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Reading Analysis: *The Foundation of Stewardship and Ecology in the Bible*

1)

An individual's reasoning for wanting to create a more a sustainable and environmentally-conscious world in which they live can come from many different motivations. Factors such as political beliefs, environmental concerns, animals rights concerns, religious doctrine, and one's own personal spiritual reasons all give a hand at influencing each individual's treatment of the earth, its inhabitants and its resources. However, in the book Food, Farming, and Faith, Gary Fick spends two chapters focusing on the influence of religion in the environmental arena, using the Bible as a reference point to support his work. Looking at these two chapters together, *The Foundation of Stewardship and Ecology in the Bible*, not only define what it is to be environmentally conscious, but also gives extensive reasoning for how the Bible (and Judeo-Christian belief in general) is a powerful tool in shaping people's attitudes towards the environment.

Through the use of citing and interpreting numerous passages from both the Old and New Testament, Fick explains that deeply rooted within the Bible is the message of sustainability and environmental nurture. In Chapter 2, *the Foundation of Stewardship*, Fick defines what it is to be a steward of the earth, "...to live so as to take care of the earth and other people as best they could" (*Foundation, 16*), and reveals the importance of this concept as it reflects one's relationship to God, fellow humans, and other living organisms. According to Fick, stewardship is an important ideology stemming from the

Bible and an obligation bestowed upon us, as “the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15 & *Foundation, 16*).

The presence of stewardship in the Bible, however, hasn't always been made clear and is still a controversial subject today. Fick explains that there is a misunderstanding in interpretation that has led many to believe that we aren't obligated to be stewards but, in fact, are permitted to be just the opposite: rulers and users of the earth. Essentially, it has become a word game. Fick explains that various definitions and connotations of Hebrew words and texts has led some to confuse God's appointment of service with a grant of freedom in which allows them to use and use without regret. This, however, is just an unfortunate misinterpretation, as Fick points out multiple principles of stewardship in the Bible, including “the earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him” (Ps. 24:1 & *Foundations 21*) from the Old Testament and the famous parables of the New.

Chapter 3, entitled *Ecology in the Bible*, takes the idea of stewardship and it expands it into activism in order to meet sustainability and bridge the gap between the broad and narrow view of agriculture, the religious components and the scientific. Fick approaches various ecological questions and offers biblical insight in order to help humans clarify and solve these issues on our own. He retells the story of Genesis, and quotes, “And God blessed them. And God said to them ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on earth,” (Gen. 1:28), once again emphasizing a misunderstanding that can and has led to imprudent ecological behavior,

most specifically overpopulation (and all the problems that can stem from it, i.e. loss of resources and space).

This misunderstanding, Fick says, poses a threat to the environment that God created. Fick believes that the real message of Genesis 1:28 was not to establish *dominion* (as the English language knows this term) over nature, but rather to entrust us with a “responsibility to God, unlike the birds and fish,” (*Ecology*, 36). Along with this responsibility comes accountability if abused, and Fick makes this apparent as he points out such biblical examples as the story of the Flood and of the Egyptian Pharaoh imposed infanticide in the story of the Exodus. He then likens them to historically recorded devastations such as war, famine, disease, and slavery, all of which are capable of agricultural and ecological destruction.

On the upside, Fick states that the Bible offers an easy prevention and/or solution to these problems:

“Humans are told to seek knowledge which can increase food production, protect and repair the environment, and care for human reproduction so that present and future people can be blessed with the abundance of creation. A full environment is a dynamic concept depending on the application of human wisdom and knowledge. It is clear that the land is “overfull” when the food supply is inadequate and the environment is deteriorating” (*Ecology* 37).

Humans are not to be thought of as separate from nature seeing as “man has no advantage over the beasts” (*Ecc. 3:19*). Instead, we serve a very important and integral part of its welfare and survival. According to Fick, “God hold humans responsible to him for their care of the rest of creation” (*Ecology*, 39).

2)

These two chapters are most definitely intriguing, yet stray away from the center of the religion road as Fick takes on the full responsibility of writing an academic piece as a believing and practicing Christian. Fick states, "...I have approached this scriptural interpretation with the perspective of an ecologist or environmentalist, but also as one who believes that the scriptures are true and reliable when they are interpreted with reference to the whole of the Bible" (*Ecology*, 32). Although he does offer sound examples relating to the Bible and the topic at hand, he also lightly brushes over contradictions in the Bible, such as on page 38 in *Ecology*, Fick mentions a contradiction within the two creation stories, yet offers no reasons as to why they conflict or how this could affect the validity of the Bible as a whole to others.

Compared to Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, Fick's approach would awkwardly fall somewhere in the middle. His work shows obvious research and journalistic applications such as Pollan, yet also carries a strong sense of personal belief and preference of a certain way of living, as is the case with Kingsolver. Either way, the means by which Fick and the other writers present their cases do not, in fact, change the one connecting conclusion in which they all come to, and that is simply the importance of living by and for a sustainable planet.

3)

After reading these two chapters, one can immediately see the advantage an HRS student would have in understanding Fick's writings. Not only does a history of studying religious *text* help when actually comprehending what is being said, but the familiarity of

analyzing religious *belief* in an open-minded, scholarly approach makes a source like Fick's have much more impact. With the ability to read a Biblical and scientific comparison without prejudice, it opens one more set of doors to sustainability. Fick offers a view that obviously would win over many Christians, but could also provide beneficial influences on non-Christians as well, as long as they approach it the same way we, as HRS students, have been taught to approach it—with a clear and unbiased mindset that suggests we are in the just perfect position of being connected and removed to the topic at the same time. Analyzing cultures and religions in this way (which some could consider an art-form in itself) expands the amount of reference points we have, therefore expands our overall knowledge bank, which, in turn, will hopefully help achieve the sustainability we need in the world, as well as confronting other issues at hand.