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CONVEYING CHRISTIAN VALUES THROUGH THE TEACHING OF
AGRICULTURE: A BIBLICAL APPROACH

By Patrick Ogutu
Department of Agriculture
University of Eastern Africa, Baraton
P.O. Box 2500, Eldoret Kenya

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**363-98 Institute for Christian Teaching
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Introduction

The Lord gave Adam dominion over all creation (Gen. 1:26). Man's role is that of a steward who takes care of the earth. As a steward he is entrusted with the management of the Lord's earth. He has responsibility to nurture the environment. Agricultural training will lead youth to hold Christian values with esteem and have respect for the environment. It is a training that is useful for the present and the hereafter. The main thrust of this paper is that God appointed man a steward. The earth is a gift for man to take care of, and at no time were the earth's resources to be exploited for personal gain. While we live in the world, we should expect the Land owner to return at any time. We should always be ready to receive Him. The earth is God's and man is simply its steward or caretaker. Hence, we are all responsible for the efficient utilization of the earth's limited resources and the well being of its environment. Not only because sustaining the environment will ensure our continued well being but more so because it's a responsibility bestowed by the Creator Himself.

This paper will look at agriculture in the Bible, more precisely, a Christian view of agriculture, the values to develop and how to achieve these values. This paper will show how a Christian teacher can aid in helping students to develop Christlike values. This will better prepare the student for service in this world but greater still for service in the Lord's vineyard.

A Biblical Perspective of Agriculture

Agriculture is the oldest profession mentioned in the Bible. The original duty given to man was to take care of all crops and animals alike. Agriculture was to enable man to trust in God, and have commitment to living out God's will, and experience God's presence in his life. Having faith in God would give man purpose and direction in life. Faith then leads us to values which determine our priorities. A value is an idea about what someone thinks is important in life (Hill 1998). Hill further defines it as a single belief that guides actions and judgements.

The Bible declares that “. . . let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground (Gen. 1:26). The Lord has overall authority over all things.

Man's role thus is that of a caretaker and not ownership of the earth. He was to take care of the earth and all creatures. He was to be a manager, a steward and at no time was he allowed to exploit the earth. "It is the faithfulness, the loyalty to God, the loving service, that wins the divine approval. What we will be in heaven is the reflection of what we are now in character and holy service" (White 1941).

Further, it declares " . . . I give you every seed-bearing plant . . . and every fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food" (Gen. 1:29). Vegetation was provided to man for food. It was provided for his welfare and he in turn was to take care of the vegetation so there would be an increase in food production. Using good seed, well-prepared land, minimum weed competition, with favorable environmental conditions and timely planting translate into high yields. The Lord promises to give the increase when we play our role as farmers effectively. For instance, accounting would be required for each animal slaughtered etc. This points to man's role as a steward rather than the ownership. We are accountable to God for the creatures on earth.

"Cursed is the ground because of you . . . By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Gen. 3:17-19). After sin came into the world the soil was cursed. It was no longer perfect for crop production. Thorns, thistles, and weeds became a reality as plants grew in undesirable places. Food would now only be available through hardship and sweat. The amount of work needed to produce a crop increased tremendously. The more we sin (Gen. 4:12) the fewer the yields we obtain from our ground. It is interesting to note that when we go against God's word, the earth on which we depend is cursed.

"The creation is groaning as in pain of childbirth" (Rom. 8:22). Man has exploited the earth and its resources against God's original command. Today the earth is exploited and uncontrolled destruction of forest, soils, air and water resources continues unabated. There is a cry in the world today for environmental balance to protect water sources, minimize pollution, control global warming, prevent desertification, etc. The Christian has a duty to point mankind to his original role of steward and to point to Christ who died for us so we can be counted righteous in the sin-marred world.

According to Lev. 25:13 the Hebrew culture-practiced jubilee every fifty years. The idea was to prevent any one person from accumulating much more resources than he needed. Hence, at that period liberty was proclaimed, at this time all land

reverted to the original owner. This way nobody owned plenty of land at the expense of his neighbors. The idea of a kinsman redeemer is exemplified in the story of Ruth and Boaz in the old testament.

According to Lev. 25:3 also after every seven years land was left to rest. The idea behind this was that the people live with few excesses so they can concentrate on serving and knowing the Lord. In agriculture leaving land fallow is a sound practice where there is plenty of land and there is a need to break a disease cycle in the soil and replenish the soil's nutrient pool. When the land is left to rest, the disease causing organism does not find a host plant to thrive on, thus the organism dies. The soil nematode is an excellent example of how leaving the land fallow can control a pest. In modern intensive agriculture the normal way of eradicating nematodes is through soil fumigation or growing a non-host crop like pasture. The spiritual connotation of the sabbatical year is to signify rest, like the Sabbath, a special day set aside to worship the Lord. The Sabbath comes every seventh day of the week and also every seventh year of the calendar year. Because of ideas just briefly expounded, every man learns to live on less, or better put live on just enough to live. Unlike in more affluent societies, such as those of the "developed" world where excess is the norm and worship of God is not the priority for many.

However, we have hope that "... On the day of God" (2 Peter 3:11-13), the earth will be restored to its original mint condition. There will be a renewal and there will be no more exploitation. Perfect stewardship will be restored to man. Christ died to restore our relationship with God. In a restored relationship man can look at life holistically in conformity with God's original plan. Thus, to the Christian there is hope, indeed the only hope, in all this confusion and quite plainly madness occurring around us.

A Christian View of Farming

The way I see it, farming is stewardship. The land was provided to man by the Lord. We are not land owners but just caretakers. A caretaker can be defined as a man or woman in charge of another's property. He could also be defined as an agent, a substitute, or an intermediary. (Rogets Thesaurus, 1987). The parable of the rich landowner (Luke 12:16-20) tells what will happen to us when we amass for ourselves great wealth. For all things do not belong to us, rather it is God who has put us in charge of them and will hold us accountable with what we use them for. As

agents we are merely representatives of the Landowner. The yield, income and glory from our work ought to go back to the Lord who gave us the resources in the first place. "To live for self is to perish. It is the spirit of Christ to give, to sacrifice self for the good of others. It is the spirit of Satan to get, to draw to self." (White, p.259.1941)

One's priorities reveal his life direction. As a Christian farmer, your responsibilities include conserving and safeguard the land. You also have responsibility to the future generations to leave land as a resource better than he found it. That means the land use practices employed must be sustainable to ensure future generations ability to produce food is not jeopardized. To effectively use land, land uses must be allocated according to the condition and potential of the land. For instance fragile land could be used for forestry and extensive farming like ranching where there is minimal damage to the land instead of intensive use of the land. Soil conservation practices such as strip cropping, reduce soil erosion. If one inch of top soil is lost, it can take more than fifty years to rebuild and restore it again (Brady, 1990). It is in the top soil where nutrients and moisture needed for plant growths are found. Once soil leaves our land by erosion, it is carried through streams and rivers to salty oceans where it is lost forever. On the same thought, as a Christian farmer, you ought to prevent pesticide and fertilizer runoff. The chemicals eventually enter rivers and streams making them very fertile. This is called eutrophication. This encourages the excessive growth of water loving plants such as the water hyacinth. These plants consume a lot of oxygen and thus reduce the amount of oxygen available to other living organisms in water. This phenomenon explains some massive fish kills that may be observed in polluted water bodies. A Christian farmer has a role in maintaining ecological balance and sustainability and ensuring food to all in the long run. This means for instance, he would not be satisfied with effluent flowing out of his farm to contaminate his neighbor's farm. Farmers are stewards, responsible for maintaining the quality of the land and other environmental resources. In Rev. 17-18, it is reported that the wrath of the Lord will come upon all those who are responsible for the destruction of the earth and its resources.

The Christian is responsible for improving land. This can be done by carrying out agricultural activities that would improve the structure and productivity of soil such as addition of organic matter, growing deep rooted leguminous plants, and minimization of soil compaction with heavy machinery. When a soil is well-aerated, it is easier for water infiltration and root penetration to take place. Additions of

nutrients also enhance plant growth and hence crop cover. This minimizes the impact of rain drops on the ground. When rain drops hit bare ground, they do so with a great force that eventually the pore spaces are clogged and water runs off the soil surface leading to soil erosion and insufficient water for growing plants. A good crop cover also shade's weeds to minimize crop-weed competition for moisture, sunlight, space and nutrients (Foth, 1984) and hence increase yields.

A good Christian farmer has a responsibility to provide for his family. He also has a duty to God and mankind. He takes care of his family's daily needs. He works hard to get good yields so he can raise an income for his family's needs. And the need of spreading the gospel to all nations.

A Christian farmer needs to have a positive attitude toward people working for him. He needs to empathize with his helpers on the farm. Hence, for instance, their wages should not be very low. He must consider his helpers as part of his winning team. The farmer should realize that without his helpers support, he would be unable to achieve his farm's goals. Hence, helpers are partners in the farm business. Their contribution to the farm income is crucial so communications, fairness, and training are all important to the overall productivity of the farm. The farmer should be able to answer the following questions positively: Do they come to me to share their joy, sorrow, and concern? Do we enjoy working together for the betterment of the farm? Is it always our desire to improve the productivity of the farm so all may benefit? "The positiveness and energy . . . and strength of character, manifested in Christ are to be developed in us, through the same discipline that He endured" (White, *Desire of Ages* p. 72). Its only in emulating Christ that we can be true stewards in His vineyard.

As a farmer, there is a need for balance in his lifestyle both in his time at work and at play. A farmer's activity give vigor to life and gives him something worth fighting for although he may sometimes at times feel very discouraged. A Christian farmer has got to create time for his family, friends, and God. His whole world view and faith in God come into play here. In his busy schedule he must find some quiet time to commune with God for wisdom and courage to go on in the midst of adversity.

Practicing wholesome agriculture also gives great appreciation of nature. Growing crops fills one with gratitude and awe. A farmer carries out various cultural practices on the land including land preparation, planting good quality seeds, controlling weeds and applying fertilizers. He also does his best in terms of

providing various needs for crop production but only the Lord can give the increase in yields that he desires. A farmer is always filled with awe when he watches a seed germinate and grow through the vegetative and reproductive phases. It is humbling to see how little the farmer contributes as compared with what the Lord provides to the crops to increase yields. From a single seed, comes forth as many as a thousand other seeds. For example, as one passes by a corn field, he is usually mesmerized at the phenomenal growths that takes place, in a short period of time, say of three days. The miracle of crop growth, production and beauty is indeed fascinating. It truly points to and reminds of a greater Being that created all things. Even though sin has marred the face of the face of the earth, nature clearly manifests that God is the creator and sustainer of all creation.

He provides us with food and beauty in nature. Practicing agriculture helps one to appreciate God as the Creator. He is involved in self renewal for both plants and animal life.

A Christian farmer works hand in hand with God. The Lord created and controls life, our task is to restore and renew what has been marred by sin. The Lord created a perfect Eden. But because of the fall of man and the entry of sin, imperfection entered the world. Thus, currently, our task is to work a ground that does not produce unless sweat is shed. Crops are now cultured under less favorable condition such as weed infestation, disease problems, declining fertility and water shortage.

A Christian farmer ought to be creative in order to improve productivity. Man is now always carrying out trials and research to find the most suitable and sustainable ways of boosting productivity. It may be through effective disease control, improved nutrient balance, modification of the natural environment such as crop culture in greenhouses, artificial moisture supply or irrigation, introduction of new crop varieties that have greater resistance, etc. Creativity demands that farmers always improve and modify the techniques they employ in producing food in order to improve harvests and the quality of produce. A farmer has a yearning to always improve yield, hence the fast acceptance of new methods and seed varieties. "Higher than the highest human thoughts can reach is Gods ideal for His children" White, 1995).

Christian Values in Agriculture

The Christian world view can be summed up in four terms: Creation; Fall; Redemption; and Glorification. Man was “created in the image of God,” (Gen. 2:7). Since this is the case, one really ought to be whom he was created to be. Our purpose is to be like God, to reflect His nature and character. God has total dominion over all creation including man. We are to exercise stewardship, a derived dominion, over the natural world (Sire p.68,69) that was given to us by God.

Sin has marred God’s creation. The devil is working hard to block the channel of communication between God and man. God is engaged in a controversy with Satan. Satan is questioning the character of God. The battle is moving toward a final triumph for God (J. Fowler, 1998).

Christ, our incarnate Brother, came to this world to restore our relationship with God. He died to set us free from the bondage of sin. This way, we can look at life holistically in conformity with God’s original plan (J. Fowler, 1998). Christ will come again to restore the earth to its original glory. With this background we can now explore values necessary for stewards in the practice of agriculture.

Quality of work

A farmer will improve productivity by increasing efficiency on how things are done around the farm. His desire will be to use minimum input for maximum output. This way a greater yield and profit can be realized. As an illustration, consider where different farm operations such as planting, fertilization, harrowing, and herbicide application are done by one tractor pass in the field. The amount of fuel, labor, and time saved is tremendous. Soil compaction on your field that would have occurred from many passes of the heavy machinery is also reduced. These savings mean that the farmer gets more profit in the long run. Efficiency is also improved by maintaining your machinery and tools in tiptop condition. For instance, tractors should be maintained so they are always ready and available for various tasks on the farm. If any tool or machine shows any sign of distortion, it should be fixed immediately. It is always cheaper to repair small distortions immediately than to end up buying a new tractor at a later date. This illustration can also be applied to disease control in animals and other general farm operations. It is always cheaper to prevent than to cure diseases in animals. The quality of work can be improved if farmers and their helpers know why and how things are done as they are done in Agriculture. This way, situations are corrected before they become too expensive. When you have responsible people in the farm, the quality of work greatly improves.

Team Spirit

Cooperation is an important value in a farm. When workers on the farm work like a team, less wastage results because each individual's effort is a part of the greater whole. The cooperation of various individuals enables the farm to work like one unit. As the saying goes, "united we stand, divided we fall." Cooperation on the farm also points to a pleasant relationship among workers. When people are happy with their work, they tend to be motivated. A motivated group will achieve much for the enterprise. In turn, relationships can be strengthened when we know and love what we do (Palmer, 1993) greater productivity can be achieved.

Love of Land

When we love the land, we tend to treat it with more care. We know that's all we have. If we lose it, we will not be able to produce enough food for the increasing human population. The world population is increasing every year while the size of land stays the same. There is a sense of beauty on the land that enables it to keep producing for the ever increasing population. Nature has a way of reminding us how beautiful God's handiwork is. Land well-taken care of yields much, which in turn feeds a lot of people and everybody is happy.

Social Responsibility

In the Bible time it was common for people to glean fields behind harvesters (Ruth 2:2). Wealthy land owners had a responsibility to assist the less endowed individuals by letting them pick grain that dropped behind the harvesters in the field. This way the farmer fulfilled his role as his brother's keeper. When we manage a farm, a sense of fairness, justice and empathy should be seen in the farm workers. As helpers work hard to increase yields in a farm, the farmer would do well to share some of the profits to the workers. The farmer will empathize with his helpers. It's important for them to know that the farmer cares for their welfare. They are part of the family of God. White (1941) says in proposition to his abundance is his obligation to use his gifts for the uplifting of humanity.

Work Ethics

Christian education will cultivate work ethics in students. Examples of work ethics are briefly listed and described below. Punctuality, which refers to one's ability to keep time for different appointments. It is important to keep schedules in farming. Timing of crops in terms of planting, harvesting, rainfall, temperature, etc. could mean the difference between a bumper crop and crop failure.

Consistency is another ethic. It may be defined as living or acting conformably to one's own belief or profession. In agriculture effort is always made to consistently work at improving our yields, methods and tools. This is the only way we keep up feeding the increasing population on the same size of land.

Service oriented students develop good conduct that is of advantage not only to them but to others. Agriculture trains individuals to learn to be of service to others. To help others help themselves is the direction to go in agriculture. We would never be able to consume all the food we produce. Farmers produce to feed others.

Students learn to be trustworthy in carrying out their duties. For example, if plants are not well watered, they wither and the authority will realize that the students were not trustworthy. When nature is mishandled one's actions will always find him out. This way, these students learn very early in their lives to be trustworthy. Trust goes hand in hand with faith. A farmer has to learn to be patient and wait upon the Lord. In agriculture, we depend a lot on the Lord. For example, we plant our seeds in the ground having great faith that they will grow and provide feed for our animals. Farming enables one to have faith in God and His providence for us. Many a times farmers just go to their knees and place all their plans and goals in the hand of the Lord.

Many times a farmer finds himself involved in business. This would be through direct sales of products in the market and also through processing of raw materials to increase their value. A case in point is when a farmer sells dairy products such as ghee, butter, yoghurt, ice cream. The Lord encourages us to develop the intellect to its fullest capacity, the Bible says that we must use all our might and mind to know the creator. Christians ought to obtain all the education possible, with the budget in view of imparting our knowledge to others (White, 1941). The Lord desires for us to develop to the highest potential so we can serve Him better. That way, we can be better stewards.

Another ethic is accountability. Accountability refers to one being answerable

to someone. A farmer must give account to the land owner, the government and God for his stewardship role. Students are trained to return to the government what belongs to it and also to God what belongs to Him. Accountability indicates the quality of dependence other people can depend on us to carry out the task at hand effectively.

Another ethic is Nondiscrimination. This implies not making a difference in treatment or favor. Treating all equally regardless of race, color or creed. We are all children of God, created equally. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ and nothing else should make any difference. This attitude can only be attained when we focus our attention on Christ as our example. Christ loves all mankind no matter who you are and where you are from.

Creativity

Agriculture trains one to think and to look for ways to improve how we do things. Through creativity high yielding varieties of crops have been developed, efficient machines are in use, herbicides are being used to eradicate weeds, pesticides are being used to control pests, etc. Training individuals to seek for better solutions for our daily farming needs is at the heart of agriculture and its ability to continue being useful into the future. It is important for students to realize that all this creativity comes from God who is all wise.

Stewardship

The most important is that the land is not ours but it belongs to God. We are caretakers of the Lord's vineyard. The Lord has given us talents to glorify His name. Man is a manager of the earth resources and will one day be held accountable for how he used the resources that were entrusted to him.

Application

Integration of faith and learning can be defined as a deliberate and systematic process of approaching the entire educational enterprise from a Biblical perspective. Its aim is to ensure that students are under the influence of Christian teachers and that by the time they leave school they will have internalized Biblical values and a view of knowledge, life and destiny that is Christ centered, service oriented and kingdom directed (Rasi, 1998).

Our world view permeates every facet of our life. It comes out in the way we

work and relate with others. This enables us to inculcate spiritual values in the teaching of our various subjects. Spirituality in the classroom and school is a top concern of educators in Adventist schools (Kornijeczuk and Kijai, 1994).

Integration of faith and learning can be promoted in agriculture in the following ways:

Teach by example

The daily life of the Christian teacher plays a big role in the manifestation of faith, learning and integration (Kornijeczuk and Kijai, 1994). When we take Christ the master teacher as our role model it is easy for students to accept spiritual matters. When students perceive teachers as genuine, God fearing people, the influence of Christ in their lives takes root easily. Teachers must show genuine love and concern for students for integration faith in learning to take place. When one loves the subject and also loves Jesus it becomes easy for us to input values in the teaching of agriculture. Christ took rough fishermen and helped them to become champions of truth through integration of faith and learning. Adventist teachers have a role today to present Christ to their students. Seed that has been planted today by faith will eventually germinate. Christian principles must find deliberate expression throughout each teacher's instructions. One important way to learn faith is to identify and imitate their teacher's behavior (Hill, 1998).

Students are precious in the sight of God. The teacher, a steward, has a great responsibility in modeling Christ before the students. The process of integrating faith and learning can only be passed on by teachers who themselves have adapted it in their own experience. However, in the process of bringing together faith and learning, Adventist teachers must carefully respect the integrity of both religious belief and academic discipline (Rasi, 1998).

Teacher/Student Relationship

Fieldwork gives opportunity for the teacher to work with the students in the farm. The teacher gets to show the students how various practices are done. This way we emulate Christ by sharing Biblical precepts with our students. Christ, our example, mingled freely with the people and provided their needs where they were. When we mingle with students, it is easy to pass values such as positive attitude, humility, respect of nature etc.

White (1995) on an example of how integration of faith and learning can be

introduced in practical work says “as children work, the teacher can explain the garden of the heart, with the good or bad seed sown there, and that as the garden must be prepared for natural seed, so the heart must be prepared for the seed of truth. As the seed is cast into the ground, they can teach the lesson of Christ’s death; and as the blade springs up, the truth of resurrection . Practical work encourages close observation and independent thought. It develops ability to plan and execute , strengthens courage and perseverance, and calls for the exercise of tact and skills (White, 1995).

The above qualities are important for a good farmer to have. Shull (11CC:283-286) states that there is improved student teacher communication when teachers work with students in the field. Lessons are easily grasped and related to spirituality in the field. For example, as a teacher works with students pruning a fruit tree, he points the students to the soon coming Messiah. The messiah will come to redeem His own, while destroying the devil with his followers. Pruning a tree is done normally by removal of plant parts to adjust the fruit load. It is also done to improve the tree’s appearance or usefulness. The usefulness results from increased efficiency of light utilization or the facilitation of cultural operations, such as harvesting or disease control. Furthermore, training and pruning may enhance the productiveness of plants and the quality of plant products (Janick, 1979). On the other hand as a mother hen covers and protects her young ones from attack by birds of prey students can learn how God protects His children. No matter how big or aggressive the attacking bird is, the mother hen would rather lose her life so the chicks may live. This points to the Great Controversy Christ is putting up against the dragon, to protect us. Christ would have come to die in this world, even if there was only one sinner. Quality may be seen as a quest for wholeness or oneness with each other, with creation, and with God. Such a quest for relationship, meaning and quality is part of faith (Hill, 1998). Holmes (1987) states that the idea of a Christian college starts with teachers who are Christian scholars, who model Christian values. Sire (1990) also puts it that Christian teachers ought to have the mind of Christ.

Using a Framework

A “framework” is a statement of values and principles that guide curriculum development (Hill, 1998). Hill further states that these principles are derived from Adventist education philosophy.

Value is an idea about what someone thinks is important in life. The idea of value often involves the idea of weighing up something, or choosing from alternatives. Value can be defined further as a belief that guides actions and judgements. (Hill,1998) Students make value judgements as a result of what they see or hear from a more powerful person -in this case the teacher. Teachers should help students to develop a solid Character, to realize their individual worth as God's children, embrace Christian values and learn to make principled choices. (Rasi, 1998)

When a teacher relies on Christ, the Spirit of Christ will come upon him and God will work through him by the Holy Spirit upon the mind of others. (Ed p131)

Conclusion

A teacher as a steward of God's earth will model Christ in the classroom and on the farm by example. He will prepare holistic young people who are looking forward to the return of the Land Owner. "All life with its culture and its learning must be penetrated with Christian perspectives, if Jesus Christ is to be the Lord of all. All young people's human potential must be as fully developed as possible, if the stewardship of his or her life is to honor God (Holme, 1987) ."

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All Bible Quotations are from New International Version (NIV).