

Green Theology in Genesis 1:11, 30, 2:8, and Creating a Sustainable Environment through Orchard Cultivation

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Abstract

While the call for proper response toward creating sustainable environment in the contemporary time is on the increase, and huge amount of money has been spent in this regard, there has not been corresponding level of awareness and involvement of people on individual basis. It has been left to the government and few companies while many citizens adopt arm-chair approach with expectation of a change of status. The magnitude, impact of and how to respond to environmental abuse are discussed in this paper with emphasis on green theology in Gen. 1:11, 30; 2:8 and its values in achieving sustainable environment. The study shows that God's emphasis on the greenness of the vegetation and his model of planting a garden is worthy of emulation in creating sustainable environment for human existence. One of such expected efforts is orchard cultivation which has been wrongly considered as a menial job. The importance of orchards is discussed in this paper with particular reference to how the church can be meaningfully engaged in this task through awareness creation and purposeful tree planting.

Keywords: Green Theology, Eden, Orchard and Sustainable Environment

Introduction

Responding to environmental challenges has attracted multi-dimensional approaches both at local, national, and global levels. This is due to the series of hydra-headed effects of environmental abuse and degradation that are not only threatening the living organisms and the ecosystem. Both animate and inanimate objects have now been affected by adverse environmental factors and are continuously pushed toward the precipice of impending doom. To avoid this and many other consequences, several committees of intelligentsias, and meetings of professionals on environment as well as amortizing huge amount of fund for environmental issues, are just some of the steps taken so far at different levels of decision-making organizations. Furthermore, policies that focus on waste management, de-forestation and climate change just to mention a few are always formulated by designated authorities. Yet, the individual participation of citizens in such preventive steps has not been encouraging. While it must be noted that the required financial demands and policy formulation depend much on government, the contributory involvement of individual citizen will go a long way in achieving the desired result.

One of the steps to facilitate such involvement is the promotion of green theology. This is a theological concept that discusses the relationship between ecology and environment. It holds that human environment should be an integral part of theological discourses. This is with the intent that Christians, through preaching and teaching of biblical concepts, will not only be aware of magnitude of environmental abuse and degradation, but also be aware of the divine intent on sustainable environment, and be prepared to positively respond to emerging challenges. Examples of such theological bases is in the creation account in Genesis 1:11, 30 and 2:8, where the prima status of the earth as conveyed through color green , which has become the symbol of productivity and blessedness. This paper proposes that a better understanding

of the divine intent of the greenness of the earth in creation will facilitate a better human relationship with the environment. This paper intends to examine green theology in Genesis 1:11, 30 and 2:8 through exegesis, and apply its inferences to orchard cultivation in the contemporary context.

Environmental Abuse

This simply means attempts to use the environment, directly or indirectly in such a way that it brings about adverse effects on both living and non-living objects in a given location. This is usually being referred to as environmental exploitation or degradation in some other quarters. In all, the idea of wrong use of the environment- water, land and air is the point of emphasis. Such effects often come from increase in industrialization, or at every local level of human operation. On either side, the aftermath of such efforts brings about high rate of epidemics, disasters, desertification, drought, tsunamis and famine. Other contributory agents include religious groups, who through their various activities create noise pollution during worship sessions. Through indiscriminate waste disposal, they also contribute to the dirtiness of the environment and blocking of the sewage system. It must be noted that rate of deforestation through bush burning with its attendant effect on both the flora and the faunas is on the increase.

Forests, grasslands, and wetlands are parts of ecosystems that shape life, economy and society. Forests help in the prevention of soil erosion, maintenance of soil fertility and fixing of carbon from the atmosphere. Forests also host a large proportion of terrestrial biodiversity; protect water and moderate climate change. Between 1990 and 2005, the global forest area shrank at an annual rate of about 0.2 percent. Losses were greatest in Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁶⁵ Loss of forest, grasslands, and wetlands, which has resulted to the loss of habitat, biodiversity, soil retention

²⁶⁵*Global Environmental Outlook GEO4* (Valleta: UNEP, 2007), 24.

and regulation, has also led to disturbance of biological cycles and webs. This has also resulted in diminished water resources and water quality. The loss of forest ecosystem services has also resulted in increased hazard of flooding and landslides during extreme weather. The effects of this include loss of forest products, grazing pastures and fishery reserves. The list includes loss of recreation opportunities and tourism.

Land degradation is a long-term loss of ecosystem function that is often caused by chemical contamination of the soil with elements such as cadmium and mercury.²⁶⁶ According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report of 2004 on forest products and economic division, some working papers have that the concentration of persistent toxic substances observed in many parts of sub-Saharan African indicate that the rate of contamination is becoming widespread across the region. A particular example is that of about 30,000 tons of obsolete pesticide in stockpiles that was recorded in Africa. Furthermore, the UNEP report on regionally based assessment of persistent toxic waste and substances held that the environmental levels of toxic chemicals will increase in countries that are using them in large quantities such as Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe.²⁶⁷ Soil erosion is another major environmental crisis affecting use. It is a natural process of removal of soil by water or wind. The rate of erosion has been accelerated by inappropriate land management, such as clearance of forest and grassland, inappropriate felling of trees and overgrazing. Loss of topsoil means the loss of soil organic matter, nutrients, water holding capacity. Eroded soil is often deposited in an unwanted location that results into damage of infrastructure, sedimentation of reservoir, and loss of hydropower generation. All the aforementioned effects are products of human activities. P. R. Ehrlich and A. H. Ehrlich summed it up as follow: "Humanity today is on rampage of changing natural habitats

²⁶⁶[www.fao.org.DOCREP/008/90400e/904000000 htm](http://www.fao.org.DOCREP/008/90400e/904000000.htm). Assessed 20/11/09

²⁶⁷Ibid.

dramatically, cutting them down, plowing them up, overgrazing them, paving them over, damming and diverting water, flooding or draining areas, spraying them with pesticides and acid rain, pouring oil into them, changing the climates, exposing them to increased ultraviolet radiation, and so on and so on.”²⁶⁸

Green Theology

This is a theological position that holds that that nature should be viewed and treated with a sense of respect and responsibility. According to Trees van Montfoort, it is “...a far-reaching Christian theological consideration of the relationship between God, creation, nature, and human beings.”²⁶⁹ Relationship in this context presupposes a positive and responsible management and preservation of earth’s floras and faunas. In Daniel Carroll’s opinion, green theology speaks of achieving sustainable environment through eco-justice, which is a *sine qua non* of ecological responsibility.²⁷⁰ To greater extent, green theology is similar to other environmental theologies such as conservative theology, eco-theology and deep ecology. They all intend to refocus theological discourse toward fostering responsible environmental engagement from religious perspective. As asserted by Steve Bishop, they are concerned with a clear departure from dominant theological worldview that is oppressive to the nature.²⁷¹

John Button summed it up in *Dictionary of Green Ideas* as “... a set of beliefs and concomitant lifestyle that stresses the

²⁶⁸P.R. Ehrlich and A. H. Ehrlich, “The Value of Biodiversity” in *Biodiversity and Creation*, vol.1: History, Background and Concept. Ed. Richard Laddle (London: Routledge, 1976), 209.

²⁶⁹Trees van Montfoorts, <http://www.dartonlongmantodd.co.uk>. Assessed 04/03/22.

²⁷⁰Daniel Carroll, “A Green Theology? Theology and Ecology,” <http://www.theway.org.uk>. Assessed 23/03/22

²⁷¹ Steve Bishop, “Green Theology and Deep Theology: New Age or New Creation?” *Themelios* 16 (3), (191):8-14.

importance of respect for the earth and its inhabitants, using only what resources are necessary and appropriate, acknowledging the right of all forms of life, and recognizing that all that exists is part of one interconnected whole.”²⁷² In the light of the magnitude of environmental degradation in the contemporary time, green theology in the context of this paper include any theological propositions toward restoration of the earth to its prima ecosystem. Examples of such are discussed below.

The Greenness of the Vegetation

The Concept of אֶשְׂבִי (Gen. 1:11, 30)

God has special interest in the serene environment through the declaration that the earth should produce אֶשְׂבִי עֵשֶׂב “green vegetation” The emphasis on the word אֶשְׂבִי is basically on greenness. The use of this term signifies God’s intention create conducive ecosystems on the earth. With the use of this term, it implies that the bio-geochemical cycle of the earth then was at maximum. The air composition was at a perfect state without any distortion or deficiency. The greenness of the earth reveals God intention to protect the earth from desertification. Also, in 1:30, God declares, “And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground- everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.’ Here again, there is emphasis on the greenness of the human ecosystem through אֶשְׂבִי יֵרֶק “green plant.” יֵרֶק in this context according to Ernest Klein, connotes the succulent nature of young herbs.²⁷³

²⁷² John Button, “Green Theology,” *Dictionary of Green Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1998), 190.

²⁷³ Ernest Klein, “יֵרֶק” in *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (Tel Aviv: The Israel Map and Publishing Company, 1987), 265.

The greenness of the earth also enabled distribution of rainfall and earth temperature due to low carbon emission and protection of earth floras and faunas. The present global outcry on the climate change is product of distortion of the environmental structure that God established at creation. The greenness of the earth at creation was an attempt to insulate the earth against erosion, desertification, and global warming. Such greenness should be maintained as intended by God. If not, its destruction will spell doom for humanity

The Garden of Eden (2:8)

After God had created man, he planted a garden in Eden. The J Source in this account reveals a remarkable difference from P. In P account, God created everything apart from man through fiat “divine declaration.” But in J, God is presented in anthropomorphic sense of planting a garden which is an agricultural term. גֶּן־עֵדֶן “The garden of Eden,” refers to an enclosure which can be metaphorically taken for the cosmos.

Eden can be taken in a literal sense as a place, although it has been taken it as a symbolic representation of a delightful place.²⁷⁴ It is also compared with גֶּן־אֱלֹהִים “the garden of God” in Ezek. 31:9;28;13; and גֶּן־יְהוָה “the garden of Yahweh” in Isa. 51:3.²⁷⁵ Whatsoever be the case, it is clear that the garden must have been good and delightful indeed. God put Adam in this blissful place as his abode. God caused all manners of trees to grow in the garden. The nature of the trees was given as נְהַמֵּד לַמְרֻצָּה וְטוֹב לַמֶּאֱכֹל “pleasing” and “good” for food. This suggests that all that man needed was provided for him. The location, size and types of the trees were determined by God.

²⁷⁴James D. Price, “עֵדֶן” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1997), 230.

²⁷⁵I. Cornelius, “עֵדֶן” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1997), 331.

Two particular trees are mentioned in the garden. They are עץ החיים “the tree of life,” which is placed in the midst of the garden, and עץ הדעת טוב ורע “the tree of the knowledge and evil.” The pre-Eden context of the earth shows a terrifying picture of an arid and uninhabited desert similar to תוהו ובהו “emptiness and formlessness” Genesis 1:2. The displeasure of Yahweh toward the unproductive scenario necessitated the planting of the Garden of Eden as a model for human habitation, ecosystem and sustainable environment. In actual sense, it was an orchard that was planted for humans to emulate as model of developing green attitude to the environment.

In continuation of the beautification of man’s environment, Yahweh caused a river to flow out of the garden. This was also to make man comfortable. The river was later divided into four to facilitate easy flow throughout the garden. The J editor was meticulous enough to point out that Pishon “flowed around” the whole land of Havilah. This suggests that God cares so much for the environment he put the man. He would not want any part of it to suffer. Therefore, part of human environment includes the trees, water, and, and all that God put in the garden. As part of God’s provision for man, he put gold and precious stones, bdellium and onyx at human disposal. The description of the other three rivers shows that Eden and its surroundings were well taken care of (vv.11-13). God established a serene environment for man.

Orchard Cultivation

An orchard has been defined by *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* as a place where fruit trees, nut trees and herbs are planted. The word “orchard” is from the Latin *hortus* “garden” and *geard* “yard.”²⁷⁶ It therefore refers to a garden or yard where different trees, fruit trees and herbs are planted for various purposes. The thesis of this presentation is that orcharding is an important means of enhancing the Christian

²⁷⁶*Webster Collegiate Dictionary* 2001 Edition

missions. God of Israel was the first orchardist, who planted a big garden in Eden in the East (Gen. 2:8). The use of anthropomorphic expression for God in form of a farmer portrays Him as a purposeful being. After the creation of man, God brought him into the garden he had planted with a specific instruction to him to cultivate it (2:15). It may be of interest to know that all humans needed were in the garden. His only job was just to cultivate the garden. The art of cultivation in this context is very important.

To cultivate, according to Webster, is an attempt to prepare land for raising crops. It includes all efforts from ploughing of land and planting to the point of crop harvesting. It was out of his efforts in cultivation that man was to feed and tend for himself.²⁷⁷ Orcharding in modern time has been restricted only to the hand of professionals for aesthetic value, i.e. to beautify a particular location. At smaller dimension are those that keep orchards for economic reasons. However, there are few companies that keep orchards for industrial and medicinal purposes mostly in developed countries. What is common among Africans is arable farming, where food crops are mostly planted for consumption purposes. The common opinion of people is that planting herbs and fruit trees is a lazy man's job that can only fetch a small income and respect. This negative attitude is not limited to individuals, even the church is involved in playing down the values of orcharding. The values of orchards cannot be underestimated in the light of their climatic, environmental, economic, and spiritual challenges in the contemporary time.

Spiritual values of Orchards

The serenity of an orchard is very useful spiritually. It enhances sound spirituality of the human mind. It also enhances communication between God and man. In the creation account, the Bible holds that at "the cool of the day" God would visit Adam and interact with him in the Garden of

²⁷⁷Ibid.

Eden. The serene and conducive atmosphere in the garden must have facilitated this. In addition, a well-organized orchard is good for meditation and meaningful prayer. It facilitates spiritual concentration by its quietness and beauty. The planting of orchards also brings a sense of appreciation of what God has created. It reveals God as Almighty, purposeful and powerful.

Physical Values of Orchards

Planting orchards has aesthetic value. It beautifies the environment and adds glamour to human existence. Flowers and fruit-bearing trees protect human habitation from scorching sun and heat. It also protects houses against storms and destructive erosion. It reduces the rate of carbon emission which is now at an alarming rate.²⁷⁸ The increase in the effects of the climate change in form of drought and loss of biodiversity are largely due to increase in loss of forest without corresponding tree planting. Many of the environmental disasters in recent time could have been averted through meaningful and well-organized orcharding.

Economic Values of Orchards

The economic value of orchards cannot be underscored. Products of orchards are important sources of income for human beings. Apart from the fact that many herbs and fruits from orchards are useful for consumption, they can also be sold to earn a living if they are produced in large quantities. In fact, with the increase call for fruit and vegetables in human diet, one major way to make more money is through orchards. Many of these products, if produced in large quantities can be exported and can be a good source of foreign exchange. It must be noted that although Israel is located in the desert part of Palestine, it is one of the largest producers of fruits.

²⁷⁸O. O. Areola and Sade Oderinde, "The Church as Agent of Biodiversity Stability/ Sustainable Development," *The Church and the Environment* edited by Adetoye Faniran and Emiola Nihinlola (Ibadan: Penthouse Publication, 2012), 60.

How could this be possible if not through massive involvement in orcharding.²⁷⁹ Many times, Nigeria farmers concentrate on planting food crops, which at the end of the day yield little income. Often times, they consider planting herbs and fruits-trees as menial and a waste of time.

Medical Values of Orchards

Planting orchards can also be of great benefit to society. Orchard products can be used as food and materials for medicinal purposes. Many orchard trees and herbs possess medicinal values to cure many human diseases. They are even better than synthetic medicines in treating some diseases such as diabetes than those that are produced in laboratories. Orchard herbs and trees are natural and fresh. In fact, many people do not know the medical importance of various parts of herbs. All the parts of trees, most importantly fruit-bearing trees are useful. It all depends on the acquisition of the right knowledge. For example, according to Darshan Shankar and A. Hafeel, *Phyllanthus nituri* has been proved to be effective in treating malaria among the Indians. Even in Africa, common fruits such as pawpaw and lemon are rich in vitamins A; B and C for eyesight, nerves and muscle movements, fortifications of immune systems and development of high resistance against illness.²⁸⁰ These are just samples of the usefulness of orchard plants beyond the common knowledge of people about them. One important discovery in recent times is the Moringa tree, *Moringa oleifera* “drumstick tree,” which has been described as ‘complete balance diet’ on its own.²⁸¹ It

²⁷⁹Olu Onafeso, “The Church, Environment Degradation and the Challenge of Climate Change,” *The Church and the Environment*. Edited by Adetoye Faniran and Emiola Nihinlola (Ibadan: Penthouse Publication, 2012), 52-56.

²⁸⁰Ndambi O. Asaah, Ibrahim Manu and Ngambi N. Ombaku, “Integrating Different Healing Practices,” *Compass Magazine for Endogenous Development* (2003), 43.

²⁸¹Darshan Shankar and A. Hafeel, “Revitalising Indigenous Health Practices,” *Indigenous Knowledge and Development Monitor* (November 1999): 67.

has higher percentage of all food nutrients. Planting these herbs and trees in orchard will go a long way at solving medical problems and reducing the occurrence of sickness of people.

Academic Values of Orchards

The value of orcharding cannot be limited to the health sector alone, it also has academic values. When well-managed, orchards can be used for educational purposes such as excursion and leisure centers. They can be used as botanical gardens which students can go to learn about various herbs, leaves and their usage.

Material Values of Orchards

Orchard's products can be of help in building houses and artworks of various types. Followers from orchards can be used in the production of perfumes and as condiments in cooking. They add to the flavor of food and enhance better living.

Sustainable Environment through Orchard Cultivation

In the light of the above-stated facts, it is important for the contemporary church to rise up to the challenges of educating its members about the values of orchards. To start with, the church should be a model in this regard by making her premises beautiful through the planting of herbs and flowers. The church needs to rise up to the challenge of maintaining a good environment through planting fruit trees around the church auditorium. This will not only beautify the church, rather, it will project and tell so much about Christian message. It will make the church premise attractive to unbelievers and serve as avenue to propagate the message of Christ. Several churches' environments have been severely abused through uncontrolled tree-falling, which has resulted in opening the earth surface to heavy rainfall and high sunlight intensity. Essential soil minerals have been destroyed

on account of these effects and erosion has washed away large proportion of the soil.

The church can also engage in establishing orchards for economic reasons. Harvests from such gardens can be sold to augment the church's income. Such orchards can also be used for academic purposes. In addition, the church should educate members on the importance of orchards. This can be a way to liberate them from the shackles of poverty and unemployment. Church members should be encouraged to make use of their local environment to plant vegetables and fruit-trees for their own consumption to earn a better living.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the spate of environmental abuse in the contemporary time with particular emphasis on church involvement. The entire world has now been affected by the prevalence and the magnitude of environmental disasters. Religious groups are also contributory agents to this menace through poor structural planning and poor sewage system. One of the ways to respond to these challenges is through orchard cultivation, which has economic, medical academic and physical values.