

# Christian Ethics and Embodiment of Ecological Behavior: *Contribution to the Thinking of Ecological Theology for Coastal Society in Inner Ambon Bay*

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**Abstract**— Humans need support in the sustainability of their lives. The surrounding natural environment plays an important role for that. If nature is damaged, and so will the human life. For this reason, we need ways to survive as well as the thoughts that underlie the way of survival. The viewpoint of Christian ethics is one of the thoughts that can be given to add insight into human thinking, especially the Christian community on the coastal waters of Inner Ambon Bay (TAD) to realize the right lifestyle with nature. This study seeks to present the contribution of ecological theology thinking to the coastal societies in Inner Ambon Bay (TAD) so that they can renew ecological behavior in order to realize the welfare of living side by side with nature biblically.

**Keywords**— *Christian Ethics, Ecological Behavior, Inner Ambon Bay.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ambon City is the capital of Maluku Province which is located on Ambon Island and is classified as a small island. The city is a center of government, education, transportation, economy, defense and security, social and culture, tourism and the target of urbanization from the area around Ambon Island and outside Maluku Province. As a result, the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) categorizes the city as a Medium City Class which indicates a variety of changes continuously.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, the dynamic aims to improve the welfare of people's lives, supported by the availability of various infrastructures, human resources, natural resources and so on. On the other hand it increasingly gives an indication for the increasing problems of environmental damage, one of which is the Inner Ambon Bay waters (TAD).

TAD damage is caused by pollutants originating from a variety of society activities, increasing population settlements that continue to grow in line with population growth, development of various infrastructures, industries and society activities in waters. Various types of pollutants are categorized as organic waste, inorganic waste, sediment and other materials. All of those enter and influence the quality of the TAD waters either directly or indirectly as has been found through plenty of findings from expert research. [1], [2], [3], [4]

Diverse results of their research have given a picture of damage in different intensities with the category from “medium” to “bad”. The degradation has caused damage to the three main habitats of the waters such as coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangrove forests, thus affecting the presence of other biological resources related such as fish, [5], [6], snails, mussels, sea cucumbers, mangrove crabs, crabs, barong shrimp and tiger shrimp, sponges, seaweed and so on.[7]

In the end, the problem also affected human life such as reduced income of the fishing community due to the decrease in the number of fish production from traditional fishermen groups in Waiheru, Latta, Lateri and so on. In addition to the problem of decreasing levels of fisheries production, there are also other problems such as bad influences on human health, in which 34 people got sick and some died in 1994 due to consuming shellfish in the waters of TAD. Widaryana stated that this was because people consumed shellfish contaminated with Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning from poisonous “phytoplankton” or “dinoflagelata” or “Gymnodinium bahamense”. [8] This phenomenon was repeated again in 2012 which is generally called “red tide” so that the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) issued a warning not to consume

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<sup>1</sup>Regency/City Profile,  
<http://ciptakarya.pu.go.id/profil/profil/timur/maluku/ambon.pdf>  
f, Retrieved on 20 February 2012.

fish and shellfish in the TAD because it can cause poisoning and death.<sup>2</sup>

Paying attention to this problem is realized that the problem of TAD is not only bad for different members of the community but it also affects human life. Noting the damage to the TAD, it was assumed that various bad deeds of the community indicated a human paradigm that was not harmonious with nature. This perspective is assumed to also encourage the birth of diverse behaviors that are contrary to nature itself.

The destructive act of nature is strongly opposed by the Christian view which emphasizes the relationship between faith and nature. Christian commitment to the need for an uncontaminated green earth, air and water is an important dimension. Therefore the role of religion is very important in seeing human relations and natural arrangement. [9] This is also what Paul affirmed by expressing a view of “new creation” which is the goal of everything.[10]

Considering this, true faith in God must also be expressed through the restoration of relations with the universe such as building a harmonious relationship with the environment. One of the reasons is the salvation of God, which is not only intended for humans but for all of His creation. Therefore, damage to the TAD is one indication of human actions that are contrary to faith in God. However, to determine the level of people's bad behavior towards nature cannot be done adequately. Based on that brief description, it is interesting to respond to the issue based on Christian ethics.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is the result of literature review supported by field observations to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects such as from holistic views (attitudes), behaviors, motivations, actions, contexts and so on which are then described in the form of words and languages in a special (natural) context by utilizing the scientific method.[11] To understand the perceptions and behavior of the community towards the TAD ecosystem area, the writer conducted research on eight villages and one sub-district, which are Poka, Hunuth/Durian Patah, Waiheru, Nania, Negeri Lama, Passo, Lateri, Latta and Halong. All villages or sub-districts are in the vicinity of the TAD waters.

Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of informants, based on research instruments or interview guidelines in the form of questions that had been prepared in advance. Secondary data was obtained through documentation of other research results, both through print and electronic media. In testing the validity of the data obtained, the writer checked the validity of the data owned by using the triangulation method. This technique is a data validity checking technique that utilizes something other than the data for checking purposes or as a comparison to that data. [11]

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<sup>2</sup>*Fish and Bia in the Bay of Ambon are in Toxic.* 19 July 2012. <http://new.beritadacera.com/berita/maluku/69743/2392>, Retrieved on 03 January 2013.

Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the writer utilized a variety of secondary data that was successfully obtained to examine the primary data as a data comparison. This was done by the writer through various literature studies that are closely related to the existing research problems.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Ethical aspects cannot be separated from human behavior which is related to reason and daily attitudes. That means a fundamental change in life will only be valuable and effective, if it produces a real change of behavior in reality. The importance of ideal behavior seems very clear when considering various images of the outlines of acceptable behavioral boundaries before God. [12] Because through all that, the ideal behavior will represent “to what extent” and “how” humans realize their relationship with God in the form of behavior (Mark 10:24-25). This aspect is in line with the statement:

“If we take the theocentric view as the basis ... our view of God will shape the way we behave in more ways ... if we believe that God is essentially included in the world, our behavior will be more ... considering other creations. Furthermore, if we believe that the fundamental characteristics of God are the Almighty Creator ... God's love will extend to the entire creation as a whole, not just the species individually”. [13]

Looking at such a perspective, the ideal behavior is not just reflecting the intimacy of human relations with God alone. But furthermore it also represents the existence of “two-way love” as a response to human love for God and others as affirmed by Mark 12:29-31. [14]

Looking at this perspective, the realization of ecological behavior must reflect the ideals of self-development based on God's will. This is the result of overall self-empowerment based on God's intervention in which two-way love radiates. For Paul, that dimension is very important because the true Christian life is a movement of behavior that continues to work for the good of each other with God's help (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). Here, God Himself continues to inspire and sue human life to realize the two-way love so as to deliver their lives in appropriate behavior. [15]

Considering the explanation, it is increasingly clear about the importance of the realization of ecological behavior as a reflection of an ideal life between humans and all creation based on God's will. Through ecological behavior it does not only represent the existence of self-empowerment as a feature of mere human resource enhancement. In this dimension, the ecological behavior becomes a “propaganda der tat” of the loving presence of God in His creation community continuously. That is one true Christian mission based on God's will, because that mission is always closely related to plenty of efforts which to continue to work for the good for others. [16]

Therefore, through ecological behavior in the present life, the community of God's creation increasingly has life continues into the future according to His will (Luke 16:25, Matthew 25:46). Looking at such an understanding, what is stated by Browning was right[14]:

“God's love for humans cannot be imagined. He manifests His love in a variety of unique and creative ways, even though most of it is not understood by humans themselves. So how could God have created humans with such great ability to respond to His love, then let human evil destroy all of God's work?”.

#### *A. Realizing Ecological Behavior as an Ideal Character*

To achieve this dimension humans must repent as a condition of transforming their lives based on God's will. This aspect can only occur if everyone accepts Jesus as an ideal figure as well as a reference to the development of their lives. That reference manifests in the personality of Jesus who is full of love, obedience, humility and so on, which is always revealed in his attitude, words, behavior or whole life.

It is through the character of Jesus that God sues human morality which still perpetuates oppression, arbitrariness, discrimination, social inequality, hypocrisy, arrogance and so on. Therefore, when there is a repentance from humans to God, the personality of Jesus will become a driving force as well as a model and direction of their lives towards nature as their neighbor through guarding, maintaining and maintaining the “face of God” contained in all His creation. [17] Thus God is proclaimed by humans in the form of love for God and His creation in the most concrete form (*propaganda der tat*) even though it contains various risks.[18]

That is one of the cornerstones of ecological behavior that God wants so that each person has a new, holy life because God wants holiness (Leviticus 19:2). Through that standard, God wants everyone to behave in the same way as Himself towards all His creation. With such a basis, direction and idealism, the birth of ecological behavior has a solid foundation as a character of human self that is consistent with nature as their relatives through a high level of care and willingness to sacrifice without replying.[19]

Realizing ecological behavior must also be understood by everyone as a struggle of faith in the entire history of their lives. This problem can be seen clearly when everyone understands very well that from the beginning of their creation they were made by God as His mandate until fulfillment in the era of “new earth and new heavens”. Therefore, when everyone manifests these ecological behaviors in daily life, they become messengers of God against others who “will”, “are” and “have” destroyed the “face of God” in all of His creation. Every person he calls to realize ecological behavior must act as agents of renewal and empowerment for others through the example of their lives. This means that everyone present is not just to oppose but to be a model example or profile of a new human being capable of treating nature as “fellow” or “brother” so that it penetrates the bad habits of other people.

Paul also stressed that every person sent by God must have a “flawless” behavior and “shine like stars in the world” as a character in the midst of a “crooked force”(Philippians 2:15). As a result, ecological behavior contains exemplary which represents that the people sent by God are those who are wise in giving judgment, rejoicing in doing various acts of love, patience, perseverance, hospitality, living in harmony with each other, not arrogant, serving all of His creation who are in distress as their neighbors and so on. That is part of the meaning of Paul's thought that humans and the whole of creation have been united by God in a bond of solidarity full of love. Therefore, every person who lives a new life will always “complain in the heart” when seeing the fellow humans “complaining” in His suffering (Romans 8:22). All of this happens because everyone is a mandate of God and closely related to God's historical-cosmic plan to redeem all of His creation and they are also called to manifest “life-giving” behavior for other fellow creatures as a lifelong struggle for faith.[20] The struggle must be won by those who have a new life because God is their power to continue to present His love for their fellowmen, and at the same time bring their fellowmen to God as stated in Ephesus 1:19.[21]

Other aspects also need to be considered in realizing ecological behavior as one of the true missions that everyone must remain in optimal condition in realizing their mission according to God's will. That affirmation reminds every believer not only to struggle with the life of their fellowmen but also with themselves. [22]

Seeing such issue it is not surprising that Paul sees all the struggles of the believers in daily life like a “race” which describes their faith struggle to realize their mission according to God's will (Philippians 3:12-14). That is the reality of every person who has a mission in seeking the realization of ecological behavior as an ideal character in their faith life continuously. The life of everyone depends very much on the mercy of God's love so He continues to enable them to live by imitating the love of Jesus as a distinctive character and true faith. That aspect will continue to give strength to them to continue to carry out what He wants for all His creation.[21]

This is important because everyone can be disqualified from salvation that God has bestowed upon them if they do not reflect His attributes as affirmed by I Corinthians 9:24-27. As a result, Paul advised everyone to have a continuous evaluation (II Corinthians 13:5a) because in these ideal conditions everyone is allowed to continue to realize “the face of God”. All that is important because in optimal conditions it represents humans who not only stand the test but also continue to direct their attention to God with the help of His Spirit as affirmed by II Corinthians 13:5b.[23]

Therefore, when God is in human life, the struggle of faith and their struggle in the mission that is entrusted, will never be in vain.[15] So the continuity of human focus on God is a strong impulse to continue to express His love for others through the development of ecological behavior as an ideal personal character. That dimension is what makes them have a high endurance and fighting power to continue to express God's love for others.

Based on the various perspectives above, the realization of ecological behavior as an ideal character can be seen as a form of the realization of God's characteristics in real terms and a response to His call continuously. This is manifested in a human willingness because of the strong urge to always strive for each other's good and oppose various forms of fraud, violence, repression, discrimination and so on for all of His creation.

These various good deeds are carried out with love, sacrifice, without discrimination and without claiming reprisal so as to bring the common good. In that dimension, there is clearly a connection between the nature of God and real human action. So if the opposite happens then it is rebellion, hypocrisy and deception as a form of sin like what Jesus stated in Mark 7: 8 so that He strongly criticized and rebuked them (Matthew 23:27-28, Matthew 6:1-6, Mark 7:18-22). Therefore, the Bible strongly emphasizes the importance of human renewal to produce ideal behavior (Matt. 5: 8). This dimension is important because God also pays attention to the motives and attitudes that underlie the right behavior through real human actions. [24]

#### *B. Realizing Ecological Behavior as a Moral Obligation*

Carrying out this obligation cannot be separated from understanding the will of God as the only norm for human life which is part of repentance. Nevertheless, God does not want it to be carried out blindly (legalistic piety) but moreover it must be understood, comprehended, realized and believed to be an essential truth. Here it is clear that God provides the widest possible opportunity for humans to respond to Him honestly, openly, willingly and faithfully.

Such aspects will give rise to good ecological behavior because not only is based on the "knowing" aspect but is also driven by the "willing" dimension to actualize God's will. This is what God wants because that's where He will meet those who love Him with all the power they have.

That is the basis for the responsibility of realizing ecological behavior as love that prospers a common life so that it is not seen as a burden that must be borne by humans. Because through the realization of ideal behavior, love for God will be perfect due to realization of nature as human beings. This is also a service because God loves the realization of such love in real life. [25]

Looking at this perspective, the responsibility to realize ecological behavior is not just born because God requires it but He is in His love that allows them to love their fellowman. With love, everyone is enabled to carry out these moral obligations through concrete actions that give birth to the common good. As a result, the task of realizing ecological behavior becomes a form of realization of love for God in earnest way because the essence of love has been understood and realized first. [26]

Based on these perspectives, the moral obligation to realize ecological behavior is a calling of life as well as true worship. So when everyone who sees the task as a struggle of faith, they will realize the actions that bring peace, generosity, and willingness to help others who are oppressed [27]

Through these actions, everyone manifests the existence of "complete humanity" in accordance with their dignity as the image of God. So in this dignity there is "my" obligation to "him/her" or "them" as "my fellowman" and can also be described in human rights correctly. [28] Regarding this aspect, it was confirmed that:

Human rights have a holistic understanding, one of which is the relationship with all of God's creation, where every person is free and dignified in implementing their obligations to respect the dignity of various creations of God as their fellowmen, while respecting the existence and identity of God's creations. In consequence, everyone has the right to implement their duties to preserve and maintain God's creations. In the end everyone has the right for the future so as to carry out the obligations for the welfare of generations of all His future creations. [29]

So it is clear that the obligation to realize ecological behavior is a form of manifestation of love for God through real action to others. Because in that struggle everyone refers directly to the existence of self as *imagodei*". Therefore, everyone has the right to have a life that is at peace in their unity with all of God's creation. This unity is realized through the act of nurturing, protecting, guiding and governing with faithful and just love, constantly opposing all power and paradigm that destroys the whole of creation, striving for the continuity of the existence of all God's creations into the future and so on. [30]

In other words, through moral obligations, human beings have the transformative service task so that all of His creations remain sustainable. [31] Through all this, it also shows the essence of true humanity because it is based on God's love, so that human love is multidimensional and spans time and space. So love that underlies ecological behavior is not an abstractive but real idea in its reality. [29]

#### *C. Ecological Behavior and the Final Goals*

Seeing the previous explanations, it can be understood that ecological behavior is one of the characteristics of a new life based on repentance to God and is a struggle of each person continuously in relation to nature as their fellowmen. Seeing this perspective, ecological behavior is reflected in the sign of human love for God through the realization of love for each other as true worship to continue to realize God's love for all His creation.

Therefore, through ecological behavior each person is a partner of God who remains a channel of love for His creation through real actions. This aspect is important when looking at God's revelations about Himself both in nature itself (general revelation) or in Jesus (special revelation). In the various revelations of God, He affirmed who the human being is and what kind of history they must form in this world. For that goal and purpose, God calls people to live and experience His love because He wants to share the divine life and love with all His creation. That is a news of joy as a basis for the birth of an ideal life because it is He himself who wants to do so. [32]

Such an assertion is important when paying attention to a view that asserts that modern humans have viewed themselves as subjects and historical actors. Modern humans tend not to accept a humanity model outside of their own conditions and ideas because they have “created” themselves too. They consider the “sacred” as an obstacle to their freedom. [33]

In line with this perspective in ecological behavior it is implied that every person who has a new life takes a crucial role based on the nature of God on all of His creation without ignoring the limits set by Him. One example is that humans must be able to act actively and wisely as affirmed by experts in their “theocentric” interpretations which concentrate on “*sabbat*” (Genesis 2:1-3). For them, “*sabbat*” which means “to stop” is a reference for humans to “brake” the dynamics or power of human beings as if without limits. Even though humans are given a special place, they are just creatures like other creatures, so they take part in an intimate fellowship with Him.

Therefore, as a “representative of God”, everyone with their ecological behavior reflects the ability to refrain from excessive activities and power because it not only reduces various other creations but also damages humanity itself.[34] As a result all human existence and presence is only to seek the common good, bring reconciliation and deliverance for all His creation. This is one of the main missions of everyone because they accept Christ and through that presence God is glorified.

It is in this aspect that each person influences others and draws them “out” from a pattern of life that they do not want to share with fellow creatures of God. So in that ecological behavior, every person who has “a new life” does not live in their own “shell” but are told to “come out” to fight for and struggle with the whole life of fellow creatures. Therefore, everyone with their ecological behavior reflects solidarity based on God's love. This means that everyone who has “a new life” will become a “community that has hope in God as well as they complain and fight for the redemption of God's other creation”. [35]

Such an affirmation directly affirms that everyone in ecological behavior is practicing the love that restores each other as part of God's “already” and “in-the process” salvation, while rediscovering the orientation in glorifying God. Salvation has a cosmic dimension because God not only reconciles humans with Himself but also “the world” to Himself. [35]

This view is important when realizing that God creates everything for the sake of His glory, but humans have ruined all of His work, where humans have reduced God's own goal and purpose when they fall into sin, so that their lives become chaotic and futile. In the end, humans cannot fulfill their original purpose of praising and glorifying God. Furthermore, all creation is also affected by chaos and futility, so that it can no longer fulfill the great task of “telling the glory of God” as it was at the time of its creation.

This situation is called “slavery” because humans and all of God's creation cannot escape from it.[36] (End, 2008: 439). So based on the essence of that “new life” everyone in their ecological behavior describes the existence of a moral order

that produces a healthy life before God.[37] Because in Him, every person who has “new life” reflects the belief of faith in various real works that all of God's work in its totality is “really very good” because it represents the self of a loving and noble God. [38]

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Ecological damage will have an impact on the quality of life of living creatures, including human life. For this reason, it is necessary to renew the thinking of humans as intelligent people who are required to protect and care for the natural surroundings. Based on this, the contribution of thought, especially from a theological point of view, more specifically Christian ethics is needed to increase the reference of religious human thought. By prioritizing ethics in the treatment of nature, the society, more specifically the people who live on the coast of Inner Ambon Bay (TAD) can further optimize their treatment of the nature of their residence

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