

# Ecological Crisis and Theology: a Relational Approach

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Divinity  
in  
Graduate Division of Religion and Theology Studies

The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
May 2005

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## Abstract

Having recognized the urgency of cry from the environment about its suffering, there have been plenty of theological attempts to make the prescription. Among them, three common approaches can be found: anthropocentric, biocentric and theocentric. However, the major problem shared among the three approaches is its relying on centralism, which inevitably results in different forms of egoism and domination. Therefore, the central thesis of this study is to decentralize the current eco-theological approaches, which are relying on various degrees of centralism, and at the same time by claiming that the relational approach, which is de-centering of any centralism, is a better way to discuss the current ecological problem.

## 撮要

在回應全球環境生態危機的前提下，基督教就曾多方作出獻議。在眾多有關環境生態的神學討論中，我們大致上可歸納出三個較普遍的進路：以人類為中心、以生態為中心和以上帝為中心。然而，三者卻有一共同的弱點，就是同樣太著重「中心主義」的意想模式。倚賴「中心主義」的思想進路無疑會帶來不同傾向的自我中心主義以及伸延至不同程度的支配心態。有見及此，本文提出以「非中心主義」的進路去取代現有流行的「中心主義」的進路，其中以「關係式」的進路去建構今日生態神學的討論。

## **Introduction**

Ecological crisis is not unknown by many today. No one will dare to deny the seriousness of the problems on both biotic and a-biotic environment on earth. The biological science was my first study in university. From which I have learned the amazing advancement of biotechnology. The Human Genome Project has been almost completed. It signifies the day of human manipulation of our body at genetic scope has come. Once the incurable disease might now be tackled by genetic modification. However, it is only the one-sided achievement in our understanding of biological world. At the other side, I am totally overwhelmed by the reality of our own living environment. The lectures on ecological science lent me an ear and an eye to the dangerous situation of our earth planet. Our outer atmosphere has been suffered from the depletion of ozone layer. Within this precious natural shelter, the temperature is unceasing to climb up and the global greenhouse effect is greatly changing the living condition, especially on the sea level and the size of ice land on both poles of the earth. At the same time, without obtaining an approval from the sea, we are forcing the sea to ingest our various kinds of human-made wastes. Among those, the worst of them is the nuclear one. On the land, the excessive deforestation is taking place in an uncontrollable manner. The desertification in Africa surely further hampers the survival of those

already poor-ridden developing countries. Added up all those human-made impacts on the a-biotic world, the survival of numerous living species is under serious threatening. At this point, I come to realize that human beings are one among them, which means we are all living under the same crisis.

With this question in mind, I am trying to figure out how the Christian faith responds to this common threat. Therefore, I devote my effort to do a critical examination on the relationship between the Christian faith and today's ecological crisis. However, I am not the single one to take this matter seriously. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, many voices had been lifted up from the Christianity.<sup>1</sup> In 1979, in response to the invitation of the World Council of Churches, about 900 people coming around the globe gathered in the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to attend the conference about the future of our world. The title of the conference was "Faith, Science and the Future" and it was designated to ponder the theme on the contribution of faith, science and technology in the struggle for a just, participatory and sustainable society.<sup>2</sup>

Four sub-themes were included:<sup>3</sup>

1. The relation between science and faith as forms of human

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<sup>1</sup> Although I am brought up with a Protestant background, I am not restricted to have an ecumenical sense of my own faith. Here the word Christianity I am using is included the Roman Catholics, Orthodox and Protestant groups.

<sup>2</sup> R.L. Shinn ed., *Faith and Science in an Unjust World: Report of the World Council of Churches' Conference on Faith, Science, and the Future, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA, 12-24 July, 1979* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980), p.3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.5-6.

understanding and the role of faith in determining the right use of science and technology.

2. The analysis of ethical problems resulting from present and prospective developments in particular areas of science and technology.

3. The economic and political problems relating to world resource use and distribution, and the more equitable sharing of science and technology.

4. The new expressions of Christian social thought and action, which are both attentive to the promises and threats of modern science and technology and engaged in the search for a just, participatory and sustainable society.

To create a just and sustainable living society, the use of science and technology is undeniably a helpful tool. But science and technology are both as promise and threat to our life and our planet respectively. Intermingled with them, the religious faith is indispensable in the use of science and technology in the construction of a sustainable world. Theologian Charles Birch, in his contributed essay in the conference, stated that the role of faith is cooperating with the science to construct a world-view, which is a life-sustaining view.<sup>4</sup> The resultant world view must entail a live-ethic which embraces the whole of the world of value.

Among the Roman Catholic circle, the voice of ecological concern is much easily discerned from the words of the Pope. Pope John Paul II made a worldwide speech on the celebration of the World Day of Peace on the first day in the year 1991.<sup>5</sup> His

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Birch, "Nature, Humanity and God in Ecological Perspective," in R.L. Shinn ed., *Faith and Science in an Unjust World: Report of the World Council of Churches' Conference on Faith, Science, and the Future, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA, 12-24 July, 1979* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980), p.67.

<sup>5</sup> <http://conservation.catholic.org/ecologicalcrisis.htm>, assessed on 25 April, 2005.

message began as:<sup>6</sup>

IN OUR DAY, there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of DUE RESPECT FOR NATURE, by the plundering of natural resources and by an progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty. Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. The public in general as well as political leaders are concerned about this problem, and experts from a wide range of disciplines are studying its causes. Moreover, a new ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS is beginning to emerge which, rather than being downplayed, ought to be encouraged to develop into concrete programs and initiatives. (emphasis made by myself)

Representing common vision shared unto about 1.1 billions Catholics around the world, Pope John Paul II encouraged them as followers of Jesus Christ to act for the already sick ecosphere. A desperate need for joint action on the international level should be supported with individual level. A new solidarity of the world between the developing and well industrialized countries should be formed. At the end of his message, he cited St. Francis as an example of creature friendly Jesus' followers who has serious obligation to respect the world and watch over it with care.<sup>7</sup>

In the same year, another conference held by the World Council of Churches in Australia. But the significance of this assembly was the presentation of the theological

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



concept of the presence and energy of the Holy Spirit in Orthodox perspective.<sup>8</sup> In the assembly, various presenters made their papers according to the following four themes:<sup>9</sup>

1. Giver of life – sustain your creation!
2. Spirit of life – set us free!
3. Spirit of unity – reconcile your people!
4. Holy Spirit – transform and sanctify us!

In co-operating with the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox theological thinkers had to reexamine their teaching and preaching, their worship and their activities in regard to human's relationship to the natural world from the ecological view-point. Various aspects of the Holy Spirit were studied and one of them was especially focus on today's ecological problem. There is no hesitation about the exclusive factor of the ecological Problem, i.e. human being. Human beings, by acting wrongly provoked the ecological crisis, but misguided actions are not a permanent and original natural tendency in us, but an elective activity, formed by his mentality: the human conception about himself, about the world and about God. To rectify this error, from the Orthodox theological perspective, the Holy Spirit of God is important in sustaining a creation which is being threatened by human acts of destruction. In the article titled "Creation and the Ecological Problem," Vassilios Giultsis believes that amid the negative consequences of the Industrial Revolution, human estrangement is one the significant

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<sup>8</sup> Gennadios Limouris, *Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation : an Orthodox Approach for the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, Australia, 6-21 February, 1991*, (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5

cause of today's tragic ecological dilemma.<sup>10</sup> The imbalance between the technological achievements and humanity's soul searching was the underlying root. Giultsis blames that after the Fall, the illusion and insecurity and an mistaken rely on the power grasping the human beings have been leaded astray from the God. Out of the fear of death, human beings misplace the security in the manipulation of the civilization and the environment. It ends up with an ecological impasse. However, hope still exists as the Holy Spirit comes and renews the whole creation. The reconciliations of God and humanity as well as humanity and the creation are expectable. Humanity and the creation are sanctified and united through the work of the Holy Spirit. Human beings will change from "master of creation" to "provident human" and "co-creator" with the Creator<sup>11</sup>

Coming across the views of their ecological concern from the three Christian traditions: Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, I find that different streams of Christianity are the same in constructing their work on tackling the present critical condition in our common world. Since the disturbing and worrying news of our world is a global issue, a global means of solution is expected. A new solidarity is to be formed, as Pope John

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<sup>10</sup> Vassilios Giultsis, "Creation and the Ecological Problem," in Gennadios Limouris, *Come, Holy Spirit, Renew the Whole Creation : an Orthodox Approach for the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, Australia, 6-21 February, 1991*, (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1990), p.228-233.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

Paul II claimed, crossing cultural variance, geographical boundary to resist the anti-living ecological destruction.

First, I come across the issue by re-examining the current ways of eco and theological discussion, which will be in the chapter one. Second, I argue that the relational approach in theological tradition is a better approach than the current approaches, which are confined in the centralism mode of thinking. Third, I find the supporting evidence of my proposal from the current theologians. At the end, I try to sum up what is the significance of a relational approach in the comprehension of the present eco-theology construction.

## **Chapter 1: The relationship between Christianity and ecological crisis**

The responses to the ecological crisis are very rich. Among them, the core of the question is in two foci. The first is the relationship between God and nature and another is the relationship between human and nature. To address these, three common approaches are found: 1. anthropocentrism; 2. biocentrism; 3. theocentrism.

### **1.1 Anthropocentrism**

Anthropocentrism is a way of thinking that human is placing at the center. Everything in the world is estimated in the reference to the utility to human. The human values and human interests are at the highest priority. Therefore, a conflict of interest between human and nature, the final direction is to safeguard the human interest in matter cost in the sacrifice of the others. As the human value is the highest priority, a total manipulation of all the non-human factors becomes inevitable. The sacrifice of forest is inevitable in the need of wood for building and paper materials. The dumping of human waste into the ocean is inevitable for the clean-looking on the surface of earth. The human manipulation of nature turns to an absolute authority in the form of total conquest and exploitation of nature. For the better the human living condition is, the endless continuation of exploitation is permitted. Behind all, a self elevation of the

status of human is unmasked. Human is rising to the highest rank among all and have sovereignty to employ all the resources on earth. Anthropocentrism is based on a kind of hierarchal thinking and divides everything in ranking.

And what is anthropocentrism related to the Christianity? Lynn White, in 1967, wrote a brief but influential article in the magazine, *Science*. Entitled, “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” in which he asserts, “Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.”<sup>12</sup> The lethal ideological root of human being is the overemphasis on anthropocentrism. The anthropocentric ways of thinking gives humans permission to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the integrity of the world. In addition, the extended strain of thought originated from the dominant Western theism that represents God as transcending the world and humanity as exercising dominion over the natural order. At the result, nature has no reason for existence except save to serve humans. Thus Christian arrogance towards nature bears a huge burden of guilt for the contemporary environmental crisis.

Besides, the accusation from outsider of Christian circle, there have been more and more awakened theologian and biblical scholars taking serious look at the

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<sup>12</sup> White, Lynn, J.r. “The Historical Roosts of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science* 155 (March 1967). 1203-7. Reprinted in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*. Ed. by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York and London: Routledge, 1996. p.184-193; esp. p.186.

anthropocentrism in the Christianity. Such awakening can also be reflected that in the development of Old Testament study. The Bible and Christian doctrines are strongly anthropocentric and the whole universe is viewed as the stage of salvation history. On the other hand, the human beings are divinely ordained to rule over and dominate all other species and nature generally. It is evident in the history of Old Testament study in between 1960s and 1970s. The dominant domain of Old Testament interpretation was driven by ancient Israel's theology of historical redemption. The representing work of that age was two volumes of Old Testament Theology written by Gerhard von Rad.<sup>13</sup> His theology is heavily in discussing the opposition between Baal and Yahweh, Israelite faith and Canaanite religion. He has a clear cut mind of either/or of history and nature. The creation is in negative value. An Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann explains that von Rad's antagonism between faith and religion has to be understood against the Germany background in the early of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> The church struggles in the loyal line with the National Socialism began from Barth in 1920s. von Rad continued Barthian way doing theology. A radical antagonism between creation and history was resulted. Not until 1971, Westermann offered mounted a serious challenge to von Rad's presuppositions and argued that the two theological poles: salvation history

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<sup>13</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53:2 (1996), p.177-190.

(soteriology) and creation (blessing) are not necessarily in tension but together.<sup>15</sup>

And what is the solution to the ecological crisis in relation to anthropocentrism? In the final part of his essay, the remedy work of the environmental crisis, White doubts that it can be done by applying more science and more technology.<sup>16</sup> Since the science and technology have grown out of Christian view of human-nature relationship, the spirit of manipulation and conquest has dominated in the science and technology achievement. Instead, he suggests that the cure must come from the root i.e. the ideas of human and nature relationship. Human must first examine and makes critique their current attitudes toward nature.<sup>17</sup> At here, White is correct in pointing out that it is the anthropocentric thinking that is the root of today's ecological problems.

## 1.2 Biocentrism

When seeing that the anthropocentrism is the root of causing ecological devastation, some goes to another end and asserts that it is the biological world as the center in the human-nature understanding. This approach compensates the lope-hole in the first approach i.e. the valuing of human and devaluing of nature. The supporters of

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<sup>15</sup> Claus Westermann, "Creation and History in the Old Testament," in *The Gospel and Human Destiny*, ed. by Vilmos Vajta (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971), p.11-38.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

biocentrism refute the use of human interest as the ultimate reference point. That means the nature is not treated in functionally and all for the human benefit. Rather, they believe the nature is valued for its own sake. The nature should be valued in a way that human is no different from nature. In other words, human is on the same level as everything in nature. All the existences in the universe form an entity and within which everything is equal and no system of hierarchy is existed. The equality that biocentrism promised sounds like a good prescription to the pain exerted on nature by anthropocentrism.

In the positive side, biocentrism establishes a new paradigm to understand the human-nature relationship and enables to overcome the dualism between human and nature. The human species is not verse other living species as well as the whole nature. The hierarchical view is replaced by a holistic view. However, in pursuit of the absolute equality of everything, biocentrism shows a partiality on the value of nature as anthropocentrism does on value of human. The most serious drawback is its striking similarity to pantheism. Pantheism is commonly understood as God is all and all is God. The presence of divinity is so pervasive that within all things. The common between biocentrism and pantheism is that all things are included in the universe and they are interdependent and interrelated. The evenly leveling of everything claims the ultimate



value in the universe itself. It means that the universe is the source of value for human, animals and everything else as well. According to Richard Young, the mistake that biocentrism and pantheism share is the replacement of transcendence of God by the deified universe.<sup>18</sup> It runs against the Christian belief to assert the value outside God. As the values of everything can be found in the universe, it is a rejection of God. The error of biocentrism and pantheism is to look for ultimate reference from nature instead from God. Based on this error, Young continues to lay out two possible ethical difficulties:<sup>19</sup>

1. When value structure is flattened, a radical equality of all things in nature will be appeared. Worst of all is its makes judgment become impossible. The in-distinction between human and other animals causes the ethical dilemma. As the rats have rights and needs the same as human do, why not let them feed on the food in our storage, farm land?
2. When human is reduced to the same level as the rest of nature, it tends to dethrone our special responsibility before God. Human are granted with intellect and freedom to caretaking the world. But now, all of these are subjected to the rules of the universe. Human exists and acts according to the natural laws. Then, the morality and rationality inside human becomes abandoned. Human cannot perform the true human-self in the world as long as a biocentrism is maintained.

Indeed, biocentrism seems to be a good corrective to anthropocentrism in the removal of hierarchical structure. The anti-hierarchy nature of biocentrism is striking the deadlock of today's human-nature relationship present in the ecological problem today. The human and nature relationship should be oppressive subordination and domination.

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<sup>18</sup> Richard A Young, *Healing the Earth: a Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and their Solution*. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p.125.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126-128.

Otherwise, a reckless manipulation and exploitation is inevitable. However, my own view is diverting from biocentrism in the radical equality between human and nature. Such unilateral leveling of human and nature leads to a conceptual problem in the understanding of human-self. The human is no different from other animal kinds and to live according to the natural law. The abandonment of human rationality and morality in making decision disables human to become human-self. As a result, biocentrism blurs human's distinctiveness and uniqueness. To safeguard the value of all other non-human elements, a dysfunction of human as human-self is too much a cost as well.

### 1.3 Theocentrism

Against the anthropocentric egoism and biocentric egalitarianism, a third approach is suggested with God placing at the center and is termed as theocentrism. As God is the center of the universe, God alone is the source and ultimate point of reference and meaning. The purpose, value, ethics and principle by which the whole universe is uphold. Since God is the center of value, all things find in him the purpose, value and meaning in relationship with God. Such kind of centralization of all values in God resolves the anthropocentric egoism. In doing so, theocentrism does not repeat the error that biocentrism does, according to Young.<sup>20</sup> The unique role of human is still affirmed

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.128.

distinctively but not supremely. In the creation, the stewardship of human in relation to nature has turned from management to servant-hood. Overall all, ten advantages of theocentrism over anthropocentrism and biocentrism are proposed by Young,<sup>21</sup>

1. The ethical dilemma is resolved without giving human absolute sovereignty to legislate any abusive actions on nature;
2. The uniqueness of human is preserved without yielding to anthropocentric arrogance;
3. A basis for true stewardship is provided;
4. The divine intent in creation can be served as the direction in combating the current ecological crisis;
5. Hope of a kingdom of peace and harmony is provided;
6. It is God, rather than technology and science, where human should place faith and trust for ultimate solution to the ecological problems;
7. Theocentrism provides a reason for the existence of every creature and rights for the creatures to live the life that God intends for them;
8. It is in God an sustainable environment is reliable;
9. Theocentrism is large enough to encompass the concerns of both anthropocentrism and biocentrism without doing injustice to either one and without acquiescing to their shortcomings;
10. A holistic view of life is found in the ultimate source of everything, i.e. God.

The most important of all is the suggested common relationship between God and nature and God and human. It overcomes the anthropocentric egoism and paths a way to value nature without the expense of divine transcendence. Another theocentrism advocate, James A Nash, writes that:<sup>22</sup>

Since God is the source of all in the Christian doctrine of creation, all creatures share in a common relationship. This kinship of all creatures is symbolized in the second Genesis story of creation by the formation of both humans and other animals from the same

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.129-130.

<sup>22</sup>James A Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), p.97.

element, the earth. It is symbolized in the first creation account by the fact that humans and other land animals are created on the same day... This affirmation of relationality is, moreover, enhanced by the theory of evolution, which describes humans as related to every other form of life through our common beginnings in one or more living cells and through our subsequent adaptive interactions. We evolved relationally; we exist symbiotically. Human existence depends on coexistence with the rest of creation. Equally, the doctrine of creation implies that nature is not alien to humans; we are interrelated parts and products of a world that is continually being made and nurtured by God.

One can see that relationality between everything is originated in God, who is the source of common relationship. The strong biblical evidence is based on the creation story. In Nash' view, the intrinsic value of the creation is established by its original and ongoing relationality to the creator God who loves all the individual items in the world and gifts the world to all living creatures and not just to human and whose redemptive purpose include not only human but the world. As John 3:16 says, "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." Not only human who believes can be granted for the salvation, but also the world is the loved one in God's eye.

In spite of its advantage over anthropocentrism and biocentrism, theocentrism is not without problems. As seen in the Nash argument, the common relationality is derived from God. It is a top down mode of thought, which relies heavily on God as the center and all things else are at the lower position. The divine "is" becomes the human "ought"

as an imperative from above. The model of God-nature and God-human relationship is directly applying to the human-nature relationship. Theocentrism, which places God as center, has the serious defect of hierarchic tendency as in anthropocentrism. The incomparable status of God, rather than human, is now being overemphasized. The theocentric model is a kind of thinking mode in ladder-like. Human and nature share in the same ranking, but superior of them is God. The hierarchical mode of thought is still advocated in the theocentrism, though the center of human in anthropocentrism has been replaced by God. It is still dangerous, theologically and ecologically, to overemphasize that some is higher than the rest.

#### 1.4 Summary

As I analyzed the three dominant approaches of the theological response to the present ecological crisis, I have found that the common of the three is a “centering” mode of thinking. Here, the centering I mean a deliberately embrace of one as the superiority and the rest as the subordination to it. No matter it is a shift from anthropocentrism to biocentrism, or biocentrism to theocentrism, it is just a “re-centering” process. A center is maintained and established at the expense of the non-center elements. As shown in the various kinds of oppression are originated in anthropocentrism, theocentrism would lead to certain similar disastrous impacts when dualistic hierarchies are prevalent in the

way to treat the world. The centering of nature in biocentrism does not regard the God's transcendence and human's uniqueness sufficiently. The unilateral pursuit of equalitarian and blurred distinction between both nature-God and nature-human are not compatible to the Christian traditions.

Emerging out of the above analysis, the need for a reconstruction of approach is affirmed in the response to the ecological crisis. But the reconstruction is now not relied on changing the focus on anthropos, bios or theos. The effort on keeping to re-arrange the center from anthropos to bios or theos is futile in the resolution of ecological problem because it still clings on the centering. Therefore, I am suggesting that a "de-centering" have to be done. In "de-centering", I mean to remove the focus on the center, not try to find any as the center anymore. A centering mode of thinking should be abandoned and, now I am proposing that, to be replaced by a relational mode of thinking. Without struggling to be the center, bios, anthropos and theos no longer exist in competing in the hierarchical structure. Instead, in a communal way, a symbiotic interrelatedness among the three should be discovered. In the relational, difference and uniqueness of each can be preserved but not to be intermingled. The value of each is appropriately regarded. In the next chapter, I come to an exploration of the Christian theological resources that come up to support a relational mode of thinking.

## **Chapter 2: The being of God as communion of relationships**

The relational mode of thinking can be derived from the doctrine of Trinitarian God.

The development of the doctrine of Trinity can be simply recognized into two streams.

In the Western Church, the understanding of Trinity was begun with God's unity and asked about trinity. And the Eastern Church, the Trinity was started from the trinity of the Three Persons and then found out what was the unity of the Three. Among the two approaches, it is the latter one that I am interested in to develop the relational mode of thinking. The unity within the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit is the ground to construct one new relationship between God, nature and human.

A relational understanding of God can be traced back from the Trinitarian doctrine.

Inherited from the Jewish monotheism, Christian understanding of God is not polytheism, bitheism or trithesim, but only believing in one God. God who is one is constructed theologically as one divine essence. However, how to understand the divinity of Jesus and Holy Spirit along with the Father, as shown earlier in the Old Testament period? It compelled the earlier church to formulate a doctrine of Trinity to compose the divine concept of the Three as well as the One. The resulting is the understanding of God who is three persons in one essence. The meaning of Trinitarian

doctrine is that God is one as well as God is Three. However, another immediate question arose, it was how can God be understood be at once one and three? According to the Christian traditions, there are two approaches: God is trinity in unity and God is unity in trinity. The two approaches originated from Greek Fathers and Latin Fathers respectively. In the former approach, the focus of understanding is from three to one. The full deity of the Three, Father, Son and Spirit who are different and differentiated from each other constitutes an undifferentiated one divine essence. For the latter, the focus is from one to three. It is under the umbrella of divine unity that the three Trinitarians persons to be understood. Indeed, both approaches have each own merits and shortcomings. Their common concern is the understanding of God at the once one and three.

In order to figure out the relationship between the divine Threeness in Oneness, Jurgen Moltmann finds that perichoresis is the best key.<sup>23</sup> Perichoresis, a Greek word translated in “mutual indwelling” or “interpenetration.” In the eighth century, John of Damascus was the first to apply this term to speak of the mutual indwelling or unique communion of triune persons.<sup>24</sup> Perichoresis refers to the manner in which the Three Persons of the Trinity relate to one another. It indicates that the individuality of the

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<sup>23</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p.157.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.



persons is maintained, while insisting that all three are sharing in the life of each. It goes along with Moltmann's understanding, that is:<sup>25</sup>

Precisely through the personal characteristics that distinguish them from one another, the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in one another and communicate eternal life to one another. In the perichoresis, the very thing that divides them becomes that which binds them together. The 'circulation' of eternal divine life becomes perfect through fellowship and the unity of the three different Persons in the eternal love.

Being distinct from the merely the joining together of three different individuals (which is known as tri-theism) and three modes of beings of the One God (which is known as modalism), doctrine of perichoresis lays down the best way to interpret the meaning of Trinity. Being indwelled each other, made room for each other, the Triune Persons form a communion of unity in the circulation of the divine life. In the perichoretically communion, the Persons constitute both their differences and their unity.

Through the concept of perichoresis, Moltmann asserts that all subordinationism in the doctrine of the Trinity can be avoided, because,<sup>26</sup>

It is true that the Trinity is constituted with the Father as starting point, inasmuch as he is understood as being 'the origin of the Godhead.' But this 'monarchy of the Father' only applies to the constitution of the Trinity. It has no validity within the eternal circulation of the divine life, and none in the perichoretic unity of the Trinity. Here the three Persons are equal; they live and are manifested in one another and through one another.

Therefore, persons in God are constituted by relations, which in relating also

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.175.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 175-176.

distinguishing the persons one another. The concept of Three in One is not meant as a speculation in terms of abstract idea, but is signifying the relation within God, i.e. mutually respecting, mutually penetrating, mutually indwelling and interdependent. It is what John Zizioulas writes his book around the thesis that the Being (of God) as Communion.”<sup>27</sup> Based on the patristic sources from the Cappadocians, Zizioulas argues that the being of the triune God is the communion between the three Persons. He holds that there is no true being without communion. To be a person means to be in relation.

Zizioulas claims that,<sup>28</sup>

Being a person is basically different from being an individual or ‘personality’ in that the person cannot be conceived in itself as a static identity, but only as it relates to. Thus personhood implies the ‘openness of being,’ and even more than that, the *ek-stasis* of being, i.e. a movement towards communion which leads to a transcendence of the boundaries of the ‘self’ and thus to freedom.

Person is open to communion and through which self-transcendence becomes possible.

This idea resonates with Buber’s “I-Thou” concept in which says “I become through my relation to the Thou.”<sup>29</sup> I am who I am by how other people define me and how I define myself in interaction with them. Overall, it is in taking relations that the triune God to be understood.

The central thrust of the understanding God in social model, which demonstrates the

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<sup>27</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 407-408.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p.11.

Trinity as that of a harmonious society, is to construct of an analogy of a divine society. In the society, the primary base is to build up a harmony oneness and union of activity of the Three divine Persons. In this social analogy, the inter-relatedness of the Three Persons with God is understood. Basing on the norm and source in Triune God, a constructive pattern of relationality between God, nature and human is going to be developed in the last chapter. Coming next is the analyses of certain contemporary theologian's works on eco-theology. Having critically examined their works, I intend to figure out what were these predecessors' diagnoses and response to the ecological crisis. Among their proposals, I am going to find out and locate the precursor of what my central thesis calls the relational approach to theological construction.

### **Chapter 3: The supportive evidences for relational approach in the eco-theological discussion**

From the previous chapter, I have argued that in the theological tradition about the discussion of Trinitarian God, it is the perichoretically relational approach to fully grasp the sense of Triune Persons in one divine essence. The symbol of God as “Persons in communion of relations” indicates the dynamic mutual relation with all other persons as well as created world. God, understood as different Persons in communion, reveals uniqueness of each through mutual relationships. And how this understanding enhances today’s eco-theological issues. In the following, several works from different theologians are discussed. They are in common that all emphasize the communion tri-parties: God, nature and human, instead of a centering on any of them.

#### 3.1 Sallie McFague and the Body of God

Sallie McFague published a book named *The Body of God*.<sup>30</sup> At the first glance of the title, it is obvious to tune in with what the author would imply to mean. It is a book of the about the construction of theology for our current ecological crisis. Her central thesis is to re-present the understanding of God-world relation through one lens, the

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<sup>30</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: an Ecological Theology* ( Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

model of the universe or world as God's body.<sup>31</sup> The long held imbalance of the emphasis on the transcendence of the Christian doctrine of God is challenged. She is arguing to think of God's transcendence in an immanent way, i.e. the world is our meeting place with God.<sup>32</sup> To do so, she begins to expose the limitations and weakness of the dominant dualistic and monarchical model of God, and ends up with a replacement by the model of the world is God's body.

In dominant monarchical model, power is supreme high in the hand of God and from whom human beings derived the power over the world. In critique of it, McFague finds out three flaws.<sup>33</sup>

First, God is portrayed as worldless and the world as godless. God is a totally other creator-king upon whose power everything is dependent. God's power serves as directing and governing over everything in the world at every moment. God relates to the world externally, not internally; God is not part of the world, but essentially different and apart.

Second, the portrayal of God is also a benevolent ruler of the world. But the benevolence God pours out is understood limitedly only unto human beings. The world is just the stage for the performance of salvation history between God and human beings.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., vii.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.136-141.

Within this model, the world has been put in the periphery of the great salvation history of human beings.

Third, elaborated from the above points, in this model God is only remote from the world and only relates the benevolence to the human beings. God's action is on the world, not in the world. This distantization between God and the world, unfortunately being leaded astray further and being misinterpreted as the example of human-world relationship.

According to Ian Barbour, eight kinds of the models of God-world relation can be classified. And four of them are worth noticing here for the discussion of McFague's approach of God-world relation:<sup>34</sup>

1. The Monarchical model, in which the relationship between God and world is analogous to that of the ruler, the lord and those being ruled. The ruler appears as almighty and all-knowing, getting everything under his control. Those being under his ruling are demanded as obedient completely and their freedom is in the conflict with the ruler's predestination. And the hierarchical concept is highly emphasized.
2. Deistic model, in which the relationship between God and the world is analogous to that of the relationship between the clockmaker and the clock. After the initial creation work, God is remained hidden and the world is left to run by following the normal laws. Interventions of God belong to supernatural kind which is taking place just in case of something wrong in the system.
3. The agential model in which the relationship between God and the world is analogous to the agent and his action. If there is actor to act, before the act, there should be an intention in the actor's mind. The intention can be discerned through the actions. God's intentions can be also discerned and distinguished through God's

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<sup>34</sup> Ian G Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), p.229-331.

actions in the world and history.

4. The organic model in which the world is analogous to the body of God. This model emphasizes the immanence of God and implies an intense organic interrelatedness between the world and God. So closer the relationship is that God is affected by the world, suffers with the world, and changes with the world. The interdependence and symmetrical kind of relationship is employed instead of the hierarchical and imperialistic one.

And Barbour commented that each suggested model has its own strengths and limitations. The different models represent the various degree of God-world relationship in terms of the transcendence and immanence of God. The more transcendent a God is understood, the more detached and remote a God may be looked like. In contrast, the more the immanence of God is emphasized, the much close interrelationship of God and its creation, the world it would be. The monarchical model stresses on the transcendence of God but its hierarchical terminology is too oppressive to the world. The Deistic model maintains the transcendence of God but the God-world relationship looks like a baby being abandoned. In the agential model, the transcendence of God is understood in the expression of the intention of an action. And the organic model, the immanence of God is maintained compared with the other previous models. The 'model of God' proposed by McFague is to understand the world as God's body. God is embodied like ourselves, but divine action is not only organic but also agential. McFague combines both organic and agential model.<sup>35</sup> This combination opens a way to include both God's immanence and transcendence. In her summary of her proposed model of God, she

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<sup>35</sup> Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: an Ecological Theology* ( Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 140.

says:<sup>36</sup>

“We have suggested God as the embodied spirit of the universe is personal (agential)/ organic model that is compatible with interpretations of both Christian faith and contemporary science, although not demanded by either. It is a way of speaking of God’s relation to all matter, all creation, that ‘makes sense’ in terms of an incarnational understanding of Christianity and an organic interpretation of postmodern science. It helps us to be whole people within our faith and within our contemporary world. Moreover, the model does not reduce God to the world nor relegate God to another world; on the contrary it radicalizes both divine immanence (God is the breath of each and every creature) and divine transcendence (God is the energy empowering the entire universe). Finally, it underscores our bodiliness, our concrete physical existence and experience that we share with all other creatures: it is a model on the side of the well-being of the planet, for it raises the issue of ethical regard toward all bodies as all are interrelated and interdependent.”

The importance of the discussion of McFague’s proposal that the world is God’ body is directing us to a promising and influential way to re-articulate the Christian theology with the concern of the healing and renewing of the world. She is successfully in attempting to re-stress on the immanence of God by which the world is reconnected to God intimately. It further suggests human beings that we are not our own and we have to possess the awareness of the interdependent network of life.<sup>37</sup> And we would take care of the world instead of subdue of it. In other words, it is what Moltmann perceives the ecological consequences of an overemphasis on divine transcendence that stripped

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>37</sup> Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecology, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p.95.



God of God's connection with the world and increasingly secularized the world".<sup>38</sup>

### 3.2 Denis Edwards and the Spirit of Communion

Denis Edwards, a diocesan priest and teaches theology at the Flinders University School of Theology in Adelaide, South Australia. One of his theological interests is in the relationship between contemporary science and Christian faith. In the past, he has already published his ideas.<sup>39</sup> In 1999, he was participated in a project in the development of eco-theology organized by three theological traditions, the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Uniting Churches. The first fruit is published in the book named *Earth Revealing – Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*.<sup>40</sup> The essays composed within are aimed at less dogmatic and more creative about what is relevant and what is less relevant in Christian heritage. Within the book, Edwards presents a paper aiming at the theology of the Holy Spirit as an ecological theology.<sup>41</sup> He summaries the proper role of the Holy Spirit into four proposals:<sup>42</sup>

1: In creation and redemption, the Trinitarian Persons act only in profound communion and in undivided unity with one another; but this

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<sup>38</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); it is a paper edition and the earliest English translation appeared in the 1985 by SCM Press, p.1.

<sup>39</sup> Edwards Denis, *The God of Evolution: a Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999); *Jesus and the Cosmos* ( New York: Paulist Press, 1991); *Jesus the Wisdom of God: an Ecological Theology* ( Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> Denis Edwards ed. ,*Earth Revealing-Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Denis Edwards, "For Your Immortal Spirit is in all Things," in *Earth Revealing-Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*, Denis Edwards, ed. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001), p.45-66.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57-63.

one undivided action does not exclude a proper role for each person.

2: A foundation for a theology of the proper role of the Spirit in creation can be found in the work of contemporary theologians who discuss the proper roles of the Trinitarian Persons in the incarnation and Pentecostal event.

3: A first argument for a proper role of the Spirit in creation is that ongoing creation is best understood as a dynamic relationship between each creature and the Trinity; such a relationship approach would involve distinct Trinitarian Persons.

4: A second argument for a proper role of the Trinitarian Persons in creation is that what are distinctive about the Trinitarian Persons (their relations of origin) come into play in the one work of divine creation.

Distinctive role of the Holy Spirit in creation can be elucidated into two terms: the power of becoming and the gift of divine communion with each creature. It is appropriate to view the Holy Spirit as ecological Spirit because it is the role of the Spirit to “enable each creature to be and to become, bringing each into relationship with other creatures in both local and global systems, and in this process of ongoing creation, relating each creature in communion within the life of the divine Persons-in-communion. Edwards concludes the Earth reveals a profound relationship between and among God and creatures, and all with all, through the Spirit.

He persuasively contends that a radically relational God has created “a world that is relational to the core.”<sup>43</sup> And he adds,<sup>44</sup>

The theological insight that God is Persons-in-Relation provides a basis for a vision of the fundamental reality of the universe as relational. If the essence of God is relational, if the very foundation of all being is

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>44</sup> Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: a Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2004), 132-133.

relational, if everything that is springs from Persons-in-Relation, then this points toward an understanding of created reality as “being-in-relation.” Science tells us that each creature exists in a nested pattern of constitutive relations. Theology points to the Trinitarian relationships of mutual love. A theology done in the light of science suggests a worldview in which a relational universe is thought of as emerging and evolving within the relations of the divine Trinitarian Communion. In the worldview I am proposing, continuous creation can be understood as created being-in-relation springing from the divine Communion understood as Persons-in-Relation.

He also substantiates his claim that it is the Holy Spirit who “gives life” and “create communion” in the world. The theology of Holy Spirit provides a foundation for an encounter with the Spirit who dwells in every thing into a life-giving relation with the divine communion.

The appraisal of the Edward’s work is his discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in creation. He opens up a view of a relational community in the ecotheology. By this I mean, he is eloquently retrieve a Trinitarian understanding of God in relational communion into the contemporary discussion of ecological crisis.

### 3.3 Jurgen Moltmann and God in the Creation

Moltmann is a well known theologian who has great influence on the Protestant circles. After his famous books *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*, he was taking a deep exploration in the doctrine of Trinity and in year 1980 (English Translation in 1981)

resulted in a book named *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. Five years later, he wrote another book named *God in Creation*. It is a book about his exploration of the doctrine of creation in light of the ecological crisis. In the preface, Moltmann exclaims that “it is a serious challenge to work thoroughly on the Christian doctrine of creation for the problems of our time.”<sup>45</sup>

The direction of Moltmann’s starting point of the discussion is made explicitly in the book’s title *God “in” Creation*. The preposition ‘in’ points out the emphasis on that God in creation, which indicates God’s immanence in the world. The word ecology from Greek is derived from *oikos*, meaning the doctrine of house. In view of this, the creation, the ecology is the house for God’s indwelling.<sup>46</sup> In a sense, the immanence of God is the indwelling of God in the creation, the house. In the God-world relationship, it is not only God in the world but also the world in God.<sup>47</sup> It is a kind of mutual penetration which sound similar McFague’s model of God in the tendency of panentheism. In a panentheistic way, the relationship between God and the world is much more holistic and intimate. Although McFague and Moltmann reach the same goal, their approaches are totally different. The former comes to her outcome by her proposed metaphorical

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<sup>45</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.), xvii.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

theology in which the theological reflection is constructed from the religious experience by means of various literary forms. But Moltmann comes up with the same outcome from the concept of perichoresis, the social doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>48</sup> The Trinitarian perichoresis means the eternal community and fellowship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And this inner-Trinitarian perichoresis is the good analogy between the relationships within God and the relationship between God and the world. As the reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the world and God is also indwelling reciprocally and interpenetrated mutually. After all, the immanence of God in the world is highly regarded.

The second insight from Moltmann's work is his stress on the role of the Holy Spirit in developing ecological friendly theology. Where do the ecological and pneumatological relate? Moltmann claims that the choice of words in the title has already reflecting his 'pneumatological approach' to the study of the doctrine of creation. The 'God' in the title 'God in Creation' he means that God the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup> God so loves and cherishes the life that the Holy Spirit is indwelling the creation. Four different types of efficacy of the Spirit can be identified, his creating, his preserving, his renewing and his

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., xiv.

consummating.<sup>50</sup> Among them, the renewal and consummation is worth much more attention than the creation and preservation.

The third aspect worth notice is the new relationship between human being and the world in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The concentration on the salvation of the individual's soul resulted in a surrendering of the universal scope of salvation and thus worsens the discrepancy between value of human being and that of the world.<sup>51</sup> The long held "Christological concentration" in the Protestant thought must now extend to the cosmic breadth in order to match the situation of today's world. Through the Holy Spirit, the presence God in the creation can be discerned by human beings.

In addition, under the principle of perichoresis, Moltmann perceives the pattern of the relationship between God, the world and human beings is behaves similarly in the inner-trinitarian community.<sup>52</sup> The intention of all is the reconciliation and peace-bringing between the nature and human beings, just as Moltmann describes.<sup>53</sup>

Through the spirit we bound together with the natural environment. This association is a system comprising human beings and nature. We might describe it as a spiritual ecosystem. Through the spirit, human societies as part-systems are bound up with the ecosystem 'earth'; for human societies live in and from the recurring cycles of earth and sun, air and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.18.

water, day and night, summer and winter. So human beings are participants and subsystems of the cosmic life system, and of the divine Spirit that live in it.

### 3.4 Summary

Throughout the analysis of works on theology constructing in responding to the ecological crisis, we can see there is a variety of ways to respond the ecological challenge. Their books are note worthy in many aspects and the interest of this paper is on their dealing of the relationship between God and the nature. Common to all three are on the one hand, their position in refusal of hierarchal understanding of the God-nature relation and on the other hand, they reconstitute an intimate relation instead.

1. McFague's retrieval of immanence of God in her inspiring metaphorical terminology opens a way for the wider discussion of the balance of the transcendence and immanence in God-world relation.
2. Edwards' proposal of the Spirit of Communion reinforces the intimacy between God, world and human beings, and indicates human beings acts within the communion with others.
3. For Moltmann, the core of his thesis is not in finding out the distinction between God and the nature. Instead, it should be the recognition of the presence of God in the creation and the presence of creation in God.

They share the similar goal but their means to each is different.

1. McFague proposes the world is God's body because of the incarnation theology.

Jesus of Nazareth is the embodiment of God in the world. He is the image of the invisible God. From the paradigmatic story of Jesus humans could know the divine immanence. Its clearest expression is the inclusive love, which serves as a framework that composes all of creation toward the salvific, liberating, direction. From this McFague extends a metaphor of the world as the body of God.

2. Edwards demonstrates how the life-giving Spirit implies that all the creation is inspirited. From this understanding of the Spirit, an "unspeakable closeness of God,"<sup>54</sup> empowers all the creations living in relation on the same planet becoming possible.

3. Moltmann rebuilds the intimate God-nature relationship through the concept of "oikos", house and dwelling place. The creation is not created to be subdued, dominated by God, or human, the representative of God (Gen 1:28). Instead, the creation is a place to dwell, and God is dwelling in this place. That is God "in" creation meant. How is it possible? It is because the reflection of God as creator has to be rooted from Shekinah, a rabbinic concept about the descent of God to human

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<sup>54</sup> Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: a Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2004), p.128.



and his dwelling among them.<sup>55</sup>

Overall, McFague, Edwards and Moltmann develop their understanding basing on the incarnation theology of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit as the bearer of communion, and the dwelling of God. More or less in degree, they emphasize the Three Divine Persons in each perspective. Following their path, I would like to focus on the doctrine of Trinity. The mutual dwelling of the Three Divine Persons in unity enlightens a way to develop a relational approach in eco-theology.

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<sup>55</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.), p.15.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly, there are strengths and weakness in each current approach to ecotheological talk, the major defects shared among anthropocentrism, biocentrism and theocentrism is the centralism. It results in a different degree of hierarchical domination and oppression. Instead, in this study, I am arguing that a relational approach surpasses this shortcoming. It is only in the relational understanding, the dynamic relationship between God, nature and human is presented.

The symbol of triune God as Persons in communion is the dynamic ground for the current theological development. The relational approach is extended from the inner-Trinitarian study to the economic Trinity. It is a theology embraces the nature and human in mutual influential and self-limiting way.

From this, I suggest that the idea of interconnectedness should be stemmed from the relational approach. Interconnectedness signifies that all the creation are inter-connected in a mutual life-enhancing direction. None of any parties becomes dominated in the relation and manipulates others to serve the interest of one's own party alone. Most often, human is wrongly regarded as the master in the creation. It may be due to a mistaken concept of human-nature relationship from the biblical story of Creation.

Here, I would like to re-read the biblical account (Genesis 1-3) so as to re-establish an understanding of human-nature interconnectedness.

The beginning of the Bible is the record of the primeval origin of the world. Its enigma nature attracts many to study of it. If the story of creation in Genesis 1-3 is not the most studied part of the scriptures, and then it could be the most debated one. The scientists doubt the description of the beginning of the universe but the creationists insist its creditability. The gender advocates severely attacks the hierarchic mindset of the conservatives who stubbornly upholds the inequality of sex. The contemporary biblical scholars, doing the similar job as feminists, loosen one's bias in reading this creation account as much as possible. For long, many biblical scholars misplaced their focus on the human in the origin setting. They considered human beings to be the centre of the universe since they interpreted the making of human beings is the climatic event in the priestly creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3). By the same token, the human is the main character in the so called "Story of Fall", which is the Yahwist creation account (Genesis 2:4-3:24). These two interpretations later became the foundation stones upon which the election theology<sup>56</sup> and salvation theology<sup>57</sup> built. However,

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<sup>56</sup> Walter Eichrodt, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, vol.2 (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), p.98-117.

<sup>57</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1962), p.

the today's biblical scholars doubts with their predecessors' anthropocentrism. They retrieve a much comprehensive perspective to read these two creation accounts again.

In her book "Stories of the Beginning: Genesis 1-11 and Other Creation Stories", Ellen van Wolde has made the following comment after the study of the priestly creation account,

"The question which then becomes acute is: on the basis of this story, how can we abandon anthropocentric thinking and find a different starting point for an ethic and a belief in which our own position has always been central?"<sup>58</sup>

Have we abandoned such kind of thinking? Let's see how we are accustomed to teach and be taught that the creation of human beings is the climax of the Creator's creation design. Since the making of human beings was on the sixth day, we infer that all the creation of the universe and everything in beforehand is the preparation work for welcoming the main character, human, to come onto the stage. We use this to point out that how wonderful our Creator has made everything ready for our appearance. However, such kind of linear reading is abused by us that we have got off one stop earlier before reaching the final destiny, the culmination of linear sequence in the text. The final stop ought to be the seventh day on which the Creator finished all the creation, watching them as good and then came to rest. This day of rest is the origin for the

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136-138.

<sup>58</sup> Ellen van Wolde, *Stories of the Beginning: Genesis 1-11 and Other Creation Stories* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996), p. 33.

institution of the Sabbath. In the discussion of the Sabbath, Brueggemann summaries four important points,<sup>59</sup> of which two of them are explicitly relevant to my argument. The Sabbath is a kerygmatic statement about the world: the world is safely in God's hands and relies on God's promises and not any others' efforts. Secondly, the Sabbath is a sociological expression of a new humanity willed by God. Sabbath is the end of grasping and therefore the end of exploitation. These two suggest that God, the Creator, not human being, is the central figure of the creation story. Indeed, from, it is clearly that God has been already on the stage as early as the start of the account. It is God who acts: 'God created', 'God's Spirit (*ruah*) swept', 'God said', 'God named', 'God blessed' and 'God saw that it was good'. It is a story about the speaking and acting God, but not the thinking, seeing and speaking human beings. The main theme of this Priestly creation account should be the relationship between the world and its creator rather than the human beings dealing with the world.

However, some may still argue that is not only the human beings is made in the image of God and given the authority to rule over the world and its inhabitants? Regarding to the second part of the question, we come along with this earlier in 1:16 in where God has directed the heavenly bodies, moon and sun, and given them the task of ruling over

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<sup>59</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p.35-36.

the day and the night on earth. From here, one would not conclude that the earth is serving the heavenly bodies. The same Hebrew verb ‘rule’ occurs in 1:28, however, we would like to conclude that the earth is serving the human. Don’t we jump for this conclusion too soon? It is clear that the structure of Genesis 1 shows the task of ruling both to the luminary bodies and to the human beings are expressions of reciprocal relationships between the created phenomenon: <sup>60</sup> the luminary bodies performs their ruling role in relation to light on earth, and in the parallel, the human beings performs their ruling role in relation to the earth and the animals on earth. Indeed, the ruling is both relative and relational because it is based on interdependency and implicitly the divine providence behind the scene, which will be discussed when we come to the Psalm 104 in the below. The interdependency can be shown by today’s physics’ knowledge. The planets in the universe are keeping their place or distance between by the force existing between their mass. Likewise, we are managing our planet and in return our planet is providing what we need.

On the other hand, one may argue that the superiority of human beings is related to their

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<sup>60</sup> Besides the culmination of the day 7 as an institution of the Sabbath, there is a designed arrangement of two sets of three, in which days 1 and 4 correspond, so do days 2 and 5, and 3 and 6:

Day 1	Light	Day 4	Luminaries
Day 2	Sky	Day 5	Birds and Fish
Day 3	Land (Plants)	Day 6	Animals and Human Beings (Plants for food)
Day 7	Sabbath		

unique feature of God's image. Human beings are only the creatures which God does not make 'after its own kind', but 'in our image' and 'after our likeness'. The possessive pronouns linked with 'kind' – everything is created after 'his' or 'her' or 'their' kind – indicate that the plants and animals refer back to these creatures themselves. However, in the case of creation of human beings, the possessive pronoun 'our', linking with image and likeness, does not refer back to humankind but to God. This difference in possessive pronouns is an indication that the human beings, unlike the other creatures, do not find a point of reference in themselves, but in God alone.<sup>61</sup>

What kind of superiority can we deduce from here when the human being cannot be self-referred? I think this could be a drawback in arguing the superiority of human over other creatures. This completely turns down the maxim that 'man is the measure of all things'. Too often, we, one of the created being, exploit other created beings to achieve our goals. This utilitarian attitude is so deeply rooted that we have omitted the scriptural record of the incapability of self-reference. The starting point of our ruling role is due to our likeness referring to God. Perhaps it is true that the survival of the world and other created beings on it is dependent on us. But by no mean is the order of creation or the order of things dependent on human beings. God, indeed, is the ultimate ground of being for all.

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<sup>61</sup> van Wolde, *Stories*, p. 25-31.

So far from the Priestly creation story, I have tried to show that the human beings should not occupy the highest throne, which is falsely constructed by our own pride and perpetual desire of thinking ourselves more highly than we should have been. Then, what else does this account tell us about the other created beings? It is the blessing of them to be fruitful in quantity. This blessing is also applied on the human beings later in 1:28. This blessing guarantees that life of all created beings is to continue. Once again, it repeatedly emphasizes the provision of the Creator towards His / Her creatures. Moreover, they share another commonality, that is, 'God saw that it was good'. It is the comment shared with all the created beings, including both animals and humans, and other created orders of the universe. The comment of 'good' basically carries two kinds of notions, ethical and aesthetic. In the ethical sense, which is expressed in the tradition of Moses and prophets, tends to demand obedience. What the God commands, the commanded is followed as such. It is an expression of command - and - obey formula, that is, 'God said so and there was so' structure shown in the Genesis 1. However, it consolidates the hierarchic thinking mode in our religion that God and His / Her world is distant away. Conversely, the aesthetic sense should be the primary quality in Genesis 1 because it pursues wholeness instead. In Brueggemann's words, it is:



“God stands not over against but alongside and in friendly continuity with the world. In the aesthetic perspective, the distinction of God from God’s creature is not nullified. But the friendly disposition of God toward the world is affirmed. God is satisfied that the world he has evoked in love is attuned to his purposes. The blessed world is indeed the world that God intended.”<sup>62</sup>

Friendship represents such kind of intimacy between the two. Therefore, the aesthetic quality of the saying ‘God saw it was good’ is primarily implied in the Priestly creation account. It is the description of intimacy between God and His / Her creatures.

From here, a question arises, that is, does the more or less same kind of intimacy exist between the created beings? The interdependency between the human beings and the physical earth has already been proved in the above section. The remaining is the relationship between human beings and other biological created beings, various kinds of animals. Then, we must proceed our reading unto the next creation story, Yahwist’s account (Genesis 2:4-3:24). About the making of created beings, the writer of Yahwist source supplies the information which is not found in the Priestly account:

“Then the Lord God *formed* man from the dust of the *ground*, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a *living being*.” (Genesis 2:7)

“Then the Lord God said, ‘it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’ So out of the *ground* the Lord God *formed* every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every *living creature*, that was its name ..... but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner .....and the rib that the Lord God had taken

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<sup>62</sup> Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p.37

from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man .....”  
(Genesis 2:18-25)

Our understanding of the relationship between human beings and other created beings would be enriched when we carefully analyze the Yahwist’s source. Firstly, from the Hebrew text, we find that three pair of verbs are used to describe the making of both man and other animals. They both are formed (*yatsar*) from the ground, the soil (*‘adamah*) (2:7, 19). In 2:7, God breathes into Adam’s nostrils the breath of life and he becomes a ‘living being’ (*nephesh hayyah*). Exactly the same expression (*nephesh hayyah*)<sup>63</sup> is used of the animals in 2:19, somewhat obscured by the many English translations (including NRSV, NIV, NASB, KJV, NJB; and in Chinese Union Version: 「活人」, 「活物」), ‘living creature’. So humans and animals share a common origin, ‘*adamah*’, and a common nature, ‘*nephesh hayyah*’. If we look further ahead to two other passages,

Genesis 3:19: ... you are dust, and to dust you shall return;

Psalm 104:29: ... when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

, they indeed also share a common destiny, for humans and animals, are to return to the dust of the ground.

In this Yahwist’s story, the animals are created because ‘it is not good that the man should be alone’ (2:18). From here, we notice that there are two discrepancies in the

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<sup>63</sup> According to BDB: ‘*nephesh hayyah*’ is always used to indicate the animals in the Old Testament.

Priestly and Yahwist's account of creation concerning the creation of living beings. First, the making of animal is not come before the making of human beings. Secondly, it is told that in Yahwist's story the man is not good due to his singularity and the creating of animals is intentionally to remedy this loneliness and change the man to be good. Up to that moment, the aesthetic quality 'good' has not yet been reached and opened to be fulfilled, possibly, by the animals. According the development of the story, we come to know that this is not fulfilled by any animal but the woman, another human beings, created with the man's rib by God's hands. She is indeed the really 'a helper as his partner' (*'ezer kenegedo*). '*'ezer*' means 'helper'; where the NRSV translation of '*kenegedo*' as 'as his partner' does not make the meaning of this qualifier obviously as some other English translations do (KJV: '*meet* for him' ; ESV: '*fit* for him'; NASB: '*suitable* for him' ). It does mean that woman is the only helper *who is suitable* for the man. But it does not negate that the animals are the helper to the man. The animals are helper to man but just not the 'suitable kind' only.

In sum, the Yahwist's creation account gives us further information about the non-human created beings. They share common origin (from ground), nature (living being) and destiny (return to dust) with the human beings. On the other hand, they had been once viewed as the possible 'helpers suitable for human beings'. Also, I admit that there is indeed a real difference between the human and non-human living creature

such that the former possesses the image of God and the task of name giving for the latter. However, their difference should not be the reason for neglecting their commonness and closeness either. Only the anthropocentric oppressors would always emphasize the difference. Because of that by doing so they can take it as a chance to exploit others and make uses of others to serve their own means.

The biblical account of creation and theological significance of periochoersis are supporting the relational approach to understand the God-nature-human tripartite relationship. The significance of a relational approach in resolve today's ecological crisis is to transform the human concept of world. A non-centering approach in favor of any parties: God, nature and human. It is in the scientific world, the potential of human achievement is lifted up to incomparable status. In fact, only through a mutual relations, interrelatedness, and self-limitation, all kind of human effort is favorable to create a symbiotic living condition for all else creatures.

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