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THE HERMENEUTICS OF GENESIS 1: 28 AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS: A SOCIO-ETHICAL EVALUATION.

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Abstract
The study of environmental ethics has revealed several implications and impact of the human activities on the environment. Man seems to have exceeded the limit of his supposed interference and the impact has been greatly noticed, talked of and felt. The reason(s) for such attitude remains obvious. Basically, historical records show that the creation story of the book of Genesis especially in chapter 1, verse 28 is the most outstanding cultural, ethical and religious source for the notion of human mastery over nature. This work therefore deemed it necessary to x-ray the hermeneutics of the passage as to offer a socio-ethical evaluation in relation to environmental life. Findings show that reading the passage within the context of creation story at large suggests a better meaning of some basic concepts like subdue and dominion on which the claim of man's mastery over creation hangs. Reading the passage in line with other God commands to man like God's injunction to Adam not to eat certain fruits in the garden, shows that God had not given Adam absolute access to creation in Genesis 1:28. Again considering the basic concepts like "subdue" and "dominion" in reference to their usages in other passages and within Jewish cultural setting suggests a dominion of a benevolent king and not tyrant, a prerogative user and not absolute owner. Hence Genesis chapter 1 verse 28 from any perspective does not support the human exploitation of nature but rather suggests benevolent attitude towards nature for the general good of man, his environment and society.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Environmental Ethics, Biblical Creation Narrative, Dominion, Socio-Ethical Evaluation.

1. Introduction

The degrading nature of the human environment for the past years has called for critical concern. The global effects left no one in doubt if the human and other species are in danger of extinction if human environmental activities are left unchecked. Okoro observes that

> Man has acquired unlimited power over nature consequently a wide range of environmental problems has emerged; those problems include climate

> change ('global warming'), the acidification of surface waters ('acid rain'), the destruction of tropical forests, the depletion and extinction of species, and the precipitous decline of biodiversity. Yet, while all of these problems have physical (environmental) manifestations, their causes - and their potential solutions - are invariably bound up with human attitudes, beliefs, values, needs, desires, expectations, and behaviours. (Okoro, 2015:.293)

So it is obvious that man, since past centuries ,has been the problem to the human environment to the extent that some have suggested it would be well ordered by nature, if about one billion men were to disappear from the stage of history so that the 'highest good' namely the achievement of ecological balance could be achieved. Man sees himself as the sole master of the universe and claims dominion over the creatures of the earth. This feeling is so ardent in man especially when claiming that such mandate is a divine mandate. God created man as the last creature mandated him to go and multiply, fill the earth, subdue and have dominion over all creatures (Gen.1:28) for human benefit. It has been observed that such opinion is not a viable option. Man has to look inwardly for a better understanding of his mandate on and over the earth. There are two schools of thought which raised great deal of scholarly attention devoted to interpreting Genesis 1:26-28, where God seem to have instructed the first human couple to "subdue" the earth and "have dominion over" other creatures. Some interpretations emphasize human stewardship or responsibility for tending the garden and caring for the well-being of other creatures while others read these verses as legitimating human unlimited exploitation of other creatures, the earth's resources and other life. (Richard, 1996: 131)

The first school supports her claim with Genesis 1:28 while the second school claims that by the virtue of being the creatures of God, everything created has intrinsic values beyond its usefulness to man. So basically, historical records show that the creation story of the book of Genesis was the most important cultural source for the notion of human mastery over nature. Among scholars with varying opinions are philosophers, ethicist as well as environmentalists and theologians. Either of the opinions has its implications. Man must make use of the created things for survival and at the same time over usage of the environment constitutes danger to human life since human life is an important part of the environment. (Niederschlag, 2009:13) There are other factors however, attributed as part of the causes of environmental degradation; such factors as natural disasters like erosion, earthquake etc as well as human factors like quest for development and human over population. Among all, the growing sense of man's mastery over nature seems to be basic and outstanding and it is centered on the reading of Genesis 1: 28 as a divine mandate. This work therefore sets out to consider the critical exposition of the hermeneutics of Genesis: 1: 28 as a way forwards. It discovers that the passage does not in itself constitute danger to human environment and life but the wrong interpretation. It offers therefore a possible hermeneutics of the passage, which will help man towards a better attitude towards nature.

2. Environmental Ethics in Perspective

Ethics generally as a concept has been defined differently from different dimensions. These definitions had added to the complexity of the concept. For some, it is all about the issue of wrong and right in relation to human conduct. It could also be understood from its contractual

meaning with moral. For the sake of clarity we shall define ethics from its etymological root and from what ethics is not. The initial approach to the definition of ethics from its etymological form is to refer to its Greek and Latin roots ***ethos*** and ***aethos.*** Ethics is from the Greek word ***"ethos",*** translated in Latin with ***mos, mores***, meaning rules, custom, habit, character or disposition normally associated with right and wrong.

There are scholars who are of the opinion that ethics has to do with a set of social conventions or a religious decree while others see it as the branch of study dealing with what is the proper course of action for man; that is to say that Ethics defines the elements essential to human well-being and proposes principles to be used as guidelines for generating an ethical culture of specific values, standards, rules, and agreements which people adopt for conducting their lives in the human society. Then coming to Environment ethics, it is an aspect of applied ethics. (Brennan, & Yeuk-Sze, 2016: 5) it is ethics studying environment. Environment is defined as the space or sphere or even within our context, where human beings inhabit. This includes all the natural and human phenomena that affects humans and is affected by them and from which they get their means of subsistence such as food, clothing, medicine and shelter and wherein they exercise their relations with their human and non-human fellow creatures. (Allaby, 1981: 23). It is also seen as "a set of conditions such as climate elements and substances comprising the earth and what is related to it like rock constituents, running water in rivers and interactions such as physical interactions like chemical transformations and vital interactions related to the growth of living organisms taking place. (Jamil & Assukkania, 1987: 18)

The ethical problem associated with the human environment was never an issue until the much negative impacts of the human activities on his environment began to manifest themselves on human health and life. As scientists in the early seventies, the analysis and information of science awakened human consciousness to see how much harm that had already been done in the areas of air and waters pollutions and how far the soil has been poisoned. Today the concept of climatic change is a household name in the world as it affects every sphere of human life. It was this shock of the ecological crisis that triggered in the mid-seventies, "a kind of general mobilization for environmental ethical reflection" and everybody began to seek for an ethically acceptable approach towards the human environment. There is no doubt that everyone is now concern about the role of man in the enhancement of the environment hence the necessity and urgency of ethics of the environment.

The first inspiration perhaps for environmental ethics came up around 1970s. It was "when environmentalists started urging philosophers, who were involved with environmental groups to do something about environmental ethics". However, it is evident that prior to the agitation of the environmentalists in 70s, an intellectual climate had already developed in the late 1960s with the publication of the famous scientific landmark papers of Lynn White's "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis" (March 1967) and Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (December 1968) and more importantly an essay in Aldo Leopold's A Sand County Almanac, "The Land Ethic, where Leopold explicitly identified the roots of the ecological crisis as being philosophical. It was the debate of this work of Lynn White thesis and on the tragedy of the commons that eventually led to what is known today as environmental ethics. At the initial stage, the debate was dominantly historical, theological, and religious. It was much more later that it took philosophical shape. Other important steps

taken towards the development of what is known today as Bioethics (which environmental ethics is a major part), includes the publication of a book called Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology by John B. Cobb In 1972, though more theological than philosophical, the book really helped in shaping the discipline of bio-ethics in general. Environmental ethics is an important part of Bioethics.

3. Challenges in doing environmental ethics

Generally the study of environmental ethics as we stated above evaluates the impacts of human activities mostly on human environment all in relation to human life since the protection of the environment in most cases gears towards achieving one basic aim and objective -the protection of human life though not exclusively. With this in mind, it could be said that the challenges of environment ethics could come in either ways- either the protection of the other species and general environment for the sake of human life or the elimination of the same for the survival of man hence such questions could be put: Suppose that putting out natural fires, elimination of certain dangerous animals to protect human life or generally culling destroying some individual members of overpopulated species either of animal directly or scaling them away by destroying their natural inhabitant is necessary for the protection of the integrity of a certain ecosystem. Will these actions be ethically acceptable or permissible?

In very difficult and poor situations, it becomes necessary that the poor masses should survive on firewood in the scarcity of kerosene and cooking gas, thereby leading to the act of massive deforestation, could this be ethically justified? Other questions could be put as follows: what should be the ethical implications of some farming activities such as slash and burn techniques to clear areas for agriculture if this will make the cost of labour cheaper hence low cost of food for the poor masses? Again it is not in doubt that man depend largely on the produce of land to survive, what could be the ethical implications if in the course of protecting the forest many lives are lost due to malnutrition? The questions are endless; many minerals are found and extracted from the ground through mining; do mining companies have moral obligations to restore the landform and surface ecology or to explore it for the good of man? These questions facing environmental ethicists could best be seen as conflicts of values or complementary opposite hence very difficult situations.

The principles of instrumental value and intrinsic value were suggested by some ethicists as a solution. By these principles a distinction could be made of those species that have values in themselves and those whose values are meant to serve the needs of others. With this distinction, some of the environmental ethical problems could be solved. Also as is applied in other branches of Bioethics, the prerogative right of man over other creature should be maintained. If man should be seen not as an absolute owner of the world, then the limit of his power over other created world could easily be drawn. The fact at the end remains that human life must be protected and the environmental life is a major part of that human life. There is no doubt that human attitude towards nature is getting out of tolerable limit and needed urgent ethical consideration. In the study of environmental ethics, as stated above, there are two major schools of thought -the first school champions the intrinsic value of created universe while the second school teaches that non-human entities are considered valuable only in relation to man. In the modern literatures on environmental ethics, the views of these

schools are expressed in terms of instrumental value and intrinsic value of things. While the former is the value of things as means to further some other ends, the latter is the value of things as ends in themselves regardless of whether they are useful as means to other ends or not. The instrumental value is the working tool of the second school and the intrinsic value remains in the hands of the first school.

3.1. First School

Nature has intrinsic value irrespective of what man thinks (Agar, N., 2001) about it. The chief proponents of this position are the different religious groups like Christian religion, Islamic religion, Judaism etc. Among Christians for instance, it is believe that the world was created by God and there is beauty in creation which is meant to be enhanced by human activities. Studying environmental ethics from this Christian perspective, man must see the earth as God's creation and not just as a product of chance or as facticity. The world origin defiles human comprehension. We cannot, when we understand a little extend such knowledge beyond the meaning the world carries in itself. Man should therefore understand this world as a creation of God, and should sees himself in his efforts to make some changes in the world as a call to responsibility before God. It is then that the world will be seen not as an easy material at the disposal of man which he can make arbitrary use of. For them, "God saw everything that He had made and it was very good."(Genesis 1:31) hence the human relationship with nature should strive to enhance this goodness. Man should only see himself as a prerogative user and not absolute owner. The school however has led to pantheism and high sense of sacred where everything in nature is worshiped and this is great obstacle to development of the society.

3.2. Second School

This school of thought considers Environmental ethics in its traditional set up which is majorly anthropocentric. They favour anthropocentricism theory, which states that the environment should be evaluated and related with, based on its value to human life. (cf. Bradley et al, 2019; 24). It places man at the center of all creatures as the measure of all things. This school of thought originates with Pythagoras who first in his quest to discover the origin of all things, states that man is the measure. The Biblical injunction in Genesis 1:28 under consideration, where God admonished man to go and multiply, subdue and have dominion over all creatures remains a crucial reference point for this school. Some religious figures also favoured this school of thought. They believe that the non-human aspects of nature are useful only so far as they benefit humankind. Wesley and Calvin stand out among the proponents of this school. They are of the opinion that all creatures were made for human beings hence were ordained for the use of man. So the command to "rule" and "have dominion" over the earth is not only to have right of use of nature but even to exploit nature to any degree. (Liz, 2013: 2)

So at the center of the theory of this school is the creation story of Genesis 1: 28. The earth was created to be lived in and all things in it to be useful to man, hence man has no limit to the use of the earth and its contents. Not to do so is to fall short of the desire of the creator. However in recent years, environmental ethicists pose challenges to traditional anthropocentrism. All efforts are now towards developing an ecological ethic that is both scientifically accurate and free of human-centered preconceptions. This is one of the major issues of the modern

environmental ethics. Environmental ethics questions everything and consider environmental activities in relation to their impacts in the life of man because it assumed moral superiority of human beings to members of other species on earth hence it questions this basic assumption. Secondly there is a consideration for the Christians' view of creation which has assigned intrinsic value to the natural environment and its non-human contents but not from faith but rationality.

4. Responsible Factors and a Way Forward

Some scholars have suggested some responsible factors and basically, every finger points to the increasing human quest for development as well as industrial revolution and the contemporary breakthrough in science and technology. However from the readings of the above two schools of thought, religion is a basic factor though some scholars like Okoro Kinsley (2010) described religion as environment friendly. They observed that there is high level sense of sacredness, especially among Africans as an impediment to development. Africans, they say, locate force/vitality in all things in the universe, hence sacred rivers, rocks, woods, mountains, forest etc. and this understating of the attitude of this natural phenomenon defines and organizes the African epistemology. They advocated for the demystification of religion. By implication such high sense of sacredness protects the environment. So the basic reason of the first school of thought is anchored on Religious account of creation. Others like Lynn White and Toynbee based on outright misreading of the scriptures have blamed the environmental abuse experienced globally on Judeo-Christian tradition. The reading of Genesis 1:26-28 remains the root of human claim of absolute authority over nature.

The second school also anchored their reason on religion. They are of the view that they are obeying God's command which ordered man to rule and subdue the earth. This being the case, it seems complex for the same account of creation from the same source to offer such sharp contradiction. Searching deeper into Religion, many have identified the Judeo-Christian misinterpretation of Genesis 1:28 as one of the major causes of the recent developments against nature. Even where it is not the direct factor, it has indeed encouraged a trend that set in motion the world's recent extremely negative technological progress that is so disturbing and even in many areas of irreversible. Scholars like Niederschlag, see it that way. The interpretation of this biblical story by the second school and other Christian and non Christian anthropologists, they said is one of the major causes of environmental degradation. To subdue the earth as God's mandate in Genesis 1:28, for them means unlimited supremacy of man over nature. The passage, he says, does not in any way suggest exploitation but to make it habitable for human living. He states that the misinterpretation and meaning; historical impacts and the negative effects of human environmental activities in the nature in recent decades as a result of God's command in Genesis as quoted above has become frightening. Lynn White, an American historian has indeed long criticized the Judeo-Christian attitude towards Creation. Lynn White observes in 1967 in Ceylon that not even those Christian leaders help the matter. (Liz, 2013, 1) Other religions like Buddhism have better attitude towards other creatures in the world than the Christian Religion. Niederschlag is of the view that the human environment cannot even be exploited on the ground of saving human life in the sense that the environment is still part of human life and a great factor that enhances it.

God, he said, could not have ordered man in Genesis 1: 28 to destroy the beauty of His created world.

As a way forward as to save humanity from the likely impacts of environmental degradation, ethicists as well as Theologians have called for a new lifestyle towards nature. The new life style advocate by some theologians is a sharp recourse to the demands of the Decalogue. This involves a sense of "reverence for life", "acting in such a manner that we can be judged and be corrected by the consequences of our actions. If these principles are adopted, they contrast egoism or selfishness for an egoist is concerned only about his own well being hence he assesses the environment only by whether they benefit or harm him. Until man begins to see himself according to Albert Schweitzer - as a "life that wants to live in the midst of life that wants to live", other creatures will continue to suffer. They believed that we must act and think out how we can and should concentrate our limited resources and powers so that we can contribute to the care and concern for our environment. Of course they insisted that all moral appeals will remain wishful thinking if we are not ready for a radical rethink and a corresponding lifestyle. It is within these contradicting views with regards the meaning of God's injunction in Genesis 1:28 that this paper considers a Hermeneutical evaluation of this Biblical passage as a necessary step towards proper understanding of God's demands as well as towards a lasting solution to environmental degradation and crises.

5. The Hermeneutical Discourse on Genesis 1:28.

> And God blessed them, saying: increase and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the air and all living creatures that move upon the earth… (Gen, 1:28)

This section of the work deals with the hermeneutic of the above biblical passage before it could be properly applied to environmental ethics discourse. A hermeneutic of a word or concept is about interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts or simply a method or theory of interpretation. Hermeneutics is "the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts" (Schleiermacher, 2016; 1)

Modern hermeneutics includes both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as semiotics, presuppositions, and pre-understandings. The above story as presented in the book of creation (Genesis), chapter 1, verse 28 is the last segment of the creation story. Man was the last creature of God and God placed him according to the story at the center of all creations. This scriptural passage has generated confusions due to the variations both in meaning and applications attached to it by scholars. Formally it was a theological issue among the Biblical scholars but of recent with the expansion of environmental ethics, it is being applied by some scholars and environmental ethicists, to justify the human environmental activities. The key words in the passage are increase, multiply, fill, subdue and rule (dominion) over. Right from the beginning of philosophy, among the ancient philosophers for instance, some of them were influenced by this passage especially in their philosophical anthropology. Protagoras defined man as the measure of all things, things that are, are and things that are not, are not (Adeniyi & Wogu, et. al. 2015). He placed man as the master of all creatures. This Protagoran statement was given different meaning depending on the perspective approach. The dominant of this

statement is mostly in Anthropology where all creatures have meanings only in relation to man. The keywords as stated above remain our focus in this section.

5.1. Increase and multiply.

The commonest meaning of increase is more of numerical expansion while multiplication is duplication. The word increase was used 7times in the book of genesis and 59 times in the Bible while Multiply was used 15 times in the book of Genesis and 53 times in the whole Bible. In relation to creation stories, it was not human only that were mandated to increase and multiply in primordial times.

> All kinds of sea creatures and birds had been so commanded the "day" they were created. (Gen 1:20-22). Sea creatures were not again ordered to "be fruitful and multiply" after the flood. The flood, of course, would not have affected sea species." But after the flood, as the story is told, God declared that all creatures of the land and air-"all flesh-birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth"-were to "breed abundantly" and "be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." (8:17). (Richard, 1996: 133)

Therefore God's command to multiply should be an avenue for man to unduly dominate every creation unto extinction.

5.2. Fill.

The word "fill" stands for "making up" or "adding up", occupying an empty vacuum or space. It could be used in the sense of filling up a vacancy. It was used 6times in the book of Genesis and 76times in the Bible.

5.3. Subdue.

The word "subdue" is more of military term. It is to overcome. It is from the Hebrew word kabash ((כָּבַשׁ), meaning bring under bondage or "enslave", to make to obey, i.e. to "subdue", and even in the harshest instances "molest" or "rape." But it only comes in harshest instance "when the party being subdued is already hostile". The Bible uses it to "speak of military enemies in scripture. Not to subdue an attacking army would lead to death. Hence, we subdue the earth because without such subjugation the harshness of nature would yield death for us rather than life" (Poiesis Theou, 2009; 8) .Due to its strict meaning and applications, it was used only once in Genesis and that is in our memorial chapter and verse and 7 times in the Bible.

5.4. Rule and dominion

These are two royal concepts which are used in reference to a king. To rule and have dominion is to become a king over or master over others. They can be used interchangeably. In Hebrew this is *radah*. ((רָדָה) it's a royal word. It suggests the dominating rule of a king. The word rule was used 4 times in the book of Genesis and 84 times in the Bible. The same word is used in Psalm 72, which is originally a coronation psalm for Solomon. Verse 8: "May he have dominion [*radah*] from sea to sea… (Theou, 2009:9).

Now having expounded the major keywords, we prefer to narrow our discussion to the two most outstanding concepts at the helm of the application of Genesis 1.28 in environmental ethics discourse and the words are subdue and rule/dominion. The proper understanding of the words subdues. Rule or dominion could only be possible when evaluated comparatively in reference to their uses in other passages of the scripture as well as in relation to other injunctions of God to man with regards his earthly life and relationship with nature. When the word dominion is considered with reference to other passages of the scripture it offers us better understanding. It was used in Psalm 72, where originally it is a coronation psalm for Solomon. Verse 8: "May he have dominion [*radah*] from sea to sea . . ." Reading further up to verses 12-14; we understand what the world dominion, which is *radah*, in Hebrew looks like. It is a "liberative" concept

> He rescues the poor who call to him, and those who are needy and neglected. He has pity on the weak and poor; he saves the lives of those in need. He rescues them from oppression and violence; their lives are precious to him. (Psalm 72: 12-14, cf. Ezekiel 34:4)

So it obvious that God's appointed king rules His people with fairness. The king shall not be a dictator over the people. It is not a slave-master relationship. He tends and cares for the people like a shepherd tends his flocks. The king's dominion should be the type

> That protects the defenseless and gives justice to the oppressed. Applying this to the command for humanity to exercise dominion over creation, we can see that while we rule over creation, we're called to protect it. As a king accepts tribute or taxes from his subjects, so too we receive a bountiful sustenance from the fruits of creation. Yet also as a king should take care of the weak and poor in his kingdom, so too we are called to guard natural beauty, preserve endangered species of God's creatures, and even to restore the places which we have too often ruled "with force and harshness. (Theou, Ibid)

The command or God's injunction "to subdue the earth" according to some biblical commentators should not be understood as meaning "that God gives man free rein to do anything he wants to the planet—bend it to his uses and abuses, rape it of all its beauty and diversity—for his own benefit" (Forerunner Commentary). God couldn't have, after creating the good world order Adam to destroy or disfigure it. He rather ordered him to expand the goodness in His creation. It is obvious therefore that "the dominion that God desires is one that protects the defenseless and gives justice to the oppressed."(Ibid)

6. Biblical Ecological Perspective.

The reading of Genesis chapter 1, verses 26-28 alone will not give us the detailed information about God's intention for man and the environment. This is because there are variations in the interpretations of the said passage. "Some interpretations emphasize human stewardship or responsibility for tending the garden and caring for the well-being of other creatures, while others read these verses as legitimating exploitation of the earth's resources and other life forms for human benefit. (Richard 1996, 131) There is no doubt that "whatever one makes of

these texts, there are still many other biblical laws which call on humans to respect the earth and care positively for other creatures' well-being". (Ibid. pg131).

To bring out further the idea and meaning of subdue and dominion in Gen.1:28, it is necessary to take a brief survey of biblical ecology beginning with the story of the life in Eden as recorded in Gen. 2; side by side with it as part of God's expanded instruction: Then the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. (verse15). This will greatly modify the forceful connotation of "have dominion" and "subdue it" suggest and when the words "cultivate" and "guard" are replaced with "tend" The forerunner commentary further states that the word tend from its Hebrew root ***"abad"*** brings out a distinctive meaning of the injunction to men "to work or serve," and thus referring to the ground or a garden. This is when other translations which used "to till or cultivate" based their reason. In the same sense, ***shamar,*** the Hebrew word for Keep *gives* a better implication of the responsibility of man over nature which is "to exercise great care over." (Forerunner Commentary, pg. 3-4).

Several biblical passages show that God has the intension that man should care for the rest of creation from the beginning of creation. However one might argue that God's demands for animal sacrifice especially in the Old Testament contradict our thesis upholding reverence for other creatures. It is still an indication of the intrinsic worth of other creatures outside their usefulness to man. "That animals might be sacrificed instead of humans likewise indicates a sense of their worth, as if somehow equivalent to that of human life". (Richard, 1996; 140) So it is not contradictory "to include biblical texts calling for animal sacrifices in a study of reverence for life and environmental ethics in biblical law" (Ibid, pg.141). After the destruction of the first world, the bible states that God made covenant between himself and Noah and his sons "and every living creature... for all future generations." (Genesis 9:12). He did not lose consciousness of this while dealing with the Israelites. He instructed them to care for the land and give it rest while cultivating it.

> Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, when you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land." (Lev. 25:2-5)

Considering also the fact that God gave Noah a similar injunction, shows that it is an injunction to apply tender care over the goodness in nature as man makes use of nature. God, after the flood which destroyed the first world, blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. (Genesis 9:1-2) The stated Genesis story which we are considering should be understood within the context of "taking care of, guard and expand" and makes use of what he/she is taking care of. It is best situated in the context

of stewardship rather ruler-ship. Man therefore must take care of the earth knowing that he is a care taker and as "a caretaker maintains and protects his charge so that he can return it to its owner in as good or better condition than when he received it".(ibid). It means to subdue all that will disfigure the goodness in creation as

> God subdues that in us which leads to death rather than life and that thing is sin – so too we subdue in nature that which leads to death, turning it around so that it yields life. Jesus' words about pruning in John 15 provide a beautiful example of the way in which God subdues sin, using as an analogy the way a farmer subdues nature. Thus agriculture and other life-giving uses of nature are proper fulfillment of the command to "subdue" creation (Theou, 2009, 2)

Commenting on this passage, Benson biblical commentary states that the passage suggests rather a benediction and a promise, than a command, as appears in Genesis 1:22, where the same words are applied to the brute creatures, which are not capable of understanding or obeying a command".(Benson). For Pope Francis in his recent encyclical On Care For Our Common Home, ***"Laudato Si', Mi' Signore"*** – "Praise Be To You, My Lord" states that "we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the Earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures".(Pope Francis, 2015, 6). He is of the view that the "biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15)". Here "tilling" for him, "refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving.(Pope Francis, 2015)

In summary, from the above Hermeneutical evaluation, Genesis 1: 28 will stand to mean and reads that God blessed them and commissioned them to be co creators, to increase and multiply and fill the earth with goodness and subdue it and rule over the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the air and all living creatures that move upon the earth as a benevolent king. As a loving father, to have dominion over all creatures as to guard them from all forces that can destroy the goodness in creation. To be a prerogative master, steward and user who will give account to the supreme and absolute owner and creator of the universe. God cannot, as a benevolent God and creator, after creating the universe out of love, hand it over to a tyrant or approve what White calls, "attitude of human superiority and unbridled domination" that will destroy His wonderful creation. However which ever meaning attached to Genesis 1:28, it has some implications in environmental ethics.

7. Implications

From the above readings and considerations, the followings could be deducted: (a) that the passage should be read within the context of the whole creation story of Genesis and other injunctions to the first parents. This method will bring out the divine purpose in creation and also the limit of human access to other creatures in creation, while exclusive reading will distort the same. Take for instance; God instructed Adam and Eve not to eat certain fruits in the garden. If God had given Adam absolute access to creation in Genesis 1:28, then this His order in Genesis 2: 16-17, to eat freely from every tree of the garden, but not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, will be a contradiction. (b) the basic concepts in the

passage-"subdue and dominion" should be understood inclusively with their usages in other parts of the scripture especially the Old Testament. Take for instance, the word "dominion" as was used in Psalm 72, which is originally a coronation psalm for Solomon and which portrays a reign of a peaceful and wise King, who ruled his society with fear of God. It was a reign of a King, who asked God nothing than wisdom to relate well with other creatures so as to enhance the goodness in creation.

(c) It is obvious that the Old Testament scripture was written within the context of Jewish culture and cultural narrative. They have their contextual usage of words, which portrays their worldview. As we know worldview of a society influences their attitudes and behavior. The Jews understand the world properly within the context of creation story. They have a "radical amazement at the very existence of a universe that is vast and infinitely varied and yet in many ways orderly". For them also, "the chaotic forces are understood to be as much a part of nature as the regular, predictable patterns. To the extent that the forces of nature can be harnessed, it is the job of humanity to be the stewards of the world, and to act on behalf of its rightful Owner." (My Jewish Learning. 2017).The generations after the first Adam understood the nature as such that speaks for God's glory. Their presence was regarded as such that testify to the goodness of God.

> Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exults! Let the sea and all within it thunder, the fields and everything in them exult! Then shall all the forest trees shout for joy, at the presence of the Eternal One, who is coming to rule the Earth; God will rule the world justly and its people in faithfulness (Psalm 96:11-13).

Non-living things are sometimes refer to in the bible as having life in them. This shows the extent they value outside their value for human beings and their needs. "…ask the beasts, and they will teach you; the birds of the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth and it will teach you; the fish of the sea, they will inform you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Eternal has done this?" (Job 12:7-9) They all speak volume of the greatness of their creator. It is therefore true that the nearest society to the creation narrative understood subdue and dominion of Genesis 1:28 not as an absolute supremacy of man over nature but only as borrowers God's ownership and the terms of our lease

> How do we root our action plan in our Judaic tradition? first of all, by implementing our belief that this is God's world, not ours. To take seriously the notion that we are but leasing the planet from God is to provide ourselves with specific behavioral guidelines. One who leases is called, in general, a shomer, usually translated as a guardian. (Swartz, 2018: 6)

We have the earth on lease, only that the type of lease we have over the earth is deeper. It is sho'el, type, meaning a "borrower". Borrowers in this sense "may use any part of what they borrow -- but they must ensure that, at the end of the term of the lease, and at any given moment during the lease, the property is at least as valuable as it was at the beginning of the lease". This understanding has balanced the human attitude towards nature, hence they were advised to

> Harvest a tree? Not without planting another. Farm the land? Not without allowing it periodic rest and rejuvenation. See to it that any degradation of the environment is accompanied by an equivalent restoration. Evaluate land use on the basis of how it improves or degrades the environment, so that, for example, agricultural practices that prevent soil erosion, crops that are easier on the land, requiring less irrigation and pesticides, and harvesting methods that preserve the integrity of the ecosystem are given strong preference. Attempt in each of our own lives to strike such a balance, conserving energy, supporting environmental causes, planting trees, as a path toward restoration of what we have used or abused.(Swartz, pg7).

The above Jewish ecology shows that their reading and understanding of the scripture especially Genesis 1:28 did not in any way bring about negative attitude towards nature and other creatures. They understood their rule and position in the world as prerogative users and borrowers of the earth.

8. CONCLUSION

From our discussion so far, it is no gainsaying that the modern environmental crises affect human life in different ways and the cause has been identified as a result of the human quest for development, over human population, socio-political and economic systems. However as we have seen, it has also been identified that more devastating is the Christian reading and understanding of God's injunctions in Genesis 1"28 which commands man to subdue and have dominion over the earth.

The wrong understanding of the above injunction has destroyed the fabrics of human-environmental relationship. It has also been affirmed that the Christians' merciless dealing with creation, especially with the environment, can never be justified not even by the fact that the Christian creationism has placed man in the Central of the universe". The strong argument is that "Man is part of creation and is only dealing with the rest of creation by the virtue of his being the greatest of all but before God man is only a prerogative user". The rightful reading and understanding as was expounded in this work shows rather a benevolent subdue and use of nature as a prerogative user and not an absolute owner entitled to reckless attitude towards nature. Conclusively man mandatorily must be faithful to the earth, a mandate rising from the relationship that binds him to the creator of the universe God and only this will change his behavioral relationship towards the world around him. The hermeneutic of Genesis 1:28 never encouraged the exploitation of the earth by man. It rather as we have seen, emphasized rather the vocation of men towards shaping the world as a procreator and caretaker. It is only with such attitude that the earth shall be of great benefit to man who through his attitude will the 'highest good', namely the ecological balance.

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