

# THE WEB OF LIFE: THE STORY OF CREATION

**R. Vibekehh. N. D. Bat-og** | Gajah Mada University,  
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## ABSTRACT

The worsening environmental crisis has become one of the most pressing global issues that all nations and peoples of the world must give attention to. Scientists have earlier warned us that if this trend of ecological degradation continues, it might not take long when the planet earth will not be able to sustain life anymore. This paper argues that the root cause of the current global ecological crisis is mainly theological and ethical. It goes back to the issue of how the biblical account of creation should be interpreted and understood in the light of the present ecological crisis. It suggests a contextual reading of the Bible particularly the Genesis creation account that takes seriously the current environmental problem that besets mankind. Specifically, it proposes a reinterpretation of the divine mandate to "replenish," "multiply," and "subdue" the earth which are very often used to support the human abuse and manipulation of the environment. This paper also seeks to show that religion and science can substantiate and support each other's claims and can work together for the preservation and enhancement of nature and environment.

### Key Words:

• *Web of life* • *Creation story* • *Science and technology* • *Fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue, and dominion* • *Image and likeness*

*This we know: the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web*

*of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself. What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth. One thing we know: our God is your God. The earth is precious to Him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on the Creator. – Chief Seattle, an American Indian in 1855.*

The concept of the Web of Life came into fore when the Federal Government of the United States of America plans of selling the land occupied by the American Indians lead by Chief Seattle in 1855. In his opposition Chief Seattle, although lacking in education to American standard, issued the above statement in the US Congress. Such statement, so full of wisdom and knowledge of the origin of creation, vibrated in the hall of congress that convinced the legislators to stop the sale of the land and converted it into an Indian reservation.

It demonstrated that the knowledge of the interrelatedness of Creations is not a monopoly of the Whites but the Red people have their inherent knowledge about the interrelatedness of Creation. Such wisdom has never been articulated by the Whites as precise, as compact, as stirring, as forceful, as down to earth, and as beautifully as Chief did, making it a classic statement that future generation highlights in almost every ecological and environmental campaign and initiative. The statement put in a nutshell the Biblical version of Creation which we will try to explore to understand.

In the discussions to follow we will attempt to explore the interrelatedness of Creation as part of the Web of Life and the union of religion, science, and technology. How the Creator predetermine His work by putting things in sequence that provisions were installed for subsequent creations putting first thing first and not the other way around, unlike the humans who often put the succeeding before the preceding, thus resulting in disorder and eventually conflict that when it gets out of hand becomes full blown confrontation.

### **The Creation Story – Genesis 1: 1-31 / 2: 1-4**

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* <sup>2</sup> *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* <sup>3</sup> *And God said, “**Let there be light,**” and There was light.* <sup>4</sup> *God saw that the light was good, and he separated the **light** from **darkness.*** <sup>5</sup> *God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning – **the first day.***



The Chronicler pictures the Creator like a painter who sits down to paint a masterpiece. He starts with an empty canvas, formless and empty; the surface is black and is engaged in deep thought on the picture to paint. Take note that the spirit of God moves over the waters. When we examine the composition of water we come up with H<sub>2</sub>O, 2 atoms hydrogen and 1 atom oxygen. And moisture is composed of several atoms of varied elements, and hydrogen and oxygen are but only two of those elements that compose moisture.

What is mysterious is the light that was first created. Or was there just an understatement of the **true light**, the mysterious light that Jesus claimed in Matthew 8:12 “I am the **light** of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the **light** of life.” This **light** is the same light in Rev. 21:23, “and the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the **Lamb is the light** thereof.” This refers to Jesus Christ as the glory and the Lamb of God, giving meat to His claim, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” (Rev. 22:13) James 1:17 refers to God as the Father of the heavenly lights. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, it however suggests that on the first day sequentially with light is the creation of time as an earth's turn makes a day. The first day also marks the creation of the gaseous form of elements that engulf the earth.



*<sup>6</sup> And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water,” <sup>7</sup> So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning – the second day*

The mention of water again surface on day 2 of the creation process. In the previous verse's mention of water, it reports the vast space out there and the presence of water. It affirms the importance of water in the story of creation and as life giving element to other creations. Using technology and science, scientists today are able to confirm the presence of water in other identified planets and outer space. Again, the emplacement of the ozone layers encircling the earth is a protective measure provided by the Creator for this particular work of creation against any aggression that may be caused by other creations. The ozone layers not only protect the earthling from the harmful effect of the ultraviolet rays from the Sun but also from other

invading alien body as it would burn up the objects that enter the earth's atmosphere. Science and technology affirms that with the abuse of the environment follows the depletion of the ozone layers, which would also result to the degradation of the environment leading to climate change to the detriment of mother earth and all the creatures that are in it. The King James Version called the sky "heaven". Religious studies refer to heaven as the abode of God, the angels and the multitude of heavenly hosts, the place where every children of God aspire to go and join the Creator. Each religious group has its own perspective of what the heavens are and how to get there. One thing for sure is that all religions point to God, however, the great difference lies on the fact that Christianity claims that its Christ is the way to God. Another earth's turn is an additional day of creation.

*<sup>9</sup> And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup> And God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters be called "seas." And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup> Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land*



*That bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. <sup>12</sup> The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning— the third day.*

For the third time the Chronicler emphasized the presence of water. It reveals that the waters under the sky is more concentrate that the waters above. The gaseous elements, which transformed to liquid, again transformed into solid – the dry land. As science has it, the dry land is composed of various chemical elements which up to the present, science are discovering new ones. So we have the soil of various types, the sand of different kind, the rocks and stones either precious or semi-precious, and the metals of soft and hard; and such other minerals that are energy producing for use when the proper technology is invented for its proper utilization. And God not only converted the waters into dry ground called land, he also converted the fundamental waters into seas. Both conversions are in preparation for provisions that the succeeding creations need to survive.

Deep into the earth strata are chemical plant nutrients now called chemical fertilizers. These were deposited deep so as to naturally and

gradually supply the necessary plant nutrients needed for its growth while the decomposition process is taking place and replaces the extracted elements from under.

The dry land produced vegetation to prevent the energy produced by the sun, the wind, and the waters from eroding the dry land which, if not control would result to earth's destruction. The vegetation came about in sequence – first the grasses as covering for the dry land especially the lowlands to prevent soil erosion, followed by the shrub to hold the moisture in the lowland; then the fruit trees which would supply the food requirements of the upcoming creations; and the forest trees in higher grounds to act as watershed to hold and regulate the fresh waters while flowing downstream. All these were created to contribute to the maintenance of an ideal climate for the coming creations. It is of great note that vegetation produces oxygen which the later creations –fish, birds and animals and human beings – Inhale to live. They in turn exhale carbon dioxide for vegetation to continue its existence and vice versa. Life is a give and take cycle; a message that we must deeply understand that greed should not be a way of life. On this day, God commenced the creation of biodiversity.

The waters of the seas are with mixed with salt as the Creator anticipated that future activities on the dry lands would produce effluence that would be harmful when not properly handled. So the salty waters could neutralize the harmful effect of the dry land activities. Yet, in spite of these divinely provisions for His creation, unless humankind will not stop its environmental and ecological harmful activities, these provision will not last and will soon takes its toll on the perpetrators themselves. Another earth's turn is an additional day of creation.



<sup>14</sup> And God said, “Let there be light in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the Stars. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day.

On the fourth day, God created objects that would take in and display and continue the power of His Glory – the sun, the moon and the stars. The sun as the source of light to His creatures so they will be able to see where they are heading for while in motion to avoid colliding each other. But besides lighting the way or pathways, the important roles played by the sun are providing energy, which is transformed into power of multi-purposes uses. The sun's energy when it touches the leaves of the flora enables it to manufacture its food for growth, which science called photosynthesis. It also enables decay of the biodegradable things that goes through the process of conversion, first, into organic nutrients and then into inorganic nutrients for the plants to absorb as food to grow. The light also enables the growth of planktons in salt, brackish and fresh waters as food for future creations in the seas.

With the aid of technology, science was able to identify that light is the origin of colors and not the object we are looking at. Colors come from the light while the surface of the object that it comes in contact with either absorbs or reflects it. When the surface reflects the colors of light the human eyes will see various colors, and when the surface absorbs the color the human eyes see black.



For that matter, Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:16 instructed all believers to “let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” God has provided light so that every good deed of His believers should be shown so that people will see and glorify Him. In verse 13 He said, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.” Christ is the big Light and His believers are the media to reflect the goodness of Christ in their lives just as the leaves either absorb or reflect the color of good deeds of Christ.

God also provided a lesser light to govern the night. Science discovered that it does not only provide light for the night but it also influences the movement of the water with its pulling power – the high and low tides – as it also influences the seasons of the year. He also created the stars which are seen from a far distance. Its importance and implication is that when we see these creations at night, we are reminded that God is out there in the expanse overlooking our every activity. He is telling us that we are but just a part of

His Creations, and that He is continuously creating after this creation. It is an additional strand to the macro Web of Life. And another earth's turn is an additional day of creation.



<sup>20</sup> *And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky."*<sup>21</sup> *So god created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving things with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*<sup>22</sup> *God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the Water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."*<sup>23</sup> *And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.*

Now, with the provisions emplaced for future creations, God created creatures in the waters of various kinds and the birds on the sky also of various kinds. The fish have their planktons for food and the birds have the fruits and grains also for food.

What is worth noticing at this stage of creation is that, God shifted His communication from the heavenly hosts who were with Him at creation. He directly communicated to creation commanding them to be fruitful and increase in number and to fill their respective habitat. When God created the hydro habituating and aero gliding itinerant creatures He provided them with senses which are not among the gifts of other creations, senses that could warn them events that threatens and excites. But in the whole, each compliments each other in the Web of Life.

Because of the mysteries that this strand of creation brought, it became the focus of studies and research initiatives of the wisest rung of Creation. Currently, man is exploring the aqua world as well as the aero world in the hope of discovering the mysteries of Creation. Man is exploring the deeps as well as the outer space in the hope of meeting the Creator. But to their dismay, what confront them are still parts of creation as mentioned in the Genesis. The meeting between the Creator and creation (man) is unknown. As Christ puts it in, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Matthew 24:36. Because they that are imperfect cannot face the Perfect, which for that matter Christ advises us to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 6:48.







defying and/or disobeying the Creator by rejecting the duties in the mandate. Let us examine the meanings and objectives of the key words of the mandate: (a) be fruitful, (b) multiply, (c) replenish, (d) subdue, and (e) dominion.

- (A) To be fruitful is to dedicate our life in doing “good” and not making children as your heart's desire. The fruitfulness that it points to is of the spirit, “*but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” Galatians 5:22. The good deeds shall be seen by men and glorify the Father (Creator) in heaven. After the fall however, to be fruitful has additional meaning, which is to be productive to sustain life. (Gen. 3 17b, Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.) However, this fruitfulness must be carried out using appropriate technological knowledge and scientific wisdom, which can maintain ecological balance. As Chief Seattle puts it, whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves, what happens to the earth will happen to us, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on the Creator.
- (B) To multiply (increase in number) is to do it through the mathematic formula of  $1 \times 1 = 1$ , and not man's way of multiplying which involves additions and multiplication and addition and more multiplications as man is never satisfied with the law and always have the tendency to defy any law that limits their human lust and desire. Following the mathematic principle of My Dear Aunt Sally (multiplication, division, addition and subtraction), we will always come up with an answer which is one.  $1 \times 1 = 1 \div 1 = 1 + 1 = 2 - 1 = 1$ . The China policy family ratio of 1 couple: 1 child is a sign of obedience to the Divine mandate at creation.
- (C) To replenish is to refill what has been vacated with the same substance that was taken out. When we cut down trees to build our houses or any structure, we should replant the area with the same tree or plant the same number of trees that were cut down as replacement of what has been felled or taken out. It need not be at the same spot where the tree was cut down, but there should be replacement in adjacent sites. The purpose is to maintain ecological balance.
- (D) To subdue is to regulate the growth of vegetations and the vegetative replacement (*replenish the earth, and subdue it*) to maintain the aesthetic or pleasing looks of the place as in the Garden of Eden before the fall of

man. As in the time of creation, God has designed a way of maintaining climatic temperature. He used the umbrella-carpet-basin principle, where trees serve as umbrella to ward off or cushion the effect of the burning sun, grasses as carpet to prevent erosion and humus soil as basin to hold and conserved water. The role of the creeping things that move along the earth help prevent water run off as like the earth worm who dug deep into the soil (1 meter) that serves as water reservoir. They also hasten the conversion of the decaying substance into fertile soil that the plants feed on.

- (E) To have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air and to all that moves on the ground that have life, is to domesticate, control or train them to serve God's purpose for their creation. But man instead abuses this component of creation. If we continue to do so, we are destroying a strand of the Web of Life, which could cause its eventual destruction.

The creation of man has its special treatment and uniqueness, because at this stage of creation God told His family, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...*" At this point and time, I would like differ with the traditional view that man was created in the looks of God. I would like to venture into a view that the image and likeness that is stated is not "to the looks" of God, His family and the heavenly host which were with Him at creation. Rather, I would say that the words "image" and "likeness" would mean "concept" and "fond of." That man was created according to God's concept of what man should look like, the looks that they are fond of looking at or can take the form when they please. We should take note that no one can see a spirit, and God the Father is a Spirit. Jacob talked about seeing God face to face and yet he lives. (Gen. 32:30) No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. John 1:18. Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9b) God who is a spirit can take the form of man but man who is corruptible cannot take the form of God. This issue of man created "in the image of God" needs a lengthy and thorough study to resolve. The greatest miracle that can happen in this world is when man stops claiming that he is God.



<sup>1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth were completed when they were created. <sup>2</sup>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. (NIV)

(<sup>†</sup>These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, KJV)

This portion of the Story of Creation is not given its due treatment. It is underrated. But I maintain that the seventh day is as important as the first to the sixth day. It is equally important for the fact that on the seventh day, God created an intangible thing called “rest”. Not only is rest observed on the seventh day, but in all the seven days of the week. Of the 24-hour day-life, 8 hours or one-third is apportioned to “rest”. Its process on the resting body may not be seen, but its effect is manifested in the body condition of the host. Rest revitalizes and rejuvenates our body and prepares us for another 16-hour day's work and leisure. The Scripture is precise on this in Exodus 23: 10-12, “For six years you are to sow our fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days do you work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.” As one of the laws of ecology says, nature heals itself. Rest is the healing power innate in us at creation. As taking in food is life-giving and maintaining, rest is life refreshing and rejuvenating.

As presented, we notice two levels of Web of Life, the Macro and the Micro. The Macro represents the universe, the solar system in which our earth is a strand and the constellations and galaxies that is beyond our comprehension. When God finished creating our world, the Chronicler is telling us that our world, the heavens and earth is just but a generation of God's continuing activities of creating. We are merely a grain in the web of life, if we harm the web, we are harming ourselves. If we aspire to get the best of life we should be stewards and not demolishers of the Web of Life. For when we work for those of our own we are working with nature; but if we work for those that are not of our own we are working with the Divine.