



New Earth Ethics: Harmonizing Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Perspectives

Sahat Tua^{1*}, Mei Suryani Sinaga², Erwin Simanjuntak³

Institut Agama Kristen Renatus Pematang Siantar.

*Corresponding Author

Sahat Tua

Institut Agama Kristen
Renatus Pematang Siantar.

Article History

Received: 11.06.2024

Accepted: 05.07.2024

Published: 17.07.2024

Abstract: This research delves into the imperative need for environmental preservation amid the escalating awareness among humans about the planet's vulnerable state. Human-induced disturbances in the environment, primarily stemming from exploitative resource management practices, have led to widespread degradation. The onset of industrialization magnified this exploitation, with nature being viewed solely as a means for economic prosperity. However, this mechanistic approach has precipitated severe ecological repercussions, necessitating a reevaluation of humanity's relationship with the environment. Employing a literature review methodology, this study elucidates the multifaceted dimensions of the environment, encompassing both its physical and biological aspects. It examines the interplay between ecology, economics, and geography, emphasizing the importance of a balanced understanding to achieve environmental harmony. Drawing from Christian ethics, the article underscores the theological perspective on humanity's role as stewards of creation. While humans are granted dominion over nature, this authority is tempered by the responsibility to nurture and preserve the environment. The biblical narrative underscores the interconnectedness between humans and nature, highlighting the intrinsic value of all living beings. The research also addresses humanity's failure to uphold its stewardship duties, attributing environmental degradation to human greed and disregard for ecological balance. However, it presents a hopeful outlook, asserting that the Christian faith offers a framework for restoring harmony between humans and nature. By embracing principles of repentance, restraint, respect, and responsibility, Christians can contribute to environmental conservation and enhance their worship through sustainable practices. Ultimately, the result advocates for collaborative efforts among individuals, irrespective of religious affiliations, to safeguard the environment and ensure the well-being of future generations. It posits that by embracing a holistic approach rooted in ecological stewardship, humanity can strive towards a harmonious coexistence with nature, fulfilling its ethical and moral obligations towards the Creator and fellow beings.

Keywords: Ethics, New Earth, Anthropocentric, Ecocentric.

Cite this article:

Tua, S., Sinaga, M. S., Simanjuntak, E., (2024). New Earth Ethics: Harmonizing Anthropocentric and Ecocentric Perspectives. *ISAR Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Studies*, 2(7), 16-19.

Introduction

Recently, the increasing awareness among humans of the need to preserve their environment has become more apparent. This phenomenon correlates with the growing knowledge and experiences indicating that the planet Earth is undergoing serious disturbances or damages. These disruptions or damages are generally caused by human activities, particularly in the utilization and management of natural resources. An exploitative and destructive approach to the environment tends to be a common pattern in its utilization. Therefore, the processes of exploitation and management of the environment often bring about destructive impacts, whether intentional or unintentional (Spencer, 2015).

The degradation of the environment has actually been ongoing for some time, especially since the beginning of the industrialization era. This era raised awareness among humans that nature is a collection of resources that can be utilized to enhance prosperity.

Since then, natural resources have been exploited to meet human needs with the hope of improving their standard of living. With the emergence of technologies such as machinery, the approach to nature became more mechanistic (Ariawan, 2020). This led to uncontrolled increases in the exploitation of natural resources. Nature is often viewed merely as a tool to fulfill human needs, without considering its intrinsic value. Awareness of environmental damage began to emerge after World War II and became more global about three decades ago when the negative impacts on the environment became more apparent. At that time, humans began to realize that non-renewable natural resources were becoming depleted (Phungsuk, Viriyavejakul, & Ratanaolarn, 2017).

The mechanistic approach to environmental management, accompanied by rapid population growth, reached its peak in the late 1960s with what is known as the "global population

explosion." This phenomenon drove development focused on "economic growth," which unfortunately increased the exploitation of natural resources. The goal of this development was not only to enhance prosperity but also to meet the increasing basic needs of the growing human population. For example, forests were not only utilized as a source of industrial raw materials but also converted into agricultural land. These activities were exacerbated by pollution and environmental contamination. To maintain the fertility of agricultural land, chemical fertilizers were widely used, while pesticides were used in large quantities to protect crops from pests, resulting in increased agricultural production. All of these, along with the development of industries and transportation systems aimed at increasing production and distribution, led to damaging levels of pollution. Consequently, natural resources became increasingly degraded, the ability of nature to support life declined, and this threatened human survival itself (de Wet, 2014).

From the above description, it becomes clear that conflicts causing environmental damage or illness are caused by human actions in the exploitation, processing, and consumption of natural resources. Conflict arises when these actions exceed the bounds of reasonableness or proportionality. These boundaries are violated when humans, aided by science and technology, are able to use natural resources massively, intensively, and rapidly, while simultaneously damaging or polluting them. However, what is more concerning is the increasingly boundless behavior of humans, making them feel like masters and owners of nature. Therefore, awareness of the need to preserve and care for the environment must be emphasized to humans, by questioning their attitudes and behaviors towards nature. How does Christian theology or ethics respond to this?

The purpose of this research is to assert that environmental conservation is a human responsibility to maintain its continuity. Thus, nature is viewed as a gift from God that has economic functions in meeting human needs. However, the existence of nature is not solely based on human interests.

Method

This research employs a literature review approach. The literature review approach involves the process of gathering information from various literary sources, analyzing readings, and managing research materials (Zed, 2008:3). Literature review is an integral part of research, especially in the context of academic research aimed at developing theoretical and practical aspects. Researchers conduct literature reviews with the primary goal of establishing a solid foundation for building theoretical frameworks, conceptual frameworks, and formulating initial hypotheses. The sources of data used include various literary materials such as the Bible, textbooks, scientific journals, articles, and literature reviews related to the concept being investigated.

Result and Discussion

Environment refers to the surrounding conditions that influence the growth and behavior of living organisms. Everything around humans that impacts human development, whether directly or indirectly, can also be considered as the environment. The environment can be defined as: 1) the area where living organisms exist; 2) the conditions or situations surrounding these living organisms; 3) the overall situation encompassing living organisms or a group of living organisms. According to the Indonesian Law No. 4 of 1982 on the Basic Principles of Environmental

Management and Indonesian Law No. 32 of 2009 on Environmental Management, the environment is the totality of elements in a space, including objects, forces, conditions, and living beings, including humans and their behavior, which affect nature itself, the continuity of life, and the well-being of humans and other living beings. The environment can be defined as the collection of all elements and conditions present in the space we inhabit, which affect our lives. The environment encompasses all external factors, both biological and physical, that directly influence the life, growth, development, and reproduction of humans (Simangunsong et al., 2021).

The environment refers to all elements, forces, conditions, situations, and influences present in the space we inhabit, which also affect the existence of living beings, including humans. The environment is analyzed through the environmental science discipline based on ecological principles, considering other disciplines such as economics and geography. It is important to have a balanced understanding of the principles and basic concepts, as well as the interrelated relationships between ecology, economics, and geography to achieve harmony in the environment (Elsy, Boose, & Ariawan, 2020).

Christian ethics (Greek: *ethos*, meaning habit, custom) is a branch of theological science that discusses issues from the Christian perspective of what is good. When viewed from the perspective of the Torah and the Gospel, Christian ethics are everything desired by God and that which is good. Thus, Christian ethics are actions that are morally good when measured. Currently, the issue faced by Christian ethics is the will of God for humans created in His image, and human attitudes towards that will of God (Putra, Padmasari, & Ariawan, 2020).

In the creation narrative, it is explained that humans were created along with the entire universe, indicating the interconnectedness and unity between humans and their environment. However, it is also stated that humans, as the image of God ("*Imago Dei*"), were given authority to rule over and manage the earth and all its contents. Thus, while humans are an inseparable part of creation (the environment), they are also given the responsibility to care for and manage the earth. Therefore, the relationship between humans and their environment can be seen as two sides of the same coin that must be balanced (Yates, 2016).

1. Unity of Humans with Nature

The Bible depicts the unity between humans and nature in the creation story: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7), just as "He formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky" (Genesis 2:19). In Hebrew, humans are called "adam," which comes from the same root word as the word for soil, "adamah," reflecting the color of human skin and the color of the earth. In Latin, humans are called "homo," which is related to "humus," meaning soil. In this context, soil, often connoted with earth, has a complex relationship with humans: humans are created from soil (Genesis 2:7; 3:19, 23), they must earn a living from the soil (Genesis 3:23), and eventually, they will return to the soil (Genesis 3:19; Psalm 90:3). From this, it is evident that humans and nature (the environment) are interrelated in a relationship that follows ecosystem principles. Therefore, when humans damage nature, they also indirectly harm themselves (Müller, 2013).

2. Human Leadership Over Nature

Although humans and nature have a mutually reinforcing dependency, the Bible also emphasizes a clear distinction between humans and other natural elements. Only humans were created in the image of God and given authority to rule over and govern the earth and all other creations (Genesis 2:26-28), as well as being responsible for caring for and preserving their environment (Genesis 2:15). Thus, humans have greater power than other creatures, elevated as "rulers" on earth with the honor bestowed by God (Psalm 8:6). Humans act as God's representatives ruling over other creatures, living as God's ambassadors. As images of God, humans are also elevated as partners of God. However, because of their role as God's representatives and partners, human authority is delegated and entrusted, accountable to the Creator, God. Therefore, humans are not allowed to act arbitrarily toward nature but must fulfill their duties responsibly and must not become "tyrants." Human power is that of a "caretaker." Thus, humans should act in balance, meaning resource management and utilization must be accompanied by efforts of conservation and preservation of nature (Thomas Resane, 2015).

In Genesis 2:15, the word "manage" is translated from the Hebrew term "abudah," which has similar meanings to the words "worship" and "serve." Therefore, humans, as images of God, should view environmental management as part of their worship and service to God. In other words, mastery over nature should be done responsibly: utilizing it while preserving and caring for it. True worship is to carry out God's will in human life, including in the task of managing ("abudah") and caring for ("samar") the environment entrusted to humans.

3. Human Failure to Preserve Nature

The Bible clearly states that within humans lies a "desire" to be like God, ultimately resulting in "violation" of God's commandment (Genesis 3:5-6). Actions violating God's commandment not only impact the relationship between humans and God but also with others and with nature. Humans began to view nature not as "fellow creatures" but as objects to be owned and dominated. Nature is only considered in the context of practical and materialistic use. Humans focus on management tasks without considering the task of preservation. Thus, humans fail to fulfill their leadership responsibilities over nature.

The roots of harmful human behavior towards nature are revealed in terms such as "cursed ground," "painful toil," and "thorns and thistles the ground will produce" (Genesis 3:17-19). Humans are often driven by fears about the future, leading to greed and materialism (see Matthew 6:19-25). Theologically, it can be concluded that the root of current environmental degradation lies in human greed, defined by John Stott as "economic gain at the expense of the environment." Sinful humans not only view nature as a means to fulfill their needs but also as a means to satisfy their greedy desires. In other words, sinful humans shift from "needy creatures" to "greedy creatures." Failure to fulfill the leadership task over nature also reflects human failure to control themselves, especially in controlling their desires (Moritz, 2017).

4. New Relationship between Humans and Nature

The Bible, especially the New Testament, records that God, full of love, loves His creation (kosmos) so much that He sent His only son, Jesus Christ, into the world (John 3:16). Jesus Christ, referred

to as the Word (logos) of creation (Colossians 1:15-17; John 1:3, 10a), incarnated as a human being (John 1:1, 14); and through His sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from the dead, He reconciled God with everything (ta panta) or this world (kosmos) (Colossians 1:19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19). Jesus has restored God's relationship with humans and all His creation, including the relationship between humans and nature. Based on this, the harmonious relationship as in Eden (Paradise) has been restored (Loader, 2014).

What was described in the Old Testament as prophecies of peace throughout the earth and among all creatures (Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:17; 66:22; Hosea 2:18-23) has been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, in the Christian faith, the relationship between humans and nature is not only about "dominion" (dominance) but also about "communion" (fellowship). That is why Jesus, who incarnated as a human, also used elements of nature, such as "water, wine, and bread," in sacraments that serve as signs and seals of the new relationship between humans and God. In other words, the relationship between humans and God should be reflected in a good relationship between humans and nature. Fellowship with God should be reflected in fellowship with nature. A good relationship with nature also guides us towards the perfection of creation in the "new heaven and new earth" (Revelation 21:1-5), which is the ultimate goal of God's redemption work through Jesus Christ. In the new heaven and new earth, the original creation order will be restored to its original state, where humans live in harmony with God and all creatures in an eternal and peaceful world.

Conclusion

Nature or the environment is a gift from the Creator to be used wisely for human well-being. Humans are given the ability to utilize natural resources to meet their needs. However, it is important to remember that the creation of nature is not only for human benefit alone. Nature is also important for the sustainability of other living beings and the entire ecosystem. Nature has an ecumenical function, meaning it is a place for all living creatures. The concepts of "economy," "ecumene," and "ecology" have their roots in the Greek word "oikos," which means house. "Economy" means household management; this indicates humanity's task to manage natural resources wisely to meet their needs. "Ecumene" reflects the idea of inhabiting a common home, emphasizing the importance of harmonious life between humans and nature. Meanwhile, "ecology" means understanding and investigating the house, which indicates humanity's responsibility to understand and maintain the balance of nature.

Humans play an important role as stewards of this common home's sustainability. Although having the responsibility as economic managers, humans often fall into the trap of greed. Therefore, a process of renewal, repentance, and self-control is needed to create an attitude full of appreciation and responsibility towards the environment. The Christian responsibility in preserving the environment can be formulated in the concept of 4R - "repent", "restraint", "respect", "responsible". Authentic worship is worship that can be manifested through responsible actions in daily life.

In living together, Christians are expected to collaborate with all individuals, including all creatures. The concept of "ecumene" describes the collective effort to build harmonious life

on this earth. This task is the responsibility of all humanity and God's creation together. Therefore, the responsibility of Christians is to contribute in accordance with their beliefs and hopes to God, by enriching and improving their worship through the preservation and respect for the life given by the Creator. Improving the quality of worship is reflected in the practice of discipline, resource management, and sustainable self-control.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ariawan, S. (2020). *Building Critical Thinking in Covid-19 Pandemic Era: Impossible or I am Possible? International Research Journal on Advanced Science Hub* (Vol. 2).
2. de Wet, F. W. (2014). Renewal according to the mind of christ as trigger for prophetic action in dealing with human waste. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i2.2630>
3. Elsy, I., Boose, M., & Ariawan, S. (2020). Mengembangkan Karakter Kristen Mahasiswa dari Belajar Etika Kristen dengan Metode Self-Directed di Perguruan Tinggi. *Osf.Io*, 2(1).
4. Loader, J. A. (2014). Understanding of failure and failure of understanding: Aspects of failure in the old testament. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2657>
5. Moritz, J. M. (2017). Christianity and the Philosophy - Christian Theology of Creation and the Metaphysical Foundations of Science. *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*.
6. Müller, J. C. (2013). Practical theology as part of the landscape of social sciences and humanities - A transversal perspective. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v69i2.1299>
7. Phungsuk, R., Viriyavejakul, C., & Ratanaolarn, T. (2017). Development of a problem-based learning model via a virtual learning environment. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(3), 297–306. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2017.01.001>
8. Putra, N. P., Padmasari, V., & Ariawan, S. (2020). The Importance of Fostering the Ethics of Christianity. *Academia.Edu*, 2(1).
9. Simangunsong, B., Dewi Aritonang, H., Ariawan, S., Simanjuntak, H., Harianja, R., Tinggi, S., ... Batam, B. (2021). Tanggung Jawab Gereja Membangun Gerakan Eco-literacy di Kaldera Toba UNESCO Global Geopark. *Regula Fidei: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, 5(2), 262–275. Retrieved from <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2019/06/24/pt-tpl-sosialisasi-tentang-luas-lahan-konsesi-hutan-dan-klaim-tanah-adat>
10. Spencer, A. J. (2015). Beyond Christian Environmentalism: Ecotheology as an Over-Contextualized Theology. *Themelios*. Retrieved from <http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/themelios/Themelios40.3.pdf>
11. Thomas Resane, K. (2015). The mining-induced displacement and resettlement: The church as a leaven and ecclesiology in context's response. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i3.2967>
12. Yates, G. E. (Gary E. (2016). The Problem of Repentance and Relapse as a Unifying Theme in the Book of the Twelve. *Themelios*. Retrieved from <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rfh&AN=ATLAI60926000915&lang=pt-br&site=ehost-live%0Ahttp://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/> (View online)