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## **Created to Work the Earth: Towards a Triangulated Ecological Ethics of Responsibility**

**Joseph Irmiya, Ph.D.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Over the years, ecological discourse has revolved around anthropocentric, biocentric, theocentric, and Christocentric perspectives respectively. These theories even though stimulating in themselves and good in their own rights, their advocates have fallen short of giving an approach that synthesizes these approaches in order to address the problem of environmental protection as an ethical responsibility embedded in God's divine mandate towards man in Gen. 2:15 ". . .to work it and take care of it." It therefore becomes necessary that this study steps into the discussion using a triangulated approach to synthesize these renowned perspectives of ecological discourse. The major results from the use of this approach underscore that in working the earth, it is man's ethical responsibility to use the creation for his flourishing, it is ideal that man becomes a steward of creation while pointing to God as the creator and sustainer of creation who deserves worship through the use of His creation, that it is ethical for man while working the earth appreciates and values it noting that the earth was not solely created to be used as an end in itself. Furthermore, it is discovered that it is man's ethical responsibility to use the earth responsibly as a pointer to Christ through whom all was created and the redeemer of creation. The research recommends that more integrated approaches are needed in discussing ecological matters and there is need to strengthen environmental education*

*within the church setting so as to improve people's ethical responsibility towards the creation.*

**Keywords:** Created, work the earth, Triangulated, Ecological ethics, responsibility, creation-care.

## **INTRODUCTION**

It is not hyperbolic to assert that ecological issues form part of the contemporary concerns that have taken the center stage of the global academic theater. This reality is built on the premise that “the world has witnessed alarming environmental problems ranging from industrial and human waste; deforestations; ozone layer depletion leading to global warming; toxic waste and radiation pollution; desertification; waste water management; extinction of animal and plant species; genetic mutilation of plant and animal species through toxic waste, biological and chemical weapons, and careless genetic engineering for commercial purposes; land erosion due to exposure and overuse; and oil spillage and industrial chemical pollution, just to mention a few, (Ayodele and Olugbemiro, 2009). Worthy of note is the fact that despite the havoc these environmental problems are causing to the world, these environmental issues did not receive any close attention until in the 1950s (Ukpong, 2004). Since then, countless literature has been produced on this matter such that the sea of ecological scholarship almost overflowed with different perspectives addressing diverse environmental issues across the world. Most of the works produced on these ecological issues have come to terms with the fact that the problems mentioned above and many others associated with ecological crisis exist and majority of these problems are anthropogenic in nature, hence scholars tried over the years to give befitting explanations on the impacts of human activities on the planet and why the environment needs to be protected and sustained.

The opening chapters of Genesis—1 and 2 inform us expressly that *Elohim* created the environment in its beauty and wonder

after which He made man in His own image and likeness, blessed him and gave him a mandate to “subdue . . . rule over. . . work and take care of [the environment] . . .” (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15). While commenting on the Genesis creation account with a focus on the environment, Olanisebe (2009) notes that “it took God some time and special effort to put together what we have in the world today as the environment and God will not be happy if any of the people to whom He has committed the care of that environment starts to misuse and abuse it.” Olanisebe is quite right on this matter, and every serious theological discourse on the environment finds its footing on this Genesis mandate. For instance, Clemence (2015) openly agreed that Genesis creation narrative provides the necessary foundation for environmental reflection because in it, God gave human beings a special place and role of stewardship in relation to the rest of creation and this special place has given man a unique dignity and responsibility. Nonetheless, it is good to note that this mandate given to man has been variously interpreted by different theological giants in the history of biblical scholarship which made White (1967) accuse Christianity of misinterpretation that became the cause of our environmental crisis holding that Christianity for long held unto the anthropocentric view of the relationship between man and creation. However, in response to White’s accusation, Christian theologians have responded without mincing words to debunk and counteract his accusation. One of these scholars who responded to White is Bishop (1989) who said “. . . it is not Christianity that is to blame, biblical Christianity has a lot to say about the care and concern of the earth and its environment.”

Admittedly, since White’s accusation against Christianity, many discourses abound on addressing the ecological issues the world is grappling with using the scripture as a point of departure particularly in an attempt to prove White’s accusations wrong. These scholars have advocated different ways of addressing these ecological issues ranging from

anthropocentric, biocentric, theocentric and Christocentric perspectives respectively. While acknowledging the novel contributions of the advocates of these viewpoints to the world of ecological discourse, this paper is aimed at underlining that though these views are good and have contributed a lot to the academic world, but each of these approaches (as used in the past) is not enough to singlehandedly address the ecological issues bedeviling the world today. With this view in mind therefore, one believes that the time is ripe when this obvious lacuna needs to be bridged through the use of a triangulated approach in order to synthesize these differing perspectives to argue that man created in the image of God has the primary purpose and mandate to work the earth. Triangulation here means “using multiple dataset, methods, theories, and /or investigation to address a research question. It is a research strategy that can help you enhance the validity and credibility of your findings and mitigate the presence of any research biases in your work” (Bhandari, 2022). This approach considers man as an instrument whose nature of God in him has qualified him to be able to demonstrate a responsible care for the environment placed under him through a critical consideration of the natural ethical principles guiding his relationship with the environment.

### **MAN CREATED WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY TO WORK THE EARTH**

Talking about ecological ethics of responsibility cannot be accurately done without considering the sole purpose of man’s creation on earth and created in the image of God. Before we move further, it is worthy of note that it is beyond our scope in this essay to explore the different arguments concerning the definition and the extent to which man is made in the image of God. However, from the divergent interpretations of Genesis 1:26, four groups of views may be discerned according to Clines (1967): firstly, the image is a spiritual quality of man; his self-consciousness and self-determination, his talents and understanding of the eternal, the true, and the good, his self-

consciousness, his capability for thought and his immortality, his reason, his personality, his vitality and innate nobility. Secondly, the image consists in man's rule over his fellow-creatures. Thirdly, the image is the term for the immediate relationship between God and man, and finally the image consists in man's form, which is similar to God's. All these views as proposed by different scholars as summarized by Clines are not far from the true meaning of the image of God in man. It is realized that none of the scholars is bold enough to categorically spell out what exactly constitutes the image of God in man simply because the Bible remains silent about it. It is therefore of no surprise to have Peterson, (2016) after critical analysis of the various views and exegesis of the key biblical texts on the image of God to conclude that interpreting the *imago Dei* as human identity is exegetically and theologically preferable to substantialistic, functional, and relational interpretations. He furthered that the identity interpretation has been shown to be dogmatically coherent and faithful to the range of canonical texts that refer to the image of God.

The lines of argument on this concept as underlined above ranges from substantial (bodily), functional, identity and relational perspectives, and all discourses on the *Imago Dei* revolve around these lines of thought. So with this view in mind, it would be safe to conclude with Mueller (1999) that "instead of trying to divide the human being into characteristics that image God's likeness to varying degrees, we must come to terms with the fact that the human being, in its entirety, is essentially the image and likeness of God," that man is created not in God's image, since God has no image of His own, but as God's image, or rather *to be* God's image, that is to deputize in the created world for the transcendent God who remains outside the world order. That man in God's image means that he is the visible corporal representative of the invisible, bodiless God, Clines (101).

Our conclusion above carries within itself the element of function, which would help us address the reason why man was

created so unique and different from other creatures and creations of God. In verse 26 of Genesis 1, we could see clearly that immediately after God's resolve to create man ". . . in our image, in our likeness" the purpose of man was mentioned, which is to "let them rule." While appealing to the Hebrew syntax of the Genesis creation narrative, Middleton (2005) concludes that "God's purpose for humanity is to rule, yet he cautioned that the syntax does not permit one to interpret image and rule as equivalents." The syntax of Genesis 1:26 would indeed give us a hint that man was made in the image of God in order to rule. This in other words means that part of God's image in man is the ability to rule other creatures that are not in the image of God. therefore, rule is the necessary and inseparable purpose of humanity, rule is virtually constitutive of the image of God and human dominion is the explicit definition of human existence, (Peterson, 2016, p. 38).

The instruction to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the livestock, the cattle and every creeping thing that moves on the ground and over all the earth" is a call to responsibility called "work." This work refers to "the task of caring for the world God put us in . . . [it] is what humans do in order to produce a result that benefits us, our families, our fellow humans, our society or our environment and also brings the creator, God praise, honor and glory." Agang (2020:87). To have dominion therefore means to engage into work. The only creatures given the mandate of dominion are the human beings, not other animals and so only human beings were given the mandate to work because they were created in the image of God. this is further gleaned from the assertion of Agang (82) when he proceeds that ". . . as human beings, part of what it means to be made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) is that we are like God in doing work . . . God explicitly assigned work to Adam and Eve." Hence, "the dominion of man over creation can hardly be excluded from the content of the image of God." Genesis 2:15 affirms this saying "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Therefore, the sole responsibility of man is to give the earth and everything

therein a responsible care that makes it flourish as the creation of God.

Man, as the representative of God on earth, given the responsibility to “work the earth,” is not a free agent that does with the creation anyhow he likes. There are some guiding principles that would help man relate with other creation as God would. This therefore makes man responsible for his actions towards the environment placed under his care, and God’s command to work and care for creation is the foundation of all ecological ethics that is Biblically informed. At this point, it becomes necessary to categorically underline that “a system of ethics that is responsive to earth must encompass all of the earths’ constituents—biota and abiota in themselves as individual types, in their interactions, and in their collective totality” (Schaefer 2009, p. 111). This means that the scope of our ecological ethics at this point encapsulates the care for every creation both living things and non-living things. Hence to the concept of ecological ethics we now give a turn.

### **THE CONCEPT OF ECOLOGICAL ETHICS**

To begin with, ethics primarily refers to the “philosophical study of right and wrong action” (Lachman, 2006:3). It fundamentally studies moral standards as they relate to human conduct in any given situation. Similarly, ethics for the most part dictates standards or value judgements for human action. In other words, ethics spells out what human actions are acceptable and what actions are unacceptable in his interaction with himself and other entities. Morally speaking, the ethics or principles guiding the actions of an individual towards others flows from his moral consciousness which originated from God since creation, though many philosophers see ethics as a philosophical phenomenon. While ethics concerns itself fundamentally with right and wrong actions of human beings. The moral principles that try to define one’s responsibility towards the environment are called “environmental ethics” (Verma, 2017, p. 1). Ecological ethics therefore concerns itself

with the interaction between human beings created in the image of God and other creations in the concrete world. It is an all-encompassing phenomenon that considers every creation of God as good (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), valued by God and so must be valued by man whom God created in His image and likeness. This line of argument was further stressed by OKore (2024, p. 3) saying, “ecological ethics goes beyond traditional ethical theories that focus on human-to-human relationships and extends ethical consideration to non-human entities, such as animals, plants, and ecosystems.” Having this scope of ecological ethics in mind, the question that confronts us here and now is; what are the core ethical principles that should guide our ecological responsibility? Below are some of these principles.

### **Valuing the Goodness of Creation**

As we seek to establish the contours of our ecological ethics, it becomes critical that we begin with the mention of the fact that ecological ethics becomes a theological reality by recognizing and respecting the goodness of the entire creation. In the Genesis creation narrative, we could clearly see that after a creation activity takes place, God qualifies what He had created by evaluating it saying “and . . . it was good.” This evaluation occurred five times in relation to the environment, and when he finally finished His work of creation by creating man on the sixth day, the narrator concluded “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” Gen. 1:31. Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative statements “all that he had made” and “it was very good” bring to the fore without mincing words that the entire creation is good and hence needs to be valued. However, as scholars tried to think and explain valuing the goodness of creation, many questions were raised beyond the answers provided. Some of these questions are; should the other creations be valued by man instrumentally as means to human ends or intrinsically as ends in themselves? If other-than-human entities are valued intrinsically, does their value originate and persist in them to be discovered by humans or is



their value something that humans create and attribute to them? These and more other questions relating to the valuing and respecting the goodness of creation are pivotal in exploring why ethical principles need to be applied in man's relationship with other creation. In responding to the above questions, it is noteworthy that all the creations of God both living and non-living deserve to be valued and respected because they derive their intrinsic goodness from their creator. This is clearly pointed out by Schaefer (18) when he opines that "this valuation is realistic, relevant, and meaningful for Christians because of their relationship with the ultimate bestower of value who is God. since before the creation of man, God saw and called the other creations "good." This is to mean that other creations both biota and abiota do not need the conjunction of man before it is considered good and before it is valued. It has its internal, inbuilt value given by God and this value must be respected by all and should be a guiding principle for our relationship with the environment.

### **Sustainability of Creation**

Ecological ethics does not only recognize and advocates the valuing of the goodness of creation, but it equally emphasizes the importance of sustainability. This in the words of Okore (p. 4) refers to "the ability of a system to maintain ecological balance over time." He further clarifies that "it recognizes that the natural world had limits and that humans must live within those limits to ensure the long-term health and wellbeing of the planet" (P. 4.). to further buttress the concept of environmental sustainability, Siddiqui *et al* (2024) assert that "Sustainability. . . embodies the harmony between environmental preservation, social equity, and economic prosperity, striving to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own." Sustainability is an ecological ethical principle that restrain human beings on how they ought to use other creations, it dictates the boundaries which man ought not to cross while using other creations. It is an ethical principle because it spells out in clear terms to what extent the use of

other creations is ethically acceptable and unacceptable. As man works the earth, he is responsible to ensure a future that transcends short-term gains, through sustainable practices that work in harmonizing the well-being of both humanity and the planet such that both human beings and the environment flourish in mutual interaction as designed by God.

### **Stewardship**

Ecological ethics further makes it a point of duty to emphasize the importance of stewardship which stands in sharp contrast with the dominion theology. This stewardship refers to the responsible management of the other-than-human entities. Gubazire (2022) with a kin interest on this concept explains that “stewardship describes a responsible treatment of the natural world through a caring attitude and safeguarding practice. It challenges human beings to committedly preserve nature and to only tamper with it for the procurement of basic need.” This therefore means that stewardship as an ethical principle guides human action with regards to the use of the environment such that exploitation is not allowed, but tender care be shown to the environment because it possesses an intrinsic value within itself.

### **Non- maleficence**

In general terms, non-maleficence refers to “promoting the well-being of those with whom we interact” (Edward, 2009). It is further defined by Beauchamp and Childress (2019) as “the obligation to abstain from causing harm to others.” Now in relation to humans’ interaction with the environment, ecological ethics acknowledges that man as created to work the earth has the moral obligation not to harm the natural world in any way. Furthermore, non-maleficence entails that ecological ethics recognizes that human actions could have detrimental impacts on the environment placed under his care. Therefore, man must take critical and deliberate measures on how to minimize those impacts for the benefit of all the entities in the

creation order. Nonetheless, what should be the motivation towards a non-maleficent attitude towards the environment is the clear fact that everything created by God has inherent value and hence ought to be respected and cared for.

### **Justice**

It is crucial to mention at this point that ecological ethics stresses the importance of justice as well. In defining this term, Cole *et al* (2001) understands it as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.” Clemence (34) clarifies that “Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.” fascinatingly, it is observed that all these elements of ecological ethics including environmental justice focus on man’s behavior in relation to the environment. Yet, it is notable that environmental justice does not only allow an individual dictate what he does with God’s creation around him/her, but other social bodies (like Environmental protection agencies) get involved in order to help people control their actions towards the environment through formulating, implementing and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. This is so because man, on a natural ground is liable to be unjust to other creations because of the effect of the fall.

### **A SYNOPSIS OF THE DOMINANT PERSPECTIVES IN ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE**

The devastating increase in environmental problems witnessed in the past decades such as pollution, environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, and overexploitation of natural resources in the countries of the world has brought to consciousness the need to declare a state of emergency to these problems. In the time past, the scientists were left to address these issues but in recent times,

theologians have seen the need to address these problems much better using the scripture as their point of departure. Hence, Conradie (2020) affirms that “discourse on ecotheology has been thriving in the academy since the 1970s in all major geopolitical contexts around the world, typically in different ways, depending on particular concerns” The approaches used in discussing ecotheology or environmental concerns are numerous all depending on the concern one has in mind, but the dominant perspectives are: anthropocentric, theocentric, biocentric and Christocentric.

### **Anthropocentric Approach**

When you ask a layman and many religious people of the reason behind God creating plants, animals and other natural entities, the common answer would be “for man’s use.” This understanding gives a clear picture of the anthropocentric view of nature and it has made anthropocentric approach to ecology the most popular perspective in addressing environmental concerns across the world. this view originated from Genesis 1:26’s assertion where God said “Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, **so** that they may **rule**. . . and God said to them . . . increase in number, fill the earth and **subdue** it. . . **rule over** . . .” most if not all discourses on anthropological perspective of environment use this text as a point of departure. Therefore, this perspective has been viewed as an “environmental theory that considers the human species (*Anthropos*) as superior to non-human species (natural world). It places human beings at a higher position on the ecological scale. Mankind is above everything (Gubazire,302).

This is the reason why White accused Christianity as the cause of our ecological crisis as mentioned earlier. The adherents of this view hold that, “the natural world bears value only when it serves human interests” (Passmore, 1974, p. 43), “the earth’ species and ecosystems should be preserved for the sake of human well-being . . . only humankind is the reference point of deep seated values” (Norton, 1984, p. 131). Massaquoi (p. 35)

further explains that “the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in particular, embraced the view of human progress at the expense of natural resources.” Anthropocentrism does not accord value and respect to other-than human creation because the environment was ultimately made for the enjoyment of man, hence the environment finds its worth extrinsically when used by man not intrinsically as create by God. Gubazire (303) sums it all by emphasizing that anthropocentrism does not guard the environment against harmful exploitation. It gladly justifies human encouragement of the natural world, even for lucrative ends (non-basic needs)

Anthropocentric view of ecology by its nature, texture and purpose proves itself inadequate to address the problems of our environment. In fact, this view adds more problems than solution. This view is selfish and one-sided, it made man to forget that the kind of relationship that should exist between him and other constituents of the environment should be symbiotic relationship not dominion because both depend on each other for survival, (Olanisebe, p. 24). However, the inadequacy of this approach resulted to another proposed approach which places the environment at the heart of its discourse.

### **Biocentrism Approach**

The anthropocentric perspective of the environment as discussed above was considered a very harmful approach to the environment. This is because it does not consider the other-than-human entities to have any value independently, unless they are used by human beings. In other words, their value depends on the value given them by man. Now, with kin consideration of the harm caused by the anthropocentric approach, a biocentric approach was proposed as a solution to our environmental crisis. Massaquoi (p. 37) commenting on this alternative approach argues that:

“with Christianity perceived as anthropocentric and therefore part of the environmental problem, many are turning to a view that teaches that the entire natural realm, with its chain of dependencies, is the nucleus of all existence on earth. The environment itself is the ultimate reference point of all meaning and values. The earth is to be appreciated for its own sake without the consideration of humanity.

By implication, biocentric approach is a total opposite of the anthropocentric approach to the environmental problems that the world battles with ceaselessly. It considers the other-than-human entities as the epicenter of creation, holding that its value supersedes that of humanity. Johansson (2012) elucidates that “the founding idea in biocentrism is that humans are part of nature and that also other living beings have moral significance.” Remarkably, the advocates of this view are however of the opinion that the only hope of redeeming humanity from the arrogance and greed that characterizes it, is through placing adequate emphasis on nature and acknowledging its inbuilt value. This view regards human beings as part of the environment, not above it. It is a view that considers the environment first and any other thing second. One of the strengths of this point of view is that, it gives humanity a sense of belonging to the environment in which he lives, but it calls humanity to live responsibly as a member of the whole ecosystem. Young (1994) spoke well to the credit of the advocates of this approach saying “those who hold strongly to biocentrism are often the most vocal and consistent in living a sensitive, resources-conserving lifestyle.”

Worthy of note at this point is the obvious truth that biocentric perspective is equally deficient in addressing ecological problems too. This is because “biocentrism in its purest form, denies any form of deity . . . [and] humankind is evolving, and not created” (Massaquoi, 37). At the heart of biocentric point of view lies the goal of harmonious interaction of nature through the removal of a definable god and making nature becomes god

as Thomas (1966) clearly stated. Furthermore, this approach to ecology undermines any proposed solution to earth problem, it rather claims that the earth possesses within itself the ability to solve its problems and the problems of humanity, even though when followed closely to its ultimate end, it sees human beings as responsible to guard the creation not to consume as anthropocentric approach presents. In addition, this approach is a weak approach because in its utmost desire to protect nature, it create little space for God who is actively concerned and involved with His creation. Hence, as a result of all these flaws this approach could not addresses our ecological problems and there comes a need for a more adequate approach.

### **Theocentric Approach**

With the inadequacies of the two approaches presented above, the theocentric perspective comes in to the scene been optimistic to salvage the situation. Massaquoi admitting this need, furthered that “the past failure of anthropocentrism and the impending failure of biocentrism cry out for the viable alternative of theocentrism.” The anthropocentric viewpoint made man the center and lord of creation, while the biocentric made creation the lord of itself, the theocentric now comes in, to place God the creator at the center of creation. This perspective presents God as the source of value, meaning and purpose of creation, everything exists to serve the purpose of God and He sustains and make life possible. Rossi (1985) could not keep silent on this matter until he avows that “theocentrism condemns the tragic distortion of anthropocentrism while affirming mankind’s priestly role at the center of creation.” this in other words stresses that theocentric approach emancipates man from been at the center of creation and meaning of existence, but placed man within the ecosystem so that he becomes a steward rather than being a ruler or exploitative dominator. Furthermore, it should be understood that, it is the recognition of God’s involvement in creation and the understating that the natural world is God’s creation that

brings about the conception of ecotheology, which ultimately gives God His deserved space as unchallenging and remains unchangeably sovereign in creation

Theocentrism though considered adequate to encompass both anthropocentric and biocentric approaches, it clearly fails to recognize the fallen nature of man which affects not only himself but creation entirely. Hence, man and the environment need redemption and recreation. This therefore brought about a Christocentric look at the environmental problems of the world.

### **Christocentric Approach**

As presented above, the theocentric approach to ecology is an exceptional approach, in the sense that it recognizes God as its epicenter, the creator and sustainer who gives value to his creation. It however came to the fore that this approach could not recognize the fallen nature of man which inevitably distorts his interaction with other creation. Hence, the inception of the Christocentric approach is meant to address the issues that other approaches could not address as discussed above. Ituma (2012) says “Christocentric ecotheology is a religious concept that addresses ecological problems from Christian religious approach.” Jenkins (2008) having acknowledged the dominance of other approaches to ecological issues argues for the use of soteriological narratives in the pursuit of Christian eco-ethics.” The soteriological approach can be used interchangeably with Christocentric approach in the sense that they found their footing on the truth that “just as God, through Christ is creator of all things, so in Christ God is the redeemer of all things” Conradie (2010). In other words, both soteriological and Christocentric approaches placed the person and work of Christ at the center of ecological discourse, De Wit (2013). With this in mind, Moltmann (1997) appeals that “we are challenged to live our lives in such a way that we enable the rest of creation to fulfil its eschatological goals.” This view admits that salvation



in Christ extends beyond people, including the whole creation (Col. 1:15-20).

Christocentric approach recognizes that both humanity and the earth are in a state of fallen-ness which makes man's abuse of creation inevitable and hence in need of Christ's redemptive work which would bring about absolute reconstitution and reconciliation between humanity and nature for a better relationship in which man takes seriously his God-given mandate of being an ambassador of God here on earth. Hence, Christocentric approach would enable humanity to transform and change its exploitative attitude towards the environment knowing fully well that Jesus Christ also died for the environment and therefore, the environment also awaits renewal at the second coming of Christ. However, it should be noted that holding unto this approach alone would not address the ecological problems of the world, in the sense that it could lead to abdication of moral responsibility. Therefore, as we shall see later, integrating the above views as advocated in this paper is the best way of adequately dealing with these ecological challenges.

### **A TRIANGULATION OF THE APPROACHES TO ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE**

The discussion of the dominant approaches to ecological discourse above shows in clear terms that all the approaches when taken to the extreme are inadequate in solving our ecological problems. But now, the question is; how can a triangulation of these approaches present us a good and balanced ecological ethics of responsibility advocating that man, made in the image of God was created to work the earth? This approach argues that it is unwise to discard either of these approaches. Rather, these approaches could be synthesized in order to bring balance as we address the ecological problems bedeviling the world at large. In doing this, we shall consider man's ethical responsibility based on the synthesis of the dominant approaches.

Firstly, anthropocentrism as discussed earlier is a man-centered approach, which gives man the liberty to use God's creation as he deems fit. We are not at this point saying that the mandate God gave man in Genesis is not factual, but we are aligning with other giants to agree that so much misinterpretation of the mandate has been in existence. Therefore, this triangulated approach is here advocating that in a trial to present a man-centered approach, that God gave man the earth for his use, extremism must be avoided. This in other words means that God had never intended that man uses creation as an end in itself. Rather, the primary goal of creation must be achieved in man's use of creation—which is responsible use of creation to the glory of God and the flourishing of humanity. This, then, discloses the fact that for anthropocentric approach to address the ecological problems of the world, it must embrace within itself the need for ecologically-minded people, people of good moral character, people who embody ecological virtues and appropriate attitudes towards the natural environment. This approach calls for a transformative character that strips humanity from its ego and self-centeredness against the environment to a responsible representation of his master—the creator of both man and the environment. Therefore, we declare that man can never be a master of the environment, but a creature among creatures to experience and share a symbiotic interaction as both are sustained under the providence of the creator.

Secondly, the biocentric approach explained also comes with its extreme respect for the environment which at some point it was considered a god on its own. We further explained that it opposes anthropocentrism in that it considers humanity as a simple biological mechanism, no difference from the rest of of the animal kingdom, Massaquoi (p. 38). This view when held to the extreme, like pantheism could lead to idol worship where people worship nature instead of the creator of nature. We, however noted that noble is the desire of biocentric approach to appreciate the beauty of nature, but considering nature as equal with man is a serious fallacy. Hence, the triangulated

approach comes in to bring both anthropocentric and biocentric perspectives together to argue that, man should use the creation responsibly acknowledging its goodness, value and beauty, but not to the extent of giving creation the value and respect accorded to God the creator. Man, cannot be equal with other creation, simply because he was made in the image of God, hence a representative of God in caring for creation as God would.

Thirdly, the theocentric approach was highlighted to be the most acceptable approach to ecological crisis by many Christian theologians. This perspective takes into critical consideration of God as the creator and sustainer of creation. From Him originates the intrinsic value of all creation. In other words, whether the creation is useful to man or not, it has value within it as deposited by God Himself. Furthermore, this perspective gives God His proper place as the creator and sustainer of creation who is constantly involve in His creation. However, it was discovered that if this approach is also held extremely, neglecting the good aspects of anthropocentric and biocentric approaches, addressing our ecological issues would be inadequate, because it would certainly leave other important components of environmental care out of the game. Hence, we vehemently argued that while it is true that God is the creator and should be the center of creation, but it is still true that we ought to focus on God through Christ through whom humanity and creation would be transformed.

Fourthly, the Christocentric approach helped us to underscore that Christ should be the focus of creation in that just as through him, God created the world and all therein, it is also through him that God would renew, transform and redeem creation ultimately. This approach when taken seriously without integration with other approaches would certain make man become irresponsible as regards the care for creation holding that since creation will eventually be renewed at the eschaton, then there is no need to bother about caring for it.

**ECOLOGICAL ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY AS DERIVED FROM THE TRIANGULATED APPROACH**

The triangulated approach used in this work as used in the above scrutiny of the different popular approaches to ecological issues, we at this point can draw some important truths and lessons for ecological ethics of responsibility. The following truths could be discerned:

**It is man's ethical responsibility to use God's creation for his flourishing**

Previously, we have explored that one of the prominent approaches to ecology is "anthropocentrism" which regards man as the king or god of creation. This view as underlined above considered that the value of creation depends on how much man values it. Furthermore, we could recall that this approach got originated supposedly from God's instruction that man should "rule over and subdue creation." As we discussed this view, we categorically expressed that this view is inadequate in terms of addressing the ecological problems that we have in the world today. Therefore, a triangulated approach at this point suggests that inasmuch as it is wrong and against God's intention that other-than-human entities to be abused, it should be noted that man has the ethical and moral responsibility to use God's creation for his flourishing. As man uses the creation, he is not allowed to exercise dominion in his interaction with creation, rather man is only allowed to use God's creation according to "reason." This is because it is only humans who can use their reasoning capacity to determine how to use other entities and this ability is unique to humans among other corporal creatures.

Furthermore, the triangulated approach advocates that as man use creation, it is his ethical responsibility to use it moderately for the necessities of life. Tertullian (in Schaefer, 197) opines that "God blessed the entirety of creation for wholesome and advantageous uses by humankind, he found a wide difference

between purpose and misuse and between moderation and excess.” Man is not allowed to be irresponsible in his excess use of God’s creation beyond his needs, but he should responsibly use it gratefully as blessings from God. Therefore, in ecological ethics of responsibility man is called upon to restrict himself to use creation only for the satisfaction of his needs, not his wants, (Butkus, 2002).

**It is man’s ethical responsibility to care and sustain the environment**

The biocentric perspective as clearly discussed above showcased that the environment was given utmost importance, such that it was considered self-sustaining and in fact capable of sustaining humanity. This view is however debunked by the triangulated approach holding to the fact that the environment needs humanity as part of the elements of symbiosis. Both the environment and humanity are interconnected and hence are interdependent upon each other for their flourishing. Therefore, we gleaned from the triangulation that it is man’s ethical responsibility to care for and sustain the environment in which he lives and upon which he depends for survival. However, this approach calls the attention of humanity not to depend on the environment as if it has no creator, hence becomes idol worshipper, rather the caring relationship should be that man acknowledges that God created the environment and entrusted it unto man for a responsible stewardship through which man brings honor to God ultimately. Nevertheless, as man uses and cares for the environment, he should know that he is accountable to God for how he used it, and so he must use it appropriately limiting usage only to necessities of life while ensuring availability for future human use (Schaefer, 213).

**It is man’s ethical responsibility to use the creation and bring glory to God**

God as the center of all ecological discourse is the advocacy of the theocentric approach. However, the triangulation of these

various perspectives reveals that holding unto this view alone certainly abdicate other aspects of environmental issue out. At this point therefore, the triangulation of these approaches informs us that as man use the creation for his flourishing, he should also take care of the creation. In addition, as he does that he should make sure that he uses the creation in order to point to God as the ultimate. It is yet pertinent to underline that, it is not enough to consider God as the epicenter of ecological discourses, but man ought to use the creation of God as a means of knowing about God. This would inevitably help man to know about some of God's characteristics such as His goodness, power and wisdom. Christians are to relate with the world in a way that posits God as Lord over nature with humankind as its manager (Massaquoi, 43). Nonetheless, man is given the ethical responsibility to help the creation fulfil its mandate or primary purpose, which is to showcase the handiwork of God and bring Him glory always, and man is saddled with the ethical responsibility of acknowledging and thanking God for the blessings of earth. Man's use of creation, must be to the glory of God alone. As man flourishes through the use of God's blessings in the environment, God is being glorified.

**It is man's ethical responsibility to use the creation and point to Christ.**

At the heart of triangulated approach to Christocentric perspective lies the truth that, it is man's ethical responsibility as created in the image of God to work the earth while pointing to Christ the redeemer of both man the environment. In doing this, man is called upon to relate with the environment acknowledging the obvious truth that his fallen nature has also affected his relationship with the environment. As such, man must relate with the environment with all sense of carefulness knowing that the environment been infected by human sin envelopes within itself entities that could harm his life in the process of their interaction. It is argued that discussing ecological matters only at the level of theocentric view would not

allow man to project into the ultimate future of all creation. It is therefore important to note that as man uses the creation of God, he is saddled with the responsibility of pointing others to Christ which could serve as a starting point for evangelism through the use of nature. Man is at this point cautioned not to use the creation of God as if God does not care for it. God's care for the creation is shown through his ultimate desire to transform it from the corruption it experienced through the fall of man. This reality is captured vividly in Romans 8:20-22 when it says "for the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." Human beings are called and given the responsibility to use the earth responsibly as both await emancipation by Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

This work presents a triangulated approach to ecological discourse. It argued that each of the dominant approaches (anthropocentric, biocentric, theocentric and Christocentric) used in addressing the ecological concerns of our world is inadequate to solve the problems. This is because each approach has its own flaws and areas of interest while neglecting other vital aspects of the matter. Therefore, this paper proposed the use of this triangulated approach, which possesses the capacity of drawing a wealth of information from each approach in other to collectively address our ecological problems absolutely. However, the use of triangulated approach advocated that in all the dominant approaches, extremes must be avoided inasmuch as a balance needs to be created in our ecological discourse. hence, the triangulation reveals that man as created in the image of God is given the responsibility of using God's creation for his flourishing, and as he uses the creation, he must use it based on reason and necessity, ensuring availability for future use and knowing that he would

be held accountable for how he use God's creation. Nonetheless, this approach divulges that it is man's ethical responsibility to offer a responsible care for creation as God Himself would, but must not get involved with it to the extent that it becomes like a god to him. Furthermore, the paper also exposes that man is given the ethical responsibility to use the creation in order to showcase and bring glory to the creator and that God desires to renew creation through Jesus Christ which equally offers man the responsibility to use the creation and point people to Christ who is the redeemer of both man and the environment. Finally, it is believed that when man responsibly use creation, and adequately takes care of it pointing God as the absolute creator and sustainer who through Christ restores the dignity of creation and redeems both man and creation, then our ecological problems would be addressed sufficiently to the glory of God the creator.

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