

**Institute For Christian Teaching
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**Alienation, Human Values And Ecology:
The Role of a Christian Geographer**

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Introduction

For many years geography has been perceived (by students, academics, the general public, etc.) as a discipline that just studied places, rivers, boundaries, and locations in various parts of the world. In its fuller sense, though, there are many areas emphasized by geography such as climate, physical environment, ecology, human geography, computer graphics, cartography and many others. It is important to note that geography as a discipline has grown from a descriptive approach to an analytical approach and applies scientific investigations in its methodology. These scientific investigations have led to better understanding about human cultures and the natural environment.

One area to which geographers have given emphasis in recent years is the field of environment and the natural resources. Environmental questions arise through consideration of man's relation with the biosphere and lithosphere and include aspects of the utilization of land, water, energy, mineral resources pollution, hazards and many others. The environmental questions that Macgill (1986) noted raise issues of human impact on the environmental- man's utilization of natural resources and interferences with natural processes- and of the environment's influence on the course and quality of human life- man's adaptation and response to environmental conditions.

The issues raised are complex. The intricate connectedness of all things great and small do not easily lead to simple solutions. These issues are found at all levels of spatial resolution- global, regional, national, intra-national, and local- and over a variety of possible temporal perspectives, both short and long-term, historical, present and in the future.

The need for a greater weight of Christian scientific perspective in environmental questions is a matter of urgency. This need arises from the perception of our overgrowing magnitude of environmental problems, laying bare man's incomplete understanding of these problems and inability to deal with the environmental issues effectively, efficiently, and equitably as might be desired. Scholarly interest, especially within the Christian community, is warranted, not only for the intrinsic intellectual value of advancing the pursuit of knowledge of man-environment relations, but also because most environmental issues constitute pressing contemporary problems.

Some of these environmental problems identified by Macgill (1986) include questions of basic human needs (adequate food and heat); threat of physical harm (through, for example, environmentally related disease, the impact of hazardous substances on man, and the safe disposal of hazardous wastes); associated social adaptation, mental stress and political conflict (local, regional, national, international); environmental productivity and sustainability (the productivity of marginal agricultural systems, desertification, salinization, depletion of rain forest, CO2 build up and change); and species diversity and habitat preservation.

The Adventist Christian scholar should be more concerned about the physical and human environment chiefly because of our concept of the Creator and His creation. Adventists are in a better position to tackle the environmental questions and provide a better leadership in this area because of the strong link between the doctrines of the Sabbath and Creation. The Bible states it clearly when it says that the Creator looked at all that had been made and declared it good. As Adventist Christians, we should view this statement positively, influencing our attitudes toward environmental questions and shaping our spiritual experiences.

The purpose of this paper is to show how man's alienation from God due to his disobedience as a result of sin, and how this has a direct bearing on man's perception of God's creation. This also calls for reinterpretation of man's ethical values, especially in relation to ecological issues. The major problem which is also affecting Christians is that the human race is seen as the most important part of nature, and with the rest of creation there for its personal benefit.

Rasmussen (1992) states that building an environmentally secure world- one in which human needs and wants are met without destroying natural systems- requires a wholly new economic order. In our present condition, high levels of consumption, population growth, and poverty are driving the earth's environmental decline. Further, the central issue that a Christian geographer can add to this concept of economics is the ability to see creation as a continuing process and to strive for that perfection which is a gift from God. This concept embraces scientific inquiry and spiritual understanding of ecological issues.

The Concept of Alienation and Ecology

The concept of alienation is not new to Adventists. A lot has been said about the concept of man's alienation from God; however, little has been said and done, especially among the Adventist African Christian scholars, regarding the alienation of humanity from God and ecology. Far too often environment is considered a fringe issue by many Christians.

In various parts of the world ecology (or environmental issues) has gained attention in the contemporary society; it is an increasing concern in our world. Many Christians including Adventists, are coming out strongly to assume ecological responsibility.

Ecological concerns should be considered central to Christians because survival of our earth and its people depends upon the ecosystem and the natural environment. Therefore, we have a responsibility to respect and maintain the complex system. As Christians, we hold an image of God as Creator, providing a powerful reason for the existence of planet earth, and for the presence of humans among the diversity of other animal and plant life. However, Mann (1989) states categorically that:

" as scientific research and inquiry expanded knowledge, it appeared that what had once been inexplicable and incomprehensible, except in terms of divine intervention, could now be given a rational explanation. Consequently, God's act of creation seemed to be removed from the dynamic evolution of spiritual consciousness to those areas where human knowledge was still imperfect, to the earliest origins of the universe" (pp. 44)

The creation

Again, as Christians we acknowledge that God is the Creator. Our beginning view of nature is the concept of creation: that God was there in the beginning and God created everything out of nothing. Genesis 1:1 makes it very clear that " In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." From this, we understand that creation is not an extension of the essence of God (Schaeffer 1976) but created things have an existence in themselves; they are really there. The doctrine of creation is considered by Christian geographers as the central issue in geographical studies. Lockton (1990) notes that " the central value in geography is the environmental responsibility." Here, geography stands out because of its ability to integrate both the cognitive vs, affective domains in his approach without any artificiality.

Scientists such as Whitehead, Oppenheimer, and others acknowledge that modern science was born only of a surrounding awareness of historical Christianity. Whitehead has emphasized that "Christianity believes that God has created an external world that is really there, and because he is a reasonable God, one can expect to be able to find the order of the Universe by reason"(pp.47) Whitehead, even without the Christian background, understands that there would never have been modern science without the biblical view of Christianity. The biblical view of nature gives nature or the total environment a value by itself, not to be misused but of value in itself because God made it. Isaiah 44:24 states that:

I, the Lord
 who has made all things,
 who alone stretched out the heavens
 who spread out this earth by myself.

God made the world. He sustains and takes care of it. However, contrast is seen in man's behavior, which is reflected in the following words that man does not experience himself as part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it.

However, as a Christian geographer, my view of the environment depend on my belief in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. This kind of belief, both historically and philosophically, on the biblical doctrine of creation leads directly to the role of christianity to the scientific revolution.

The Fall

Geographical implications of the fall of humanity from God have two dimensions: the spatial and temporal dimensions. First, the study of the physical (or natural) environment has both spatial and temporal dimensions. The changes that have occurred from the time of creation to the present time have attracted geographers and ecologists. The concept of the fall of humanity from God is one aspect; the second dimension is the alienation of human beings from their environment. An Adventist geographer who has addressed this issue is H. A. Lockton (1990), who says that "the alienation of human beings from environment which was a result of sin is central to geographical curricula".

Looking throughout the pages of the Bible, we find lessons related to the environment. When God decided to make man in his own image and after His likeness, as written in the book of Genesis 1:26, he gave them a command "to let them have dominion over..all the earth" The dominion, accorded to man, is derived from the likeness to God. God also commanded, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1.28). The implication is that human beings are dependent upon God for the immediate world; however, they are supposed to till it, keep it and care for it.

The story of the Fall in the Old Testament is fundamental to man's understanding of God. It shows how badly things have gone wrong. Not only is man's relationship with God disturbed, but also that with his environment. The story speaks of the human relationship to the natural environment, rather than to God to.

The temporal relationship between humanity and nature is emphasized. The Creation of God, which was orderly and where beauty and righteousness prevailed, came to an end when the devil tempted Eve in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7). Mann (1990) observes that the temptation of the serpent was a suggestion of human pride that dominion is personal and that in life and death they are answerable to no one but themselves. This is considered as the hubris of the story of the fall. This was the beginning of man's rebellion and the advent of idol worship.

There is a battle between God and the devil. C.S. Lewis comments that "in the heart of our post-fall situation: there is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan"

The Salvation

The physical environment is not just to provide the environment in which men can live in peace and comfort; it is also to declare the glory of God (Psalm 8:1; 19:1 Jeremiah 5:22; Roman 1:19-20). The physical world has been marred by sin. What is seen today is not a reflection of what God wanted the earth to be. Mann (1989) notes that in the new Testament it is in the very person of Jesus Himself that we see most clearly the union of the 'natural' with the 'divine.' Jesus showed a harmony with nature and sensitivity towards it, He constantly used the imagery of the natural world to illustrate his teaching. The geographical dimension of the emphasis on the redemption of the individual and on salvation, or deliverance from the power of sin, extends to every aspect of a person's life and affects society, which in turn should be reflected as a positive attitude towards the environment.

The salvation truth should free us from the self-centeredness that produces lack of concern for the needs and desires of others and for the consequences of our own actions. This lack of concern is seen in the threat of resources depletion, degradation, pollution and many other environmental problems. Greed, selfishness and covetousness are responsible for the drain on our physical resources.

In Romans 8:19-21 the final redemption of creation is foretold: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation himself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" Therefore, Christians are called upon to have a deep concern for every aspect of man's existence and well-being, including the environmental issues.

Christian Vs. Humanistic Values

Values in the study of geography occupy a central position because geography deals with the various resources of the natural environment which are under threat. One Christian geographer notes that:

" Geography is the most effective subject in secondary school for values formation with the exception of religious knowledge of scripture classes. Social and spatial justice is simply the starting point for the potential in values formation which geography offers" (Codrington 1983) (pp.1)

Interest among geographers in studying and understanding man-environment relations increased from the 1960's onwards. Ackerman (1963) notes that the overriding problem in geography is nothing less than an understanding of the vast interlocking system comparing all humanity in its natural environment on the surface of the earth.

Values are expressed geographically through various ways, these are religious values, social values, human values, and economic values. Much of the geographical interest has been directed towards understanding the way individuals, groups and societies perceive and react to environmental conditions. Crawford (1981) recognized that:

" We have become estranged from ourselves and the world in which we live." Consequently, we have lost the sense of dignity and significance of self and others..., the relatedness of life, and... the sense of the tragic significance of life"(pp 148)

Lockton (1990), an Adventist geographer, observes that geographers are emphasizing a number of values in the study of human environment. The central values are those of ecological concern and social--justice. He further notes that the areas of concern ultimately relate to morality, and so are of vital concern to Christian teachers. The Christian's values lie in the belief that God is the Creator of this universe, and self-preservation, and appreciation of the beauty of the natural environment and understanding the intrinsic values of nature is important. Man's moral responsibility reaches to the future as well as to the present.

The Christian's Attitude Towards Ecological Concerns

The interest of the geographer in places and the environment relates directly to the concern for stewardship. It is more demanding for a Christian geographer because of his/her christian

background where the individual is aware that he/she is not only dealing with the natural world but the world that was created by God. As the Psalmist says: "The earth is the Lords" (Psalm 24:1 NIV). The statement includes everything that inhabits the earth.

A number of writers in the 1980s have tried to show that the word stewardship has ecological implications. These include Wilkinson,(1980); Hall,(1986, 1990); Santmire,(1985). Hall (1990) finds " the steward" a commendable self-designation for Christians. He notes that it avoids the most objectionable aspects of some terms by which we designate ourselves such as " the elect" or "the saved," which may suggest superiority or false security. The term " stewardship" genuinely conveys the concern of christianity for all of God's creation. Hall (1990) further declares that the term is being co-opted into the scientific community. The church and Adventist educators (including geographers) must face the challenge of preserving it and presenting it within the context of an ecological theology. Lockton (1990) laments that"as a church we put so much emphasis on the doctrine of creation, yet we have not developed the theology of the environment." (pp. 13)

As a Christian geographer and environmental scientist, I believe that time will come when clear stands will be taken by individual Christians on moral and ethical grounds. We shall have to weigh our interest, the good to be achieved and the cost to be paid in the long run. Therefore, the christian has to use his understanding to weigh the competing values of the interest concerned and make his/her judgment on the grounds of his/her moral principles. Mann (1989) makes it very clear when he states that the christian moral duty is to:

1. Understand his situation within the earth's biosphere and the situation of the earth in space;
2. Understand the good to be attempted and the evil to be averted in all his judgments;
3. Consider the means to be adopted and the consequences for good and bad of his actions, actual and potential;
4. Balance the possible benefits against the risk of decisions. (pp.65)

In the final analysis the Christian's attitude towards the environment should be based on the conviction that the earth is the creation of God and, therefore, as humans, we have a duty to take care of it and preserve it in our lifetime. (see 1992 Annual Council statement, "Caring for God's Creation," in Appendix.) Galatians 5:22-24 lists nine fruits of the spirit (Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness, faithfulness,

humility and self-control) which should be used for a Christian view of the environment.

The Integration of Faith and Learning in Ecological and Geographical Studies.

Geography stands out as one of the fields that helps students grasp the complexity of the natural and human environment. It helps the students see the impact on the environment of human selfishness, greed and lack of concern. This in turn, may encourage the students to recognize and evaluate their own social, cultural, moral and religious values towards the environment and their relationship with other people.

Historically, from the time of Greeks to the present, there has been a constant search for more knowledge about the earth and the inhabitants; therefore, through the many years geography has been shaped and reshaped, and this has led to a more scientific approach being developed which, in turn, led to greater knowledge about cultures and the natural environment. Geography has a strong interdisciplinary approach which focuses attention on scientific inquiry and its contribution to both the natural and social sciences.

The various areas of geographic studies which are relevant to ecologically issues that should serve as good examples to the students are: 1. Geomorphological dynamics; the origin and movements of the earth etc, are excellent topics in the subject which has rich illustrations which exhibits the power, might and majesty of its creator through the following features: the creation of mountains, valleys, hills, drainage systems, varied and beautiful landscapes of the world. 2. Climatic change and how it affect, man's activities; 3. Energy as a resource that needs to be preserved and properly utilized e.g wood fuel needs in Africa and the planting of trees which also help to preserve soil fertility erosion and in soil control management; 4. Industrial and urban studies- which can serve as good examples of pollution and urban settlement problems- such as slums etc and how a Christian teacher and student can take the responsibility of rectifying the environmental related problems; 5. How to help students develop skills on how to tackle problems related to land degradation, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, malnutrition- population increase and many others.

Most of these areas are relevant in the study of ecology and environment. Also they are useful in the context that they lead the students to greater understanding of human cultures, the natural environment and the influence of man

The student should appreciate the fact that the earth is the Lord's. He is the Creator, He sustains and sees what we do and how we act and behave towards the created earth. Therefore as

Christian educators, our role is to be able to give examples and be able to correlate what we learn with Biblical truth in all relevant disciplines that teach ecology and geographical issues. The above mentioned examples of human impact on the environment are prevalent in different parts of the world which geography illuminates in its studies of contemporary issues and many others which we can use to demonstrate to the students the responsibility of a Christian to manage well what God has given.

The Role of a Christian Geographer

A geographer with a strong Christian background who has mastered his/her discipline and carefully tried to understand the interrelationship between the physical earth, humankind, culture and environment is in a better position to explain the intricacies with the touch of Christian perspective. The problems facing mankind, such as political unrest, refugees, natural calamities and natural crises, the unpredictable global climatic patterns, threats of famines and floods, disasters over land and sea, and many others, can be explained from Biblical predications as found in the books of Daniel and Revelation and many others.

The field of geography and environmental studies apply the affective and cognitive domains which can be merged to show the relationship between christianity and living. As Adventist educators, we should value and promote environmental responsibility and concern for humanity in our daily life, so that the students will be able to learn, appreciate and comprehend as part of their educational program what is said and done.

The Bible is rich in both geographical and environmental lessons. For example in the new Testament a lot of geography appears in the accounts of Jesus' journeys as He moved from one place to another. The record often presents the length and breadth of His movement, and with this background, the geographers may add the depth. Geographical regions, places, locations, interactions, and spatial dimension are discussed in the Bible. All these are good examples an educator may use to explain the relationship among human history, the natural environment and present or contemporary events, and compare the Biblical examples with what is happening today. In fact, geography illuminates the scriptures, as Hendrix (1990) puts it.

Conclusion

I have observed that most of the Adventist schools and colleges don't give much emphasis to the study of geography and environmental studies. Yet, these courses are relevant to their students, missionaries, and development and relief agencies/workers and any person interested in field work.

As Christian workers and teachers, there is need to appreciate God's creation through the natural and the human environments. Geography integrated with an environmental perspective will help us understand and appreciate and the contemporary issues as they unfold in different parts of the world.

Therefore, the attempt in this paper is to show and to demonstrate the role of geographers in God's creation, the concept of alienation of humanity from environment as a result of sin and the role geography can play in shaping the values students hold in relation to the natural environment.

It is important to know that as Christians our daily life says a lot and carries a lot of meaning to our students, and geographic and environmental education will place us in a better position. Gaebelein(1968) makes it clear in his statement that "we need teachers who see their subjects, whether scientific, historical, mathematical, literary, or artistic, as included within the pattern of God's truth." (pp.23). There is a need to develop in the student the grand concept of Christ. Gaebelein(1968) further notes that "it is for the Christian teacher who in all he does seeks first the glory of God." (pp.53). Therefore the desire is to shape the values of our students through divine truth.

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APPENDIX

1992 Annual Council Statement
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"Caring For God's Creation"

The world in which we live is a gift of love from the Creator God, from "him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the spring of water" (Rev. 14:7, NIV; cf. Rev. 11:17, 18). Within the Creation He placed humans, set intentionally in relationship with Himself, other persons, and the surrounding world. Therefore, as Seventh-day Adventist, we hold its preservation and nurture to be intimately related to our service to him.

God set aside the seventh-day Sabbath as a memorial and perpetual reminder of His creative act and establishment of the world. In resting on that day, Seventh-day Adventist reinforce the special sense of relationship with the Creator and His creation. Sabbath observance underscores the importance of our integration with the total environment. The human decision to disobey God broke the original order of creation, resulting in a disharmony alien to His purposes. Thus our air and water are polluted, forest and wildlife plundered, and natural resources exploited. Because we recognize humans as part of God's creation, our concern for the environment extends to personal health and lifestyle. We advocate a wholesome manner of living and reject the use of substances such as tobacco, alcohol and other drugs that harm the body and consume earth's resources; and we promote a simple vegetarian diet.

Seventh-day Adventists are committed to respectful, cooperative relationships among all persons, recognizing our common origin and realizing our human dignity as a gift from the creator. Since human poverty and environmental degradation are interrelated, we pledge ourselves to improve the quality of life for all people. Our goal is a sustainable development of resources while meeting human needs.

Genuine progress towards caring for our natural environment rests upon both personal and cooperative effort. We accept the challenge to work toward restoring God's overall design. Moved by faith in God, we commit ourselves to promote the healing that rises at both personal and environmental levels from integrated lives dedicated to serve God and humanity.

In this commitment we confirm our stewardship of God's creation and believe that total restoration will be complete only when God makes all things new.