

# Biblical/Theological Response to waste and pollution (drawing on the Old Testament Laws)

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# Introduction

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- Ecotheology is a form of constructive theology that focuses on the interrelationship of religion and nature especially in light of the environmental crisis that has affected the world.
- It's important to note that a relationship does exist between human religious/spiritual thinking and environmental degradation
- Ecotheology is concerned by issues such as sustainability and human domination. Christians have tended to be looked at with suspicion in light of the creation story which has been misinterpreted.
- This presentation will try to give religious reflection on the human relationship with earth that in particular pollution and waste. We will use two texts from the Old Testament which are: Isaiah 24.4-6b and Jeremiah 12.4

# Introduction Continued

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- Christianity has embraced and pursued a vision for the well-being of the earth and all creatures.
- St Francis of Assisi is one of the proponents of Christian Ecotheology and has great influence.
- We will endeavor to explain how certain human behaviors and habits have caused great ***mourning and withering*** of the earth as stated in our two texts.
- The presentation will also look at how the earth is ***mourning and withering*** from an environmental perspective?
- What does it mean for the environment to ***mourn*** and how? What can Christian communities do to stop or alleviate the earth from ***mourning and withering***?

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“The earth mourns and withers...it is polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty.”

Isaiah 24:4-6b



- “The earth mourns and withers...it is polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty” (Isaiah 24:4-6b)
- This scripture give a true reflection of the condition to which the earth is manipulated and abused by its inhabitants. Mourning and withering signifies a sad and death type of feeling. If the earth is in such a state it means that there are several factor that are causing to feel that way.
- We might want to ask ourselves or reflect as how humanity can cause such pain to the earth? (Pollution and Waste)- rivers that have become dumb site, water way that are blocked by waste, air pollution. Urban flash flooding is also attributed to block water ways and polluted river. Mourning cabin be (flooding, epidemics of waterborne diseases caused by contaminated water resources)

# Jeremiah 12:4

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- “How long must this land mourn? Even the grass in the fields has withered. The wild animals and birds have disappeared because of the evil in the land. For the people have said, ‘The Lord doesn’t see what’s happening!’” (Jeremiah 12:4).
- Similar to what Isaiah, the mourning continues to be repeated expressing sorrow to death of something, the act of grieving by the environment.
- It can be argued that as Moltmann points out, ‘Gen 1.28 will have to be interpreted in an entirely new way. Not to subdue the earth, but free the earth through fellowship with it’ Jurgen Moltmann, The future of Creation, (Philadelphia Fortress Press, 1979)
- Psalm 24.1,2 “the earth is the Lord’s and all that fills it, the world and all its inhabitants”.
- Human participation of love and justice is necessary to maintain creation and cosmos.

# Waste and pollution

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- Land, water, air and wildlife are affected by urbanization due to high human density which then causes high demand on resources. The environment is impacted or ***mourns and withers*** in several ways which include:
  - 1. Solid Waste
  - 2. Water Supply
  - 3. Sanitation
  - 4. Air Quality

# Water Quality

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- Many rivers in the urban and peri-urban areas are more like open sewers like what will shown in the images to follow. The lack of proper sanitation has a drastic impact on watercourses. People and industry use rivers for waste disposal which contains organic material and nutrients and different types of toxic pollutants.
- These make the water unsafe for humans to either drink or irrigation as well as being harmful to aquatic animals
- The effects are huge, the change of quality of surface water also affects groundwater because they are linked so pollutants from the surface will infiltrate down and contaminate soil and ground water.
- Just Isaiah says the whole natural water system is violated and the earth mounts

# Macheke River in Masvingo

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- This is a river that flows in the City and provides part of drinking water it is highly polluted by waste. As a result the water does not flow



# Solid Waste



# Solid waste

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- If one takes a closer look at the previous pictures of different type of waste we can identify the following item: glass bottles, plastic bottles, used dippers, plastic papers and cardboard boxes.
- All these items have one common element they hardly decompose which means they can only contribute to the mourning of the earth as it fails to digest them.
- Secondly, two things come to mind- waste management crisis and deliberate human activity that causes harm to the environment both of which can be stopped. The community can engage in safe waste management services, most the items mention about can be re-circled thereby contributing to sustainable us of natural resources.
- Urban waste often ends up in illegal dumps on the streets, open spaces, waste lands, drains or rivers. All pictures used on this presentation are from one high density suburb in Harare, called Budiriro.
- Every corner has one identical feature of waste dumps. We have mobilized communities into few streets each and management waste (clean up campaigns) while policing those who come to dump

# Clean up at a church Conference by the Pilgrims

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# Liberation solidarity model

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- This model advances that the Church is in solidarity with the weakest; with that part of creation. Liberation theology articulates the biblical motif for liberation in Exodus and other passages. It can be argued that if the earth is mourning and withering because of human activity then there should be advocacy for the liberation of creation.
- In Exodus the poor cry to Yahweh to be liberated and Yahweh hears their cry and God takes the side of the side of the poor. In same manner, the renewal of the earth comes in response to the cry of the poor and dumb creatures witch are suffering from the waste and pollution.
- However, unlike humans, the earth's responses are catastrophic to human (drought, harsh climate condition, flooding etc.)
- Mathew Fox, "Creation Spiritual" in Creation, Vol.2, No.2, 1986

# Conclusion

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- The Old Testament views the earth as precious and to be preserved.
- The texts used in the presentation show that the earth is in mourning and withering due to irresponsible human activity
- We can prefer a few idea:
  1. Change of biblical interpretation of the creation story
  2. Reduce-obtaining more than what one can meaningfully use, Recircle and Reuse- improperly disposing of what can continue to be of use to oneself or others.
  3. Bio digesters that can provide energy while managing waste

# Questions

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- 1. Back room discussion question; In your community, how is your environment mourning and withering?
- 2. Individual Assignment Question; write a project proposal as to how your community can best deal with pollution and waste management (offer about three options that are simple and practical)