

BEING IN HARMONY

Biblical Vision of Interconnected Existence

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1. Introduction

The current “environmental crisis” is not simply a calamity or disaster or a crisis of certain particular phenomenon in the world. It is, rather, a fundamental deterioration of the integrity and comprehensiveness of the total rhythmic, interdependence and coherent flow of the entire ecosystem. The root of this crisis remains on the inability of the human being to place him/her self within a broadly conceived ecological context. Therefore, in search for a plausible response to environmental crisis, we have to retrieve or reconsider different premises on human superiority and various hypotheses – philosophical, theological, and religious – on his/her existence and role in the universe. In this pursuit, the religious symbols, traditions and practises of Christianity have also been challenged. Indeed, at times the Christian world view and theology were accused of despotic views on nature resulting in environmental crisis.¹ However, the Christian theology has undergone radical changes during the past forty years and our understanding on the human being and his/her relationship with the rest of creation has changed. The Christian theology finds its rationale for existence in creation, which is also characterised as the distinctive feature of Christian integrity and identity. The whole novelty of the Christian conception of creation consists on a ‘contingent beginning’ of the world. Accordingly, what might not have existed at all does actually and really exist by the supreme and inscrutable Will. The foundational fiat

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¹Lynn White Jr. accused Christianity as the cause of the entire world’s environmental problem. According to him, Christianity, being the most anthropocentric religion, by using creation theology, has de-divinized and desecralized the nature. See, Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995, 25-35. (This article is originally published in *Science* 155, 1967, 1203-7). There followed a lot of discussions and debates on the basis of this article.

claims that the creation is a free, but ultimate act of God. This doctrine of creation, which offers a comprehensive vision that encompasses the manifold of humanity, earth and God, also plays a fundamental role in helping us to form the origin, purpose and goal of life. Though there is more than one narrative in the Bible on creation, this article concentrates on the ecological significance of the story of creation narrated in the first chapter of Genesis.²

2. The Biblical Vision of Creation

The first, though not the oldest, but the most popular creation story in the Bible is narrated in the form of a liturgical hymn (Genesis 1:1-2:4a), which describes the origin of the world in a seven days' scheme. In comparison with the different similar Ancient Near Eastern traditions of the biblical time, this narrative keeps its uniqueness with its monotheism and picturizes God as the creator of the 'heavens and the earth.' The conjugation of these two different terminologies – 'heavens and the earth' – which is a way of saying that "God is responsible for all observable cosmic phenomena,"³ provides a special and condensed theological insight and relates God with the entire reality.⁴ Accordingly God is a universal being and human beings cannot limit the compatibility of the creator into their own short milieu. This idea is presented in the form of a story, with a beginning and an end.

3. From Chaos to Order

The liturgical hymn of creation, with which the book of Genesis opens, begins with the description of a chaotic situation of an absolute nothingness. It describes: "In the beginning when God created the heavens

²The Bible contains quite different cosmogonies in Genesis, Proverbs, Job, Psalms and Second Isaiah. The early biblical treatments of creation share the narrative and dramatic forms of ancient myths. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, "Introduction: The Theology of Creation Traditions," 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, 10 gives a detailed discussion on the different creation narratives in the Biblical tradition. Among the two narratives of on creation in the book of Genesis, the Yahwistic tradition (Genesis 2:4b-25) is regarded as the ancient one.

³Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 36.

⁴Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn, *The Book of Life: Biblical Answers to Existential Questions*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs 41, Leuven: Peeters Press, 2009, 122.

and the earth, the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of deep..." (Genesis 1:1-2). In the biblical vision, 'formless void' (*tohu wabohu*), is a term to denote the initial ambiguous and indefinable situation of meaninglessness and no-thingness. It is a way of explaining the 'void and vacancy' or the 'absolute nothingness,' prior to creation, – a pre-developed or undeveloped chaotic and unbearable state, where meaningful life was impossible, over which an awesome wind was sweeping.⁵ God, as the creator, begins his activity in this initial chaotic and void state and through the parallel works of '*opus separationis*' and '*opus ornatus*' (separation and ornamentation) he brought out order, stability, harmony and life into it. Theologically, this is understood as an articulation of the absolute beginning of the universe as well as an expression of the sovereign power of God.

The creation, separation and the ordering of the universe, reveals a divine intention which reflects the wisdom, goodness and ordering hand of God the creator. "The creation is internally structured, ordered in the way it is," asserts Richard L. Fern, "reflects God's purpose in creating a world radically other than himself."⁶ The primary purpose of separation is to bring order into the chaotic situation. The three acts of separation – from unformed to form, above to below, and water to dry land – is a gradual progress towards harmonisation of cosmos.⁷ The first act of separation is the division of time, whereas the last two separations are the arrangements

⁵The biblical scholars suggest different meanings such as desert, nothingness, devastation, waste, uselessness, groundless claim, uninhabitable chaos, unformed and void, hodgepodge and mish-mash to the word '*tohu wabohu*.' It is also seen as sinister, nihilating, demonic powers, but, the forces related to life, order, goodness and truth. See, Bernhard W. Anderson, "A Stylistic Study of the Priestly Creation Story," in *Canon and Authority*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973, 156; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion, 1st Fortress Press ed., Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994, 104. William P. Brown, *Structure, Role and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1-2:3*, ed. David L. Peterson, Dissertation Series, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993, 74; Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963, 47.

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

⁷It is to be noted that the author of the Priestly creation narrative speaks of three separations, such as, the separation of light and darkness (Genesis 1:4), the separation of water above and water below (Genesis 1:6) and the separation of the water below and the dry land (Genesis 1:9).

of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the created order.⁸ The further activities of creation must be understood in this background. As Jürgen Moltmann observes, “[t]hrough the separation the works of his [God’s] creation acquire identifiable form, rhythm and symmetry.”⁹ The first phase of creation ends on the third day with the appearance of vegetation. Here the purpose of the transformation of primeval chaotic situation becomes clearer. All initial elements of creation intend to prepare a setting of life in the universe. Thus, at the end of creation, the world is no more a place of ‘chaos full of opposing forces,’ nor is there the domination primeval darkness or watery abbeys. The formlessness and deserted situation of the beginning has been transformed under the creative will of God, and a dynamic and lively space came into being. With the establishment of the order in the creation, the primary chaos disappeared. Jose Morales asserts:

The word of God calls the world ... into being; God acts directly. Step by step, bringing order out of chaos. Even the structure of the creation account shows the sacred writer’s interest in the idea of order. Creation is set into a seven-day framework. Each work recounted according to the same plan. Each begins with a divine word, there follows confirmation formula, the writer then describes the work done and gives a formula of approval. There is rhythmic and gradual ascent in the text culminating with the creation of man and woman.¹⁰

The author of the Priestly creation narrative depicts a God, who creates every creature individually with its own particular task and duties and assigns a proper place to it. By this action, everyone receives its own definite role in the created universe. The initial works of separation are followed by the placement of the beings in accordance with their proper place and time; the day and night by sun, moon and stars; sky and sea by birds and fish; earth by animals, plants and finally by human beings respectively. Each one is created according to its kind, and placed according to its character in its own suitable environment. All created beings are also assigned with their own tasks and functions.

Thus, at the end of the acts of creation, the formlessness and emptiness of the early stage is transformed into a new sphere and it is filled. This description is not chronological, scientific or historical; it is

⁸Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 119.

⁹Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1992, 73.

¹⁰Jose Morales, *Creation Theology*, Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001, 17.

cosmological.¹¹ As Bernard W. Anderson observes, here the creation becomes a divinely decreed order within which each creature accomplishes the creator's will. Through the commandment of the creator, the creatures came into being with their particular nature and mission,¹² and no being comes into existence in its own way, but with the pronouncement of the word of God. In this well-planned and systematized universe, no created being is independent in its own self, for the creatures carry their own particular mission intended by the creator. The heavenly bodies, the sun and moon are neither absolute powers nor independent in themselves, but are only servants continuing the functions designated by God. Thus, in contrast to the chaos and nothingness at the beginning, the story ends with a picture of a dynamic state, where in all creatures exist in mutual relationship and communion.

4. Goodness and Value of Creation

According to the Priestly creation narrative, everything was brought into existence in a well-ordered scheme, and at each step of creation, the creator paused to survey his work. After every creative act, he assured that what he had done was 'good' and at the finale of creation, the whole grand design was pronounced 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). This declaration, as Rolf P. Knierim points out, "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."¹³ The appraisal of the creator on the goodness of creation signifies his unique intention of creatures. This assumption expresses appreciation for the intrinsic value of each and every creature, plant and planetary process, not only for the beginning of creation, but also for the entire time. Realities have come into existence through the act of God and are under his control through separation and ordering, hence are good. Therefore, the goodness ascribed to the creatures is not an outcome, which is away from the creator; rather it is the expression of his being itself.¹⁴ Since God had assured that his

¹¹Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science*, Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1984, 69-70.

¹²Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994, 30-31.

¹³Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method and Cases*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995, 199.

¹⁴Bernard F. Batto, "Creation Theology in Genesis," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, The Catholic Biblical

creation is simply good, no less than perfection, whatever is created is completely satisfying to God in all respect. The Priestly creation narrative attributes intrinsic value to creation and views the creation in its integrity. Therefore, the eco-diversity in the created order, which is the reflection of the being of the creator, is good in itself. The reflection of the wisdom and goodness of God in the ordered universe, however, does not imply that its natural order be 'monastically identified with the being of God.'¹⁵

Human beings, while accepting God as the creator of the universe realise the rest of creation as God's creatures. As Celia Deane-Drummond opines, "[a]cknowledgement of the creatures of the earth as God's creatures is the first step in affirming their importance and worth."¹⁶ As creatures of God, the value of a being is neither self generated nor independent, rather, it is related to God; it is divinely endowed. Being the generous creator of everything, God has declared that whatever thing he has created is good and thus he values each creation. This 'good' in fact, refers to the ontological goodness of the beings and every creature is made to share the divine goodness. Accordingly, life, whether it is of human or nonhuman, is related to the life giving Spirit of God and therefore, is worthy of respect. The innate goodness and value of each created being signifies that the goodness of creation does not consist of the assessment of human beings and it cannot be counted solely with reference to human desires and interests. As John Hart argues, the intrinsic value of a created being is not anthropogenic and it remains beyond humans' acknowledgement and assignment.¹⁷ The simple fact that the creatures are created gives worth to them. It 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."¹⁸ Thus, according to the Genesis account, the created universe and all beings in it receive their worth not from the usefulness or worth that is articulated by humanity, but from its own value.

Quarterly Monograph Series 24, Washington, DC: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992, 35.

¹⁵Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 10, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 165.

¹⁶Celia Deane-Drummond, "Living from the Sabbath: Developing an Ecological Theology in the Context of Biodiversity," *Interface* 7, 1 (2004), 4.

¹⁷John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006, 124.

¹⁸Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology*, Urbano: University of Illinois Press, 1995, 24.

Here we affirm the value of the non-human world in itself, regardless of its usefulness to human beings. The world and its different creation receive its value from the investment of 'God's self,' in it, and everything in creation manifests the divine purpose.¹⁹ The faithful can see and experience God's providence within the natural order as well as within history. Every event in the world and history happens ultimately for the glory of God. In order to value goodness of the created beings, argues Stephen J. Pope, "we must attend to boundaries, accept our limits, engage in self-restraint, respect natural finitude, and strive to conform to, or least cooperate with, the natural pattern of interdependence within which we are immersed."²⁰ Therefore, human beings cannot see anything in the order of creation as useless, expendable or the created world and the multitude of beings in it as just 'a resource' for their benefit alone. Instead, the earth and its various creatures are to be valued in its own inherent stance.

5. The Biblical Creation: An Opening to the Web of Interconnectedness

The fundamental faith experience of the Bible is expressed in terms of the creatorship of God. This vision of creation underlines and affirms the sovereignty of God, his creatorship and thus the creatureliness of all earthly existing beings. The sovereignty of God functions as the foundation of the interconnectedness between the different spheres of existence as well. The logic is plain: if God is the creator of all creatures, all beings in the created world are related each other *ipso facto*. The interconnectedness and the reciprocal affiliation are the direct outcome of the act of creation which coalesces every created being in the web of mutual dependence on each other towards 'a community of interconnected living things,' affirming the interdependence of every species and every member of every species by a complex web of interrelationships.²¹ In the order of creation, each member, 'in being itself' contributes to the whole, and realises its potential that is conducive for the flourishing of life.

This integral relationship of God to creatures is the most fascinating expression in the biblical ecological vision. Though radically other, being immanent in the cosmos and guiding it according to his vision, God is in

¹⁹Norman Habel, "Key Ecojustice Principles: A Theologia Crucis Perspective," *Ecotheology* 5-6 (1998), 117.

²⁰Stephen J. Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, New Studies in Christian Ethics 28, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, 205.

²¹The Earth Bible Team, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," in *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Normen C. Habel, The Earth Bible 1, Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000, 44.

constant relation with his creatures. The power of life within humanity and the life giving principle in the whole universe is the power of God. All existing realities in the world primarily depend on God for their existence and then on each other. Therefore, as Ted Peters observes, “dignity is dependent upon the web of interconnectedness that will finally unite all things, upon the anticipated whole of redeemed reality wrought by God whose love for us makes ends rather than means.”²² This interconnectedness and interdependence keep the living as well as the non-living beings from the danger of separatism. Encircled with this web of mutual dependence and relations, no being can exist in the world in isolation or no one is alien in this biotic community. Isolation shows the deficiency of interrelatedness. We, the human beings are what we are, in relation with the different organisms and the processes that makes the life possible on earth.²³ “Each human person in a certain way is a hypostasis of the entire cosmic nature,” argues Dumitru Staniloaë, “but he is this only in solidarity with others.”²⁴ This solidarity and interrelatedness prompt us to understand the meaning of ‘existence’ in terms of ‘communication in communion,’ – a life “existing in relationship with other people and things.”²⁵ It reminds us, how God, in his goodness and wisdom shaped this universe with the spirit of interconnectedness and mutual dependence. God intended this universe for all his creatures and human being is part of this ‘much larger whole.’²⁶ Since humans are part of the rest of the creation, human lives as well as responsibilities are ‘complexly, yet harmoniously intertwined’ with lives of many others, persons as well as things.²⁷ These ‘natural resources’ are the gift and benevolence of God and our consumption of it demands to recognise his graciousness and to be grateful

²²Ted Peters, *God: The World's Future - Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1978, 371.

²³Norman Wirzba, “Introduction: The Challenge of Berry's Agrarian Vision,” in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba, Berkeley, CA: Counter Point, 2002, xiv.

²⁴Dumitru Staniloaë, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, trans. Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer, vol. 2, Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000, 2.

²⁵Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 3.

²⁶Edy Korthals Altes, *Spiritual Awakening: The Hidden Key to Peace and Security, Just and Sustainable Economics, a Responsible European Union*, Studies in Spirituality 16, Leuven: Peeters Press, 2008, 37.

²⁷Wirzba, “Introduction,” xi. According to Wirzba, in nature, more things connect us than distinguish.

to him for the different gifts. It further extrapolates the necessity of respecting the integrity of creation. Our life and existence in the world are dependent upon and linked with many factors and conditions, such as the climate, the air, the water, etc. Therefore, humans should have a knowledge about 'when to stop' and 'how to use'. However, this concept of interrelatedness should not reduce the identity and uniqueness of human beings. Being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), they have a unique role and responsibility in the order of creation. The biblical tradition has viewed and interpreted this ethical responsibility in terms of human dominion.

6. Human Dominion in Terms of Interrelatedness

Basically, being human is being directed towards others, for human beings are essentially social and communal at the core²⁸ and they are radically interrelated with and dependent on everything else in the universe. In a vast community of individuals within an ecosystem in which each one depends on others, human beings exist as 'individual beings' with their own uniqueness. The human specificity and distinctiveness are manifested through mutual dependence and relationships, which becomes constitutive to the core of our being. In this web of interrelatedness, one affirms his/her identity and particularity in and through communion, for "a person cannot be imagined in himself but only within relationships."²⁹ This relationship is theologically explained in association with the concept of '*imago Dei*.' To be created in the image of God is primarily understood in terms of the 'fellowship and communion with God.'³⁰ "As the image of God on earth," says Jürgen Moltmann, "human being corresponds first of all to the relationship of God to themselves and to the whole creation. The unique calling of the human being is understood 'to be in responsible relationship with God, with each other and with the rest of creation.'³¹

This basic nature of the human person, who is 'created in relation' first with God, and then with the rest of creation, is the basis of his/her

²⁸Richard M. Gula, *Reason Informed by Faith: Foundations of Catholic Morality*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989, 67.

²⁹John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians 4, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997, 105.

³⁰Kallistos Ware, "In the Image and Likeness: The Uniqueness of the Human Person," in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection between Body, Mind and Soul*, ed. John T. Chiraban, Westport: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1996, 3.

³¹Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 77.

interconnectedness. As Eberhard Schockenhoff, observes, “the unique dignity which his immediate relationship to God gives the human person is thus displayed in the special commission which he receives for the other beings within creation.”³² At this juncture, the biblical anthropology brings out its uniqueness, in which the existence of the human being is differentiated with their ‘relationship with God and other creatures.’ These two axes of human relations i.e., as a creature, which is part of the whole creation, but at the same time being clearly distinguished from the rest of creation, define the interrelatedness between human persons and the world.³³ Through the special affinity with the creator, the personhood of the human being is exposed to the different aspects of their external relations. However, the multidimensional facet of human relationship cannot be grasped from externality alone, for it ‘follows from their relationship with God.’³⁴ This innate aspect of relationship provides dynamism and intensity to the human persons while they relate with the rest of creation. It also clearly manifests the twofold dimensions of their existence, i.e., on the one hand, the human being is related with the creator in a special way that the rest of creation is not, on the other hand, she/he is a creature among the rest of creation, a co-inhabitant on earth. The realization of these dual dimensions of human existence makes human beings more authentic in their behaviours especially in the dealings with the created world. While developing an ecological vision, we must give due importance to this fundamental relatedness. Any kind of violation and degradation of nature that diminishes the integrity of creation and threaten the fundamental relationship with the creator and creation will be ultimately an offence against the creator.

7. Towards a Harmonic and Holistic Existence

This integrated existence of human being in communion with nature can further be explained with the concept of ‘wholeness.’ Nuanced by its very terminology, ‘wholeness’ is filled with a variety of concepts such as unity, integrity, haleness, totality and so forth. Though the term ‘whole’ was used since a long time, ‘wholeness’ as a scientific term came into use only by

³²Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Natural Law and Human Dignity: Universal Ethics in an Historical World*, trans. Brian McNeil, Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003, 234.

³³Marjorie Keenan, *Care for Creation: Human Activity and the Environment*, Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2000, 28.

³⁴Schockenhoff, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, 229.

the end of the nineteenth century. Here, I use this term in order to explain the breadth and subtlety of the interrelatedness of human beings with different ecosystems as well as God.³⁵

Though 'wholeness' can be explained in terms of 'totalness' or 'entireness,' this is not a single dimensional component; rather, it encompasses the "happenings," "havings," "doings" as well as "be-ings," of a person.³⁶ Nevertheless, we cannot deduce wholeness either on external realm or on physical good. Whatever things are natural for human beings are not just biological, organic or genetic. It has a wider nuance that includes the 'full range of inclinations' and the 'desires common to rational beings' for 'knowledge, for life in a political community and for union with God.'³⁷ The description of Wendell Berry in relation to health seems to be plausible for a better explanation of this term. He deciphers its density and solidity by focusing on the convergence of 'health and holiness.' Berry says:

In that, [the convergence of health and holiness] all the convergences and dependences of Creation are surely implied. Our bodies are also not distinct from the bodies of other people, on which they depend in a complexity of ways from biological to spiritual. They are not distinct from the bodies of plants and animals, with which we are involved in the cycles of feeding and in the intricate companionships of ecological systems and of the spirit. They are not distinct from the earth, the sun and the moon, and the other heavenly bodies.³⁸

Therefore, we can neither compartmentalise nor fragment the wholeness of a person from the wholeness of the entire creation; we must "come with all other creatures to the feast of creation."³⁹

³⁵My idea of 'wholeness' can be better explained with the German term '*Ganzheitlichkeit*.' With the help of *Ganzheitlichkeit*, I would like to explain it in terms of the relatedness between God, human being and the surrounding nature. It implies that the welfare and well-being of the human being calls for solidarity, mutuality as well as indivisibility of the welfare of entire ecosystem. It includes the dynamic nature of reciprocal interaction between the organism and its various environments. Susanne Sandherr, "Ganzheitlichkeit," *Lexikon der Christlichen Ethik* 1, 2003, 584.

³⁶Fern, *Nature, God and Humanity*, 188.

³⁷Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, 149.

³⁸Wendell Berry, "The Body and the Earth," in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*, ed. Norman Wirzba, Berkeley, CA: Counter Point, 2002, 99.

³⁹Berry, "The Body and the Earth," 99.

This holistic vision draws our attention towards the deeper interconnectedness of the entire ecosystem which invites us to value things and gives each existing being its due 'respect' and concern. The individual and social life is nourished and sustained only while one respects the distinctiveness and individuality of each being. However, this approach is neither a 'romantic sacralization nor moralization' of nature, nor a total negation of technology or science; rather it promotes a reasonable acceptance of the formation of a 'possible better world.' In our effort to materialise a 'better world,' while working for human flourishing, ample emphasis should be given to the benefit of different ecosystems. It must be well balanced in relation to our interdependence within the ecosystem.⁴⁰ In order to have a better world, we must confirm the well-being and happiness of our different relations, especially, our relationships with our fellow human beings and nature. Ethically, we can explain it in terms of 'sustainable development,' in which the reciprocal 'striving and thriving' of the social and natural systems are situated together.⁴¹ In this view, the needs of the present and future generations are balanced in a better way.

The core of this 'holistic vision' remains on the practise of moral principles, which aims at the true good of the entire creation. It includes the annihilation of our desire to possess more, to (ab)use or exploit others (persons as well as resources) for individual benefit and to have more, merely for enjoyment or luxurious life. If the advancement of science and technology ignores the multifaceted relatedness of human beings and concentrates on the accumulation of material goods and its consumption, even if it is for the 'benefit of majority,' it will not bring happiness and freedom, nor does it offer true well-being and welfare.⁴² Therefore, our idea of wholeness appeals to see realities above their material realm and frame the concept of happiness and welfare in the context of one's right relationship with God, neighbour, him/herself and the earth. A true and genuine welfare consists neither in the progress of material goods and its consumption or maximisation, nor in the construction of great monuments and architects; instead, it does focus on the building up of richer relationships between persons not excluding the creator and different creatures on the earth. In this view, the ecological task of Christian theology is to enhance and enrich the different spheres of relationships that

⁴⁰Pope, *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics*, 206.

⁴¹Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996, 168.

⁴²*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, §28.

promote the human and ecological flourishing. It prioritises the human responsibility and its obligation to promote the rights and dignity of all beings in the cosmic community and affirms the intrinsic relationship between the well-being of the individual self and the productivity, diversity, and dynamic stability of the natural world.

8. Conclusion

The Christian view of creation underlines a 'shared existence,' of different beings in the created world. The biological integrity and well-being of an individual depends on the ecological integrity of his/her entire ambience and the well-being of an individual is intrinsically intertwined with the integrity of creation. As a being depending on others and many other living as well as non-living beings and systems, one can neither compartmentalise nor radically separate his/her well-being from the well-being of nature; rather both are integrally interconnected and thus go hand in hand. Hence, in a wider spectrum, the good to human beings and true human interests neither rival the good of other creatures nor threaten the harmony of creation and we can place the human being in their vast order of life in which the good of each individual is to be realised in relation to the whole and each element of the whole in due proportion. We cannot actualise the individual benefit and goodness apart from the common good wherein the environmental sustainability and integrity would become the most essential conditions. Therefore, our moral choices and actions must consider the value and well-being of nature that would promote the welfare of all.