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## An Investigation of the Relevance of Biblical Teachings On Church Participation in the Preservation of Environment Resources in Tigania West Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*This study sought to investigate the relevance of biblical teachings on the preservation of environment resources in Tigania west sub county, Meru County. The objectives of this study was: to determine the level of awareness by Christians in activities that promote preservation of natural resources in their environment, to find out whether Christian leaders teach their church members biblical principles regarding preservation of natural resources in their environment, to find out strategies Christians are using to preserve natural resources in their environment and to determine the level of participation by Christians in preserving the natural resources in their environment. The study reviewed literature on related themes such as theoretical review of Level of awareness by Christians, teachings by Christian Leaders and strategies by Christians Level of participation by Christians. It is hoped that the study was significant to the Christians and church leaders. The proposed study confined itself to churches in Tigania West Sub county where data was collected from Christians and church leaders. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The target population was 917 Christians. The sample size was 92 which were 10% of the population according to Mugenda. The research instruments to be used were a questionnaire for Christians and church leaders. Piloting was done to help identify ambiguities and inadequacies of research instruments. The primary data was collected from the subjects, thoroughly sorted, edited, coded, organized and analyzed systematically using qualitative and quantitative methods. Finally results from the data collected in this study was analyzed by use of percentages and frequencies and presented in charts and tables. From the findings, Christians knew that nature has to be respected and cared for as God's creation. It is therefore recommended that Christian leaders schedule teaching and preaching on environmental stewardship based on the Bible and guided by their statement of beliefs on nature. The leader of any Christian church or ministry has the responsibility to lead this environmental protection and stewardship education effort or to find a qualified leader who can do so. This helped the church's environmental stewardship program.*

**Keywords:** church-community initiatives, environmental stewardship.

### **1. Background to the Study**

Christian responsibility to care for the environment (forest, soil, water) has been noted throughout the history of the church. Unfortunately, this has not always been given high priority or disciplined application. All too often it has been neglected, either because "spiritual" matters were regarded as more important, or because economic prosperity was the main focus. In recent years, the church has been blamed for the global environmental crisis. White (1967) argued that Christianity has put humanity at the centre of the universe, nature being viewed as existing for humans to use and exploit as they wish. According to White, by destroying the fear of spirits in natural objects, Christianity allowed humans to exploit and destroy the earth. We may note a PNG example where a sacred tree in Adiba village, in the Western Province was destroyed by Christians.)

These lead to both Christians and non-Christians doing what they like with the environment. There is some truth in the claims of White and those who support his views. Too often, Christians have acted self-centeredly; they have failed to emphasize the need for good stewardship and practical care for the earth, and have not opposed thoughtless and greedy exploitation. To this extent we must repent and put our house in order.

However, White was mistaken in two ways. First, it is not just Christian-based cultures that fail in environmental care; for example Marxist Communism has a very bad environmental record, and the nations of Japan, China, and Malaysia, none of them with Christian foundations, are among the worst in contributing to environmental degradation.

Berry (2000) argues that the church has rarely used the creation story as a license for destroying the environment. The key verses in Genesis 1 about subduing the earth and having dominion over it are usually interpreted in terms of stewardship and care, and responsibility to sustain the order of the world that God created – consistently with the message of Genesis 2 and the rest of the Old Testament. The dominant view through most of church history is that the creation message is God centered, not man-centered. The failures of the church in relation to the environment have a broader base that is related to human ignorance, thoughtlessness, and selfishness.

With the rise in the number of environmental problems that the world faces today, there is no doubt that there is a need for the principles of environmental stewardship to be fanned into flame among Christians through biblical teachings. Christian leaders have been placed by God in strategic positions of leadership and influence in their various ministries, and they can use this to move people towards God's environmental agenda by their teachings, motivation and exemplary actions. It is, therefore, imperative that key guidelines be provided for Christian leaders to help them to fulfill this God-given mandate through biblical teachings.

Christian leaders know that they have a biblical responsibility towards the environment and see the need for action to address environmental degradation, but do not know the extent to which they should be involved in environmentalism Story (2012). This has resulted in inaction on the part of leaders who most of the time do not even teach or preach about Bible based environmental protection. Their failure to lead in this regard has also led to a corresponding lack of action by Christians; who generally have not engaged in practical Bible based stewardship of the environment. The lack of action revealed above, creates a problem for Christianity as it is now seen as choosy with regards to which biblical standards it upholds and which standards it ignores (Story,2012).

## **2. Biblical and Theological Foundations Concerning Preservation of Environmental Resources**

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Psalms 24:1. The Bible says that God expects, even demands, that we be stewards of His creation. Scripture is undisputable. God created the different species of plants and animals, blessed them, protected them and made a covenant with them, and we have a responsibility to live according to the duty set before us in the place God has assigned us to live and work.

Every time we, as humans, randomly destroy an ecosystem or drive a species to extinction, we are stating that what God created, we can destroy without implication. There is no scripture to support that view. Every time a species goes extinct, we are defaulting on the stewardship that God has called us to manage. We are at the crossroads, able to choose to save or to destroy. Christians are called to be stewards: to nurture, to protect, and to preserve His creation...for His glory. This is not a time to hide our heads in the sand and wait for the rapture mentality. Jesus Christ is LORD of life and we above all people have a solid reason to be environmentalists, not for creation's sake, but rather for the Creator's sake and for His glory alone. The following is a Biblical foundation for this position.

In psalms 24 verses of the Bible records that, the earth is Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who are in it. Verse 2 it states, for he founded it upon the seas and established it on the waters. In verses 3 the Bible poses a big question, who may ascend the hill of the Lord?

Who may stand in His holy place? The text above is a clear indication that God is the creator of mankind the universe, and everything in it. He controls and keeps everything in position according to His will and desire. However according to God His property, animals, and human beings should obey him. If man fails to do this, then he can't stand before God, that why in verses 3 the writer wonders who can stand in His holly place. This shows for man to be right with God he must preserve the environment and all other Gods creation.

In genesis chapter 1,2man has been given mandate to control the Gods given creations name the animal, till the land and eat the produce in it. This indication that man is supreme and powerful over lest creation. Therefore we find that God gave man a good environment and empowered him to maintain it as good as it was and even make it more beautiful. In fact we find that God created everything on earth before creating man. In the first account of creation man comes last, but he is given divine mandate over it.

In the New Testament, the term is also used to refer to the care for household food (Luke 12:42) and finances (Luke 16:2). In connection with the household of God, Paul refers to himself as a "steward of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. 4:1). This implies a spiritual responsibility for the Gospel.

Christians believe that an ecological theology includes the understanding that God the Creator has entrusted his creation to the stewardship of humanity. Christians, as the recipients of God's grace, have a special calling to manage well what he has given (I Pet. 4:10). Based on the etymology of the terms and the statements of scripture, it is possible to state our role in this manner: Christian In Jesus' parable of the "Shrewd Steward," he made it clear that the steward is accountable to the Master for his stewardship: "Give me an account of your management..." (Luke 16:2). The consistent teaching of the stewardship passages is that faithfulness is the essential requirement.

While the mandate to protect the environment has been given to all mankind, leadership is what

God uses to move people onto his agenda (Black by, 2002) It is an acknowledged fact that the key for organizational success and growth is effective leadership. Leaders have the ability to teach biblical truth and move people towards the plans of God as described in the Scriptures. This ensures that God's people flourish in every way as God intended and become God ambassadors of all that God gave them stewardship over, to include the environment. No wonder the Bible states that "where there is no guidance the people fall, but in the abundance of counselors there is victory (Proverbs 11:14).This shows that God placed leaders strategically to provide

guidance to His people. It is clearly within God's plan for there to be leaders to help God's people to move in line with His will. God would have never called or used leaders if there was no need of them. In the Bible many notable leaders like Moses, Nehemiah, Paul and above all Jesus, were used by God to lead His people according to His plan. Even in situations where there was a need for change or the ushering in of new understanding, God appointed and anointed leaders to accomplish His purpose in His people.

Christian leaders need to lead Christ's church, which He purchased with His own blood, towards God's plans for them and to be good stewards of God's creation. The Bible states that leaders should lead in service to God; giving a warning specifically to leaders to be on guard for themselves and the flock to which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers and to diligently shepherd the church of God which Christ purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28 This means that Christian leaders have to oversee and guide the church, knowing that it is so valuable to Jesus that He shed His blood for it. In addition to the above, the Bible also states that Christian Leaders should "Shepherd the flock of God...exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory." 1 Peter 5:2-4 Clearly Christian leaders have to make sure that they serve God and teach His will in all they do. Now that it is theologically understood that environmental protection is God's will, leaders have to make sure that action is taken to ensure that in their ministries and churches, something is being done to ensure that they are leading the way towards environmental stewardship in word and deed.

Ephesians 4:11-15 is perhaps the Scripture that best provides a solid theological basis for Christian leaders to prepare, guide and lead God's people towards works of Christian service. It states that Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:15).

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. The above Scripture passage makes it clear that apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers and all other Christian leaders regardless of the titles they use have been appointed by God to equip Christians (the saints) to serve God and understand His precepts. It appears that this leadership role is God ordained to ensure greater growth towards Christ-likeness in believers in word and deed. This is what this Scripture passage refers to as "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." If Christian leaders do not train and equip God's people to such a fullness of service, then they will be tossed to and fro and will not be able to do the things that God instructs them in His Word to do. Since biblical environmental protection is God's agenda, then Christian leaders have a role to play in motivating and encouraging it among Christians (Blackaby, 2002).

Thus, as the Bible mandates environmental protection, it should be the business of Christian leaders to ensure that they lead and influence people to live in obedience to God in the way they relate to the environment. The overall purpose of the Christian leader's life has to live up to God's agenda because failure to do so will lead to frustration and futility (Boa,2012). Research has also revealed that pastors are moral leaders. This is because they guide and shape the moral stances of their congregants (Miles,1999) Christian leaders, therefore, have influence and can lead their congregants towards greater moral understanding of issues such as Christian environmentalism and shape the moral direction of their congregants towards what God has desired concerning care for nature. As they use all the skills they have at hand, Christian leaders can change and influence positively the ethical and moral beliefs and actions of those that they lead.

According to Towns (1992) a true leader is able to influence, relate to other people and persuade others to follow. This means that leaders possess the ability to persuade others to follow exactly what the Bible teaches about Christian environmental protection because they are strategically positioned to influence and persuade. This is in line with Sweet's (1999) observation that it is not people who are right who change the world but those who can communicate their definition of right to others.

### **3. Statement of the Problem**

The foregoing discussions on value-based practices regarding environmental preservation in Tigania West sub-County were the desired norm. The study sought to use biblically guided approaches with a different value system as prescribed by God the creator and sustainer of the universe. A study conducted in Kenya by Mireri, C. (2005) on 'Challenges Facing the Conservation of Lake Naivasha, Kenya' in the Department of Environmental Planning & Management, Kenyatta University, indicated that resource use conflicts are part of human nature. Based on the biblical and theological foundations discussed, selfishness is one of the sins of humanity and residents of Naivasha were only a sample that demonstrated who they were. Another study done by Wamicha, & Mwanje, (2000) on titled 'Environmental management in Kenya. Have the National Conservation Plans worked?' has analyzed the major environmental actors in Kenya and their mandates. The study has identified them as Central Government Ministries, specialized agencies and special commissions, resources mappings and survey agencies, research organizations and regional authorities. The findings led to a conclusion that environmental plans have not worked in Kenya because challenges with constitutional legal framework and resource management issues. The constitutional legal framework has not considered quality of human values as implementers of that constitution. This is the gap that the study sought to fill by teaching biblical values on environmental preservation using similar methods, under the same constitution but with different vision- the welfare of everyone for the present and future generations. The National Environment Policy, 2013. Ministry of Environment, Water and Natural Resources has highlighted on many challenges but specific concern of the study in Tigania was water, trees and soils. In the words of Policy, 'Quality fertile soils are a foundation of sustainable agriculture. Soils are also essential in the hydrological cycle. Soil degradation processes of particular

concern throughout the country include erosion, compaction and soil fertility depletion. Loss of natural habitats, has reduced vegetation cover and exposed soils to extensive wind and soil erosion in many parts of the country' (p. 17). The evidence of the problem was compelling in that studies done by the major actors cited were replicable in Tigania. The researcher systematically sought to include the church in the national resource preservation initiatives based on biblical values in anticipation that those positive practices changes realized in Tigania would be a pilot for the Government, other churches, researchers and wider world of scholars.

#### **4. Research Questions Which Guided the Study**

- How did the level of awareness of biblical teachings by Christians help to promote preservation of natural resources in their environment?
- To what extent did Christian leaders teach their church members biblical principles regarding preservation of natural resources in their environment?
- What were the strategies used by Christians to preserve natural resources in their environment
- To what extent did the level of participation by Christians help in preserving the natural resources in their environment.

#### **5. Significance of the Study**

The Christians in the churches and the community around shall be the beneficiaries of the good environment given by God. Enough rains, soil and clean water are some of immediate benefits by the community. The findings were available to Government of Kenya (GOK) educational institutions and research bodies through this report. It is hoped that the GOK will partner with county governments to ensure that citizens protect and conserve the environment so that this generation and the coming generation will have resources to sustain them.

#### **6. Theoretical Framework**

The theory of commons on environmental protection has been discussed by Berge (2003) had had earlier been criticized by researchers and the issue was that competitors regarding the use of environmental resources do not see eye to eye on unified environmental preservation strategies because values differ from user to user. Sax's public trust theory (Sax, 1970) explored various approaches to preservation of environmental resources. Bento (2001) has discussed the interpretation of Sax's doctrine of environmental preservation by various stakeholders in who formed communities. Professor Sax, called for citizen's greater participation in protecting natural resources and thus greater utilization of strategies which would work effectively in various communities to achieve the same goal, environmental preservation. Delgado (2001), of University of Colorado, advocated a law reform to try and minimize the resource use conflicts that emerged from various approaches. In the right of the foregoing, Christian values derived from the Bible and made available to the participants through teachings that led to implementation were given a chance.

In Tigania West Sub-County, different human users of trees may differ on the basis of economic interests, ranging from charcoal makers, timber merchants to farmers who want to preserve trees for other purposes. Theory of commons was adopted to guide the study because it was relevant to the issues at hand in Tigania West Sub-County.

#### **7. Recap of Literature Review**

In addition to the lack of information about stewardship perceptions, researches conducted to date has also failed to reach a consensus about key indicators of effective ethical attitudes that would guide equitable practices on environmental preservation. While many different variables (e.g., socio demographic characteristics, personality traits, values, knowledge) and environmental sensitivity scales have been considered and tested, none of the variables were found to consistently and strongly predict pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors.

#### **8. Methodology**

This research was undertaken by use of descriptive survey. A research design is a programmed to guide the researcher in collecting analyzing and interpreting observed facts (Orodho 2004). He goes ahead to define descriptive survey as a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. Mugenda (2003) support this view by asserting that this type of research attempts to describe such things as possible behavior, attitudes to describe and characteristics descriptive survey enabled the researcher to have a systematic collection and presentation of data in order to determine the influence on biblical teachings on the preservation of environmental resources. The reasons for choosing this design was that it was the most appropriate in collecting data about the characteristics of a large population in terms of being cost effective and within the constraints of time available and more so the questionnaire is employed as the main tool for data collection (Orodho 2004).

#### **9. Data Analysis, Presentation and Discussion**

Data was analysed descriptively through the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study also sought to establish whether the environmental protection is preached and taught in the churches that participated. The findings were summarized and processed as SPSS output in the table below.



		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Proposed actions
Valid	strongly disagree	36	39.1	39.1	39.1	The church leaders to teach biblical values on environmental preservation.
	Disagree	42	45.7	45.7	84.8	
	Uncertain	7	7.6	7.6	92.4	
	Agree	6	6.5	6.5	98.9	
	strongly agree	1	1.1	1.1	100.0	
	Total	92	100.0	100.0		

Table 1: Environmental protection is preached and taught at your church

### 9.1. Discussion of the findings

The study found out that 45.7% % said that they disagree with environmental protection being preached and taught at their church, while 39.1 % strongly disagree, 7.6 were uncertain. 6.5% and 1.1% agreed and strongly disagreed respectively. However, while the active environmentalism that has resulted is to be commended, the teachings of these movements have to be corrected as some even believe nature is to be worshipped like God. Were Christian leaders urged to teach Christian values regarding environmental preservation in other parts of the world? According to (Blackaby, 2002) biblical environmental protection is God's agenda; therefore Christian leaders have a role to play in motivating and encouraging it among Christians. The Bible states that people fall where there is no guidance but in the abundance of leaders who the Bible also questions how people can hear without anyone preaching to them. This means that the role of Christian leaders in preaching the Word of God is critical if Christians are fully to become and do all that God wants them to be and do. Even so with environmental protection, it is not logical to assume that people will just end up knowing about what the Bible says about it without anyone sharing that aspect of the Word with them.

## 10. Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations and areas for further research

This section presents the summary of findings conclusions drawn from the analysis and the recommendation of the researcher. The objectives were to examine the level of awareness by Christians in activities that promote preservation of natural resources in their environment, to find out whether Christian leaders teach their church members biblical principles regarding preservation of natural resources in their environment. to find out strategies Christians are using to preserve natural resources in their environment and to examine the level of participation by Christians in preserving the natural resources in their environment.

### 10.1. Summary of the Findings

Teachings by Christian leaders on preservation of natural resources were presented. The results for questions indicating preaching or teaching gaps are indicative of a glaring teaching gap. This shows that, only a few Christian leaders are taking the time to either preach or teach about biblical environmental protection in their churches or ministries. No wonder that ninety percent of the participants disagreed when asked if Pastors and Christian leaders are talking enough with their congregants and audiences about environmental protection and stewardship. In fact, there is very little deliberate effort to develop a teaching or preaching curriculum on biblical environmental protection. The above scenario is very problematic because if Christians are not taught about biblical environmental protection, there is no hope that they will put it into practice.

### 10.2. Conclusions

Most leaders who undertook the survey stated that they understood their strategic position that allows them to motivate biblical environmentalism and were ready to move to a place where they will begin to make great influence toward its. The only thing that is left is positive action on the part of Christian leaders to ensure that biblical environmental protection is indeed fanned into flame. Clearly, the strategic position of Christian leaders in the biblical environmental agenda is beyond question. God has given Christian leaders a platform through which they can teach and demonstrate this biblical environmental agenda to their audiences in whatever ministry setting they are in. Christian leaders have to become the mouthpieces of God; who also lead by example from the Bible, preaching and teaching people to be true stewards of God's natural environment.

They have to understand that God is the owner and Creator of all things and He has entrusted the earth and its resources to mankind's care. Christian leaders, therefore have to influence Christians through their ministries to act responsibly with nature as good and faithful stewards and avoid the wrath of God. If humanity does not keep, preserve and nurture the earth as mandated by God, they shall be found guilty for destroying the earth and be liable for God's judgment

It is time for action in Christian environmentalism to be manifested. Therefore Christian leaders have to make room in their lives for biblical environmentalism so that when others see them in action they will also follow in their footsteps. Without being overly prescriptive, this means that Christian leaders will have to remove those things that have acted as hindrances and put into practice the agenda of God in biblical environmental stewardship. If it means revisiting Christology or their mission statements, they have to do it,

to ensure that they can understand that God loves nature and that a true relationship with God will have underpinnings of love for nature. Mankind as a creature created in the image of God, and especially Christians whose relationship with Jesus is beyond doubt, cannot and should not try to separate themselves from the issue of nature protection. This is because this forms a critical part of what it means to be a

Christian and what it means to have a relationship/fellowship with a God, who values nature.

### 10.3. Recommendations to Relevant Stakeholders

- As Christian leaders begin to play an active role in encouraging biblical environmentalism, it will be very important to develop a statement of belief on nature. Christian leaders need to buy teaching materials e.g. environmental based literatures, initiate environmental clubs and movements to enhance awareness.

This statement of beliefs on nature can be given to every congregant or follower and can be placed on church or ministry information boards or websites to ensure that everyone knows what the Bible says about nature. This will help put into perspective the Christian environmental stewardship mandate in the face of the philosophies of non-Christian movements that people hear all the time. Therefore, the human race can use nature for its own purposes with the understanding that nature belongs to Him and people are His caretakers. Jesus taught His disciples that He did not come to be served but to serve. Again the Bible states that Jesus emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant. Therefore, which mankind is not subservient to nature, he can serve nature like Christ came to save and serve man though He is man's King. It is important to understand that the words "subdue" and "dominion" in Genesis 1:28 refer to a stewardship or caretaker role that God has given to mankind over nature as only God has absolute authority over nature.

- Christian leaders should schedule teaching and preaching on environmental stewardship based on the Bible and guided by their statement of beliefs on nature.

The leader of any Christian church or ministry has the responsibility to lead this environmental protection and stewardship education effort or to find a qualified leader who can do so. This will help the church's environmental stewardship program.

- To be effective as leaders in Christian environmental management, Christian leaders have to lobby government and influence change at state and national levels. The church can write proposal to the government for funding seek support for the environmental based project.

This is because it is the essence of true democracy for people to be able to stand up for what they believe. In a democratic nation like Kenya, it is expected that Christian leaders will be able to do this. This is not to encourage Christian leaders to be deeply involved in politics. The environmental crisis has no borders as most environmental harms have the ability to cross borders in their effects and some natural resources are shared with other countries. It is, therefore, recommended that Christian leaders encourage people to engage in good environmental stewardship at home to show love for God's people in other parts of the world and this is consistent with the biblical mandate to love. Christians can also be encouraged to pray for people in other parts of the world whose forests and habitats have been destroyed by other people's environmental abuse.

Concerning the matter of leading by example, the Bible encourages believers to remember their leaders who speak the word of God to them and imitate their faith. Therefore, Christian leaders have to be exemplary. They have to live their lives and lead their ministries in a manner that is worthy of imitation. In fact, Christian leaders have to be the paradigm of what it means to be good environmental stewards in their communities by encouraging and leading their ministries to engage in practical environmental protection measures such as, using energy efficient appliances and compact fluorescents, unplugging appliances when not in use, carpooling, recycling, avoiding littering and pollution, tree planting.

### 10.4. Areas for Further Research

- Research should be done on the impact of biblical teaching on preservation of forest since trees are major source of rainfall.
- The role of Christian movements in sensitizing and organizing Christian drives on preservation of environmental resources.
- The impact of church ecumenism in the preservation of environmental resources. Collaboration of churches should be initiated with the aim of preserving natural resources

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