
Human Culture and the Integrity of Creation

Biblical Reflections on Genesis 1-11

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Culture and cultures: the global dimension

The debate about gospel and culture generally focuses on the problem of the authentic inculturation of the gospel in “indigenous” culture contexts. Indeed, no one can be universal outside his/her own yard; there is no universality without identity.

But any authentic model of indigenization must be transparent in terms of the universal dimension of the gospel. More than ever today our world is one. Even the remotest South Pacific island cannot escape the effects of the predominant economic, military and communication orders of the world. “Coconut-time” is not beyond world-time which in the opinion of many concerned people is quickly rushing forward to the zero-hour of global destruction. The worldwide proclamation of the gospel today is far less a geographical than a theological task.

The global concern is one of the decisive features of Christian inculturation in the context of a socialist society like the German Democratic Republic. Living in this country, with a borderline which divides not only two cultures of identical national origin but also two fundamentally different social orders, one cannot help developing a border-transgressing world-view. This Germany produced a number of world-famous poets, philosophers and theologians, and it gave rise to two world wars. The borderline separates not just two different German states; it also separates two world systems and the two most powerful military blocs confronting each other and this planet, threatening to bring about the total annihilation of life and the world.

To speak about gospel and culture today, one must face this reality. Whatever may be the specific problems posed by the variety of different national, racial, tribal, social

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cultures, we cannot ignore human culture as such, which has to be safeguarded against extermination.

But there is a deep ambiguity about this statement. For it is human culture itself which has created the technology which threatens us — together with the distrust and fear which makes the misuse of technology possible.

To make this paradox even more complex, it has to be added that this overall threat to human culture comes from a “Christian” culture, the highly advanced civilization of Europe and North America which has had many centuries of gospel-preaching and teaching. It is within the framework of this culture that an almost perfect system has been established to nourish one’s own economy at the expense of the so-called third world; that an unproportionally high percentage of the limited natural resources of the earth is used and wasted; that the most sophisticated means of mass destruction have been invented in order to guarantee “security”!

It remains a persistent challenge to the gospel and culture debate that the first atomic bomb in human history, the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, has been called the “Christian bomb”.

Approaching the problem of gospel and culture from this angle coincides with one of the main tasks set by the WCC’s Sixth Assembly in Vancouver 1983. The Vancouver delegates urged that priority be given to engaging the churches “in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation”.

But how are ecological and social factors interlinked in the concept of the integrity of creation? Can it be claimed that the integrity of creation is the testing ground for human culture?

In the following pages I attempt to reflect on these questions in the context of the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis. These chapters constitute something like the biblical “prime story” about the relationship between human culture and the integrity of creation. The exegetical approach presented here needs a word of explanation. It combines the results of the historico-critical method with a “transcritical” view of the text in its final version shaped by the last redaction. This special interest in the *Letzt- und Jetztgestalt* of biblical texts receives its main impulse from the Amsterdam school around Frans Breukelman. This school, to which the following interpretation owes some of its basic ideas (alongside the commentaries of Claus Westermann and Walter Brueggemann), puts its main emphasis on the narrative and lexical coherence of texts, reading them in a seemingly “naive” way as one whole.

Genesis 1-11: a story of mutual relationships

The humanity-earth relationship: Adam and Adama

When God decides to rid the earth’s face of humankind and all living beings because of human wickedness, it becomes clear that the human being is no longer the crown of creation but the trouble-maker. God will now revoke one part of the original divine work as Creator; every single one of the already considerable cultural achievements of humanity — the cultivation of the earth 2:15; classification of animals/language 2:19ff.; division of labour 4:2; building of cities 4:17; metalwork 4:22; art 4:21; cult 4:26 — will be set aside.

In the story of the Flood human culture is washed off. The waters, driven away from the earth on the third day of creation, again cover the ground, drowning all vegetation and all signs of human presence. Or, to follow the second creation account, the Flood, originally sent to make the earth fertile (2:5f.), will now produce global sterility. The integrity of God's creation and human culture appear mutually exclusive.

To understand this tragic development it is necessary to go back to the beginning of the creation story. What is the "evil" (6:5) which makes it impossible for God to tolerate humanity as part of creation?

Reading the first chapter of Genesis with this question in mind, one stops at 1:26-28. Humanity there receives the divine mandate to have dominion over the earth and the animals. However this may be interpreted, it indicates a relationship in which nature is subordinated. Is, thus, the Bible itself to be blamed for the "ruthless imperialism" over nature which, according to Dorothy Sölle, has shaped our relation to creation?

The history of the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 is perhaps an instructive lesson in one-sided and selective Bible-reading. For the "master" of creation in the first creation account is very clearly counterbalanced in the second account. There we are told (2:5) that the task of the human being is "to serve the earth" (*abad adama*).

This Hebrew word *abadlebed* has the double connotation of servant/slave and work. Thus the usual translations (e.g. till the ground) leave out one part of the original meaning, possibly the more important one. For it might well be that already the final compiler of the Genesis stories knew something of the dangers which the "Master" of 1:28 could cause if not tamed by the "servant" of 2:5.

However, the term is repeated two more times. In 2:15 God puts Adam in the garden of Eden "to serve/cultivate and to keep/guard" it (*abadlshamar*). Later, after the Fall, God is concerned that human beings could "take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (3:22). This leads to their expulsion from the garden. God's motive is frequently explained as some kind of divine "envy".

The text itself gives another explanation. "Therefore the Lord sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground (*abad adama*) from which he was taken" (3:23). Does that not indicate that Yahweh wishes to guarantee that Adam continues to serve the earth? Eating the fruit of the tree of life would make humanity independent of the fruits of earth (cf. 2:9,16) and thus negligent in serving the earth. This service according to 2:5 is important for the human being; to refuse it would mean the loss of an important part of being human. If Adam is the master of creation he is at the same time also bound to the earth as its servant.

This interpretation which focuses on a complementary relationship between human mastery and human service of the earth is strengthened by a second observation. *Man* is expelled from the garden "to serve the earth from which he was taken" (3:23). The Yahwist account of creation obviously wants to emphasize that "Adam" is made of *adama* — earth. Adam, the human being, is an earthly creature whose fate is inseparably connected with that of the earth itself.

Does the "Fall", then, have something to do with the human being's refusal to fulfill the task of serving the earth, especially with the temptation to become "divine" ("You will be like God", 3:5) rather than human? This could be suggested by a phrase which belongs to the most frequently quoted ones:

...till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return (3:19).

This passage, which is generally understood as the introduction of human mortality, has another possible meaning. In a modified interpretation it points to a kind of final “metanoia” or conversion of Adam to the *adama*, even a kind of reconciliation after the original betrayal of the earth.

It is worth mentioning that the verb *shub*/return, which is used twice in 3:19, in the Old Testament frequently has this theological meaning of “metanoia”, of restoring the right position of human beings with regard to God. This use occurs often in the prophetic and Deuteronomic texts (cf. Deut. 4:30; 30:2; Jer. 15:19). Maybe this interpretation could also explain why the serpent, having induced the ambitious desire for “knowledge” and to be like God, is cursed to go on its belly and to eat dust (3:14) — another way of “returning” to the earth from which it is taken, like the other animals and like Adam (2:19).

There is another observation worth making. Earth-woman-body/matter-sin is often opposed to man-mind/spiritual qualities. This played an important role in justifying the dominance of male over female, human beings over earth, mind over body; it created the dichotomy between God and the world, subject and object. Looking carefully at the text of chapters 2 and 3, this pattern appears to be mere prejudice. First, there are no “bodily” desires which cause the Fall, only purely intellectual/theological desires and ambitions: the “subtleness” of the serpent (3:1), the temptation to start a first theological dispute about God (3:1-5) rather than obey his commandments, the aspiration for wisdom/knowledge (3:6).

Secondly, and this may relate to the first, the woman in the Yahwist account is the only one of all the numerous beings mentioned (Adam, animals of the field, birds of the heaven, serpent) who is not directly made of the earth/*adama*. She is made of Adam. That means that the woman as the second human being on earth is the first one of “human” origin. Does that, according to the narrative logic of the text, explain her greater inclination to abandon the earth, to aspire for the “higher”, to turn her face towards heaven rather than to earth?

This, of course, would have consequences not only for the dichotomies/domination patterns mentioned above but also for the understanding of sin. As all human beings after Eve are, like her, not formed out of earth, it is humanity as a whole who from now onwards is tempted by this sin: to forget about the god-given earthly origin and the earth-oriented task of Adam.

Human culture, described in Genesis 1:26-28 as human domination over nature, is explained in Genesis 2:5-3:24 in terms of “cultivation” of the earth which basically carries a connotation of service rather than rule, mutual relationship rather than autocratic control. Adam is made of *adama*/earth to serve the earth, which in turn gives its fruits to sustain human life. Like Adam all animals are made of *adama* (2:19): human and non-human life are inter-related and connected to the earth. Humanity and nature are, to use a modern term, part of one and the same ecosystem. Life is bound to the earth. Human culture should take this into consideration.

Human work described as “cultivation”, i.e. serving and tending the garden (2:15), is the first and basic biblical statement on “culture”. The integrity of creation requires that human work/culture is not dissociated from the earth, not even in the name of “higher”

— e.g. “purely” intellectual, religious, theological — aspirations as in the story of the Fall. By making his life on earth much more difficult (3:17ff.) God reminds Adam of his essentially human relationship to the earth: a punishment which reveals at the same time God’s ongoing, life-sustaining grace (cf. 3:21: the making of garments).

The man-woman relationship: Adam and Eve

Having spoken about the inter-relation of all life which results from its earthly origin, something has now to be said about the uniqueness of human life (which corresponds to the aspect of “mastership” in Gen. 1:26-28).

In 2:18 God realizes that creation is still imperfect. Adam is “alone”, without “a helper fit for him”. The Hebrew word *lebadol*/alone is derived from *bad*/part: Adam exists only “partly”. The other word *kenegdo*/fit has for him the meaning of “facing one another”, including a connotation of “communication” (*nagad*=to report). Adam needs a “counterpart”.

Thus God makes more earthly creatures, forming them like Adam out of *adama* (2:19). Adam, confronting them, gives them their names. But he does not find the “helper” who could become his counterpart (2:20).

Both this action of naming the animals and the failure to find a counterpart amongst them indicate a certain stage of human culture. Adam is no longer exclusively determined by his earthly origin and community with the animals. He turns out to be different from animals, even their “master”, through defining them. Man is not “nature” alone, but nature plus “culture”.

This is clearly shown in the creation of the second human being who is a woman, and, as already mentioned, unlike Adam not made of earth but of human matter. Humanity since then is only indirectly, i.e. through Adam, linked to the earth. The further development of human culture requires a “breaking away” from nature and an element of “domination”. This implies a promise and a necessity, but at the same time, as we have seen, a great risk.

To go on with the story. In the second human being the first human being recognizes himself, defining her as “woman” and himself as “man”. Adam’s existence henceforth is no longer determined by his serving/ruling relationship to earth and by his obedience to God alone, but also by his relationship to his fellow human. The social dimension has emerged. Obviously, this relationship starts as “good”. Adam rejoices in his “counterpart”, calling her “flesh of my flesh”, affirming an essential “oneness” between “my flesh” and “your flesh” (2:24). It is the first occurrence of an “I”. But this “I” is not opposed but closely linked to the “you”, pointing to a “we”: a community of cooperation (“helper”) and without “shame” (2:25).

This goodness of the interhuman relationship changes in chapter 3. As from 2:18ff. the text starts describing a human-animal relationship. But unlike Adam who refused to communicate with the “beasts of the field” (*hajat hasadeh*, both in 2:19 and 3:1), the woman now starts a conversation with one of them, thus accepting the serpent as a “counterpart” and, taking its advice, as “helper”. (Does that point to a tension between “cultivation” and the “cult” of nature, the latter being the constant challenge which the Canaanite cult of Baal posed to the worship of Yahweh?)

However, humanity has to pay a high price for that advice and help received from the serpent. The first fruit of “knowledge” for Adam and the woman is the perception of their nakedness. They make themselves “aprons”.

It is interesting to note that the term *hagol* in 3:7, usually translated as “apron”, in all other places in the old Testament normally means “girdle”. This word describes a common part of the normal clothing, but occurs “frequently with the specialized meaning of soldier’s belt”, e.g. 1 Samuel 18:4; 2 Samuel 18:11; 20:8; 2 Kings 3:21.¹

Does the knowledge of “good and evil” obtained by eating the fruit open the eyes to the dark side of one’s fellow human? Is the “girdle” in 3:7 the symbol of a primal “armouring” against each other in an attempt to protect “my flesh” against “your flesh”?

Whatever the special meaning of “girdle”/apron here may be, there is no doubt that the interhuman, and thereby also the God-human relationship, is now undermined. They hide themselves, they accuse each other. The dialogue between “you” and “me” becomes hostile. The consequences of this are not without an inner logic. The relationship between man and woman, man and earth is radically changed; it becomes more complicated and ambiguous.

Procreation now onwards is no longer effortless and without trouble as in the case of the sleeping Adam (2:21), but nature imposes itself with pain on woman’s childbearing. To remind her of the gap between nature and human culture which she did not respect?

At the same time the woman becomes dominated by the man (3:16). As a result of their failure to cooperate and communicate in the cultivation of the earth.

And, finally, Adam is facing severe difficulties in securing the fruits of the earth. To call back to his mind that his task is not the cult but the cultivation of nature?

Thus there appears to be a dialectical relationship. Humanity, on the one hand, is inseparably connected to the earth, dependent on and even subordinated to it (*abad/serve*). On the other hand, humanity has a clear mandate to rule the earth/nature. The necessity for Adam to struggle with “thorns and thistles” (3:18), Eve’s pain in giving birth to her children, the enmity between human beings and animals (serpent 3:15) — all this seems to warn against any romanticization of nature, any cultic adoration of the earth.

Humanity cannot survive without constantly struggling with nature, without constantly searching for new and more effective ways of cultivating the earth — for new scientific insights and better technologies, thus exercising the right to dominate (Gen. 1:26-28). A naive and one-sided idealization of nature as well as a global condemnation of technology/rationality etc. may be understandable as a reaction to the present ecological crisis. But this cannot be an adequate and realistic way out. Nature is not only beautiful, it is also dangerous and life-consuming.

We must at once stress a complementary aspect. The domination of human beings over nature is no ruthless imperialism. If human beings are the “head” of the ecosystem, they are also part and “servants” of it. This implies the recognition of certain limits to the human handling of nature, of certain rules which have to be strictly observed. People must use, not abuse the earth; cultivate, not exploit it. They have to work “in relation” — both to the earth and the neighbour.

Keeper of the brother — keeper of the earth: Cain and Abel

Chapter 4 of the Genesis narrative starts dealing with interhuman relationships, between Cain and his brother Abel. The crucial point of this story seems to be the

¹ J.M. Myers, in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, New York, 1962, Vol. II, p.399.

question why God had regard for Abel and his offering, but not for Cain (4:4f.). Normally, the explanation given centres round "God's free decision", failing to argue whether this "free decision" did not indeed imply a severe injustice which provoked the violent reaction of Cain. But could not there be another explanation?

The birth and the name of Cain receive a comment: "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (4:1). The name of Abel receives no such comment. The Hebrew word *habel*/Abel means "vanity, breath, vapour"; it seems to underline the "nothingness" of Abel in contrast to Cain. The text does not define Abel as "a man" like Cain (4:1), but as "his brother". Abel has no individual identity; he is Abel-in-relation-to-Cain. From the very beginning he is the dependent one.

This is stressed in the social and literary context. In the patriarchal system of Israel the first-born son, being the successor to the father as family head, was always considered superior to the second-born. He inherited the land and had also claim to a double portion of all other kinds of wealth (Deut. 21:17). His position of inferiority, therefore, put the second-born son in solidarity, for example, with women and servants. Abel stands for the smaller and weaker ones. Might this not be the reason why God in Genesis 4:4 takes special care of him? The context of the Book of Genesis could well support this thesis. Among the brother-couples dealt with there is not a single one where the first-born gets his traditionally sanctioned legal right. It is always the second-born who takes his place. This is clear in the story of Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27). But the same happens with Ishmael and Isaac (21:10), Zerah and Perez (38:27ff.), Ephraim and Manasseh (48:13ff.).

This would suggest that God's favouring Abel was not just an arbitrary action but well in line with the "preferential option" for the small ones: for those who need special support because they are living on the underside and in the backyards of society. The Exodus events find their reflection in the Genesis narrative.

To go on with the story. If Abel is described as "his brother" this in fact implies a change in the position of Cain as well. He is no longer an absolute being in himself ("a man", 4:1), he also has become Cain-in-relation-to-Abel. The question is whether he accepts this. If Cain looks at Abel in the same way Adam at first looked at the woman, seeing her as "flesh of my flesh", as enrichment and complement to his own existence, then there should be no difficulty in the relationship.

But the viewpoint is different now. Cain does not rejoice in his brother and the special care of God for the small brother. To speak in the pattern of the Adam-woman story in chapter 2: "Adam" now considers God's taking away one of his ribs a hostile act, a deprivation rather than an enrichment. The counterpart has become the adversary. The "I" no longer recognizes itself in the mirror of "you", "you" has become the rival, the one against me. "I" is something without "you".

This is made evident in the expression "his face fell" (4:6). Cain stops looking at his brother, he breaks communication with him. The result: "Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (4:8). Without interhuman communication/cooperation even coexistence becomes impossible.

In the final dialogue with God Cain continues his rebellion against God and his brother: "Am I my brother's keeper?" (4:9). The text leaves no doubt that from God's side there is only a clear "yes" to that question. Obedience to God for Cain would have meant looking after Abel the same way God looked after him. But Cain obviously did

not appreciate God's concern for his brother. He wants a more "neutral" God who does not constantly attack the privileges of the stronger ones.

But there appears still another ally to support the brother whom Cain refused to serve/keep: the *adama*. It has "opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand"; the blood "now is crying to me from the ground/*adama*" — 4:10f. The earth reflects Cain's homicidal action. Having received deadly instead of life-sustaining deeds, blood rather than seeds and fruitful work from the hands of Cain, the earth does not remain a silent witness. It enters into solidarity with Abel and refuses solidarity with the human being who abused his strength and killed his brother: "When you till the ground/*adama* it shall no longer yield to you its strength" (4:12).

Consequently, Cain is driven away from the earth (4:14) which has become infertile because of his rising against his brother. Cain, who was introduced in 4:2 as "servant of the earth" (*obed adama*), is no longer able to be in harmony with the earth. The "servant of the earth" should also have been a "servant/keeper of the brother". If the human being is part and head of the ecosystem, the ecosystem is also part of the socio-system. The interhuman and the human-earth relationships are closely linked. Justice and peace have an ecological dimension and are the main condition for preserving the integrity of creation.

Respecting life: justice and integrity of creation in the Flood story

It is, then, no wonder that in the Flood narrative two chapters later (Gen. 6:9) God's grace and the "justice"/*sedaka* of one man, Noah, become the basis for God's decision to maintain the integrity of creation despite all human wickedness: Noah, a "man of justice/righteousness" (*sedaka*) "found favour in the eyes of the Lord" (8:1f.). After the Flood God promises never again to curse the earth, 8:21, establishing his everlasting covenant with all human and non-human life including the earth (9:9ff.). This decision is irrevocable and has remained valid till today.

Two things may be especially mentioned here. God's grace sets the basic and lasting precondition for the integrity of creation which comprises humanity and nature. God's promise in this sense contradicts any end-of-the-world mood and prophecy. And it is not humanity who, like Atlas, has to carry the world on its shoulders.

On the other hand, God's grace is not "cheap" grace. The adequate and necessary human response to the divine grace is justice/*sedaka*. The Flood story shows that there is a legitimate human domination over the earth and animal life (9:2f.). But at the same time human beings have to respect life — the life of the brother and the life of non-human creatures.

This is expressed in the double prohibition not to "eat animal flesh with its life, that is its blood" and not to shed the blood of human beings (9:5f.). Animal life and the brother's life have something in common. This high estimation of life as such (*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben* in the sense of Albert Schweitzer) again emphasizes the close relationship between the sociological and ecological aspects. There is a connection between all living beings. The rapidly and irreversibly continuing eradication of biological species in our time is a sin in itself and a warning that the human species as well is on the way to extinction. If the fish in the rivers and the trees in the forests are dying, it is high time for humanity to return to an attitude of overall life-respect, to come down to the earth again.

This leads us to the final episode in the Genesis creation stories: the Tower of Babel.

Human culture: earthwards or skyscraping?

The Tower of Babel was a masterpiece of human inventiveness which required an already highly advanced stage of culture/technology. Why then is the work stopped by God? Why does God turn the elaborate coordination of different activities (11:3) into scatteredness, disrupt communication through a confusion of languages (11:8f.)? Does God no longer want human beings to cooperate and to communicate one with another as in the beginning (2:18)?

It seems that the reasons for God's intervention lie in the motives which the people set, for their ambitious undertaking "to build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens" (11:4) — "Let us make a new name for ourselves" (11:4).

The name: after Genesis 2:7-23 humanity has already a name. It is called Adam-made-of-Adama. And it is called "man" and "woman" after having recognized the "I" in the face of "you". According to the divine order, the human name expresses both the interhuman relationship and the relationship to earth. Adam, when still alone, could name the animals (2:18ff.) but could not name himself. He found his own name ("man") only through a human counterpart and helper (2:23).

But now the people of Babel want to make a name "for themselves": not in relation to the fellow-creatures nor in relation to the earth, but in relation to the "sky" — a tower "with its top in the heavens", this term "heaven" in 11:4 being clearly opposed to the term "earth" (*eres*) at the end of the verse. As in the story of the Fall, the face of the human being is turned upwards once again, losing sight both of the earth and the earthly brother. A "skyscraping" culture has emerged which is characterized by human absolutization.

This is emphasized by the basic meaning of the Hebrew word *migdal*/tower used in 11:4. It describes a part of a fortification, a watchplace from where one distinguishes between approaching enemies and friends and a shelter where the population could take refuge. The "tower" of the city of Babel is a protected area, a strong room and a place of "safe" defence and struggle against outside hostility/aggression.²

This relates the "tower" of 11:4 to the "girdle/apron" in 3:7. Human beings want to protect themselves against one another, and they make immense technical advances in the process. Having started with a simple "girdle" in the garden of Eden, their military build-up will now touch the sky — an absolutely "safe" defence-system which makes one part of humanity "invulnerable", i.e. independent of the fate of others and of the earth. Human inventiveness, human cooperation and communication have become totally destructive. That is the reason why God intervenes.

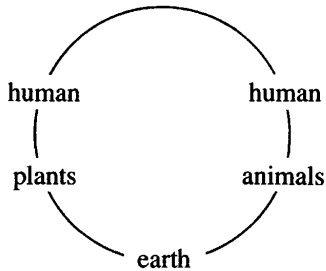
Seen from this perspective, the Tower story seems to present some striking parallels to our contemporary situation. A large part of human creativity and natural resources is wasted for "defensive" or openly aggressive military purposes. Huge towers of armaments are erected on the back of nature and on the back of the hungry, poor and homeless, especially in the third world. And the name of God is claimed for that idol of "security" against others (cf. the religious connotation of the "tower with its top in the heavens").

But it is not God who is defended by the skyscraping "defence-initiative" of Babel. For the God who made Adam out of *adama* and man and woman out of "one flesh", the God who is always caring for the downtrodden and disinherited "Abels" throughout world history — this God cannot dwell in the murderous "security" of the city of Babel.

² *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, eds M.S. Miller and J.L. Miller, New York, 1952, p.77f.

A revolution to peace

If relationship is now the key notion in ecology and if our approach to nature is affected by what we believe about humankind (and vice versa), it is clear that the Genesis creation stories tell a lot about relationships between humanity and nature. The human being as the “crown” of creation is at the same time integrated into a manifold network of relationships: it is Adam-in-relation-to Adama (earth), Adam-in-relation-to-Eve, Cain-in-relation-to-Abel, Noah-in-relation-to-the-animals. This dialectical and complex human-earth-relationship of at once domination and dependence/service/responsibility can be expressed by a circle:



It is clear that the human beings have a top position. However, this superiority is not only relativized by the mutual dependence of human life on earth (service/keeping/cultivation) but also by the fact that being human always means being human-in-relation-to-another-human. The highest place in the circle, i.e. the “absolute” top, remains empty. Maybe God keeps it, so that it might not be usurped by human beings. It means that human aspirations are not to deal with the “above” but with one another and with nature.

Thus the relationship between human beings obtains basically on the same level (brothers and sisters rather than masters and slaves) and implies mutual assistance (“helper”). The first-born have to look after their weaker brothers and sisters, thus counterbalancing human inequalities: a movement of constant re-establishing of justice and peace which becomes fundamental for the integrity of creation (cf. 6:9 the justice/*sedaka* of Noah).

Any human culture absolutizing itself at the expense of other human beings and/or nature undermines the integrity of creation and thereby becomes self-destructive. If humanity needs a “conversion” in its attitude to nature, it at the same time needs a fundamentally new self-perception based on co-existence, cooperation and communication rather than confrontation and competition. There is no other way to keep the “oikoumene”, the inhabited earth, habitable, no other way for humanity to survive. Human culture must be humanized to a global peace culture, thus establishing the preconditions for more justice and a reintegration of creation. The next revolution facing humanity is a revolution to world peace.