, von Rad views the notion of a “created chaos” as a contradiction in itself in that God creatively established a beginning and all of its subsequent existence. Most importantly, creation is not a finished story and its known goodness is a guarantee rather than a chance.

To create ex nihilo or to amend the environment (matter) is pre-eminently a saving action and can be seen in the essence of the Priestly writer’s usage of the word “beginning”. It should also be noted that “*bara*” is only used by the Priestly author with God as its subject and as the One who exerts, does and acts creatively within our history (the beginning) and our whole cosmos (heavens and earth).<sup>32</sup> It is a powerful achievement of this century that empirical observations and insights into the sequence of beginnings at the micro and macro levels of God’s transforming universe has had on our thinking. Today we know the earth does not belong to humankind; we belong to an earth whose evolutionary drama is not yet complete. We can re-discover the Priestly notions of a purposeful future and a created source. It is in this sense that harm to the earth is to heap contempt upon its Creator. On the micro scale, the splitting of the atom and the explorations of “inner space” anatomy of matter is

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.38.

almost as vast and mysterious as outer space. The public is constantly being given information concerning the far reaches of the universe of which scientists are continuously searching for a cosmology of beginnings. A word must be said about our physical planet, which is now understood as an evolving, maturing and living organism which functioned without humankind for some 15 billion years.<sup>33</sup> The physical structure of this planet – its core, mantle and mountain ranges – act as the skeleton of its own beginnings and its own present existence. The soil that covers the surface is like an enormous digestive system into which all things are absorbed, broken down and recycled. The oceans, waterways and rain function has a circulatory system that provides life, giving blood and revitalizes the Earth's body. The vegetation of the planet (unlike all other known planets) provides its respiratory system, its lungs, constantly regenerating the entire atmosphere. We certainly know the animal kingdom provide enormous diversification of life that is very sensitized to environmental change. Humanity, equally sensitive to environmental conditions, enables the wholeness of this planet to reflect on itself and on the Earth's divine beginnings unknown to all other creation. We are the means by which the Earth has freedom, choice and spiritual awareness in a highly developed way.

Yet, humanity is destroying at an alarming rate the very conditions necessary for life to exist on this planet. We have not yet outgrown our inaccurate description of ourselves and thus fail to fully reflect on the larger self in the sense that the earth regulates itself much as a body does. Destruction of the environment is destruction of our divine beginning and our divine future. Undoubtedly, the boldest and greatest

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<sup>33</sup> Dowd, M., Earthspirit, p.46.

environmental assertions are in the future and not in the past. The greatest service the churches could render the world at this time is providing insight into the environmental crisis by examining past chaotic actions which have contributed to the crisis and to open the resources already available to us for altering our way of thinking about creation. In this sense, we too are early Christians.

Verse 2 has been understood by many readers as a backward step and less dominant than verse 1.<sup>34</sup> This is due in part to the human suspicion that threat lies behind creation and faith must stand this test of separation. Notwithstanding, the ecologically dramatic nouns such as wasteland, darkness and abyss and whether one unites or severs the two verses via “when” the universe owes its being to Yahweh, a conviction which Isaiah 45:7 states “I (God) form the light and create darkness”. Therefore, regardless of the environmental circumstances of chaos, the Creator was involved with the action of the universe and its history. It would be helpful to point out that any mature culture is sustained by intricate systems of beliefs in which ideas and practices are mutually self-reinforcing. Nevertheless, the present generation appears to be divorced from feelings of awe, beauty and care for their creation partner, even though space travel has afforded us a more universal point of view.<sup>35</sup> In fact, with all the arguments, pro and con, for space travel, no one suggested that we should do it simply to look at the Earth. But that may have been the most important

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<sup>34</sup> Vawter, On Genesis, p.38.

<sup>35</sup> Coyne, F., The Universe: A Scientific Understanding, p.73.

reason of all. Astronauts returning from space have given testimony of an earth as an harmonious, intelligent and loving whole.<sup>36</sup>

It would be fair to declare verse 3 (as well as the remaining first story of Creation), to be quite positive when compared to verse 2. "Then God said" "Let there be light and there was light" - with only these words the author expresses God willful command and unborn light obeyed His word. Little reflection is required on the importance of light in any form of creation, whether it be in the realm of sciences or in the realm of humanities. Theologically, light is frequently the symbol of revelation conceived by hearing the word, yet this verse can be viewed as an awakening over the dualism between the darkness found in verse 2, and the light found in verse 3. The New Testament does reflect this dualism of light and darkness in John 1:5, 8:12, 12:35, 12:46. The language of light is seen as an element of deity. Examples of such language include Paul recognizing the presence's of God in a blinding light (Acts 9:3, 22:6), God dwelling in inaccessible light (1 Timothy 6:16) and the luminous cloud at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5) not to mention the Christological dimension of light. The effect of delivering light firstly is order itself, which is to uncover the darkness. The primacy of light prior to life and order and even before the sun (Genesis 1:16) surely reflects the author's thought that light had its origin solely on the verbal will of God and tells us who created light as well as providing the reader of the initial pronouncement of the divine word and the power of such word. B. Vawter makes the point that the Priestly author must have insisted light be the first creature of

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<sup>36</sup> Dowd, M., Earthspirit, p.86.

all creation because it was the first condition for the rest of his creation.<sup>37</sup> Following the notion light is goodness for “God saw how good the light was” (verse 4) can be interpreted to forward the notion that this light was a reflection of his verbal will and a goodness of creative thought. The spiritual suggestions of light echo throughout the ages whether through the ancient myths of Egypt (the sun god) and of Marduk in the Babylon myths or in 1 John 1:5 where darkness did not overcome the light of Christ’s ministry. In daily life, light offers guidance, safety and assurance whether one waits for the light to return from winter’s darkness in order to seed or awaits beauty of dawn as opposed to the colorless darkness. As such it can be said that what light brings to the physical earth, God brings to the soul: life and beauty. The psalmist sang to God often with light in the heart (Psalms 97:11 and Psalms 104:2). It can be stated however that the Priestly author did not bring himself to say that darkness was good even though it too was a creation of Yahweh! All aspects of the human and the environmental experience can not be without His creative presence. The ecological cry of escape will be developed near the end of this paper in the sense that the tragic experiences of creation can be transfigured. Scripture abounds with this kind of deliverance and examples include Psalm 91:5, Psalm 112:4, Jeremiah and Christ himself.

The final verse of the first day sets in motion the alternation of day and night and again expresses the manifestation of the power of Yahweh. The naming of light and darkness allows completion of the first day. In keeping with Israelite custom the Priestly writer has day begin in the evening before the morning, yet the rhythm does

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<sup>37</sup> Vawter, On Genesis, p.41.



not allow for notions of action and rest for all creatures of our planet, a time for openness and a time for meditation. The steady dependability of this daily rhythm is vital for all aspects of life whether it be in the advance of human endeavors such as agriculture, space exploration, medicine and art. Separation of the heavens and earth takes its place beside creation by being fashioned by the word. John 9:4 writes “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day”. Equally true is the theme of “coming in” from one’s daily work, which must be part of all faithful human life rather than a hectic activism devoid of the meditation previously mentioned.

### **Day Two**

In a way not dissimilar to that in verse 4 the happening of separation occurs in verse six with the division of one body of water from the other. Again, through the divine Word the dome (sky) is called into being. This dome is referenced in Psalms 29:10, 148:4 and Revelations 4:6 and is reminiscent of the Babylonian myth whereby the sun god Marduk splits chaos in half and uses each for the sky and earth. In Job’s reply (Job 26:10) this bell serves as a boundary between light and darkness. Although the habitable earth does not emerge until verse 10, it appears the author saw fit to presuppose water and the taming of it in similar fashion in the controlling of darkness (verse 4). Perhaps the author’s intent was to tell his readers that Yahweh controls the heavens, the place of ancient deities (verse 14 to 18 and Ephesians 6:12). It would seem most possible that through the construction of the dome (atmosphere) the Priestly creation account begins the first stage of ordering his narrative. From a geological perspective, sky and water bring forth life to our habitation and thus we can

view this unity in both theological and ecological terms. The upper atmosphere, stretched out like a tent (Psalms 104:2) is conceived as a place of much divine activity (Genesis 11:5, Deuteronomy 10:14) as well as a window through which rain falls (Genesis 7:11, 2 Kings 7:2,19), a storehouse for snow, hail and wind. The Hebrew word “ruah” with no exact English translation is used throughout the Old Testament to mean breath, wind or spirit.<sup>38</sup> In Psalms 33:6, the wind is portrayed as the breath of Yahweh which becomes an agent of power through His command and as such can be conceived as a sign and a principle of life. Unfortunately, the Priestly author’s principles of life have suffered recently as a consequence of human activities to the point where carbon dioxide concentrations in the global atmosphere have increased 35% during the last one hundred years.<sup>39</sup> This results in global warming and climate change affecting all aspects of the natural world. We know components of the global climate system include the atmosphere, oceans, ice, land surfaces and the biosphere – all processing, ordering and inter-reacting. We also know that air pollution affects soil use, rainfall, the ozone layer, vegetation, fresh water and all human endeavors. According to the scientific journal *Nature* (March 13, 1999) the rate of the earth climate change exceeds anything seen in nature in the past 10,000 years. This statement of urgency is real. According to this article, we are slowly beginning to lower the CO<sub>2</sub> (a main ecological culprit) by about 1% per year. We also know that extreme weather caused by pollution affects public health. The leading causes of death in China are emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which directly relates to atmospheric pollution caused by the burning of low quality coal in

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<sup>38</sup> Vawter, *On Genesis*, p.46

<sup>39</sup> *Nature*, Sept.3,1998, p.131.

homes and factories. Certainly, this catastrophe of lost lives is preventable. Many Chinese people live beneath an acid rain tent five times the maximum recommended by the WHO.<sup>40</sup> We also know that the emissions of greenhouse gases weaken the ocean's ability to transport and overturn massive amounts of heat and cold around the planet and vertically into its depth. Sudden change in ocean circulation has led to collapse of marine ecosystems and land use for decades in advance. This article further suggests that without reduction of these emissions, a critical limit may be crossed by the end of 2100. Without knowing with absolute certainty the climate's sensitivity, we must not wait to choose the optimal strategy – for technology exists today to lead us in the right direction of a carbon free energy source. This appears to be a responsible approach in light of CO<sub>2</sub> atmospheric life-span of over one century. Ecological integrity is essential for all life because such bio-diversity and mosaics absorb the punches of change and ensures resiliency of the Earth body. The two partners of creation will have to go into the future as a single sacred communication of Yahweh's loving gift of life. Whether it is clearly recognizable or not – we are now the chosen generation to reverse the ecological trend and guide the Earth back to health, back to its purpose of being a sacrament of life-giving principles. The telling, explaining and demonstrating is part of this journey and we must inspire others as well.

As a principle of life, the word *spirit* was understood by ancient Israel to be given to the earth: He renews the face of the earth (Psalm 104:39, Job 34:14) and

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<sup>40</sup> Nature, Vol.#386, March 13, 1997.

when taken back, loss and death occurs (Genesis 6:3, Job 17:1) and vitality severely diminished. The spirit of Yahweh allows discernment (Proverbs 17:27) and is charismatic when inspiring the receiver to do deeds beyond the expected and rising above attainments and habits of one's worldly existence. We are certainly aware that the native American cosmology led to a different sense of environmental reality than the Judeo-Christian cosmology. The Creator is viewed by native Americans as being expressed in nature and they had no sense of detachment or domination of the natural world. Furthermore, discernment of their Great Spirit would only be possible when one's heart is close to nature. Many native American chiefs understood that when a person's heart is far from the land it eventually becomes hard and when there is lack of respect for living and growing things, this would inevitably lead to lack of respect for the human and environmental web. Mother Earth is portrayed in a positive and inspiring way rather than one of diminution as viewed by other cultures. In this sense, native cosmology is viewed as life-giving by native Americans.

Known to have less than average rainfall in a region, which lacks rivers and lakes, the author exhibits an awareness of the meaning of water for the competing traditional nomadic lifestyle and the up-surgings agricultural interests as well as the dire consequences of no moisture.<sup>41</sup> Similar to the atmosphere's imagery, the might of Yahweh is expressed in saving Israel (Exodus 15:23-25). Biblically portrayed, water is life and salvation for creation as the saving acts of Yahweh are compared to the production of water in the desert. The blessings of stillness, righteousness and

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<sup>41</sup> Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, p.37.

wisdom are expressed by using the promise of living water. John 4:10 gives a comparison between living and stale water:

“If only you recognized God’s gift,  
and who it is that is asking you for a drink,  
You would have asked him instead, and  
He would have given you living water.”

John 4:10

### **Day Three**

The gathering of the water into a single basin and allowing the existing land to appear dry is the first of two acts of the third day. Verbally, Yahweh names dry land “earth” and the basin “sea”. Uncommon today, the author designates earth as only a particular part of our planet and ends the need for name giving. Everything else that follows in his narrative will be new, called into being, made or created by Yahweh. The earth belongs to Yahweh (Psalms 24:1) and is his footstool (Matthew 5:35). The only basis of the earthly and heavenly dualism found in the Old Testament is the curse put on the earth because of the sin of the first man (Genesis 3:12). The New Testament offers many examples of this kind dualism by which the earthly is opposed to Christ’s teachings.

The Priestly author alludes to creation of the sea as being another example of Yahweh verbal might. Created by the Word, the sea is presented as a witness to His great power. Ecological care is one enterprise whereby authentic Christians can parallel this call to witness God’s power and glory. It would be no exaggeration to

state that the oceans of today are in a greater chaotic state than during the post-exilic times and the amount of scientific knowledge available to us today would be utterly stunning to the ancient Israelites. Of positive note, many Western countries are setting up marine reserves to ensure the sustainability and bio-diversity of ocean species, as the traditional legislated "catch limits" proved quite unsuccessful.<sup>42</sup> Yahweh sets the boundaries of the sea (Proverbs 8:29) which it may not pass and is present at these boundaries (Psalms 139:9). In contrast with scriptural passages which view the seas with stormy terror, Psalms 104:25 holds the oceans with appreciation, teeming with life and expansiveness. This abundance of water is emphasized in Genesis 1:20 verse of teeming water life. Our desire to shift, divest and dam bodies of water and rivers in order to accommodate human development is well documented throughout history and around the planet. Examples of such interference include the Yangtze river of China, the Caspian Sea, the Danube and the Columbian river of northwestern United States.<sup>43</sup> Closer to home, we are blessed with the largest bodies of fresh water; yet the marshlands, rivers and animal life surrounding the Great Lakes have become poisonous wastelands with deformed animals in some cases (Lakes Erie and Huron). The difficulty of such efforts to use the natural resources, is not so much its intended and helpful usage in areas of agriculture, water filtration and drinking water, but the incredible lack of understanding and study of the long term ramifications of such projects on the bio-diversity of the local environment in question. An ecological vision is not yet commonly and sufficiently developed to offer an effective prescription for such

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<sup>42</sup> Science, p.1537, Vol.#284, October, 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.1537.

human activities. Yet, credit must be given to New York City, which recognized the ecological, financial and social benefits of resource management. New York avoided paying more than 6 billion dollars for a new water filtration plant (plus annual costs) by restoring the soil ecosystems of the Catskill Mountains at a cost of 1 billion dollars. The city bought the land in the Catskills, restricted its commercial use and used its natural filtration capabilities instead of an engineered solution.<sup>44</sup> This was a relatively cheap way to provide clear, abundant water for its city dwellers and highlights the theme that the natural world's diversity and complexity begets stability. Fortunately, there is an awareness today that when the natural boundaries of a sea or river is changed to accommodate a local industry, we are in fact intruding upon our vulnerable partner of creation by not fully investigating its whole and long term environmental impact.

The second creative happening during the third day could be described as the artistic beauty of Yahweh's blessing: the seed bearing covering of the Priestly writer's dry land, vegetation. Repetitively the author again declares "God said ... and so it happened..." (verse eleven to thirteen). The vegetative growth being classified into plants bearing seed and trees bearing fruit in the seed is a curious piece of science with an emphasis on the reproductive activity of nature. A parallel is drawn in Exodus 9:25 when distinguishing between herbs and trees of this verse. Understanding that plants do not have the same expression of life as animals, von Rad describes this second work of creation in terms of "the world of plants as the lowest

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<sup>44</sup> Nature, p.428, Oct.1/98, Vol.395, Issue 6701.

level of organic life".<sup>45</sup> Although categorization occurs throughout his narrative, I believe the Priestly writer in no way elaborates nor subjects vegetation to this "lowest level" classification. What does exist in the Priestly account up to verse twelve is the creative, majestic commands of saying and making with no scoring of environmental rank. The wide-spread criticism of the still-prevalent view that objectifies nature, likens it to a machine and places humans apart from it, is appropriate, for this bias fragments the natural world into specialized parts. Surely, such a view is socially and scientifically outdated and demands new foundations such as Christ's model of dominion found in Philippians 2:5-11. With strong ties to the land, the Priestly author portrays the earth as participating in bearing its seed for plant and tree life and thus, the ancient conceptions of mother earth arose. In addition, the command for earth to bring forth vegetation would appear to be a quite logical and natural development as told by the Priestly writer. B. Vawter reminds his readers that in the Hebrew scheme of things the "bloodless, unbreathing and unmoving vegetation" of the earth did not fall under the rubric of life or of the living and its "special" creation is in view of its relation to the truly living beings which God is about to bring into being.<sup>46</sup> One only has to patiently reflect within the narrow confines of one's experience to grasp the cyclical significance that vegetation offers within history and nature.

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<sup>45</sup> von Rad, Genesis, p.53

<sup>46</sup> Vawter, On Genesis, p.46



## **Day Four**

The fourth day of creation bring forth the lights (stars) to the dome (sky) and in similar fashion to other divisional aspects of the Priestly narrative it is accomplished by the word rather than through an act of making. Verse 14 and 15, although in parallel with verse three in some regard does allow confusion by the suggestion that day and night has been separated on two occasions and the plural “lights” intended for separation and not to give light. These heavenly lights, commanded to mark out all time whether it be the minutes, days or years belongs to Yahweh and thus the Priestly author may have intended his reader to rid themselves further of the pagan mythologies and perceive all things, including time as being in the domain of one Creator. It is valuable to note that the idea of time remains undefined and mysterious although humanity continues to measure, describe, analyze and circle it. Other than the reckoning of time, stars are personified (Psalms 148:3) when invited to praise their Creator and are absolute in height under the “throne of Yahweh” as expressed in Job 22:12 thereby allowing human ambition and endeavor to strive to reach the stars (Isaiah 14:13). It is common religious language today to declare these celestial bodies as part of the ornamental works of creation. In the Priestly perspective perhaps these stars were means of telling time and not seats of deities and as such each step in the process of time is a critical time, a decisive moment which either hastens or retards creation’s salvation. Responsibility of all creation to express this critical time never ceases and the present ecological moment recapitulates the entire past. In this sense, the future of the created world is actually being realized in today’s time. Contrasting the divine utterance in verse 14, the

Priestly author further describes the creation of the two great lights, one governing the day and one governing the night as an act of divine making (verse sixteen) with the deliberate separation occurring once again. These verses of “light” continue to be somewhat difficult to reconcile with the former “light” verses of the narratives (verse 3 to 5, 15) yet the author advances the thought of governance not yet put forward. It is hard to imagine that there is a group of people on Earth who do not understand the utter dependence and governance of the Sun and Moon upon all earthly life forms. It is possible the author wished to further elaborate the profound necessity of light in one’s daily life in terms of seasonal change as well as signs of locating Yahweh’s creativity in the skies thus combating astrological ideas of his day. One can easily recall the words of Psalm 19:1;

“The heavens declare the glory of God;  
and the firmament shows his handwork.”

To the Priestly writer and his supporters the sun and moon were no longer independent forces but united under their one and living God. Undoubtedly the writer of this narrative was a seer of the universe as we are in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet he must not have known the immensity of the galaxies nor the full wondrous beauty of this local planet when viewed from atop with which this generation has been privileged. Nevertheless the wings of his faith went out to whatever may have been the fullness of his universe and all that was out there belonged to his God. He was seeking understanding and meaning while providing testimony to the awe of Yahweh. The trait of courage to enter into a new conception of the universe would not allow the Priestly author to remain safe within a smaller framework. The stretching of faith and

mind was required. S. McEvenue reminds us of this point in that the Priestly creation account is a story about cosmic creation itself and although the culmination of the creative effort is humankind, this is still totally within a progressive cosmic order. McEvenue further challenges Christians to join God in cosmic time and cosmic rest by observing our Sabbath rest in all subsequent history.<sup>47</sup> For this is the created universe in which we live and what lifted the Jews from obscurity to permanent religious prominence was this passion and unending quest for meaning rooted in their understanding of God.

In ancient cultures, such as Egypt and Mesopotamia the sun was an extremely important religious symbol for solar deities yet the Priestly author understood the sun and other cosmic identities to be a natural body created by Yahweh. The Priestly narrative returns to the cosmic bodies only at the conclusion of the creative narrative in Genesis 2:1. As such, this verse views the sun as merely a bearer of light, obedient to its maker. There are frequent scriptural passages in the Old Testament which refers to the brightness and glory as well as its power to harm both vegetation and human (2 Kings 4:19, Psalms 121:6, APC 12:1). Likewise, the worship of the lesser of two great lights was widespread during the time of the Priestly account and so it must have been incumbent upon the Priestly writer to stress the creativity and the permanency of this light and Yahweh's transcendence over the moon in like fashion to the greater light. Thus the Priestly author, in a revolutionary way, emptied the sun, moon and the stars of their divinity and by reducing them to component parts of the universe which would be accessible to human probing! Similar to the creation of

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<sup>47</sup> McEvenue, Interpretation and Bible – Essays on Truth in Literature, p.121

variety of plant life which belongs to its own species, the array of lights, large or small also belong to its sphere yet set under the ordered whole of the Creator-Creation relationship. C. Westermann connects the worldliness of the heavenly bodies and space exploration and notes that the precise praising by the heavenly bodies of the Creator occurs only in the first chapter of the Bible.<sup>48</sup> To comprehend the significance of this Priestly account is to value these formulations in a religious and cultural atmosphere of various astrological false beliefs.

### **Day Five**

In verse 20, the Priestly author states both water and air creatures occur in a single creative pronouncement. Here too, paralleling the abundance of vegetation found in verse 11, the waters are wealthy with living creatures although the pairing of different creative components is absent. Scripture presents the value of fish in a variety of ways; the esteemed part of one's diet is suggested in Numbers 11:5, fish were included among topics of Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 5:11) and the economy of line fishing was known to the Israelites (Isaiah 19:8, Job 40:25). Within the Gospels, fish and fishing are mentioned much more frequently than in the Hebrew Scriptures. With such an abundance of vitality and importance assigned to the waters and to the skies, it is of secondary interest that the ancient Hebrew concept of mother did not correspond to these two spheres of creation even though fertility (verse 22) was recognized in these species as it was to the dry land of verse 10. Incredulously as it may appear from a distance, perhaps the author's concept of fertility of the earthly

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<sup>48</sup> Westermann, Creation, p.44

seed was viewed as automatic and evident as opposed to the reproductive powers of fish and birds, which require a certain degree of cooperation?

Similar to the land and the air, the dynamics of our oceans and waterways are awakening in humanity a desperate need to alter our way of thinking about the abundance of the oceans. Firstly, we must acknowledge our discomfort and confess our personal resistance to conversion of the magnitude that humanity is now called upon to make. We can be reminded of Jesus' words "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen..." Such large shifts in thinking and meaning are not easy to make, yet it is mandatory if humanity wishes to preserve any sense of diversity in the planet's water basins. Again, it is a basic ecological tenet that creation's interdependence and stability depends upon bio-diversity. In much the same way as macro-agriculture thwarts this bio-diversity, rake and vacuum fishing depletes aqua-diversity. Although data has been widely circulating the Western world for the past number of decades, humanity for the most part appears to be numb to the warnings of a less than abundant web of sea-life. The U.S. Food and Agriculture people issued a summary report in March 1997 which stated that 66% of the oceans species are fished to capacity. This report comes 75 years after a group of scientists gave warning of a 1/5 drop of ocean species (International Council for the Exploration of the Seas – 1902).<sup>49</sup> One should readily understand that the world fish stock is in crisis because a basic and sensible supply/demand ratio never really existed at all among the world's countries. Failure to adopt policies was the result of people's inability to heed the

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<sup>49</sup> Nature, p.105, Vol.388 #6645, Aug.28. 1997.

oceans' warnings. In common with fish stocks in the North Sea, cod are heavily exploited with as much as 60% of the fishable stock being removed annually. The present exploitation rate is unsustainable in order to avoid the disaster off the coast of Atlantic Canada.<sup>50</sup> As humanity remained nonchalant about the visible signs of our oceans' decreasing abundance over the past century, then what about the invisible ocean's floor? Life at the bottom of the oceans might seem to be immune from large-scale shifts in climate, pollution and human activity. Yet recent studies reveal links between ocean bio-diversity and the Earth's surface behavior. The array blessings of goodness, fertility, abundance and order are being depleted from the ocean floor. Scripps Institute of Oceanography, San Diego has just completed a seven-year study (1992-1999) on the diversity of the ocean floor along the West Coast of the United States.<sup>51</sup> This report concluded that there was not enough food coming down to the ocean floor to support the amount of life that the researchers observed. In short, the sea floor dwellers are starving. These creatures are also being cheated from the necessary diversity required. Last year, another research group from Scripps reported a gradual 2-degree increase in ocean surface temperature, affecting the eastern edge of the Pacific Ocean along the two continents. One must be prudent to understand that seven years can be a long time for science but insignificant from the viewpoint of the ocean; yet with decreased food supply and real ocean warming one can envision severe competition and lack of diversity at the sea floor. Equally disturbing is the precipitous decline of the world's bird population, flight paths and feeding/mating lands on the earth's surface. The drive to squeeze ever more food from the land (a

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<sup>50</sup> Nature, p.107 – Vol.385, Feb.1, 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Montreal Gazette, October 2, 1999, p.J8.

type of bio-monoculture), has sent Europe's birds and all wildlife in a steep decline. According to British Ornithologists, 10 million breeding individuals of ten studied species have disappeared. Add to this estimate, another 116 bird species in serious decline and the invertebrate and plant populations upon which they depend for survival, and we have a suffering environment.<sup>52</sup> One of the most beautiful expressions of creation and love, the famed flamingos of Kenya's Lake Nakuru once numbered over a million in the 1970's have all but vanished from this increasingly polluted and shallow lake.<sup>53</sup> The pollution in Lake Nakuru is from industrial refuse in the last 5 years only!

Fitted into the whole process of world-creation is the Priestly author's introduction of animals onto the narrative scene, thus beginning the unfolding of the whole of the animal kingdom according to its broad divisions. The goodness of creation as previously mentioned, is an underlying theme of the satisfaction of His own word and work. The Priestly writer repeatedly stresses Yahweh's joy at what he created and it is in the readers interest to understand the world in its constitutive and diverse parts which is everywhere recognizable.

In the sequence of animals created, fish, fowl, and sea monsters, von Rad rightly states that nothing in this realm, regardless of one's dimension of chaos is outside the creative will of God.<sup>54</sup> The Priestly narrative sketch of ordering the

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<sup>52</sup> Nature, p.611 – Vol.400, Aug.12/99.

<sup>53</sup> Montreal Gazette, October 2, 1999, p.J8.

<sup>54</sup> von Rad, Genesis, p.54

universe continues to unfold as Yahweh blesses the creatures of the water and air (verse 23) and utters the command to be fertile, multiply and fill their environment. With Psalms 74:12, the combat imagery personifies the watery chaos at the beginning of creation and God's creative power over it:

Yet, O god, my king from of old,  
You doer of saving deeds on earth,  
You stirred up the sea by your might;  
You smashed the heads of the dragons in the waters,  
You crushed the head of Leviathan,  
And make food of him for the dolphins.  
You released the springs and torrents;  
You brought dry land out of the primeval waters,  
Yours is the day, and yours the night;  
You fashioned the moon and the sun,  
You fixed all the limits of the land;  
Summer and winter you made.

The author's remarks of blessing, in addition to the goodness of each creation being called into being reflects an ancient notion of possessing something quite fortunate. In the author's view, God is the source of blessings too and in keeping with His testimony, the Priestly writer gives no reason for God's act of blessing. W. Bruggeman views this act of blessing as the generous, yet unfolding story of Yahweh's creative acts. That is, Yahweh so ordered the pre-existent material substratum, which was disordered and wild to make possible a reliable place of viability, a place of abundance, fertility and extravagance - the natural world. Yahweh has authorized in the world the inscrutable force of generosity, so the earth can sustain all its members and the capacity for such generosity is assumed with every genus and species of creation.<sup>55</sup> This "bringing forth" of the Creator's

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<sup>55</sup> Bruggeman, Theology of the Old Testament, p.529



generosity is summed up with the author's assertion of blessing. The appropriate response to the miracle of creation can be discovered in Israelite doxology. In the following example, the psalmist presents the universe as singing the glories of the Creator and each passing day supports and proclaims to the next the message of God's grandeur. Nature is presented as having a language of its own that is to be understood by all of humanity. This psalmist speaks of his Creator as revealed and discovered in the order of nature. Thus to speak or act ill towards our environment is to desecrate it. Nature does not require human institutions or reactions in order to manifest this glory.

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
And the firmament proclaims his handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
And night to night declared knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
Their voice is not heard;  
Yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
And their words, to the ends of the world.

Psalms 19:1-4

The gift of blessing can be viewed as a communication of life from Yahweh which can bring vigor and strength. which according to the fifth day Priestly passages is Yahweh's first-born animals of creation and which our tradition practiced most frequently: the patriarchs, David, Solomon, Christ Jesus at his Eucharist and Ascension (Matthew 26:26, Luke 24:50).

## **Day Six**

Through Yahweh's utterance, further division and categorization occurs in verses 24 and 25 by the frothing of "all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things and wind animals of all kinds". Like the plants, the Priestly author regards the presentation of these animals as having been produced by the earth and for the second time, repeats the words "Let the earth bring forth" (verse eleven) indicating a creative participation of the maternal earth. The bond to the earth can suggest that the Priestly writer regarded their lives to be directly dependent upon the earth and only indirectly from Yahweh. In regard to the omission of a blessing communicated from Yahweh to the animals, as the previous paragraph mentioned von Rad simply states the omission was intentional.<sup>56</sup> Whether the discrepancy of blessing the water and air creatures but not the land animals was an intended omission or not clearly it can be perceived as a gift of His word and making given the authorization to be and reproduce themselves. The ability to praise God is given to animals in Isaiah 43:20; the burden of judgment placed on the animals is particularly strong in Hosea 4:3:

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel,  
For the Lord has a grievance,  
Against the inhabitants of the land:  
There is no fidelity, no mercy,  
No knowledge of God in the land.  
False swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery!  
In their lawlessness, bloodshed follows bloodshed.  
Therefore the land mourns,  
And everything that dwells in it languishes:  
The beasts of the field,

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<sup>56</sup> von Rad, Genesis, p.55

The birds of the air,  
And even the fish of the sea perish.

Hosea 4:1-3

It is significant that the prophet Hosea's primary concern was not the economic or political condition of his people but their moral condition. Hosea would have us understand that the moral breakdown of a people is the primary source of its collapse since it usually precedes and causes economic, political and ecological decay. The loss of character is more to be feared than the loss of any other possession. When instead of truth-seeking and mercy there is lying, stealing and killing then does the land mourn and languish. Hosea 4:6 provides a disarmingly simple answer to the cause of Israel's moral deterioration. Hosea states this moral decay springs from the religious illiteracy of his people; they simply do not know nor seek God and thus are destroying themselves and their environment due to this lack of knowledge. Our concern here is Yahweh's blessing of environmental diversity which gives creation its true vigor and vitality.

The Priestly account introduces the creation of man (verse 26) unlike any of his preceding work: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."; has been examined in a variety of ways with endless interpretations throughout the centuries. I believe the Priestly writer expressed his concept of humanity the best way he could by using the "in the image of God" phrase. Verse 26 can be viewed as the climax of the author's first chapter and this Priestly phrase supports the notion that human life has greater sanctity than other life forms as described in Genesis 9:1-7. When we are able to understand that the Priestly writer offered completely novel views of

sacredness of the whole human body; the powers of human thought, intelligence, judgment, compassion and action; the futility of worshipping earthly and multiple gods – then we can understand that the Priestly writer strived to release his readers from the meaningless prevalent worldview of his contemporaries. If a people's creation story is their foundation for meaning and value, and if our present ecological crisis is due to the fact that we still live and operate within systems and institutions which do not correspond to this new ecological reality of today – then learning this new ecological worldview would seem urgent for Christians. The visible truth of today's environmental damage and the Priestly author's truth of the "image of God" relationship does not contradict the truths of partnership between humanity and the natural world. Humanity is presently given about 1500 million hectares on which to grow food, yet forfeits about 10 million hectares per year due to various environmental stresses.<sup>57</sup> It is not in nature's image to harvest annual crops which leaves it bare and increasingly vulnerable to erosion, poisons, unlimited development and so forth. The concept of fertility is re-stimulated by numerous fertilizing techniques in the agricultural sector simply because the land's fertility is lost by this aggressive cropping. The fertility of other parts of creation, such as air, water and life forms has equally suffered in recent decades. Moreover, massive single species planting lessens a region's diversity and reduces resistance to disease – which in turn forces ever-potent insecticides and fungicides to protect the plants from the very disease by which they were able to combat. Indigenous diversity allows the multi-species to replenish the soils and lessens the water table pollution due to agricultural run-off. A recent example of how nature's image is inherently affected by man's

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<sup>57</sup> Nature, April 22, 1999, Vol.398, No.6729, p.126.

deformed image of his larger self and the interconnectedness of all creation occurred this summer along the Marne river of France. The run-off of agricultural pollution by the regions wine growers caused thousands of fish to die. The French military, piling them over 2 meters high along the banks of the river, estimated that the fish stock will require 2 decades to return to normal levels. It is ironic to note that the champagne industry has been striving to meet the increased demand for wines arising from the anticipated worldwide millennial celebrations.

The ethical implication of the “image of God” notion obliges Christians to conform to the image of Christ to the best of their ability which includes a renewed recognition that non-human life have intrinsic value and an aggressive protection of the planets bio-diversity. This understanding of a suffering partner is crucial when practicing one’s faith on the only known habitable planet of creation. It is false to try to reconcile the Priestly God-likeness imagery, which explicitly portrays a loving God delighting in the blessings of his creation, to this century’s notions of an environment serving humanity. The same effort of releasing which the Priestly author strived toward must be revisited in today’s world on the ecological front. People who view entire ecological systems as a singular organism do portray a closer likeness to their Creator than those who place humans aloof from nature. Nature possesses an intrinsic goodness by being a member of God’s community and by being our partner in creation. This is precisely the point which S. McEvenue made when he stated that God will be revealed in nature and not in human institutions.

The pagan world related its environment to what was perceived and imagined through symbols. Yet, the very asking of the question (and other questions as well) and the various responses to these inquiries do point to some kind of likeness of Yahweh. In similar accord, von Rad declares interpretations are to be rejected which proceed from an anthropological stance strange to the Old Testament and one-sidedly limit God's image to man's "dignity, personality, or abilities for moral decision". In short, von Rad dismisses an exclusively spiritual dimension for this Priestly verse.<sup>58</sup>

Undoubtedly, the final sentence of verse 26 has awakened an innumerable amount of comments and positions surrounding the Priestly author's "Let them (humanity) have dominion over" as a second characteristic of man and is found in Psalm 8:

When I behold your heavens, the  
Work of your fingers,  
The moon and the stars which you  
Set in place—  
What is man that you should be  
Mindful of him,  
Or the son of man that you should  
Care for him?  
You have made him little less than  
The angels,  
And have crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the  
Works of your hands,  
Putting all things under his feet:

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<sup>58</sup> von Rad, Genesis, p.58.

All sheep and oxen,  
Yes, and beasts of the field,  
The birds of the air, the fishes of the sea,  
And whatever swims the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Lord,  
How glorious is your name over all the earth!

The word dominion expressed in verse 26 and in the above psalm certainly points to an expression of kingship and royalty. This should not be all too surprisingly if one reaches back into the distant past to understand the ancient setting by which the Priestly author wrote his narrative. The complexities of his time is not the point here, yet it is necessary to point out family life was strictly patriarchal with strong clan ties demanding utmost loyalty or severe punishment, human labor was viewed as both a source of blessing (the gift of abundance) and a curse (difficult and painful task).<sup>59</sup> Legal justice was leveled by the clan or by royal authority, as no women, foreigners or children could serve as witnesses let alone judges. Kings seldom made new laws but rather built decisions around age-old customs and judgments. Nearly every nation in the Near East permitted slavery although Israel limited its use.<sup>60</sup> In the nomadic and agricultural setting it must be understood, within this brief sketch of ancient Israel that many pagan Gods would come and go, mix among the Israelites, leave a pagan practice or two behind. Pagans had no difficulty changing from one God to another, globally or locally. Artificially they would claim loyalty to Yahweh with no real intention of abandoning all their old beliefs in the bargain. This is precisely the challenge the Priestly author faced when articulating his

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<sup>59</sup> Boadt, see Chapter 13 for a general discussion of ancient Israelite social life.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.264.

creation narrative amongst the ideas of royalty or power-play prevalence encircling his daily life. The Priestly author offers little historical context to the notions of image and likeness but speaks of God's purpose more profoundly and this purpose is unequivocally of dominion, of authority which gives the non-human creation a new relation to God. It is necessary to appreciate the Priestly author's predicament: humanity who according to the contemporary myths was created to be a slave of the gods would be lifted above the environmental gods to become ruler of all of nature. The religious, physical and psychical slave of nature is now portrayed as lord of nature. This nascent dignity of man is only part of the effort of the Priestly narrative. In the context of the present age, it is simply religious ignorance, which supports the present day environmental slaughter based solely upon the "dominion" passage. Perhaps human interest and not biblical understanding is at play in this kind of thinking. Sadly, it is precisely this kind of blatant domination of nature which has been portrayed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. How else can a person dismiss the Western world's 280,000 hazardous waste sites, ponds and landfills containing most of the world's 70,000 common use chemicals?<sup>61</sup> Does humanity mirror the likeness of God when 90% of these hazardous sites pose a continuous threat to ground water or when countries and corporations sell waste products to foreign countries or to ocean bulk carriers?<sup>62</sup> Domination of the natural world lessens the beauty, the awe, the diversity of our planet in unlimited ways: quality food becomes a premium as it makes its way down from the upper oceans; elephant herds invade macro-plantations in desperate attempts to eat from their shrinking habitat which is being destroyed by economic

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<sup>61</sup> Worldwatch, paper 103, July 1991, p.16 & 97

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.16



development; clear cutting enormous tracks of vegetation before we know what we are clearing – resulting in scientific ignorance and human dilemmas; frequent air pollution advisories in hundreds of urban areas; future expectations in the arts, languages and histories are lost due to misspent opportunities offered by the natural world. Although some people do hold to the notion of domination of the environment – the most frightening aspect of this classic notion occurs when we truly acknowledge that we do not really know what we are dominating. Humans still do not know what most living things do or are about. The argument to counter this kind of ignorance is not discard what you do not understand. In this sense, humanity is throwing away knowledge. Furthermore, domination practices adversely affect complex climatic, biological, chemical and human systems, which require feedback. The systems with strong stabilizing feedback are more likely to persist than systems lacking such diverse stabilization. Species that are components of these stable systems will likely survive as well. These simple observations can explain the importance of a stable yet diverse Earth body and the illusion of humanity's unlimited power.

Fortunately, many people, albeit a minority, are beginning to realize what this means for the continued existence of humanity. Furthermore, it is too casual for the ecclesiastic community to bracket the ecological crisis under a “social justice” category – for creation is precisely where Christians worship their God and practice their faith. The ecological crisis is very immediate and real and transcends denominational practices. The unfinished business of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – feeding the poor and eliminating nuclear annihilation of the created world is inextricably

connected to the general destruction of our planet. When surveying this passing millenium, one common trait of the many admirable thinkers is their ability to be synthesizers of opposing and differing viewpoints. Life-giving principles can live on while most sinister notions eventually become sequestered. Examples of such divergent views coming together include reason and faith (Aquinas), Asian art and European technology (Gutenberg) and economic restraint and compassion (Ghandi). Our Christian tradition demands a similarly courageous and definitive 21<sup>st</sup> century response to the evolving ecological crisis which confronts us today.

The Priestly narrative's second blessing at verse 28 is in the present tense and Priestly states God's command quite matter of factly. This blessing, similar to verse 22 entails an enormous abundance of opportunity, beauty and responsibility in regards to fertility, multiplication filling subduing and dominance. Written at the beginning of verse 28 "God blessed them" would affirm the Priestly author's notion that humankind is a single entity and all humanity stands in union before their Creator. It is not unimportant that the text speaks of community rather than mirroring the individual. Although it is beyond the purpose here to fully explore New Testament material, Philippians 2:1-11 speaks of such community in connection with Jesus' readiness to turn from himself toward creation and toward his fellow creatures. It is an explicit call to form a new kind of human community and by extension a new natural community which expresses the divine image. Verse 29 is Yahweh's call for humanity to experience and to function in this environment and to be aware of its Holy source. It is now divinely ordained that man should eat from seed-bearing

plants and seed-bearing fruit. It can be viewed as the author's expression of peaceful coexistence with the animals of his world and his reluctance to feed on flesh and thus lessen the sacredness of all life. Traditionally, animals have played an indispensable role in agriculture but today's global livestock industry has put these creatures at odds with the environment.<sup>63</sup> A good dietician would promote a vegetable diet against a meat-rich diet, which contributes to the diseases of affluence. It is plausible to approach this verse with the view that by being created in his image, the narrative calls for a newness of the human community to escort and minister the interest of all life. Verse 31 concludes the six days of activity with an affirmation of the goodness of all, which God has made. The author points to Yahweh's supremacy over His creation and asserts total goodness of the six days of activity. Equally necessary is that God looks at everything and says creation is very good even though people may not have judged it to be so. It is created for God's purpose and for whatever ends he determines. The goodness includes everything from the nature and history of the cosmos down to the minutest environment of an organism not yet discovered. Implicit in the "goodness of everything" is the creature's inability to experience and pass judgment on the wholeness of creation, thus allowing tensions of joy and sorrow as well as positive aspects of ignorance.

The Priestly writer claims that his account of creation is no mere local reality but rather of universal reality beyond the boundaries of his horizon. This is in accordance with the true nature of all things. Although the Sabbath is not mentioned, nor that humanity should rest during this holy and seventh day, it can be implied that

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<sup>63</sup> Worldwatch Paper 79, September 1987, p.38.

the Priestly author used God's resting day as a further example and distinction of his people. Observance of the Sabbath would allow Israelite identification and perhaps preserve itself from assimilation. It is possible that the Priestly writer simply felt it necessary to have a day of rest from daily work. Eventually, the keeping of the Sabbath rest became one of the three great marks of the Jews. Humanity can rest on the Sabbath as a disciplined reminder of our Creator and in like fashion we are to fashion a new rest for all creation and the Sabbath is not to be a day of sleep. It is important to point out that the Priestly author connects the Sabbath day with Creation and not with some event in the life of one of the patriarchs or in the history of Israel. In this sense the observance of the seventh day is universally valid, binding for all humankind and that Judaism is not merely a local religion. The Sabbath is an expression of confidence by the Priestly author for people to trust God and to end (at least for one day) the grasping of possessions. In contrast to the gods of nature, the Priestly author's God is at peace with his creation and the well being of his rule and thus able to rest during the seventh day.

Without trust in the Creator as expressed in the Priestly narrative a worldview of chaos and environmental instability is a continual certainty. Humanity understands that the ecological systems of our planet are always in states of fluctuations and inter-relationships with other creatures. God freely made it possible for creation to come into being, shaping and reshaping the world in the process. The world that came into being is one that can be acted on by humanity. Freedom exists not only when action is sufficiently unconstrained, but also when there is a possibility of making a

difference. For Christians of our times, the world must be such that differences may always be made. To the degree by which individuals attend to ecological health, we communicate to others our own psychic health, our own diversity and our own love and trust in the Creator. The Priestly creation narrative provides genuine ecological insights for today's world which is environmentally deprived and we will have to actualize our own various stages of creating, severing and ordering to eliminate the ecological chaos which is part of daily experience. It is important to understand that even "good" people can blind themselves to the evil that is going on in front of their eyes. The environmental crisis is a vast destruction of life in which we all participate, that threatens to overwhelm us and that will not go away unless we resist the unjust suffering of our planet. We are now in ecological chaos because of our failure to respect ecological order.

## **THE YAHWIST ACCOUNT**

In similar fashion to the previous section, this part of the thesis will offer a brief overview of the Yahwist creation account followed by an interpretation of the text, which might provide impetus for ecological responsibility and further awareness of our dependency upon our creation partner. It is with hope that by the treatment of this text individuals will react in a personal way towards environmental care. In Sean McEvenue's *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, he notes the power of Scripture in ecological terms by the degree of conversion upon the real life of the reader. The reader has to react either by complying, or rejecting, or else by accepting a status of guilt when it comes to environmental concerns.<sup>64</sup> Eco-catastrophe is not some remote possibility in the future. It is here now – affecting all continents.<sup>65</sup> Never before in human history has there been an extinction rate comparable to today. Without a life-giving ecological conversion, humanity will remain unable to adjust its activities into positive environmental patterns which we are increasingly becoming aware of. This is the new ecological reality, which must be recognized and managed because ecological concerns necessarily go hand in hand with all peoples.

It is generally accepted among classical source critics that the Yahwist creation account pre-dates the Priestly creation account and that the Yahwist author reached back into the primitive cultures and its stories of creation to help him

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<sup>64</sup> McEvenue, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, p.60-61

<sup>65</sup> Berry, T. and Clarke, T., *Befriending the Earth: A Reconciliation*, closing Chapter.

understand his own experience. When we read this account of creation, we are reading the final form of an address to the author's contemporaries in ancient Israel. For the present question, we may accept the traditional hypothesis of the Yahwistic authorship occurring toward the end of the tenth century B.C.E. At the same time we are reading an accumulation and a diversity of tradition dating into the far distant past in the forms of themes which have been preserved, distributed and debated until today. C. Westermann states in his book *Genesis* that there is a blending of two narratives within the whole Yahwist creation account. Briefly (a) one narrative tells how God put man in the garden, punished and removed him from the garden once man violated God's command, and (b) the second narrative tells how at the beginning God formed man, breathed life into him yet realized man would be incomplete without a suitable partner. It certainly is not the intent here to address the blending of the two narratives into one, but to emphasize that no person can be isolated from his fellow creature or Creator. The Yahwist author states in Genesis 2:15 that his fellow Israelites have a personal relationship with God. In this sense, humans are inevitably linked with God and the natural world. It is pertinent to this paper to highlight two authorial motifs noted by Westermann. Firstly, disobedience forced man's expulsion from a garden which placed food, obligation and care before man. The Yahwist presents humanity as threatened by his own nature by rising up against his Creator. The second story is that man remained joyless until united with his counterpart leading to the motif of community. In this sense, a person remains completely isolated without this unity of Creator, partner and nature's garden. The individual person is in pain outside of relationships.

The Yahwist creation story provides a completely different ecological mood than the Priestly account in that this faithful declaration positions the story in a very local and personal world. The Yahwist author builds his narrative around his people's local habitat and daily existence. The earth is viewed as humanity's field of endeavors and accomplishments. The reader of this text must acknowledge the author's interest in Yahweh as a sender of blessings. The Yahwist writer reached backwards into tradition to tell his story of creation and blessings provided by the Creator.

#### ***ECOLOGICAL COMMENTARY - GENESIS 2:4b – 2:18***

The Yahwist writer immediately declares God as the maker of the earth and heavens, thus offering his readers a primary and encompassing principle of cosmology. Although no process and sequence is offered in this opening passage it is itself a revelation of God's will for all of creation. This is the Yahwist understanding of the truth about the nature of all reality – the Creator is the source of all meaning. It is necessary to point out that in our search for new levels of truth and meaning this generation has been given opportunities to begin to explore the universe beyond this planet. Our understanding of the Earth has been greatly advanced as a result of space research. For example, only in the lifeless void of space can the influence of gravity and other earthly phenomena be separated from the biological and chemical processes we want to understand. Apart from the vast increase in our knowledge of our nearest neighbors, we have been bequeathed computer miniaturization, improvements in



communications, engineering and medicine.<sup>66</sup> Most importantly is our sense of a new cosmology, the gift of deeper awareness, responsibility and awe, which can inspire our future and give us a wider sense of dominion. In this regard, our emerging knowledge of the Universe can overwhelm all previous conceptions in that it draws them all into a comprehensive fullness and further highlights the interconnectedness of our global village. This continual search for meaning and understanding is precisely what set the early Israelites apart from their contemporaries.

The Yahwist author provides the barest of descriptions in his opening verses by allowing the negative conditions to designate his immediate environment prior to his confident sixth verse in which a stream was “watering the surface soil”. These negative conditions consist of no field shrub, no grass, no rain, no humanity and no cosmic struggle. The Yahwist sets the earthly conditions by describing in verses 5 and 6 the bareness of land due to the lack of vegetation and water. Today, ecological suffering is far too common in many parts of the world and the bareness of so much vegetation seen during this past century is literally undoing the work of centuries of organic evolution. Humanity’s intimate connection to the land ensures that it will not escape feeling the effects of its demise. We know vegetation has had a long history of stress and acidification, a history that offers a critical backdrop for considering a new bareness from air pollution and acid rain.<sup>67</sup> The passage of “no field shrub or rain” implies that they receive their function directly from God and that the earth remains lifeless – but by the will of the Creator. Undoubtedly, the Yahwist author

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<sup>66</sup> Dowd, M., Earthspirit, p.37.

<sup>67</sup> Postal, S., Worldwatch #58, March 1984, p.87.

views vegetation and water as necessary primary elements for life by the mere mention of these environmental components.

A desert motif can be implied due to this lack of vegetation and water when one considers the constant presence of vast arid lands as home for the early Israelites. Furthermore, a nomadic lifestyle, bounded by the desert was common for large portions of the ancient Israelite population. The harsh environment pressed most inescapably upon their consciousness.<sup>68</sup> It was the occasional oasis and its surrounding living beauty, which refreshed and released the hardships of their lives. Furthermore, Isaiah 35:7, 43:19 states that waters be held as a source of life and that spring water be of a higher value than waters from stagnant pools. In the Yahwist narrative, verse 6 is fashioned with the notion that God created the welling stream and thus provides all things upon which life depends.

Whether life moves through the vastness of the unexplored universe or through minute spots of microbiology, its dependence upon Yahweh is total and unquestioned. Reverence for all life forms is a natural way of affirming the reverence due for God. Compassion can serve as the bridge between love for God and love for all life forms. An important ethical awakening consists of the experience of compassion. When reverence for other creatures becomes depleted a person is left with only superficial principles which do not belong to him and rolls off him. It is

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<sup>68</sup> Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, p.252.

our duty to share, maintain and inspire life, for this obligation can be a source of constant renewal of self and of creation.

Once the earthly setting is developed, the Yahwist writer immediately focuses upon one of the two interwoven narrative themes, namely the formation of the living being (Verse 7) out of clay (adama) and breath. It is an ancient, classical idea that man should be made from the clay of the earth and occurs frequently in Hebrew Scripture (Isaiah 29:16, Job 4:19, 10:8 and in Psalms 90:3, 104:29, 146:4). According to the Yahwist, this creative motif is presented in two stages: the designer working his clay and the provider blowing the breath of life into man. The Yahwist writer advises his faithful readers that all humanity receives existence from God and this existence is created by Him. Humanity consists of the earthy elements, which are found on and in our planet. It is significant to point out that up to this point in the narrative, the Yahwist author has not divided up nor discriminated the formation of humanity from the animals which, according to verse 19, are formed out of the ground by God. In like manner, the reading Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 indicates a commonness of creation by declaring all creatures come from dust and will return to it and that the variance and estrangement of this earthly familiarity belongs only to the motive and moment of God:

“For the lot of man and of beast is one lot;  
The one dies as well as the other.  
Both have the same life-breath,  
And man has no advantage over the beast.

The commonness of the earthly elements is further illustrated in the last half of this century by the discovery of DNA which contains the biological data and instruction for making protein – the basic building blocks of growth. Science has excelerated to such an extent that it is believed that in a few years a complete human DNA mapping will be achieved.<sup>69</sup> Of course, the understandable fears which make it into the media include such fears as: ignorant manipulation of not knowing the full consequences of such efforts; piracy, employers seeking health data and blatant manipulation of gene discoveries which move from a cure of lethal maladies to attending to casual ailments. On the positive side, is the hopeful discovery of ill genes for such horrific diseases as Huntington's, Lou Gehrig's, cystic fibrosis. AIDS, many cancers as well as the capability of major organ transplants and growth.<sup>70</sup> We know agricultural companies have already marketed bio-engineered plant products which do not spoil and dairy cows have been injected with growth hormones in order to produce greater volumes of milk.<sup>71</sup> Genetically modified (GM) foods, which may very well play a major role in realizing hunger relief, has produced some general as well as scientific unrest in Europe according to the Guardian Weekly of March 14, 1999. The general thrust of this fear is based on scientific ignorance of the possible effects of GM foodstuffs on humans, the environment, fertility and lifespan of wildlife and the general weakening of the gene pool of all forms of life.

Because of the possibility of such profound change in life forms it is

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<sup>69</sup> Nature, Vol.398, No.6729, April 22,1999, p.639.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.639.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.640.

imperative science not be given free and unlimited potential in this area of research. The recognition that we are able to determine various forms of life in a certain sense by an infinite collection of genetic data that is knowable will forever change our view of ourselves. It is a kind of closing of one frontier and opening of another. It is my belief that the new genetic discoveries bode more good than ill and that a reasonable and responsible society can curb abuses to the extent of its ethical affirmation of life. We must come once more under the control of the ideals of a true life-giving civilization for it is a strength to be trusting to ourselves, our environment and our imagination.

The Yahwist writer states that God planted a garden and placed the formed man inside the garden. It can be implied by Genesis 2:5 that this garden be tilled and kept. In this sense, the idea of a work-less paradise is foreign to the Yahwist writer for physical effort is required to care for the garden. The Yahwist writer expresses that God creates that on which all life depends and humanity only fashions (tilling) that which is provided by the Creator. The land within the garden requires it to be worked and by being entrusted with this environment, humanity can be capable and responsible towards this commission. Furthermore, a notion of trust from God towards man is implicit in this care for this garden. This care is shown in the Genesis 2:15 directive “to cultivate and care for”, “the delightful and good food” (Genesis 2:9).

It is from the ecological perspective that it is possible to see that what has been called scientific agriculture is in reality an anti-care model of land use. The violence to nature which seems intrinsic to the domination model is also associated with violence to all people. For example, although grain production during the last 30 years has doubled – the rate of nitrogen fertilization increased 7 times while phosphorous feeding of crops increased 4 times in the same period.<sup>72</sup> These two chemicals are major sources of nutrient loading into freshwater and near-shore marine ecosystems. Agriculture contributes 80% of the annual increase in atmospheric Nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O) which is one of the greenhouse gases which contributes to the depletion of stratospheric ozone – which in turn allows the burning of the earth to occur.<sup>73</sup> We must acknowledge that land is hallowed ground which roots all elements of life. Clearly this is a vital moment for humanity to reassert our compassion, care and respect for the Earth and it is not unreasonable to predict that by the end of this coming century the only large mammals remaining will be those that we humans choose to allow to exist. People must become less numb to this kind of systemic impact on various life-support systems. Care of creation given to us by the Yahwist narrative calls for all areas of the earth to be subject to the knowable principle of conservation and preservation so that the natural world be safeguarded. The ecological damage occurring on a global scale certainly signals humanity's untrustworthiness in this regard – for the land is becoming less resilient due to the carelessness of its gardeners. A metaphor for moral fruitfulness can be found in Isaiah 5:1-7 by which attentive care will forestall harsh judgment for peoples.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p.641.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.641.

Israel is the vineyard of the Lord Almighty;  
The people of Judah are the vines he planted.  
He expected them to do what was good,  
But instead they committed murder.  
He expected them to do what was right,  
But their victims cried out for justice.

Isaiah 5:7

Once the formed man is placed in the garden, God caused numerous delightful trees to grow with the tree of life placed in the middle of the garden. This conception of tree of life appears in various passages within the Scripture (Proverbs 3:18, 13:12, Revelations 2:7) and appears in the Gilgamesh and Babylonian myths under the notions of “plant of life”, “water of life” and “bread of life”.<sup>74</sup> According to the Yahwist author the tree of life was placed in the center of the holy garden with the intent of common observation and that the other trees produced food which was good to eat. In this respect the garden’s intent was for humanity’s provision and happiness, yet it is common knowledge that these provisions and the joy they are able to bring to humanity are economically disjointed. For example, according to the Worldwatch Institute a non-profit research group, most countries still have only a vague idea of the magnitude of air, water and soil contamination caused by industrial activity. The difficulty here is not the narrow confines of economic activity but the ecological and sacred ignorance of such activity. This ignorance is a source of bias.

In recent years there have been attempts to put a monetary value on the provisions which humans presently enjoy. Two such studies are: “Nature Services”

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<sup>74</sup> Vawter, On Genesis, p.69.

by Gretchen Daily and “The Work of Nature” written by Yvonne Baskin, both published by Island Press in 1997. Posing such economic questions concerning the dollar value of various ecosystems may seem crass and misguided, but for the urgent reality of the environmental crisis this is one approach to jolt people into care of creation, which has been undervalued and understudied in so many ways. By attempting to price eco-services, these two authors provide quantitative estimates of what is lost when we degrade nature. Such studies might serve as eye-openers by taking explicit account of the enormous trade-offs involved on such environmental issues as land use. In this sense, the pricing of nature may be one way to slow the loss of precious ecosystems, which have incalculable value for our planet. Economists and ecologists are also beginning to collaborate together as ecology is no longer considered a minor “green” nuisance. Economists are beginning to include such interactive items as environmental costs to future generations, lower levels of pollution versus production and land use. Ecologists are also trying to awaken governments up to the fact that their annual GDP accounting practices are highly misleading tallies of annual economic health. A country’s GDP may remain quite positive while its natural environment gets degraded and its land poisoned – thus the GDP is not affected while these “assets” disappear. Unquestionably, we have bent the rules when it comes to environmental care as portrayed in the Yahwist narrative.

Cultivation and care are authorial words which reminds all faithful listeners to renew their consciousness of the elemental realities on which all life depends and with a relationship which must exist if it is to endure in its goodness. The best of



man's nature, his praise to his Creator can not survive without this natural beauty. What ultimately appears, beauty or ugliness, depends upon this care of the ground and is similar to the heart of humanity which produces nothing unless it is received from Yahweh. The verbs of Genesis 2:15 to cultivate (till) and care (keep) for the earth humanity is deeply embedded in the sharing of work. In this sense there is no indication of lofty sensual enjoyment for one's earthly life, but a call to service under the will of the Creator. This type of service calls for interdisciplinary efforts and an understanding that various human endeavors are on different scales of time. For example, culture requires time to assess science not only at the ecological level but also its potential impact on values, traditions, beliefs and so forth. In this regard, there is an urgent need to focus environmental care on the achievable, which can be realistically addressed, in the next few short years. All religious people must be concerned when technology threatens to outstrip efforts to place their application in an ethical context. For it is the arrogance of modern advancements to think that we can continually control, direct and dominate the natural world. It is an illusion of unlimited powers. Yet, building on biblical insight, cultivation and care can provide all the provisions necessary for humanity and as such rebut the Job 12:7-10 passage that portrays an outer manifestation of a deeper inner crisis. The land is given to Adam, (i.e. to all humans) to both care for, be responsible for and enjoy. We must recall the land of Israel which was given to the 12 tribes by God, not just for one generation but for all generations (Joshua 15).

With a lesser degree of cosmic emphasis than the Priestly writer, the Yahwist narrative primarily remains focused on personal relationships with other earthly creatures and of course with God. The ecological notions portrayed in the Yahwist creation account are timeless as they pertain to all ages of human conduct and demand universal obligation under its Creator. God's ordering for cultivation and care should move Christians to respond to this ecological dimension of their faith. The sense that humans today are to be trustees of nature – protecting, conserving the natural world in accord with God's acts simply falls short of the Yahwist creation narrative. Environmental morality as outlined in the Yahwist text requires humanity not to consider nature as a stranger – even though we are most ignorant of its complex riddles. By reading this text we certainly are aware of how God feels about nature, as He is a force to be reckoned with who rules with supremacy. It is necessary for Christians to confirm the goodness of creation – for the Yahwist author portrays a God who makes things happen for humanity and not for his own glory. One can ascertain a correlation between worship and environmental care in which a very personal decision must be made to surrender to the utter dependence of God and take care of the blessings given by Him.

## **COMPARISON OF THE TWO CREATION ACCOUNTS**

The two creation narratives must undoubtedly be situated in the context of the remainder of Israel's testimony of faith in Yahweh and if not so understood, then these two accounts can be susceptible to various religious and intellectual usage not wholly based upon Yahweh's creative gift of life. Situated in their reality, the authors were not blind to the tragedy and conflict of their environment yet they refused to seek answers in the status quo of natural chaos and multiple natural gods. Both the Priestly and Yahwist creation accounts uncluttered their universe. Whatever may be the preferred dating of these texts, the complex interplay of source material surfaced in each one's perception of their environment. Thus Israel spoke of the natural world in differing expressions. This reliance upon tradition is not dissimilar to the earliest Christians who had to rely upon an already existing pre-Christian history.

Concrete differences of environmental emphasis does exist between the Priestly and Yahwist accounts as the former purports dominion while the Yahwist text exercises equality with the whole of Yahweh's creation. The Priestly creation story being longer and containing much more detailed environmental material than the Yahwist presents God's power, freedom and control over Creation. Nevertheless and in direct opposition to this tradition, the Priestly writer methodically affirms many ecological insights of Israel's faith which include:

- 1) Singularity and Unity of Origin from Yahweh
- 2) Yahweh's goodness of the created environmental order
- 3) Natural world (and matter) is good and not magical
- 4) Yahweh's word enacts creation with limitations
- 5) Yahweh places humanity above other creatures
- 6) Yahweh commands human responsibility
- 7) Humanity is to share divine gifts, work and rest

The Yahwist author immediately focuses on his earthly habitant with man as his first creature for in contrast to the Priestly account, the Yahwist account presents no material for a hint of a cosmic struggle based upon a plurality of nature wills. The Priestly account provides man at the peak of the creating formula whereas the Yahwist portrays an earthly service which does not exist in the Priestly story and definitely connects a closeness with the environment as opposed the clear presence of man, structurally developed in the first creation account. The Yahwist allows ecological perceptions albeit with greater anthropomorphic tendencies:

- 1) God is Creator of universe
- 2) God formed all creatures from earthly elements
- 3) God provided a delightful and good environment
- 4) God ordered cultivation and care for the earth
- 5) God allowed limited freedom
- 6) God needed man to make the garden happen

Although both accounts utilize ancient mythical motifs in their creation stories, the Yahwist undoubtedly has less historical and environmentally pertinent

material than its counterpart. The Priestly author offers a piece of literature, which is technically systematic with a precise chronology of happenings not explicitly found in the Yahwist and stresses notions of divinity outwardly. While these ideas of divinity (e.g. blessings and image) can be valid in the Yahwist via concepts such as partner and stewardship they must be generated through discernment. Should the Yahwist be the older tradition then the story of the general is earlier than the story of the particular, which does offer much more ecological significance.

The Priestly account offers little emotional suspense with no notions of sin, unclean environment or unclean animals. There is minimal reference to the interaction between woman and man although humans are the culmination of creative acts. He offers the powers of procreation simultaneously to male and female after a blessing. The Yahwist's described partners are joined together only after an unsatisfactory searching of the formed man and the Yahwist God is not portrayed as a contented God looking upon his domain. Positively, the Priestly reveals a sensible ordering of nature, paralleling no psychological or aggressive demands other than the certain demands of joy and blessings. The Priestly author connects all creatures via Yahweh's blessings, yet separates humanity with the "image of God" passage with not a word of the process involving the stuff from which man was made of, nor any shaping of the human form, nor any geographical grounding for man as the Yahwist does by his "four rivers" insertions. The Priestly emphasis is on what was created and for what purpose and how this creature status can give meaning to oneself and the planet around him. By not presenting any material that God used for our planet and

speaking of the whole human race, the Priestly writer preserves a highest degree of awe and freedom for the Creator. This notion follows the idea that the Priestly provides this formulation of power and might (by firstly decreeing something and then creating it) and portrays his God as being aloof from the mundane, earthly realm of human experiences. The Yahwist creation narrative does not provide this majestic creative power. It is a Priestly characteristic to use repetitive verbs in presenting different ways of creation (the creating, making, willing). It is correct to generally view the Yahwist narrative to be more anthropomorphic than the supreme royalties found in the first Genesis account. Furthermore, the creation of man by the earthly elements does not imply subordination any more than the creating of woman from man – for it is precisely the assault against nature's gods, which the two writers sought.

Beyond the climax of the human it can be implied that all creation – by following its Creator – observe a day of rest, although the Priestly writer does not explicitly state whether Israel nor creation will be faithful to Yahweh on this account. Observation of a holy and restful day is absent in the Yahwist version. Both authors allow man's giving of names to the animals yet under the Yahwist context, animals give man meaning not only as a fellow creature, but as a helpful partner within creation and thus perhaps the Yahwist account is more humane in that there is community among creatures. The Priestly narrative provides a divisional aspect of biologically different species with no functional relationship as in the Yahwist narrative. Certainly, the ability to give and assign names can imply an intellectual

dominance as well as experience and observation, which allows an understanding by which the two Creation authors strive to portray unique human qualities by comparison with fellow creatures. No such comparison was related about the vegetative world.

There exists a number of literary units which the two creation authors provided which have profound ecological ramifications for their peoples as well as universal relationships. Although outside of our scope of inquiry, an exhaustive study must embrace the whole of Scripture and in particular the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which brings God into everything “that exists”. For the various biblical sources take their readers through such diverse and rich itinerary of faith that neither creation author cringed in hopelessness before the chaotic beliefs of their day. There is no argumentation, only a faithful story-telling in which lyrics were quite common in addition to ecological notions subject not only to the two creation accounts. Examples of such include the lyrical pronouncements of Genesis 9:1-7 where the environment is profoundly connected to the flood passage (sin, punishment, chaos and greening); fertility and multiplication are certainly a cause of the genealogies of Genesis 5:1-2; and the garden expulsion can interest the Genesis 6-9 reader in terms of punishment. Neither author allowed a static environment, but sought a newness to their religious beliefs, which is similarly discovered in their newness of literature. This non-classical literalism does not allow for a historical nor ecological single event for faithful trust but rather – the addressers transcended their contemporary data. In this way both authors moved in literary as well as ecological boldness with

imperative environmental intent and claim which contains an optimistic and a reflective view for humanity and its simplifications within creation.

Both the Priestly and the Yahwist creation stories treat God in the third person by being the object of the narratives and not part of the conversation. The authors put limits on all creatures and assert recognition of differences and boundaries for creation as well as a knowing of community. Surely the ancient Israelite knowers of these two texts reflected upon the environmental order of the world around them and the prohibitions offered in each narrative. Both authors must have been careful writers of text, careful listeners to a chaotic present by reckoning that something was ill in their world which opposed the reality of their Yahweh. This notion is articulated in the authors' expressions of the universe's interconnections which are divinely willed, real and can be nurtured. Each author underscores divine blessings of his world and that should care be foreign to Yahweh's blessing then the environment can be undone. Neither author takes a scientific stand concerning the origin of the universe for each narrative contains notions of divinity and most biblical passages focus upon the earth. Nevertheless, each author takes an authentic stand based upon God's will, speech and action in that humanity's relationship, assured by the Priestly account and somewhat precarious in the Yahwist version, is truly faithful only in the Creator-Creature context. Certainly both the Priestly and Yahwist accounts were limited in forms of literary expressions of knowledge and imagination. By utilizing various motifs the two creation authors portrayed a God that is both intimate (demanding day to day attention and responsibility to His creation) and



somewhat distant (requiring creation to come to grips with its Creator). Each in their own way, the authors situate the environment under a non-smothering God whose power allows a sense of freedom in a “let be” style versus a “must be” quality. One could almost ascertain that Yahweh is not so overly concerned with humans only – for the God of the Priestly and Yahwist creation accounts values all creatures. The two creation narratives voice the Creators concern for His whole environment – the universe. Thus, the authors did not allow themselves limited quietness in their faithful presentations of creation or in the formation of the earth, but offered various ways of expressing ecological meaning for their readers, under this Creator-Creation context.

## **JUDGMENT OF INTERPRETATION**

The second exegetical operation of this paper is to ascertain whether the ecological insights derived from the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives are indeed correct, somewhat probable or incorrect. Initiated from one's personal interest and viewpoint the interpretation of a text is a process of learning of the general as well as the particular. It is within the Lonergan context of meaning that judgment of facts and judgments of value can be derived. The categories employed in understanding the Genesis creation narratives moved from the author's objects (God, activity), literary units, the author's setting (history) and to my own insights and reflections from the inquiry. It is from this process of perception, inquiry and reflection that one is able to pass on judgment.

When a reflective person reads Genesis 1-2:18 and allows the words of the passages to be assimilated, then there can arise a clear and general sense that the two creation narratives express a divinely created world whereby humanity and the natural world are inextricably connected under the creative acts of Yahweh. This wholeness of meaning is under the context of the author's life, his times, and his challenges and under the scope and aim of the author's perspectives of reality. We know the Priestly and Yahwist writers were heirs of an already formed tradition and their purpose included passing on something which they received. The authors' adapted traditions into their community and into their religious confession of Yahweh as Savior. The created cosmos as presented by the Priestly and Yahwist writers is

extended to the whole of history and the whole of creation. With this unity of the created world and its history, Israel affirmed that all creation realizes its meaning of God: the One who creates, the One who saves. Theologically significant is the freeing of creation from mythology for it was God alone who gave creation its success, rooted in the blessings bestowed upon creation.

One can derive value from this general reading of the Genesis creation material. The two creation stories do affirm the orderly creative acts of Yahweh and the blessings given to the environment and to humanity. One's normal experience, intellect, reflection is not able to deny the importance of the goodness of creation. The facts of order and goodness of creation are derived from understanding the text (data) yet do entail subjectivity in the order of truths or falsities. Furthermore, these facts of order and goodness are not historical trends or urges but values of understandings, values of truths and values of acts by which responsibility is the authentic response grown out of the empirical, intellectual and rational operations. These four non-logical operations (be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible) are at the core of B. Lonergan's work, *Method in Theology* and demand authentic conversion should one be open to environmental care. Judgments of value require knowledge of ecological reality of the past and present, a response to one's personal values and cultivation thereof and a moral transcendence which allows for growth through conversion which can be expressed in a variety of ways for the love of all creation.

The particularities of the two creation accounts provide much ecological material in terms of symbols, imagery, motifs, literary units and structure. The words used in the narratives point to a single unique Creator creating a unique environment. Humanity is unique within this created order and is in an immediate unique relationship with Yahweh. The two creation narratives point to a God who is to be praised as opposed to humanity's praising of material goods. Humanity is orientated to the land, to the world where everything that will take place concerning God's dealing with creation will occur. The creation authors announce ecological insights through divine order from chaos, blessings and dominion. The theme of dominion, if situated in its proper historical setting can not give support for those people of today who wish to dominate the natural world. The abuse of the natural resources was not the intention of the Priestly writer.

Through divine creation, fundamental features of nature are revealed which confirms value through reciprocal relationships between humanity and the natural world. The Priestly and Yahwist authors portrayed a God who respected all life and what makes humanity into the "image of God" is to live in accordance with God's creative acts. Each creation narrative sets out a program for environmental care with trust in Yahweh and in their future. Each reader of the creation narratives will have to react, make obligations and pray if one wishes to make a fundamental change. One is, of course, free to reject these judgments and continue to praise creation alone. The ecological insights gained from ancient Israel can be made relevant in today's world only by the authors' truths concerning God's revelation into Israel's history. The

secular environmental movements of today can only argue for environmental care from the perspective of human interest. A secular approach can not discern any lasting ecological protection for there is no inherent respect for creation in such action.

### **RELEVANCY FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIANS**

This third exegetical operation within Bernard Lonergan's *Specialty of Interpretation* has its purpose in communicating the message derived from understanding and judging the Priestly and Yahwist creation narratives. Lonergan discusses the importance that his six other specialties have upon interpretation of texts. It is through research that one discovers what was meant; the author's historical setting allows insight into the intentions of the author; certainly dialectic invites and even demands the exegete to become more acutely aware of ecological challenges of today in addition to a conversion on a higher order and to continue to objectify one's personal and community stance.

The Christian tradition with its formidable past is significant in today's world which faces unprecedented ecological peril that intersects all social issues. The generation of today has entered into a qualitatively different era in which humanity's capability to affect global change is simply without precedent. With this in mind, this final section will assess the relevancy of the two Genesis creation narratives under the

following headings: Order from Chaos; Goodness of Creation; Image of God; Care and Cultivation. The thesis will conclude by summarizing the ecological notions of this paper in light of Christian Scripture.

## 1) Order from Chaos

As stated earlier in the Scope of Inquiry section, the Hebrew Bible which is central to the religious traditions of Judaism and Christianity presents the non-human creation as a well ordered design under the providence of the creator. This understanding of order and purpose can not exist in a vacuum. The Hebrews certainly believed that worship, good works and moral value were enshrined in this created order. In today's world, disruptions of the natural order are regarded as a kind of disharmony in human order. The maintenance of order and the stability of our environment are to be central goals of social, moral and religious societies. Yet, we build apartment buildings next to oceans or housing next to mountains only to cry natural disaster when, in fact, no natural chaotic breakdown occurred – only human foolishness and interference. To this point, we may recall from Romans 12:2:

“Do not be conformed to the world where you live  
But rather be transformed through the renewal  
Of your mind. You must discern the will  
Of God, what is good, what pleases, what is perfect.”

In a recent study of the Hebrew Bible, *The Cosmic Covenant*, Robert Murray finds that the Hebrew texts reflect the same awareness of order and relationality of human and non-human life systems which characterizes all primal cultures.<sup>75</sup> Murray argues that rituals and laws of early Israelite covenant community are designed, in part to preserve order in the face of those who believed cosmic forces threatened their

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<sup>75</sup> Murray, R., *The Cosmic Covenant*, p.117.

very existence. This tradition is given to us from Jeremiah with hints of controlling the power of the seas.

Have you no fear of me, says the Lord  
Will you not tremble before me,  
Who set the sand as bounds for the sea  
A limit it never can pass?  
Its waves may heave and toss, but they are powerless;  
Roar as they may, they cannot pass.  
But this people has a rebellious and defiant heart;  
They have rebelled and gone their own way.

Jeremiah 5.21-3

The ordering of time and seasons, of oceans and rivers, of deserts and fertile plains may be said to belong to the covenant and to the divine blessing of all of creation.<sup>76</sup> The covenant, which was established after the Flood, offered the promise that fruitfulness of the earth would not again be threatened by the bursting forth of chaotic waters. It was a covenant made between God and humans “and living things of every kind” and affirmed to all creation that God’s ordering from chaos of the cosmos would not be again abandoned. From this passage we may add:

While the earth lasts  
Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,  
Summer and winter, day and night,  
Shall never cease.

Genesis 8:22

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<sup>76</sup> Northcroft, M., The Environment and Christian Ethics, p.168



The covenant can bind in a fundamental and permanent way an order, which unites all orders of creation to Yahweh. It is in every sense a cosmic covenant by which all life pursues its purposes. Liturgically, the Genesis 9 account of the covenant joins with the Genesis 1 account of goodness. This is reflected by the belief that worship and sacred rituals of human communities interact with the order of nature and the cosmos.<sup>77</sup> Many of the liturgies, songs and prayers of Psalms refer to a king and notably King David. Understood in this light the relationship between the fertility and order of the land with the complementary health and wisdom of the king is a powerful theme running through Hebrew Scripture. Psalms 72 is evidence of this literary function: The Psalms of Asaph and in particular Psalms 74-79 do show elements of rituals designed to preserve the order of heaven and earth and to maintain the blessing from the covenant. These Psalms strive against chaos by invoking the divine name over all cosmic forces. Following example is Psalms 74:9.

All our sacred symbols are gone;  
There are no prophets left,  
And no one knows how long this will last.  
How long, O God will our enemies laugh at you  
Will they insult your name forever?  
Why have you refused to help us?  
Why do you keep your hands behind you.

Psalms 75 describes the power and the might by which Yahweh can put down the human and environmental elements, which tend to disorder and chaos. The true worship of Yahweh is also linked to the environment in the summary law in

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p.169

Exodus. This is known from our first commandment to abstain from idolatry of the natural order and instead to worship Yahweh alone. The significant association here is to treat our local environment and the ever-reachable universe as a divine gift rather than an object of worship. True worship is related to true blessings and order. Within any age, unjust kings are not able to worship truly and are a cause of much disorder and chaos. Again, we have the words of Jeremiah who clearly connects ecological devastation with abandoning worship of Yahweh:

Does the snow of Lebanon vanish from the lofty crag?  
Do the proud waters run dry, so coolly flowing?  
And yet my people have forgotten me;  
They burn their incense to a Nothing  
They have lost their footing in their ways, on the  
Roads of former times, to walk in tortuous paths,  
A way unmarked.  
They will make their country desolate,  
Everlastingly derided;  
Ever passer-by will be appalled at it and shake his head.

Jeremiah 18:14-16

The pride of Hebrew society and specifically the kings had denuded valleys of great cedars for their great building projects. The wealthy grew richer, society became unequal and the fertility of the land decreased.<sup>78</sup> This devastation of the land can be interpreted as the consequence of human revolt against the created order and the wisdom of Yahweh. Waste, greed, injustice and idolatry are contrary to this

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.171.

order and undermine the unity of creation under Yahweh creative acts. Perhaps the most compelling passage in this regard comes from Isaiah:

See how Yahweh lays the earth waste,  
Makes it a desert, buckles its surface,  
Scatters its inhabitants,  
Priest and people alike, master and slave,  
Mistress and maid, seller and buyer,  
Lender and borrower, creditor and debtor,  
Ravaged, ravaged the earth,  
Despoiled, despoiled as Yahweh has said.  
The earth is mourning, withering,  
The heavens are pining away with the earth.  
The earth is defiled under its inhabitants' feet,  
For they have transgressed the law,  
Violated the precept, broken the everlasting covenant,  
So a curse consumes the earth and  
Its inhabitants suffer their penalty,  
That is why the inhabitants of the earth are burnt up,  
And few men are left.

Isaiah 24:1-6

The ancient Israelite connection between the order and beauty of the environment and worship of God expresses a basic theological and ecological truth. All created life is intricately tied up with its inter-relationships of ecosystems and the biosphere. Unfaithful and corrupt dictators or kings do indeed ravage the land. Much attention towards the care of the land is given in Hebrew Scripture and it is not improbable that the very witnesses of this environmental chaos were the writers of the

message themselves. It is not stretching the imagination to assert that the present day semi-desert setting is a direct result of excessive agricultural production, deforestation and overgrazing. In both Priestly and Yahwist creation accounts the concept of original goodness of the earth and God's wisdom is clearly evident. The ecological harmony in relationship to humans and to Yahweh does not need manipulation in order to have its value, diversity and beauty realized. Surely, for some, the denial of the goodness of Yahweh translated to the disrespect of the divine order of which humans are only a part.

The idea of nature's goodness and harmony contrasts sharply with other Ancient Near Eastern narratives of origin and quite significantly with modern scientific accounts of the environment and aggressive competition for space and resources is a reality for these accounts. It is as if nature was born from the violence of the ancient myths and more recently science has utilized the "strongest species" attribute to describe the logical outcome of the evolutionary process. Ecological order is characterized by species diversity, by a stable biomass and by the preservation of the ecosystems.<sup>79</sup> In similar fashion there are many scientific discoveries which point to a natural order of cooperation and mutuality in which humans have managed to distort. M. Midgley, in her book, *The Ethical Primate*, argues that much interaction of plants and animal life in ecosystems is non-competitive. Even in today's "primitive" indigenous human societies we still observe degrees of mutuality, no avarice – only relationships built upon reciprocity, security

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p.176

and mutual comfort.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the myth of Eden points to a time when human society lacked domination and lived in settlements without walls. The non-hierarchical garden offers a vision of created order as it was intended rather than as it was learnt. The Eden story affirms that the divine created order has the potential for order and goodness despite the occurrence of much chaos. Thus, the cosmic covenant, the Jubilee laws and ethical controls on the resources do demonstrate the efforts of one ancient people to build a lasting relationship with their environment under their Creator. Should we take the example of Israelites' determination to celebrate a Jubilee every fifty years, then one can recognize their belief to protect and nurture the environment. This emphasis on Jubilee (Leviticus 25) bears witness of God's reign over all of creation and was intended to restore and renew human society and the natural surroundings of their environment. According to the Jubilee – even the land was set free. What can make the Jubilee tradition so powerful is that it recognized the need for order and the respect for the inter-connection in all aspects of creation. All parts of God's order had to be attended to in accordance to Israelites' understanding of God's vision for creation itself.

The belief that God creates and is sustaining our complex order is a core biblical theme. The Priestly creation story displays some of the cosmological dimensions that are seen in other contexts such as Psalms 104. God's creation is a cosmic order, which is harmonious in all its parts and is sustained in being by the Creator. It is thus crucial that Christians maintain God-centered language when proclaiming the word of God rather than reverting to scientific language. For science

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<sup>80</sup> Marshall, Relief in Social Tensions, p.335

is concerned with description and control and is neutral to meaning while a theologian is concerned with ultimate meaning and purpose which transcends the whole cause-effect scheme.<sup>81</sup> In like manner, B. Lonergan's concept of science in his masterpiece work, *Insight*, is given much attention.<sup>82</sup> For Lonergan, science is a belief system, which is concerned with order and chaos, yet the spirit of inquiry within this belief system aims at full explanations of all phenomena within coherent systems forever testing. And similar to Anderson, Lonergan views science as not constituted by meaning or value. It is important to recognize that the ordering of creation as presented in the creation accounts are concerned with the subsistence of the world and all creatures of creation and with the question of origin of the cosmos. For there was no creed of belief in Hebrew Scripture – it was just a given. The Yahwist creation narrative makes it very clear that without this relationship with God at its center the ordering of the wholeness of creation ends in futility.<sup>83</sup> It is necessary for Christians to realize that the Yahwist was concerned with man and the environment in all areas of existence: means of life (v.8 economics); the commission to work (sciences and law v.15)<sup>84</sup>; speech – linguistics (v.19-23). The Yahwist describes a pattern of interconnection with the wholeness of creation and as evident today when a part suffers, all parts of creation suffer. Humans are definitely not exempt from this vulnerability. Humanity's dependence on the natural elements of soil, water and air has shown up incredibly in this century's suffering from erosion, drought and pollution. Global human experience attests to this fact. Human

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<sup>81</sup> Anderson, Creation in the Old Testament, p.18

<sup>82</sup> Lonergan, B., see his popular book Insight, 1956.

<sup>83</sup> Westermann, Creation, p.79

<sup>84</sup> Westermann, Creation, p.80

intelligence, technology and civilization may be special marks of our species but our kinship with the natural world is profoundly more important although Christians are to pay attention to scientific progress in order to gain further insights of creation's splendor. We know the sciences can disclose more knowledge to care for creation. A Christian response to the ecological crisis and the environmental ordering is not to water down the stewardship notion. Undoubtedly, it is much better to be a steward than an exploiter or an indifferent onlooker. Yet this management style of the natural world runs the risk of unthinking anthropocentricity by restricting conceptions of the divine ordering and hence divine relationship between all of creation. The Christian endeavor is to keep belief, knowledge, experience and action in tandem when articulating environmental care.

## **2) Goodness of Creation**

A feature from the Genesis' creation story, which presents their testimony for environmental care is the goodness of creation. The Priestly phrase "God saw how good it was" within the creation account occurs six times in singular acts of creation and also in a general concluding tone after the completion of the sixth day. If one is to pay attention to the perception that the Priestly writer strived to set apart his view of creation from that of other ancient Near Eastern peoples than the concept of divine generosity in Yahweh's creative acts points directly to the goodness of the natural world.

Genesis I refers to Yahweh's cosmic creativity as being very good. The primordial waters, which have to be separated before the heavens and earth can be established as such, do not have to be thought of as intrinsically threatening. When God moves over the waters to separate them, the earth can be born in goodness and once the gathering and ordering of seas accomplished the emptiness of the earth is filled with plants, animals and humanity. At the end of the third day the narrative portrays the earth's goodness by the greening of the earth with vegetation and according to their species. In connection with the goodness of the natural world is the theme of fertility. The greening of the earth occurs because God commands the earth to release its fertility and bring forth is various species. Alongside this relationship between Yahweh's ownership and his gift of goodness (seen as a divine blessing) from the fertility of the earth are themes of human wisdom, righteousness and worship by which the goodness of land can sustain all its members. If we follow these three themes from W. Bruggeman than we are allowed to ascertain that the outcome of the previously mentioned disorder to order sequence of creation intends a locale of divine goodness which can be summed up by the word blessing.<sup>85</sup> Bruggeman asserts the necessity of wisdom when witnessing the goodness of creation by stating: "Wisdom is the critical, reflective, discerning reception of Yahweh's gift of generosity. That gift is not for self-indulgence, exploitation...It is for careful husbanding so that resources should be used for the protection, enhancement and nature of all creatures... there is wisdom in the very fabric of creation and human wisdom consists in resonance with the wisdom of things which is already situated in

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<sup>85</sup> Bruggeman, Theology of the Old Testament, p.531



creation before human agents act on it".<sup>86</sup> In this respect, wisdom offers moral guidance to the individual and to the community. Throughout Hebrew Scripture (Exodus 25-31, 35-40 and Proverbs 10:4 for example) all human work (whether it be artesian, scribe or shepherd) was a moral call towards care for the world. Work by itself could be described as frustrating and painful without this wisdom to grasp the source of one's blessings and the goodness of creation.<sup>87</sup> Genesis I and II saw work as a gift of caring for the earth (Genesis 2:15) and in terms of earthly fertility Genesis 1:28. Genesis IV provides the source for our images of raising food through farming and livestock through shepherding. We might add that wisdom ethics provides self-correction by challenging and rewarding the search for it (Proverbs) yet quite elusive (Br 3:8 - 4:4 and especially Job 28). Proverbs 22:2 vividly reminds hearers that the rich and poor alike stand mute before the power of divine creation:

The rich and the poor meet together;  
The Lord is the maker of them all.

Proverbs 22:2

But where does wisdom come from?  
Where does understanding dwell?

Job 28:12

The elusiveness of self-correction and by extension, idea of prudence in the areas of justice can be discovered in Isaiah 24:4-6 where the wisdom to understand

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.531

<sup>87</sup> Boadt, Reading the Old Testament, p.253

the differences between the way nature works and the way people think and proceed with their lives.

The earth mourns and withers,  
The world pines and fades,  
Both heaven and earth languish.  
The land lies polluted,  
Defiled by its inhabitants  
Who have transgressed the laws,  
Violated the ordinances.  
Therefore a curse consumes the land  
And its people burn for their guilt.

Isaiah 24:4-6

Bruggeman's second theme regarding the goodness of the environment and the blessings it provides from Yahweh is righteousness. Bruggeman states "the world, as Yahweh's creation, is not ordered so that some may set themselves over against the whole to their own advantage."<sup>88</sup> The world, as Yahweh's creation, requires daily, endless attention to the gifts of creation, for their abuse and exploitation can harm and impede the generosity that makes [all] life possible. Creation, moreover, has within it sanctions to bring death on those who neglect the enhancement of generosity". Hebrew Scripture treats righteousness in different circumstances, yet consistency of righteousness from Yahweh was a constant demand from the Israelites. On the human side, it is reasonable to hold righteousness to mean appropriate behavior towards Yahweh and all aspects of creation. Appropriateness of

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<sup>88</sup> Bruggeman, Theology of the Old Testament, p.532

behavior can range from worship to care of natural world and based upon divine relationship. Assurance of salvation due to righteousness is one aspect of Israelites reliance upon Yahweh. By treating the blessings of the environment as divinely ordained, appropriate behavior is to look at “everything He had made and He found it very good”.<sup>89</sup> Righteousness is also evident from Genesis 2:15 understanding to cultivate and care for the very same matter by which he was formed (Garden in Genesis 2:18 and 2:7). As it is righteous to give praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh it is righteous to care for all partners of creation. We should be reminded of this divine ecological responsibility by the words of Chief Seattle when assigning lands to the U.S. President Franklin Pierce in 1854. “You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children that the earth is our mother, whatever befalls the mother befalls the sons of the earth”.<sup>90</sup> The mere expression of a covenant (or an accord as mentioned in the previous quote of Chief Seattle) requests an obligation toward righteousness. The consistent and steadfast righteousness of Yahweh is a basic component of early Israelite testimony yet questionable from the human side. The attempt to express creation’s righteousness and wisdom finds expression in the following Job passage.

But ask the beasts to teach you,  
The birds of the air to tell you,  
The plants of the earth to instruct you,  
The fish of the sea to inform you...

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<sup>89</sup> Genesis 1:31

<sup>90</sup> Scharper, The Green Bible, p.78

Who among them do not understand  
That behind all life is God's hand?  
God holds the life of every creature  
And the breath of all humankind.

Job 12:7-10

Thirdly, the theme of worship given by Bruggeman is a requirement if one is to carry out the practices of righteousness regarding the care of nature and all the blessings contained in it and reflect upon the sheer generosity of such blessings. The power of divine blessing is alive and loose within the world and part of Israelite's testimony. The P and J creation accounts holds that "public worship is a context within which the generosity of creation can be received and enhanced".<sup>91</sup> As mentioned in the Priestly account previously, creation and blessings of goodness are done by utterances and acts culminating in a holy restful seventh day. W. Bruggeman correctly confirms creation faith to be the affirmation of creation "as an ordered, reliable place of generosity – a treasured counter to the disordered experience of chaos in exile".<sup>92</sup> He adds that if this judgment is accepted "creation then is an enactment, done in worship in order to resist the negation of the word of exile. As a consequence, creation is not to be understood as a theory or as an intellectual, speculative notion, but as a concrete life-or-death discipline and practice".<sup>93</sup> It is not unnoticed that the instructions for making of the tabernacle, given to Moses by Yahweh in Exodus 25-31 consists of seven speeches ending with a provision for the Sabbath, thus paralleling the same Priestly writings of our first creation account.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p.533.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p.533

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p.533

Bruggeman suggests the power of blessings is intensified in a holy place in addition to providing location from a world experiencing disorder and evil.<sup>94</sup> Worship, in this creation context, permitted the faithful to praise, give thanks to their Yahweh and replenish their lives as caring, responsible, sane and joyous people. Is it too bold to suggest that for the most part, the outside circumstances of the world would not readily encourage such resolved worshipful living?

Worship provides a most sacred and profound ecological message of the two creation accounts due to the Israelite belief that Yahweh is the source of all power and creativity. Yahweh alone is supremely the object of worship and adoration; no one and nothing is to be worshipped besides him. As Creator, the purpose of all creation is to praise its beginning: the Creator. It is important to recognize the priority of worship over any or all legal or doctrinal formulations. The last hymn of the Book of Psalms, Psalms 150 celebrates the common calling of the whole cosmos to worship the Lord. This Psalm requires the assembled worshippers to recall their ecological (and moral) inter-connection with the whole of creation: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord".<sup>95</sup> The abandonment of worship of the Lord inevitably leads to the abandonment for the sacredness and for the moral significance of the cosmos. For worship can be found in Genesis 1:31 "God looked at everything he had made and he found it good" and Genesis 2:1 "Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed" and Genesis 2:3 "So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy...". The created is unable to make a day holy.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p.534

<sup>95</sup> see Psalm 150

Worship to the Creator is the fundamental principle of Israelite religion and respect for all life, a fundamental principle of Israelite morality. All creation's ability to worship the Creator given by Psalm 150 involves an ecological claim that all creatures have claim to space, nourishment, rest and life based upon the goodness derived from God.

While on the theme of worship and its necessity to address the goodness of the created world, it may be appropriate to briefly contrast the Israelite practices of worship with the contemporary pagan practices of worship. Prayer to Israel's God was personal, spontaneous and their God was viewed as the saving and protecting God. The Psalms exemplify this direct and open approach to their God and the regular faithful Israelite poured out all his concerns in this divine/human relationship. The essence of prayer in early Israelite times was not asking – but offering and continual self-dedication. From the ecological perspective, prayer should be concerned with God's rule over righteousness; sufferings, injustice, violence within creation and so forth and not self-seeking. The prayerful concern for the rest of creation receives priority before self. In contrast to the One Creator, pagan worship achieved a highly sophisticated polytheism within a cosmic order whereby various powers assumed respective duties.<sup>96</sup> Under this context, the aim of human endeavor was to achieve an integrated harmony with the competing natural powers of the universe on which a person's daily life depended upon. The good life for a person consisted in the obedience, which a slave owed to his master and fitted this obedience

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<sup>96</sup> The Interpreters Bible, p.358

willingly into the hierarchy of authority with which he was surrounded, beginning with the elders.<sup>97</sup> The terrible person was the active, independent type who disrupted this authoritarian harmony and the evil villagers were those who questioned and not automatically obeyed authority.

Undoubtedly, it is clear that the two creation authors not only had completely different worldviews than the pagans but did not live in a mechanical mind-set. To these authors the goodness of creation with its blessings can be expressed in human ability that has wings and dignity under the will of God. In Michael and Kenneth Hines article "The Sacrament of Creation" they address the theme of goodness in terms of a sacrament.<sup>98</sup> To these authors, it is important for Christians to view creation as a whole and each creature as totally dependent upon the will of God. Once this perception is finely tuned then the goodness of natural world can be realized as a sacrament. The notion of goodness portrayed by the Priestly writer by the daily blessings provided requires wisdom of our image under the Creator, that we practice constant attention and reflection of our relationship with the natural world. It is this companionship that keeps generating blessings to enhance the gift of creation. The blessings of abundance, vitality and beauty are captured by the following words of Eco-theologian Thomas Berry. "If we have a wonderful sense of the divine it is because we live amid such awesome magnificence. For, if we lived on the moon, our

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.359

<sup>98</sup> Himes, Sacrament of Creation, p.45

mind, our emotion, our speech, our imagination and our sense of the divine would reflect the desolation of the lunar landscape."<sup>99</sup>

For Christians of today, blessings do not have to be invented for they are surrounding us in all creation and made visible and real in countless ways through nature, language of encouragement, music, affection to name a few. When a person is flooded with this realization of goodness of creation and its blessings then that person in turn will want to bless others. Jesus Christ never lost the intimate knowledge of his blessedness during his travels for his blessings touched the original goodness with each. Christians must constantly and unceasingly claim the goodness of all creation by unmasking the world of ecological destruction so prevalent in the world today. We must also keep looking for places and people where the truth is freely spoken and where one can be reminded of the blessedness of creation as opposed to places where the natural environment is cursed, exploited and accused. Christians can also celebrate the goodness of creation more often and in countless ways in which blessings beget blessings through Jesus Christ.

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<sup>99</sup> Berry, Befriending the Earth, p.78



### **3) Image of God**

The central fact concerning the place of humans in the Priestly creation narrative is the dignity and honor accorded to humans by God. Man though part of creation and made from “the dust of the ground” with the mysterious life principle “breathed into him by God”, is nevertheless distinct from all creatures of God. For humanity alone is made in the image of God. It is this Priestly dominion theology of Genesis I, by which humans are given authority over the natural world that has really captured the imagination of modern environmentalists interested in the Bible. At the core of this debate is whether the Priestly writer thought humans made in this divine image were to be an exploiter or benevolent steward. Yet the other view presented by the Yahwist creation version is that when humans were assigned their role in the world, they were not to rule the animals or subdue the earth but to cultivate it. This image of humans is to serve (Hebrew verb ‘abad) and to engage in the service for creation. The phrase “in the image of God” can only be understood in terms of an action of God who decides to create humanity in his image. This phrase must stand in a relationship with Him. And because it is a relationship with the divine then humanity is meant to correspond, to relate, to hear within this relationship. Humanity, like the natural world must stand before him in this holy relationship. The idea of some people to assign physical attributes to humanity, such as standing erect above the environment, is missing the spiritual, personal communion, which is freely given by God. It is pure speculation to hold the idea that a person is like God in appearance and form, etc. In addition, the idea that “in the image of God” is to be

understood as a representative of God on earth does not correspond to the Priestly text and begs the question – for whom does mankind represent God? – the natural environment? The notion of “image of God” retains its religious roots that no human can be excluded. The biblical declaration about the dignity of people differs from the secular view in that it speaks to human worth and divine meaning of human existence. C. Westermann states this purpose of “the image of God” is that something unique and divine may happen between a person and God and therein one’s life receives the ultimate meaning.<sup>100</sup>

It cannot be denied that humanity holds a privileged position in the midst of the community created by God, but over the centuries too much emphasis has been placed on privilege and not enough on the sacredness of the natural world and humanity’s responsibility towards it. As one is made from the earthly matter, so one recognizes the moral obligation that derives from the roots of creation. From the biblical standpoint, especially from Genesis 6:5, which relates God’s reaction to the increasing violence among humans, it would appear to be absurd to do evil to the earth, which is like an extension of our own bodies, that which were made and continue to share with all of creation. The Noahic covenant in Genesis 9 involves recognition of human corruption and sin before the divine destruction and indeed after its restoration.<sup>101</sup> This Noahic covenant is a guarantee of the created order on God’s part but not a license for ecological corruption. The idea that the dominion of the created world be based upon the phrase “image of God” and hence humanity’s

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<sup>100</sup> C. Westermann, Creation, p.61

<sup>101</sup> Kraftchick, S., Problems and Perspectives – Biblical Theology, p.165

supremacy over nature is a narrow and limited interpretation of the Creation narrative. It is an incoherent premise to be indifferent or to dominate other species while proclaiming one's faith to the Creator.

Bernard Anderson is a biblical scholar who has written extensively on the question of nature in the Hebrew Bible. Anderson concludes that humanity's special status as the "image of God" is a call to responsibility to all creation and not only in relation to fellow man.<sup>102</sup> Only in recent times are we realizing that as a global human family we exercise great power over the elements of the earth. It is a power whose force is becoming increasingly and alarmingly apparent. As Christians search the roots of the global environment crisis it may become quite evident that the crisis is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is spiritual. Should the special dignity bestowed upon humanity by Yahweh through the "image of God" passage of the Priestly writer be divorced from the freedom to acknowledge and the responsibility to act, then the natural world will continue to be desanctified. The present generation of humanity is the first generation to view our planet from space. Perhaps future historians may find that this vision had an enormous impact upon human's "self-image" by revealing that the earth is not the center of the universe. From space we see a small fragile ball dominated not by human interest but by patterns of clouds, oceans, soils and so forth. It is humanity's inability to fit its activities into that pattern that is changing the fundamental environmental systems.

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<sup>102</sup> Anderson, Creation of the Old Testament, p.45

#### **4) Cultivation and Care**

The Genesis material leads to an ethic, which is centered on the divine judgment that world is good. What emerges from the reading of the Yahwist creation account (and the Eden account) is a strong sense of attachment and inter-relatedness to the natural environment. Each and every generation regardless of culture or religious disposition are irrevocably tied to the land's health. There is much biblical characterization of the dichotomy between history and nature, which connected the Israelites history to their religion and thus the value of the natural world became marginalized and devalued.<sup>103</sup> The conception of Israel's desert origins and its austere historical consciousness are both understandable as a religion of humanity, freedom and dignity. Whatever the environment that provided the context for Israel's encounter with nature and there is dispute as to the image of the "stark solitude of desert" as the only formative setting for biblical religion, we must rediscover the role nature played in the ancient Israelite context.<sup>104</sup>

Christians are aware that the land is the object of God's loving care and is entrusted to human society. Cultivation, in today's ecological context must extend beyond agricultural production to feed populations for we are certainly capable of re-cultivating vast areas of desolate destruction. Perhaps the most significant indication of the moral status of land is the rest of the Sabbath where by the goodness and order are affirmed and enjoyed by the Creator. For every seven years the land is to lie

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<sup>103</sup> Hessel, *Theology for Earth Community*, p.24

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p.27

fallow in order that it may recover its strength. Certainly the Sabbath of the land has ecological value, particularly where over fertilization, poisonous pesticides and erosion play havoc for whole communities throughout the world. This notion of resting the soil can certainly be extended to the oceans and air. We are also reminded not to forget the land (and all natural resources) does not belong to us. The God of Israel is certainly interested in patterns of agriculture, distribution and feeding the poor of creation for he cares for the defenseless and the vulnerable. One should not look for security in the products that the land alone can provide but seek the goodness of the whole created order. Land is also the dwelling place of other creatures and the idea that land can be owned outright by humans implies a sense of idolatry and thus denial of dependency on God. The love and respect for life and ecosystems are not secondary to respect for human life but are relationally intertwined with human identity and purpose in a moral and a natural ecology celebrated in Christian worship. Nevertheless, lost blessings and injustices are not the end of our Lord's creative acts as is given in Isaiah.

Let the wilderness and the dry lands exult  
Let the wasteland rejoice and bloom  
Let it bring forth flowers like the jonquil,  
Let it rejoice and sing for joy...

Isaiah 35:1

The hope of Isaiah's ecological vision points to the possibility for fulfillment of the created order and directs Christians not only to moral effort but to mirror God's justice for all creation. In the same manner, we have an obligation to preserve the

critical order of the biosphere and to realize the rightness of wisdom pertains to the natural order also. Biblical faith in the goodness of the land represents a trust in the earth to provide her gift in due season to meet the needs of human activity. But their trust in nature also requires the wisdom and respect necessary for the land to offer its blessings.

The Yahwist creation narrative describes the first primary assignment God gives to us in terms of cultivation and care for the land. Our society today is just as bound to the land, as were our biblical ancestors. It is a consistent belief that human well being is closely tied to the “adama” of the earth. A profound sense of human limitation is an insight that Christians are to be reminded of if we are to recognize our true limits, our sense of service to creation and thus life in a sustainable relationship with the rest of creation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Perhaps the most appropriate starting point for this section of relevancy for environmental care is with the Apostles Creed. The Creed and its earlier form “Jesus is Risen, He is Lord” draws together and summarizes the work of the Creator, the work of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. The whole Creed speaks of God and when it speaks of the world around us and of humanity, it does so in relation to God. All the other articles of this common Christian faith statement depend on the first article of faith. This dependency is also similar to the Ten Commandments, which makes the first Commandment explicit. With the profession of faith that God is “Creator of heaven and earth” it is the belief of all things that is “seen and unseen” – creation in its entirety. The implication is a deep bond within the whole of creation – its physical environment of all planets and all life encompassing the cosmos. When Christians profess their Creed they are expressing their existence to God the Creator. It is the very genesis of creation and of Christian faith. As earlier outlined in this thesis, each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection and any initiative towards ecological care must begin with worship of praise and thanksgiving to our Creator. St-Augustine recognized this divine goodness in his *De Genesi* adv. Man. 1,2,4 when he spoke that “by the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. It follows that each creature, known or unknown reflects the wisdom and goodness of God’s creative acts”. Implicit within our Apostles Creed is the interdependence of all creatures, the awe and fertility of the natural environment and the beauty of His work

by which humanity should submit its will and intellect. The second article of the Creed is belief in Jesus Christ and is at the center of all Christian prayer. Jesus himself affirms in Mk 12:28 that God is “the one Lord” whom we must love with all our heart and with all our soul and all our mind. Christian liturgy can be the beginning of authentic ecological responsibility. To confess Jesus as Lord is to believe in his divinity which extends over all creation. The concluding article of faith in the Apostle Creed is belief in the Holy Spirit by which a newness of breath of life is available to all so that we may adore the Creator of all creation, establish a loving, caring relationship with all creatures “seen and unseen”. Christianity uses much sensory imagery when referring to the divine Holy Spirit – water – in baptism, anointing with oil, fire in terms of transforming Christians and cloud and light as manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The ultimate mission for all Christians who profess the Apostles Creed is to make all creation share life everlasting in communion with their Creator. It is a renewal of universal goodness and order under our Creator.

Contrary to some people who feel there is very little scriptural basis for ecological care, Christian Scripture provides numerous passages which direct and encourage Christians towards voluntary compassion for all of creation. The Gospel message provides impetus and not alienation towards the diversity and fertility of creation. Jesus came proclaiming a Jubilee (Luke 4:16-22) in which all creation is to be liberated from its sufferings as given in Romans 8:18-25. This reminds Christians of Leviticus 25, which aims towards ecological balance. In John 10, Jesus himself is the good shepherd who gives his life for his flock. Luke 15:4-7 portrays divine love



not unlike a shepherd seeking lost sheep. The often quoted passage of Jesus' admonishing his disciples ceaseless quest for materialism (Matthew 6:25-33) is very pointed. John 15:1-8 speaks of trimming a vineyard so it may bear more abundant fruit. These familiar images, though they speak directly to humanity's encounter with God, at the same time reveal that the fundamental relationship between humanity and the natural world is one of caring for all creation. Jesus Christ is the first born (Colossians 1:18-20, Psalms 104:30) of a new creation and gives his self to renew the whole earth. Furthermore, a foundational ecological stance must be acknowledged when Christians read of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) – joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness and self-control. The earlier passage in Galatians (5:13) incline Christians to serve one another through love.

The concept of redemption is significant in the context of environmental care for creation and redemption can be traced through the two Scriptures. Our interest here is what has been described as a "spiritual motif of Christian Scripture on which humanity's sense of belonging in the world was replaced by a deep sense of alienation and threat."<sup>105</sup> The goal of existence within this view was to escape from the fallen physical world, which had profound ecological dimensions. Undoubtedly, the kingdom of God is the center for God's redemptive activity, yet salvation expressed as the establishment of the kingdom of God entails the restoration of the entire universe to its original goodness. All of creation is to be restored to its ecological balance. The passing away of heaven and earth should not be used to

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<sup>105</sup> Hesel, Theology for Earth Community, p.39

avoid ecological responsibility nor the present state of abuse and neglect of the earthly resources. God's divine love for creation is evident in the two testaments. Theologian Frank Cross makes the parallel of ecological abuse tied to this "passing away of heaven and earth" in that belief in the resurrection certainly does not justify abuse of our present bodies.<sup>106</sup> The redemption of nature as well as humans are found in Romans 8 and I Corinthians 15. Jesus' concern was not in a Gnostic type of dualism but in the continual ancient Israelite belief of the goodness of the environment with all its cosmic dimensions. In short, the One who redeems, creates.

The environmental thinkers and activists of today are not starting from scratch, for this interdisciplinary subject dates back to the ancient world views – it is only with unprecedented and global urgency that must be addressed. For Christians, environmental care transcends the recoloration of "red" and "green" ideologies. Paul declares in Acts 7:28 "In Him we live and move and have our being". And what is true for human beings is true of all that is; all the microcosmic and macrocosmic beyond all numbering. If divorced from God in Christ, piety towards environmental care can easily slip into forms of idolatry. Christians can only live in balance with the natural world to the extent that we bestow the meaning of sacrifice into our daily lives and our place beside all creation.

Jesus Christ functioned with lordly power and Scripture is quite clear about the kind of power which can genuinely create. We find in Colossians 1:17 that Christ would hold all things together and he pointed to future Christians a way of life by

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p.40.

which all creation which include an ecological dimension under a God-centered universe which holds human accountability for the fate of the earth. This vision of a sacramental universe has the potential to reawaken the truth of the created gifts of our Creator. It is to the Creator of the universe that we are accountable for what we do or fail to do to preserve and care for the earth and all of its creatures. Living responsibly within God's creation is an integral dimension in one's fullness of life. This notion of responsibility calls Christians to care for the environment according to standards that are not of our making and implies a balance between a sense of limits and a spirit of experimentation. A third ecological dimension is respect for all life in which the dignity of human life and the blessedness of creation are inextricably related. Divine goodness is not expressed singularly but represented by the diversity of our universe. By employing appropriate technology and making human fulfillment compatible with ecology, Christians exhibit reverence and awe for our Creator. Fourthly, Christians must affirm a worldview for the ethical significance of global interdependence. As we move into the next millenium, only unreasonable people would not assert that the gravest environmental problems are clearly global and immediate. In this shrinking world every human is affected and everyone is responsible – although those most responsible are often the least affected. Creation is a partner with the entire human family. A fifth ecological notion is authentic social and economic development, which entails proper industrial and agricultural technologies thereby enhancing both partners of Creation. Recent history as shown that unrestrained human development is not the answer to improving the lives of people and that there is a fundamental critical order in the biosphere which affects all life forms. Human welfare depends

on recognition of the goodness and relatedness of all the orders of life on earth. We must respect what is given in creation. Sixthly, biblical faith represents a faith that the earth will provide its gifts and will meet the needs of the human community. This trust in the earth's abundance requires Christians to treat the planet with respect and wisdom. Worship and respect for the giver of creation translates into careful harmony of the world's gifts. Indifference to the Creator translates into carelessness for the environment.

People are beginning to understand that the earth is a single reality within our universe and that its health cannot be restored in fragments. We have often heard that our planet is a one-time endowment by which humanity can meet a wondrous array of ecological insights and should humanity forfeit the sense of awe for the natural environment then the earth simply becomes an alienated market place. For some individual Christians care for our planet seems overwhelming, urgent and major, yet Christians must pay attention not only to the ecological messages found within Scripture but to the realm of science, for here too, we can further discover a partnership with the natural world which gives us meaning and value. Christians must pay attention to the diverse linkages in the natural world as they should to Scripture: there are linkages between chemistry and physics of the atmosphere; there are linkages between the physiological processes of vegetation and the earth's surface; there are linkages between life forms and pollution; there are linkages between all environmental processes and human activities; there are linkages between human decisions and trust in the blessings of creation; there are linkages between

human intellect and trust; there are linkages between creation and God; and there are linkages in coming to know God's love for creation and our worship to Him.

Humanity must never be asleep to feelings of joy, suffering and interdependence with the created world. There is much scriptural basis for protecting the environment as well as the priority of blessedness of our world. Christians are reminded of Genesis 9:12 when God announces the Covenant "between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all generations". Although nascent, "*eco-theology*" in today's world demands all Christians pay true attention to all areas of human endeavor. Church tradition has given us discernment and direction in which environmental ethics lies in our hands and not to consider our world a result of a divine act of creating is somehow against our spiritual covenant. Scripture offers Christians a testimony of how God made holy all of creation.

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