



The Divine Imperative and Care for Creation in Genesis 2:8-15

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ABSTRACT

God is the creator and owner of the entire creation. His purpose is that His creation is cared for. He created humans to care and have concern for the creation. Creation care is, therefore, a terminology used to describe the deliberate acts of humans in showing care and concern for the entire creation. The term emphasizes the need to ensure the continuity of the creation and its sustainability through responsible stewardship in the care and preservation of the creation by humans. However, human actions, in many ways, have negated God's purpose of caring for creation. The purpose of this paper is to argue that Genesis 2:8-15 serves as a biblical foundation for creation care. The exegetical approach is adopted to achieve this purpose. The text reveals that God is the creator and originator of creation care. He commissioned humans as stewards with the responsibility of serving and guarding the creation from exploitative usage thereby ensuring their sustenance and continual survival. Creation care holds its foundation from the Bible and the glamour for environmental safety and conservation of the creation should not be left in the hands of environmentalists. All should join the campaign for creation care. Consequently, as faithful stewards, humans must take seriously the God-given task of serving and guarding the creation which is an act of worship and obedience to God's command.

Keywords: Creation Care, Biblical Foundation, Divine Imperative, Serve, Guard, Exegesis.

I. Introduction

The world at large (Nigeria in particular) is suffering from harsh climatic conditions such as extreme coldness, global warming leading to extreme hotness, and inconsistent patterns of rainfall leading to drought and flood conditions. These harsh conditions have also led to an increase in the occurrence of floods, earthquakes, landslides, and hurricanes amidst several other advanced climatic conditions affecting the general well-being of creation.

These harsh climatic conditions are held by environmentalists to be caused by the abuse of the components of the environment by humans. Human

actions such as indiscriminate cutting of trees (deforestation), excessive hunting, uncontrolled urbanization and industrialization, and use of combustible machines and equipment that release carbon monoxide into the atmosphere among several other human activities have negatively affected the ecosystem leading to drastic changes in the functionality of the various component of the environment. This has necessitated a campaign against the abuse of environmentalists and has also become a subject of interest among religious leaders and biblical scholars (theologians) who view creation care from the biblical lens and provide biblical solutions to the issue of creation abuse.

Genesis 1 and 2 give us an account of the creation of the universe. The book asserts that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). He created the universe and gave it the ability for continuity by inserting life (seed) and the tendency to reproduce in most of the creation, especially plants and animals (Genesis 1:22-33). This act signifies God's desire for absolute order in the ecosystem as He creates humans, giving him control over the created order.

Humans occupy a special place among God's creation as they were created in the image and likeness of God. This placement comes with both privileges and responsibilities. The privilege enjoyed by humans is centered on God's pronouncement that humans are free to eat the plants and animals He created as food (Genesis 1:29-30). The responsibility of humans to the creation is the focus of Genesis 2:15 where the Bible states that "God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it". This statement connotes a form of divine command by God to humans on the need to care for the creation. Thus, the thrust of this paper is to examine Genesis 2:8-15 to understand the divine command, as it relates to the human role in the creation care. The paper will employ the exegetical method in examining Genesis 2:8-15 to achieve its set purpose and, it will limit itself to the role of humans in creation care as deduced from the divine imperative in Genesis 2:8-15.



An Overview of the Concept of Creation Care

Creation care is a nomenclature used to describe the deliberate acts of humans in showing care and concern for the entire creation, the term is used to emphasize the need to ensure the continuity of the creation and its sustainability through responsible stewardship in the care and preservation of the creation by humans. According to Diane J. Chandler, the advocacy for creation care among biblical scholars began from the late 20th century to the early 21st century with Joseph Sitler as the early pioneer in his “prophetical evangelical theological writings on the ecology” which focuses on the “theological ethics related to nature, seeing the interconnectedness of all creation and viewing environmental degradation through a spiritual lens.”¹

Other early biblical scholars who championed the campaign for creation care include Lynn White, Jr. who argues that the exploitative domination of nature often leads to an ecological crisis and Paul Santmire who holds that creation care has a biblical foundation and called for the organization of Christian organization network to be dedicated to fostering creation care.

Diane further states that creation care forms an integral part of the mission and purpose of the church as it is a means of revealing God's law because it is divine love that prompted God's acts of creation. She asserts that all creations are interdependent on one another and humankind is given a unique oversight role by God. Hence, creation care is a way of reciprocally loving God and expressing gratitude for God's abundant blessings.”² She attributes believers’ reluctance to care for creation to be caused by several factors which include: first, the extreme eschatological mindset of believers that views the world as just a passage to the ultimate home (heaven), developing the attitude of “this world is not our home”; second, some believers view care for creation as a form of alignment to the ‘New age movement’ making such believers to distant themselves from it; third, some believers often fear that creation cares if not control may lead to pantheism; fourth, creation care is view by some believers as more of a political movement than religious; lastly, some believers feel that creation care is a form of distraction from carrying

out the mandate of the Great Commission. Hence, she calls on Christian schools to front mobilization of believers to awaken to their responsibility towards creation care.³

Katie Isaac in emphasizing the need for creation states that Christian stewardship responsibility is not only limited to people but also all creation, she reveals that some believers view advocates of creation care as nature worshippers (pantheists) making such believers shut their hearts from any attempt in convincing them on embracing the creation care. She suggests that changing the nomenclature from 'environmentalism' to 'creation care' could make it more acceptable for Christians because of the biblical association that creation brings God into the picture.⁴

Katie advocates for a theological reframing of the Christian view of creation care, calling for a shift from the exploitative domination of creation (Genesis 1:28) to love for creation (John 3:16) and she finally submits that believers should engage in creation care conversation and people be enlighten on the numerous benefits of creation care.⁵

The ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew and Arch Bishop Justin Welby of Canterbury emphasize the urgent need for religious leaders to join the campaign for creation care. They state that although creation care is mostly seen as a secular affair handled by scientists, technocrats, and politicians, there is a need for religious leaders to champion the course because the way one handles or cares for creation signifies one's love for God and fellow humans. They hold that the abuse of creation can affect the future generation. They clamor for the responsible use of the creation to avert ecological crisis and ensure the sustenance of the world in harmony and justice.⁶

Young Seok Cha in his quest to provide a theological and ethical implication of creation care states that the theological basis for creation care is centered on the fact that man is created in the image and likeness of God. He explains God's image and likeness in humans to mean God's mandate to humans to rule the creation on His behalf and to reflect God's love and justice in caring for creation

¹Diane J. Chandler, ‘Creation Care: A Call to Christian Educators and Church Leaders,’ *Christian Educator Journal*, Vol. 18 (1), 2021, 113-114.

²Chandler, 116-117.

³Chandler, 124.

⁴Katie Isaac, ‘Starting and Sustaining Creation Care Conversation’, *Direction*, 49/1, 2020, 52-54.

⁵Isaac, 54-61.

⁶Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Justin Welby, ‘Creation, Care and Ecological Justice,’ *GOTR*, 60:3-4, 2015, 229-235.



(Genesis 2:15). He further states that 'dominion' does not mean exploitation of the creation for selfish purpose but responsible stewardship.⁷

Hence the concept of creation care deals with the call and mobilization of Christians to embrace 'eco-theology' through enlightenment and involvement in activities that will not pose a threat to the sustainability of the creation. The concept views God as the creator and humans as a steward whose task is to exercise responsible dominion over creation by protecting it from all forms of abuse and exploitative usage. Therefore, the task of creation care is not a mere secular affair but it also has a religious dimension.

Background to the Book of Genesis

The Hebrew title for the book of Genesis is *b'reshit*, as derived from the first word of the Hebrew Bible. The word means "in beginning." The term *b'reshit* as used for the title of Genesis in the modern Hebrew Bible is derived from the shortened version of the original Hebrew title *Sepher Maaseh Bereishit* which is translated to mean "the book of the Act of in the beginning." The title Genesis as used in the English translation of the Bible originated from the Greek Septuagint title of the book '*geneseos*' which means "the book of origins."⁸

There are two schools about the authorship of the book of Genesis. The first is a traditional view that attributes the authorship of Genesis and other four books of the Pentateuch to Moses. Their argument is based on the similarity between Genesis and other books of the Pentateuch and also the presence of the Law (Torah) in Genesis. Although they agreed that Moses did not witness the events in the book of Genesis, they held that Moses could have written the book using history preserved over time in the oral tradition.⁹

The second school is a view held by critical scholars such as Julius Wellhausen who propounded the Documentary hypothesis known as the JEDP theory, which opines that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) was written from four different documents which he calls the J, E, D, and P

document compiled by four different authors and the differences in their writing is based on the nomenclature used for God in the Pentateuch, the nature of Deuteronomy and the priestly nature of Leviticus.¹⁰ Genesis 2:18-25 belongs to the J document.

Genesis 2:8-15 falls under the narrative genre of the Old Testament corpus. The main characters are Yahweh and Adam. The thrust of the text is Yahweh's instruction to Adam on creation care. Yahweh as the creator of Adam and other creations established what should be the relationship between Adam and creation.¹¹

Exegesis of Genesis 2:8-15

Passage

Gen. 2:8

וַיִּטַע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גֶּן-עֵדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשָּׂם שָׁם אֶת-הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר:

Gen. 2:9

וַיַּצְמַח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאֲדָמָה פֶּלִי-עֵץ נְחֹמֶד לְמִרְאָה וְטוֹב לַמָּאֲכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הָגֶן וְעַץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:

Gen. 2:10

וְנָהָר יֵצֵא מִעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת-הָאֲדָמָה וּמִשָּׁם יִפְרָד וְהָיָה לְאַרְבָּעָה רָאשִׁים:

Gen. 2:11

שָׁם הָאֲחָד פִּישוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ הַחֲוִילָה אֲשֶׁר-שָׁם הַנָּחִיב:

Gen. 2:12

וְהָיָה הָאֶרֶץ הַהוּא טוֹב שָׁם הַבְּדֵלָה וְאֶבֶן הַשֹּׁהַם:

Gen. 2:13

וְשֵׁם-הַנָּהָר הַשֵּׁנִי גִיחוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֶת כָּל-אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ:

Gen. 2:14

וְשֵׁם הַנָּהָר הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חֲדָקִל הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ קִדְמַת אֲשׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פָּרָת:

Gen. 2:15

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחָלֵהוּ בְּגִן-עֵדֶן לְעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה:

Translation

Gen 2:8-15 (NIV)

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden was the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there, it was separated into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) 13 The name of the second

⁷Young Seok Cha, 'Theological and Ethical Implications of Creation Care', *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, Vol. 6, No 2, Fall 2012, 89-91.

⁸Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 1-2.

⁹Fruchtenbaum, 2.

¹⁰Fruchtenbaum, 71.

¹¹Fruchtenbaum, 11-12.



river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Exegetical Notes and Comments

Genesis 2:4ff contains what seems to be another creation story different from the one narrated in Genesis 1:1-2:3. This account gives a more detailed explanation of how man was created from the dust of the ground and how God breathed life into man. It also gives information on the state of the creation especially the plant before God brought rain on the earth and states what seems to be one of the reasons for creating man which is to "work the ground";

When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens — 5 and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, 6 but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground — 7 the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:4-7).

These double creation narrations in Genesis 1 and 2 are held by scholars to be a result of the existence of two separate documents which constitute the sources for the compilation of the book of Genesis and the other four books of the Pentateuch. Based on the documentary hypothesis, one of the sources is labeled the J- source whose document accounts for the creation narration in Genesis 2:4-25, and its unique feature is the use of the name Yahweh for God. The second is the P- document which was compiled by the priests and this source constitutes the creation narration in Genesis 1:1-2:3.¹²

Genesis 2:8-14 reveals God as the 'planter' and sustainer of the His creation. Verse 8 contains two actions that are of great significance: first, the Bible tells us that God planted a garden in the Eastern part of Eden which consists of different trees for human consumption and then the placement of man in the Garden.¹³ The verb translated as 'plant' in the Hebrew Bible is נָטַע (*nata'*). It connotes the acts of

the actual planting and also the process of growing a plant.¹⁴

Second, after He had planted the garden, God 'put' man in the garden. The Hebrew term translated as 'to put' is שָׂם which also means to appoint, to place, or to ordain.¹⁵

Verse 9 describes the nature of the trees God planted in the garden. These trees are described as pleasant to the eyes and good for food. Among the trees in the garden are two special trees; the tree of life located amid the garden which is a means of preserving and promoting life in its blissful state and the tree of the knowledge of the knowledge of good and evil which was later prohibited for human consumption.¹⁶

Verses 10-14 discuss the presence of the rivers in the garden. The Garden of Eden consists of four rivers that own their origin to one source; the rivers that enter into the garden split into four. The rivers serve as a source of water for continuous sustenance through watering the garden.¹⁷

Verse 15 contains God's instruction to a man with his duty toward the creation which is expressed in two terms used in the passage; the first is עָבַד which means 'to serve', 'to till' or to work and the second is שָׁמַר which means 'to keep', 'to guard', or 'to protect'.¹⁸ R. Boaz Johnson in his exposition of Genesis 2:15 chooses the term 'to serve' as the most suitable translation for the term עָבַד and 'to keep' as the suitable translation for שָׁמַר. He views the two words as worship words. He states that there is a relationship between God, man, and the creation, and this relationship is based on the fact that as man serves and keeps the creation, he is worshipping God. Thus, according to him, creation care is an act of worship to God and the desecration of the

¹⁴David J.A Clines ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 676-677.

¹⁵James Strong, *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek- Hebrew Dictionary* (np: Biblesoft Inc, 1994), in loc.

¹⁶John Walton, Victor H. Mathews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), in loc.

¹⁷Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part one: From Adam to Noah*, in loc.

¹⁸James Strong, *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek- Hebrew Dictionary*, in loc.

¹²Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis Part one: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989), 84-86.

¹³Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 75-76.



creation through exploitative usage means desecrating God Himself.¹⁹

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum on the other hand describes Eden as a place of rest and for man to enjoy this rest he must undertake the physical activity of serving the Garden of Eden by tilling and by doing so he is keeping the garden which he describes as an act of obedience to God.²⁰

Implications of Genesis 2:8-15 for Creation Care

Genesis 2:8-15 holds great lessons for believers about God's command to man concerning creation care. Some of these are;

God as the Creator and Originator of Creation:

From the exegesis of Genesis 2:8, it can be deduced that God is the creator and owner of the universe including the Garden of Eden. Thus, the Garden of Eden is God's creation. The verb *נָטַע* (planted) used to describe the acts of the creation of the Garden of Eden connotes a sense of 'work'. To plant requires some certain process of growth, although the Bible is not clear on whether the garden was called out into being like in the case of the creation in Genesis 1:1ff or it took the natural process of establishing a garden which may include tilling, planting and nurturing of the trees in the garden into maturity. However, the verb *נָטַע* (to plant) signifies God's work of establishing the Garden of Eden, making it to be fruitful and delightful. God created the universe and put in place an equilibrium where all members of the ecosystem will co-exist interdependently. God did not only create the Garden of Eden He made provision for their continuous survival and sustainability by providing water through the four rivers that flow in different directions within the garden, this signifies God's desire that His creation continues to flourish and serve the purpose for which they were created. Hence, God is the creator, owner, and sustainer of the Garden of Eden and all that it contains.

Humans as Stewards of God's Creation: After God had planted the Garden of Eden; he took the man and put him in the garden. The verb *שָׂם* (to put) can also mean 'appoint'. God plans that humans should be stewards of the creation. As a steward, man is expected to look after the garden and all that it contains. He is expected to maintain the equilibrium state of the garden through responsible

use of the resources of the garden and not to exert an exploitative dominion over the creation. He is only allowed to use the fruits of the trees as food (v 9). It is worthy of note that God did not give the ownership of the creation to man, hence man is not the owner of anything but rather man is placed as a caretaker who is accountable to the owner on how he handles the creation and shall be rewarded based on his faithfulness to the task assigned to him.

Creation Care as a Divine Command: When God placed man in the Garden of Eden; He gave man two commands which were to *עָבַד* (serve) and *שָׁמַר* (guard) the garden. Man is expected to serve the garden by tilling or working it, ensuring that the garden is at its ultima level of functionality. This means that for man to continually use the garden, he must play his role to ensure that he maintains balance in the ecosystem and guarantees the existence of the garden. The act of serving the garden requires man to nurture and care for the garden; it requires some form of physical activity (work) to ensure the conservation of the resources found in the garden. Thus, the garden is not just created for human use and pleasure but human is also created to look after the garden.

The second instruction of God to humans regarding the Garden of Eden is to 'guard' it; this depicts humans as the defender of the garden from all forms of attacks either internally by humans or externally by other members of the created order. Human is to be a watchman of the creation; he is not to exert domineering rule over the creation but should rather protect the creation from all forms of dangers that will distort the equilibrium of the creation.

II. Conclusion

The concept of creation care is an advocacy from biblical scholars on the significance of maintaining balance in the ecosystem by enlightening believers on the need to abstain from abuse of the ecosystem and to participate in campaigning for activities that will promote the well-being of the ecosystem for the benefit of the present and future generation.

Genesis 2:8-15 provides a biblical foundation for creation care as the divine imperative. The passage reveals that God is the creator, originator, and sustainer of creations. He created and appointed humans as stewards with the responsibility of serving and guarding the creation from exploitative usage thereby ensuring their continual survival. Thus, creation care holds its foundation from the Bible and the glamour of environmental safety and conservation of the

¹⁹Rajkumar Boaz Johnson, 'A Biblical Theology of Environment in the Creation Narrative,' *Covenant Quarterly*, May 2010, 9-10.

²⁰Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*, 78-79.



creation should not be left in the hands of politicians, environmentalists, technocrats, etc. Christians, theologians, religious leaders, and religious organizations should join the campaign for creation care as this will signify their obedience to God's commands and their love for God and His creation. As faithful stewards, all humans must take seriously God's given task which is an act of worship and obedience to God's command.

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