Environmental Stewardship: Biblical Theology as a Basis for Ecclesial Participation.

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Abstract

Environmental problems and climate change have recently emerged asenormous problems affecting the world. Various organizations and groups have been actively trying to respond to this menace. Christians however all over the world are demonstrating passive attitude towards environmental management. Many Christians believe that there is lack of clear Biblical guidance on their role in environmental matters. They thus do not know how God expects them to act. Other Christians are trying to get such guidance from non-biblical sources, which are not authoritative enough to compel Christians to act in certain ways. This study seeks to answer the question: "How should a Christian act towards the environment?"To answer the question, a descriptive exegetical study was conducted on scriptural passages linked to key doctrines (Creation, Man, Sin, Covenant, Christology, Eschatology and Salvation) to find out if they also provide direction on how Christians need to treat the environment. These key theological themes were chosen because they are regarded fundamental to orthodox Christian faith. The findings of this study show that most of the scriptures linked to key theological themes also provide guidance on how Christians should treat the environment.

Key Words: Environment, Stewardship, Theology, Biblical, Dominion, Responsible.

Bible Version used: New International Version.

Introduction

Environmental crisis, evidenced by the frequency of drought and floods, coupled with increasing diseases, chronic lack of food, and poverty, is darkening the future of the Kenyan people (Brown, 2006). According to the *Atlas of our Changing Environment* (2009), natural disasters such as drought and flood, coupled with other challenges such as crop failure, water scarcity, and growing desertification are diminishing the chances of survival, making life in Kenya increasingly difficult and hopeless. About 80% of Kenya is dry and gradually turning into a desert (Ibid). According to Mark Kipkurwa Boitt and Patrick Ambi Odima (2017), desertification in Kenya has been sweeping at an alarming rate. In 2013, the minister of environment in Kenya, Judy Wakhungu reported that drought had eroded the country's natural resources to an extent that they were inadequate for production and support of livelihoods in the country (Otieno, 2013).In 2015, the river that attracts a lot of tourists because of the wildebeests—Mara, dried for the first time in history. In 2016, the government reported that the source of water that serves Nairobi city was in the lowest level in history, and the government was planning to divert a river from Murang'a County, in order to salvage the situation in the city. In 2017, the government has had to import food from South America to feed its citizens.

Intervention measures fronted by the Kenyan government included irrigation, for instance in GalanaKulalu Irrigation Schemes, bore holes, for instance in Machakos, Kitui and Makueni counties, provision of relief food, formulation of policies to assist in waste management etc. In spite of these, food is still a problem, dumping sites, for instance Dandora, continue to increase in size, rivers continue to dry, deforestation persists, and life continues to be difficult (Atlas of

our Changing Environment, 2013). Political solutions, as was the case with 'Mau eviction,' have not yielded much.

There is general consensus among many analysts that these are only the consequences of a deeper problem, which according to the Presbyterian Eco-Justice Task Force, (1989:7) has largely "neither been noticed nor apprehended." While many people are trying to deal with a physical problem, the root cause of the entire menace may be lying undeterred. The Cape Town Confession (2010) summarizes the real problem as: 'our collusion in the toxic idolatry of consumerism.' The solution to this menace therefore, as Edward Brown (2006) affirms is spiritual intervention. The challenge however has been that, while "theology" has been extensively researched, systematized, and taught for several years, clear guidance for participation in environmental stewardship is still missing. No wonder, in too many churches, in too many seminaries, in too many Christian organizations, in too many Christian meetings, Christians do not know what to do, and cannot guide anybody on the right course of action, because they think that solution will come from another quarter.

Richard John Neuhaus (1997:20) declares:

> Too many philosophers and religious thinkers, including serious Christians, have thought it necessary to look outside the Christian tradition for a way of understanding the nature and destiny of the universe, when a more convincing account can be developed from within the tradition.

It therefore means that, for a Christian, there are sufficient instructions and guidance on what needs to be done to and about nature. This requires a change in perception. Such a perspective is the only fertile ground that can allow seeds of Christian responsibility to grow. The Cape Town Confessions (CTC) states that the right perspective is to view environmental care as "a gospel issue" in the same breath as we would view sin, and providence (CTC I.7.A, 2010).

Environmental Stewardship Ecclesial Participation Outcomes: Conceptual Framework

The central concept under consideration is ecclesial participation. Ecclesial participation in this study is the active and wilful involvement of the church in activities that promote environmental stewardship. The use of this concept implies 'engagement' and 'conservation attitude.' Engagement means involvement of and by the Church in environmental activities, particularly soil conservation, water conservation, tree cover management (afforestation and caring for existing tree cover), and waste management). Conservation attitude includes personal drive to conserve the environment by reusing resources, reducing waste, and leading simple lifestyles (loathing consumerism).

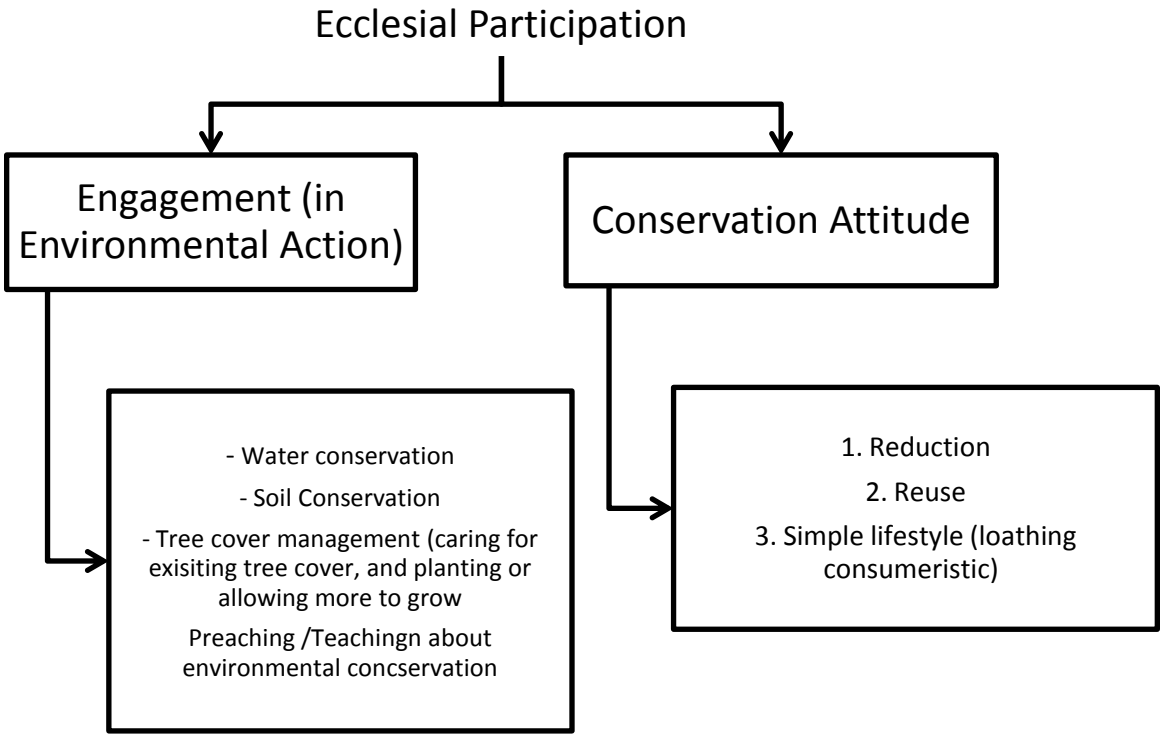


Figure 1: Envisioned Outcomes of Ecclesial Participation

It is argued in this paper that attainment of these participatory dimensions such as water conservation, and simplistic lifestyle depends majorly on the influence of the theology held. It is believed that participants,who hold convincing beliefs that they have a spiritual responsibility to care for the environment, are more emboldened to participate in environmental stewardship.

Methodology

This is a descriptive study, intended to find out whether selected scriptural reference linked to key theological themes, also have guidance on how human beings should treat the environment. Purposive sampling used to determine key theological themes to be studied, based leading authors in systematic theology: Millard Erickson (1983) and Wayne Grudem (1994). The majordoctrines that selected were Creation, Man, Sin, Covenant, Christology, Eschatology and Salvation. These themes are given extended coverage in the mentioned books, taking hundreds of pages and citing hundreds of scriptural references. This study will only use the summarized conclusions, most of which there is concurrence between these two authors. Exegetical method was used to find meaning and application of the selected scriptural references, to determine whether they had guidance on how human beings should treat the environment.

Findings

The study of key themes revealed that all the selected scriptures linked to key theological themes also provided guidance on how human beings should treat the environment, which will trigger ecclesial participation.

Doctrine of God and Creation in Relation to Environmental Stewardship

Scriptures linked to God as a creator of the universe include Genesis 1-2, Job 41:11, Psalms 24, John 1:1-5, Colossians 1:15-17, among others. These passages first teach that entire creation belongs to God and worships God(Psalms 24; Job 41:11). According to Dewitt (1998), God creates everything with intentions of earning worship and praise from it. The rest on the seventh day was not an afterthought, instead it was the goal.It is not a theological appendix to the creation account, but just a conclusion of the main events. Dewitt states that it was to "bring a closure now, that the main event of creating people has been reported. It intimates the purpose of creation and the cosmos. God not only sets up the cosmos to serve as his temple. He is making a rest for himself, a rest provided for by the completed cosmos" (DeWitt 1998, 35).

The end of the book of Psalms proclaims, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" This command to worship God is addressed not just to his human creation but to other animate life. In Psalm 148, the exhortation is widened to include all creation- sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, mountains, trees and birds, all owe their existence to him, and so are to offer him praise. The Psalmist is not concerned with how these various natural elements worship the Lord, but with the part that the whole earth plays in glorifying God (Marlow, 2008). The creation had original blessedness and goodness that emanated from God. If Genesis chapter 1 was a poem, then the end of every stanza was the same: 'and God saw that it was good.' The blessedness is aptly demonstrated by the diversity shown. In Genesis 1:11-12, the phrase "according to their kinds" is used three times. As shown in Genesis, diversity is a key aspect of God's blessedness. It can be thus argued that,Christian's treatment of the environment show how they value and worship the creator, God.

Doctrine of Sin in relation to Environmental Stewardship

Sin is a major theological theme in Christian theology. It is the result of broken relationship between God and humanity. This brokenness of relationship also affects human treatment of the environment. As a result, as Gus Speth (2013, in Harris 2016:1) observes, humanity exhibits characteristics such as 'greed,' 'consumerism,' 'selfishness,' 'carelessness' and 'neglect' towards the environment. There is an underlying spiritual dissonance in the universe that makes it difficult for humanity to live within its means and in harmony with the natural system that supports their lives. In the *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis asserts:

> This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (*Laudato Si* 2015, 2).

The consequence of human action therefore, has been "the groaning of creation" (Romans 8:22). Even in the Old Testament, the prophets (Jeremiah 12:4; Hosea 4:1) described the earth as mourning (Marlow 2008, 10). According to Ben Lowe (2009), sin kills the 'shalom' that was there from the beginning. A careful reading and analysis of the Old Testament reveals that this shalom comes as a result of positive relationships between God, humanity and non-human creation. He posits:

> Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace. Meaning more than simply absence of conflict, however, it is about right relationships between God and everything else, where wholeness and flourishing occurs without opposition. Such Shalom was present in the Garden of Eden and its complete restoration is what we eagerly anticipate in the kingdom of God (Ibid, 27).

Cornelius PlantingaJr (1995) points out that whatever opposes God's intentions and violates his shalom, is sin. The Fall of Man in Genesis resulted in death, not just of humanity but also of relationship. The original shalom was positive relationship between God, humanity and non-human creation. Hillary Marlow graphically represents this in triangular version where God, humans, and non-human creation relate very well in a give and take scenario (Marlow 2008:9). God satisfy humans and humans serve God. God sustains non-human creation, and in return he receives glory and worship. Human relationship to non-human creation is described in terms of stewardship and in return humans receive satisfaction. Lowe (2009) observes that "all three levels of human relationships-with God, with one another, and creation, are being violated." Prophets such as Micah, Amos, and Isaiah advocated for justice and righteousness and for the restoration of God's purpose for human relationships, his shalom in the world. What is not so often noted is that the absence of these core values in society results in disruption to the land, including drought and failed harvests (Micah 6:15; Amos 5:11) and more widespread devastation of the physical landscape (Amos 8:7-8; Isaiah 1:7-8). If human beings sin by neglecting God's fundamental principles of justice and righteousness, there are consequences in the wider environment.

This being the case, the most careful science and the best economic theories and the most profound governmental policies, while necessary, will never be enough. Spiritual problem demands a spiritual solution (Brown 2006). The Church's mission therefore of fighting sin, means that when God forgives human sin and blesses the earth, environmental health is also realized. Ecclesial participation in this aspect is related to the ministry of preaching for holy living, and creating awareness that God's promise of blessing the earth, is a gift that accompanies forgiveness to repentant sinners.

Doctrine of Humanity and Environmental Stewardship

The third doctrine that has been given prominence in theology is what is commonly known as "the doctrine of Man". It has been widely accepted that humanity is central to the entire creation.

Doctrine of Humanity verses Dominion and Anthropocentricism

The whole creation is recorded to have looked "very good" to God only after Adam and Eve had entered the scene. Some commentators have argued that this statement suggests that there is something that only humanity could add to make the entire creation 'very good.' This therefore means that humanity means a lot even to God. Ironically, scathing attack levelled against Christianity by Lynn White in 1967 is related to the doctrine of humanity. White Jr., using passages related to commissioning of Adam in Genesis 1-2, accused Christian teaching of anthropocentricism and dominion as being the cause of environmental degradation. Does the doctrine of humanity really advocate for anthropocentrism and destructive dominion? The following section examines the interpretation of the passages used as reference for these positions.

Dominion

God declares in Genesis 1 to Adam and Eve,

> "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28).

This has been interpreted by others to mean that humanity was given uncensored freedom to exploit the environment. One such conclusion was made by Lynn White Jr. in 1967.

Such conclusions means that Christians destroy the environment lawfully, based on an alleged biblical permission. A careful study of the contextual meaning of the word dominion, used, reveal otherwise. It reveals that, as Robert Manahan (1991) observes, human beings are to rule over the earth and nature, but he is to be a biblical ruler who is modelled after Jesus Christ, a servant king (Mark 10:45), who keeps and protects the environment. The idea was for human beings to obey God even in their actions on nature. Nature was to obey humanity, as humanity obeys God. God was to be beneficent to humanity as humanity becomes beneficent to nature. In Genesis 2:15 Adam was to work and care for the land, as an elaboration of an instruction he was given to have dominion. Adam was created in the image of God, and so expected to use what God had provided, to bring forth beauty and accomplishment to the creation of God. Other scriptures pointing out to stringent expectation of a human being include the book of Deuteronomy 23:13, where there is guidance provided for the disposal of human waste, and in Exodus, guidance is given on the rest that the land should get. In Deuteronomy, guidance is given in the use of land, and trees (Deuteronomy 20:19-20).

A human being was therefore not just the last created being, but a co-creator with God, with assigned responsibility to care and maintain the created blessedness. This theme of human responsibility to care for the environment is maintained throughout the Bible. The doctrine of man advocates for stewardship mind-set. Human beings are to care for what belongs to God.

Anthropocentricism

According to John Calvin (Institutes Volume 1, 22), "the end for which all things were created was that none of the convenience and necessities of life might be wanting to men." In this view, humanity is portrayed as being the centre of creation. In this paper, this view is understood as anthropocentricism.

Anthropocentricism is a human centred perspective of the entire creation, positioning a human being as being the very reason creation exists. A careful study of the Genesis 1 however reveals that man is positioned as a steward, rather than a 'god' to be revered by the creation. Arguing against anthropocentricism, Hillary Marlow (2008) asserts:

> Such a human-centred perspective on God's world seems to take little account of the diversity, complexity and, to our minds, strangeness of much of the natural world, which is now accessible to us through a wealth of nature films and documentaries. But it also carries a more profound theological weakness affecting our view of God as well as of the world, and can lead us to a self-centred and childish understanding of God as the one who always gives us whatever we want. If we see the rest of the world- the 'non-human creation'- as existing purely for human benefit, we fail to take seriously either the creation or its creator. Such attitudes have contributed to exploitative and damaging practice in many parts of the world, as human beings have tried to take what they regarded as their right, without regard for the consequences (Ibid, 5).

Anthropocentricism is therefore a view that is totally against the Biblical teaching. Today our planet faces an environmental crisis wrought by the ever-increasing demands and changes of its human population. Ironically it is this same humanity which God designated to care for the earth, not to destroy it.

The Place of a Human Being in Environmental Stewardship

Humankind, both male and female are created in the 'image of God.' In addition they are given special instructions to subdue and have dominion over the animals Genesis 1:27-28). Other scripture clearly show that he is made "a little lower than angels and crowned with glory and honour" (Psalms 8:5). For many Christians this suggests that human beings are regarded as separate from creation, and totally distinct from other created beings. An examination of all factors however reveal otherwise. For example, the fact that Adam is created, in the same day as other animals, and using *adamah*, the dust of the earth, shows that he was part of the creation.

Dyke *et al* (1996:59) adds that God created the universe in such a way that humans are inseparably linked to it, physically as well as spiritually. Out of the common stuff of earth God formed a man: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being' (Genesis 2:7).

The implication of this is that Adam is presented as being part of the creation. For some scholars, the implication of 'dust' is that he is made from nothing. For other scholars, he is made from soil, that is, what had already been made, to show he is physically connected to the ground. Hillary Marlow points out:

> In Genesis 2, the focus narrows to the formation of a single human being (*ha-adam*, "the human') and his purpose in the wider creation. The earth is depicted as ground (*adamah*) without water and without vegetation (v 5-6), but once rain has fallen, the Lord God moulds the human from the dust of the ground and places him in a garden, the Garden of Eden. This humble origin, graphically conveyed by the shared Hebrew root of the word '*adam'* from the *adamah*, to mean human from the humus, is one that the human being shares with the vegetation (v 9) as well as with other animals (v 19). In today's scientific terms, it is a reminder that we are just one of the carbon-based life forms which colonize this planet (Marlow 2009, 18).

Therefore, human beings should understand their position, not as superior, but as responsible. Adam was given the responsibility to rule over what God had made. He is to rule from among, not above. This position makes a human being advantaged and accountable, advantaged in terms of the opportunity to provide for his pleasure from what God has created. Accountable in terms of the expectations to make decisions, and be ready to answer questions concerning those decisions, when the owner comes to ask. The expectations therefore is that Adam was to rule like how Christ rules the Church, not to get pleasure, but to develop and give meaning. Humanity is called apart, to image God in caring for the earth and its creatures.

They are to "subdue and rule over" but also to "work and take care of" (Genesis 2.15). This perspective should suffice to deal effectively with two dangerous worldviews: anthropocentricism and dominion.

God's intention of Adam in Environmental Stewardship

Millard Erickson asserts that proper definition of the term "*adam*" (which was also given as a name for the first male human being), reveals that God had the entire humanity in mind, when he provided natural resources for his consumption and enjoyment. Erickson observes that Adam was a definite historical individual, but nevertheless, he and his wife Eve were the entire human race at that point. Adam contained within him, germinally or seminally, all humans who ever will be within the span of history. God did not promise and provide to Adam alone the rest of creation for consumption. God did not intend for Adam alone to enjoy its benefits. God intended for all the benefits to accrue to all members of the human race, at all times (Erickson in Land & Moore, 1992). This thus requires a stewardship mentality.

According to Marlow (2009), it can be argued that, whatever God intended for Adam and Eve in creation, whatever view he had on them, whatever plans he had in mind, these would be for all humanity as well. What did God intend for Adam? First, as Marlow observes, Adam was created to be a steward. He was to care for the created system, so that everything would benefit. The various parts of the creation are interconnected and thus have interdependency with and upon one another. The fortunes of one part of the universe are tied up with those of other parts. The human depend directly and indirectly on the other creatures, and should not in any way tamper with the system (Ibid).

The ideal stewardship role of humanity, as John Calvin asserts, is closely related to the attitude of contentment. He posits:

> The custody of the garden was given to Adam, to show that we possess the things which God has committed to our hands, on the condition, that being content with the frugal and moderate use of them, we should take care of what shall remain. Let him who possesses a field, so partake of its yearly fruits, that he may not suffer the ground to be injured by negligence; but let him endeavour to hand it down to posterity as he received it, or even better cultivated. Let him so feed on its fruits, that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred or ruined by neglect... Let everyone regard himself as the steward of God in all things which he possesses (Calvin in Sorley 2009, 63).

The word 'stewardship' as used in the Old Testament means being in charge of a house (Genesis 43:19; 44:4; Isaiah 22:15). In the New Testament a steward, *epitropos* (Matthew 20:8; Galatians 4:2) is the one who has been put on trust or honour to care or guard something. Stewardship *oikonomos* (Luke 16:2-3; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10), refers to the act of honouring the owner of the house, by having the right relationships within the home, in relationship to an owner, for who stewardship is performed (Dewitt 1998). Stewardship therefore is acting in God's love to do activities that enhance God's creation in a way that brings honour to Him. This is done first in recognition that harmony, unity, purity and integrity in creation is important to elicit a respect for creation. Secondly, these activities are done to show love to an ailing environment for its own good. As Francis Schaeffer (1970) states, it is the biblical view of nature that gives nature a value in itself. It involves responsible behaviour and lifestyle against greed and consumerism behaviour.

The participants of stewardship are Christians who are in the covenant relationship with God. It does not mean that the people should be rich, or get sponsored by big organizations. Christians need to use whatever is available, learning from the staff of Moses, and the widow's oil in II Kings 4:1-7.

Edward Brown asserts that Christians need to care for the environment more than anyone else, because they have relationships with the creator (Brown 2006, 79). The proper approach to creation care should be theologically sound, scientifically informed and implemented by a community of redeemed people acting out of love for God and for each other. The bar of performance for the Church of course, is higher than is expected of others. The First epistle of John 3:5 state that anyone who claims to know Jesus Christ should also walk in his light. As discussed earlier, Jesus is creator, integrator, and reconciler. Ironically, many who call on his name abuse, neglect, and do not give care about creation. Yet many Christians have not even come to a level where they consider these things carefully, to wonder how they honour God the creator verbally, yet fail to do God's work practically; how they praise God from whom all blessings flow, yet diminish and destroy God's creatures on earth; how they learn at the Church that God created all things in a good condition, yet participate in destructive behaviour. Calvin DeWitt summarises this contradiction precisely: The pieces of this puzzle do not fit! One piece says, "We honour the Great Master!" The other piece says, "We despise his great master pieces!" (Dewitt 1998, 16). Ecclesial participation in environmental stewardship come as a result of proper theological understanding of the doctrine of Man, that he is created, not to be 'god' or have destructive dominion, over the creation, but to care for the earth, so that everything teems with blessedness and goodness.

The Doctrine of 'Covenant' in Relation to Environmental Stewardship

One biblical injunction that clearly demonstrate environmental problem requiring spiritual solution is II Chronicles 7:14 which state: If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

How does God bring this healing? It is evident from scripture, that God brings healing as a gift that accompanies his covenantal promise to repentant hearts. God has a covenant with his people, where he is the suzerain king, while humanity is the vassal. To understand the suzerain-vassal relationship in a covenant, an examination of Hebrew covenants will help.

The Bible has several covenants made between God and specific characters or people groups, for example Noahic, Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Genesis 6:18; 9:12; 17:7; 2 Samuel 7). A covenant is a contract, usually between two parties. According to Sonja Page, biblical covenants are modelled on practices of the societies of the first and second millennium B. C. in the Ancient Near East (Page, 2012, p.1). In the Old Testament times, common covenants were between suzerain and vassal kings. The suzerain king initiated the covenant, and came up with stipulations, sanctions, promises, and for obeying the covenant, and even punishment that would follow in case of disobedience. The Hebrew word for covenant, *berith* has a connotation of mutual agreement between two parties, where both commit to honour their contracts. Like other Ancient Near Eastern treaties, God followed the same pattern when making his covenants with his chosen leaders and Israel. The terms of covenants included the suzerain king providing the stipulations for the covenant. The initiative for making the covenant came from the suzerain king, and so were the other parts of the covenant: stipulations, promises of blessing or curses. In the Biblical covenants, God provided instructions to be followed by his people, with blessings for either obeying and curses for disobeying the instructions. The promises of blessings to certain individuals or people groups, demonstrates God's witness to his faithfulness and nature.

In the covenant that God made with the Israelites, the judgement for either blessings or curses depended directly on the quality of their response to God's covenant.

The sanction was so clear and the promise of blessing so attractive, that the Israelites did not need a reminder of the consequence that would befall them if they disobeyed. Even in the case of Abraham, obedience to God's instruction gave him blessings. When Israelites became disobedient, their promise of blessing was lifted, and replaced with curses, where their land 'vomited them' out into exile. The land motif runs all through the Old Testament, with clear communication of the possibility of loss in case of disobedience. It is possible that the Israelites did not believe that such a loss of land could ever happen. The last deportation of Israelites to exile, in fact included the King of Judah (II Kings 25). After seventy years of exile, some leaders decided to repent, and to lead others in the same. God remembered his promise, and so Israelites were allowed to return to Judah. Ezra reminded the Israelites returning from exile about God's covenant, showing clearly God's stipulations, promises of either blessings or curses, depending on their response. Ezra reports that his audience were 'appalled' and stood from sunrise to midday, listening to God's law, and wondering how they became blatantly disobedient. To them it was clear that God was just in whatever had befallen them.

God's stipulations stressed clearly that continuing possession of the Promised Land dependent entirely upon their faithfulness to God (Deuteronomy 11:8-12). Some Israelites wavered in their trust and obedience along the way towards the Promised Land. The punishment for them was that they would not inherit the land. According to Presbyterian Eco-Justice Task Force, (1989) Israel's greatest sin was breaking of the covenant they had entered with God in two major ways: idolatry and injustice. Israel was expected to worship God alone, but this was not kept. They were expected to treat their neighbours and the earth with justice but this they also failed. Amos addresses those "who trample upon the needy and bring the poor of the land to an end" (Amos 8:4).

The curses that befell Israel for disobedience were devastating to individuals and their nation in similar proportions. Sadly, the punishment and curses also affected the land, resulting in environmental degradation. Presbyterian Eco-Justice Task Force (1989) observes that "a degraded environment is regarded as punishment for a basic stance of disobedience – unfaithfulness to the covenant" (Ibid, 48).

Ken Gnanakan (2004) observes that the connection between land and God-Israel relation clearly communicated to Israel that God was the owner of the land. In fact, God says 'the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants' (Leviticus 25:23); and He refers to it clearly as 'my land' (Jeremiah 2:7; 16:18). The Hebrew word *nahalah* is used in 2 Samuel 20:19, and 21:3 means that land was loaned to Israel, but was still owned by God (Deuteronomy 25:23). The lending of the land is a covenant God made, with obligations and expectations. Right from the beginning, God communicated clearly that the land was a gift (Genesis 12:1, 17:4-8). In Deuteronomy 9:6, God clearly states: "Know, then, that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to occupy because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people." This thus means was given as a gift of grace, not deserved by the Israelites (Leviticus 25).

Gnanakan (2004) therefore observes that no one was free to do as he liked with the land. Israel received clear communication on how they were to handle the gift of God, and the repercussion for treating it as the owner wanted. Their ongoing occupancy depended on their "moral behaviour" and their "observance of the law" (Ibid, 62). Moses made it clear in the book of Deuteronomy 11 that Israel needed to pay attention to the Commandments of God in order to enjoy his blessings of inheriting the land. In addition, their obedience would guarantee them long life in the land. The long life is because God was going to give them lives in abundance.

The symbolism used was that the land would be flowing with milk and honey, a powerful way of illustrating abundant living that God was promising. God would crown his blessings by sending them rain to water their crops. God makes it clear that his blessings of rain would by far be better than foot pump irrigation that they were used to doing in Egypt. God would just bring rain in the right time. The Israelites would not worry again about security, because God was going to watch over the land from the beginning of the year to its end. God would not be like the Egyptians gods who were consulted only during planting season and harvest. God promised to watch over the land every day of the year. The implication was that as long as Israelites were obedient to God, they would be assured of blessings and happiness in the land that God was giving them as a gift.

The land they were to inherit was a land of freedom, abundance, and fulfilment, flowing with milk and honey. Furthermore, to show clearly that God was present in this land, Israelites were given directions on how to inhabit the land well. They were to give their newly acquired land a sabbatical rest, on the seventh year, where the land was to lie fallow for a whole year. Their people were also supposed to be concerned about the poor and the afflicted. (Ibid) They posit:

> God's redemption is twofold: to free the weak and oppressed from unjust conditions, and to free all sinners (including us) from violating others and for our own authentic humanity. God thus restores human creatures to health and wholeness, and at the heart of the matter is the forgiveness of sin… The forgiving redeemer frees us, not for withdrawal from this world and contemplation of another, and not for community with our own kind only, but for right relationships with all of God's creation (Ibid, 50).

The Doctrine of Christ in Relation to Environmental Stewardship

One of the passages used to argue for divinity of Jesus is Colossians 1:15-18, where Christ is clearly shown as the creator sustainer, and redeemer of the earth. The understanding of the role of Christ in creation and sustenance is assumed in this paper to be clear. However, the role of Christ in redemption is perceived to be least understood, and is therefore given more attention. Matthew 19:28 and Romans 8:21-22 show that Christ will redeem the earth from the current form of decay, and will liberate it from the bondage it now suffers. How will this liberation happen? Revelation 21:1 states "then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea." Does the new heaven and the new earth mean that the current earth will be wiped away? To understand this, we need to look at another passage: Isaiah 65. In this passage, Isaiah presents a picture of the millennium, where human beings, non-human creation, and God will be living together on the earth harmoniously, and even the serpent will 'lie with a baby" peacefully. Christ thus shall restore relationships in the new earth. The word used for this restoration, *apekatestathee*, is also used in Luke 6:10 in the healing of a hand. Jesus did not procure another hand, but restored the 'corrupted' hand to a condition considered 'good.' This means that, rather than procuring a new earth, the ministry of Jesus will be to correct the corruption of the current earth, and restore relationships. If Christ shall restore the earth, into an original good situation, does not this action bring to question the morality of those who corrupted the earth in the first place? Should it also not excite people to begin to care for the environment now, since they are participating in the process of healing? John receives a revelation where God was seen fellowshipping with humanity in a similar situation as was in Eden: 'in the coolness of the evening.' This idea is useful in moving people to participate in the work of restoration now.

Ecclesial Participation

The forgoing discussions have demonstrated that scriptural passages used as reference for key doctrines in Christianity, also provide guidance for environmental stewardship. Christian theology therefore, can be used to influence ecclesial participation in environmental actions. The causal mechanism can be graphically represented as below:-

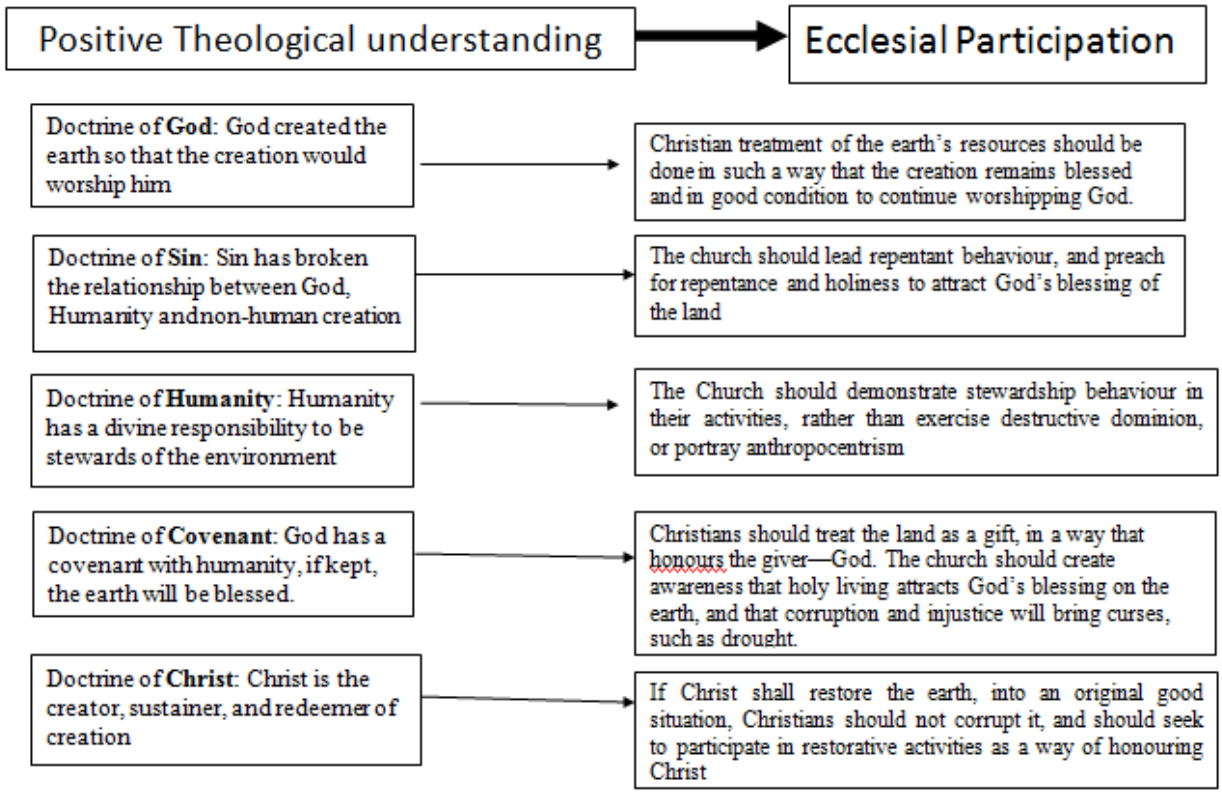


Figure 2: Ecclesial Participation Causal Mechanism

The diagram above shows that if the Church has the right theological understanding, and properly formed Christian worldview, it would participate in environmental stewardship.

Kenya with a population of 45 million, and where majority are Christians, would have majority of its citizens participating in actions. George Kinoti points out specific areas of Christian involvement:

> … [w]e must work to rescue all creatures in danger of extinction – whether the danger comes from pollution, habitat change, overfishing, poaching or any other cause. Christians should be encouraged to take proper care of their own fields or gardens and to participate in community protection of common water and grazing resources. Christians should also support national and international policies and laws to govern the care of the environment and the use of natural resources. We should be working alongside people like WangariMaathai, the Kenyan woman who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize because of her work to conserve Africa's environment.

In other words, Christians all over the country should, as a form of worshipping God, practice water and soil conservation, planting and caring for the trees, do waste managementand even preach and teach about environmental stewardship in the churches and Christian meetings. They should also develop a conservation mindset and stewardship perspectives that will impel them to reduce the resources they consume and reuse or recycle what they have not used.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed how various scriptural references to key Christian doctrines also provide guidance to environmental stewardship. The doctrine of 'Creation' shows that everything that was created belongs to God, and was first blessed by God. Therefore, human beings should treat it with the same respect they have for God, and should ensure that in their treatment of the environment, the blessedness is not compromised. The doctrine of 'Sin' also show that, irresponsible human actions towards the environment is a demonstration of corruption inherited from the Fall of Man, a temptation that any redeemed Christian should seek to overcome.

God's covenant with humanity requires obedience to God, and the reward is that the land will be blessed. The paper has also shown that the mission of Christ to save and redeem mankind is tied with his mission to redeem the environment at the end (eschatology). The ministry of Jesus at the end, which includes healing of the earth, should excite people now to participate in the process.

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