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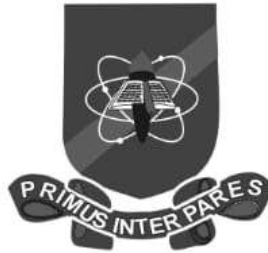
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EDITORIAL

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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Appropriating Economic-Justice in Genesis 2:15-17 for Societal Sustainability: The Nigerian Case

Ucheawaji Godfrey Josiah¹ and Joshua J. Zoaka²

Abstract

Appropriating economic principles, and sustainable development, as espoused in Genesis 2:15-17 remains germane for societal sustainability. Although scholars have engaged the text from various perspectives, little is said about its relevance to sustainable economy. This paper draws certain economic principles for responsible economic management for societal sustainability. Moreover, the Historical-Grammatical Method is adopted for the interpreting the purposively select text of Genesis 2:15-17 unique for economic justice. The work discovers that though economic resources are YHWH's gifts, fair and responsible/accountable management remains the duty of humanity (Gen 2:15-17). It identifies *nuach* as a state of safety/security of Eden's economic resources (Gen. 2:15). It further submits that greed/avarice, misappropriation, etc., constitute major setbacks to economic stability (Gen. 3:6-19). Therefore, it advocates for justice in terms of adjudication (*mûth thāmûth*) for violations of prohibitions (*mûth thāmûth*) as these could result in sustainable economy in Nigeria.

Keywords: economic justice, contentment, economic management, societal sustainability, genesis 2:15-17.

Introduction

The interconnectedness of policy adherence and economic stability as exemplified in Genesis 2:15-17 though reversely captured, beckons for a critical analysis especially in the economic context of Nigeria. Notwithstanding, existing studies on Genesis 2 have focused on the linguistic nature of the text with special interest on language as power (Stratton 133-145). Others like Assohoto & Ngewa observed that in Genesis 2:15-17, YHWH gave Adam hands for labor, as well as mind and heart for contemplation.

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Adam (humanity) was to find happiness in labor, as well as in meditation, as this labor was geared towards his sustainable survival and those of his generation. The book of Genesis 2:15-17 has been viewed as a text that enforces responsibility (14). They further posit that YHWH provides but holds man responsible for maintaining or managing what he has provided. Again, that it is not enough to have been blessed with resources like land and other economic endowments of nature (14).

However, the other side of the coin is that land, including its resources, must be maintained, and controlled against all that could destroy it. Thus, they call for a conscientious effort to stop destructive processes harmful to our resources. Interestingly too, freedom was the central focus of Genesis 2:16-17 and the misuse of human such freedom brought evil and sufferings in the world (Kizhakkeyil 93-94). Again, in his discussion on Genesis 1-3 (of which chapter 2 is part), Gunda tends to assume that rather than being an historical narrative, Genesis 1-3 should be interpreted as etiological, that is, as philosophical investigation of causes and origins. In his queries however, the reference to especially Genesis 2:15-17 and its intrinsic economic principles are undermined (25-46).

The scholars above have situated Genesis 2:15-17, in the context of language, as a powerful tool, labor as a means to environmental sustainability, responsibility, the misuse of human freedom as the cause for evil as well as a gender motif text. Nevertheless, little or nothing is said about the relevance of the text to economic management especially in Nigeria, which is the main fulcrum of this work. This work is not concerned with the statistics of economic mismanagement in Nigeria but rather, draws certain unique economic principles needed for responsible economic management as enshrined in the text in focus. It is premised on Maslow and Herzberg's Expectancy theory that states that increased effort will lead to increased performance, as well as that the realization of a valued outcome is dependent upon a person's preference of success over failure (Onu and Kabuoh 59-77).

In other words, as custodians of resources one's increased effort, which results in selfless performance, thus leads to increased outcome that is dependent upon one's choice to succeed in the sustaining of their resources. This work also utilizes the Historical-Grammatical Method (Terry 231). This Model is employed as an exegetical platform to interpret the purposively select text of Genesis 2:15-17. This is because of its uniqueness to economic sustainability motif relevant in the quest for economic management in Nigeria. This work is not concerned with the statistics of economic mismanagement in Nigeria but focused on principles needed for responsible economic management as enshrined in Genesis 2:15-17. Therefore, this paper explores the relevance of practical adherence to sustainability principles as shown in Genesis 2:15-17 narrative especially in the quest for economic stability in Nigeria. It further analyzes the text with the view of generating a template for fairness that would enhance economic management in Nigeria.

Economic Justice as a Social Need

The search for justice implies the presence of certain dislocations, imbalance, oppression marginalization as well as social maladies that includes mismanagement of economic resources (Josiah 147-168). Again, Adidoo discussing on Justice writes: “it is a concept that has moral, religious, philosophical, and political origins”. He even links justice with theology as well as socio-political terrain (129-146). As observed earlier, justice as fair and right relationship, is not only between humans, but it also includes “nature gifts” which means that justice deals with fairness among humans and between humans and all other parts of creation including endowments of nature. No wonder the coinage of Eco-justice, with its meaning as ecological health and wholeness together with social and economic justice (Ferguson 2).

Interestingly, in the Hebrew mind, morality takes a new dimension in which relation with God (vertical) is the basis for both justice in society and prosperity in relation to nature (horizontal) (Ruether 603-614). Nevertheless, Rasmussen writes about Pastor Walter Rauschenbusch who joined in what he calls “Social Gospel” – a movement formed to give voice to what Ernst Troeltsch calls “the social question” or ‘social modern problem.’ He opines that in the nineteenth century, there was a great chasm between the wealthy and the poor. This indeed is a reality of limited revenues for limitless needs in most societies, especially because economic resources were mismanaged by the powerful few thus leading to violence and insecurity of lives and property which has lingered to the twentieth (and even the twenty-first) centuries (515-527).

Briefly, this author argues that mismanagement of economic resources have negative bearings on society. He admits that such inclination remains destructive in the sense that it leaves many impoverished, while few become wealthy at the expense of the populace. The rights for nature’s gift have overridden the rights of nature as a gift. He calls humans to subscribe to the mission of care for society. Indeed, Rasmussen’s position is relevant to our study. He sees a correlation between holistic fairness and economic prosperity.

Accordingly, the interplay between justice and power (economic power or prosperity inclusive), is succinctly captured by Walter who posits that physical power is not limited to military power or the threat thereof, but also to economic power. He holds that this economic power is both physical and spiritual. It is physical because of the wealth created by the economic process, and spiritual, because law, custom, and other similar considerations enforce it. He notes that unless there is a tolerable equilibrium, no moral suasion or social restraints can prevent the balance of power from decaying into mutual hostility (Walter 28-29). This idea of a link between economic process and spiritual enforcement is portrayed in the Genesis 2:15-17 narrative. Hence, the chosen text of Genesis 2:15-17 which presents several principles for economic stability will be used to foster eco-justice through a transformative society which could by practice (physical) and policy (spiritual) build a sustainable economy. Anderson on the other hand, notes that the false sense of

financial security and the abundance of oil wealth have led to a corrupt government and social crisis.

Finally, the culture of consumerism has led to the belief that natural resources are inexhaustible since some natural resources such as plants, animals and fish are renewable by reason of their capacity for self-regeneration (Anderson 196-198). Indeed, Anderson is right when he calls for justice in social and economic issues like capitalism, growth of affluence and increased rate of consumption and the abundance of oil wealth breeding a corrupt government and society. In fact, these social issues are economically driven, and indeed are adverse in effect. However, the next section is focused on the economic realities in the Nigerian Nation.

Economic Context of Nigeria

In identifying the Nigerian nation's economic situation, Salisu opines that the economic setback of Nigeria borders on the misappropriation of public resources to private ends, as well as pervasive regulations (policy matters) that exist and used by government officials who have an excessive degree of discretion in applying those policies (Salisu). Again, to Obadan the description of Nigeria is paradoxical. This paradox is glaring in his analysis that placed the poverty level in Nigeria in *pari passu* with the country's immense wealth, thus revealing an imbalance. Particularly worrisome to him, is the country's retrogression in national socio-economic development, although, Nigeria was among the richest 50 countries in the early-1970s (Obadan 159-188). In fact, Boyo succinctly describes the level of gross impunity characterized in the decision-making on matters related to economic mismanagement (Boyo). Accordingly, Nelson opines that Nigeria has over the years exhibited lack of governance in the management of oil wealth, which has affected economic development adversely. He echoes the fact that countries endowed with resources and having leading assets in Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) usually have strong institutions that serve as check on corruption as well as uphold agreed standards and mete out justice where necessary without fear and favor. He decries the fact that long-term public investment does not thrive in a system (like Nigeria) characterized with personal interest, poor accountability and lack of transparency (Nelson 17).

The foregoing is illuminated by the current attempt of the federal government's leadership to reverse Nigeria's mismanaged economy and the level of impoverishment in the Nation (Onyekakeya). This attempt reveals to an extent, the economic plight of the Nigerian masses. Apparently, the Nigerian Nation harbors some untapped resources such as gold, silver, iron ore, limestone, manganese, bitumen and so on. However, the little revenue generated to be reserved for the benefit of the masses, are shared amongst governors as this culture of sharing continues to breed uncontrolled corruption that requires a drastic measure especially in the way these resources are managed (Onyekakeya). The above, though disheartening, only gives a skeletal picture of the real economic situation in Nigeria. Notwithstanding however, the next segment discusses the text

of Genesis 2:15-17 with the view to highlight necessary economic-sustainable principles for economic management especially in Nigeria.

Generating Economic principles from 2:15-17

Exegesis of Keywords in Genesis 2:15-17

¹⁵ וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְתְּהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעֲבָדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ:

¹⁶ וַיִּצַו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגָּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:

¹⁷ וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב נָרַע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

Genesis 2:15-17 (Transliterated form)

¹⁵ wayyiqah y^ehwah 'elōhîm 'ēth-hā'ādam wayyannichehû b^egan-'ēden l^e'ābdah ûl^eshāmrah.

¹⁶ way^etsaw y^ehwah 'elōhîm 'al-hā'ādam lē'mōr mikkōl 'ēts-haggan 'ākōl thō'kēl.

¹⁷ ûmē'ēts hadda'ath tōb wārā' lō' thō'kal mimmēnû kî b^eyōm 'akālka mimmēnû mûth thāmûth.

Genesis 2:15-17 (KJV Translation)

¹⁵And the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ¹⁷But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

וַיִּנְתְּהוּ - wayyannichēhū – Principle of Rest/Security (v. 15)

The phrase *wayyannichēhu* is derived from the verb *nuach* which could mean *rest*, *satisfaction*, *resting place of camel*, or *repose* (Brown, Driver and Briggs, p. 629). The word as used in Genesis 2:15 for “place or put” (*yanach*) is the Hebrew Hiphil verb with an imperfect mood. By this usage of hiphil imperfect in the text, the author of the passage suggests the ‘causing of an action’ by a subject (Futato). In essence, Yahweh is the subject here, who *caused* the object (Adam a representative of humanity) *to rest* in the garden. Better put, Yahweh *laid Adam to rest*, or settled Adam and his immediate *Edenic* community in an already established garden full of resources to be sustained (security). In fact, Yahweh settling humanity in the garden, is invariably letting ‘blessing’ come down on them, providing them with rest and quietness (Eze. 44:30; 1 Ki 5:18) or even giving them joy and satisfaction (Prov. 29:17) within the confines of the garden of Eden (VanGemeren 56-59). The principle of rest in this text becomes unique since *nuach* as rest varies

from *shabath* which means “to rest from labor.” From the Arabic rendering, *shabath* means ‘cut off, interrupt, neglect etc.’

In other words, *shabath* suggests setting apart for a purpose (respite); a time-out after work. The Aramaic renders the same word as the ‘cost of neglect.’ However, *shabath* as a Hebrew nuance portrays the idea of someone ceasing from doing something (this occurs 13 times) and desisting from labor (Gen. 2:2-3; Exo. 23:12) (VanGemeren 56-59). One may seek to understand whether humanity had worked having been created on the sixth day before the *shabath* rest (Gen. 2:1-3) for them to rest from their labor as did YHWH after the six days of creative activities. Notwithstanding, it could be assumed that the introduction of *shabath* in Genesis 2:1-3 was to keep humanity informed of their need to rest after labor through the weeks ahead. No wonder the codified law at Sinai reinforced the *shabath* rest with emphasis on work or labor of the six days preceding the *shabath* (Ex 20:8-11).

On the other hand, *nuach* as used in Genesis 2:15, carries the idea of safety or security (communal, economic etc.). Humanity in their Eden community was to be at rest since the garden was at rest. That is to say, Yahweh caused Adam to rest (*yanach*) in the garden thus implying that, the garden was conducive for man’s habitation. What this further suggests is that provisions for man’s survival in Eden community were adequate and sustainable in the context of the existing resourceful, ever-watered and blooming garden (Gen. 2:9-14). However, man’s peaceful and continuous sustainable existence in Eden was dependent on their adherence to a superior’s instruction (policy) on the management of the garden resources of Eden (Gen 2: 16-17). To this end, the maintenance of the economic status of the garden in Eden would require conscientious attention by its inhabitants to strict rules on what to use, and what to reserve. This is what Holladay implied when he said that Adam was placed in custody of the garden (Gen. 2:15; Lev. 24:12) (pp. 4726, 5423, 6001, 8758). Nevertheless, the next principle deals with stewardship, also strategic to economic sustainability.

לְעַבְדָּהּ - ל' *'abadah* – Principle of Care/ Responsibility/ Accountability (v. 15)

The verb infinitive constructs ל' *'abadâ* as used in Genesis 2:15 derives from the verb, qal *'abad*, rendered as to: till, cultivate, work, serve, perform, do, keep (in service), yield to, perform the proper rites for etc (Holladay 3766). In Hebrew, the Infinitive construct carries the idea of the English word “of” which expresses a variety of relationships: for instance, the shoe “of” the student could mean the shoe “belonging to” the student. In addition, the gate “of” gold could mean the gate “made out of” gold. The love “of” the Parish Priest could mean either “the love the Parish Priest has for” members or the love members have “for the Parish Priest”. The Infinitive construct expresses purpose. In other words, the purpose for which Adam is to dress the garden is for the good, wellbeing or benefit of the garden, which by extension would benefit Adam too. This is so because Adam’s “rest” in the garden is within the designed “rest” or security inherently ensuing

from the garden (see the principle of *nuach* or rest above). Adam was set, settled or put in custody of the garden (Gen. 2:15; Lev. 24:12) (Holladay 3766).

Hence, *`abad* which is a verb, qal infinitive construct is suggestive of YHWH's handing over of the Eden resources (garden) into Adam's care for him to elevate and sustain its wellbeing through adequate and responsible management. Lowering our hands for the betterment of the environment or getting our hands dirty for the sake of the land brings about the wellbeing of the land. Nevertheless, what we observed is that we lower the wellbeing of the land in order to better our economic status in society. Whereas in the real sense, lowering the environment implies lowering our economic status because when the land is degraded, it reduces the yields and outcome needed for survival. Given this responsibility, Adam was at the same time accountable for his actions towards the resources under his care. So, the principle here is that of care or responsible management of the resources which calls for accountability. This is so because responsibility begets accountability.

וּלְשָׁמְרָה - *ûl^eshāmrāh* – Principle of Preservation/ Conservation (Gen. 2:15)

The Hebrew *ûl^eshāmrā* is a verb qal infinitive construct suffix 3rd person feminine singular used in Genesis 2:15. It is derived from the word שָׁמַר (*shamar*) rendered as, “watch, guard, observe, keep, save, retain, be careful about, carefully, attentively.” In fact, in 2 Kings 22:14 it is used in relation with the priest who looks after the cultic cleanness of priestly garb while in Esther 2:3 it is portrayed as the custodian of harem (house of the women in Shushan the Palace) (Holladay). Succinctly put, the word suggests a kind of management that is geared towards preserving or conserving resources. Accordingly, Josiah and Onyazonwu submit that the invitation in Genesis 2:15 to “keep” (*shamar*) the garden is at the heart of a practical understanding of sustainable stewardship, holding that preserving, allows natural resources the capacity to renew and replenish (Josiah and Onyazonwu 51-63).

Again, strengthening Josiah and Onyazonwu's position above, Josiah writes “...the difficulties (of food scarcity) faced by farmers are traceable to the first human disobedience to God's command: but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it” (Gen 2:17) (Josiah 21-34). This position presents a link between adherence to certain sustainable rules (including economic) and conservation of resources. Nevertheless, as earlier on observed, the Hebrew Infinitive construct as used in Genesis 2:15 - *ûlshamrah* has the idea of the English word “of” which expresses a variety of relationships. It is, in essence, to express purpose. Therefore, in this context, the purpose for Adam's keeping of the Eden resources was for the conservation and/or preservation of resources for their daily sustenance.

מִכְּכֹל עֵץ הַגָּן אֵס - mikkōl 'ēts-haggan 'ākōl - Principle of Choice and Contentment (v.16)

The word *mikkōl* is a combination of *min* and *kōl* where *min* carries the idea of “from.” It has its basic meaning as, “out of, away from. It indicates the ‘beginning-point of motion, out of’ while *kōl* means “all, everything, totality etc. (Holladay). The text of Genesis 2:16 suggests that Adam (humanity) has the choice to and could eat of all the trees in the garden. Hence the injunction “of every tree in the garden, you may freely eat.” So here we see that Adam was given the freedom in the use of Eden resources though within a context of contentment as we will see in the next principle. Freedom has limits. In this breath, there are boundaries of operation was set by YHWH. This is what contemporary prohibition acts or promulgations are mostly about – setting of boundaries so one does not exceed set limits of operation.

Again, the existence of individual or corporate freedom as shown in the earlier section of this paper, does not guarantee that defiance against set rules would have no repercussions. Instead, strict adherence to set limits in any given society assures one of sustainable existence. The subsequent segments of this paper elaborate in the position.

וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב יִרְעוּ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ - ūmē'ats hadda'ath tōḥ wāra' lō' tōkal –Principle of Restraint (v.17)

The Hebrew *ūmē'ats hadda'ath tōḥ wāra' lō' tōkal*: ‘and from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat.’ In the foregoing statement, the use of the Hebrew *lō'* - ‘not’ expresses an unconditional prohibition. In this case, it is a prohibition against the eating of the restricted tree (reserved for a purpose known only to YHWH). Hence, it reads “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shall not eat of it...” This is echoed in the statement of Josiah where he alluded that the root cause of food scarcity experienced by farmers appears to be the violation of the law of restraint (Gen 2:17) (Josiah, pp. 21-34.). From this text, we derive the injunction for restraint in the use of nature’s wealth; a caution against exorbitant and unsustainable behaviours of consumerism; a restriction on greed and corrupt practices which when omitted, had always been detrimental to the nation’s development (Josiah 33-45).

מִוֹת תְּמוּת - mûth thāmûth – Principle of Adjudication (v. 17)

The word *mûth* is a verb qal infinitive absolute. The word *mûth* immediately precedes another verb of the same root: *thāmûth* – verb qal imperfect 2nd person masculine singular. When an infinitive absolute comes before another form of the verb from the same root, it is to emphasize the kind of action in view. Therefore, the Hebrew infinitive absolute followed by the finite verb often implies “the absolute certainty of the action” (Meyers 99) while the qal imperfect expresses an ongoing situation in the present (Futato). To this end, YHWH who represents the highest court of justice stipulates the verdict for violation of the already established prohibition against the eating of a restricted tree (reserved for a purpose known only to YHWH, Gen. 2:17a). And the absolute

certainty of this judgment is represented in the use of an infinitive absolute in conjunction with a *qal* imperfect- *mûth thāmûth* – dying/ to die, you (violator) shall die – a divine adjudication being accentuated. The underlying point here is that YHWH as the arbiter gives a mandate for adjudication as a form of justice for violators of restraints.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this text, we see two categories of imprudent managers. First, we have Eve as well as Nigerians who are deceived by being talked into embezzlement (Gen 3:1-6; 1 Tim 2:14; the serpent's role implied here) and then, Adam as well as Nigerians, who outrightly take more than their due of public resources given by Yahweh against the 'constitutional' injunction prohibiting misappropriation and greed (Gen. 2:16, 17). Genesis 2:15-17 presents certain principles embodying justice that of course could enhance economic management especially in Nigeria. Like the garden (resources) of Eden, Nigeria's economic resources are unquantifiable. Nevertheless, just as the Edenic resource eluded the ancestral Adam, Nigeria's economic resources may be exhaustible if the principles espoused in Genesis 2:15-17 are not keenly considered. Such principles as: (Heb. *nûach*) which borders on security, of Care/Responsibility/ Accountability (צָבָד-`abad) which suggest that when we care for our resources responsibly, it gives us sense of accountability (Gen. 2:15); of Preservation/ Conservation (שָׁמַר-*shamar*) (Gen. 2:15); contentment and Restraint. Suffice to say that Adam breached these principles and thus mismanaged the Eden resources by acquiring more than was his due (eating from the reserved and conserved tree) and thus was penalized and was exposed to hard labor, a form of retributive justice (See Gen. 3:6-19).

This paper, therefore, submits that avarice, mismanagement and misappropriation (which are obvious breaches of the set principles), constitute major setbacks on economic and social stability. It therefore follows organically that violation of economic laws results in loss of resources meant for the masses, and thus results in a dislocated society. Notice that misappropriation and greed will only lead to lack as it were. Adam lost the resources, faced hardship, lost the security (both economic and physical), and sustainability of the garden (safe home) of Eden. Not only that, but even other members of the earth community also revolted as animals became hostile; trees refuse to produce, the land itself produced thorns and thistles (Gen. 3).

In essence, it could be deduced here that responsible care, accountability, preservation/conservation, contentment and restraint and meting of appropriate sanctions for defiance against prohibition acts (which obviously suggest justice), remain potent for a stable and secure society. Therefore, there is the need for responsible and accountable management of resources through fair policy formulation as enshrined in Genesis 2:15-17. Again, where steward defaults in the proper management of public resources, there should be adequate sanction as this will serve as a check for violators.

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