

RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIAN VALUES IN ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION IN IMENTI SOUTH SUB – COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The Bible gives a very simple and clear basis for a Christian doctrine of the value of environment as God's to mankind. Eco-theologians have done studies in this area to show symbiotic relationships between mankind and environment. A study was carried out in churches in Imenti South Sub-County, Kenya, in 2014. Christian values were investigated based on four variables, namely empathy, stewardship, Christian teachings and the understanding of role of Christians on environmental conservation. The study utilized the descriptive research survey design. The target population of this study was all the 88 pastors and 1733 congregation members of the Christian churches in the Sub-County. A sample of 22 churches was studied using questionnaire and data was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 for windows. The findings indicated that preachers and teachers of the Bible in the churches studied did not sensitize members on the variables studied. The study recommended that the teachers and preachers disseminate God's instructions on environmental preservation and lead the churches to organize on days of cleaning their home environment and in the neighboring towns. The churches also needed to actively participate in building gabions and terraces to reduce soil erosion and planting of trees, to replace the already cut ones.

KEYWORDS: Stewardship, Christian Values, Environmental Preservation

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The term environment is a fluid concept, which is both culturally grounded and socially contested (Hannigan, 1995). Environment includes all the physical and biological surroundings and their interactions, (Kumar and Kumar, 2009). The environment or environmental studies are part of a broad subject that requires an integrated approach for dealing with the various aspects, (Kumar and Kumar, 2009). According to Osuntokun (2001), environment refers to human beings and their surroundings, including the life support provided by air, water, land, animals and the entire ecosystem of which human beings are but a part (Osuntokun, 2001). Scientists have identified other less visible outcomes, but severely urgent problems currently being debated by the scientific community which include depletion of ozone layer, deforestation, extinction of species, the generation and disposal of nuclear wastes and global warming. Some of these issues have a global effect, and if not addressed, the outcomes will be disastrous to the entire humanity. The Church's role in the environmental movement, to many conservationists, is unclear. There are instances of Christians supporting as well as denouncing conservation. Yet, with the creation of faith-based nonprofit and the growing trend of faith-based environmental groups, conservationists must decide how to interact with faith-based organizations. Human, animal and floral life depends primarily on well cared environment. If humans destroy the environment, we can all be sure we are

headed for total destruction. Humans have destroyed the environment on the basis of poor theological interpretation of Genesis 1:28 the way forward is concerted effort at environmental preservation. World Council of Churches; Ten Affirmations on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation stated that “We will resist the claim that anything in creation is merely a resource for human exploitation. will resist species extinction for human benefit; consumerism and harmful mass production; pollution of land, air and waters; all human activities which are now leading to probable rapid climate change; and the policies and plans which contribute to the disintegration of creation” (Seoul; 1990).

Biblical and Theological Foundations for Christian Values on Stewardship

Christianity tradition constantly presents pre-eminence of human beings over the rest of the Creation. For instance: ‘What are human beings that you spare a thought for them, or the child of Adam that you care for him? Yet you have made him little less than a god, you have crowned him with glory and beauty, made him lord of the works of your hands, put all things under his feet’ (Psalm 8: 4–8). Only humans are the image of God, only humans are free and only humans can actually turn against God (commit sins); only humans, too, deserved the incarnation of God (Jesus Christ) to save us from the original fall. The consequences of this idea may be diverse, but it implies a pre-eminence of human needs over other species. The practical consequences of this approach imply that potential ecological problems are of second-order importance when conflicting with human development (i.e. solving poverty), or even limiting population growth, particularly when demographic policies compel mandatory practices on people’s family values.

Observation of nature has traditionally been considered as a natural way of approaching God, as recognition of the bounty and beauty of the created world inspires a similar recognition of the Creator. By contrast, within the framework of natural theology, a better understanding of how nature works has a religious purpose, since it also provides knowledge of God’s characteristics. The consideration of nature as an image of God is very clear in the Christian traditions, and it is also accepted in polytheistic religions. For instance, the Bible includes many references to the role of nature as a revelation of God. Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans echoes the same idea: ‘Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made’ (Romans, 1: 20). The Gospels are full of natural images, which Jesus used in his preaching: the beauty of ‘the lilies of the field’ is an image of God’s providence to his creatures; doves represent simplicity, and snakes cunning. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard tree (it begins very small), or like a field containing both wheat and chaff (good and bad men live together). It is clear from these references that these images were used not only to facilitate the grasping of spiritual concepts from the ordinary experiences of his disciples, but also because nature itself reflects the virtues of the Creator.

According to this attitude, humans are the centre of Creation, the only ones who are created in the image of God, and the only ones to have a direct connection with Him. The main purpose of the other creatures is to serve human needs, and therefore resources may be exploited only for the benefit of humans. The only limitations are the respect of other humans needs, both present and future. Some authors have accused the Christian tradition of being behind the current ecological crisis, since this dominion tradition has grounded the massive exploitation of natural resources (Berry, 2006). The most controversial aspect is what should be the correct interpretation of the first *chapter* of Genesis: ‘God blessed them (humans), saying to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth”. God also said, “Look, to you I give all the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the surface of the earth, and all the trees with seed-bearing fruit; this will be your food. And to all the wild animals, all the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that creep along the ground, I give all the foliage of the

plants as their food”. And so it was’ (Genesis 1: 28–30). Obviously, a literal interpretation would justify the exploitation of resources for the benefit only of humans, but several Christian exegetes have supported a different interpretation, since the dominion concept is not absolute in the Jewish tradition, but rather a delegate mandate.

Human-caused disorder impacts all creation, since when man is not at peace with God, he is not at peace with the Creation either: ‘Yahweh indicts the citizens of the country: there is no loyalty, no faithful love, no knowledge of God in the country, only perjury and lying, murder, theft, adultery and violence, bloodshed after bloodshed. This is why the country is in mourning and all its citizens pining away, the wild animals also and birds of the sky, even the fish in the sea will disappear’ (Hosea 4: 1–3).

Christian responsibility for the environment begins with appreciation of the goodness of all God’s creation. In the beginning “God looked at everything had made, and he found it very good (Genesis 1:31), the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the earth and the seas, fish and birds, animals and humans – all are good God’s wisdom and power were present in every aspect of the unfolding of creation (proverbs 8:22-31). Humans, made in the image and likeness of God, are called in a special way to cultivate and care for it. (Genesis 2:15) men and women, therefore bear a unique responsibility under God to safeguard the created world and by their creative labor even to enhance it safeguarding creation requires us to live responsibly within it, rather than manage creation as though we are outside it. The human farm is charged with preserving the beauty diversity and integrity of nature, as well as fastening its productivity.

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it wrote the Psalmist (Psalms 24:1). But the cedars of Lebanon, which were a part of the earth the Psalmist, knew they were gone. “the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalms 19:1) but today in many parts of the world the sky proclaims is dimmed and muted by a yellow brown haze and scars of the earth below testify to its own erosion. The Christians in the study were to experience environmental challenges as participants with God and people in the process of environmental conservation.

Statement of the Problem

Bible teaches that caretakers or managers of nature, people are to practice good stewardship. The word “steward” and “stewardship” is used throughout the old and new testament in the Bible Genesis 15:2, Matthew 20:8, I Corinthians 4:2 when the word for steward (manager, servant) is used in the Bible it refers to a person who is duty in charge of taking care of something that does not belong to him or her. This meaning is consistent with Webster’s dictionary definition of large household or estate to manage domestic concerns”. As stewards of nature, people have been appointed by God to manage the “domestic environmental concerns”. As stewards of nature, people have been appointed by God to manage the “domestic environmental concerns” of our planet earth home. All religions include a particular cosmology that tries to explain the beginning and development of the universe, and the role of human beings in the natural world. Whether humans have a leading role in God’s design for creation, or are just equals among other animals, has profound implications for the environmental equilibrium of our planet. It affects our sense of which we are in the universe, how we should relate with other species, and how we should use natural resources to make our life more equilibrated and sustainable.

In Kenya, the environmental degradation is a fast growing national catastrophe. The country experiences the effect of polluted air and water, oil and wastes on the beaches, loss of farmland, wetlands, forest, rivers and lakes. Throughout time, the Church has played a large role in setting values and shifting norms, for better or for worse. When conservationists step back and recall how values are critical to conservation progress, the importance of where the Church

stands on environmental issues becomes undeniable. (Genesis 1:28) established that God's basic ordering of creation, people are under the authority or dominion of God. Thus from the perspective of God's basic ordering of creation, people and nature are in the same class or order. All of creation including people must submit to God's plans and ways. Godly dominion over nature means that people act as stewards or caretakers of nature as fellow creations of God. People, like plants and animals, must also cope with living in a physical world and universe created and controlled by God.

National Environment Management Agency (NEMA) focuses on increasing people's capacities to transform their visions for society into reality. The mainstreaming of environmental issues in the curriculum at primary and secondary schools in Kenya dates back to the colonial days (before 1963). The Kenyan government has, since the publication of the Report of the National Committee on Education Objectives and Policies (NCEOP) in 1977, made deliberate attempts to mainstream environmental issues in all curricula at all levels. The commitment was reiterated when parliament adopted Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988 on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond with a call to make environmental studies part and parcel of every training and to be integrated at all levels of education. It was on those grounds that the study sought to sensitize the church to play a participatory role with God-given values on preservation on the environment.

Key Questions Which Guided the Study Were

- What is the level of awareness in the church concerning the need to care the environment in south Imenti sub-county?
- What approaches can the Christians use to educate others on the environment care using godly values?
- What are the challenges faced by Christians in the course of educating the community on environmental conservation?
- In which ways can the Christians contribute towards environmental preservation?

Significance of the Study

The study utilized the descriptive research survey design. According to Creswell (1994) it intends to present facts about the nature and status of a situation as it exists at the time of the study. In addition, it also concerns with the relationships and practices that exist, beliefs and processes that are ongoing, effects that are being felt or trends that are developing (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). Therefore, it can be helpful in order to describe the current conditions and situations based on the impressions and perceptions of the participants of the study (Creswell 1994). The design was therefore be appropriate for this study since the researcher gathered information without manipulation of variables.

The Kenyan government will benefit from this study in that it will highlight the pathways that could be used to deal with the problem of environmental degradation in the country, by incorporating the largest religion in the country. This step is important in establishing the mechanisms and policies in which the government can address the issue.

The church will also benefit from this study in that it will provide information on what the church is doing, and the areas it is failing in effort to conserve the environment. This is important in forming suggestions for the improvement of their service, and fulfilling the Gods command of protecting the environment The findings are useful to the existing knowledge of Christianity teachings with regards to nature conservation. This may serve as a point of reference for academics, researchers, students and eco-friendly Non-Governmental Organizations, in their quests to explore the means of salvaging the natural world.

Critical Review of Theories and Gaps

The basic idea behind Diversity Begets Diversity by Robert MacArthur and John MacArthur (1961) is that having a diversity of environmental conditions will provide habitat for a diverse array of species. For example, a landscape covered by a mosaic of young forests and old forests, conifer forests and deciduous forests, will provide habitat for far more species than any one of these would alone. Island Biogeography Theory fully developed by MacArthur and Wilson (1963, 1967) and predicts that the largest number of species will exist on large islands close to continental land masses. The theory of island biogeography proposes that the number of species found on an undisturbed island is determined by immigration and extinction.

The Using Nature’s Template theory by Hunter (1990), can be expressed quite succinctly: understand forest ecosystems (in terms of their composition, structure, function, and the disturbances that regulate patterns across space and time) as thoroughly as possible and use that knowledge to design management systems that are as unobtrusive as feasible. However, the foundation for this idea is a bit more complex; it begins with the cycles of disturbance and succession for which all forest dwelling species have evolved. Since forest species are adapted to natural disturbances it is logical to assume that they will be better able to cope with human-induced disturbances – like logging and quarrying-if the human-induced disturbance is a reasonable facsimile of a natural disturbance.

The theories have further presented the consequences of human behavior to the environment. They however fail to present the way religion and particularly Christianity and Christian values affects environmental conservation. Christianity plays an important role in shaping the behavior of the people of a certain community. This study will therefore present the impact of the Christian values and teachings on the human beings behavior towards the environment.

Methodology

The study utilized descriptive survey design. Twenty two churches were sampled and studied in regard so main variables. The study utilized the descriptive research survey design. The target population of this study was all the 88 pastors and 1733 congregation members of the Christian churches in the Sub-County. A sample of 22 churches was studied using questionnaire and data was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 for windows. Ethical considerations were observed.

Data Analysis, Interpretation and Presentation

Table 1: Contribution of Christian Teaching on Stewardship, on Preservation of Environment

Statement	SA (5)	A(4)	U (3)	D(2)	SD (1)
The preachers in our church emphasizes on the God given role of environmental conservation in their sermons	6.7	14.4	4.6	36.4	37.9
The church leaders do stress on the God given duty of Christians to take care of the environment	4.6	6.7	2.6	47.7	38.5
The church members do actively take part in the actions of environmental conservation, like collection of litters	5.1	8.7	7.2	49.7	29.2
The preachers do preach on the importance of taking care of the environment	5.6	4.1	2.6	44.6	43.1
The church teaches the members on the importance of being stewards to the environment	3.6	6.2	3.1	51.3	35.9
The church leaders’ emphasizes on members to plant trees, in order to conserve the environment	6.7	7.7	5.6	31.3	48.7

Discussion of Findings

The study established that the majority (85.6) strongly disagreed that the preachers in the churches emphasized on the God-given role of environmental conservation in their sermons, while (14.4%) agreed. Human beings were given dominion by God dominion over the rest of Creation is not absolute but delegated, and therefore they cannot use it arbitrarily but rather with proper responsibility. These ideas have crystallized into the concept of environmental stewardship, which is now the most standard approach amongst those Christians concerned with the environment, (Attfield, 2006). The study further established that the church leaders did not stress on the God given duty of Christians to take care of the environment, as was indicated by the majority (67.7%) of the participants. The findings reveal that the church members were rarely taught on their roles of being stewards to the environment, and this was because the preachers rarely gave the teachings on the environment.

The study further established that the church members did not actively take part in the actions of environmental conservation, like collection of litters, as was indicated by the majority (59.7%) of the participants. According to Gottlieb (2003) environmental degradation is not only a health danger, an economic catastrophe, or an aesthetic blight but also sacrilegious, sinful, and an offense against God. The study further established that the majority (56.6%) of the participants disagreed that their preachers did preach on the importance of taking care of the environment, as opposed to (4.1%) who stated that they did. This information implies that the church members were not preached on the importance of environmental care.

The study further sought to establish the teachings of Christianity on empathy, and its impact on environmental conservation. The findings obtained are presented on the table 9.

Table 2: Teachings of Christianity on Empathy, and Its Impact on Environmental Conservation

Statement	SA (5)	A(4)	U (3)	D(2)	SD (1)
Our church teaches its congregation members to take the matters of environmental conservation, as their own issue	3.6	10.8	1.0	40.5	44.1
The church teachers the members to be mindful of their environment, as they carry out their day to day activities.	4.6	5.1	1.0	39.5	49.7
The teachings of the church teach us to be mindful of others, through conserving the environment, and condoning the acts of environmental degradation.	7.7	4.1	4.6	41.0	42.6
The preachers in our church do preach that as Christians, we should take action towards preventing the environmental degradation, starting from personal level.	6.7	6.2	5.6	39.5	42.1

Discussion of Findings

The majority (84.1%) of the participants indicated that their churches did not teach congregation members to take the matters of environmental conservation, as their own issue, as opposed to (10.8%) who agreed. The study further established that the churches did not teach the members to be mindful of their environment, as they carry out their day to day activities, as was indicated by the majority (59.7%) of the participants who strongly disagreed. This does not imply that religious reasons alone will change people's minds in terms of environmental sustainability, but they will obviously help with the bounding force of religious moral principles (Schumacher, 1973; McDonagh, 1986).

The teachings of the church did not teach the people to be mindful of others, through conserving the environment, and condoning the acts of environmental degradation, as was agreed by the majority (52.6%) of the participants, who

strongly disagreed. The study further established that the majority (62.1%) did not preach that as Christians, we should take action towards preventing the environmental degradation, starting from personal level. This may have led to increased environmental degradation actions by the Christians.

The participants were asked to indicate the teachings their churches taught on empathy, and the responses obtained include; the Christians should have a feeling for the environment, and feel bad when someone degrades it, the Christians should take a step towards reclaiming the degraded areas of environment, as it is our God-given task and that the environment supports the existence of all of us.

The study further sought to establish whether the Christians did apply the empathy teachings, in environmental conservation. The findings obtained are presented on the table 3

whether the Christians did apply the empathy teachings, in environmental conservation.

Table 3: Distribution of Participants by Responses

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	172	88.2
No	23	11.8
Total	195	100

The study established that the majority (88.2%) of the participants indicated that they did practice the Christian teachings on empathy, as opposed to 11.8% who said they did not. These findings reveal that the Christians did apply the teachings on empathy, in caring for the environment, however, the preachers failed to give them adequate teachings on empathizing with the environment.

The study further sought to establish if the churches did offer teachings to the Christians on the love for environment. The findings obtained are recorded on the table 4

Table 4: The Level of Awareness of God-Given Values Regarding Environmental Conservation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	14	7.2
No	181	92.8
Total	195	100

Discussion of Findings

The study established that the majority (92.8%) of the participants indicated that their churches did not teach them on love for the environment; as opposed to (7.2%) who said they did.

The study further sought to establish the teachings the church offered on the love of the environment. The responses obtained include; care for the environment by keeping it clean and habitable, making the environment habitable for us, and the future generations.

The participants were also asked to indicate how they understand on empathizing with the environment. The responses include; educating the community on the best environmental conservation methods and the dangers posed if the environment is degraded, and mobilizing people to take part in the acts of environmental cleaning and preservation.

Role of Christians in Environmental Conservation

The study sought to establish the role played by Christians in environmental conservation. The responses obtained include; planting of trees, avoiding littering, burning of wastes and litters building gabions to stop soil erosion, making terraces around the slopes, planting of flowers to beautify the place, taking part in cleaning days organized by churches, and educating people on importance of conserving the environment.

Recommendations, Summary, Conclusion and Areas of Further Research

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the study makes the following recommendations

The churches were not adequately taking part in environmental cleaning near towns. The study recommends that churches should organize on days for cleaning the environment, in the neighboring towns, collecting litter and burning. They should also start an initiative of placing litter bins in the towns, to curb littering.

The preachers in the churches did not emphasize on Stewardship and taking care of the environment. The study recommends that the preachers should mobilize their congregation members on how they can take care of the environment, and make the congregation members to elaborate to the people outside the churches.

The members of the church were not taught on ways of taking care of the environment. The researcher recommends that the churches in collaboration with the government should produce leaflets to distribute to the people of the area, on the importance of taking care of the environment. This will enable the Christians who do not attend the churches, to understand the importance of environmental care.

The churches were not actively involved in reclaiming the already depleted areas of Meru. The study recommends that the churches should also actively participate in building gabions and terraces, to reduce soil erosion, and planting of trees, to replace the already cut ones.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to establish the contribution of Christian values on environmental preservation in Imenti South Sub-County. The first objective of the study was to establish the impact of Christian teaching on morality, on reduction of environmental degradation in Imenti south sub county. The study established that; the pastors did not emphasize on the moral importance of environmental conservation, in every sermon, the church leaders did not teach the congregation on their role in environmental conservation, the church leaders rarely taught on the problems and dangers posed by littering of papers and unrecyclable materials on the ground. The study further established that the church did not takes part in building gabions in the eroded areas, the church preachers did not actively preach against the acts of deforestation, the churches did not offer teachings on the moral concepts of caring for the environment and that the church members did practice the teachings on the morals of caring for the environment

The second objective of the study sought to establish the contribution of Christian teaching on stewardship, on preservation of environment in Imenti south sub county. The study established that; the preachers in the churches did not emphasize on the God given role of environmental conservation in their sermons. The study further established that the church leaders did not stress on the God given duty of Christians to take care of the environment, the church members did not actively take part in the actions of environmental conservation, like collection of litters. The churches never taught the

members on the importance of being stewards to the environment, and that their church did not teach on stewardship. However, the participants further indicated that they did practice the teachings of stewardship.

The third objective of the study sought to establish the role of Christian teachings on empathy, against the environmental conservation in Imenti south sub county. The study established that; that the churches did not teach its congregation members to take the matters of environmental conservation as their own issue, the churches did not teach the members to be mindful of their environment as they carry out their day to day activities. The teachings of the church did not teach the people to be mindful of others, through conserving the environment, and condoning the acts of environmental degradation and that the participants indicated that they did practice the Christian teachings on empathy

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concludes;

That the churches did not offer teachings on the morals of taking care for the environment, and the members did practice what the teachings taught. The efforts of the church members were not sufficient enough, to stop the effects of degradation.

That the preachers did not offer teachings to the Christians on their God given role of stewardship to the environment, and the Christians did practice the teachings. Their practices were inadequate because the environment was still being degraded at a considerable rate.

That the church members were being taught on matters concerning empathy, and they did practice them and for this, the environment was still being degraded.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

From the findings of this study, the researcher recommends research on the following areas.

Assessment of the efforts of church administration in participation of matters pertaining to environment conservation in Kenya

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