

World and Environment

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World and Environment
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THE NATURAL WORLD AND LIFE

From the time I was about nine years old, I spent every summer on my father's estate, and when I was fourteen I moved from my grandfather's house to my father's house in the town.

My father's influence on my mental development was of a different kind from that of my grandparents. It did not really come from the intellect, properly speaking, at all.

In his youth my father had had strong intellectual interests. He had thought seriously about the questions raised by books such as Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Renan's *Life of Jesus*; but quite early he began to devote himself to farming, and he gave himself up to it more and more as time went on. Soon he became an example for landowners in eastern Galicia.

When I was still a child he brought from the Paris Exhibition a great package of hatching eggs from a kind of chicken that was still unknown in east Germany. He had held this parcel on his knees during the whole journey, so that none of the eggs should be damaged. He worked for thirty-six years with all kinds of fertilizers, trying out their specific effects exactly, in order to increase the productivity of his land.

He had mastered the techniques of his time in his own field. But I realized what his real concern was as I stood beside him in the middle of a herd of splendid horses and watched how he greeted one animal after another, not simply kindly, but positively personally; or when I drove through the ripening fields with him and watched him stop the carriage, get out, and bend over the ears of corn, again and again, until he finally broke one open and sampled the grains carefully and reflectively. What this utterly unsentimental and completely unromantic man was concerned about was a truly humane contact with nature, a contact that was active and responsible. Accompanying him like this from time to time, the growing boy came to realize something he had never learned from all the many writers whose books he had read.

This relationship of my father's to nature came to light in its own way in his relationship to the sphere that is generally called the social one. The way he participated in the life of all the people who were dependent on him in one way or another—the laborers in the cottages, built according to his design, which were grouped round the farm buildings; the small tenant farmers, who served him under conditions he had worked out with the strictest justice; his concern about their family circumstances, the upbringing and education of their children, the sickness and old age of all of them—all this was not “on principle”; it was welfare work, not in the usual sense, but in the personal one. In town, my father behaved in just the same way. He was fiercely opposed to blind charity. He understood no help except the help of person to person, and that was the help he practiced. Even when he was old, he allowed himself to be elected to the charity committee of the Jewish congregation in Lemberg, and went tirelessly from house to house, in order to discover the truly needy and what their real needs were. How else could that have been done except through genuine contact?

From: Martin Buber,
Begegnung. Autobiographische Fragmente

March 1978, television news: The oil tanker “Amoco-Cadiz” has run aground, and 230,000 tons of crude oil are in the sea. The oil slick. The oil on the coast of Brittany. Miles of it. We are shown a seabird in the surf, its feathers covered with oil. It beats with its wings in its struggle for life, tires, sinks. The child beside me cries, “Why doesn’t anyone help? Help it!” and begins to weep.

We are visiting the Senckenberg Natural History Museum in Frankfurt and have an upsetting experience. On one of the walls there are specimens showing the stages of growth of the human embryo. We and our children are marveling over the miracle of the way human life grows in the mother’s womb. A young woman comes over to the wall and calls to her companion: “Look! Here you can see the beasts grow.”

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To my Bavarian homeland
and the powers of its life

Preface

From the very beginning, creation was intended to be the subject of this volume in the Biblical Encounters Series. However, the title *World and Environment* was finally chosen, so as to give a name to the challenge of our time with which the ancient biblical statements about creation are today confronted. In this volume, accordingly, we shall be discussing the *natural* world and environment.

Our whole outlook on the world and the environment, and especially the realm of nature, is a live issue today, and one that is vital for our survival. But readers will not expect the book to be a handy aid to argument or the source of patent solutions drawn from the Old and New Testament; the challenges of the twentieth century were not the challenges of the biblical period. But what readers *are* invited to do in their search for the perspectives of knowledge and action offered today in the relationship between man and nature, is to look at, to learn, and to think actively about what the Old and New Testaments disclose in the way of orientations and impulses. The center of gravity of this account is the tracing of biblical findings, while considering our contemporary theme of world and environment. Our goal is to encourage theology and faith in the face of a survival crisis in our time and to pursue the path for ascertaining the true Christian position. In our present book, the Bible and the present start out together.

To encounter the Bible with the present in this way, to let ancient texts have their say on new questions, is an unusual undertaking, at least for someone concerned with the historical exegesis of the Bible. To do justice to the circle of readers in such a wide field as world and environment, without doing injustice to the specialists, pushes the writer into new territory—the explorer begins hesitantly and is often tempted to turn back. It is impossible to see everything in an undertaking of this kind—impossible to think of everything—impossible to take everything into account. Whether we arrive at our goal is for the reader to decide. It seems to me that in our

situation today the risk of trying to make a contribution, as a biblical scholar, to a theology that is responsible to the present is more important than the need to secure one's position in the guild of historical specialists.

The book's dedication is intended to express my gratitude to the world that molded me. Gratitude for my Bavarian home, its landscape, its people, its feeling for elemental values and for moderation. I am more conscious today than ever of how much in experience and outlook I owe to this background—and not least for my work on this book.

While I was living in Hamburg, I was able to have numerous discussions with Udo Krolzik about questions in the field of science and systematic theology, and later discussions with scientists at the University of Mainz have given me both criticism and help from the scientific point of view. I should like to express my thanks to all these discussion partners, as well as to my assistant Susanne Krüger, for her intelligent cooperation in reading the proofs, and to Maria-Theresia Küchenmeister, for typing the manuscript.

ODIL HANNES STECK

Haibach/Aschaffenburg
March 1978

Introduction

Four Essential Conditions for an Encounter Between the Bible and Our World and Environment

The biblical texts grew up in a preindustrial world. Two to three thousand years lie between us and their formulation. But the subject of the world and the environment, as we are all talking about it today, is a modern problem. *Pollution, ecological crisis, environmental protection, energy problem, raw materials depletion, and over-population* are quite recent terms. They represent phenomena belonging to the world of today. They are the components of the dangerous threat to our survival which has grown up as a result of the technical possibilities and qualitative claims of modern industrial society. Consequently, they do not occur at all in express form in the biblical texts. A biblical encounter with the subject of the world and the environment therefore has its own difficulties, because such a confrontation means putting questions to the Bible in the context of problems of which the Bible knows nothing. If our confrontation is not to be impaired by this immense historical difference; and if it is to produce more than the conclusion that in earlier times everything was simply different and that every age has its own problems, then we must take these difficulties into account in the course of the encounter itself. We must come to terms with the essential conditions under which our undertaking has to be carried out; and these conditions must take account of the special circumstances surrounding our subject.

The first and most fundamental condition: We must define the whole complex of the world and the environment in such a way that biblical statements and contemporary questions can be usefully related to one another. But what are these contemporary questions?

The second essential condition: We must delve into the important aspects of the present world and environment, even

if historical interpretations of biblical texts only convey these with naive oversimplification. A confrontation can, after all, only come into being if the biblical texts are not merely unfolded in the light of historical questions raised by current exegetical discussions among specialists. Rather, we must have in front of us an outline of our present problems, so that the biblical texts can reveal their character as something unique and different in relation to these present-day questions.

The aim of this encounter is to lead us to the biblical texts in a manner that opens up their critical power and their continuing stimulus for our own time. This cannot come about in any simple and direct way, as if we had only to set the unique historical character of the biblical statements against the background of modern questions in order to gain direct solutions and specific directions for our present challenges. This would simply mean leaving out the difficulties we mentioned at the beginning or drawing a veil over them. If the unique character of the biblical statements and the unique character of the modern world are both to be preserved, we must take a different approach to biblical exegesis. That approach is the starting point for a *third essential condition*: We must make clear what can and cannot be said about our topical subject in the framework of this exegetical book.

A *fourth and final condition*: We must explain the plan for this book.

Let us now develop these four essential conditions.

1. The Natural World and Environment as the Common Field of Reference for Our Encounter

a. The problem of approach

Let me first of all draw two demarcation lines, in the negative sense.

One—The concept of creation is not suited to act as a guiding thematic term or starting point when we confront the

Bible with the present, under the heading world and environment. The statement that God made the world and man—that he made me—is undoubtedly anchored in the biblical texts. But if we want to address today's problems and experience, then we can no longer begin with the concept of creation, because in our scientific world, molded as it is by scientific, technical, and economic processes, no empirically demonstrated knowledge and no independent, self-sustaining experience corresponds to that concept.¹ In the street or at school, and on into the discussions that shape scientific and political opinion, the creation perspective no longer has the binding force of something viewed as a matter of course. The philosopher Karl Löwith said years ago: "The post-Christian world is a creation without a creator and an era which—for lack of a religious perspective—can no longer even be called profane [literally, "outside the temple," and therefore what is not sacred]; it is simply worldly."²

Two—On the other hand, the paired concepts world and environment do not provide an adequate approach either. The words certainly have the advantage of describing aspects of our reality that are open to experience and investigation—even if the ambiguous term *world* needs closer definition because it only acquires a clearly defined content through the concept *environment*; and they are words used in our own contemporary language. But at once a new difficulty emerges. On the basis of these concepts, no corresponding facts can be drawn from the Bible. Needless to say, the modern concept of the environment does not occur in either the Old or the New Testament. Only late and scattered terms such as *kol* ("the universe," "everything") or *ôlam* ("the world") can be found in the Old Testament to correspond with the total concept world.³ The New Testament does offer the comparable terms *kosmos* and *aion*; but these words are parallel to the description of a total view of things, which includes nature, and they are used in connection with the world of man *and* mankind. Or they may designate a spatial and temporal sphere of power belonging to this earthly time, which is coming to an end in order to be replaced by a future time.⁴ These concepts are not therefore

entirely reconcilable with our contemporary use of the word *world*, especially when it is linked with the concept of the *environment*.

b. World and environment as a total view of things

If in considering the subject of the world and the environment we want to bring the Bible face to face with the present, we cannot do so simply on the level of using common terms. The field of reference necessary for the confrontation is only valid when the theme involves *a common view of the facts*, under which both the biblical statements and our contemporary conditions can be investigated and brought into a relationship of confrontation. What can this all-embracing viewpoint be?

I would recommend beginning with the term borrowed from biology which stands for environment in the ecological sense. In biology, the environment is the *milieu*, the elemental aspects of natural life (as distinct from the social environment);⁵ it means "the surroundings, living and nonliving, that affect an organism,"⁶ with the totality of the elemental factors that determine existence. Or, picking up the difference between surroundings and environment, we may be more precise and say that the environment is "that, and only that, in the surroundings of a living thing which is of direct importance for itself."⁷ The essential thing about this viewpoint for the framework of our encounter is that here living things are not seen in isolation as individual subjects. They are viewed from the very beginning *in the elemental and vitally decisive complex of the surrounding natural conditions that are essential for their existence*.

F. W. Dahmen has impressively described, even for the nonbiologist, the presuppositions, factors, and processes in this whole complex.⁸ In what follows we shall be adhering to his viewpoint. Our subject, the environment, will cover the milieu of constitutive, natural living conditions as these affect the living being which is related to them. In this sense, therefore, the environment is not only the habitat, or living space, which is

of decisive importance for the life of the organism, it is the connection between habitat and the living thing itself. This connection presents itself in a different form for different kinds of organisms. As the different habitats (or biotopes) show, minute organisms have a different habitat from the bee, and a deer's is different from that of man.

In this sense, the concept of environment is isolationist because it is directed toward the vital conditions of existence for only one kind of living thing in a given class. Nevertheless, taking a broader look at life's phenomena, environments are found to be interpenetrating, with different kinds of living things existing together in biozenotic communities. Consequently, our viewpoint must be developed further to cover the phenomenon of the ecosystem. By an ecosystem "we understand highly varying, widespread sections of the earth's surface in which several—it may be a few, it may be very many—kinds of living things always live together and are linked with one another and with their milieu through numerous relationships."⁹ In an ecosystem, stable conditions of life develop through the reciprocal effects of surroundings and living things, and through active shaping and control on the part of the living things themselves. These stable conditions can also be endangered, however, if they are overtaxed.¹⁰ In a total viewpoint covering organisms as a whole, the ecosystem—that is to say, "the cohesion of effects between different living things and the conditions in which they live, or the complex of living communities and their living space"¹¹ can and must be seen as the surrounding milieu of constitutive conditions of existence for all living things. The ecosystem is therefore really the whole terrestrial globe, including the atmosphere as biosphere and the heavenly bodies with their effects on life.¹² In what follows we shall sum up this phenomenon of ecosystems on earth, as well as the ecosystem of the earth itself—as the milieu of constitutive natural living conditions in connection with all the living beings related to it in their totality—gathering it together under the heading *world*.

In combining the concepts of world and environment, then, we are starting out with a certain perspective of the facts.

It implies a view and examination of the connection between all living beings, together with the surrounding milieu of all their constitutive, natural living conditions (the world), as well as the particular aspect of this connection for an individual species (the environment); and this is all to be viewed in the context of an ecosystem—on the level of the elemental preconditions, factors, and processes that determine existence.

c. Explanations and definitions

This connecting viewpoint needs further explanation and definition.

It is characteristic of this perspective that, in accordance with our ecological starting point, everything that lives and the factors determining their existence are, from the beginning, seen in conjunction with one another; this viewpoint is neither confined to man, nor does it exclude him. A further characteristic of this perspective is that it takes into account living things, together with the milieu of their elemental living conditions, i.e., their habitat and the living and nonliving elements of that habitat—weather, food, reproduction, etc. In this way it takes account of the vital basic equipment required by the living thing. Inherent in this basic equipment is quality: what is given with the habitat, what is the precondition or basis for life that it offers, and what is the possibility of achieving life in each specific case. Note that the acquiring of this equipment is not, ultimately, within the power of the living thing, but is always its already existing presupposition and accompaniment, insofar as it lives at all.

This does not exclude the fact that a living thing can and must adjust itself to this already existing basic equipment (adaptation); and that it always actively forms or reforms its sphere of existence by means of instinctive reactions or deliberate activity. We have only to think of eating, for example, or of building nests or cultivating fields, and also of metabolism—the conversion of energy, the giving-off of heat, and the excretion of waste products.¹³ World and environment must therefore, in our sense, include the natural world as a

given datum and foundation, together with the way the living thing uses and shapes it in order to secure the elements necessary for its life. The viewpoint that we have worked out is accordingly not an artificial, theoretical one that sets the particular living thing apart from the elemental factors necessary for its existence. On the contrary, in its approach it is primarily a phenomenological viewpoint—one which takes account of the particular character and the totality of conditions that are of elemental importance for the living thing; which perceives the active use of this equipment, as reality shows it; and which thereby penetrates farther, grasping the given, essential presuppositions that make the achievement of life and the utilization of life's equipment possible in the first place.

Finally, since this elemental perspective is oriented toward living things in general, and penetrates into given elemental conditions in the special case of man, what it does not include is man's self-formed, anthropogenic (or "human") milieu. That is to say, it does not cover man's milieu in the sense of the social, political, and historical conditions and activities that exist between people—although these factors certainly belong to those that determine existence and quality of life, and they undoubtedly determine human interventions in the world and the environment (seen as life's given, elemental equipment) and always mold life's elemental milieu in the form in which man meets it. Yet, man's self-formed milieu, as we find it in the manifestations we have mentioned (social, political, etc.), always has as a presupposition and foundation the given fact of the elemental basic equipment linking human beings with other living things, and also the use and shaping of it by man and every living thing for the purpose of securing the elements necessary for life. Consequently, in what follows we shall only be discussing man's self-formed milieu insofar as its connection with the basic perspectives of our subject require it.

If the subject world and environment is related in this book to the elemental, pragmatic perspective of the living thing in the milieu of its constitutive, natural conditions of existence, then the reader may well ask why this subject is not simply called nature? It is true that if nature is defined in the usual

sense, then the viewpoint we have worked out has undoubtedly to do with nature, particularly in its orientation toward the world and the environment in the sense of what is of elemental importance for life. In order to contrast this fundamental, given world of life (including its life-securing use and shaping by every living thing) with the world and environment built up by social, cultural, and historical conditions, we shall call our viewpoint the natural world and environment.

However, it would not be advisable to change over to the term "nature" in describing this viewpoint, because this would constitute a serious shift in perspective; for the modern concept of nature,¹⁴ with its prevailing confrontation between nature and man, would have to be taken over as well. For us, on the contrary, the important thing is to find an approach that takes life and milieu together, the milieu being the presupposition, together with the vital use made of it and the form given to it. Such a viewpoint comprehends everything living to an equal degree, and yet it comprehends man's unique nature. If, in accordance with a widespread concept of nature, we were to set nature apart as being untouched by all the phenomena which have come about through human intervention and modification, then this guiding concept would inevitably lead to the loss of our viewpoint. For where can untouched, unmodified nature as the milieu of living things be found? Even more decisive are the consequences that the modern concept of nature would have for our approach to today's challenges. We are accustomed to understand nature as a physical world of phenomena that surrenders to the scientifically inquiring human subject, as an arsenal of logical, mathematical laws in a countless number of individual sectors, and as a potential source of material for industrial and economic exploitation. Is this classical scientific concept of nature adapted to comprehend, separately and in totality, our viewpoint of the specifically existing cohesion of living things, including man, with the elemental world in which he lives? Today critical voices cannot fail to be heard; so for the moment, we shall do better to dispense with the concept of nature as symbol for our view of things.

We have already said that our viewpoint of the world and

environment aims to be a phenomenological one, notwithstanding its link with ecological insights; i.e., it is not intended merely as a specific question put by biology, which in the biblical sphere would at most bring to light ancient insights relevant for the history of science. As a phenomenological perspective it has many strata. Seen in this way, the connection of the living thing with the elemental world in which it lives (in totality and in its separate parts) includes the selective scientific questions about laws and constituents in origin and process. But the essential thing is that our viewpoint of the world and environment includes considerably more. It covers the observation of the whole of this complex as such, together with its reciprocal relationships; questions about its meaning and value, the existence of its given facts, and its preservation or modification in the process of time; questions about its openness to human experience; questions about human responsibility; and questions about connections with the political and social organization of man, who makes the living space of the world the stage of his own history.

In this study of the connection and reciprocal effects of living things and their natural world—a connection which is constitutive for life—the subject world and environment is elemental and is formulated in total and fundamental terms so that it can effectively act as the common perspective in our confrontation between the Bible and the present.

2. Some Problematic Aspects of the Natural World and Environment Today

The historical scholar feels passionately responsible in his advocacy of the unique character, original meaning, and historical difference of the biblical texts, which lie so far back in time. But even this activity of his, devoted though it is to a life that is past and gone, is practiced in the present and is therefore inevitably related to contemporary circumstances that are

certainly not the same but are at least equivalent. If the interpretative scholar were to disregard his own historical place and the historical position of his activity, he would be hindering the impact and interpretation of biblical statements in our time. For he would be avoiding the question of how the unique historical character of biblical facts appears in respect to our own present, and he would thereby be avoiding his duty and the service he can render in keeping biblical and historical pointers and impulses open for contemporary challenges.¹⁵ Consequently, we must now satisfy ourselves, even if only provisionally and incompletely, about some important aspects of today's problem in the field of the world and the environment.

a. Common present-day experience

If we pursue the viewpoint world and environment today with the eyes of an average mid-European, we find ourselves in a strangely ambiguous situation.

On the one hand, we still find in the scope of our daily experience that the components of the ecosystem, as these affect our natural milieu, unquestionably continue to function. The reciprocal play of climate, weather, soil-constitution, usable water, and stocks of animals and plants, together with proven and continually more effective utilization techniques, seem to be evidence that admits of no problem. Worldwide economic relations meet every demand for both necessities and luxuries in the sectors of foodstuffs, raw materials, and energy. True, there are breakdowns: unusual climactic conditions, storms, droughts, earthquakes, insect plagues, but these are local and temporary. Immediate measures and counter-measures through the appropriate channels can be expected to bring relief and help to the people affected. The protection of whales, seals, storks and sea eagles, alpine plants, marshes, moorland and mud flats, simply for their own sakes is more or less accepted; and so is aid to improve natural living conditions in other parts of the world. But, when all is said and done, there is diminished enthusiasm; for these are not the living conditions in which people around about

us have to live. Deficiencies in man's natural surroundings, however, appear to be locally confined, unavoidable, and compensable. After all, even if rivers are very seriously threatened as natural habitats, there is enough usable water. And, even if satellite towns and transport systems destroy landscapes, there are protected recreation areas near the cities or farther away. Losses of this kind, even if people are conscious of them at all, are put up with as falling under the decisive question of man's utilization of the living world: land use is obviously necessary in view of the economy, industry, the gross national product, jobs, the securing and raising of our accustomed standard of living.

There is no doubt at all that for the average person the natural conditions of life and their use by men and women in our parts of the world are anything but a vital question, even when deficiencies are felt here and there. Natural conditions at our disposal are so much a matter of course that to reflect about the connection between life and the natural conditions of life, as this has a bearing on men and women, seems in our area entirely theoretical and artificial; while in its bearing on the threat to other forms of life, which are of no direct human use, it appears to be of secondary importance. For our average consciousness, the vital questions are to be found on a different plane: not in the field of the natural elements of life, but in the sector of political, economic, social conditions and decisions, and in the scientific and technological developments of every kind that are decisive for the specific world of the individual and its quality. It is not without reason that Dieter Lührmann writes: "For us seedtime and harvest are no longer the cycles with which hopes and fears are bound up; now it is the cycles of inflation and the economic situation."¹⁶ The prospects and fulfillments of the individual's life are primarily decided in the sectors where man builds his own life, not in the elemental sphere of natural life, which is completely a matter of course. And it is from there that the shadows, fears, and burdens of the individual's own world are also derived. The precipitously growing complication of technical, economic, and political processes is rapidly turning our modern, enlightened world into a riddle. In addition, widespread strain

and exhaustion is often the outcome of a relationship to the world that, on the emotional level, is highly sentimental and yet offers diminishing opportunities for entering into and preserving relationships. Many find it increasingly difficult to accept and endure their own lives, and the world around them, with imagination and a love capable of suffering. There is an urge for maximum freedom, but detached from equivalent responsibility as an essential part of liberty, because with responsibility, liberty is forced back into those compulsions in life from which it wants to escape.

On the other hand, in recent years the media have confronted us with a multiplicity of environmental institutions, measures, and spontaneous initiatives, which have brought the realm of elemental, natural conditions for life and survival into the limelight. Explosive though they are, however, they have found it hard to gain a hearing from our general consciousness beyond a circle of locally affected people, simply because such data does not fit into the framework of our present experience. So global predictions are bound to slide off public awareness even more, when they point to the threat to our survival posed by an endangering of the ecosystem in its elemental, fundamental significance for all living things, including man. Even such challenging titles as the following, collected at random recently, indicate a detached viewpoint: "Grow Up in Freedom—for Death" (report in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on a conference of the Catholic Academy in Bavaria), "Planetary Nightmare" (headline in the same newspaper), "Man at the Time-barrier of Survival" (K. Müller), "Agriculture and the Survival Crisis" (K. Egger), "From Exploitation to Cooperation" (G. Liedke), "Creation in Front of the Abyss" (G. Altner), "A Planet Is Plundered" (H. Gruhl). These are visions of an elemental threat of comprehensive and unimaginable scope, which cannot be permanently endured by the general consciousness and simply ask to be repressed. And this is the case all the more because the individual seems to himself to be utterly powerless in the face of these threatening developments in a world he can no longer see through. If he accepted the truth of these predictions, they would be contrary to what his actual experience of the world tells him.

And it would be contrary to his long-cherished expectation that specific, individual measures to protect the environment (measures to protect the landscape, water, and air; measures to reduce noise; measures to protect threatened animals and plants), together with new technologies and long-term crisis management by the people responsible, will knock the bottom out of fears of this kind.

In this conflict, a desire for soothing reassurance is all too understandable. But is it realistic? In recent years scientific discussion about the world and the environment has arrived at essentially different opinions. It has ushered in a radical change which teaches us to view the present situation with different eyes.

b. The radical change of opinion and the support to be found for it in the present situation

Only a few years ago our general awareness was entirely concentrated on human society, in line with our general view of the world. Mental, political, and economic activities were concentrated on the social relationships among people and on the capacity of social systems for realizing a high quality of life on a wide scale. Peace, liberty, equal rights, and social justice for all were the target concepts in discussion, and still are. Apart from isolated protective measures, the natural world and environment as given *datum*, together with the use and shaping of it so as to secure shelter, sources of food, and raw materials, was only viewed in the perspective of the society of men and women living here and now. It was only a problem insofar as it did not as yet display an equal, just supply when measured against prevailing human standards of living. People had to bring this about by means of technical operations and social and economic policies, so that injustices and inequalities could be adjusted in such a way as to make utilization and exploitation of the world's resources as just as possible. The given datum in this view of what had to be done was the natural world and environment as an object of exploitation, as raw material, and as the substance for shaping and organizing human life. It was viewed as something quite other than man. The impulse behind this view of what had to be done was man, absolutely and exclusively orientated toward his claims

to a high standard of living. The goal, finally, in the familiar descent from north to south, was to increase or preserve the same standard of living, or at least to reach it in the foreseeable future, in the southern regions.

Certainly, besides this exploitation of the world and the environment in order to produce what is necessary for the dictated standard of living, there stood, and still stands, the more harmonious experience of world and environment in leisure and tourism, as a factor of physical and psychological relaxation—though this too is anything but free of human marketing, and man's need for relaxation must be content with the reservations that have been laid out or with the surrogates provided by the media. This need is optional, private, and without obligation, compared with the dominating, grabbing exploitation whose purpose is to raise the standard of living.

But this interpretation of the world which is totally oriented toward man has been undergoing a radical change in recent years. The trend of this change is as follows. The problem of our time is no longer solely man in his social aspects, seeking the widespread realization of a high quality of life, because existing resources in the world are no longer unquestionably at our disposal. On the contrary, the whole problem of our understanding of the world is now broadening out, in a significant development of the critical consciousness, to cover the sphere of the world's natural resources and conditions. The change is directed toward the subject world and environment as we propose to interpret it: namely, the effects of human actions on the whole context of the world and living things in general.

The oil crisis acted as a warning signal, and for a time it even stirred up general awareness. It made clear to people, in a form they could actually experience, something that experts had long known through scientifically calculated forecasts (by the Club of Rome especially, at that time): the fact that the earth's resources of the highly important raw material crude oil are limited. We can forecast the time when they will be exhausted, if we continue our present exploitation, let alone increase it. The calculation of the time limit has meanwhile

been brought to the notice of every user of the mass media. Similar time limits apply not only to oil but to all sources of energy that are relevant at the present time. Time limits have been worked out also for sources of other raw materials and foodstuffs. "We can take this," writes the physicist Klaus Müller, "as an indication of the fundamental change of aspect introduced simply by the fact that all undertakings are faced with the pressure of a calculable date, a date that is irrevocable. But it is this very fact—the fact that we have everywhere to reckon with ultimate time limits—which is the new situation that we . . . find in every sector."¹⁷ This makes the most important factor in the upheaval clear: it is the time factor. Hitherto the experience that molded the outlook of the average person was a static one, the ecosystem was an inexhaustible reservoir of vitally necessary supplies with unproblematic possibilities for exploitation. Today people can no longer look on the ecosystem in this way. Even if we continue our exploitation as before (and even more, if we increase it, which is probable because of the increasing population), the elemental world of man's life is now already presenting itself—in terms of foodstuffs, raw materials, and energy—as a finite, limited foundation for existence whose time limit can be calculated.

Time is the revolutionary factor that is changing everything today. But subordinate to this, the natural world and environment has a further sector of given data and circumstances: the habitat or living space. Expanding industrialization, increasing population, and the resulting social problem of providing work, and also a measure of satisfaction of demands for a high quality of life, have had certain results. The exploitation of the vegetable and animal world, the introduction of harmful substances, and the intervention of technology, have led to an increasing strain on the biosphere, and to growing modification of and damage to the water, air, soil, and climate of the space in which life exists. These things, in their turn, mean a continually spreading disturbance of the controlling and regulative processes of the ecological cycles. And again the time limits are foreseeable. In accordance with this revelation, the subject of the world and the environment is

today going beyond individual problems. Under the pressure of the time factor it is presenting itself as an environmental crisis with the character of an elemental crisis of survival.¹⁸

This perspective of a threatening survival limit for all living things on earth is not intended to point toward a rarified counter-picture of virgin nature or a purely agrarian utilization of nature, free from technology and industry. It rather realizes that an upheaval, reaching to the very roots, is going on with regard to the connection between the elemental, given world and man's use and shaping of it to secure his own life. It perceives the upheaval that has taken place because the degree of human utilization has now reached a point that makes the deadline facing the world and its life (including man)—the world's coming annihilation—a fact that can be forecast. This upheaval acquires harshness and inescapability because its development cannot simply be brought to a halt, let alone reversed, through the further perfecting of scientific and technical measures; the complex reciprocal effects of the crisis phenomena, to which Klaus Müller especially has pointed, would alone make this impossible.¹⁹ In this situation, progress in science and technology does not bring sufficient power to master the survival crisis.²⁰ C. F. von Weizsäcker is breaking new ground when he says, in the final section of his book, *Wege in der Gefahr*:

We have not added our voice to . . . the criticism of technology in principle; nor have we assented to the fundamental optimism about technology. The main characteristic of our attitude was the thesis that . . . there are technical methods to counteract technically caused dangers. The real dangers are the ones that are brought about by human beings. In the language of today we might put it as follows: technology is an instrument of the reasonable will. Technology can be controlled as far as our reason extends. But technology cannot compensate for the failure of reason.²¹

The consequences of his upheaval are of elemental clarity. In the past what dominated man and the relations between individuals,

groups, and nations in daily events and experiences were the levels of life to which political, economic, and social activities applied. Now, beyond his threatening wars of annihilation, man is having a new dimension forced on him: the perspective of the elemental world of life and its elemental potentialities of existence. This is being laid on him as a problem for worldwide mental and political activity, with the shadow of the threat to his survival presented by the deadline set for the world's existence. If we follow up this perspective, the differentiations and differences in human society are reduced to the subject man, which includes all and everyone—man in relation to the world and the environment, as the fundamental, spatial and temporal ecological system. This system asserts its claim, not as the environment of the specific individual, but as all-embracing totality, because the damage and destruction which are showing themselves affect it as a whole. At the limits of man's unquestioning disposal of things, it simply shows him that he himself is a highly dependent element within this natural world, that he has elemental needs, and that the natural world's end also means his own. It shows man that world/environment and man have a common future, and that it is now being decided how and whether people can live after us. It shows man that with the annihilation of nonhuman life, we are determining the fate of human life as well. In the face of the inescapable time factor, the crisis in the use and molding of the elemental life of all living things throws back at him the simple but decisive question: What will be the future of human and nonhuman life that wants to follow us and live?

c. The reasons for our present situation

We may use the catchwords "environmental crisis" or "survival crisis" to describe our present situation. But if we ask about the reasons for it and its background, the literature on the subject will bring us up against extremely complicated connections and interdependencies between many sectors and phenomena. This being so, we cannot even approximately

describe them within the limits of our present framework. The interested reader may turn to C. F. von Weizsäcker's latest book,²² or to the work of Klaus Müller²³ or Günter Altner.²⁴ I should like also to draw special attention to the extensive compilation on environmental strategy published in 1975 by the Sociological Institute of the Evangelical-Lutheran churches in Germany.²⁵ In our context we must select and concentrate primarily on the reasons and aspects that are of essential importance in a confrontation between this subject and the biblical texts.

Plants, animals, and groups of people have always suffered from limited stresses and strains and damage to their ecosystems, and the radius of this damage has ranged from the very small to the relatively extensive. The fact that today, in contrast, the ecosystem as a whole is drifting toward the limits of survival (according to well-founded forecasts) is due mainly—if we take a superficial view—to the ever-widening encroachments of man's modern world, with its industrialization and mechanization. But this is to name only a secondary cause, not a primary one. In considering this secondary cause, the crisis-conscious critic should remember, before making any hasty and illusory condemnation, what positive effects industrialization and mechanization have in controlling danger to human life from the natural world and in the human development of life—effects which we cannot now imagine ever doing without.²⁶ Even the pressing problem of unemployment makes the facts clear today. The results of the present situation in the industrial and technological sectors are inescapable. But when we are inquiring as to reasons, we cannot be content with an illusory and simpleminded condemnation of industry and technology. On the other hand, even though the intensification of technical research is and will remain essential and unrelinquishable for the control of individual elements of danger, yet there is general agreement that this will bring no essential turn of events in itself. The basic reason for our situation is not simply that, at the present time, we are lacking in the technologies to eliminate the approaching survival crisis. Optimistic and superficial views of this kind start

from a complex in which the reasons for strains on the environment and environmental damage are of a purely technical kind. The environmental crisis is therefore seen as the problem of an inadequate but adaptable technology. It is consequently also seen as the sum of part-problems, which can be isolated, and whose solution is striven for and expected by means of a technology of production and waste-disposal which must be continually pushed forward.²⁷

In building up the economic systems in the developed countries through their industrialization and mechanization, people did not yet comprehend the heart of the problem, even though subjects central to our present discussion were frequently touched on. Evidence has been offered to show that it is not the systems but their presuppositions which, if they are laid down in a certain way, produce corresponding crisis phenomena.²⁸ In spite of all the differences in their structure, economic and social systems are the executive media in the industrial countries and are oriented toward quantitative growth. However, the actual impetuses and impulses that direct them still lie behind the systems themselves. In the introduction to the compilation on "Environmental Strategy," the essential reasons for our present situation are precisely located and tersely formulated.

This way of looking at things [i.e., the explanation of the environmental crisis as a merely technical problem] . . . does not lead to an adequate analysis of the reasons for our environmental problems. For it does not take into account the motives, values, and goals which stamp economic behavior, conditions of production, consumer-wants, and our whole economic and social system in such a way that material progress leads simultaneously to wrong social development and an endangering of the ecology. It therefore disrupts the cohesion of cause and effect whereby strains on the environment are the consequences of behavior which is directed toward a certain goal in a certain way. If we follow up this connection, the environmental crisis proves to be the crisis of our individual and social models and ways of living.

The question about the operative values and norms then becomes the key problem for the continuance and progress of industrial society.^{28a}

It is stressed that "the goals that dominate a society and the attitudes toward nature expressed in them have essential importance for the environmental crisis."²⁹ To sum up, "The environmental crisis is therefore only properly understood when the models and patterns of behavior of the given society, which are the cause of that crisis, are brought to the surface."³⁰ The goals, attitudes, models, ways of behavior, values, and norms of a society, in individuals and collectively, are accordingly the domain where the determining causes are to be found. And this exposes man, in his social character and because he is stamped by the history of his civilization, as being the true originator of the situation.

What is it about man's goals, attitudes, models, ways of behavior, values, and norms in modern industrial society that cause such serious effects—effects which are so far-reaching that the limits of survival can be prophesied—in the realm of the natural world and environment even though these attitudes are paradoxically bound up with the quality of human life?

Following the pioneer insights of C. F. von Weizsäcker, representatives of both science and the humanities have put forward analyses that touch on the roots of the survival crisis. These analyses put foremost the far-reaching effects of modern science insofar as these have molded the minds of people as a whole and the attitudes, aims, and expectations behind human activity. Klaus Müller actually coins the term "the scientific catastrophe"³¹ and feels able to say about it: "It is the quintessence of all the hazards caused by an outmoded attitude to science."³² After an analysis of physics, Müller goes on to show the far-reaching effects in this field also.³³ Günter Altner shows similar trains of thought in the sphere of biology.³⁴ Christian Link concentrates on the epistemological field and the realm of scientific methodology.³⁵

What insights have emerged? Of course, we shall be forced