

## FOREST AND CHRISTIANITY: A STUDY ON THE BONDING

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**Titus Richard M.A., M.Phil.**

Assistant Professor

Saveetha School of Engineering,

Chennai.India

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### Abstract

Through the years and in all corners of the sphere, people have looked to trees to make sense of our lives, glorifying their transcendental qualities in diversity. At the spiritual level, trees awaken us towards our connections with something larger than ourselves. In mythology, trees are sometimes depicted as the abodes of nature spirits. There are lots such illusions that can be quoted from the Bible. The Bible continually gives much significance to forests which are evident through various verses that are to be discussed. People are being compared to trees and animals which proves the intimate connection between man, forest and religion. Jacob – the father of the powerful nation Israel is compared to a tree. In the Bible, Prophet Isaiah says, "In days to come shall Jacob take root; Israel shall blossom and bud; and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isaiah 27:6). Like the German artist, Anselm Kiefer brilliantly explains his connectivity with forest – "I grew up in a forest. It's like a room. It's protected. Using such illustrative, the paper is to be discussed elaborately.

**Keywords:** Transcendental qualities, spiritual, mythology, dendrolatry, The Bible, intimate connection

### Introduction

A forest is a shadowy place. In folklore and fairy tales, they are usually inhabited by mysterious individuals, symbols of all risks with which young people must contend if they are to become adults. Forest is a place of challenge, a realm of death holding the secrets of nature which must be penetrated to find meaning. Curiosity breeds contempt. In analytical psychology, the forest represents feminity in the eyes of a young man, an unexplored realm full of the unknown. Forest stands for the unconscious and its mysteries which connects the human race with the same.

Wood offers a fascination, beauty, and complexity of grain that makes it particularly suitable as an artistic medium. The regard for nature and forests manifested itself most strongly in the 17th century by the Irish poets. They handed down their works in a verbal tradition. Often, their spur came from trees and forests and many of their public performances might easily have relied upon trees for shade and shelter. Some hundred years

later, the first book on nature and forests to be printed and published in Ireland was by Samuel Waring of Waringstown, Co. Armagh. It was precisely about the propagation of trees and it is believed to be the most primitive horticultural work to come from an Irish press.

#### Review of literature

Christian values towards the environment are diverse. Different traditions, for example, emphasize different aspects of the creation of narratives. White's (1967) seminary work in this area focused on branches of the church that emphasize texts such as Genesis 1:26–28. This states that humans were given a divine edict to have dominion over the earth and increase in number. However, other traditions, especially among liberal and Protestant denominations, teach divinely sanctioned stewardship (e.g., Genesis 2:7–15) where humans are put in Eden to care for and till the earth. To add further complexity, some contemporary movements focus on apocalyptic rather than creation narratives. Apocalyptic beliefs are widely reported in American fundamentalist and Pentecostalist movements. Guth et al. (1995) express concern that the outlook of these churches risks their members becoming disengaged from current environmental concerns as they focus on preparing for the afterlife. Fundamentalist Christian faith may even encourage individuals to welcome growing environmental problems as positive signs of the Second Coming. In support of this assertion, a recent US study found that American citizens most dismissive of climate change were more likely to be Evangelical Christians demonstrating a high level of religious observance. This paper aims in explaining the relationship between Christianity and forest in specific.

#### Forest and Religion

Forest is significant in many of the world's mythologies and religions and has been given deep and sacred connotations throughout the centuries. Human beings, observing the growth and death of trees, have often seen them as powerful symbols of growth, death, and rebirth. Evergreen trees, that stay green throughout these cycles of growth, death, and rebirth, are often compared to the symbols of the eternal, immortality or fertility. All such proofs led the human race to the practice of *dendrolatry* – worshipping trees.

The image of the Tree of life or world tree occurs in many mythologies specifically in Christianity. The Egyptian Book of the Dead mentions sycamores as part of the scenery where the soul of the deceased finds delightful rest.

The evergreen tree was an antique representation of life in the midst of winter. Near the early Middle Ages, the fable had grown that when Christ was born in the dead of winter, every tree throughout the world unbelievably shook off its ice and snow and produced new shoots of green which again evident the antique representation.

#### Forest and Christianity

The Bible comprises of plenty of references to trees and wood (over 525) than to any other type of living organism excluding humans. Such references are found from Genesis -

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the first book of the Bible, which refers to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9) to Revelation. These references prove the strong intimacy between Forest and Christianity.

Both the Bible and the Koran refer to the usefulness of trees for food, animal feed, oil, wood fuel (including charcoal) and construction. Trees are mentioned as a source of food in the book of *Genesis 1:29* of the Bible where God refers to the forest and its hold as 'meat' to eat. A sense of balance between forest and human is revealed in the book of *Deuteronomy 20:19-20* of the bible where the importance of trees for food, cutting fruit-trees during the siege of an enemy town was prohibited.

The Bible maintains a state of equilibrium in treating all kinds of trees equally. May it be the Gopherwood that protected Noah's ark all through the forty days and night rain or the Cedarwood that King David stored and his son King Solomon used to build a house for the Almighty. This may sound a bit religious but still, this is what one can understand from the bible – '*All are equal before HIM*'. Gopher wood is compared to the local papaya tree making the reader understand the durability of an ark that saved the next generation of the earth. It was not rejected because it was weak and unstable. At the same time, the Cedarwood is something costly which was again used to built royal palaces, churches, etc. Therefore, Christianity proves and finds the use of forest in an effective and an astounding manner.

Beyond the mention of their utility, trees are important in the bible books as symbol and metaphor. As mentioned prior in the abstract, characters in the bible are being compared to trees and animals which proves the intimate connection between man, forest and religion. The Bible explicitly likens great men to trees. Jacob – the father of the powerful nation Israel is compared to a tree. In the Bible, Prophet Isaiah says, "*In days to come shall Jacob take root; Israel shall blossom and bud; and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit*" (*Isaiah 27:6*). His growth is being compared with the blossoming and budding of a plant. His children are being compared to the fruits of the plant. This is strong evidence of the personification of plants in the bible.

In the Christian doctrine of salvation, there are three main trees – the tree of life, the tree of good and evil and the tree of life in paradise. Of all the three trees, the second one is considered to be a curse which paved way for the fall of Adam and Eve. Jesus taking the curse of the second tree of good and evil removes the curse of the same and leads to the third tree of life in the paradise of God.

Jesus, the son of God is comparing the kingdom to a vineyard where the Father is the gardener. He likens himself to the vine and his followers to the branches of the vineyard in the book of John 15:1, 2. And bible candidly likens Jesus to a Lamb. John at the very first sight of Jesus says, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (*John 1:29*).

## Conclusion

Religious texts such as the Islamic Hadiths, the Judaic Mishnah and the writings of the early Christian ancestors also hold much information on plant knowledge and fable. Apart

from mentioning only the utilities of plants, the Bible also openly likens great men to all forest characters like trees and animals. The Bible begins with trees and ends with a tree. In short, we can say the bible is a story from the tree (good and evil) through a tree (cross) to a tree (in paradise). All such proof makes strong evidence of the intimate connection between Forest and Christianity.

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