

THEANTHROPOCOSMIC VISION OF THE HOLY BIBLE: An Alternative to the Cosmocentric and Anthropocentric Visions

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Abstract: The biblical creation accounts provide an alternative to the anthropocentric and cosmocentric visions prevalent in the ecological discourses because according to the Bible the cosmos and the humankind have their meaning and purpose because of God's plan for them. According to the Priestly account the creation is internally structured, ordered and reflects God's power, wisdom, goodness, and purpose in creating a world. By acknowledging and proclaiming goodness of creation the Priestly account attributes value to creation and views the creation in its harmonious integrity. This harmony of God-Human-Earth is complemented by the creation account of the Yahwist tradition. In God's plan, 'Ādām gets fundamental meaning and significance in his relation to 'adāmāh; 'Ādām is created out of 'adāmāh, nourished by 'adāmāh and at death returns to 'adāmāh. The vocation of 'Ādām is to take care of 'adāmāh. The earth and the human, material and spiritual, secular and the sacred, nature and culture are interwoven in the Theanthropocosmic vision of the Bible.

Keywords: 'Ādām, 'Adāmāh, Anthropocentric, Cosmocentric, Creation, God, Land, Theanthropocosmic

1. Introduction

God is at the centre of any biblical vision on nature, humankind and their mutual relationship; it is God's design and handwork. The holy Bible begins with the solemn profession of faith that "In the beginning ... God created the heavens and the earth"

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(Genesis 1.1) and St Paul affirms in the letter to the Romans: “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Romans 1.20). “The heavens declare the glory of God,” exclaims the Psalmist (Psalm 19:1) in the Bible. The earth, equally, shows forth the glory of God, because it is equally God’s handwork. The Bible uses two words ‘*adāmāh*’ and ‘*erets*’ referring to earth. The term ‘*adāmāh*’ literally means ground, soil, dust, and earth.¹ The word ‘*erets*’ is used to refer to the inhabited world.² Both terms are frequently used as interchangeable words.

From the Biblical point of view, all beings are created by God; they are good; God continues to care for them. They are sustained in existence by God and they are created with a purpose. It is also to be noted that the Bible contains different creation accounts in *Genesis*, *Proverbs*, *Job*, *Psalms* and *Isaiah* with similarities and differences.

The biblical creation accounts celebrate the goodness and the power of God rather than trying to answer the scientific question: “How and when was the creation?” or the philosophical question: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” The biblical creation stories are to be read more as liturgical and religious texts rather than scientific explanations or philosophical treatises. They serve religious – cultic and creedal – purposes. According to the Bible there is a contingent beginning for the world: what might not have existed at all does actually exist by the divine power and programme. Creation is a free act of God, an expression of God’s omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence.

In this article I would argue that the biblical creation accounts give a Theanthropocosmic vision, involving God, human beings and earth and provide an integral vision regarding the origin,

¹P. G. Ploeger, ‘*adāmāh*’ in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, 88-98.

²J. Bergman and M. Ottosson, “*erets*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, 388-405.

purpose and goal of human life on earth. As the angels sang at the time of the birth of Jesus: ‘Glory to God, Hope to people and Peace on Earth’ (Luke 2.14). The Bible speaks about God’s love and care for human beings. Earth is given to human beings as their home where they could experience and witness to God’s love. Human beings live, move and have their beings in collaboration with other living and non living beings. They are our neighbours and we are responsible for their well being as God’s stewards. As they are God’s creatures they have a value in themselves, independent of use value for humankind. This Theanthropocosmic vision is presented as an alternative to cosmocentric and anthropocentric visions prevalent in the ecological discourses. The cosmos and the humankind have their meaning and purpose because of God’s plan for them. It is this divine perspective as revealed in the Bible that I present as Theanthropocosmic vision.

Among the two creation narratives in the book of *Genesis*, the Yahwist tradition is regarded as the older one, though it is given as the second in the book of *Genesis* (Genesis 2:4b-25).³ The first account (Genesis 1:1-2:4a), though written later to the Yahwist tradition, is of Priestly tradition and is narrated in the form of a liturgical hymn, describing creation in six days and seventh day as a day of rest. This creation account has similarities with other Ancient Near East cosmogonies. The biblical tradition is unique, however, in its emphasis on the unity and supremacy of God. God is the creator of the ‘heavens and the earth,’ meaning, God is responsible for all “observable cosmic phenomena.”⁴ The

³Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, “Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions,” in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 24*, Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, ed., Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992, 10 gives a detailed discussion on the different creation narratives in the Biblical tradition.

⁴Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis, New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 36.

Priestly account provides a unique theological insight and relates God with the entire reality.⁵

2. From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation in the Priestly Tradition

The liturgical hymn of creation, with which the book of *Genesis* opens contains also a cryptic description of a chaotic situation of an absolute nothingness, together with the creedal formula on God's power and goodness: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of deep" (Genesis 1:1-2). In the Priestly vision, the 'formless void' points to the chaos and meaninglessness prior to creation. God's creative power transforms the 'formless void' into a good, orderly cosmos. In this account one could see *opus separationis* (works of separation) and *opus ornatus* (works ornamentation). The creation is internally structured, ordered and reflects God's power, wisdom, goodness, and purpose in creating a world.⁶

God is calling the world into existence directly. He says: "Let there be light" and there is light. Step by step, God brings order out of chaos. It is to be noted that here God works without any other support from other divine beings; he does not use any other material either. He brings into existence His plan out of nothing. The structure of the creation account shows the order; cosmos is ordered by God in a seven-day framework. The account of each day's work commences with God's command, then there is a confirmation that the order has been fulfilled and the description concludes with a formula of approval. One could see a gradual progress in the hierarchy of beings that are created which culminates with the creation of man and woman.⁷

The work of separation brought order into the formless void and gradually cosmos is brought out of chaos. The orderly did

⁵Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn, *The Book of Life: Biblical Answers to Existential Questions*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 41, Leuven: Peeters Press, 2009, 122.

⁶Richard L. Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity: Envisioning an Ethics of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 141.

⁷Jose Morales, *Creation Theology*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 17.

not come from disorder by chance but because of the will of God. According to the Priestly creation account there are three separations: the separation of light and darkness (Genesis 1:4), water above and water below (Genesis 1:6) and water below and dry land (Genesis 1:9). A unique “identifiable form, rhythm and symmetry”⁸ is brought to the world through the works of separation. These works of separations are followed by the works of ornamentations on the third day starting with the appearance of vegetation. God continued his *opus ornatus* with the Sun, the Moon, and stars on the fourth day, birds and fish on the fifth day and animals on the sixth day. The creation on the sixth day was concluded with the creation of human beings, the crown of creation:

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1.27-28).

God took rest on the seventh day.

Thus, at the end of the acts of creation, “formless void and darkness” that was in the beginning was transformed into a new sphere of order, beauty and goodness. God created everything, living and non-living, according to his plan, and placed them with specific roles in their suitable environment according to their nature – fish in the water, birds in the air and animals on the land. The cosmos shows an order within which each creature accomplishes the creator’s will as the creatures came into being with their particular nature and mission, at the commandment of the creator. Creatures are fulfilling God’s will; their place and function is ordered by God.⁹ The heavenly bodies, the Sun and the Moon are neither absolute nor autonomous powers but creatures with specific purpose designated by God. Thus, in

⁸Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1992, 73.

⁹Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994, 30-31.

contrast to the formless void at the beginning, the narrative ends with an ordered universe which was very good.

After every creative act, God declared that what he had done was 'good' and after the creation of human beings, the whole creation was declared 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). According to Rolf P. Knierim, this declaration "is a most profound formulation which in essence includes all else that can be said. It cannot be said any better. It is a fundamental theological statement about the world."¹⁰ The goodness ascribed to the creatures is the expression of God's goodness; creatures do not have 'good' independent of the creator.¹¹ "Acknowledgement of the creatures of the earth as God's creatures is the first step in affirming their importance and worth."¹² By acknowledging and proclaiming goodness of creation the Priestly account attributes value to creation and views the creation in its harmonious integrity.

From an ecological perspective, we could argue that the eco-diversity is good and reflects the divine power and divine purpose. It follows that any destruction or exploitation of creation is a sin against the God's plan because cosmos is God's work and he declared it to be 'very good.' Moreover, the intrinsic value of creation is not anthropogenic but ontological; it remains beyond humans' acknowledgement and assignment.¹³ It is not because of any use value to human beings that something on earth is valuable but because they are from the plan and

¹⁰Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method and Cases*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 199.

¹¹Bernard F. Batto, "Creation Theology in Genesis," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 24, Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992, 35.

¹²Celia Deane-Drummond, "Living from the Sabbath: Developing an Ecological Theology in the Context of Biodiversity," *Interface* 7, 1 (2004), 4.

¹³John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006, 124.

decision of God. Their value is given by God, not by human beings. This is a corrective to the anthropocentric view of the cosmos. The ontological value of creation means, “even if humans are uniquely important in creation, it does not follow that everything in creation is made for us, to be pleasing for us, or that our pleasure is God’s chief concern.”¹⁴ In a similar way human beings are valuable because we are created by God in his image and likeness and we have a unique role and responsibility in the order of creation. This view corrects also the cosmocentric view of the universe where all that exist have intrinsic values independent of God. According to the Bible both human beings and other creatures living and non living are valuable because of God and the biodiversity is to be protected.

According to the Bible creation of human beings is very special as they are made in God’s image and likeness and they are given dominion over all the earth, and over every living beings. The blessing, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1.28) is often wrongly accused of as the basis of ecological crisis. According to the Bible, however, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God so that they would continue and sustain the creation and rule over it ‘in holiness and righteousness’ (Wisdom 9.104) as stewards and custodians appointed by God. Any individual or collective exploitation of the natural resources is the result of a faulty anthropocentrism and is against God’s plan. All that exist because God so decided; we shall not destroy it for our selfishness. The dominion that human persons have over the rest of creation is one of responsibility, of making it fruitful, of tender loving care with holiness and justice; it is a divine call and sacred trust. A careful reading of the Priestly Creation narrative presents us with a Theanthropocosmic vision that celebrates a harmonious and integral vision of reality involving God, Humankind and Nature. This harmony of God-Human-Earth is complemented by the creation account of the Yahwist tradition.

¹⁴Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, Urbano: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 24.

3. The Harmony of 'Adāmāh and 'Ādām

The harmony between 'Adāmāh and 'Ādām which is again the result of God's plan, is celebrated in the Yahwist account of Genesis 1-11. 'Ādām gets fundamental meaning and significance in his relation to 'adāmāh (2:5,15; 3:17,23; 4:3; 5:29). The first man is called 'Ādām as he is made out of 'adāmāh (2:7). They are closely and intimately bound together as bridegroom and bride. 'Ādām owes his existence to 'adāmāh as all other living creatures (2:19) and is understood in reference to 'adāmāh. 'Ādām was created and placed in 'adāmāh in order to care for it, till it, and use it (Genesis 2:5). Taking care of 'adāmāh was the vocation of 'Ādām (2:15). He can use 'adāmāh for his sustenance (2:9). Finally, he has to return to 'adāmāh (3:19) out of which he was taken: "From 'adāmāh you are, and to 'adāmāh you will return." Thus, 'Ādām is defined in relation to 'adāmāh: he is created from 'adāmāh, he is sustained by the fruits of 'adāmāh, and finally he returns to the embrace of 'adāmāh. His vocation is to take care of 'adāmāh. He worked on 'adāmāh, enjoyed her fruits and lived on her bosom. Work was basically taking care of 'adāmāh, a joy for 'Ādām and 'adāmāh in turns takes care of 'Ādām.¹⁵

The sin of 'Ādām, however, brought a radical change in this relationship with 'adāmāh. She was placed under a curse because of 'Ādām:

Cursed is 'adāmāh because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground (3:17-19).

Their harmonious relationship was broken and corrupted. Until then was work joy and relaxation, an expression of love and care, of course in obedience to God. Since the sin, work became laborious and hard; 'Ādām had to labour hard in order to earn sustenance. Despite all the hard work 'adāmāh failed to yield good crops; very often it produced merely thorns and thistles.

¹⁵For a study of 'adāmāh motif, see Patrick D. Miller, *Genesis 1-11*, Sheffield: The University of Sheffield, 1978, 37-42.

Struggle for survival became the law of life and only the fittest could survive.

Genesis 4:1-6:7 depict the increase of human sin which worsened 'Ādām's relationship with 'adāmāh. Cain killed his brother Abel and the blood was shed on 'adāmāh; 'adāmāh became impure and turned against him and cried out to God for punishment (4:10-12): "Now you are under a curse and driven from 'adāmāh, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work on 'adāmāh, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderers on 'adāmāh." To purify 'adāmāh and 'Ādām God sent a flood (6:11-8:17). Noah became the new 'Ādām on the new 'adāmāh. The primeval relationship of harmony and union was re-established and the rainbow was given as a sign of God's covenantal with the whole of creation. "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said,

This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth (Genesis 8.11-17).

God made 'adāmāh once more the loving and faithful mother and bride, who provided rest to the new 'Ādām.¹⁶

The story of 'adāmāh in Genesis 1-11 is also the history of 'Ādām and this mutual relationship is constitutive and continues even today. "The account of creation, of life under God and rebellion against God, of creaturely existence, sin and judgment, of human vocation and community, is all set as a story about

¹⁶The root of the name 'Noah' denotes 'rest', 5:29.

'Ādām and 'adāmāh."¹⁷ They existentially belong together. 'Ādām lives, moves and have his being in 'adāmāh; 'Ādām cannot live in some other context other than 'adāmāh. The nature of human being demands this definition: àdām vis-à-vis 'adāmāh, God has united them; hence, nobody should separate 'Ādām and 'adāmāh (Matthew 19:6).

4. Land in the Bible

The intertwined story of 'Ādām and 'adāmāh is continued in the stories of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Yahweh promised Abraham, the father of all believers three blessings: land (Genesis 15:18; 17:8), progeny (Genesis 15:5b; 17:2,6,16,19), and the divine presence (Genesis 17:7,8b). The land and progeny are not merely material or worldly blessings. They are the symbols and expressions of the third blessing, the divine presence. The 'Ādām and 'adāmāh, material and spiritual, secular and the sacred are interwoven in the Theanthropocosmic vision of the Bible. "One leads to the other; one is the echo of the other; one reflects the face of the other. Thus, one may say, earth is aureole of heaven."¹⁸ Abraham and through him the covenant community was called to have divine presence and realization through the land and children. It is their vocation to live, move and have their being in the divine milieu on earth; these realisations for the patriarch and the covenant community was promised through realities of land and progeny. The divine takes here human and material dimensions. The land and progeny become truly a blessing for the glory of God when they are shared for the service of the whole humankind. In the Theanthropocosmic vision of the Bible the earth has human and divine dimensions and the humankind has earthly and divine dimensions and the divine has earthly and human dimensions.¹⁹

¹⁷Miller, *Genesis 1-11*, 41.

¹⁸Paul Kalluveetil, "God's Work for the Indian Folk: Towards Exploring the Indian Milieu of Biblical Hermeneutics," *Journal of Dharma* 30.3, 2005, 330.

¹⁹W. Brueggemann, *The Land*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

The interweaving of the story of land, human history and the divine plan is continued in the rest of the Bible. The Books of *Exodus and Numbers* present Israel as landless slaves in Egypt and their struggle for freedom. The covenant at Sinai made them once again God’s chosen people and Yahweh their God. Under the leadership of Moses the liberated people set their journey towards the Promised Land. The Books of *Leviticus and Deuteronomy* prescribe the covenant life-pattern of the covenant people in the Promised Land.²⁰ Their vocation was to live in the land of God, faithful to him and to his covenant. When they disobey God, they will be polluting the land as well; divine presence will not be there and the land and progeny will be taken away from them. Land is not the goal, but the means to the divine. Earth is also a place of service for the poor and the marginalised. Land is not to be used merely as a private property. According to Leviticus 25.23, “The land is mine and you are but aliens who have become my tenants.” The Books of *Joshua and Judges* gives the story of the possession of the land, distribution of the land among the 12 tribes and their life in the Promised Land as the tenants of Yahweh. The Books of *Psalms and Wisdom* celebrates Israel’s life with God in the Promised Land. This is continued in the Books of *Samuel and Kings*. As the covenant community failed to fulfil God’s plan, the land was taken away from the Israel, and they were sent in exile. The prophets – *Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel* – warned the people against their wickedness and turned them back to Yahweh and promised them a return to the Promised Land. The Books of *Ezra and Nehemiah* describes the return to the Promised Land and gives the people norms for new life in the land. The Post-exilic Prophets – III *Isaiah, Haggai, Malachi, Zechariah*, etc. – prepared them to rebuild the temple, the symbol of God’s presence in the land and exhorted them on living in the land as tenants of God. These books also give the Messianic prophecies in which the children of God will be led to God’s kingdom.

²⁰Kalluveetil, *Vachanabhashyam*, vol. 1, 269-287.

The New Testament reaffirms the original blessings of the Theanthropocosmic vision of the Bible with the Incarnation: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3.16). The Birth of Jesus is announced first to the shepherds with the angelic acclamation: "Glory to God in the highest, hope to people and peace on earth" (Luke 2.14). The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John describe the life and teachings of Jesus, the Messiah, who leads 'Ādām and 'adāmāh to the original blessings of Theanthropocosmic vision and reality. Jesus, the new 'Ādām, brings back the original order, rhythm and harmony in creation, leading the people to the heavenly kingdom and the Father's house. The Parables of kingdom foretells the eschatological feast and banquet, which present the life in Father's kingdom. However, Jesus in his preaching in words and deeds challenged the worldly perspectives of an easy and comfortable life in this earthly land, without the divine and the people in need. The *Acts of the Apostles* describes the origin and growth of the Church as the community of Jesus and the letters of *Paul, James, Jude, and John* exhorted and encouraged the Christians to live here on earth as children of God. The Book of *Revelation* depicts the life of the Christians in the heavenly land and the struggle against the forces of evil who try to transform the earth as the land of the devil.

5. Conclusion

In our days, even when we live and enjoy the benefits of the science and technology, there is a growing awareness that the quality of life is progressively declining and the world peace and even the very existence of life on earth is threatened by lifestyles that lead to the plundering of natural resources for the benefit of the individual, society and humanity in general at the exclusion and exploitation of the rest of the reality, living and non-living. We can no longer remain indifferent to the environmental problems such as, climate change, desertification, deterioration and loss of productivity in vast agricultural areas, the pollution of rivers and aquifers, the loss of biodiversity, the increase of

natural catastrophes and the deforestation of equatorial and tropical regions. We cannot afford to forget the simple truth that we live, move and have our being in a net work of relations with matter, microbes, plants, animals and other human beings and greater truth that the network of relations are constitutive of our forms of life. Though as human beings we have our unique identity, we form part of the universe with the rest of the world, who are not strangers or enemies but neighbours and partners without whom human life is impossible.

We live in a scientific age and we are prone to look at everything from a secular point of view, influenced largely by empirical sciences. Science dominates our lives through technological progress to such an extent that people are tempted to relegate all forms of knowledge other than those of the empirical sciences to the realm of fantasy. It is a fact, however, that scientific solutions are not enough for solving ecological crisis, though we cannot solve them without science either; science is as much part of the problem as it is part of the solution. Science is to be complemented by all branches of knowledge; for ecological crisis is not just a scientific issue to be left only to scientific investigations for solutions. It is a moral issue which needs response from ethical and religious perspectives. Both humanities and sciences should take into account the fundamental nature of ecology and accept the fact we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we had in the past. We need integrated and holistic visions involving the knowledge of the sciences, wisdom of the humanities and directives of religions. Though human beings are rooted in nature, they are also formed by the community and oriented to God. Ecology is to be seen from cosmic, human and divine perspectives; not as three separate perspectives but as an integral and harmonious Theanthropocosmic vision.

The environmental catastrophe is the result of a faulty vision of humanity as a dominating *homo faber* and it is to be replaced with the mindfulness of *homo custos*. The enormous growth of science and technology resulted in the overall development and comfort of human living, though it had destructive effects on

environment and life in general. *Techne* is to be guided by *Poesis*; a life facilitating mechanism needs to be complemented by a meaning giving dynamism. The 13.7 billion year Universe Story shows that we are bound together and do not live in a static mechanistic cosmos as understood by the Enlightenment scientists and philosophers. We live in an ongoing project involving God, human and the earth. Human beings are to live according to the divine plan which includes the rest of the created beings. Human beings cannot reduce the rest of the creation into merely a use value for their survival and well being. They are obliged to take care of the survival and well being of all beings as God's stewards and tenants on earth.

Human beings belong to a cosmic family where there are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters in many shapes and sizes; there are no outsiders, strangers or enemies. The Cosmos is a theocentric community existing for the praise and service of God. The splendour of the universe reveals God's artistry, imagination and providence. Love and care for nature is part of the divine plan, leading to a life of interconnectedness and transcendence; it is inner spirituality, connectedness to all creatures, preservation and conservation that enables human beings to connect with all-in-God and God-in-all.

Pope John Paul II's Peace Day Message in 1990: "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation" is an expression of the biblical Theanthropocosmic vision. Remembering that all life is created by God that God continues to care for it, we affirm the sacredness of all life and receive God's gift of life that we share with all other creatures and all creation. We need a paradigm shift from "Human Beings-as-conquerors-of-the-world" to the "Human Beings-in-solidarity-with-the-world." The Bible presents a picture of human beings in solidarity with nature and grace. Human beings are rooted in the nature, extended to human community and oriented to God. They are called to transform the nature, build up communities and work with grace. Environmental problems and ecological crisis are due to wrong understanding of the human persons, of relations among persons and peoples, and of our relationship to all of creation

and God. The problems are not primarily biological, scientific, technological or economical but philosophical, moral and theological. Environmental crisis knows no borders, however. It affects the rich and poor, believers and non-believers, developed and underdeveloped nations, other living beings and non-living beings. As the web of life is intra-connected so is also interconnected with the non-living which are again interconnected. And the problems affecting one part of it inevitably affects the rest of beings. What distinguishes human beings from the rest of created beings is their ability to correct the situation knowingly and willingly. The harmony of the world is, thus, the responsibility of human beings and we need to work in solidarity with the rest with the help of Divine grace.

The Biblical vision urges us also to take a serious look at our lifestyles. The prevailing models of consumption and production are not only unsustainable from social, environmental and economic points of view but also are immoral. We shall not indulge in lifestyles that promote consumerism, hedonism and instant gratification and remain indifferent to the damage to fellow human beings, other living beings and the cosmos at large. In this regard we need to re-examine and re-evaluate our goals, strategies and principles and develop new lifestyles in solidarity with nature and grace. We shall create a human economy that fits with ecological concerns that also serve human needs and builds community in solidarity and partnership with the rest of creation and the creator. Above all, the Biblical vision calls for a paradigm shift in our philosophy of life and values. This will entail change from a focus on material goods to holistic well-being; from excess to sufficiency; from exclusion to inclusion; from competition to cooperation, etc.

Though we share the same cosmos, human world is different in characteristic ways from animal, vegetable or mineral worlds. We should not build a hierarchy of domination and exploitation out of these differences, but an ethic of care and protection. Our singularly unique position in terms of knowledge and freedom give us our identity and responsibility. In many ways, we can do what a mineral cannot do, what a tree cannot do, what an animal

cannot do. We need to put ourselves in harmony with nature and grace and work with nature and grace, instead of breaking their laws and frustrating divine plans. Our roles are that of conversation and collaboration, support and responsibility, never of destruction, domination and exploitation. As we are endowed with responsibility, we cannot just stand by and watch; we have to live and work in solidarity with nature and grace in conversation and collaboration. This is how as human beings we ought to live, move and have our beings, if we learn from the Bible.