

***Reading Psalm 8:1-9 from the Earth Perspective and Its Relevance to the Ecojustice Context
in Indonesian***

by

Juliana Agusthina Tuasela

Abstract

The main purpose of this article is to interpret the story of the Earth in Psalm 8:1-9 and make its relevance to the ecojustice context in Indonesian. I will explore and identify how and where “voice of the Earth” was heard in this textual tradition. This exegetical study becomes a counter ideology for the biblical text which tends to be dominant and silent towards the Earth. The theological-biblical thought transformation builds sensitiveness and consciousness of ecojustice. This study is expected to contribute the alternatives consciousness about ecojustice. Collective consciousness that is applied in the social responsibilities of the community and the church to build a sustainable living network between God, humans and the Earth. The significant thing that the Earth is able to advocate for itself by acknowledging its suffering and fighting injustice. Earth has the potential to defend and restore itself.

Introduction

The main purpose of this article is to reading Psalm 8:1-9 from Earth perspective and its relevance in the ecojustice context in Indonesian. I will explore and identify how and where “Voice of the Earth” was heard in this textual tradition. In this study, it is important to explain the terms "voice" and "the Earth" to understand this perspective. In this case, Laurie J. Braaten defines and explains the use of the term “Earth” in the principle of “Voice of the Earth. The term "Earth", without the article (and using capital letters), the connotation refers to "nature", land and the reality of non-human ecosystems. "The Earth" with articles (and lowercase), connotes a planet, or a large part of land. "Land" or "the land" connotes a subject that is narrower than Earth, often connoting the area inhabited by humans or animals. "Ground" is often a synonym for "land", although it usually means the arable land, or soil. “Earth Community "is a comprehensive term for an entire ecosystem, or web of life. That is, humans are part of a created order that cannot survive without an earth where

humans are members of Earth community.¹ In the biblical tradition, God also chooses to live among humans, the nations and the Earth.² That God becomes a member of the Earth community. The Earth community consists of the whole symbiosis, when one member acts to destroy or build life, will affect all community.³ Norman C. Habel confirms that we can explore where the voice of the Earth is heard in ancient biblical Wisdom tradition. Habel mentions in the following quote:⁴

It can be argued that applying the concept of voice to Earth is itself an anthropocentric act, making Earth into a human subject. That is clearly not our intention. We use the term “voice” as shorthand for the diverse ways in which Earth and the Earth community may communicate. When we speak of “body language” there is communication, even if there is no accompanying audible voice. By the voice of Earth, we mean the many languages of Earth, be they gesture, sign, image or sound, that send a message - whether to humans, to other members of the Earth community, or to God.

This description confirms that the earth actually has a voice and language that needs to be sought and found in the biblical tradition, especially the Old Testament.

Psalm 8 is interesting to study for several reasons, namely: *first*, the biblical and theological studies indicate the marginalization of creation, especially the Earth, in the 21st century. In the current context, there is a significant awareness and effort to restore the role of the Earth properly in theological-biblical reflection.⁵ The Bible appears silent and is not concerned about discussing the topic of the Earth. Actually, the Earth has an inner voice that needs to be heard, expressed and found in the Bible. The inner voice is tied to a specific language which indicates that its origin is

¹ Laurie J. Braaten, “Earth Community in Joel: A Call to Identify with the Rest of Creation” in “Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutic*, Ed. By Norman C. Habel (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 63

² For God’s identifying with world as the divine dwelling place see Terence F. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspectives* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 37-39, see also Laurie J. Braaten discussion concerning God as a member of Earth community in “Earth Community in Hosea 2”, in Habel, *The Earth Story in Psalms and Prophets*, 185 – 203.

³ Laurie J. Braaten, “Earth Community in Joel: A Call to Identify with the Rest of Creation”, 64

⁴ Norman C. Habel, “The Voice of Earth: More Than Metaphor?” in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and The Prophets*, Ed. By Norman C. Habel, (Cleveland: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 23

⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament – A Relational Theology of Creation*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), vii

social.⁶ In the Earth perspectives, Psalm 8 is an Old Testament Doxology that praises God as the sovereign of the universe. Psalm 8 as an apology for the domination of God and humans over the Earth. This text raises the vulnerability of the Earth so that the earth is voiceless. From a content point of view, this text shows the existence of a hierarchical relationship and dominance between YHWH, the Earth and humans.

Second, many biblical references in poetic literature raised more concern about Earth issues than what is commonly known. This tradition presents the diversity and richness of ideas about Earth's ecosystem. In poetic tradition, some people use language of the Earth as an educational instrument as it is contained in collections of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Psalms (e.g., Ps.1, 34, 37, 49, 65, 73, 127-128). For example, in Psalm, the Earth or members of the Earth community may praise God or celebrate with singing, shouting and other forms of rejoicing (Ps.65, 8, 12, and 13). The Earth rejoices (Ps 96.11; 97.1), the skies are glad (Ps.96.11), the seas roar in praise (Ps 96.11), trees sing (Ps. 96.12), the work of creation give thanks (Ps.145.10) and the Earth suffers (Ps.29:5-8).⁷ In this Psalm, the Earth and members of the Earth community are addressed as subjects capable of responding with praise in various forms. Psalm 8:1-9 represent the distinct tradition and genre. Psalm 8 is a poetic tradition, a hymn that demonstrates the dominion of God and humans over the Earth.

Third, the contextual reason that the Earth is facing an environmental crisis that threatens the life of this planet. In fact, there are indications of an earth crisis, a water crisis, a land crisis, and a crisis that continues and threatens the network of life. According Murray Bookchin⁸, "near all ecological problems are social problems," where the Earth crisis is caused by human domination of nature in the hierarchy of society. Fatally, there are patriarchal and androcentric biblical texts that tend to dominate the Earth. However, new interpretation of those from the perspective of creation theology is required. This study aims to reinterpret texts that are dominant of the Earth and provide ecojustice consciousness for the survival of the Earth communities. This interpretation refers to the flow of text dialogue that moves from the author's perspective to the reader's

⁶ Beatrice Beebe and Frank M. Launchman, *The Origins of Attachment: Infant Research and Adult Treatment*, Relational Perspective Book Series, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 27-29

⁷ The Earth Bible Team, "The Voice of Earth: More Than Metaphor" in *The Earth Story in Psalms and The Prophets*, (USA & Canada: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 23

⁸ (1982)

perspective and shifts from text interpretation to meaning. I will undertake the interpretation of Psalm 8:1-9 based on the Earth perspectives.

Structural Analysis of Psalm 8:1-9

Literally, Psalm 8 has a complex symmetrical and chiasmic structure with five elements with five elements in each half of the chiasma. The chiasma in Psalm 8 is described as follows:⁹

Table 3: Chiasma in Psalm 8¹⁰

A – LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (v.1a)
B – You have set you're your glory in the heavens (v.1b)
C – Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger (v.2)
D – When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place (v.3)
E – What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (v.4)
E' – You have made them a little lower than the angels, and crowded them with glory and honor (v.5)
D' – You make them rules over the works of your hands, you put everything under their feet (v.6)
C' – All flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, (v.7)
B' – The birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the sea, (v.8)
A' – LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (v.9)

The above structure indicates two chiasmic elements, namely: “language parallel” and “conceptual parallel.”¹¹

First, parallel language. Parallel language is the repetition of root words that appear synonymously or antonymously. Some indications of parallel language in Psalm 8 are: a) identical exclamations at the opening (v.1) and closing (v. 9) of the psalm, often cited simply as an example

⁹ Judah Kraut, “The Birds and the Babes; The Structure and Meaning of Psalm 8” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.100, No.1, (2010), 17

¹⁰ Judah Kraut, “The Birds and the Babes; The Structure and Meaning of Psalm 8” in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol.100, No.1, (2010), 17

¹¹ Ibid

of literary inclusion. b) Correspondence between *ma'aseh etsbe'otekha* in v.4 and *ma'aseh yadekha* in v.7. c) the word '*alha-shamayim* from element B (v.2b) is paralleled with (*tsipur*) *shaamayim* in element B' (v.9). d) *konantab* in element D (v.4) is synonymous with *kol shatab* in element D' (v.7) and lowly man in element E (v.5), *enosh* and *ben adam*, contrasted with the lofty divine, *Elohim*, in element E' (v.6). The five examples of parallel language support the notion that Psalm 8 is actually an extended chastic structure.¹²

Second, conceptual parallel. The chiasm of Psalm 8 shows some conceptual parallelism as follows:¹³

- a) Elements A and A' represent the identical exclamation of the majesty of YHWH's name.
- b) Elements B and B' express the extent of a dominion: God's or man's, respectively. Element B' clearly demonstrates the extent of man's dominion over birds and fish, so the invocation of young children in element B is associated with the power and glory of God who is able to defeat the enemy.
- c) Elements C and C' identified the power of God and man over three creatures. In C, God overcomes three types of enemies, namely: *tsorer*, *oyev* and *mitnaken*, on the other hand C' describes human dominion over the animal kingdom, namely: *tsoneh*, *alafim* and *behemot*. The actor in element C is God, while the actor in C' is human.
- d) Elements D and D' describe conceptual correspondence. Element D is an invocation of the God's dominion and mans are invited to contemplate the heavenly bodies because they have been established and controlled by God ("the work of your fingers"). Meanwhile, in D', man contemplates that God has established him as ruler over the world ("the work of your hands").
- e) Elements E and E' are the key thematic verses of this psalm. The two verses neatly summarize the two contrasting realities facing the psalmist. On the one hand, God is so much greater than humans, while on the other hand, God endow mans the power to rule over nature and its creatures.¹⁴

The above structure exhibits that the psalmist makes logical connections and moves from one topic to another. Psalm 8 describes the diversity of topics as follows: a) Adonai's majesty (v.2), b) the problematic suckling's and babies (v.3), c) the evening heavenly bodies (v.4) and d) humanity

¹² Ibid, 18-19

¹³ Ibid, 20

¹⁴ Sarna (*Songs*, 66) and Haham (*Psalms*, 42, n.6).

(vv.5-9).¹⁵ This multi-topic affirms two things: *firstly*, the poet treats each topic in similarly programmatic way,¹⁶ and *secondly*, interweaves the topics together artfully by creating “a single panorama with multiple elements held nicely together”.¹⁷ Structurally, this text promotes the idea of domination of God and man over the Earth.

Retelling the Earth Story in Psalm 8:1-9

Psalm 8 is one of the most inspiring and uplifting psalms. This psalm is a “hymn of praise to the great creator”. In an eco-justice perspective, Keith Carley considers Psalm 8 as an apology for the domination of God and humans over the Earth. This text raises the vulnerability of the Earth so that the earth is voiceless.¹⁸ From a content point of view, this text shows the existence of a hierarchical relationship and dominance between YHWH, the Earth and humans. This is identified through the formulation of multiple topics in the text.

The psalmist presents this topic reference in the following pattern:¹⁹

Framing context: majesty of Adonai’s name in all the earth (v.2a)

A) Adonai’s splendor *vis a vis* the heavens (v.2b)

B) The babies and suckling *vis a vis* the enemy and avenger (v.3)

C) The heaven/heavenly bodies *vis a vis* the human (vv.4-5).

D) Humanity *vis a vis* the rest of the created order (vv.6-9)

- Humanity’s exaltation (vv.6-7)
- The creatures subjected to humanity (vv.8-9)

Framing context: majesty of Adonai’s name in all the earth (v.10)

The juxtaposition sketch of this pair indicates the dominance of the primary topic to the secondary topic, as follows:²⁰ a) Adonai's splendor is “above the heavens”. b) The babies and sucklings are somehow involved in thwarting the enemy and the avengers. c) a contemplation of the majestic heavenly bodies (v.4) leads to a contemplation of humanity "finitude and fallibility".²¹

¹⁵ Hubert James Keener, “YHWH’s Subversive Order: Reconsidering the Structure and Thematis Development of the Eight Psalm” in *Journal of the NABPR*, 325

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 118-119

¹⁸ Keith Carley, “Psalm 8: An Apology for Dominion” in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, eds ny Norman C. Habel, (USA, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 111

¹⁹ Ibid, 326

²⁰ Ibid, 327

²¹ James L. Mays, *Psalms* (IBC; Louisville: Jhon Knox, 1989), 67-68

d) a discussion of humanity's role in creation leads to a description of the rest of creation as "under [humanity's] feet." The picture above illustrates the existence of a hierarchical relationship pattern in Psalm 8. The psalmist places the primary topic in a relatively high position and the secondary topic in an insignificant position.²²

Referring to the description above, the researcher will describe the hierarchical relationship and the dominance of the text as follows:

Adonai's Splendor vis a vis the Heavens (vv.1-2)

This literature shows the splendor of God above heaven. This text is initiated by acclamation at the beginning and end of the text, "LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Technically, this repeated acclamation constitutes inclusion."²³ This inclusion theme indicates the splendor of God in the following description:

- a) This acclamation shows that God's power is manifested through the splendor of His name. This psalm opens with a direct address to God in a manner common in lament/complaint psalms: "O Yahweh our Lord." This greeting has the nuances of praise to God.²⁴ It is possible that this psalm was taken from several early compositions to remember the divine act of deliverance from a difficult situation.²⁵ This greeting is to express the words of unlimited admiration for YHWH. The psalmist praises YHWH's magnificent manifestations of glory in heaven by day and by night.²⁶ The word "LORD" used in this inclusion refers to YHWH, the sacred Hebrew name and Israel's special name for God. This term is in opposition to the name *Elohim*, the more general Hebrew term for God. This indicates that this acclamation is part of the liturgical resources of the biblical community of Israel/Judah. This is confirmed in several other Hebrew texts (Deut.12:5 & 1 Ki.8:16) where God's "name" is often considered synonymous with God's personal presence.²⁷
- b) This royal nuance and language are very strongly permeated in psalm 8. All royal qualities are addressed to YHWH explicitly as well as Divine qualities given to others.²⁸ There are five

²² Ibid

²³ Keith Carley, "Psalm 8: An Apology for Dominion" in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, 115

²⁴ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms*, Part I, FOTL, XIV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 70

²⁵ Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, HAT I/15 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1966), 49; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: A Commentary*, trans. H. C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 179.

²⁶ Hans H. Spoer, "The Reconstruction of Psalm viii" in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 75

²⁷ Keith Carley, "Psalm 8: An Apology for Dominion" in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, 115-116

²⁸ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8" in *Journal of the NABPR*, 348

words for royal qualities in the psalm: **אֲדִיר** “glorious” (vv.1a, 9), **הוֹד** “majesty” (v.1b), **עֹז** “strength” (v.2a), **כְּבוֹד** “glory” (v.5b) and **וְהָדָר** “honor” (v.5b). All of these are both firm and powerful words to denote the power, power, and glory associated with God as King, Creator, and Divine Warrior. Each word has a distinctive nuance of meaning, but essentially refers to the idea of royal quality.²⁹ This text promotes two words that have the nuances of royal quality, namely: *first*, the Hebrew word “our Sovereign” which means literally “our Lord” is interpreted to refer to a king (1 Kings 1:11).³⁰ This idea is coherent with the Hebrew word “majestic/glorious” (**אֲדִיר**). This word has two meanings, namely: 1) might or power and, 2) royal attributes. It is indicated that the psalmist wanted to portray YHWH as a royal figure. *Second*, the term “glory” in this verse has a double meaning, namely: *first*, YHWH's personal presence and *second*, kingdom attributes.³¹ This text conveys the image of a king who is transcendent and dwells in heaven. If heaven is the abode of God, then the Earth will be devaluated. Heaven is God’s abode; Earth is God’s property. It is the place where God puts God’s feet.³² It means that God has the highest value and is separate from the material world.

Essentially, the inclusio affirms YHWH's power rather than immanence of YHWH. This is supported by the analogous phrase in Ps. 93:4, “YHWH is mighty in heaven.”³³ This divine transcendence legitimizes the system of binary polarity and hierarchical dualism in the text. Hierarchical dualism between YHWH's kingdom and the general kingdom.³⁴ This polarization underscores the psalmist's goal to demonstrate the domination of God over man and all creatures. The point is that the idea of “the majesty of the divine name” is the central theme of the text, on the other hand, the Earth or the cosmos is not the central theme.³⁵

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Keith Carley, “Psalm 8: An Apology for Dominion” in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, 116

³¹ G. Warmuth, “hodh” in *TDOT*, III, (1978), 353.

³² The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding Ecojustice Principles” in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, eds ny Norman C. Habel, (USA, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 44

³³ M.E.J. Richardson (ed.), *Koehler-Baumgartner Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: the New Koehler-Baumgartner in English*, II (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1995), 633

³⁴ Keith Carley, “Psalm 8: An Apology for Dominion” in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, 116

³⁵ Hubert James Keener, “YHWH’s Subversive Order: Reconsidering the Structure and Thematis Development of the Eight Psalm”, 324

The Babies and Suckling vis a vis the Enemy and Avenger (v.3)

This text is one of the most difficult passages in Psalm 8 to interpret. From an Earth perspective, this text can be read with three critical questions: who are the “children and infants”? Who is “the foe and the avenger”? and why is “children and infants” used to silence “the foe and the avenger”? This question becomes a guide to investigate the pattern of domination relations between the two in the text.

- a) Who are the “children and infants”? Related to the identity of “children and infants”, there are various polemic opinions, including: *first*, the conventional opinion that connects the identity of עוללים וינקים (“children and infants”) with the Ugaritic and Canaanite concepts. This opinion is supported by Claus Schedl and Mark Smith. Schedl identifies ינקים with the creature described by the Ras Shamra text as “gracious gods...who suck the nipple of the Athiaratu”. He interpreted the עוללים in the Psalms not to refer to “the children of the earth”, but to “sons of the gods” or בני אלהים.³⁶ Both words are translated as “powerful beings,”³⁷ from whose mouth the majesty of Adonai is sung in heaven (verse 2.b). Smith followed the schedl in identifying עוללים וינקים with Canaanite beings. According to him, the children of El in CTA rebelled against El and were expelled.³⁸ In conclusion, the phrases עוללים וינקים and אויב ומתנפם can be considered as examples of hendiadys. Then, verse 3 is translated as follows: “From (i.e., against) the mouths of suckling babes you established a strong place, for your stronghold you indeed ended the avenging enemy.”³⁹ Smith even parallels “sucking babes” with the Canaanite conception of a “cosmic enemy who threatens to devour all the beasts of the cosmos.” YHWH secures the cosmos as a safe haven (Ps.104:5) by overcoming the cosmic enemy.⁴⁰ *Second*, a progressive view based on Old Testament concepts. This view is affirmed by Oystein Lund, Auffrete, Hubert James Keener and Marvin E. Tate. According to Keener, in the OT, the Hebrew terms עוללים (babies) and ינקים (sucklings) generally refer to earthly beings who have weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This view contrasts with the depiction of the children of El in the Canaanite and Ugaritic myths. As weak and vulnerable creatures,⁴¹ the mouths of

³⁶ Schedl, “Psalm 8,” 183

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Mark S. Smith, “Psalm 8:2b-3,” 637-641

³⁹ Ibid, 638-639

⁴⁰ Marks S. Smith, “Psalm 8:2b-3: New Proposals for Old Problems”, in *CBQ* 59, (1997), 640

⁴¹ Hubert James Keener, “YHWH’s Subversive Order: Reconsidering the Structure and Thematic Development of the Eight Psalm”, 331

children and their descendants receive a power (עֶזְרָא) that is able to fight and "silence" Adonai's enemies.⁴² Psalm 8:3 affirms that "God gave babes and infants with power, and ordained this power in its natural location, *in the mouth*."⁴³ The powerful and effective name Yahweh came out of the mouths of infants and accomplished divine purposes in the world (Isa. 55:6- 11).⁴⁴ Tate affirms with an accent that the word in Psalm 8 has a double meaning, namely: "strength" and "protection". The Old Testament often describes "the mouth as an instrument for the display of power."⁴⁵ Tate interprets the cry and breath of a baby's life in two things, namely: *first*, as a testimony of God's act of creation and continuous life. *Second*, an act that reduces the enemies of life to an impotent silence. This gives access to interpret the following questions about the identity of "the foe and the avenger."⁴⁶

- b) Who is "the foe and the avenger"? In this case, there are many polemics. There are many scholars who attribute the identity of "the foe and the avenger" to atheists, sceptics and hostile forces of chaos.⁴⁷ In Psalm 44:16, the pair of words "the foe and the avenger" (אויב ומתנקם) refers to the adversary of man or the opponent of the psalmist. Lund states that there are three words that together represent "the totality of God's enemies". The enemy in this context embodies anything or anyone that threatens the divine purpose.⁴⁸ The three words used are: *first*, the word אויב "enemy" often appears and is used as an individual enemy, a nation and an enemy of YHWH (Psalm 8, Neh.1:2). *Second*, the participle of the word צַר in verse 2b indicates hostile attack by enemies that may be political, military, or personal and can be used for the enemies of YHWH (Ps. 74:4-8). In this context, this word means "the brutal attack of the enemies." *Third*, the word מתנקם from the root נקם is interpreted in the idea of avenging, vengeance and revenge. All these terms indicate the meaning of hostility and fierce attacks, namely attacks that are vindictive, revengeful, retaliatory and dangerous.⁴⁹ In essence, the word "enemy and avenger: in Psalm 8 refers to "the enemy of YHWH".

⁴² Lund, "From the Mouths," 79; Auffret, "Qu'est-ce que L'Homme," 25

⁴³ Ibid, 83

⁴⁴ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 351

⁴⁵ Lund, "From the Mouths", 79-83

⁴⁶ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 352

⁴⁷ Weiser, (1962), 141; Keith Carley, "Psalm 8: An Apology for Dominion" in *Reading from The Perspective of Earth*, 121

⁴⁸ Lund, "Out of the Mouth," 85.

⁴⁹ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 352

- c) The last question, why are "children and infants" used to silence "the foe and the avenger"? In the OT concept, Adonai uses the baby's mouth as a source of strength.⁵⁰ This concept has two meanings, namely: *first*, from God's perspective, that God uses weak people to present His strength and *second*, generally "lowly-poor-needy" expects God's intervention to fight "strong-arrogant-ruthless."⁵¹ This is in line with the general theme of the Psalms. Psalm 8:3 serves to express the psalmist's primary urge to maintain the order of creation. God uses relatively unimportant things like "children and infants" to fight a stronger enemy. The goal in the struggle against the enemy is to neutralize the enemy's mouth, and silence becomes the supreme symbol of that victory.⁵² In essence, this text connects the baby's mouth with the power and authority of YHWH.

The Heaven/Heavenly bodies vis a vis the Human (vv.4-5)

The central question in Psalm 8 is "What is humanity?" or "How is us that you are mindful of humanity?" This question is put in the context of the work of Yahweh's "fingers" in the heavens and heavenly bodies (v. 3).⁵³ Marvin E. Tate mentions that there are three qualities of divine endowment that are commonly used to express the status of humanity, namely:⁵⁴

- a) Humanity is made "a little less than God/divine beings" (v.5a).⁵⁵ The translations "a less/lower than gods" can guide the term **אלוהים** (*Elohim*) in a plural sense for "gods" other than YHWH (e.g., Exod.12:12; 18:11; Ps.86:8).⁵⁶ Generally, the use of the word **אלוהים** (*Elohim*) in Psalm 8 has a double meaning, namely: *first*, the word **אלוהים** (*Elohim*) usually refers to a foreign god or to idols or both. In this case, the writer of Psalm 8 wanted to explain the strong status of humanity in the terms of gods that are usually considered weak and ultimately powerless. This argument actually rejects the translation "less than gods."⁵⁷ *Second*, the use of **אלוהים** (*Elohim*) for YHWH in the psalms (Ps. 3:7; 4:1; 5:2; 7:1, 2, 9, 11). Ps. 43-83 often use **אלוהים** (*Elohim*) for Yahweh so this part of the psalm is called the Elohist psalm. In verse 5, the psalmist does

⁵⁰ Hubert James Keener, "YHWH's Subversive Order: Reconsidering the Structure and Thematic Development of the Eight Psalm", 332

⁵¹ Mays, *Psalm*, 23

⁵² Ibid, 82-83

⁵³ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 354

⁵⁴ Ibid, 354-359

⁵⁵ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 354

⁵⁶ Ibid, 355

⁵⁷ Ibid

not use YHWH, because there are probably about the portrayal of humanity as “a little less than YHWH”; “less than divine,” yes; but “less than deity,” no.⁵⁸ Theologically, this text stays in harmony with biblical anthropology. Humanity is near to God, but differentiated from the rest of the created world and humankind does not belong to the divine realm of existence. Human beings are endowed with divine qualities, but human is not divine. In essence, humans are not angels, gods, or goddesses.⁵⁹

- b) Mankind is "crowned with glory and honor" (v.5b). This text affirms that humanity is empowered with the qualities of the divine kingdom. These qualities are royal qualities related to the kingship and Yahweh's kingdom. The word pair "glory and honor" (כְּבוֹד וְהָדָר, *kābōd wehādār*) is found only elsewhere in Ps. 145:12, where the reference is to the kingdom of Yahweh. The word "honor", (הָדָר (*hādār*) is used in Ps. 104:1 in connection with creation.⁶⁰ This indicates the qualities given to earthly kings (Ps 21:5; 45:2-3). The word כְּבוֹד, "glory," is used frequently and refers to Yahweh (Ex 16:7,10; 24:16,17; Ps 19:1; 24:7-10; 96:9,7:6; 104:31). This word כְּבוֹד is only given by Yahweh in Ps. 84:11. These words convey ideas of importance, splendor, honor, authority, and power.⁶¹ The word כְּבוֹד "glory" in particular seems to express the persona of Yahweh in action and presence. It should be noted that in ancient Near Eastern usage, divine glory was manifested in the crown of a god or hero as reflected in Job 19:9, "He has stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head."⁶²
- a) The crowning of humanity with "glory and strength" is followed by the commission of humankind to "rule" over the works of Yahweh's hands (v.6).⁶³ When humanity is crowned with glory and splendid strength by God, then humans have several privileges, namely:⁶⁴ *first*, humans are made God's viceroy over the world. *Second*, man has the authority to rule over the created world because everything has been "put under his feet," or "laid at his feet." The rulership explicitly includes domestic animals and wild animals, plus the birds of the air and

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 355

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² M. Weinfeld, "kābōd," in *THOT* 7, 28-29.

⁶³ Marvin E. Tate, "An Exposition of Psalm 8", 356

⁶⁴ Ibid, 356

the fish of the sea (vv.7-8). His powers include "whatever moves along the channel of the sea," possibly a large sea creature such as the Leviathan (v. 8a).⁶⁵

Humanity vis a vis the Rest of the Created Order (vv.6-9)

Psalm 8:6-9 promotes the idea of God giving humans authority to govern other creatures.⁶⁶ The authority is applied in the following activities: naming, classifying and collecting to regulate the plurality of works. This activity represents the concept of government that guarantees the prerogative of the kingdom.⁶⁷ This concept is also constructed in the traditions and concepts of Israel, as recorded in Gen. 2:19-20, Leviticus 11, Deut. 14:3-20, 1 Ki 5:9-14, and Prov. 30:15-31.⁶⁸ One of the prominent roles of human authority in this text is to implement a system of animal classification. The mandate to govern humans is realized by naming animals.

The author of Psalm 8 presents the reader with a simple classification system.⁶⁹ Generally, in the classification system, people divide plants and animals into several taxa levels, namely:⁷⁰

1. Primary taxa (e.g., animals: quadrupeds/fish/birds/insects)
2. Secondary taxa (e.g., birds: waterfowl/perching birds/birds of prey)
3. Tertiary level taxa (e.g., waterfowl: herons/ducks/gulls/kingfishers)
4. Terminal specificity level (e.g., herons: great blue herons/green herons)

The above classification contains tiered from primary level taxa - secondary level taxa - tertiary level taxa - terminal specificity level. The subdivision process ends at the terminal specification level, where categorical distinctions are no longer made.

⁶⁵ Seybold, *Die Psalmen*, 52

⁶⁶ Richard Whitekettle, "Critical Note - Taming the Shrew, Shrike, and Shrimp: The Form and Function of Zoological Classification in Psalm 8" in *JBL* 125, no.4 (2006), 749

⁶⁷ Richard Whitekettle, "Critical Note - Taming the Shrew, Shrike, and Shrimp: The Form and Function of Zoological Classification in Psalm 8", 752-753

⁶⁸ Howard Eillberg-Schwartz, "Creation and Classification in Judaism: From Priestly to Rabbinic Conception," *HR* 26, (1987), 362, 372-372; Baruch Halpern, "The New Names of Isaiah 62:4: Jeremiah Reception in the Restoration and Politics of "Third Isaiah," *JBL* 117 (1998), 627-628; W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image: Humanity Divinity and Monotheism* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 15, (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 179-186, 233-239; W.W.Roth, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament: A Form-Critical Study*, (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 2-3, 18-34, 95.

⁶⁹ Richard Whitekettle, "Critical Note - Taming the Shrew, Shrike, and Shrimp: The Form and Function of Zoological Classification in Psalm 8", 750

⁷⁰ Ibid, 750-751

Based on the classification system, it was identified that Psalm 8:8-9 mentions two classifications, namely: primary level taxa and secondary level taxa that make up the four times primary level division of the animal kingdom, namely: ⁷¹

- 1a. Domesticated land animals
- 2a. Small domesticated land animals
- 2b Large domesticated land animals
- 1b. Wild land animals
- 1c. Aerial animals
- 1d. Aquatic animals
- 2a. Small aquatic animals
- 2b. Large aquatic animals

This demonstrates man's authority over animals. The idea of humans having dominion over animals is also found in Gen. 1:26-28. The difference is that Genesis describes the time when power began (Gen.1:26), while Psalm 8:7-9 shows that power was given to humans in the past (Ps.8:7b). ⁷² The writer of Psalm 8 used this classification system to present authority. ⁷³ In conclusion, this classification system is considered a rhetorical vehicle to convey the reader the idea that humans have authority over animals.

Theologically, Psalm 8 promote emphasizing the themes of praise about God's dominion over man and the universe. This text is placed on the dominion of the name Yahweh over human and the universe (verse 1). Psalm 8 describes the hierarchical relationship and domination of God, man and nature. This text has the multiple and detailed hierarchical and domination relations. The consistent movement of the “top to bottom” list, namely: God – heavenly bodies – humanity – creation. Rhetorically, the pattern attempts to convince the audience of the seventh verse's claim to the domination of God and human. Psalm 8 describes the delegation models of God's power to humans with the privilege status of governing other creatures.

⁷¹ Ibid, 752

⁷² Ibid, 749

⁷³ Ibid, 752

Relevance of Text in the Ecojustice Context in Indonesian

In this section, I will relate to the theological significance of the text to the ecojustice context in Indonesian. In the Indonesian contexts, several facts of fatal and worrying ecological damage have been observed. Indonesia is one of the countries where environmental problems are very concerning, this can be seen both directly and from the mass media. There are many cases of environmental pollution and illegal logging which cause a worrisome impact on the environment.⁷⁴ Datauk Tjumano explained that based on data from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Indonesia produced up to 65 million tons of waste in 2016, and increased to 67 tons in 2017. Meanwhile, data from the LIPI Oceanography Center shows that around 35.15% of coral reefs in Indonesia are in an undeveloped condition. good and only 6.39% in very good condition. Global warming is triggered by the burning of coal which reaches its total annual emission of 9 billion tons of Co₂; Another problem that becomes an environmental problem is global warming, namely the process of increasing the average temperature of the ocean atmosphere and the earth's surface. There are many impacts caused by global warming, such as the destruction of ecosystems of living things and the sinking of small islands, due to rising sea levels due to melting of the polar ice caps.⁷⁵ Based on the general data above, the destruction of nature in Indonesia can be categorized into three types of ecological damage, namely; soil damage, water damage, air damage.

There needs to be new sensitivity and awareness about the crisis and devaluation of the earth. This crisis is so pervasive, destructive and dangerous that academics, biblical scholars, theologians and practitioners of religion cannot ignore it. *How does the church's role address this reality? How to build consciousness of alternatives to address this dominant issue?*

In the ecological consciousness, there are several alternative consciousness is built, namely: *first*, reading text in a new perspective. Text that promotes justice and freedom for the earth. The earth and all its components are recognized as having intrinsic value in themselves, not as providing utility value for humans. In the principle of ecojustice, humans and God must give access to voice of the Earth as a subject that deserves respect. God and human beings who are pro-life, are God and humans who are pro-justice, including the justice of the earth. The Earth needs to be

⁷⁴ Januari Siregar dan Muaz Zul, "Penegakan Hukum Dalam Tindak Pidana Lingkungan Hidup di Indonesia," *Mercatoria* 8, no,2 (2015), 107-131.

⁷⁵ Datuak Tjumano, "Kerusakan Lingkungan Hidup di Indonesia- Jurnal Intelijen," [Kerusakan Lingkungan Hidup Di Indonesia | Jurnal Intelijen](#), access by June 14, 2022.

freed from the anthropocentric constructs that have so far suppressed and muted the sound of the earth. *Second*, the prophetic message must be based on justice and freedom for the nature. This new earth consciousness motivates us to promote earth justice both theoretically and practically. The ecological consciousness can begin by building a church's sensitivity and awareness about discrimination against earth. Amnesia's attitude towards action will make the church lose its prophetic value. The church's prophetic attitude can be optimized as follows:

First, have sensitivity and awareness of the earth by fighting for the Earth justice. The pro-justice attitude of this earth can begin with a change in the perspective of reading the Bible. One of the eco-theological models proposed as a form of ecological awareness is the “coming home” model. In the context of a worrying ecological crisis, we need awareness about the concept of “coming home.” It means being at home comfortably with all the earth community. We create safe homes for ourselves, others and other creatures. In the midst of ecological crisis, we are invited to continue to go home and create a safe and peaceful home. The “coming home” model as healing the earth is an integrated model for reflection.

Second, listen to voice of the Earth. The reason is that, this approach is not defensive or constructive but willing to listen to the Earth itself.⁷⁶ This approach contains several main premises, namely:⁷⁷ a) the best response to the ecological crisis is openness and humility to listen to voice of the Earth and to follow the processes and mechanisms of the Earth at work. b) listening to the Earth requires an attitude of love and concern for nature as “a blood relative.” It energizes the spirit of renewing the relationship with nature. c) listening to voice of the Earth leads to a meditative attitude by reducing or ignoring noise and sharpening the ecological approach to hearing the sounds of nature. Voice of the Earth produce symphony, comfort and calm chaotic situations. In the midst of noise, humans need to take time to admire the mysteries and beauty of nature as God's sacramentum.

Third, the church and society build a movement for the Earth transformation. This reform movement was built from below, sourced from community initiatives and pressure. This movement must become the collective consciousness of all elements of society. Consciousness

⁷⁶ Stephen Bede Sharper, *Redeeming the Time: A Political Theology of the Environment*, (The Continuum Pub, 1997), 46.

⁷⁷ Robert Patannang Borong, “Kronik Ekoteologi: Berteologi Dalam Konteks Krisisi Lingkungan” in *STULOS*, 17/2, (2019), 204-208.

followed by the participation of the movement to care for the Earth, starting from ourself, family and extended to society. The earth renewal movement can be carried out by reviving resistance attitudes and ideas. We are not only sensitive and aware of the crisis and ecological damage, but also struggle against injustice of the Earth. We are responsible for fighting for the environmental justice restoration movement. Listening to voice of the Earth creates a double benefit: on one hand, the earth is healed, and on the other hand, the earth becomes a healing therapy.

Fourth, mission call for environmental preservation. During the PGI (Communion of the Churches in Indonesia) council session in Kupang in February 2013, a topic for implementation was formulated, namely "The Church of Friends of Nature."⁷⁸ This formula contains an invitation from the Indonesian churches how to be friendly to nature as the implementation of the church's mission to the world. The Earth should be one of the objects of the church's mission. The Earth must be seen as one of God's fragile creations and needs to be embraced by humans. When humans are not friendly to nature, nature will turn to attack humans themselves.⁷⁹ Therefore, the Church has an active role in conveying the prophetic voice with an ecological spirit. The prophetic role of the church is to become an agent of God's mission to voice the attitude of ecological resistance for the restoration of ecological justice.

⁷⁸ A.A. Yewangoe, *Hidup dari Pengharapan: Mempertanggungjawabkan Pengharapan di Tengah Masyarakat Majemuk Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2017), 212-213.

⁷⁹ Jefri Hina Remi Katu, "Teologi Ekologi: Suatu Isu Etika Menuju Eskatologi Kristen" in *CARAKA: Jurnal Teologi Biblika dan Praktika*, Vol.1, No.1, (2020), 13-14.

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