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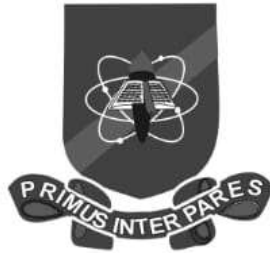
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EDITORIAL

It is with great pleasure and gratitude to Allah (SAW) that on behalf of the Editorial Board, I am presenting the 7th volume, December 2021 edition of Voyages Journal of Religious Studies, a publication of the Department of Religious Studies, Gombe State University. This edition of the publication has in it a number of articles from reputable scholars within the world of academia across disciplines.

Some of the issues covered in this volume center on Qur'an, ethics and morals, Islamic education, Da'wah activities, cultural values, pandemic in the teachings of Islam, Ulumul Hadith, peaceful coexistence and an examination of some biblical verses on stewardship as it applies to the Nigerian context.

My sincere gratitude goes to the authors who contributed their wealth of knowledge. I wish to acknowledge the efforts of the editorial consultants and the editorial board who work tirelessly to see the success of this edition. Thank you.

Lastly, we give a tribute to our former Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Umaru Dahiru, may Allah have mercy on him and grant him Jannah. Amin.

Dr. Fatima Abubakar,

Head, Department of Religious Studies,
Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria.

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An Ecotheological Examination of Genesis 1: 26-30 on Earth Stewardship in the Nigerian Context

Olowoyeye E. Olurokan,¹ Kolade S. Oluwasegun² and Ajiji M. Danjuma³

Abstract

The paper examined the dominion section of the creation account, in the light of the ongoing Earth stewardship situated within the theological framework and response to the reoccurring ecological issues. It has been observed that extreme human activities on the surface of Earth have brought adverse effect on Man and his environment. The consensus on the environment today in terms of the hazardous resultant effect, is anthropogenic in nature and there is the need to checkmate man's attitude towards nature. Thus, there is the need to advance a Christian position on the preservation of non-human resources as found in the text. We employed expository and descriptive methods to re-read Genesis 1:26-30 from an Eco-feministic perception in order to establish the managerial ground between the interaction of man and environment. We discovered that the dominion text has been used as centre force for exploiting the Earth. A critical study of the text also shows that man was created as manager. We concluded that willingness to respect the environment in the shape of the dominion is equally the sensitivity to preserve man's existence from obliteration.

Keywords: Ecotheology, Earth, Dominion theory, Stewardship and Genesis 1:26-30

Introduction

There are astonishing versions of Earth songs on the lips of concerned experts and scholars who care for the preservation of the Earth. This has been often produced in poetry, prose, drama and research reports (Goody n.p). The trajectory of insightful debates on ecology, in recent times, is largely multi-disciplinary in nature. The agitation started as a social science discourse, but currently there is an extension to humanities and its theological viewpoint is receiving much attention. Peter Stott was on this when he states that "the river of theological writings in this area has now turned into a flood" (Scott 24). From its theological standpoint, there are evaluations on the successive Pentateuchal injunctions on environmental

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management. However, much attention has not been given to the motivating and underlying force that fuels extreme human activities, with reference to the domineering tendency in the biblical text. The major foundation for this degradation - as it is derived from the 'dominion doctrine' - coined out of the Yahwehist material of the anthropocentric unit of Genesis 1: 26-30 had an immense effect on the origin of extreme human activities on the Earth (Mission and Public 1).

The questions that now arise are: to what extent should the dominion of man be on earth? Should the dominion neglect the considerable treatment for non-human resources concentrating on the hurried motives of creatures' annihilation due to human profit and appetite? In supporting such reactionary campaign, Manus fairly expresses his position, perhaps on the course, of objectivity that, "*the search for biblical foundations for ecofeminism (eco-theology) is not quite easily discernible as the scripture are not specifically composed to address such a post-colonial phenomenon*" (24). Consequently, it has been argued that there is a sharp Deuteronomistic injunction on the disposal of solid mineral waste among the Israelites in the Old Testament (Ucheawaji 21-22). However, the consequence in terms of aerobic ecological disasters is not too clear. Nevertheless, there seem no conspicuous operatives as to what become the resultant position of the scripture on the consequences and implication of the misuse of the mother earth (Scott 24).

However, religious text on man's dominion, most especially from Christian perspective has extremely influenced the degradation of the Earth. Thus, a careful interrogation of the text will turn out to give readers insight concerning the divine pronouncement on the use of non-human resources. In view of this concern, the paper adopts expository and descriptive methods of re-reading the dominion section of the text with a view to advancing an operative concern for the environment mostly on plantations, animal conservations and the land use act, which have sacred existence and bright and beautiful in creation.

Eco-Theological Concept and Discourse

Eco-theology indeed is an affectionate social, philosophical as well religious movement which primarily recognizes biodiversity within the prism of feminism. Thus, this brand of theology is passionately saddled with the responsibility of appreciating the earth as sacred existence, committed to both active and passive roles. Eco-theology possesses a formal position in Christian theology, when properly seen as a concept which has biblical foundation reflecting sociological, philosophical and political concern and establishing a considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism (Manus 24). Over the years, the lens of integration has taken a strong bearing on eco-theology in equating the misuse of the earth with the male ostentatious oppression and subordination of women in families, church and societies and the degradation of nature with similar masculine strength, attitudes and methods (McGuire and McGuire 3-5). There is also a sizeable advancement of

knowledge in eco-theological discourse when nexus is drawn with sexism, domination of nature, racism, speciesism, and other characteristics of social injustice and inequality (Aderibigbe and Ayegboyin 194).

The landmark of ecofeminism, as proportionately, one of the robust branches of eco-theology becomes specific in its accurate measurement with economic discourse, in that, it argues against the capitalist and patriarchal systems that predominate throughout the world and reveals a triple domination of the Global South; namely those of us who live in the Two-Thirds World, especially our women and the productive natural environment (Manus 24). Thus, the kaleidoscopic lens of eco-theology is primarily on the sacred thoughtfulness of the environment and feminism with an outlook on pre-patriarchal historical analysis, an embracement of spirituality and a commitment to challenging the discrimination meted out to people on grounds of gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, disability, anthro-supremacy, ethoc-hauvinism and other forms of oppression and inequity in our society (Aderibigbe and Ayegboyin 194).

Moreover, this reaction process has always pointed out the constant awareness of man's domination on the earth that has influenced processes, attitudes and methods. Bearing this in mind, the dominion doctrine is hereby picked for analysis considering the biblical viewpoint and the manner at which man had apprehended the environment.

The Origin of Man's Dominion Theory

The origin of 'Dominion theory' relates to the functional interpretation of Genesis 1:26-30 where it is relatively reasoned that the image of God is realized in man's lordship over lower creation which is meant by God to be subject to him (Hogan 34). In accordance with this submission, Fawenu notes that, "some have seen this as fundamentally oriental view of a king" (50-52). In such manner, the theory has been used as hand tool of exploitation in the hand of the feudal king of the upper creation and this is displayed in hierarchy, based on influence and power. The replication of this proposition is recognized, far beyond the limit strong men usurp power over the weaker ones. More so, it is equally established that humanity is capable of, and indeed can hardly be stopped from utilizing his lordship in consciously transforming and oppressing his environment. One way of understanding this is to see that, for the most part, animals and plants adapt to the environment in which they found themselves, whereas for man as observed by Dairo, "humans attempt to make environments adapt to them... and Christianity has contributed to the way these perceptions and consequent attitudes have developed" (85-87), though the ruthless exploitation of man was notable on the earth during the beginning of the industrial revolution in the mid-fifteen centuries (Dairo 85-87).

However, the tidal effect was caustic as enunciated by Spalling that, "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scientific discoveries were predicated on the

belief that the world was objectively observable and behaved mechanistic ally” (Cited in Cunningham, Cunningham and Siago 16-26). More so, this tune of innovation sets man on his voyage to harness the natural forces of the earth and duly make them serve him. The engagement of man on earth in turn became extractive, industrial and non-renewable. The extreme use of non-human resources was glowingly obvious and detectable in the Victorian era. Capable of boasting are the confident engineers who comment on their “God-given audacity to command and control the world around them” (Spalling 6). The excessive command of the earth, in the twentieth century, saw a rise in secularism in the West, which supported the project of growth without limit.

The need to develop materially became paramount, as happiness was seen as being something to enjoy now, on this earth, and not beyond it. The freedom to use and abuse the earth could not be contained while there were too many activities going on. But there has never been before anything like the level of human intervention seen during the twentieth century, and now there is a great cause for concern meted out by the eco-theologians due to the climate change and the reducing Green House Emission [GHE] in order to forestall the possibilities that the earth might be reaching a breaking point with the misuse of the environment. However, the utility has been on the dominion aspect of the sacred text. It was until recently that those scholars from diverse academic inclinations started to sing the earth song and more often, theologically pointing out the misconception of the semantics which have been used as supportive parlance for the exploitation of the earth. As passionately polemic to the abuse of the environment, adequate attention would be given to the re-reading of Genesis 1:26-30 from an endearing inspiration of eco-theological concern on the moderate use of the environment.

Genesis 1:26-30 and the Challenge of Eco-Theology

The last outstanding event particularly in Genesis 1: 26-27 reveals the divine operational intention to create man. The creation of man in the image/likeness of God has raised dust from different scholarly camps. The use of the Hebrew word *Na'asheh*, meaning “let us make” has been appreciated differently (Dreibelbis 6). There is a position that shows a patristic development of the text as a divine inclusion of the Trinitarian demonstration of creation (Global Warming n.p). While this position seems not to become the best of all, another one is showing the familiarity of the Ancient Near Eastern ideology of divine council of God, where He is surrounded with many children, courtiers and many servants to watch Him create man (Global Warming n.p). In another angle, the collective responsibility of the text in creation has also been termed as the reflection of God’s desire in establishing a cordial relationship between man and woman as helpmate in the working dynamic of home and societal building. However, the narrative construct of the *Betsalemo*, meaning “in his own image” and *Barata*, meaning “he created them” in verse 27 as submit

ted by Sailhamer vindicates “*the absolute personality of God with no special treatment to the trinity, divine councils or relational proportion of man, which have been injected by differing perspectives of interpretations*” (Kittel et al 2).

The subsequent line of action in v.26 emphasizes the “image” and “likeness” which has over the centuries thrown scholars of diverse academic inclinations into the ocean of an endless search (Wenham 39). Despite the problem of consensus, a thoughtful agreement with Keil and Delitzsch on the punning deployment of Hebrew parallelism of *Tselem*, “Image”, and *Demuth*, “Likeness” somewhat unifies the identical words (Cited in Adu-Gyamfi 153-173). Hence, the statement “Let us make man” proves the grand command of the divine directorate and this could be an alert to the heavenly to watch the uninfluenced sovereign God as the sole engineer in creation while they watch Him creating man. In fact, Livingston stresses the limitation of the image in his comment when he notes that, “...God said that man was created to be in our own image could be understood as having some semblance to the reality but lacking its fullness” (Cited in Sailhamer 6). Livingston’s submission reveals the general feature of the divine exactness, however, reduces man as not having the exact replica of God (34-36).

From another level of opinion, there is a logical conclusion of a likely representative image in v.26 and on such proposition, Heinsch presented the oriental worldview of the text as “the widely held believe in the ancient orient, where kings were the image of God, that is, they were god’s representative on earth and governed the earth on his behalf” (Keil and Delitzsch 31). On a lighter note, the above position is a transfer of the successive claim which promotes the direct acquaintance towards the ultimate God due to the nominalism of the lower case for the divine resemblance. Still in the interest of the divinity in v.26, Cline asserts that there is a tower of linguistic position from the shift of “*Be*” “*In*” to “*Ve*” “*As*”. Cline’s final assessment of the text is to propose the reading of the text man created, “as” the image of God, not “in” the image of God (Fawenu 44-46). However, the position seems not to have hoisted any tent of acceptance from the fact that a careful study of the text reveals that the Beth is dotted with *Dagesh Lene* and thereby retained his pronunciation in the study of Hebrew grammar (Livingston 31-36). Thus, it would be out of logical reasoning to conclude that the right usage is “as”, not “in”.

Above all, while the issue of the “image of God” lingers in scholarly debates, it is also good to reflectively ask about the essence of the image of God as it is stated in v.28. Leupold adds to this existential prerogative when he maintains that “*one of the marks that the image carries was the divine commissioning and territorial power of a ruler*” (79-81). Responsibly, the use of *Wemile u et-ha’ares*, meaning “and fill the earth”, and *Wekabashuha we redu*, “and subdue it and have dominion” demonstrates the divine existential provision for man. For Drivers, “fitness to rule was the outcome of man’s right to have dominion” (Cited in Heinisch 170). Fitness to rule in this context implies an adequate intellectual capacity to organize, t

o plan and to elevate. More so, it is reasonable to think of an adequate emotional capacity to desire the highest welfare of the subjects. The highest welfare, which Yates polishes as “to appreciate and to honour that which is good, true and beautiful ...” (Cited in Clines 54).

This thoughtfulness, however, affects man’s attitude to other creatures which are adequately beautiful and good before God. The outcome of this acceptance of accountability by man is quite functional in the active participation of the earth’s conservation and on the favorable treatment of nature. Impressively, the mandate becomes evident in the light of Freedman words, when he maintains that the need “to appreciate the earth is not on the basis of crude exploitation but to respond to the earth song which is twitting the management of the earth for the benefit of all creations” (Cited in Fawenu 52). It could also be stressed within the soaring level of the ancient oriental view the kings in the ancient world were supposed to show affection to their subject by prioritizing prudence and not to see them as the chessboard of exploitation. The fair treatment of the environment in the context of sustainability and preservation makes Wenham draw this fine line of advocacy when he writes “...and more particularly, God is always portrayed as solicitous for the welfare of His creation, so obviously, his representative, man, too should be” (Cited in Leupold 79-81).

Consequently, the vote for this new look towards the environment becomes influential and captivating in contemporary discourse. Keller’s thought was in alignment with the thoroughgoing appraisal of the environment in the context of existence. After considering the high level of dominion utility and the much havoc that have been wrecked on the environment, she was confident to agree with the eco-theological concern of the text, showcasing a type of dominion which should be “assorted with responsibilities on a good managerial term and solely invites man, in his functioning quest to at least have a second thought for the earth, to be good manager of the planet, interact wisely, justly and caringly for other creatures who in deed will as much as possible intervene aggressively to protect him” (Drivers 209).

The phase of this textual consequential re-reading on non-human resources which constitute the environment is a direct polemic against the despoliation of nature and the environment. More so, the insistence to make meaningful application of the text serves as the impetus to the protective and conservative inspirations, rooted in the fair treatment of the mother earth. Thus, the inspirations are not out of use with the common concern and reaction on climate change whose feelings have not only been shared by the concerned experts but in socio-religious dialogue as well.

The Need to Save the Earth: Nigeria Experience

Regardless of the considerable treatment for the environment in the configuration of the eco-theological concern of the text, there are often adverse results on both vertical and horizontal basis for man and his own existence. The issue of our environment being at stake is traceable to the 1988 reawakening, when we were informed by 12 Nigerian Students in Italy that our environment has been defaced with toxic industrial waste shipped from Italy (Yates 3). However, that was one of the stakes as far as environmental issue is concerned the sensitization led to Federal Environmental Protective Agencies (Freedman 25). Even though there have been initiatives to tackle this problem, has these reduced the misuse and despoliation of the environment? Even up till now, the caution is taking a greater shape on Media's (Wenhams 32).

The resultant effect of the misuse of the environment is always devastating and ridiculous in its reoccurring events. The occurrences of certain natural phenomena and events have always been associated with the heavy and unredeemable use of the environment by man and thus, invite climate change, volcanic eruption and tectonic movement (Cited in Manus 8). Depriving the forest existence with no remediation, in its prime position, is a direct shortage or termination of the fixed biosphere as it is required for existence (Oyeshola 183). In fact, there is a complaint about the pace at which the sun is scorching nowadays, and excessive human activities are guilty of this charge. The blame has been put on the array of large industries which spread their tentacles around their host communities. The discharge of the gas towers high as it is released in the atmosphere and travelled fast in the space to deplete the ozone layer and thereby illuminating the ultra-violet rays on the earth and as well dissolves the melting point of the Antarctic regions.

In attesting to the effect of the sun's intensity today, one is tempted to conclude with Olawoyin that the extremely hotness of the weather is sending a signal that "the planet seems to be rushing to hell metaphorically" (Ityokumbu 26). This could be proven that the intensity of the sun is liable of causing chemical change in the internal structure as a result. The extension of the environmental issues also raises alarm on the gradual extinction of some species of animals in the forest as a result of over-commercialized activities. Did God create these species of animals and consider their extinction before the close of the age? Does man's managerial function make him a terminator of the good works of creation? If no, then the exploitative mindset of man sets the tone of mismanagement and misappropriation of the stability of divine nature which must be profitably preserved, but in essence, has been denied.

A cursory look into the economic implication of this raid is considerable in this regard. Human activities on the land have made some communities lose their farming schemes, due to the excessive diggings of resources, just as it is in the Niger Delta Zone where oil market companies have gained ground. The actions now

breed bundle of frustrations, oppressions and exploitations for the indigenes whose voices are not heard even while their lands have been fragmented, hued with cream chemical of oil products and exposed to the danger of carbon monoxide. Yet, their necessity of life within the framework of social amenities and provision are not adequately distributed. What they were made to manage was their horrible conditions meted out on the ground of their environmental degradation that hurts and demeans the peoples own productivity and input.

More so, this awareness propped up with the sensitivity to save the earth, is as preferably, a synergy of the correlative output and input of man's survival and the environment. The campaign for the sustenance of the environment is not only a caution of the use of non-human resources, but as well, the available helping method to save man from danger, even as it reflects the moribund of the biosphere. The state of things is always considered unfavorable to both human and non-human entities and the forecast of the environment scientist has not been favorable to man, just as, Mowah and Chizea have clearly noted that, "the pictures of the future are not happy ones for human species and life on earth generally" (n.p).

It is towards this end that there is a need for ecclesiastical concern for the environment and there must be a reasonable shift from considering every environment problem around man as one of the inexplicable metaphysical occurrences. Good number of them emerged from the misuse of the environment and the natural habitats. This reaction, however on every side, is notably exonerating the treatment of nature from the re-birth of totemism, but showing a great concern for the dramatic works of creation which are bright and beautiful. This, in attempt must be perused within the check for managerial insight just as the fine line must be drawn between man and nature on the use act.

Conclusion

The conscious awareness of a world entrenched in the endemic misuse of the environment is to appreciate the level of social justice that also sings in the rhythmic concert of the well-being of the earth. This must be accompanied by an extensive tendency that human life is dependent on the environment. A second strand of this nature's affection is to set the priority right and transitively visualize the spiritual component of existence by emphasizing the sacredness of the earth unto itself. The paper accentuates the necessity for sustainability, namely, the need to learn from the many ways that people walk, in other to fine line between using the earth as a resource, man must learn to respect and ensure the preservation of nature. This is an opera to save the earth from ailing, because the more secure the environment, the more the extent of human existence. Such collaboration is possible, but only through a thoughtful response of man to his environment in terms of shaping, conserving, management and stability.

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