

***Creation in Crisis: Science, Ethics and Theology* by Kureethadam Joshtrom; Orbis Books: New York, 2014, 388 pages, US\$ 29.95, ISBN 978-1-6298-100-3.**

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Today human beings are faced with diverse problems. The contemporary ecological crisis is one of the most frightening challenges among these diverse problems. There has been an explosion of environmental activism in recent years to create awareness but at the same time there is a lack of urgency in dealing with this crisis looming over the universe. In this paradoxical situation, the author, Joshtrom Kureethadam in his book *Creation in Crisis*, makes an attempt to communicate to the readers that earth is not only our common home but our only home, the home that sustains us. This book is about the crisis facing our common home and about how the capacity of the earth to be truly a home for all of humanity and for all living beings is increasingly placed in jeopardy. This book explores how the earth came to be shaped as a home in the larger context of cosmic evolution and how the building blocks of our home planet came to be magnificently formed in a complex and dynamic process that lasted for billions of years. But human beings, the masterpiece of the entire process, with their activities threatened the very capacity of the earth to be a real home for all. The author considers the crisis facing our common home, the ecological crisis, triple cry: the cry of the earth, of the poor and of Gods. The cries are attempt to look at the ecological predicament from three different angles - physical, moral and religious. In order to drive home his points the author has organised his thoughts into four parts. I make an attempt to give a brief summary of each of these parts to show how the author delves into the topic he has chosen.

**Part I: "Are We Tearing down Our Home?"**

Part I has two chapters namely; The Making of a Home and Our Common Home in Peril. It shows that how recent discoveries in Science and developments in cosmology have dramatically changed our notion of the physical world and the cosmos. They reveal how the saga of earth becoming a home is intricately linked to the wider cosmic epic of the origin, formation and evolution of the universe. The emergence of our planet and our existence can be understood only by returning to the very dawn of creation. The author starts with big bang theory one of the scientific explanations for the origin of the universe. He states that our home planet is indeed a unique home for life, a rare oasis in the barren cosmic ocean, where life has flourished in an extraordinary abundance and variety. There were three major turning points in evolution to make the earth more amenable to life. They are the regulation of the planet's atmosphere, the production of

oxygen through photosynthesis and the creation of ozone layer. Homo sapiens arrived on the earth which was not hostile but fully prepared to welcome them. However difference in their physiological features from place to place is due to the adaptation to diverse environmental and geographical contexts. He states that in the beginning people maintained a primordial relationship with the cosmos but later there was a radical change in this relationship due to the birth and growth of the modern science and technology. Lack of at-homeness crept in probably due to our perception of our home planet as mere environment rather than a home. Based on the survey of the scientific community, the author clearly states the extent to which our common home has been imperilled. Three concerns expressed here are: firstly, the planetary boundaries are about to be transgressed or have already been crossed with regard to some fundamental geochemical and biological processes that sustains life; secondly, the depletion of the natural resources of the planet; and thirdly, the climate change. He highlights the gravity of the contemporary ecological crisis by stating that human world and natural world are on a collision course and there is an alarming situation in the areas of climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, and interference with the biogeochemical cycles. Tampering with the earth's climate and its natural processes are on the increase. The deliberate destruction of our common home – the current oikos- cide is bound to have not only physical consequences but also profound ethical implication for our fellow human beings, for future generations and for our fellow species. Like every destructive act it raises several moral and spiritual questions. The moral and spiritual dimension of the contemporary ecological crisis convey the profound truth that humanity cannot restore harmony with creation unless we live in harmony among ourselves and ultimately in harmony with the creator, the source of all being.

## **Part II: The Cry of the earth**

This section gives a physical understanding of the ecological crisis, looking at it mainly from scientific perspectives. This part is organised into four chapters. They are: Climate Change, Impacts of Climate Change, Species Extinction and Biodiversity Loss and Pollution, Waste and Depletion of Resources. This section perceives the ecological crisis as encompassing more than just the problem of climate change alone. This chapter shows that ecological crisis has many facets in addition to climate change, which are interlinked but still distinct. It gives a detailed account of global warming and associated climate change and gives an analysis of uniqueness of greenhouse effect. Climate change is considered as the defining issue of our time. Some even describe it as the world's greatest challenge to civilization. Climate change leads to catastrophic consequences for human communities and ecosystems. The major impacts of climate change for human communities and ecosystems are: extreme weather events, droughts and desertification, reduction of snow cover including the melting of glaciers, sea level rise, ocean acidification with consequences for marine life and loss of bio diversity. Cry of the earth also deals with question of species extinction and biodiversity loss and how we have polluted our common home and depleted natural resources of our common household. Biodiversity refers precisely to the rich abundance of life from

genes through species and to ecosystem. The role of biological diversity in making our home planet into a home is not only invaluable but also indispensable. The author by taking the current situation of biodiversity of the earth cautions how mother earth is precariously poised on the verge of mass extinction of species. He states that habitat loss and degradation, climate change, overexploitation, pollution and invasion of alien species are the reasons behind mass extinction and the consequences of biodiversity loss ranges from immediate consequence for human's physical and economic wellbeing to ethical, aesthetic and religious consideration. He concludes this part by saying that by doing havoc to the earth; human beings are playing a huge and mindless gamble with the future of oikos and of our fellow human beings – especially future generations and fellow species members of our common household thereby showing humanity's deformed relationship with the natural world.

### **Part III: The Cry of the Poor**

In this section, proceeding from the second part, the author highlights that it is not only the groaning of the mother earth but also of the poor of the earth. The ecological crisis is life threatening to millions of impoverished people in different parts of the world. It threatens basic human welfare in key areas like food security, health and shelter. So he feels the necessity to discuss ecological crisis within an ethical framework. Part III is divided into two chapters.

First Section (chapter 7: The Impacts of Ecological Crisis on Food, Health and Shelter) examines how the ecological crisis will threaten human welfare in three vital and basic areas of human life: food security, health and shelter. It has pronounced impact on agriculture in the decades to come due to land degradation, transformation of biogeochemical cycles due to increased use of fertilizers and pesticides, decreasing water availability and so on, with reverberating impact on the food security. It also explores the deleterious effect on human health, due to the impacts of pollution, water contamination, poor sanitation and above all climate change. It also speaks about the emergence newer forms of diseases and more resistible forms of harmful microorganisms leading to a more dangerous situation. This also discusses how the crisis can lead to forced migration on a massive scale.

Second section (chapter 8: A moral Crisis) shows how poor are the unjust victims of the ecological crisis. While the crisis is caused mostly by the rich world, its main victims will be those who have done least to cause it. As we all have the same right to equal ecological space, questions of justice and equity needs to be addressed along with those of solidarity and fairness. Ecological crisis is profoundly a moral crisis because it is inextricably linked to social justice. The author describes ecological crisis in terms of inequality and injustice. The central argument of the chapter is that all the ecological crisis calls for eco-justice at the planetary level and gross injustice leads to ecological divide. An ethical response to the ecological crisis needs to be erected on the solid pillars of justice, equity and solidarity. Ecological crisis is primarily about eco justice.

The process of creating eco justice requires a two tiered approach. First and foremost, it will have to be guided by the twin principles of responsibility and capabilities of nations and individuals. Second, the process needs to guarantee human dignity by recognizing the rights of poor countries to develop. Equity is precondition for justice. It is based on foundational values of equality and dignity. The contemporary ecological crisis reveals how divided our common household is and solidarity appears to be the sole solution.

#### **Part IV: The Cry of the Gods**

This section has two chapters entitled, 'Creation as God's Home' and 'The Ecological Sin of Irresponsible Stewardship'. Ecological crisis is a deeply spiritual and religious crisis. The contemporary ecological crisis points to the forgetfulness of a deeper truth, namely, the physical world is above all God's creation. Symbolically ecological crisis is also cry of God. Today, a spiritual perspective in understanding the crisis facing our common household and the involvement of faith communities in dealing with the crisis is vitally important. The fundamental reason the scientists wanted religious leaders and faith communities to collaborate with them in safeguarding our home planet was the realization that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect and the efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred.

The author states that the ecological crisis results from a double failure. First and foremost it is due to the incapacity to look at the physical world as God's creation or as God's own home (*oikos*) and therefore to respect its sanctity and integrity. This crisis is the result of our failure to recognize the physical works as God's primary revelation, as an icon and sacrament of God's presence in creation. It shows that how contemporary ecological crisis originates from our refusal to respect the ultimate destiny (*telos*) of all creation to enter into God's rest (Sabbath). We appear to have lost sight of the fundamental truth that all created reality is preordained to be recapitulated in God, its original source and ultimate destiny as the cosmos moves towards its eschatological fulfilment. Secondly the crisis is the result of irresponsible stewardship of our common home, entrusted by the Lord to humanity. The ecological crisis reveals that how we have failed in our original vocation to care for God's creation. Such irresponsible stewardship can be termed ecological sin, rupturing bonds with the creator, with fellow human beings and with fellow creatures and rest of the creation. As a result of this grave sin cosmic fellowship is destroyed. At the deeper level the ecological crisis shoots from human hubris, namely from our defiance to accept our proper identity as creature and acknowledge our radical dependence on the creator and our interdependence on the rest of the creation. The author gives great emphasis on our vocation to be stewards of our common home. He calls for an ecological conversion in response to ecological sin by returning to the creator and to the creation.

To conclude, the author makes an excellent effort to understand the problems faced by the mother earth in a systematic manner by basing himself on scientific data. He looked

at the entire issue of ecological crisis in physical, moral and theological perspectives by stating that the ecological crisis is a threefold cry: cry of the earth, cry of the poor and the cry of God. He highlights that the entire crisis is due to irresponsible activities and vested interests of human beings and our failure to consider the earth as our common home. He beautifully reminds us that instead of being responsible stewards of the creation, we rupture the relationship with the entire universe. It is a very timely book which gives profound insights into dangers our common household faces and exhorts all of us to look at the issue with urgency and asks the readers to repair the damage done by turning to the creator and the creation. *Creation in Crisis* is a must read book for all especially the students of science as well as social sciences, research scholars and theologians and all who are seriously concerned about the environment.