

Can the Environmental Destruction Be Prevented? A Unification Thought Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

To prevent the environmental destruction, there needs to be a redefinition of man-nature relationship and a review of the value attributed to the natural world based on the purpose for which they have been created. In other words, there needs to be a refocus on the debate surrounding problems of environment from the exclusive reliance on science to the original essence of creation. A historian of science and technology in the name of Lynn White once wrote that the ongoing environmental crisis would not be over unless we find a new religion or rethink the old one. The reason, according to him, is that what people do with the ecology, depends greatly on their religious understanding of man-nature relationship.

It is the argument of this paper that Unification Thought¹ offers a much more consistent response in solving the ecological crisis. This is because of the emphasis it puts on the essence and purpose of creation and on the correct understanding of God's attributes. Meanwhile, its fundamental postulate that God created everything in His own likeness (pp.1) provides an important clue on the type of relationship between man and nature. It is said in Unification Thought that human problems can be solved only through knowing the standard of creation when God first created the universe (pp.1) and that the correct understanding of God is the key to solving problems of individuals and society (pp.47).

RETHINKING THE VALUE OF NATURE

The issue of the value of nature and its rights vis-à-vis the humankind, has resulted into two mutually excluding views known as ecocentric and anthropocentric ethics². The first view, the ecocentric ethics tend to maintain nature intact on the premise that it has rights independent of human beings and that the species contained in it have a value that transcends human survival. The other view, the anthropocentric ethics are said to derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition that God created the natural world solely for human benefit; consequently making it a source of property for humankind.

¹ This paper uses the 1992 edition of the Essentials of Unification Thought as its main text of reference.

² A thorough explanation about their development can be found in Miguel A. Santos' book, "The Environmental Crisis".

Unless these two ethics reconcile with each other, their conflict will remain a major hurdle on which efforts to solve environmental problems will often stall.

Unlike the ecocentric and the anthropocentric ethics, which seem to put humans and the natural world at odds, Unification Thought stresses that every single element of the creation is endowed with a divine value. It also affirms that each of them is meant to be a substantial manifestation of the invisible God (pp.3). For that reason, the natural world is seen as an unprecedented means by which human beings can grasp the different attributes of God. In a sense, Unification Thought attaches to nature a value that is unique and to some extent 'sacred' just as the ecocentric ethics do. The difference, however, is that it does not see the natural world as totally separate from humans.

a) Nature's Utmost Value

According to Unification Thought, in creating human beings and all other creatures, God envisioned a form and an internal character that individualize each one of them with unique features (pp.15). It means that the environment and its existing things, including those that are often and easily ignored, can be considered 'sacred' particularly since they all carry an irreplaceable value. Even the Judeo-Christian tradition, which some ecologists blame for the ongoing ecological crisis, shows sign of nature's sacredness. The Talmud verse that "if there be a plant in your hand when they say to you, 'Behold the Messiah!' go and plant the plant, and afterwards go out and greet him" is a clear indication of the tradition's seriousness in protecting nature³.

To think of nature as 'sacred' should not necessarily mean that it ought to be kept intact and that it should have nothing to do with humans as the ecocentric ethics seem to suggest. It should rather be about contributing to and enhancing its harmony and its beauty (Wilson, 1995). In another text closely related to Unification Thought, the Divine Principle⁴, the value of the universe is equated to a museum that receives visitors. It explains that the articles on display in a museum attain their true value when there are people to appreciate, love and take delight in them (pp.29). So, if the universe is to stand totally separate from human beings, it will have no value at all. Accordingly, nature's utmost value comes solely from its interaction with human beings.

b) Nature as Substantial Manifestation of God

According to Unification Thought, God though invisible has an aspect of form called

³ Extracted from the book "World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts"

⁴ References related to this are from the book "Exposition of Divine Principle".

'Dual Characteristics' and which include both His internal aspect and His external form (pp.2). It is noted that God's external form constitutes the fundamental cause for the material part of all created beings and that it has the potential of reflecting itself in a limitless number of ways (pp.6). In other words, the human body, the body of animals as well as the materials of plants and minerals are all a substantial manifestation of God's external form. We read likewise that the vastness of the ocean symbolizes the vastness of God's mind; the heat of the sun symbolizes the warmth of God's love; and the light of the sun symbolizes the brightness of God's truth (pp.72).

In light of this, it can be assumed that nature represents the best means to provide a complete and full picture of God's divine attributes. To say that the world of created beings is a symbolic expression of God (pp.72) would mean that everything in the created universe is a reflection of some specific attributes of the invisible God. So, when species become extinct or the environment itself is destroyed, the loss involves the narrowing down of the very window by which God expresses himself. Moreover, since the correct understanding of God's attributes is the key to solving problems such as the environmental destruction, it is only crucial that we protect and preserve all the elements of the natural world.

c) Nature as Footprint of Human Existence

In addition to its fundamental postulate that God created everything in His own likeness, Unification Thought also holds that the natural world was created in the likeness of human beings. One of the reasons, God is said to have done so, is to make human beings the fruit of the created universe (pp.79). It is explained that prior to creating human beings, God created the natural world by expressing partial reflections of the internal nature and external form He had conceived for them (pp.42). As a result, every human being contains the sum total of the essences of all things. This is why human vocal cords, for instance, are so versatile that they can imitate virtually any animal sound⁵.

Having been created prior to but in the likeness of human beings suggests that nature served as the footprint of human existence. It also means that the natural world exhibits human internal nature and external form in diverse ways; thus giving the bond that links man to nature an even greater significance. Unification Thought believes that it is possible to know about the original features of the society by observing nature (pp.42). So to let it be destroyed is similar to shutting off permanently a great means of learning. With nature, we not only grasp the unseen, but also stretch up our imagination. History tells us that some of the great philosophers, including

⁵ See page 35 of the Exposition of Divine Principle for other examples on the similarity between man and nature.

Socrates, started their remarkable careers due partly to the interest they had have in trying to understand the origin and the structure of the universe.

REDEFINING THE MAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP

It is now accepted that human beings are the key to environmental problems. A United Nations report on global environment mentioned that among all those involved in protecting the environment, individuals are the most important. The idea that nature exists solely for human benefit, as in the anthropocentric ethics, should be an issue of concern because it projects a lack of regard for the environment and it seems to deprive nature of its rights. In Unification Thought, although it is believed that the purpose for creating the natural world was to prepare an environment where humans could exercise dominion (pp.78), it is also said that humans have to first fulfill the purpose of creation in order to become qualified rulers of the natural world.

In general, Unification Thought holds that man has been created as the lord of creation and that the ultimate purpose of the universe, with human beings at its center, is to return joy to God. But it also affirms that a person is qualified to have dominion over the created world when he or she grows to maturity, perfects his or her personality, forms a couple through marriage centering on God's love, and perfects his or her family (pp.26). In other words, individuals become qualified rulers of the natural world if they can first succeed in establishing a good family, seen in Unification Thought as the miniature of an orderly system of the cosmos (pp.103) and the leading bloc of a harmonious and peaceful society.

a) Purpose of Creation

Unification Principles⁶ use the biblical verse "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" in relation with the purpose of creation. These are called the Three Great Blessings and their meaning goes as follow: 1) to develop a character that reflects God's heart, 2) to experience parenthood by establishing a family and 3) to gain qualification of co-creator. The first blessing is obviously the most important since it sets the remaining two. But in terms of environmental protection, all three blessings are equally important because it is only after they are fulfilled that an individual is able to cohabit harmoniously with nature.

The first blessing is said to occur when an individual develops a personality that matches God's standard of heart and creativity. According to Unification Thought, God directed human beings to perfect themselves so that they can stand as co-creators of the

⁶ It implies to any text that is directly related to the Divine Principle and/or to Unification Thought.

creation (pp.104). On its part, the Divine Principle affirms that when one fulfills the first blessing, he or she shares similar feelings with God, thus unable to commit an act that destroys the natural balance of life and nature (pp.34). As for third blessing, which deals directly with nature, its meaning is about perfecting one's ability to have dominion over the natural world. When this occurs, human beings and the natural world become one and constantly share love and beauty to each other.

b) Understanding God's Heart is the Key to Environmental Protection

Unification Thought affirms that God is first of all a being of Heart (pp.17). Defined as the emotional impulse to be joyful as a result of giving love to an object partner⁷, Heart is seen as the ultimate reason behind the idea of creation (pp.21) as well as the core of God's character (pp.99). While its purpose is to realize the three great blessings, its key outcome is joyfulness, which becomes complete when the object partner starts to reflect fully the ideal of his subject partner. According to Unification Thought, having the heart as the core of His attributes, God could not but to create humankind as His object-partner and the universe as the object-partner of humankind.

Unlike the anthropocentric ethics where humans emerge as the selfish rulers of nature, Unification Thought sees them as the caretakers of nature with the ultimate goal of embodying the heart of God. It is said that when human beings inherit finally such heart, they feel a strong desire to love everything surrounding them (pp.99). Their lives, likewise, are fully attuned to God's principles of harmony. Such individuals stand to the created world as God to them. They are always keen to pursue the happiness and the well being of their object partners and can in no time destroy the environment. They constantly value and appreciate the learning opportunities that the natural world offers to them. Accordingly, there is constant joy anytime they relate with the things around them.

c) Inheriting God's Creativity is the Path to Sustainable Dominion

Unification Thought regards humans' strife to enrich their lives by making or changing things as a natural reflection of God's attribute of creativity (pp.25). In fact, God himself created the universe through creativity (pp.103). It is also said that God endowed human beings with creativity so that they have dominion over creation (pp.26). But, dominion in Unification Thought incorporates among other things the meaning of managing and protecting (pp.104). In other words, Unification Thought also sets up the standard for the sustainability of the natural world. Accordingly, dominion could in no time become a free pass to environmental destruction.

⁷ An object partner is a one of the parties involved in a Give/Receive relationship and who is on the receiving side.

Unification Thought affirms that a good number of human achievements became the source for environmental crisis because humans failed to conduct their activities with a creativity similar to God's (pp.26). It is believed that when they will start manifesting such attribute, there will no longer be any destruction of nature (pp.27). Therefore, in order to avoid damaging further the environment, humans have the solemn responsibility to inherit God's creativity. This is also the reason why Unification Thought stresses that scientists in particular have to become people of values and character first before engaging themselves fully in their activities. Unless they do so, they will not be able to protect nature.

UNIFICATION THOUGHT & THE PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

A key element that comes out from Unification Thought in relation to the environmental protection is that it is virtually impossible to solve such complex problems that also involve a whole range of causes by relying only on science, yet ignoring the true essence of creation. This is why there needs to be shift in the direction of the environmental debate to focus on the original purpose of man's existence and his relation with the natural world.

This is not an attempt to undermine some of the results gained so far through means of science and other policies. The existing environmental debate brought several milestones like the 1992 Rio Summit or the signing of agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol. But it is also clear that unless the idea of protecting the environment becomes an integral part of peoples' consciousness, very little if anything could be done to reverse the current trends of destruction. In the meantime, indications are emerging about civilizations that might have declined due to a failed management of the ecosystem and its resources (A. Santos, 1999).

So, if we are to avoid such a fate or secure our own survival, we need a great revolution of consciousness as often called for by the founder of the Unification Thought Institute, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. Addressing a gathering of scientists, he once explained that the real cause of the environmental crisis lies not in social or economic factors like population growth, industrialization, pollution, etc but in humans who have become ignorant of the true essence of their own existence.

In 1995, he went on to proclaim the New Hope Farm Declaration and called upon religious leaders to commit to a swift action to restore the natural environment. He said: "All mankind needs, now more than at anytime before, a movement of people living together in mutual cooperation and true love, and a movement to protect the environment." He specifically mentioned that unless a person loves nature, which was created for mankind, he can not say that he loves mankind and that he loves God. He

concluded that whoever loves God, must love human beings and nature.

In this respect, Unification Thought could be very useful particularly for the emphasis it puts on the essence of man's existence and the purpose of creation as well as for the sacredness it attaches to nature. Equally important is its ability to bring together both the ecocentric and anthropocentric ethics especially if we are to avoid the complete destruction of human civilization. Likewise, its fundamental postulate that God created humankind and the universe in His own likeness could set the standard for a harmonious and sustainable coexistence of man and nature.

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