



AFRICAN ECO-THEOLOGY

Meaning
Forms
and
Expressions

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD

**AFRICAN ECO-THEOLOGY:
MEANING, FORMS AND
EXPRESSIONS**

Edited By

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD

AFRICAN ECO-THEOLOGY: MEANING, FORMS AND EXPRESSIONS

Edited By: Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD

First Published in 2021

A publication of The Association for the Promotion of African Studies

COPYRIGHT © 2021 by The Association for the Promotion of African Studies

All rights reserved: No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or retrieved or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photographic, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the Editor

ISBN: 978-978-997-556-3



13245 Trebleclef Lane Silver Spring
20904, Maryland,
United States of America

Dedication

Dedication

*Celebrating Professor Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA
@40*

“...now the text ends, and the commentary and fascination begins”

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication - - - - - iv

Table of Contents - - - - - v

Introduction:

African Eco-Theology and the Environment ix

Chapter One

African Eco-Theology: Nature and Sources

Ikechukwu Anthony, KANU, OSA, PhD - 1

Chapter Two

Theology and Ecological Degradation
in Africa: An Igwebuiké Philosophical
Perspective

Steve Orseer Akullah - - - - 21

Chapter Three

African Ecological Theology: Pedagogical
Pathways to Environmental Protection

Timothy Barga, PhD - - - - 51

Chapter Four

When The Earth Receives The Blood Of
"A Brother": Reading The Story Of Cain And
Abel (Genesis 4:1-10) In The Light
Of Eco-Spirituality

Malachy Udochukwu Theophilus, OSA, PhD 75

Table of Contents

Chapter Five

A Cosmic Kinship: Towards the Sacramentality
of the Ecosystem

Chukwunonso Obiora, SJ - - - 91

Chapter Six

Ala deity and Environmental Sustainability

Ikechukwu Anthony, KANU, OSA, PhD - 109

Chapter Seven

Laudato Si'at 5: Reception in Africa
and Decade-long Actionable Goals

Raymond Olusesan Aina, MSP, PhD - 123

Chapter Eight

The Place of Religion in Environmental
Sustainability in Nigeria

Godwin Aturuchi Eche PhD
& *Stephen Egwuatu Amadi* - - - 159

Chapter Nine

Amadioha and the Quest for
Ecological Balance

Ikechukwu Anthony, KANU, OSA, PhD - 181

Table of Contents

Chapter Ten

An Eco-Theological Appraisal of Toxic Smog,
Toxic Waste and other Pollutants with
Catastrophic Health and Environmental
Implications in the
Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria

Princess Omovrigho Idialu, Ph.D - - 193

Chapter Eleven

Environmental Crisis and Bible-Based
Environmental Management

Onyemauwa, Veronica Uduak, Ph.D - 219

Chapter Twelve

The Scripture and Church in Forests
Conservation

Steve Orseer Akullah - - - 237

Chapter Thirteen

Querida Amazonia and Ecological Concerns

Gesila Nneka Uzukwu, DMMM, Ph.D - 253

Chapter Fourteen

African Traditional Religion and Global
Ecological Crisis: An Eco-Theological Review

Ekpenyong Obo Ekpenyong, Ph.D - - 265

Chapter Fifteen

Laudato Si and the African Environment

Jude I. Onebunne, PhD & Chintwe F. Nwakwesiri 285

Table of Contents

Chapter Sixteen

Religion and the Control of Environmental Crises in Nigeria

Chinedu Jonathan Dick, PhD

& Victor Ifeanyi Ede, PhD - - - 303

Chapter Seventeen

Laudato Si': The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor in Nigeria

Mary Winifred Gloria Eche DMMM, PhD - 321

Chapter Eighteen

Climate Change and Farmers/Herders Clashes in Nigeria: Significance of Christian Environmentalism and Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*

Michael Muonwe, PhD - - - 337

Chapter Nineteen

Saint Augustine and the Ecosystem:

Summa Creatio

Felix Gabriel Zombobah - - - 367

Chapter Twenty

Implications of the Postmodernist Christian attacks on Sacred Historical Places and Objects in Southeast (Igbo) Nigeria

Maureen Nwando Onyejegbu, Ph.D - 403

INTRODUCTION

African Eco-Theology and the Environment

Pre-colonial Africa had traditional beliefs and practices preserved in her folklores, proverbs, taboos, myths, parables, etc., which reflected her cosmology. It was a worldview in which the human person and his environment: plants, animals, trees, sun, lightening, moon, land, etc., enjoyed a humane and complementary relationship and understood themselves as sharing a common home. Awajuisuk (2010) describes this cosmological relationship as symbiotic, meaning that the human person and the environment worked together for their preservation- while the human person preserved the environment, the safe environment hosted, provided for and guaranteed the safety of the human person. Awajuisuk writes: “there is symbiotic relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds. Africans believe in three worlds which are linked together: the heaven above, the earth and the earth beneath” (103). Because of this relationship between the African and his animate and inanimate worlds, he sees himself as part of other creatures or creation. Africans also believe that all things biotic and abiotic are manifestations of spiritual forces, thus, they treat them as sacred. Alokwu (2011), therefore, avers that the visible and invisible elements of nature are linked together; and that the human person is inseparably bound with nature. This relationship with nature moderated the way in which the human person understood, related with and used the things that constitute part of his environment.

Consequences such as deforestation, desertification, extinction of species, forced migration, bush fire, air pollution, soil erosion, oil depletion, ozone depletion, greenhouse gas increase, extreme

energy, water pollution, natural disasters, metals and solid minerals depletion, etc., have become a part of the history of the African people because of the African experience of the era of colonialism which was dominated by an exploitative philosophy. The experience of colonialism hit at the religion and culture of the African people and introduced and normalized variables very alien to the African people.

Nature in the traditional African society had a personality- it was referred to as mother, father, etc., as in the cases of the earth referred to sometimes as mother and python referred to, depending on place, as mother and father. Nature was in fact understood as a discloser of God through visible animals, plants, spiritual beings, heavenly beings and earthly objects who is the creator of them all. Exploiting the environment or nature, because of what she stands for, had its consequences. Such exploitations not only had consequences for the present, but for the future, as the happiness of humanity depends on the ability of human persons to maintain a balance with these forces or realities (Mbiti 1970; Metuh 1987; Okonkwo 2011; Kanu 2015).

Following the disastrous consequences of the mismanagement of the earth or the environment, Benedict XVI (cited in Barga 2014) referred to as the Green Pope, teaches that:

One must first of all, learn 'to see in creation something more than a mere source of wealth and exploitation in human hands/ to see it truly as it really is, that is, as 'expression of a project of love and truth that speaks to us of the Creator and His love for humanity (p. 123).

The formation which the African worldview gives to the human mind regarding the environment is one in which nature is understood not only as a physical home but a spiritual abode. The African world is a worldhood that exists in unity with its

creator and the community expresses her realization of this by maintaining the relationship through caring for nature. It is in this sense that the African understands his or her life as sacramental- in that they point to something deeper than can be seen. In the words of Klauder (1987), the environment meant much to the people's identity and their interrelationship, and becomes a "revelation of God, and the world cannot be understood without God for He is the centre and end of creation" (p. 34). Nature becomes, for the African, the *locus* in and through which God touches His people and reveals himself to them. The exploitation, destruction or mismanagement of this world becomes a destruction of the modes of the divine presence.

This understanding of the relationship between the African and nature is at the heart of the African Christian's theological reflections on the environment, and also constitutes what distinguishes African eco-theology from other eco-theologies. African eco-theology is, therefore, simply a theology of social responsibility with a view to saving the future generation, to save the mother earth and the universe, the air, water and the soil from further degradation. African eco-theology is the African prophetic voice crying for the protection and preservation of the life of human beings, their environment and the entire cosmos; a voice that springs from the African worldview of the relationship between the human person and nature. According to Mbiti (1975):

Africa has a very rich heritage of what past generations of African people thought or did, experienced, and passed on to their children. This heritage forms a long life that links African forefathers and mothers with the descendants who now feel proud of it. (p. 46).

Introduction

Scholars such as Udodora (2011), Mbiti (1976), Thompson (1970), Calder (1968), Gbenga (2006) had observed that all religious traditions whether elementary, pre-literate or advanced, are environmental friendly and teaches environmental preservation and protection. African eco-theology, therefore, stands to articulate in a theological manner African earth-based spiritual traditions and innovative spiritual practices that are emerging in response to the painful realities of climate change, mass extinction, biodiversity loss, and the disruption of local and global ecosystems which have for long not received the attention that it deserves. It is in this sense that this Book of Readings titled *African Eco-Theology: Meaning, Forms and Expressions* will become one of the greatest ornaments and lights in the world of eco-theology as it responds to fundamental questions looming at the corridors of ecological discourses.

References

- Alokwu, C. O. (2011). The Synthesis of Oikothology and African Ecological Ethics as a Model for Environmental Protection in Africa. *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. Vol. 1, 35-57.
- Awajiusuk, J. F. (2010). Indigenous African Environmental Ethics: A Panacea for Sustaining the Niger Delta Environment. *Journal of Religion and Culture, Dept of Religious and Cultural Studies, Uniport*, Vol 10, No. 1& 2, 101-120.
- Barga, Timothy (2010). *A Parish Guide to the New Evangelization*. Fab Anieh.
- Calder, R. (1968). *Man and the Cosmos*. New York: NY Mentor.
- Gbenga, J. S. (2006). *African Religion and Christianity in a Charging World: A Comparative Approach*. Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015). *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- Klauder, F. (1978). *The Wonder of Real*. Christopher Publishing House.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1976). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Mbiti, J.S. (1975). *Introduction to African religion*, Heinemann
- Mbiti, John (1970). *Concept of God in Africa*. SPCK: East Africa.
- Metuh, E. (1987). *Comparative Studies of Africa Traditional Religions*. Ibadan: Cleverianum Press.
- Okwokwo, Izunna (2011). "Liturgical Theology: An Environmental Concern". *AFER* Vol. 53 No. 2, June, 417-436.

Introduction

Thompson, F. W. (1970). *West African secret societies: Their organization, officials and teachings*. Westport: Negro University Press.

Udodora, R. O. (2011). Religion and land use: A threat to global peace. In Adesewo, M. A. (ed). *Religion and Land Issue* (pp. 3140). Ilorin: NASRED.

Chapter One

AFRICAN ECO-THEOLOGY: NATURE AND SOURCES

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1977-202X

Executive Summary

The activities of human beings from the dawn of modernity, specifically in the areas of degradation, pollution and destruction of the very environment that hosts and sustains them, have led to the serious danger of extermination. Not only have these human activities succeeded in making the environment hostile to life, they have also turned it into a breeding ground for usual and unusual diseases and sickness. This has led scholars of different backgrounds to begin to investigate better ways of addressing the present ecological crisis, seeking alternatives to the Western hedonistic, consumerist and technological approach. The emergence of an African eco-theology is, therefore, based on the fact that the world needs alternative perspectives or approaches, even within theology, to the problem of ecological crisis affecting the different corners of the world. An African eco-theology addresses the problem of ecology outside of the conventional theological, uniform regulations and technical interventions that have led to the overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community. New processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based in the local culture

itself. African eco-theology adopts an approach that respects the rights of the African peoples and cultures, and appreciates that the development of the African people presupposes a theological and historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of the African people from within their proper culture. While there are a few papers written on African eco-theology, there is hardly literature that discusses its nature and sources in a profound manner in relation to the African worldview. This work, therefore, adopted the contextual approach to theology, and submitted that eco-theology is more relevant to African people when it is clothed with the categories of the African people.

Keywords: Eco-theology, Ecology, Ecosystem, African, Sources, Nature, Contextual

Introduction

The concept theology is from two Greek words Θεο (God) and λογία (study). Brought together, it means the study of God. Far back in history, Plato understood theology as an instrument for demythologizing the Greek Poets. Aristotle on his part saw theology as an aspect of philosophy that explains the cosmos in terms of an Unmoved Mover. When theology began to assume a Christian tone, Origen defined theology as a tool for expressing the Christian understanding of God as distinguished from Christian faith. St Thomas Aquinas, while working out the theory of theology used the concept in the context of a methodical elaboration of the truth of divine revelation by reason enlightened by faith. He understood theology as the science of Christian faith (Kanu 2010). These notwithstanding, theology in the Christian context may be defined in the words of St Anselm as “faith seeking understanding” (*fides quarens intellectus*). It is a branch of learning in which the Christian, using his or her reason

enlightened by divine faith, seeks to understand the mysteries of God revealed in and through history (Ephesians 1:9). These mysteries encapsulate the revelation of God himself and his love for humanity – mysteries hidden in God but revealed to humanity through the spirit (1 Cor 2:7-16).

While philosophy began by wonder at the marvels of nature, theology began with the self-conscious faith in God. As soon as human beings began thinking about the ultimate meaning of life, about their relationship with the whole cosmos, about the ultimate purpose and direction of human history, about the experience of the holy and the sacred, they were beginning to do theology. Christian theology, however, begins with the apostles, because the apostles had to reconcile themselves with the message of Christ and because they had to preach the Good News. From the time of the apostles, through the period of the edict of Constantinople in 313, the time of the breakdown of traditional social and political institutions, when theology passed to the Monasteries and to Monastic Theologians, the emergence of scholastic theology, to the theological transformation of the 19th century (Kanu 2010), theology has continued to reflect on human realities in relation to God.

One of the new faces of theology that emerged in the 19th century was contextual theology, which focussed on the particular experiences of particular people with the purpose of making theology relevant to people and their world (Oxford English Dictionary 2021; Kanu 2020a-c; Butler 1951; Schineller 1990). Among these contextual theologies, was African theology, and the present piece on African eco-theology is a dimension of African theology which focuses on issues bordering on ecological crisis. This theological perspective puts into consideration the African worldview with the intention of

presenting theology within the categories that the African people understand.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study of the African eco-theology is the *Igwebuike* theoretical framework which is an Igbo-African proverb translatable as *there is strength in number*, which philosophical speaks of the interdependence and complementarity of reality. It holds for a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards other human beings and realities within nature- knowing fully well that every reality has a purpose determined by the creator; and that there is a strong relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds to such an extent that the physical world is considered a manifestation of great spirit forces. *Igwebuike* presents a worldview in which single individuals or communities cannot unilaterally define and pursue their purposes without recognizing their mutual foundedness, their complementary natures. The refusal to understand the wholeness, interconnected and complementarity of reality and to act outside of its principles will have resounding consequences on the human world in terms of disharmony and disbalance. *Igwebuike* understands wholeness as the regulative principle of the African world since what is asserted is that the single individual is incomplete without the other (Kanu 2017). This has implications for the development of an African eco-theology. It has to be developed within this framework of interrelatedness of reality, both physical and spiritual realities. This is the category that the African understands and responds to.

The principle of wholeness in *Igwebuike* forms the basis for the relationship between human beings and nature or the environment. Thus, to care for one another as human beings is

not enough; there is the need for caring for physical nature as well since there is a relationship between the human person and the physical world that constitutes his or her home- together the whole is constituted. It is by such care and respect that harmony and balance is achieved in the universe between human beings and the physical world or spiritual world. The human person has a responsibility to pursue harmony so as to maintain a comprehensive but specific relational condition among organism and entities (Kanu 2016). This responsibility is the prerogative of the human person given his or her nature as a rational being.

African Eco-Theology

African theology generally is doing theology from the perspective of the African cultural context. This must be distinguished from Black theology which originated from particular experiences of oppression in America and South Africa. African theology is more a dimension of liberation theology. However, the need for an African eco-theology is first based on the fact that the world needs alternative perspectives or approaches to the problem of ecological crisis; and also needs to rise to her responsibility towards the environment. Nwaigbo (2015) defines eco-theology as “a reflective theology of social responsibility with a view to save the earth and the universe from further destruction” (p. 353). This theology begins from the understanding of the human person as a being created in the image and likeness of God and thus worthy of preserving. It also understand the human person as a being in the midst of other beings that are deserving of respect and preservation.

Francis (2017) observes that the contemporary world of production and labour governed by consumerist and hedonist’s vision of development, is at the base of this crisis:

A consumerist vision of human beings, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalized economy, has a

levelling effect on cultures, diminishing the immense variety which is the heritage of all humanity. Attempts to resolve all problems through uniform regulations or technical interventions can lead to overlooking the complexities of local problems which demand the active participation of all members of the community. New processes taking shape cannot always fit into frameworks imported from outside; they need to be based in the local culture itself (no. 144).

As a consequence of this insufficiency, Francis (2015) calls for perspectives or approaches that are relevant to the cultures or spiritualities of particular peoples; that is, if we must move beyond addressing symptoms to addressing the main issues. He writes:

As life and the world are dynamic realities, so our care for the world must also be flexible and dynamic. Merely technical solutions run the risk of addressing symptoms and not the more serious underlying problems. There is a need to respect the rights of peoples and cultures, and to appreciate that the development of a social group presupposes a historical process which takes place within a cultural context and demands the constant and active involvement of local people from within their proper culture. Nor can the notion of the quality of life be imposed from without, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each human group (no. 144).

Unlike the broader concerns and sources of eco-theology, African eco-theology distinguishes itself by focussing on the interrelationships of African religion and culture with nature in the light of environmental concerns. It taps from the rich African worldview, world of symbols and culture that holds that there is

a very strong relationship between the human person and nature.

African eco-theology emphasizes the need for the African Christian to see pleasing God as incomplete without making an effort towards providing the ultimate good of the human person who is his or her neighbor and the conscious promotion of ecological balance in the whole creation. This broadens our relationship with God beyond the vertical relationship with God to include a horizontal relationship with both fellow human beings and nature. This calls for a holistic kind of spirituality.

Theological Imperatives for African Eco-Theology

The need for an African eco-theology, which is a contextualized theology has its theological imperatives from the Sacred Scripture and the historical development of the Church. This aligns with Jesus' pattern of ministry and the theological approach of early Church theologians.

a. Imperatives from the Scripture

Jesus came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, His attitude towards the Jewish cult was one of Fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of His time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of Word in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, His fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a "critical yes", a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of His time. His autonomy found expression in His challenge to

fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion (Kanu 2014; 2019).

When Jesus preached the Gospel, He used categories familiar to His audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during His time. St Paul writes, "To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (9:20 & 22). In this context, St Paul was talking about mission, in a way that brings the Christian experience into the cultural experience of the people (Kanu 2021; Kanu 2012; Kanu and Obiefuna 2012).

b. Imperatives from Church History

Justin the Martyr holds that different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for His service. He saw culture as a prefiguration of Christ: a *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with Him and for Him.

Clement of Alexander established a fundamental theory- a harmony of faith and Greek culture, which places Greek philosophy at the service of faith.

Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. ... philosophy was given to the Greeks

directly; for it was a “schoolmaster”, to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew” (Kanu 2014 p. 58).

As the Church expanded from Palestine to Rome, it became clear that it was going into a new culture and would have to have new ways of expressing herself. In 312 Constantine and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan decriminalizing Christian worship. This paved the way for the initiation of large numbers of people to Christianity and the shaping of their belief systems on the Greek and Roman cultures. St Augustine taught that as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages; and faith is not to be pre-occupied with customs, laws and institutions, neither is it to reject or destroy any of these, but rather it should observe and conserve them so that they do not constitute an obstacle to the religion that teaches the true worship of God. (Kanu and Ezenweke 2012).

Sources of African Eco-Theology

There are several sources of African eco-theology that could be enumerated. However, in this work reference will be made to the Scripture, historical experience of the African people, African proverbs, African gods and spirits of nature, African mythologies, African totems and African taboos.

a. The Scripture

The Scripture is one of the most obvious sources of African eco-theology, both the New and Old Testaments. The Church understands the two Testaments as having the same authority. Scripture has always constituted the primary source of any form of theology and it is not an exception in this case. According to Stinton (2004), Scripture is the final authority on religious matters. It is the final court of appeal and constitutes the common to all controversies in eco-theology. It is literally and

authoritatively definitive of all that is affirmed within eco-theology. The Scripture, thus stands out as the principal source of eco-theology for the African people. This explains why ecological theology finds its bedrock on the book of Genesis which presents the human nature as created in the image and likeness of God. Therein, God created humanity and placed her in a beautiful forestation, acknowledging that everything was good. Given this circumstance, Veli-Matti (2015) argues that “a constructive Christian theology should be able to hold in a dynamic tension an attitude of reverent admiration for the beauty of creation in its endless diversity and creativity, and a deepening concern for nature’s vulnerability and suffering from the current global economic-industrial rape” (p. 219).

With the creation of man and woman as the summit of creation, God gave them a mandate to increase, multiply and subdue or care for the earth. Not in the sense of exploitation but with a grave responsibility towards fecundity for procreation and stewardship of the entire creation. Sermons on passages of Scripture also contribute to the development of eco-theology. More effective in this regard are dialogical sermons, which allow for a high degree of interaction between the preached word and the congregation. Clarke (2011) states that it is through this dialogue between the preached word of God and the response of the congregation that the written word becomes the living word.

b. The Historical Experience of the African People

The historical experience of the African people is one of the basic sources of eco-theology; it provides materials for eco-theology, and further shapes its construction. This is very significant, as African eco-theology has got to do with the real life experiences of the African people. It reflects on their experiences of acidic rains, carbon dioxide emissions, depletion of national resources,

floods, draughts, outbreak of diseases, pollution of seas, death of animals, shrinking of water bodies, etc.

c. African Proverbs

There are several African proverbs that bring out the richness of African ecological spirituality, and in such circumstances, these proverbs become a source of African eco-theology. Such proverbs include:

1. A tree on a hill is a meeting place for birds
2. Trees pull the rain
3. Hills with trees are footprints of God
4. The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, the second-best time is now
5. When there is something wrong in the forest, there is something wrong in the society
6. A person who has planted a tree before he dies did not live in vain
7. To plant a tree is to mix with God
8. Eat, but leave some in the forest for others
9. Do not finish the arrowroot; think of the future
10. Earth is our mother's womb
11. One will take a reserve if only one put it in the reserve
12. Treat the earth well; it was not given to you by your parents
13. Do not drain the river till it dries
14. A dried-up tree do not bear a green one
15. A tree blossoms with rain
16. No one throws a stone where he or she has placed a container of milk

d. African Spirit Forces

One of the motivations for the emergence of eco-spirituality is the understanding of the earth as the manifestation of the presence of great spirit. This becomes interesting when studied

from the African perspective where several African deities and spirit forces have taken the form of the different dimensions of the ecosystem. An understanding of these spirit forces can be a source of African eco-theology. These spirit forces include:

- a. *Mmuo Mmiri*: Igbo river goddess
- b. *Ala*: Igbo earth goddess
- c. *Osun*: Yoruba goddess of the river Osun
- d. *Oya*: Yoruba goddess of the river Niger
- e. *Oba*: The Yoruba goddess of rivers
- f. *Oko*: The Yoruba goddess of agriculture
- g. *Osanyin*: The Yoruba god of herbs and small plants
- h. *Olokun*: The Yoruba god of the seas
- i. *Anyanwu*: Igbo god of the sun
- j. *Ahiajoku*: Igbo god of agriculture and vegetation
- k. *Sango*: Yoruba god of lightening and thunder
- l. *Amadioha*: Igbo god of lightening and thunder
- m. *Damballah*: Benin Republic god of fertility and usually lives in springs and swamps. He is symbolized by a snake.
- n. *Erzulie-Freda-Dahomey*: Benin Republic Sea goddess.
- o. There are spirits that inhabit the mountains
- p. There are spirits that inhabit the trees
- q. There are spirits that inhabit the forests
- r. There are spirits that inhabit the animals
- s. There are spirits that inhabit rivers and seas

e. African Mythologies

The African world, with varied ethnic groups and languages, has several mythologies that can become sources of African eco-theology. These myths show how the divine gives special places to animals and plants to show that they are very significant to the Creator God. Examples of such myths include the Nri myth of creation, the Ife myth of creation, Efe myth of Congo, the Basare and Wassa myths of Ghana, Nyanweze myth of Tanzania

and the Abaluyia myth of Kenya, etc. An understanding of these myths helps the African theologian to think in such a manner that appeals to the world of the African people or worldview.

f. African totems

Totemism is the assertion of kinship between the human person and a specie of animals or some other animate or inanimate objects (Mbiti 1934; Theoderson et al 1975; Durkheim 1970; Meek 1937). It could also be understood in terms of species of animals or plants whose life have been bond up with the life of a particular tribe (Burton 1977). They could also be regarded as those things that a tribe or family bear their names and revere (Freud 1970). Totems are found in virtually every African society, and have been part of the culture of the African people handed down from one generation to another. Different groups or tribes have their totem or totems and this gives them their unique identity as a kinship, and in places where different groups share the same totem, they might begin to consider themselves as related to each other. What totems do is that it shows the relationship between human beings, animals and the environment, and constitutes the human person's earliest conservation behavior.

Once a child is born, it becomes his or her duty to defend his or her totem as it is a part of his or her identity as a member of the clan or kinship. They have obligation to feed, protect, care for and rescue the totem where and when necessary. There are times great stories are told young people on how human beings became great by being kind to these totems. This was a way of encouraging the young to keep to the tradition of their people by seeking greatness by keeping to the totems of the community or tribe. To each totem is attached a symbolic meaning which a taboo accompanies, such that to kill or destroy any of them has

consequences. Examples of totems among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria include:

- a. Python, referred to as father or mother
- b. *Utobi*, a specie of money
- c. Fishes in particular streams or rivers
- d. *Oziza*, a type of crab
- e. Iroko tree
- f. *Ogirishi* tree
- g. *Akpu onyima*, silk tree
- h. *Ofo* tree
- i. *Ngwu* tree

These are considered totem not only because of their relationship with a tribe or people, but also because of their relationship with spirit forces that these tribes or people revere. A good understanding of these totems can be a good raw material for the African eco-theologian.

g. African Taboos

Africans have moral principles referred to as taboos that serve as proscriptions, spelling out how African traditional societies ought to or ought not to relate with their environment and with one another. These taboos provide and preserve balance and harmony within the community, and in the community's relationship with nature (Magesa 2015). These taboos have ecological implications or relevance as they help in the management of natural resources and ecosystems. They belong the class of local ecological knowledge that is a part of the cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief on the relationships of living beings with one another and the environment. There are specific-species taboos regulate the utilisation of particular species and are usually inclusive prohibitions, banning exploitation of a particular species at all

times, may be because the specie is toxic, a religious symbols, etc., all for the ontological wellbeing of both the individual person and the environment at large.

Examples of these taboos as they relate to the conservation of the environment include:

- a. Not hunting an animal and not eating the meat
- b. Not killing a pregnant animal
- c. Not killing an animal fending for her young
- d. Not killing a python
- e. Not killing a dog
- f. Not killing an Iguana
- g. Not killing a tiger
- h. Not entering particular forests for hunting or cutting of trees
- i. Not going to the stream on particular days
- j. Not hunting on particular days
- k. Not washing cloth or taking bath on some parts of the stream
- l. Not fishing in some particular streams

These taboos were respected by members of African communities because of the spiritual background that they possess, given that they are either promulgated by a deity or the ancestors. It also provided an understanding of the environment as something that there not just for consumption or satisfying human needs. There was a relationship with nature that was guided by respect.

Conclusion

The foregone reflection on African eco-theology has studied the nature of African eco-theology and attempted at defining its nature and sources with particular reference to Scripture,

historical experience of the African people, proverbs, mythologies, totems, taboos, deities, etc. Just as African theology is determined and shaped by principles based on the African worldview, African eco-theology is shaped and determined by the African worldview without neglecting the Scripture and Sacred Tradition where necessary. This theology takes its imperatives from the Sacred Scripture where Christ presented the gospel message to people within categories that they could understand, a method of communication that the apostles adopted during their mission after Christ. It also takes its imperative from the history of the Church, with reference to the positions of Justine the Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Saint Augustine of Hippo, the Second Vatican Council, Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI on the relationship between theology and particular peoples.

The sources of African eco-theology that has been enumerated are not to be considered as theology in themselves, except for the Sacred Scripture which is at the heart of Christian theology. They are rather raw materials for theological reflection. The historical experiences of the African people, African proverbs, African spirit forces, African mythologies, totems and taboos are cultural and historical materials that the theologian engages for the development of an African eco-theology. These raw materials are not dogmatic as the specific specialization of the theologian and the manner of theologizing employed by the theologian will determine what he or she considers necessary for thought. This notwithstanding, these sources contribute to the shaping of African eco-theology and contribute towards advancing the idea of wholeness in African eco-theology between the human community and the environment. Ramose (1999) referring to taboos avers that: "The principle of wholeness applies also with regard to the relation between human beings and the physical or

objective nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for the physical nature as well. Without such care, the interdependence between human beings and the physical nature would be undermined” (p. 34).

The beauty of this study is that it responds to the question of the possibility of an alternative perspective to environmental issues not only within the broader concerns of ecology but also theology. It does not only provide an African perspective but defines it in such a manner that responds to the worldview of the African people within the context of the Christian faith. Eco-theology is primarily a study in contextual theology, in the sense that it studies eco-theology or addresses ecological issues from African perspective in a theological manner. It is within this context that discussions on ecological issues will not only be understandable to the African Christian but helpful to the solving of concrete environmental problems.

References

- Burton, J. W. (1977). About totemism. *Journal of Africa*. 10. 282
- Butler, J. F. (1951). The Indian research series. *The Occasional Bulletin*. 11. 2.
- Clarke, C. (2011). *African Christology: Jesus in post-missionary African Christianity*. USA: Pickwick.
- Durkheim, E. (1970). *The elementary forms of religious life*. London: Allen and Unwood Press
- Ekwealor, C. C. The Igbo world-view: A general survey. E. Oguegbu (Ed.). *The humanities and all of us* (pp.29-33). Onitsha: Waterside, 1990
- Francis, pope (2015). *Laudato si*. Social encyclical on the environment as our common home. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Freud, S. (1970). *Totems and taboos*. London: Rutledge and Paul.
- Ijiomah, C. (2005). African philosophy's contribution to the dialogue on reality issues. *Sankofa: Journal of the Humanities*.3. 1. 81 - 90.
- Kanu, A. I. (2013). *Towards an Igbo-African Christology: A cultural Christological construct in post-missionary Africa*. Germany: Lambert.
- Kanu, I. A. & B. A. C. Obiefuna (2012). *Inculturation as the Reconciliation of Cultures: Implications from Africae Munus*. A paper presented at the 27th Annual Conference/Meeting of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN). April 20th - 13th. At the Redemptorist Conference Centre, Ibadan, Oyo State.
- Kanu, I. A. & E. O. Ezenweke (2012). Revisiting the Lessons of the Interaction between Faith and Culture in North Africa. A paper presented at the International Conference on Sustainable Development. Vol. 8. No. 2.

- pp. 67-71. Uyo: International Research and Development Institute.
- Kanu, I. A. (2010). A Discourse on the Romance between Philosophy and Christian Theology. *International Journal of Theology and Reformed Tradition*. 2. 185-198.
- Kanu, I. A. (2012). Inculturation and Christianity in Africa. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 2. 17. . 236-244.
- Kanu, I. A. (2019). Collaboration within the Ecology of Mission: An African Cultural Perspective. *The Catholic Voyage*. 15. 125-149.
- Kanu, I. A. (2020). *Igwebuiké* philosophy of science and technology. *Nnadiesube Journal of Education*. 5. 4. 64-74.
- Kanu, I. A. (2020). *Igwebuiké* theology of Omenani and the missionary bifurcation of horizons. *OGIRISI: A Journal of African Studies*. 16. 127-144.
- Kanu, I. A. (2020). *Igwebuiké* Theology of Udi: God's unchanging revelation and man's changing culture. *Catholic Voyage: African Journal of Consecrated Life*. 17. 2. 12-24.
- Kanu I. A. (2017a). *Igwebuiké* economics: Towards an inclusive economy for economic development. *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3. No. 6. 113-140.
- Kanu, A. I. (2017b). *Igwebuiké* as an Igbo-African ethic of reciprocity. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 2. pp. 153-160.
- Kanu, I. A. (2016). *Igwebuiké* as an Igbo-African hermeneutics of globalisation. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2 No.1. pp. 61-66.
- Magesa, L. (2015). African spirituality and the environment: Some principles, thesis and orientations. *Hekima Review*. 53. 119

- Mbiti, J. S. (1934). What the African believes. *West African Review*. 26.
- Meek, C. K. (1937). *Law and authority in a Nigerian tribe: A study in Indirect rule*. London: Oxford University Press
- Njoku, F. O. C. *Ana Atutu Igbo philosophy: An African perspective on the problem of identity and conflict resolution*. Goldline and Jacobs publishers. USA
- Nwaigbo, Ferdinand (2011). "Jesus, Justice and Ecology: An African Perspective". *AFER* Vol. 53, No. 2 June, 353-373.
- Oxford English Dictionary (2021). *Indigenization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plato, *Metaphysics* 1026. A. Retrieved 20th May 2011. <http://search.sweetim.com/search.asp?q=Metaphysics+Plato&ln=en&src=1002&sf=0>
- Plato, *The Republic*, 379. A. Retrieved 20th May 2011. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Republic_\(Plato\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Republic_(Plato))
- Schineller, P. (1990). *A handbook on inculturation*. New York: Paulist.
- Stinton, D. (2004). *Jesus of Africa: Voices of contemporary Christology*. Kenya: Paulines.
- Theoderson et al (1975). *Modern dictionary of sociology*. London: Allen and Union Press
- Veli-Matti Karakkainen. (2015). *Creation and Humanity*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Chapter Two

THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION IN AFRICA: AN IGWEBUIKE PERSPECTIVE

Steve Orseer Akullah

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Federal University Wukari

stevekullah@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

Over the years the ecology of many African countries has been misused, abused, depleted, degraded or utterly destroyed by man's ignoble activities. These unwholesome activities include air pollution, dumping refuse in water channels, building on water channels and deforestation with attendant consequences to gully erosion, farmland erosion, submerging of houses and farmlands, aquatic and animal destruction among others. The consequences from ecological crises are better imagined than felt in the real sense of the world. This has become endemic as it has the potential effects of affecting present and future generations of humans and other living species in ways we cannot even predict. It is in the light of the above that a concensious look at ecological destruction in Africa and Nigeria in particular is needed, with a view to providing rapid and adequate response that is theological and impactful in order to curb the menace for the socio-economic development of the continent. It is in this regard that Igwebuiké, as a theological reality, is employed to emphasize the inescapable presence of the divine element in the human reality, and the interrelationships of religion and nature, particularly in the light of environmental concerns. The Igwebuiké theological theoretical framework and the Igwebuiké wholistic method of investigation are, therefore, employed.

Keywords: Naturalistic, Kanu Ikechukwu Anthony, Materialistic, Ecological, *Igwebuike* Theology, Africa, Environment

Introduction

Ecological degradation constitutes one of the key challenges to humanity on the African continent in the 21st century. Evidently in many African countries today, there is a growing concern on ecological degradation among other disturbing issues such as kidnapping, ethno religious conflicts, insurgency, corruption in polity, poverty, disease, hunger, economic depression which have abetted and increased to the quantum of nauseating problems beleaguering the continent. It is generally believed that both Naturalists and materialists understanding of the environment negatively contribute to ecological degradation. The philosophical underpinning of the naturalists and the materialists does not accept the notion that the universe was created by a Supernatural being but rather that “the universe was simply there.” The main thought of philosophy underscores the ideology that all phenomena can be explained only in terms of natural causes. Proponents of naturalism deny the existence of the supernatural or metaphysical laws. Naturalism in effect denies the existence of a transcendent cause of the world and therefore tends to usurp the sovereignty of God by replacing it with man’s omnipotence and omniscience.

Over the years the ecology of many African countries has been misused, abused, depleted, degraded or utterly destroyed by man’s ignoble activities. These unwholesome activities include air pollution, dumping refuse in water channels, building on water channels and deforestation with attendant consequences to gully erosion, farmland erosion, submerging of houses and farmlands, aquatic and animal destruction among others. The

consequences from ecological crises are better imagined than felt in the real sense of the word. This has become endemic as it has the potential effects of affecting present and future generations of humans and other living species in ways we cannot even predict. Angbashim observed this when he asserted: "ecological crisis has threatened our common future and the very basis of life on earth" (111). It is in the light of the above that a concensious look at ecological destruction in Africa and Nigeria in particular is needed, with a view to providing rapid and adequate response that is theological and impactful in order to curb the menace for the socio-economic development of the continent.

Definition of terms

The Term Ecology is derived from two Greek words οίκος, meaning "house" or living relations, and 'λογία', meaning "study of"; which literally translates to the "study of environment." It is the scientific analysis and study of the distributions, abundance and relations of organisms and their interactions with their environment. Ecology is a science that deals with the relationship between groups of living things and their environments. Environmental degradation connotes the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; the extinction of wildlife; and pollution. It is defined as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable (Powell 11-14).

***Igwebuike*: Towards a Theological Theoretical Framework**

As a theological theoretical framework, this piece adops *Igwebuike* theological framework for the resolution of emerging environmental concerns. The word *Igwebuike* is an Igbo-African word, and reflects the modality of being in African ontology

(Kanu, 2014&2015). It is taken from the Igbo language, which is a composite word made up of three dimensions. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence: as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population (Kanu, 2017 a&b). *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means ‘number is strength’ or ‘number is power’, that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force (Kanu, 2016 a&b). Its English equivalent is ‘complementarity’ or ‘harmony’ (Kanu, 2017c&d). *Igwebuike*, therefore, understands reality, which includes the environment as complementary. Thus, to deal violence to the environment is to do violence to oneself, because the environment is part of the complete whole, which the human person is unavoidably part of.

Igwebuike, as a theological reality, emphasizes the inescapable presence of the divine element in the human reality, and the interrelationships of religion and nature, particularly in the light of environmental concerns. Earlier efforts in this direction can be seen in the move of Bartholomew 1, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church, in 1995 when he tried to bring scientists and religious leaders together to consider addressing environmental issues. This was organized in three symposia. In 1996, the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions began series of ten conferences on religion and ecology. The culminating conference was held in New York City from October 20-21, 1998. This led to the putting together of eco-theological theories that environmentally correct religious practice may be realised. In 2010, the Spiritan International School of Theology

dedicated an entire volume of her Journal to a theological study of the environment. Besides these, there are many religious environmental projects going on all over the world (Kanu 2017&2018).

It begins with the understanding that there is a nexus between human religious/spiritual worldview and the degradation of nature. It emerged as a result of the increasing awareness of the environmental crisis wrecking the world, bringing about profound religious reflections on the relationship between the human person and the earth. Moving beyond the purely naturalistic and materialistic perspectives, Igwebuike theology in relation to the environment avers that addressing environmental issues requires a belief system large enough to conceptualize on a cosmic scale. It believes that with the vastness and completeness of divinity, religions operate in this scale.

Nature essentially belongs to God as his creation and the expression of his power and love. And God gave the earth to humanity with a corresponding responsibility. While humanity needs the earth's resources to survive, humanity has an imperative to tend and care for creation. Humanity's responsibility is to protect the earth not to over-exploit it. Creation is not to be seen as a property of anybody which can be ruled at will or to be wantonly destroyed. Creation is a wonderful gift that God has given to humanity to care for it and use it for the benefit of all with great respect and gratitude.

Materialistic/Naturalistic Philosophical Perspectives

One dominant philosophy that perpetuates the destruction of the ecology on the African continent is the naturalistic and the materialistic worldview of creation. This view is premised on the atheistic, secular and humanist worldview. Naturalism is a

philosophical theory asserting that “everything in the world and life is based on natural causes and laws as opposed to spiritual or supernatural laws (Oxford Dictionary, 781). The philosophy is shared by Butler who posited that “the physical universe is all that there is (37). Exponents of this philosophy argue that there is nothing like the spiritual within man and that there is nothing such as the soul which is different from all nature. Naturalists submit that “Nature is all.” While writing on the naturalist philosophy of the universe, Musa vividly pontificated that to the naturalists, “the universe and all that is in it is regarded as a natural entity devoid of a super nature (16). Naturalists aver that natural laws are the rule that govern the structure and behaviour of the natural universe and that changing the universe at every stage is a product of natural laws (Catholic Encyclopedia, 38). Notable naturalists include Charles Darwin, Steve Irwin, David Attenborough, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Montessori among others.

Materialism is a system of thought holding that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws, thus denying the supernatural or metaphysical laws. Materialists believe that the only thing that exists is matter; if anything else such as mental events exists then it is reduced to matter. It can therefore be observed by the careful analysis that both naturalists and materialists have one thing in common, which is, denying the creative power of the super natural, transcendent God as the creator of the universe. While some may limit their materialist account of nature itself and admit the existence of a creator of the world, the general tendency of materialism is towards atheism. Thus some naturalists and materialists are atheists. These believe that God is not the creator of the universe and that “nature is simply there” and that the physical world is eternal and uncreated (Geisler, 316). The materialistic view draws its support

from the first law of thermodynamics which states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed. The implication here is that if energy is uncreated, then, there is no creator. The second assumption of the materialist view is that energy is unlimited and cannot be destroyed. If energy cannot be destroyed, then it is indestructible, and if it is indestructible, then it will never run out but last for life. Lastly, materialists hold that science and technology can solve all problems including problems emanating from the environment, therefore, technology will fix and or replenish ecological issues that arise.

Drawing from the suppositions above, the naturalists' metaphysics is rooted in the notion that Ultimate Reality is found only in nature and nothing beyond it. Consequently, the universe is devoid of a super nature (Musa, 16). Materialists hold that because God is not the Creator of the universe, there is no divine imperative on a particular order for the use of the universe and its resources. Rather, usage of the universe and its component parts are to be carried out at the whims and caprices of man. Secondly, all the resources of the earth are deemed to be recycled as they are unlimited as man will not run out of these resources no matter what. This misunderstanding of nature therefore fuels the misuse and abuse of the environment.

Arguments against naturalists

Reacting against the materialist's/naturalists claim of creation, nature and energy, Ehrenfield (59) posited that "the religion of naturalists and humanists is self-destructive and foolish and yet the more it fails, the more arrogant and preposterous are the claims of its priests." The universe certainly has a creator, God. This evidence is supported by the Genesis account of creation where the author states "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1). The writer of Hebrews vividly

supports the Genesis account of creation when he states “in these last days he (God) has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe (Heb 1:2) and also that “by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible (Heb 11:3). The author of Samuel concurs that the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; on them he has set the world (1Sa 2:8). The Psalmist declares “the heavens are yours, and yours also the earth; you founded the world and all that is in it (Psa 89:11), the world is mine, and all that is in it. (Psa 50:12). Luke the researcher, physician wrote “the God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth (Act 17:24). So the supposition that the world is uncreated as claimed by the naturalists cannot stand empirical evidence because the universe has a Supernatural Creator.

On the claim of the materialists that energy is unlimited and cannot be destroyed, it is unequivocally refuted that useable energy is not unlimited (Geisler, 318). This fact is captured in the second law of thermodynamics which states that in closed and isolated systems such as the whole material universe, the amount of useable energy is decreasing. Fossil energy include coal, petroleum, natural gas, oil shales, bitumen, tar sands and heavy oils. Firstly, it has to be appreciated that fossil fuels are limited and will not last forever because of man's misuse and abuse on the environment. The fossil fuels will be depleted. Secondly, renewable energy sources that are replenished by nature such as the sun, wind and water, the earth's heat and plants will also run out with time. The ugly fact is that, all the energy sources are destroyed by man's abuse of the ecosystem of depletion of the natural resources, deforestation, illegal mining activities, thus destroying the natural environment.

On the claim by the materialists that the world is eternal, this can only be wishful thinking and at best day dreaming. That the universe itself will be destroyed is revealed by the Creator himself. The author of the universe made this known when he said “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away (Luk 21:33, Mar 13:31, Mat 24:35). Peter the apostle of the Lord Jesus corroborated thus “the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of the ungodly.... The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare (2 Pet. 3:7-10). It then implies that if the earth will not last forever, then everything that resides in the earth.

Materialists and naturalists claim that science and technology can solve all problems including problems emanating from the environment is only but a farce. Science and technology cannot solve all of man’s problems. The omniscience of man can never be put at par with God’s. Paul cleverly captured this when he noted that the “wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight” (1Co 3:19) and that the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, (1Co 1:25). Naturalists epistemology is rooted on the sense organs which constitute man’s gateway through which knowledge can be gained (Musa, 17). So to the naturalists what the sense organs could not perceive is considered untrue and denied as having been in existence. But not all knowledge can be perceived with the sense organs. For instance, believe and faith in the supernatural happenings of God cannot be rationalized with the sense organs alone.

According to Ehrenfeld, “deep within ourselves we know that our omnipotence is a sham and our knowledge and control of the future is weak and limited, our inventions and discoveries work,

and if they work at all, in ways that we do not expect, our planning is meaningless, our systems are running amok- in short that is the humanistic way upon which our societies are grounded for lack of validity (58). Thus, man's wisdom anchored on experiences, reason, science and technology can at best be encapsulated with faulty ideas which are invariably foolishness to God.

Materialistic inclinations that fuel the destruction of ecology

Richard (63), posits that naturalistic and materialistic misconceptions on ecology propel the exploitation, misuse and abuse of natural resources for economic growth and development. These activities sometimes result in embarrassing negative consequences accompanied by environmental degradation. It is observed that while the exploitation of ecology began on a massive industrial scale in the 19th century with the extraction and processing of raw materials in the mining, steam power, machinery and wood work, it accelerated much higher than it had in pre-industrial era. During the 20th century, the exploitation of natural resources and energy consumption rapidly increased with attendant massive consumption sustained by the extraction of fossil fuels, which consists of oil, coal and gas. Geoffrey added that non-renewable energy sources such as precious metals were also illegally mined by humans for the production of industrial commodities (125-129). Agricultural practices distorted the growth and sustenance of the natural environment by the degradation of forests in terrestrial ecosystem and water pollution in an aquatic ecosystem. With the increase in population on African continent and the resulting economic boom, the demand for the exploitation of natural resources also rose. It is therefore hoped that the wrong depletion of natural resources by the materialists will raise an alarm to ecologists and environmentalists for a quick solution to

the problem of depletion of the continents natural resources.

Why naturalists destroy natural resources

I. Technological advancement

The rapid development and increase in the sophistication of technology enables natural resources to be extracted effectively and efficiently. While in the past, it took long hours just to cut down a tree with a saw, today with the advent of sawing machines has increased the time for felling trees without leading to deforestation.

II. Overpopulation

Human population is exponentially increasing day by day. While human population is increasing, natural resources are depleted in an inverse relationship. Humanity's insatiable appetite for consumption is distorting the environment's natural equilibrium. According to the UN, there were 7.6 billion people in 2017. This number is expected to rise to about 10 billion in 2050 and about 11 billion in 2100.

III. Economic activities

Materialistic demand for natural resources leads to the raping of the earth's resources; felling of trees for timber. Timber extraction was a major source of revenue earner in Nigeria for domestic use such as roofing, furniture, motor vehicle bodies and canoes and export (Akullah, 6). Other usage of natural resources includes mining of solid minerals for jewelry and commodities for human life or for technological advancement. This leads to extraction of resources for the production of commodities necessary for human life. Production industries discharge smoke and chemicals, thus polluting the air water sources. The polluted atmosphere contains carbon monoxide

and sulfur dioxide that are eventually absorbed into the atmosphere with chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's) which depletes the ozone layer and emits higher levels of ultraviolet radiation affecting humanity and the environment.

IV. Agricultural practices

These have their fair share in distorting the growth and sustenance of the natural environment by the degradation of forests in a terrestrial ecosystem and water pollution in an aquatic ecosystem. As people move the subsistence method of farming to mechanized farming due to advanced technology and the attendant increase in population, the demand for land for farming increases causing a huge pressure on land resource.

V. Poverty and ignorance

The demand for fuel wood and charcoal brought about by heightened poverty levels in many African countries led to the destruction of natural resources. Even now, fuel wood is the primary source for cooking and heating among the poorer countries of the world. The ignorance of the people in replacing cut down trees has aggravated the sorry state of the continents natural resources particularly forests and illegal mining of solid minerals.

Ecological Crisis in Africa

Ecological crisis occurs when the environment of a species or a population changes in a way that destabilizes its continued survival. There are many possible causes of such crisis: it may be that the environment quality degrades compared to the species' needs, after a change of abiotic ecological factor, for example, an increase of temperature level or less significant rainfalls can adversely affect and even degrade the environment. It may be that the environment becomes unfavorable for the survival of a

species or a population due to an increased pressure of predation. We can add here that ecological crisis occurs when nature is placed under danger that may result to harm to other living organisms within the environment. Africa as a continent has witnessed ecological crisis that posed serious threat to its existence.

For instance, in Nigeria, the situation in the Niger delta region is quite alarming and dangerous. The region has witnessed the devastation of the eco-system with the discovery of oil and gas. Ikeke narrating the ugly scenario of the Niger Delta States said, "The exploration of oil and gas has caused untold danger to both human lives, property, and the environment of the Niger Delta" (97). The region has witnessed pollution of water, destruction of farm lands, loss of biodiversity, youth restiveness and a hostile social environment.

The encroachment on forest and forest reserves in Nigeria today has precipitated crisis on our environment. One of such crisis on our environment is desertification. In a lecture on 29th January, 2016, in a course on African Christian Theology, Gwamna stated, "it is becoming disheartening to see areas referred to as savannah or thick forest fast disappearing." The desert region in Nigeria is fast expanding and extending daily to all northern states to the middle belt states of Nigeria beyond what it used to be. This has left this region with sharp effects of desertification, soil erosion, gully erosion, rise in temperatures, short periods of rainfall with attendant crop failure and poor crop yields. Corroborating, Ukpak vividly narrated the effects of environmental crisis in Nigeria especially of the Niger Delta, thus:

The Nigerian ecosystem has been degraded not only by deformation but also by oil spills, gas flaring and sundry activities deriving from oil production, as experienced in

the Niger Delta. Oil spillage is a frequent major hazard to the economics of Niger. It often destroys farm crops and farm lands, aquatic life as well as the flora and fauna of the entire region. And as farmers and fishermen in the region depend essentially upon their land and water resources for their sustenance, destruction by oil spillage often spell doom to the people. Apart from their economic mainstay that is badly affected, the health of the inhabitants of the area also tends to plummet because once polluted food is consumed, including drinking water, the consumers contract various diseases that sometimes lead to death. Often, those who suffer loss from these oil production activities are not adequately compensated or not compensated at all. As a result of these dastardly acts by the oil and gas producers and government is the seemingly unending chaos, rift or anarchy, as has been witnessed over the years in the Niger Delta (27-28).

The Niger Delta region had experienced unfavorable encroachment of their environments and habitats due to the activities of oil and gas exploitation and exploration. The resultant effects of these are witnessed in environmental degradation, destruction of habitats, decimation of the modes of subsistence of the people and the destruction of farmlands and fishing waters. Lamenting on this horrible act, Olaniyan, averred thus: "oil and gas exploitation has caused deforestation, toxic waste dumping, destruction of soil and water, frequent oil spills and leakages, gas flaring and health problems" (15-18).

It is true that Nigeria as a country and Africa as a whole, suffers from serious environmental problems that range from deforestation, soil erosion, desertification as mentioned above, wetland degradation to insect's infestation. Efforts to deal with

these environmental crises, however, have proven difficult. This has adverse effects on the country and continent especially the rural population who suffer from poor production as a result of unpredictable climate.

Many African countries are adversely affected by air pollution which is caused as a result of human activities like gas flaring, the use of charcoals or wood for fuel, refuse dumped inappropriately, burning of bush e.tc. The endemic nature of such activities can be alarming as they are responsible for indoor and outdoor pollution, diseases like typhoid, cholera and diarrhea from contaminated air and water and infant mortality rate (Adedeji internet).

The environmental crises and deterioration on Africa as a continent and Nigeria in particular, continues to pose a major problem to development, stability and daily lifestyle of the African continent and the Nigerian nation. The continent is said to be the most vulnerable to the consequences of global warming, this means that, until Africa rises up to her feet with a holistic solution to the problem of environmental crises, the alarming effects of such crises may persist in Africa.

Effects of Ecological degradation in Africa

It is not an overstatement to argue that the continent of Africa is currently experiencing severe effects of environmental challenges which pose serious threat to human existence and other living organisms within the ecosystem. Natural resources are not limitless, and the following negative impact can arise from the wanton destruction and excessive consumption of these resources. These include, deforestation, desertification, extinction of species, forced migration, soil erosion, oil depletion, ozone depletion, greenhouse gas increase, extreme energy, water

pollution, natural disasters, metals and solid minerals depletion which all have destructive impact on the ecology of nations. Today, the continent of Africa is challenged by massive deforestation, land degradation, bush fires, air pollution, water pollution and illegal mining. The consequences of exploitation of natural resources have inadvertently caused water erosion, soil erosion, desertification and temperature rise as a result of global warming.

a. Deforestation

Deforestation is the removal of a forest products including trees where the land is thereafter converted to a non-forest use. This happen when forestland has been converted to agricultural or urban use. The removal of trees without sufficient replacement has often resulted in damage to habitat, biodiversity loss and aridity. Lamenting on the effects of deforestation, Emiola pointed out that, "logging is making tropical rainforests to disappear in Africa and ecosystems preserved in these thick forests are being destroyed on a daily basis" (120). The felling down of trees without placement has a long lasting effect on the ecosystem of nations.

b. Soil Erosion and Degradation

Erosion means the removal of the top soil by water or wind. As water flows and wind blows over the land, soil is continually transported from one place to another which causes erosion. Human activities such as digging of the soil and cutting down of plants are also regarded as causes of erosion. Erosion posed serious effects on the environment which includes removal of nutrients needed by plants, reduction of the quality and quantity of land, the pilling of sediments inside streams, lakes, brooks and other bodies of water etc. This could be dangerous to aquatic organisms.

c. Pollution

Air pollution and water pollution form a major environmental challenge in Africa today. This happens when the air and water are contaminated with toxic substances and noise which cause impaired the normal functioning of the ecosystem. The effects of air pollution include spread of tropical diseases, extreme weather condition, crop failures and or poor crop yield, while water pollution causes death of living organisms, loss of aquatic species, loss of livelihood of fishermen and many other health hazards such as water-borne diseases.

d. Desertification

Desertification refers to land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities. According to Emiola the main causes of desertification in Africa include over cultivation, overgrazing, deforestation and poor irrigation (120). Desertification causes problems to human life and other living organisms. The scarcity of water and Shrubs in desert regions has adverse effects on living things occupying such regions.

e. Global Warming

Globally, the world is said to be experiencing global warming. This is believed to arise from the effect of the movement of the ozone layers of the earth. In a bid to describe what causes global warming, Emiola said, "The destruction of the ozone layer by industrial smoke, is one particular frightening effect of air pollution. According to scientists, environmental problems such as ozone depletion is responsible for global warming (119). This happens when manufacturing industries vent smoke and discharge chemicals that pollute the air and water sources. The smoke that is emitted into the atmosphere holds deadly gases such as carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide. The high levels of

pollution in the atmosphere form layers that are eventually absorbed into the atmosphere. Organic compounds such as chlorofluorocarbons (CFC's) have generated an unwanted opening in the ozone layer, which emits higher levels of ultraviolet radiation putting the globe at large threat.

Scientists predict that more people will get sick or die from heat and stress related problems due to excessive heat waves in the daytime and warmer temperatures in the nights. Global warming is also said to be responsible for the severe droughts, erratic climate conditions as well as increase in natural disasters like hurricanes, tsunami, tornados, flood, and erosion in many parts of the world.

f. Earthquakes and Tidal Waves

Earthquakes and tidal waves are natural disasters usually caused by the activities of man. Many nations around the world have witnessed earthquakes and tidal waves with their hazardous effects. Countries such as Japan and India have been grossly affected by earthquakes and tidal waves resulting to devastation and death within the countries and other countries around the world. In Nigeria recently, earth tremors were witnessed in parts of Kaduna state and Abuja, the Federal Capital causing minor damages to property and farmlands. Tidal waves causing massive floods destroyed lives, houses, property, farmlands and businesses across many states in Nigeria in 2012. In other parts of Africa, earth quakes and land mines have occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya bringing with untold hardship to the citizens. According to Emiola "Some physicists and geologists claim that earthquakes are caused by excessive killing of animals. It is theorized that dying animals cause acoustic anisotropy due to Einsteinian Pain Waves (EPW)

emitted by dying animals" (121). This assertion, he viewed deserves further critical scientific investigation.

Biblical therapy to degradation

There is a need for the Church to formulate a theology of nature, that is, a theology that looks at the environment in the light of the Word of God, in order to create awareness on its purposes and values, which will help in its sustenance. Lamenting on the lack of environmental theology, Barnett (23) states, "The Church has a theology of man, but not of nature, a doctrine of the salvation of the Church but not of creation, and eschatology of the soul but not of the body." This therefore is a clarion call for a theology of the environment.

Biblical revelation is explicit on God's love for his creation and care for it (Psa.145:17), even as the entire creation offers praise to the Lord (Psa. 148:7-12). Man ought to relate with creation in a way that brings glory to God. While the universe shared in the fall/sin of man, the redemption of man from sin implies the redemption of the environment. God's plan for redemption include the earth (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom 8:18-25; Eph. 1:10-11). Just as the spirit of God brooded over the earth at creation so shall the spirit be involved in the establishment of the new earth (Gen.:2; Psa.104; Rev. 21: 1; 22: 17). All of these passages point to one fact, that is, God is unarguably the creator, owner and sustainer of His amiable universe.

Emiola argues that, one distinctive characteristic of man from the rest of creation is the responsibility given by God to man to "subdue" the earth, and "rule over" (NIV) or "have dominion" (KJV) over the animals (Gen.1:26-28). Additionally, there is the responsibility of man to respond to God in praise and worship for the noble causes God has done for man. In all of these

responsibilities God has endowed man with the freewill to obey Him or disobey His commands at his peril. The destruction of the universe's resources today is therefore an aberration to God's original plan for man and his created work.

Incidentally and unfortunately the Hebrew rendering of וַיִּרְדּוּ *du^eyir^ew* 'so that they **may** rule over' (Gen 1:26 NIV), which is third person masculine plural **jussive** from the verb רָדָה *radah* meaning to have dominion, rule, or dominate, has been completely misunderstood and misinterpreted to mean what God through the writer of Genesis did not intend. Additionally, the Hebrew rendering in Genesis 1:28 of וַיִּכְבְּשֶׁהָ *w^ekib^eshua* taken from the verb כָּבַשׁ *kabash* with its many interpretations such as to subject, subdue, force, keep under, bring into bondage, to make subservient, to violate dominate, to tread down, has been given negative meanings, all suggesting to destroy. The conjunction and verb *w^ekib^eshua* meaning "and subdue" is an imperative feminine. It is feminine because in Hebrew, the noun earth/land is domiciled as feminine. So Adam and Eve were to subdue, the earth (Gen 1:28). Commenting on the verbs to rule and to subdue, Akullah observed that it is absolutely impossible for God to have created a universe which He declared good only to hand it over to man to destroy as it is being purportedly implied by many naturalists and materialists (7-9).

It is apparent here that naturalists, materialists and even humanist philosophers and their likes are quick to take undue advantage of the Hebrew verbs *radah* and *kabash* that seem to have very strong negative connotations against nature, presupposing that it was God who originally commanded the misuse, abuse, destruction and the degradation of the natural environment. However, this reasoning is far from the truth. None of God's attributes denote him as having destructive

tendencies. God is even worried about the destruction of unrepentant sinners, for he would rather have them repent than perish. God is a God of love who loves his created works. Writing on God's love for his created works, Akullah (10) rightly observed; "Indeed, not only does the Lord love his forests as part of his creation, He also loves all that he has made as the psalmist declares "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made" (Psa 145:17). So then how can a righteous and loving God who loves all that He has made give out His forests for total destruction?

Firstly, the right to *radah* rule is not a right to tyrannize, oppress, destroy or degrade the environment it is rather a right to service and extends only to such duties as are consistent with the powers of the servants, and with the place which is assigned to them. The right to rule here does not imply destruction, abuse, misuse or degradation of the ecology. Akullah succinctly captured God's mission to man as his ambassadors to the universe in the followings lines:

While God made man in his image, man is to carry the image of God in his assignment on earth as his ambassador protecting the forests which are part of his created work. As God's stewards over God's creation man is like a business manager in an organizational setting whose functions include those of planning, directing, organizing, supervising and controlling the assets and liabilities of the organization (the universe) for growth and profitability. It would therefore be absurd and meaningless for the shareholders (God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit) of the organization (the universe) after setting up their business concern, hire people to only come and mismanage the business let alone destroy it (8-9).

All power is of God, and can only be lawfully exercised when exercised according to His designs. That likeness to God in which man was originally created, reminds man that justice, and goodness, and mercy, are the chief distinctions after which he should aspire; and that our dominion was designed, like that of Him who designed it, to be exercised with wisdom, rectitude, and compassion. Rulership here is, therefore, to be seen in the light of representing God in carrying out the activities of protecting the environment, maintaining and tending them for man's benefits which include sourcing for his food without destroying the forests.

God called human beings to a special task for caring for creation as stewards, since they reflect God's image in a unique way (40). There are two major dimensions of the creation of humanity in the image of God. Firstly, that "the image is about the possibility of an ongoing relationship between people and their Creator, and secondly, that image leads to the possibility of dominion over the rest of the created order" (Elsdon, 65).

While man was asked to rule over nature, he is also to depend on it for his survival. Therefore, Genesis 1 :26 & 28; 2:19 & 20 should be interpreted to together with Genesis 2.15 "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (NIV). To subdue the earth means that man is to make good use of the earth to his advantage without destroying it. It is in this light that contemporary theologians need to exercise a more sensitive and critical attitude towards the traditional understanding of creation.

Christians are Stewards of God's creation.

Christians are well positioned to help tackle the environmental crisis (faith perspective web). It is very essential to know that the

relationship between religion and nature is very relevant especially for Christians. For this reason, the mainstream Christian Churches around the world ought to acknowledge the global ecological crises and to re-examine their teachings about the responsibility of Christians toward creation. Man was created in the image of God and was equally given the responsibility to care for the other creatures of God where he (man) has been placed to live (Gen.1:26-28). These verses present man with dual citizenships: both as a part of creation, and as a being higher than other created things. For this reason, as stewards of God, mankind is to care and tend his environment.

Christendom is to discourage those who consider themselves as the lord and masters of the universe entitled to plunder her at will. The earth is burdened and laid waste, and is among the most abandoned and maltreated creations of God as a result “groans in travail...” (Rom. 8:22). Humanity is created from the dust of the earth (Gen.2:7); whose bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her water, therefore the universe needs a friendly relationship rather than the destructive relationship it currently gets.

Ehianu called for a global ecological conversion in terms of transforming our attitudes towards our environment. Every effort to protect and improve our environment entails profound changes in lifestyle, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today governs environments (75). Still on Genesis 1 :26-28 by which has been misinterpreted as a license for human over-exploitation of nature, Mbonu, quoting Lawrence Frizzel, holds that the implication of the divine command is that, humanity is the agent of God in regard to the world as a divine kingdom; that

dominion is not a license to caprice and tyranny but in its best sense, a challenge to responsibility and the duty to make right prevail over our environment. Buttressing this point further, Mbonu said, the earth has been delivered into the hands of human kind as sacred trust that they can perpetuate in a God's given order (13).

God made the entire world for the sustenance and enjoyment of humanity and he gave man the privileged position to exercise stewardship over the earth. It therefore means that the creation is not to be plundered or abused but to be seen as a resource which God has entrusted to humanity's care, to be used in service appropriately.

Conclusion

The world as a whole has witnessed ecological crises which posed serious threats to human existence and the entire ecosystem. Africa and Nigeria in particular is not left out of this scourge. Recently, it seems the issue on ecological crises has attracted more attention in many disciplines. Religious scholars are not left behind in a bid to provide answers to ecological problems.

The activities of man and other natural disasters are grossly responsible for what we are witnessing today as ecological crises. The ecosystem has been greatly degraded and abused by man resulting to many catastrophes we are experiencing today. Humans and other living organisms within the ecosystem are threatened and or destroyed by the effects of global warming, desertification, deforestation, earthquakes and tidal waves, water and air pollution.

Until we are able to provide a theology which is coherent and practical in solving the daunting effects of ecological crises, life within the ecosystem will continue to be threatened as Emiola sums up, “Man needs to responsibly care for creation for his own sake” (127).

Charting the way forward for a sustainable ecological balance

In the light of the foregoing scenario, the following recommendations are suggested so as to help sustain our environment from devastating effects of ecological crisis:

- ✓ God’s original intention and the author’s interpretation of Genesis 1:2-28 verbs “to rule”, “to have dominion” and “to subdue” should be given in its appropriate context as meaning “to take control”, “to tend”, “to govern”, “to look after”, as opposed to total annihilation, subjugation, and destruction of the ecology.
- ✓ The church ought to lead in campaigns against the destruction of the continents ecosystem highlighting the eminent dangers associated with ecological degradation.
- ✓ There is an urgent need for the church to lead in advocacy for the aggressive planting of trees in order to restore and sustain our vegetation.
- ✓ The Church should take the lead in teaching its members about caring for their environment. This should include sanitizing the environment through removal of nylon bags, clearing of gutters, cutting of grasses around the surrounding, providing disposal sewages etc.
- ✓ The Government should enact laws restricting people and industries from tempering with the ecosystem and sanctions against any activities leading to degradation of the environment.
- ✓ Ministry of Environment of the Federal Government and their counterparts in States and other Non-Governmental

Organizations (NGO's) should organize public lectures, seminal workshops, symposium etc. on issues affecting our environment and how to prevent such.

References

- "Creation, Universe and the Patriarch". web: <http://www.patriarchate.org>. Retrieved 9th February, 2016
- "Ecology" - Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia. Web. "Faith Perspective". Retrieved 8th Feb. 2019
- "World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations". esa.un.org. Retrieved 2018-06-25.
- Adedeji., Lanre. *Environmental Challenges Affecting Africa's Development*. Thelawyerschronicle.com/environment. Accessed 2nd Feb. 2016.
- Akullah, S. O. "The Economic Importance of Forests: The Biblical and Church's Response in Forests Conservation." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol 4 No 1 April 2018. Pp 1-13.
- Angbashim, John Theophilus. "Traditional Belief and Practices in Forest Preservation Among the Tarok and Eggon of Central Nigeria". *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. Vol.2, Lagos: Medilag, 2012.
- Barnette, H. *The Church and the Ecological Crises*. Lagos: 1991.
- Bishop Geoff. "SAFCEI on Ecological Crises". Web. <http://W\vw.safceionecologicalcrises.com>. Accessed s" February, 2016.
- Butler, J.D. *Four philosophies and their practice in education and religion*. New York: Harper and Row. 1968.
- Catholic Encyclopedia: Naturalism. www.newadvent.org. retrieved 1/6/2019.

- Cronin, Richard. "Natural Resources and the Development-Environment Dilemma." Exploiting Natural Resources. The Henry L. Stimson Centre, 2009. Accessed: 05/03/2019
- Ehianu, Wilson E. "The Roman Catholic Church and Environmental Sustainability: An Appraisal". Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values. Vol. I, Lagos: Medilag, 2011.
- Ehrenfed, David. The arrogance of humanism. New York: oxford University Press. 1978.
- Emiola Nihinlola. Theology Under the Mango Tree: A Handbook of African Christian Theology. Lagos: Fine Print & Manufacturing Limited. 2013.
- Geisler, N.L., "Ecology" Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options. Grand Rapids: Michigan, Baker Academic, 2010.
- Geoffrey, McNicoll. "Population and Sustainability". Handbook of Sustainable Development. Edward Elgar Publishing. pp. 125-39. Retrieved 2012-03-13. 2019.
- Gwamna, Dogara Je'adayibe. Ecological Crisis. Nassarawa State University, Keffi. 29 January, 2016 Ph. D Lecture Class, 2016.
- Ikeke, Mark. "The Value of Ubuntu in Restoration and Sustainability of Nigeria Niger Delta". Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values. Vol.I, Lagos: Medilag, 2011.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuike and African Ethics" *Igwebuikipedia Internet Encyclopedia of African Philosophy*. Kanu Anthony and Jerome Okonkwo (Eds.). Accessed 28 April, 2017. www.igwebuikipedia.info.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuikecracy: The Igbo-African Participatory Socio-Political System of Governance".

- Hummingbird Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 6. 4. pp. 1-12. 2016.
- Kanu, I. Anthony, "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Philosophy of Education" *Igwebuikipedia Internet Encyclopedia of African Philosophy*. Kanu Anthony and Jerome Okonkwo (Eds.). Accessed 30 Jan., 2017. www.igwebuikipedia.info.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, "Igwebuike as the Expressive Modality of Being in Igbo Ontology". *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 4. 5. pp. 12-21. 2018.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. (2018). "The Implications of Igbo-African Eco-Bio-Communitarian Spirituality for Global Concerns". In Mahmoud Misaeli, Sanni Yaya and Rico Sneller (Eds.). *African Perspectives on Global on Global Development* (pp. 75-91). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu A. and B.A.C Obiefuna (2017). *Sacred Trees in Igbo-African Eco-Bio-Communitarian Theology*. Ejezie L. E, S. Audu and A. I. Acha (Eds.). *Theology and Ecological Issues* (pp. 280-287). Nigeria: CATHAN Publications.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, Igwebuike and Logic (NKA) of African Philosophy". *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol.3 No1 January 2017.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, Igwebuike and Question of Superiority in the Scientific Community of Knowledge. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol.3 No1 2017.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, Igwebuike as a wholistic Response to the Problem of Evil and Human Suffering. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3 No 2, March 2017.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Ethic of Reciprocity. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3 No 2, March 2017.

- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Modality of Peace and Conflict Resolution. *Journal of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy scholars*. Vol. 1. No. 1. pp. 35-44. 2016.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Philosophy for Christian-Muslim Relations in Northern Nigeria." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* vol.2 No.2. 24488-9210 (June 2016).
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. "Igwebuikology as an Igbo-African Philosophy for Catholic-Pentecostal Relations." *Jos Studies* vol.22. 978-2023-36-1 (2014): 87-98.
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. *A Hermeneutic Approach to African Traditional Religion, Theology and Philosophy*. Jos: Augustinian Publications, 2015.
- Lynn White, Jr. *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis Source: Science, Published by: American Association for the Advancement of Science*. New Series, Vol. 155, No. 3767 (Mar. 10, 1967), pp. 1203-1207. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>
- Mbonu Caroline. "Ethics of Environmental Restoration: Biblical and African Perspective". *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. Vo1.J, Lagos: Medilag, 20II.
- Musa, J.M. *Rudiments of philosophy of education*. Pankshin, Jos: Euroka academic foundations. 2008.
- Olaniyan Adeola. *The Spiritual Foundation of Underdevelopment in Africa and the imperative of Cultural Revitalization*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited. 2008.
- Powell, Fannetta. "Environmental Degradation and Human Disease". Lecture. Slide Boom. 2009. Web. Retrieved 2018-11-14.

Steve Orseer Akullah

Ukpak N. "Man, Development and the Environment: The Case of Nigeria". Nigeria Economic Society. Ibadan. 2001.

Chapter Three

AFRICAN ECOLOGICAL THEOLOGY: PEDAGOGICAL PATHWAYS TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Timothy Barga, PhD

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Jos, Plateau State

timbarga@gmail.com

Executive Summary

African theology recognizes the sacred quality of the ecological system because it serves as the dwelling place for divinities, deities, spirits as well as the medium through which the sovereign or Supreme Being can be reached. It has been discovered that the influence of modernism and secularism has created an irrevocable havoc and devastation to the ecological system and unspeakable catastrophe to African Theology. The objective of this paper is to examine the traditional African ecological theology as a practice and ideology of resolving the present world ecological problem. This article adopts phenomenological approach. The work recommends a couple of pedagogical measures to check the wanton destruction of the ecological system.

Keywords: Ecological, Theology, Pedagogical, Environmental, African, Conservation

Introduction

Ecological crisis is perhaps the most pressing challenge the world grapples with at present. The projected rate of climate change this century is far greater than anything experienced by the earth in the last 10,000 years, mostly caused by human

activity through the burning of fossil fuels (Deane-Drummond Web). Scientists believe that human's unregulated exploitation of nature in the name of scientific and technological advancement is the cause of this crisis. In most parts of the world, deforestation, gas flaring, oil exploration and spillage, industrialization, unhealthy agricultural activities and others take place unchecked. These result in environmental degradation and pollution, depletion of the Ozone layer and the attendant change in climate resulting in global warming and cooling. Many attempts have been made, many conferences organized and suggestions proffer on what to do to control global warming so that the world can be a conducive place to live. However, it needs to be pointed out that the exploitation of the environment that results in global warming is an attitudinal issue and it is a change of attitude that can ameliorate the challenge. In this paper, it is suggested that a combination of African theological attitude to nature can serve as a model for the control of global warming.

As one reads through the creation story in Genesis, discovers how God relates to us. As a result, we need not to be told the need to protect the environment. It is for our own good. God could have done it anyway He wanted it. Anyhow we see it, we need to cherish it, protect it and leave it to the generation to come. For us to understand the theology of nature, we need to accept this from onset that God is the Creator as been told about in the sacred doctrine of creation. Seeing and accepting God as a creator will help us to deal with some questions and how to answer them. Even if we fail to provide answer at all, it calls for rethinking about our attitude towards nature.

An Overview of Ecology and Theology

The African understanding of the world is life-centered. In sub-Saharan Africa highlights, people mostly lived a subsistent livelihood which has the land a very important source of all that they have. The land and soil and everything in it are always considered a gift of the Supreme Being and have a sacred character of their own. The provident earth is also considered the ultimate leveler, which is required and needed by all. So, rather than approaching the earth with the aim to subdue it negatively, the African would seek to tend it and make it more productive (367-8). In a sense, for the African, life is the primary category for self-understanding and provides the basic framework for any interpretation of the world, persons, nature, or divinity. Being a Christian or not, the understanding of the world and relationship with nature have a religious foundation and a theological base. As for Monotheist religions, humankind is the center of the world. After creating human beings according to his own likeness, God placed them outside the common nature and gave them the power to dominate it as a whole. But Polytheist religions consider humankind as a product of nature; while, religions called “primitive” and oriental religions consider humankind as a form of life among many others. Therefore, different theological world views emerge. Theologically, the arrangements of the world and the relationship with nature have a theological base because it is God who is the creator of anything, and humanity is in the center of all. Theologically, after creating human beings after his own similarity, God placed them above the common nature and gave them the capacity and the authority to dominate the whole of his creation. The dominion and protection of the creation of God, holistically, imply all the sectors of the human life including environment. The interdependence of all the creatures under the sun is a crucial personal discipline. Accordingly, Kyomo affirms “life is worthy

of life when this discipline becomes the currency for each human being” (57-63). This interdependence which exists between human being and nature has a great consideration in the African design because the African regards nature as part of his existence according to the will of God to whom he/she attributes everything.

Thus, the African will easily live according to the vision of God, the creator of all good things for the blooming of humanity. Each African will, therefore, understand the value of nature and the relationship, which exists between God, nature and human beings. Unfortunately, today, humanity is still dangerously able to destroy the good creation of God through various destructive means: massive weapon, pollution, and wars. Nuclear irresponsible engineering, industrialization and globalization also contribute to an unrestrained destruction of normal ecosystem.

African Traditional Perspective of the Environment

Traditionally, religion plays an integral role in linking people to the natural world, imbuing them with the knowledge and values that make caring for the environment a priority (Kanu 35). In African cosmology, God is seen as the agent of creation. Creation does not arise from a mechanistic interpretation of science, but from a deep faith in the Supreme Being. This reveals that African concepts, understanding and interaction with the environment is largely religious based. They believe that human beings live in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with the divine being, God (Mbiti 48). As such religion occupies a unique place in ascertaining environmental friendliness and at the same time, it is a major instrument that has been used to cause environmental problems. However, among Africans or the indigenous people, religion has

been a source of environmental preservation and protection even though, abuses also exist. The Indigenous people recognize and understand their place in the local environment bearing in mind that nature or the environment has a spiritual dimension attached to it. By virtue of the fact that the African recognize that spirits inhabit nature, there is the tendency to nurture and take care of it. According to Grim, in indigenous beliefs, to analyze religion as a separate system of beliefs and ritual practices apart from subsistence, kinship, language, governance, and landscape is to misunderstand indigenous religion. Therefore, the respect for the environment still subsists among the African people. Hence, Grim claims that “what is evident, however, is wherever indigenous peoples have endured, they have maintained a loving experience of place and an understanding that spiritual forces capable of leading humans into both utilitarian and self-understandings abide in all of these places” (Obasola 203).

Prior to the advent of Europeans, Africans had a balanced and a harmonious relationship with their environment. Their beliefs and practices enabled them to preserve their environment. These beliefs and practices could be found in their norms, folklores, proverbs, taboos and myths, which are reflections of their cosmology. In African cosmology observes Awajuisuk, “there is symbiotic relationship between the visible and the invisible world. Africans believe in three worlds which are linked together: the heaven above, the earth and the earth beneath” (103). Africans see themselves as part of other creatures of God. They also believe that all things biotic and abiotic have souls. Hence, they treat them as sacred. Alokwu confirms this view when he records that in traditional African society, both the visible and invisible elements of nature are linked together. Human life is inseparably bound with nature and both human life and the life of other creatures are one with the divine. He

states further that it is this view of cosmic oneness that led to the belief that deities inhabit natural phenomena and that they are associated with mountains, rivers, forests, sky or sun. This oneness makes Africans to always strive to live in harmony with nature, deities and their fellow humans both living and dead (39). Among the Igbo, certain are trees believed to be the abode of deities like Iroko are left to grow for years without anyone cutting them down. Awajiusuk also confirms that Iroko or certain trees are left uncultivated in Africa.

Consequently, desertification, quarry and deforestation were rare practices in traditional Africa (103). The practice of medicine was another way traditional Africans preserve nature. Certain trees were preserved due to their medicinal significance. Hence, such trees could last for many years without extinction. There were taboos that guarded against desecration of land. The land is seen as 'mother', believed in Africa to be a deity. The earth is called Ama in Kilba and Ile among the Yoruba communities. Any desecration done to the earth could incur her wrath (Mbiti, Christianity 31). Ikenga Metuh for instance asserts that among the Igbos for example, there is a common belief that the earth is a goddess that oversees various activities of human beings and punishes any grievous contravention. Considering it as a taboo, such anomalies are considered to have capacity of inflicting harm on the entire community until sacrifices are offered to appease the gods (244). Traditional Africa's agricultural practices also helped to preserve the land. When a land was cleared for farming, the bushes were burnt on the land and the ashes would serve as fertilizer. Different types of crops would be planted on the same spot. In some part, shifting cultivation applied. After about three years of cultivation on a land, the farmer would move to another piece of land while the portion would remain fallow to regenerate. The regeneration process might take up to

ten years. Though the system was only relevant when there was low population density, which helped to preserve the land.

In another dimension, some lands are purposely left to grow trees as a forest of various sizes with embargo that people cannot trespass nor fell them down for any reason without attracting the wrath of the gods. Likewise, various communities have one totem or the other which is protected from any kind of harmful overture from the local communities. By such observance, lives of many habitats have been saved over the years until recently that the custodians of this practices have abandoned their cultures. Again, Africans believe order and cohesion can only be achieved when there is good relationship between them and all the powers which perceived in the environment. These include, God, fellow men and women, priests, ancestors, established institutions and ritual animals, plants, non-living object and special places (Okwokwo 427-8).

Ecological Theology in African Ethical and Moral Philosophy

Ecological theology says Nwaigbo Ferdinand “is a reflective theology of social responsibility with a view to save the earth and the universe from further destruction” (353). Hence, ecological theology has green theology as its synonym. Ecological theology finds its bedrock on the human nature that is modelled after the image of God. As a result, in whatever the creation account, humanity witnesses and enjoys a wonderful forestation. God in creation saw that everything was good. With the creation of man and woman as the summit of creation, God gave them a mandate to increase, multiply and subdue or care for the earth. At that first instance, God bequeathed to humanity a wonderful blessing that carries grave responsibility unto fecundity for procreation and stewardship of the entire creation. God entrusts to humanity

the care of the earth although in a participatory form since He remains the absolute creator and guide unto environment.

Ecology underlines the interdependence of all creatures: Plants, animals (including human beings) as well as micro-organisms of which without the support of the other organisms within the same system, life would not survive. Such interdependence implies that predators and prey, fire and water, food and shelter, etc., remain in balance with each other and with the environment around them. This is confirmed by the positive stand of Pope Benedict XVI referred to as the Green Pope when he said that:

One must first of all, learn 'to see in creation something more than a mere source of wealth and exploitation in human hands/ to see it truly as it really is, that is, as 'expression of a project of love and truth that speaks to us of the Creator and His love for humanity (Barga 123).

Nature or environment in African context is God's disclosure for it discloses God as the giver of the environment for human and non-human sustenance. The concept nature shapes the African worldview, philosophy and their response to natural realities. The universe for the African is a spiritual and material home. The universe exists in unity with its creator and the community realizes itself in God through His providence in the universe. The natural phenomena and objects in African mentality bear witness to God. John Mbiti for instance stresses this fact that, "Africans find God disclosed to them through animals, plants, spiritual beings, heavenly beings and earthly objects" (Mbiti 91-3). Through nature, human beings receive God's love, charity and consonance which enhances a holistic development in human life and growth. God, the Lord of nature sustained human life and growth and there was a relationship with the rest of creation. To neglect the wonders of creation or nature like water conservation, maintenance of climate and physical

conditions was to neglect the spiritual nature of human beings and this affected the human relationship and wholeness.

The spirit of sharing of common sacramental natural resources among Africans have a formative influence on the lives of the individual and society. Either its resources or the environment is disposed at other's needs. These resources were understood as generosity from God who is perceived as Father because of his generative providence. These gifts of life were shared communally because common good was more treasured than individual interests. The gifts were given by the creator as natural resources to be shared by all in the community. Therefore, observes Klauder Francis, environment meant much to the people's identity and their interrelationship, and was an expression of themselves to God and to the wider society. The sacredness of nature and its formative role is clear in African philosophy, tradition, culture and religion "the universe is a revelation of God, and the world cannot be understood without God for He is the centre and end of creation" (34). For this reason, the created world is seen as the *locus* in and through which God touches His people. To destroy or diminish anything in nature is to destroy or diminish the modes of the divine presence, and the consequence is deprivation.

People must learn to live effectively and efficiently in and with their environment and be taught how to use it. The attitude that the earth is all ours is wrong and is informed and influenced by practical materialism, greed and selfishness. More emphasis should be laid on the fact that God exists within the created world and consequently the earth is not to be exploited with impunity. Human beings are only custodians or stewards and must be convinced that God exists within the created world, and therefore the earth is a source of inspiration and awe. To believe

that God exists within the created world is to retain close ties with nature and affirm the sacredness of life in all its forms on this earth. This anthropological understanding of cosmology serves as the hedge of African care for the mother earth as a sacramental common. As a thesis to this background, Veli-Matti Karakkainen avers that “a constructive Christian theology should be able to hold in a dynamic tension an attitude of reverent admiration for the beauty of creation in its endless diversity and creativity, and a deepening concern for nature’s vulnerability and suffering from the current global economic-industrial rape” (219).

God maintains and guides his creation through our conscience. This is why Hans Schwarz said that in the natural process God’s continuous creative activity is dominant; however, in the moral process God’s preserving creative activity rules supreme. God endows humanity with certain guidelines within which it can unfold itself and which may aid it in finding its proper place within creation. If we want to take care of nature then we need to approach it with a clear and good conscience especially, if we want to take proper care of the environment. Not that we want to please people, but we should see it as a moral duty to control not to destroy or exploit it. Preserving nature through more conduct, we should be guided by everyday doings and thinking. By doing that it forms a judgement about what is right and wrong.

Divine Preservation of the Doctrine of Creation

The creation of the world was for a purpose. It has not been set without purpose or divine direction. If the creation was done with an intention, then humankind must do all that they can to preserve the things that God created. The purpose of creation is for God to express his love to the other than himself. God gives

his love in freedom and expects it to be rendered back in freedom. Creation exists because God wills it in freedom and love. Pieter Smulders advances this perspective thus:

Creation is to be considered as the free act of God whereby he gives the world and man entirely to man, as a gift of his goodness and as a task to be carried on to a fulfilment in which man responds to this word of his creator with the fulness of his own being and of his world (23).

If Christians or humanity cherished the things created by God, then there is something that must be done. What we have to know is that God himself know how to preserve it. God's providence is a Trinitarian activity. The Lord who exercises providence is none other than the Lord and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that providence is none other the Lord within the word. Even though we don't see God living with us, He is always controlling our activities so that the world will continue to be a better place for us to live. The Biblical doctrine of providence is demonstrated in the concrete experiences of Israel and her neighboring communities. There are so many of them when you read through the Bible in the Old Testament and in the life of Jesus Christ and the development of the Church in the New Testament. As such, divine providence is a sign of God's steadfast covenant love with his people.

The history of the Jews in the Old Testament exists as a powerful witness and a sign of God's interviewing covenant love - a love ultimately revealed on the cross. The Holy Scripture says: "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:17). This means that nothing in creation is self-sufficient. God is responsible for both the origin and the preservation of all creation. Hans Schwarz assumed that "without God's continuing preservation of the creation, the Cosmos will cease to exist. No atom of the universe is self-sufficient, all is utterly dependent

upon God's gracious sustenance" (187). He went on to say that to affirm providence as divine preserving is to acknowledge that creation has limits and that these limits do not rule the creature. It is due to God's acting preservation. To him this is not a passive divine activity. God enters into world occurrence and ordains that it should exist. This is not to suggest that God creates the world anew each moment, as has been suggested by some theologians. Hans Schwarz in his book *creation* said that: "when we talk about divine providence, however, we do not turn to the past. Our attention is directed towards the present. The convictions are uttered that, God has the present in his hands here and now and therefore our future is decided too" (Kwadwo 79).

Hans further made the claim that the future will not open itself in any possible way. It will open only in the manner which is sanctioned by God. With this assertion we do not just focus on the cosmos but also humanity and its conduct and history. He added that Divine providence, therefore, extends to nature. We remember that natural processes presuppose nature and matter. Yet these presuppositions cannot be taken for granted, because there is insufficient reason to suppose that an initial singularity occurred. He ended his submission by saying that Divine providence, therefore, asserts first of all that God continues to preserve his creation (185). Martin Luther, for instance, was much more impressed by the continuous preservation of God's creation than by initial creative act. He remarked that many people start something, but most do not have the energy to continue it.

Preservation of nature is very essential because it serves as the foundations of human existence. It is said almost everywhere that when the last tree dies, the last person will die. It is true

because nature provides us with varying degrees of dependability which can be understood as a result of God caring for humankind. If nature is well preserved, it will help us to maintain and sustain the environment in which we live. For example, adequate water supplies of high quality is necessary both for community use and local ecosystems. Communities as well as other creation require proper care to be able to fulfil the purpose for which they were created. For this reason, we need to work hard to preserve nature so long as we continue to live in this world without knowing the very day this beautiful, well planned nature will be destroyed as indicated in the Bible. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and Heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (Gen 8:22). How nature or the environment will look at for 50 years to come will depend on us.

Our land has a beautiful and varied landscape with many distinct ecosystems. If we desire nature to always look better with running streams, clean water, clean air and want to live something better for our generation, then we need to invest now. For the sake of the future it is not incumbent upon us to complete the work, but neither are we at liberty to desist from it. God has created nature to the extent that the nature preserves itself. Things work naturally like that and it is very wonderful. Hans Schwarz called it degrees of dependability which can be understood as the result of the caring activity of God. According to him, the first kind of dependability is represented in the rising and setting of the sun and in the cycles of seasons. He stated that they provide the foundation for the development of life on earth, as far as we know, is fully reliable.

The second reliability asserted by Hans is a different kind which arises when several alternatives and large numbers of repeated

incidences are involved. To him we encounter this, for example, in chemical reactions when wood or other fuel is burnt (189). If these natural dependencies failed us, we will be in big mess because our very lives solely depend on them Everything is in the total control of God, without his care and permission we are nothing. The Bible confirms that: Are not two Sparrow sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, yet are of more value than many sparrows. (Matt 10:30-33).

Pedagogical Pathways for Ecological Sustainability

Africa has been suffering serious degradation through recent decades. Various causes are at the origin of this environmental destruction, namely, several wars due to selfish interests by leaders supported directly or indirectly by Westerners, bad strategies of industrialization adopted by many African countries, deforestation, desertification, pollution of water, air, land, climate change, bad governance and unplanned development strategies and mismanagement of natural resources etc.

Therefore, Ecological theology is a theology of social responsibility with a view to save the future generations, to save the mother earth and the universe, the air, water and the soil from further degradation. The task of theology in ecological matters is crucial. It would be hypocritical to criticize industrial development which exists to supply or enhance our demands at the minimum price asserts Elsdon (21). This is because there is nothing inherently wrong with the human aspirations for a higher living standard rather than living in an abject poverty and inhuman standard of life. The indispensable pedagogy is that

African needs a higher standard of living to lift herself from poverty, unemployment and illiteracy.

Ecological theology has the powerful voice to protect the environment. This theology is in the form of prophetic voice crying for the protection and preservation of the life of human beings, their environment and the entire cosmos. Ecological theology has a great concern on the human person, who is created in the image of God, the source and end of all economic activities. The picture of a human person formed in the image of God opens the anthropological dimension of the theology of ecology. During creation, observes Nwaigbo God made a human person in His own image and likeness, and endowed him/her with his own characteristics, communion and fellowship (360).

African intellectuals and researchers should, therefore, conscientize the African people to protect Africa against all forms of the destruction of nature and any form of ecological crisis because by protecting the environment, they protect themselves. Also, African theologians, through the Christian mission, can valuably accomplish this task because Christian mission has the power to attack all cause which destroys the environment and climate change challenges if it is well understood and contextualized according to the need of the moment, especially by putting Christ at the center of all. African missiology has the mission to awaken Africans and to point out their responsibility towards God and the nature created by God. Ecology is the interrelationship between living organisms and the interaction between them and the environment. The way in which human beings relate to each other will be influenced by memory of the image of God in them. The image of God in people continues to prevent every assault, humiliation,

destruction and even extermination. The implication here says Mwayuli is that:

God wanted man and woman to have a balanced interrelationship with the environment. To subdue, the creator put man and woman in-charge of the earth to manage and not to destroy. Human beings depend on the earth for food and other livelihoods, which means that the emphasis is on the interdependence of all things that is people, animals, vegetation, atmosphere and social pressures (537).

Another pedagogical measure is that local community should as matter of urgency embark on ecological projects. This can come in form of tree planting campaign with young people, waste management and environmental sanitation within the neighborhood and beyond. There is a deep connection between wastefulness and waste management. The community must lead the way in providing an alternative to an attitude of wastefulness by undertaking projects that recycle used materials for reuse. Environmental stewardship corroborates Chukwemeba entails the ability to economize the earth's resources in order to avoid the unnecessary production of new materials (162).

Omorovie Mark Ikeke has argued for an eradication of environmental predicaments in Africa through the teaching of philosophical consciencism (12). According to this school of thought, the eradication of the environmental predicament in Africa requires that people cannot conscientiously apply themselves to viable and healthy practices that will protect the environment unless they are convinced of those practices. In African environmental philosophy the preachers are the philosophers of our time. It behooves philosophy as a field that is totally concerned with the search for knowledge in a critical manner to engage in that work of conscientization. What this

school of African environmental philosophy is talking about, is that environmental sustainability requires right conscience. To combat African environmental challenges successfully, we need a systematic and progressive indigenous framework. It is time that the 21st century Africans should acquire the right mental status which will equip them with pure and clean conscience to make moral choices about their environment. Africans have the right philosophical tools and systems to achieve this aim. The human conscience must be liberated through education to know that "... whatever has head or tail end is not only a missing link but serves a missing link all at the same time, in the sense of Ibuanyidanda" (226). The implication of Asouzu's claim is that when I pay less attention to oil spill and it destroys a farm land, I am in turn destroying myself. When I destroy our oil pipelines for person gain, I am in turn destroying myself too. We should learn and rise up to defend our continent.

African spirituality seeks to link the African person to God by means of African patterns of life or culture as its starting point. African spirituality gives great *respect to creatures*. Some trees and rivers are considered sacred in their relationship to humans. Orobator writes: "In our natural environment there was hardly a thing that did not command some measure of respect. The ancestral tree was an object of reverence in fact, it was the sacred place of worship and ritual performances" (1). Nature has then its sacredness that calls for reverence because as Wangari Maathai points out, "this or other trees are understood by their communities as nodal points that connect the world above with the world below ... places where one's ancestors and/or their spirits reside" (97).

The dynamics is that in African traditional beliefs we find spiritual resources and an imagination that can contribute

creatively to caring for our common planet. Since nature gives assurance of sustenance to humanity, then our understanding of life must be “expansive and inclusive” of all reality in order to encompass nature, including animals, plants, and geo-ecological life such as “land, rain, and crops” (Wangari 132). This implies that the whole created order must be protected, not only because of what people get from it but as a matter of religious commitment and conviction.

The umbilical cord is significant and can be used to foster humanity’s mutual dependence on nature. The umbilical links a baby to its mother in her womb. The growing fetus cannot survive in its mother’s womb without the umbilical cord. “In many African cultures, when it is cut after the birth of a child, the umbilical cord is buried in a special place in the homestead, to signify the belonging of the new-born not only to the clan and its spirits, but also to the ancestral soil from which it should normally not be alienated” (Megasa 122). Just as a woman carefully carries the fetus linked to her through the umbilical cord, we are linked to this world, the ruin of which entails our own destruction.

Most African cultures have the umbilical cord buried in the ancestral land in order to signify that both the mother and the new baby are inalienably and inseparably linked to the “living-dead,” the ancestors. If the umbilical cord is carelessly thrown away, this suggests disregard of this link. Therefore, when Africans say, “there is no place like home,” this is not a simple statement from one who misses one’s relatives or native food. Instead, most Africans refer to this link to the land of their ancestors and their community. It is what is missed most! It is what makes “home” special.

The connection of the umbilical cord to one's land has an ecological dimension. It connotes humanity's connection with the universe. For Magesa, it "implies the death of humanity in the long run. By destroying nature, humanity slowly loses belonging. It has nowhere to belong to, no other place to call home, and no ambiance to deeply and meaningfully connect with in life and with which to enter into communion after death" (122-23). Indeed, this is an invitation not to throw a stone where we have placed our umbilical cord, like where we place our treasured milk, or by analogy it is an invitation not to worsen the cracks within our "common home."

Conclusion

The foregoing has shown that African theology is eco-friendly. It is, therefore believed that African theology of environment will help in the effort to reduce global ecological abuse. Appropriate elements in African worldview will include African idea of the unity of reality, the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos and the African view of community involving both humans and inanimate objects (Ukpong 24).

Religion and the environment are intertwined in that they have had a history and will continue to have a role together in the future. This may be one area where science and religion can find a common ground both have the environment in their best interest and can work together to find a solution to the current environmental crisis. As religious traditions and beliefs have shaped human values and behaviors towards the environment in the past, this is one possibility for working toward positive environmental attitudes for the future.

Nature is part of the created order and is related to man, hence should be cared for. As co-tenant on earth, nature should not be

plundered, exploited or use for one's selfish end, but for the good of all. It is alarming to note that the major cause of global warming is man's plundering of nature to satisfy his selfish material ambition without considering the effects of such actions on nature and his fellow human. Man and woman must be seen not just as part of creation, but also a steward of the environment. God is the owner of nature. In traditional Africa, deities are believed to reside in nature, hence, its exploitation can incur the anger of the gods. Therefore stewards, man must not only avoid exploiting nature, but also lend his prophetic voice against the injustice done to nature by fellow human beings. To this effect eschatological views of African tradition will help in preserving nature. African traditional eschatological view is cyclic: There is no end to this world. Man moves from birth to puberty, to adulthood, he marries and when he is old, he dies. If he lives a good life, on earth, he becomes an ancestor.

Works Cited

- A. E. Orobator. "An Immense Pile of Filth': Human Ecology and Communitarian Salvation". *Duffy Lecture at Boston College*, Unpublished Paper, March 29, 2016. www.laciviltacattolica.com/african-spirituality-and-its-contribution-to-the-ecological-crisis/. Accessed 21/08/2012.
- Alokwu, C. O. "The Synthesis of Oikothology and African Ecological Ethics as a Model for Environmental Protection in Africa". *Journal of African Environmental Ethics and Values*. Vol. 1, 2011, 35-57.
- Asouzu, I. Innocent. *Ibuanyidanda New Complementary Ontology*. Zurich: LIT VERLAG Gmbit &Co. KG Wien, 2007, 226.
- Awajiusuk, J.F. "Indigenous African Environmental Ethics: A Panacea for Sustaining the Niger Delta Environment".

- Journal of Religion and Culture, Dept of Religious and Cultural Studies, Uniport, Vol 10, Nos. 1& 2, 2010, 101-120.*
- Barga, Timothy. *A Parish Guide to the New Evangelization*. Fab Anieh, 2014, 123.
- Boateng, Kwadwo. "Theological Reflection on Environmental Degradation and Vicious Cycle of Poverty". A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, 2012.
- Celia Deane-Drummond. *Eco- Theology*. USA: Saint Press, 2008. <https://anselmacademic.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Eco-Theology.pdf> Accessed 21/08/2021.
- Chukwemeba, Julian. "The Church and Ecological Concerns: A Dogmatic-system Approach." Anagwo, E. Chinedu (Editor). *Ecological Liturgy and the Church in Africa*. Port Harcourt: Corneel Printz Resources, 2021.
- Elsdon, R. Bent World: A Christian Response to the Environmental Crisis, in Ferdinand Nwaigbo. "Jesus, Justice and Ecology: An African Perspective". *AFER* Vol. 53, No. 2 June 2011, 353-373.
- Ikenga-Metuh, E. *Comparative Studies of Africa Traditional Religions*. Ibadan: Cleverianum Press, 1987.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- Kanu, I. A. (2015b). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- Klauder, F. *The Wonder of Real*. Christopher Publishing House, 1978.
- Kyomo, A. "The Environmental Crisis as a Pastoral Challenge in Africa". J.N.K Mugambi & Mika, Vähäkangas

- (Editors). *Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility*. Nairobi: Acton, 2001, 57-63.
- Hans, Schwarz. *Creation*. Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Mbiti, John. *Concept of God in Africa*. SPCK, 1970, 91-93.
- ... *African Religions and Philosophy*. London, Ibadan, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1979.
- ... "Christianity and African Culture". *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, Vol 20, 1977, 26-40.
- Magesa, L. "African Spirituality and the Environment: Some Principles, Theses, and Orientations." *Hekima Review*, n. 53, December 2015, 119-129.
- Nwaigbo, Ferdinand. "Jesus, Justice and Ecology: An African Perspective". *AFER* Vol. 53, No. 2 June 2011, 353-373.
- ... "Cosmic Christology and Eco-Theology in Africa". *AFER* Vol. 53, No. 2 June 2011, 437-461.
- Obasola, E. Kehinde. "African Religion and Environmental Dynamics: Implications for Human and Sustainable Development". *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*. Vol 4, No 2, 2013, 199-212.
- Okwokwo, Izunna. "Liturgical Theology: An Environmental Concern". *AFER* Vol. 53 No. 2, June 2011, 417-436.
- Orobator, A. E. *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 2008, 132.
<https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/african-spirituality-and-its-contribution-to-the-ecological-crisis/>. Accessed 19/08/2021.
- Osang, Obi Edward. "The Church in Africa and the Challenges of Climate Change: Pathways to African Ecological Ethics". Stan Chu Ilo, Nora K. Nonterah & Idara Out (Editors). *Faith in Action Vol 1. Reform, Mission and*

Pastoral Renewal in African Catholicism since Vatican II.
Abuja: Paulines Publications, 2020.

Smulders, Pieter. "Creation." Karl Rahner (Ed). *Encyclopedia of Theology*. London: Burns and Oates, 1975.

Ukpong, J.S. "Towards A Renewed Approach to Inculturation Theology". *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994, 8-24.

Veli-Matti Karakkainen. *Creation and Humanity*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015, 219.

Wangari, Maathai. *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World*. New York: Doubleday, 2010.

*When the earth receives the blood of "a brother": reading the story of cain and abel
(genesis 4:1-10) in the light of eco-spirituality*

Chapter Four

WHEN THE EARTH RECEIVES THE BLOOD OF "A BROTHER": READING THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL (GENESIS 4:1-10) IN THE LIGHT OF ECO-SPIRITUALITY

*Malachy Udochukwu Theophilus, OSA
Santa Clara University
School of Theology, Department of Biblical Studies
California, United States of America
theophilusmalachy@gmail.com*

Executive Summary

This article proposes that eco-spirituality is not just about the protection of the environment from denigration. It is far more than that as revealed in the story of the first brothers, Cain and Abel. This story of fratricide suggests that man is only a breath. To continue to exist, man must be accepted in the community of brothers. The subsistence of the human species lies in our recognition of the fact that we are one another's keepers. Hence, eco-spirituality is the response of the human species to the divine imperative to be one another's keeper so that together, the human species can care and protect the environment. Thus, this article argues that ecological spirituality is about how man's relationship with his fellow man can affect the environment. Creation reveals God's love and generosity; this divine generosity beckons on human beings to have a new attitude towards creation in general.

Keywords: Cain, Abel, Genesis, Eco-spirituality, Brotherhood, Environment

Introduction

From the biblical account, when God created the world, he created man and woman from the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7) and charged them with a dual responsibility: be fruitful and care or be stewards over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28-30; 2:15). In obedience to this divine command, the first brothers were born, Cain and Abel. Their occupation highlights their response to the second part of the command. The Scripture says that Cain was a tiller of the soil while Abel his brother was a keeper of flocks. However, to be able to maintain stewardship over the earth, the two brothers have to accept each other and live in harmony or else they jeopardize the divine command. Stewardship over the earth is the primary responsibility of humanity because human beings are part of the ecosystem. This stewardship must be understood as custody of both human and earthly ecology. When human beings fail to be their brother's keeper, as in the case of Cain against Abel, the earth reacts because there is a symbiotic relationship between humanity and the earth. This relationship is not merely biological or sociological, it is fundamentally spiritual. The story of Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter four underscores this relationship. Thus, this article promises to do a close reading of Genesis 4:1-10, paying attention to its theological contours so as to establish the eco-spirituality therein.

The birth of Cain and Abel (vv 1-2)

The fourth chapter of the book of Genesis opens with the conception and birth of Cain and "his brother" Abel. Usually in the Bible, a child's name can relate to circumstances of birth, physical qualities or disabilities and even future fate. In Gen 4:1 we read that "Adam *knew* his wife and she became pregnant."

When the earth receives the blood of "a brother": reading the story of cain and abel (genesis 4:1-10) in the light of eco-spirituality

The Hebrew word "know" (*yādā*.) often connotes personal or even intimate knowledge as here. When Eve gave birth to her first son, she called him "Cain," saying: *qaniti* iš et-yhwh (adonay). This etiology has been translated differently among scholars. The particle *et* is not the accusative/ object sign, but the preposition "with" as many ancient versions attest. Some take the preposition in the sense of "with the help of ..." (Kissling, 2004, 217). However, I would rather translate the preposition *et* as "along with." That is, in the sense of "like, equally with, in common with" (Lev 26:39; Isa 45:9 and Jer 23:28 attest to this translation and it works well in the context). Thus, the tone is set from the beginning where Eve's words give us a hint to understanding the story. Even the sound play (paronomasia) between the name קַיִן and the verb קָנִיתִי is very suggestive. The sound of the verb קָנִיתִי (*qaniti*), "I have gotten, obtained, created, made" (see Gen 14:19, Gen 14:22; Deut 32:6; Psa 139:13; Pro 8:22) reflects the sound of the name Cain in Hebrew קַיִן (*qayin*) and gives meaning to it.

The word *qayin* apparently meant a kind of "spear" (2 Sam. 21:16), but that does not seem to interest the author of this *Book of the Beginnings*. He appears to have something else in mind which is revealed in his use of the preposition *et* that he attaches to "YHWH." Eve has "created a man equally/ along with or like God." She has just been thrown out of the garden, and her words at her son's birth is intended to be exultant and arrogant rather than pious. "She will show God! Not for her the thought of him alone giving life (2:7). She can do it too. She is in fact setting an example of defiance which Cain himself is later to follow, when he takes away life, something that was also the sole prerogative of God (Job 1:21)" (Gibson, 2001, 143).

After Cain, a second son was born, his brother Abel who was simply identified as a shepherd (cf. 4:2). Thus, it is obvious that something is missing in the sequence. Unlike Cain's, Abel's name was not clarified; Eve did not give any etiological background to Abel's name, thus creating the impression that the name means nothing. But this is not the case. As Karolien Vermeulen rightly observes, "the omission of the name's explanation in the case of Abel can be a so-called *argumentum ex silentio* as understood by rabbinic exegesis" (Vermeulen, 2014, 31). This suggests that the silence is not only deliberate but meaningful. The gap in the narrative could be the narrator inviting God to speak in human silence. God indeed spoke. In the name of Abel, He reminds humanity, and Eve in particular who wants to equate herself with God, that "man is only a breath." The name Abel is one of the everyday Hebrew words for "breath" (*hebel*), though not so much the "breath," but "vanity," or "vapour." It is a metaphor for something insubstantial, worthless, and quickly gone. It is Ecclesiastes' favourite word. We have it too in Job 7:16, "my days are a breath," and in Ps. 39:5, "Surely every man stands as a mere breath." There is no doubt that this name is in the story to underline the shortness and vanity of human life in general, and of Abel's own life in particular (Gibson, 143); and it is an invitation for humanity to live in relationship with one another for "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). God created an ecosystem of relationship and stewardship. When these are maintained, we have a balanced and well ordered world.

Complications in the Story of the Brothers (vv 3-7)

In Gen 4:3-7, we see a complication in the narrative that eventually leads to the distortion of the ecosystem. The occupation and the cultic offerings of the brothers give us a glimpse into their attitude and lifestyle. Abel was a shepherd and Cain a husbandman, and in due course each brought an offering

appropriate to his vocation to set before the Lord, "Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel ... brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Despite the fact that the cultic act of the brothers were both described as "offerings", God looked upon Abel and his offerings with approval while that of Cain He disapproved (cf. Gen 4:4). It is difficult to understand the reason behind the divine disapproval of Cain at first glance, but one thing is almost certain: the offerings point to the attitudes of the two brothers. As most commentators believe, Cain may have been more perfunctory than his brother. It does not say that he brought the "first-fruits" of his crop, only the "fruit of the ground." In retrospection, Proverbs 3:9 says "honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all your produce;" and Nehemiah (in 10:36) echoed this agreement of the people of Israel regarding offerings that are meant for the Lord when he said: "We have agreed to bring each year to the house of the Lord, the first fruits of our fields and of our fruit trees of whatever kind." Thus, Cain reserved for himself that which was meant for God. But we were told that Abel did bring some first-born lambs. Exodus 13:12 explains that all male firstlings of animals belongs to the Lord. Thus, Abel gave God that which rightfully belongs to Him. And there is a special mention of the "fat portions," that is, the choicest part of the animal, which in one type of sacrifice in the temple (see Lev. 3:16) was reserved for God and burnt on the altar. The Epistle to the Hebrews (11:4) seems to agree with this when it speaks of Abel's offering to God as "a more acceptable sacrifice" (Gibson, 144). Even the text says that much, for God looks with favour, not just on the offering, but also on the one who offers. However, on Cain and his offering, He did not "look".

Cain was crushed by this and "his face fell" (cf. 4:5). The idiom means that, inner anger was reflected in Cain's facial expression. The fallen or downcast face expresses anger, dejection, or depression. Conversely, in Numbers chapter 6, the high priestly blessing speaks of the YHWH lifting up his face and giving peace. Cain's reaction shows a wrong attitude toward God. It is the creator's prerogative to decide what is acceptable in sacrifice and what is not acceptable. Human beings are not in competition with each other for a relationship with God. God's love for one does not diminish his love for another because he has enough space to accommodate everybody. Our only competition should be with the person we used to be (Kissling, 221).

The most interesting thing in this narrative is YHWH's interruption with a speech of warning (vv. 6–7). The specifics of the speech are uncertain, as one can see by comparing the translations. It consists of three questions: *Why...? why...? will you not?* and two if-clauses, *If you do well/if you do not do well* (Brueggemann, 1982, 57). The introduction of the conditional clause with an interrogative particle prods the answer from Cain, as if he should have known this. It is not a condemnation, but an encouragement to do what is right. The Hebrew text is difficult, because only one word occurs, נָסַח (s^{el}et), which appears to be the infinitive construct from the verb "to lift up" (*nasa*). The sentence literally reads: "If you do well, uplifting." On the surface it seems to be the opposite of the fallen face. The word *nasa*' can be used in the Bible for forgiveness, but God is not condemning Cain yet, nor calling for a confession. He is simply telling him to do well (Allen - Oswalt, 2008, 58). Everything will be changed if he does well. God will show him favour, he will not be angry, and his face will reflect that. But more may be intended since the second half of the verse forms the contrast: "If you do not do well, sin is crouching..." Not doing well leads to sinful attack; doing well

When the earth receives the blood of "a brother": reading the story of cain and abel (genesis 4:1-10) in the light of eco-spirituality

leads to victory and God's blessing. The Hebrew term translated as "crouching" (רָצַח, *rovets*) is an active participle. Sin is portrayed with animal imagery here as a beast crouching and ready to pounce (a figure of speech known as zoomorphism). An Akkadian cognate refers to a type of demon; in this case perhaps one could translate, "sin is the demon at the door," "and toward you [is] its desire, but you must rule over it." As in Gen 3:16, the Hebrew noun translated as "desire" refers to an urge to control or dominate. Here, the desire is that which sin has for Cain, a desire to control for the sake of evil, but Cain must have mastery over it. The imperfect is understood as having an obligatory sense. Another option is to understand it as expressing potential ("you can have [or "are capable of having"] mastery over it."). It will be a struggle, but sin, in this case, uncontrolled anger, can be defeated.

What Cain Said (4:8)

Meanwhile, Cain did not control his anger; he allowed his anger to determine his action. In this scene, Cain and Abel are the only actors. The awfulness of the deed is accentuated by the stark brevity of the description. Whether by accident or design, the ancient masoretic text (MT) omits what Cain actually said to his brother (Wenham, 2002, 106); while some later ancient texts like Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac, tried to supply that which was supposedly missing in the MT: "Let's go out to the field." The question that is now raised is whether the readings of the later ancient texts reflects the original or is itself an artificial intrusion into the text. While almost all commentators accept the addition, if only for the sake of meaning, some still try to make sense of the text as it stands in MT. Scholars like Ephraim Speiser claim that "the original must have contained Cain's statement, but the text was accidentally omitted in MT" (Speiser, 1964, 30).

However, I completely agree with Abraham Habermann. It is unlikely that the copyists omitted words which are so clear and so apparently necessary for the proper understanding of the text (Habermann, 1957, 30). Moreover, "and Cain spoke ..." is sufficient to explain the verse as it stands. Thus, it is possible that the elliptical text is original. The text reads ויאמר קין אל-הבל אחיו ("And Cain spoke to Abel his brother"). The correct understanding of the word ויאמר in this context is "and spoke." There are two instances other than Gen 4:8 in which אמר, followed by no direct quote, denotes 'spoke' (cf. 2 Sam 21:2 and 2 Chron 1:2). Thus, the gap in the text under review could be a narrative style with a huge theological import. The manuscripts which the MT reflects, left a space after ויאמר. The empty space indicates that "Cain spoke nothing to his brother." In other words, whatever was said were empty words, deceit and lies. The author uses this technique of aposiopesis, "a sudden silence" to create tension.

The break in interpersonal relationship manifests itself, first and foremost, in the moment the other person is no longer seen or considered as an interlocutor worthy to be spoken to verbally and truthfully. In fact, to be in front of another also involves confronting the other at the level of words, opinions and sentiments expressed verbally. The incapacity of Cain to verbally express his inner rage and displeasure as a result of the divine preference of his brother shows itself on different levels. First, in Gen 4:5 Cain could not voice his state of mind. It was the narrator who told us that "Cain was very angry and his countenance fell." His state of mind was shown even in his countenance, but he could not express it verbally. Even when God admonished him in Gen 4:6-7: "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is

When the earth receives the blood of "a brother": reading the story of cain and abel (genesis 4:1-10) in the light of eco-spirituality

for you, but you must master it." Still, Cain did not take advantage of this divine admonishment to express his mind and say something to his brother (cf. Gen 4:8). This absence of word was substituted immediately by an act of violence. Cain reacted violently to his rejection, but not against the One who rejected him so much as against the innocent one who was accepted. Jealousy had raised its ugly green-eyed head and was about to prove that it is truly "cruel as the grave." It is possible for us to read this story of fratricide with some degree of indifference because we have become conditioned to violence, but we should bear in mind that sin had "entered" and was already "abounding" and would shortly "reign" (see Rom. 5:12–21) in the most gross way. The text by repeatedly using the word "brother" brings this into sharp focus. The man, first born on earth killed the second man born on earth – his own brother! (Briscoe, 1987, 63).

When the Earth receives the Blood of a Brother: Its Implication to Eco-Spirituality

Until now we have seen how brotherhood degenerates into fratricide, an action that has caused a disequilibrium in the ecosystem. Immediately Abel's blood touched the ground, there was a disorder in the ecosystem. The ground received the blood and caused the blood to speak (cf. Gen 4:10). Abel's spilled blood cries from the ground and is heard by God. "Your brother's blood is crying to me," says YHWH. The four Hebrew words used hardly require comment. Compressed into them is a whole theology whose principles inform much of the criminal and cultic law of Israel. Life is in the blood (Lev 17:11), so shed blood is the most polluting of all substances. Consequently, un-atoned-for murders pollute the land, making it unfit for the divine presence. Here, Abel's blood is pictured "crying" to God for vengeance; צעק "cry" is a desperate cry for help. The law, the

prophets (Isa 19:20; cf. 5:7), and the psalms (34:18[17]; 107:6, 28) unite with narratives like this (cf. 2 Sam 23; 1 Kgs 21) to assert that God does hear his people's desperate cries for help; especially when the ecosystem is abused, in this case, through man's inhumanity to his fellow man (Wenham, 106).

"Where is your brother Abel?" was God's question to Cain in Gen. 4:9. The Mosaic law would require an affirmative and positive answer to this question. But Cain's response was: "Am I my brother's keeper?" This response would have been recognized as a particularly heinous violation of community solidarity, which was highly esteemed among the Hebrews. Community presupposed mutual responsibility, and this was the foundation of Israel's covenant commitment (e.g., Lev 19:18; Gal 5:14). Even death did not obviate family obligations to a deceased family member (e.g., Num 35:19, 21; Deut 25:5-10). Community responsibility took priority over individual preferences or rights. Kinship terms such as "brother" characterized those who entered into a mutual covenant agreement. "Brother" is used of fellow Israelites (e.g., Deut 1:16; 15:12) who are protected from exploitation of any kind (e.g., Lev 25:35-43; Deut 23:19); aliens who live within the community are treated as "native-born" (Lev 19:33-34). Human morality assumes an unstated covenant between persons that is grounded in the intrinsic *imago Dei*. (Mathews, 2001, 274). T. C. Vriezen expresses the implications of covenant community thus:

The Old Testament might be called the most humanly minded book of the ancient world.... The relationship between man and man is dominated by the relationship between man and God ... ; as YHWH lives in a community with man, man is also linked with his fellow-man by *chesed* (faithfulness). Men linked together by YHWH are brothers. Israel is a community of brothers....

When the earth receives the blood of "a brother": reading the story of cain and abel (genesis 4:1-10) in the light of eco-spirituality

Within this community men must help each other as much as lies in their power.... The background of the words 'faithfulness,' 'righteousness' and 'justice,' without which the Israelite community cannot exist, is the idea of the Covenant" (Vriezen, 1970, 388).

Cain abrogates this sacred obligation of kinship loyalty by the appalling crime of fratricide; a crime that caused the blood of his brother to cry from the ground. The source of the disquieting cry is the "ground" that is cursed because of Adam's sin (3:17) and is now polluted by the spilling of innocent blood. Later, Israel was forewarned that murder defiled its land, and for such crimes there was no exoneration for the nation except through retribution against the malefactor (e.g., Num 35:33; cf. Gen 9:5). Collective guilt required just and prompt action by the community against the culprit.

Abel's life turns out to be just a vapor because of Cain's cynical violence. If his sacrifice is not acceptable to the LORD, no one's sacrifice will be! Such violence stains the land and causes it not to yield to man (cf. Lev 26:20). Just as Cain is to be banished from the land for such violence, so also Israel is warned. Should they perpetuate such violence, they too will be vomited out, just like the Canaanites (Lev 18:25-28). The canonical audience, who has experienced this firsthand in the exile, knows the truth of this. Chosen people or not, a society which lives by violence will be ground into the dust of history (Kissling, 224.).

Thus, eco-spirituality is not only concerned with the denigration of the environment; it is also about how man's relationship with his fellow man can affect the environment. There is a close affinity between the humankind and the earth, an affinity that is at the same time transcendental. In the second account of

creation (cf. Gen 2:5-7) after God had created the world, he fashioned man from the dust of the earth and breathed His spirit into man. Thus, man is both a natural being and a spiritual being. The line literally reads "And YHWH God formed the man, soil, from the ground." "Soil" is an adverbial accusative, identifying the material from which the man was made. Human life is described here as consisting of a body (made from soil from the ground) and breath (given by God). Man's utter "creatureliness" is even more starkly present in the Hebrew of Gen 2:7 than it is in English. For the Hebrew word for "humankind" is *adam* and the Hebrew word for "ground" or the dust of the earth is *adamah*. This underlines, not only the etymological connection of the two, but also emphasizes their theological affinity with each other. Because man is naturally *adamah*, and supernaturally a living being, any act that dehumanizes him and squeezes life out of him by another, evokes a reaction that cries out for vengeance from the *adamah* (ground/dust) to the creator. This is because of the sacramental nature of creation. Nature, generally, both animate and inanimate have God's imprint in them. Thus, when Francis of Assisi identifies God in nature, he was not being pantheistic. He was stating the obvious, namely that nature is sacramental because it tells people about God. This explains why Pope Francis, in his Encyclical: *Laudato Si* encourages us to work together for the good of the ecosystem:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still can work together in building our common home (2015, No. 12).

Human beings working together towards protecting our common home, calls for human solidarity and a culture of love

and acceptance in the human community. For if we refuse to accept one another, any effort towards protecting the environment becomes simply a hypocrisy; for the earth is our common home and not the home of one as against the "other." The relationship between nature and spirituality has a transcendental and ontological basis since everything belongs to God. Hence, humanity will have to give account on how the gift of creation is received and treated; and this includes the gift of one another. The questions God asked Cain are the same questions he asks us every day, even though *ex silentio*, in relation to the ecosystem: "Where is your brother/sister?" "What have you done *to the environment*?" Therefore, eco-spirituality is not only about protecting the environment; it is an attitude towards creation in general, a way of life informed and influenced by our religious values. These values are founded on ontological truths such as: Creation belongs to God (cf. Psalm 24:1); human life is sacred (cf. Ex 20:13; 27:7; Psalm 139:13-14; 1 Cor 3:16-17); love one another (cf. John 15:12; Mark 12:31). Patriarch Bartholomew I captures this complete sense of eco-spirituality in his teaching on the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In his words:

We care for the plants, and for the animals, for the trees and the rivers, for the mountains and the seas, for all human beings and the whole natural environment ... creation on the one hand, and humanity on the other hand, the one that encompasses and the one that is encompassed, cooperate and correspond. As humanity offers creation in the act of priestly service to God, so also does creation offer itself in return as a gift to humanity (2012, 97).

Creation reveals God's love and generosity, This divine generosity beckons on human beings to have a new attitude

towards creation in general. For creation is groaning in pains as it awaits its liberation. And since God listens to the cry of the oppressed as evident in the story of Cain and Abel (cf. Gen 4:10), He will definitely hear the groaning of creation, calling for liberation. Human beings can be agents of this liberation as they relate with their fellow human beings and with the environment as a whole. Therefore, this sacramental approach to human ecology and the ecosystem in general point to the fact that creation is sanctified by various forms of grace. Which means that eco-spirituality draws humanity to the sacramental nature of creation by reminding all that God the Father of creation has left His imprints on the ecosystem, hence, it must be treated or approached with every sense of respect that it deserves (Duke 2020, 37).

Conclusion

Looking at the story of Genesis 4:1-10 from the point of view of Hebrew phenomenology, one realizes that all the times Abel appears in relationship to Cain, it appears as a construct: "his brother" or "your brother". Elizabeth Obara observes here that "in the appendage of "his brother" to Abel, his existence becomes an implicit request to be accepted as a brother" (Obara, 2013, 68). Thus, the story of Cain and Abel tells us that it is not enough for one to be born into the world, his/her continued existence depends on his/her acceptance in the community of brothers and sisters. Therefore, human beings by their very nature are "Abel." They are ephemeral like the morning dew that quickly disappears. Our subsistence as human species lies in our acceptance of one another; in our recognition of the fact that we are one another's keepers. We need to care for one another in order to collectively care for our common home, the earth. The story of the first brothers on earth reveals that it is God's design that human beings be their brother's keeper so that together they

When the earth receives the blood of "a brother": reading the story of cain and abel (genesis 4:1-10) in the light of eco-spirituality

can fulfil their God given mandate to care for the earth. This is the divine pattern: human beings were created and charged with the responsibility to multiply and have stewardship over the earth. Multiplication or fruitfulness also implies the preservation of the human species. If we destroy one another, who then will care for the earth? Herein lies eco-spirituality: *adam's* (humanity's) ability to care for its kind so that together, they can care for the earth; for divine pattern if violated, has severe consequences.

References

- Abraham M. Habermann, M. A. 1957. "Bible and Concordance." In *Introduction to Thesaurus of the Language of the Bible*. Edited by S. E. Loewenstamm. Jerusalem: Bible Concordance Press, 1957.
- Allen, R. - Oswalt, J. 2008. *Genesis, Exodus*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.
- Briscoe, D. S. *et.al.* 1987. *Genesis*. Nashville, Tennessee : Thomas Nelson Inc.
- Brueggemann, W. *Genesis*. Atlanta : John Knox Press, 1982.
- Emmanuel Orok Duke, O. E. 2020. "From Christian spirituality to eco-friendliness." *International Journal for Humanities and Innovation*. 1(3): 34-38.
- Francis, P. 2015. *Laudato Si*. Vatican: Editrice Vaticana.
- Gibson, J. 2001. *Genesis. Volume 1*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Kissling, P. J. 2004. *Genesis*. Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co.
- Mathews, K. A. 2001 *Genesis 1-11:26*. electronic ed. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Speiser, E. 1964. *Genesis*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Vermeulen, K. 2014. "Mind the Gap: Ambiguity in the Story of Cain and Abel." *JBL* 133, (no. 1): 29-42.
- Vriezen, T. C. 1970 *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*. Newton, MA.: Charles T. Branford.
- Wenham, G. 2002. *Genesis 1-15*. WBC. Dallas : Word Incorporated.

Chapter Five

A COSMIC KINSHIP: TOWARDS THE SACRAMENTALITY OF THE ECOSYSTEM

Chukwunonso Obiora, SJ

Society of Jesus

North-West Africa Province

skylimitcc@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

The global environmental change has become a hot-button issue. Ample studies show that our ecological footprint is unsettling the equilibrium of the ecosystem. Through the ecosystem, humans experience God's unfathomable graciousness and providence for our own flourishing and wellbeing. Supposedly, with their intelligence, humans are meant to compensate this God's graciousness with the responsibility of caring, maintaining and safeguarding our common home – the Earth. The recognition of our finitude as creatures shows our limitedness and self-insufficiency, and hence, we need other creatures in the ecosystem for existence. This means that creation is in a constant interaction with humanity and, as a result, interconnected and interdependent. Consequently, the ecosystem forms an organic unit that creates a web of relationship which interconnects all creation. Thus, there is a kinship among all creatures, even as some cultures admits totemism. Therefore, the degradation and over-exploitation of the ecosystem by human activities dislocates the sacredness of totemism and negates the cosmic kinship and sacramentality of all creation. Hence, creation contains an aspect of God – the creator and source of all things.

Keywords: Ecosystem, Interconnectivity, Creatures, Kinship, Sacramentality, Sacred, Totem.

Introduction

We live in a graced world. Our world, the Earth, as a result, is one of the most beautiful planets in the universe. Not only that it sustains life of human, animal and plants but also serves as the common home for all these creatures and more. As it stands, we do not know any other planet that supports life, except the Earth. Like a single unit, just as the fingers form a hand, so do the individual creatures in our cosmic reality, the Earth, constitute a whole. We are all radically interconnected and share mutual dependency with one another for survival.

But recently, the Earth or the entire ecosystem is growing increasingly endangered, and urgent action is needed. The Scripture speaks about human relationship with and responsibility to the Earth's ecosystem, our common home, yet humanity continues to plunder, deface and grapple largely with the earth-keeping. The human's current lavish lifestyle is becoming endemic to the ecosystem such that the future looks blurred and unsustainable.

The human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases produce intense stress and anxiety on the entire creatures on the Earth ecosystem. If science by itself fails to motivate the kind of expansive change needed to make a significant impact on the eco-crisis, then Christianity bears substantial responsibility for this moment of crisis such that the re-interpretation of some scriptural passage can engender possible solution to human intervention.

Importantly, the ecosystem represents a system of signs which derives and discovers its full intrinsic meaning and telos in the creator as the common origin of all beings. Thus, God created human beings in a way that “they cannot live, develop and find fulfilment except in the sincere gift of self to others”¹ – in love with the rest of creation.

This paper seeks to explore the interconnectivity and interdependency of all creation, how it gives rise to cosmic kinship of the ecosystem and the plausibility of human extinction if the anthropogenic mutilation of the rest of creation lingers. Herein, the ecosystem and the environment are used interchangeably to refer to the mutual relationship existing between nature and the human society which lives in it.

Eco-Crisis and Christianity

Human beings as part of creation operate within ecosystems. Their unfriendly or anti-ecological activities cumulatively affect the whole globe such that the climate is also affected. The ecological crisis has been attributed as a direct result of human exploitation of the entire ecosystem as if humans are separable from the ecosystem. We use methods of production and consumption that destabilizes the survival and equilibrium of the environmental species in our ecological niche. We need our ecological niche for survival just like our lungs need oxygen. Burning of fossil fuel, nuclear plant explosion, throwaway culture and many more generates incredible amount of pollution which belabors the Earth by creating precarious ecological crisis globally. The rise in temperature has become extremely unbearable causing the melting of the glaciers and the increase of sea levels. This makes the entire ecosystem exposed and

¹ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), 22.

vulnerable to floods in one part of the earth's hemisphere whereas the other hemisphere is challenged by unprecedented drought as a result of human activities.

The Historian, Lynn White Jr., blames Christianity as the root cause of the earth's ecological crisis. He asserts that this Western Christianity is "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen."² This overemphasis on anthropocentrism gives humans the impetus to exploit the earth in a mood of indifference to the integrity of creation. White argues that within Christian theology, creation has no intrinsic value except to serve humans. Thus, for White, Christian arrogance towards the Earth is hugely responsible for the contemporary ecological crisis.

According to White, the emphasis is that the interpretation of Genesis 1:26 can provide a justification for exploitation of the rest of creation irrespective of its consequences. In Genesis, when God considers the creation of humans, God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (Gen 1:26). It is the interpretation of the term "dominion" of humanity over the rest of creation that makes Christians culprit of the attitude that denigrates the importance of nature. His point is not that Christianity inevitably leads to an arrogant disregard towards nature. Rather, he argues that historically, Christianity has permitted a blatant disregard for the environment.

However, somehow, I believe White missed the theological point contained in the creation stories of Genesis. It is a grave

² Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Root of Ecological Crisis" *Science* 155, no. 3767 (Mar. 1967): 1203-1207, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.155.3767.1203>.

misunderstanding for critics like him to accent that this narrative of origins is interpreted in this particular manner by Christians. At the end of Genesis 1, “God saw everything that had been made and indeed, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). We cannot take the rest of the ecosystem as an inert reality that may be exploited for our own gain as if they do not have an intrinsic value. Rather, the creation narrative shows the special relationship that humans have with God, to mean that humans are the perfection of creation and acts as stewards, or caretakers, of the Earth. Put differently, human stewardship of creation is a central theme in the Genesis narrative of creation especially in Genesis 2:15, “... settled in the garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it”.

In addition, Richard Clifford clarifies the uniqueness of God-human relationship in the creation narrative, thus, “humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.”³ Humans are God’s counterpart as well as oriented towards God. Hence, we are entrusted with the management and safeguarding of the rest of creation with which we are functionally and ontologically linked with. This God-human relationship also entails that the ecosystem cannot be perceived as an object to be exploited by humans, but rather, a companion for humanity – a single family from a single source. Pope Francis in his encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*, urges every person living on this planet to protect the Earth, our “Common Home”. He advances that the Earth is God’s gift to us which is full of beauty and wonder, and we must shut down all anthropogenic activities inimical to Earths’ sustainability. In other words, Earth’s resources have made humans advance at an unimaginable rate, but we have mistreated the Earth as if its resources are unlimited.

³ Richard J. Clifford, “The Hebrew Scriptures and The Theology of Creation” *Theological Studies* 46, (Sept. 1985): 507-523, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056398504600303>.

The pope advocates for the care of our Common Home. He urges Christians, and some other believers as well, to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. The pope maintains that the simple fact of being human entails that people should care for the environment of which they are a part. In this case, Christians in their turn should “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.”⁴ The latter point dismisses the critique of White that Christianity permits disregard of the earthly ecosystem.

Also, in response to White and other critics, the dominion which is bestowed on humans is “nothing except the power and authority to care for, to nurture and to develop the whole world.”⁵ This development is not in detriment to the rest of creation. We must understand that what makes us “truly human is the distinctive ability to acknowledge, appreciate and delight in the reality of all other creation as the other, and to care for them.”⁶ The dominion over creation does not mean lording it over them, but as God’s representatives to sustain, respect and lovingly care for them.

For some people, of course, integrated perspective of the world offers humans a better way of relating with the ecosystem. However, anthropogenic climate change as an indirect human effect poses challenges to the wildlife. The rapidity of this changes undulates the adaptability of plants and animals leading to future crisis, and eventually they collapse. Also, this change and direct human effects do not act independently but

⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato si': Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 46.

⁵ John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991), 17.

⁶ Sachs, 17.

synergistically reinforcing each other's effects. This means that whatever action that humans create that affects the environment automatically creates a feedback that affects humanity, and it disrupts the integrated cosmic view. It is indicative of the interconnectivity and interdependency of all creation, humans inclusive.

It is difficult to cut the kernel of the ecological crisis with a paper knife without facing the consequences. Thus, human-induced eco-crisis has caused widespread suffering and death, particularly among the poor and marginalized who are least able to cope with rapid changes. We apparently resist the grace to see the aesthetic value that lies in the ecosystem in all its forms. Hyun-Chul Cho opines: "We must replace the dualistic way of seeing the world, which splits the world into humanity and nature, by an ecological way of viewing the world, which grasps a reality primarily in the light of relationship."⁷ If we acknowledge that the glory of God is in man and woman fully alive, then we need to care for our Common Home if we wish to actualize the fullness of our wellbeing. Then, rethinking and reimagining new ways of production and consumption which are ecologically sustainable should be our noble venture.

Thus, the action of maltreating the Earth is global and cannot be restricted only to a particular religion, race or nationality. It is the action of humans all over the world, and the consequences has no borders and has collateral damage. It affects both high and low, but the poor are mostly afflicted. By disturbing the ecological balance, we upset God's plan, we delay his purpose of making a habitable place in which humans, his chosen creatures, may flourish.

⁷Hyun-Chul Cho, *An Ecological Vision of the World: Toward a Christian Ecological Theology for Our Age* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2004), 156.

Cosmic Sacredness and Anthropocentric Eco-Desecration

Genesis 1:31 makes us understand that after the completion of the work of creation, God evaluated his work and was pleased with it because it was in perfect conformity with his divine wisdom – everything created was very good. Hence, creation is graced. Richard Lennan observes that “if all that exist is graced, then each of us is all interconnected to all that exist”⁸ which then includes: plants, animals, water, soil and air just to mention a few. As humans then, we encounter, interact and are in communion with God, and the rest of creation. It means then that every person and everything counts, the ecosystem inclusive, because of God who has graced creation.

However, human beings chose to adopt features that encourages the desecration of the ecosystem in the name of capitalism. Capitalism encourages consumerism in order to maximize profit. Capitalistic society does not care whose ox is God’s in its attempt to amass wealth to the detriment of creation. It is difficult to propose an alternative viewpoint in an excessively profit-oriented society. We cannot deny the level of profiteering that pervades our society today. After all, some of us gain from the socio-economic structure of the ailing and broken world. A world broken by unquenchable appetite for destruction of the ecosystem through excessive exploitation of its natural resources.

The health effects and deplorable condition of creation due to over exploitation of the Earth has not served as deterrent to our capitalistic society. This capitalistic society apparently prefers the instrumental value of nature more than its intrinsic value. Treating the ecosystem harshly and abusing nonhuman nature

⁸ Richard Lennan, Recorded Lecture on Graced Humanity, September 7, 2020.

leads to the fragmentation of reality. In this fragmentation, human relationship with the ecosystem has become “I” and “It” instead of “I” and “Thou”. Rather than understanding the interdependency of all things, the ecosystem is perceived as a physical reservoir of raw materials to be used exploitatively for profiteering only – “an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere ‘given’, as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape.”⁹

This discourse earlier mentioned that humanity is functionally and ontologically connected with other nonhuman realities in the ecosystem because no creature is self-sufficient, thus, interdependency. But recent global technological mindset admits only the functional dimension of this interdependency, and it desecrates and flagellates the ecosystem. Consequently, interdependency amongst creation which would have been the binding factor of all things in the ecosystem is thwarted. We must not forget that just as fish is dependent on water for survival so also is humanity dependent on oxygen from the environment. There is mutual interdependency, and so, each entity in the ecosystem needs the other, and together they all form a whole organic unit. Consequently, any undue anthropogenic maltreatment of the ecosystem affects us all.

Hence, an ecological or eco-systemic paradigm, which perceives the entire world as one and in constant interaction because of the interdependency and interconnectivity of all creation, will keep the organic unity of the ecosystem intact. Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes writing as regards environmental theology observe as follows: “The nonhuman world has been given to human beings for our good, to be used responsibly for our self-

⁹Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 86.

development, to answer to our purposes and thus to fulfill God's purpose in creating it."¹⁰ So, the intrinsic value of the ecosystem never ceases to unveil the presence of the Creator seemingly hidden within.

Desecrating the sacred, our Common Home, will always affect the flourishing of humanity. Leonardo Boff observes that denying the sense of the sacred will always jeopardize the aptitude of achieving a conducive ecosystem. Hence, he posits: "Without the sacred, affirming the dignity of Earth and the need to set limits on our desire to exploit its potentialities remains empty rhetoric."¹¹ The intended sacred here means the transcendental aura that entrances us and leaves us in wonder and amazement. It is a kind of experience that captures the depth of the teleological identity of the ecosystem that looks forward beyond the physicality of the ecosystem.

If humans become conscious of this sacredness, we may rediscover how creation is permeated and imbued by God. How he fills the ecosystem and communicates his own being within it, and so, animates it. In this light, Bernard Cooke states thus, "In itself the gift of being constitutes a very profound relationship, because it implies community in life."¹² In maintaining the sacredness of the communal existence of all things we perceive the divine. It is the communion in the sacredness of the ecosystem that I refer to sacramentality of the ecosystem because

¹⁰Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. Himes, "The Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology" *Commonweal*,

January 26, 1990, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/sacrament-creation-toward-environmental-theology> (accessed: November 5, 2020).

¹¹ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 115.

¹² Bernard J. Cooke, *Christian Sacraments and Christian Personality*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 55.

the ecosystem, as a sacred reality, becomes an avenue through which God's immanence is revealed to humanity.

In his seminal work, *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, Laurenti Magesa emphasizes that the sacred cannot be individualized as to concern only humans, but should be understood in its communal context. This implies that the entire ecosystem, which is the community of all things, is an integral part of what is sacred. Thus, the community is really what is sacred because the individual things (human and nonhuman) in the ecosystem derive their genuine sacredness from the community. He observes, "Since humanity cannot exist without and apart from the universe, this must include the sacredness of the universe."¹³ The universe which serves as the community is also heir of sacredness.

Albeit, humanity serves as the intelligible consciousness of the ecosystem, one essence of this sacredness of the community is to maintain a cosmic balance of both human and nonhuman entities in creation. African spirituality understands this sacredness in communal sense, and so observes some rites, rituals, gestures, places, animals, trees and many other things ¹⁴within an ecosystem community as sacred. In view of this sacredness of ecosystem as a community, Teilhard de Chardin points out that creation shares with humanity as part of what is sanctified since humanity is interconnected with creation in the ecosystem. This is why any anthropogenic desecration of the environment in one part of the world, ripples all over the world and affects everything.

¹³ Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2014), 176.

Cosmic Kinship: Unity in Diversity

The grandeur life of Francis of Assisi portrays a lived relationship with the rest of creation. It implies that nothing on the Earth's ecosystem occur by chance. All things in this ecosystem and in history are related and unified in the heart of God. As a result, Francis loves all creation such that he refers to them as his brothers and sisters. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis remarks "St. Francis response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection."¹⁵ His outstanding fraternal care and sensitivity to creation due to his perception of God in them initiates the foundation for cosmic kinship.

Therefore, cosmic kinship refers to the acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of all things and the presence of the divine in them. Saint Francis is able to identify especially the nexus between humans and the rest of creation which necessarily leads to God. The interior disposition of Saint Francis towards creation may help humanity reclaim the lost sensibility concerning the holistic unity of all things: the experience with God, with Jesus Christ and with the Spirit in creation.

A deep personal relationship with God marks the focus of the cosmic kinship of Saint Francis. His familiarity with God moved him to perceive the divine in everything around him. He knows that the entire ecosystem, humans inclusive, are penetrated by God. In this cosmic unity, things in the ecosystem becomes a mystery and agents of salvation. John Haught corroborates the latter statement by highlighting: "The promise residing in the

¹⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 10.

present state of nature is what obliges us to treasure it.”¹⁶ The promise in this case lies in salvation through envisioning the glory of God, and the grandeur of creation.

Cosmic kinship provides us with an insight to the vision promised by God. Therefore, if we impede the complete blossoming of the ecosystem, we may strangulate God’s promise to us embedded in the ecosystem. Through cosmic kinship we perceive the promise, the sacrament of a glory that is not completely revealed, but with an archetype veiled in creation. Hence, our participation in safeguarding the ecosystem penetrated by God enables us to encounter salvation.

Human beings cannot by themselves reach God directly. We can reach God together with the ecosystem or things in creation. God mediates and communicates himself to us through created realities. In other words, our experience of God is always sacramental. Sacramentality here represents the quality inherent in creation, which is filled with power to open our hearts to the presence of God. With the latter in mind, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin highlights: “To experience the attraction of God in creation, to be utterly sensible of the beauty, the consistency and the final unity of beings, is the highest and the same time the most complete of our passivity of growth.”¹⁷ The invisible God who draws humanity towards himself becomes transparent in the ecosystem so that humanity can be divinized. It is sensible then that although all creation may have different attributes, but they are bounded together by their source of origin – unity in diversity.

¹⁶ John F. Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 114.

¹⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1960), 131.

Human-Creation Cosmic Kinship and its Implication

Kinship refers to that network of culturally and socially defined relationships between individuals who are commonly thought of as having family ties. Kinship makes classification of people and forming of social groups possible because of shared characteristics. It forms an important part of the lives of all humans in all societies, although its exact meanings as regards human-creation relationships are often debated.

In view of the latter, Gordon Kaufman holds that “we will come much closer to articulating the fundamental assumptions about the nature of the human which are widely accepted today if we speak of our interconnectedness and interdependence with all other forms of life...and of our cultural creativity in history, producing a thoroughly cultural form of existence.”¹⁸ It means that human beings may be understood as creatures that relate to one another and experience the world within interrelated biological and historical spheres. So, human beings are not distinctive from their biological world, but are rooted in it, and yet a mystery.

Within a culture, some descent groups may be considered to lead back to deities, animal or plant ancestors called totems. Totem is referred in this context as a non-physical being; a sacred object; a force of nature (land, sea, air) or a symbol that serves as a mark of a group of people, such as a family, clan, lineage, or tribe. Some descent groups claim a common ancestry with their totem. The members of a totem have a sacred duty not to destroy or consume their totem no matter the circumstance. It is a punishable offence if any member of the descent group violates this sacred obligation.

¹⁸ Gordon D. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 109.

Many a time, festivals are organized by Igbos in Nigeria at which the members of a totem demonstrate in ceremonial dances, the movements, and characteristics of their totems. In other words, totems are seen as companions, relatives, protector or helpers and also ascribed supernatural powers and capabilities. Elsewhere, a kind of respect and veneration is offered to totems because they are family members or deities respectively. This shared or common unity provides a kind of respect and care for all things in the ecosystem.

One benefit of kinship is that it provides an intelligible way of understanding our interdependence in the environment by widening the boundaries of human community to include all other creatures in our ecosystem. In this regard, Walter Klassen proposes, "We are co-creatures with animals and trees, water and air, and cannot exist independently."¹⁹ Kinship as a relational pattern values human relatedness and mutual dependence over individualism. To be completely human entails being in a relationship with others, that is being in community with creation.

Human interdependence with all creation is therefore made possible by our kinship. One can see that the common good of every human being is inseparable from the common good of all creation in the ecosystem, and that solidarity is extendable to all other nonhuman species. This interdependency due to the interconnectivity of humans with other nonhuman species shows cosmic kinship of all creation, and that through creation, God may be experienced. In this case, God chooses the works of his creation in our ecosystem to be the outward sign of his

¹⁹ Walter Klassen, "Pacifism, Nonviolence, and the Peaceful Reign of God," in *Creation and Environment: An Anabaptist Perspective on a Sustainable World*, ed. Calvin Redekop (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 153.

presence, and also a mystical emblem that points to him, the creator.

Conclusion

Substantially, the Earth is not made up of human beings alone. In other words, humans have cosmic kinship with the rest of creation. This proximate interconnection, between humans and the entire creation, is a significant reminder of our interdependency with the ecosystem; because creation is of God, all of creation (human and nonhuman) therefore is a sacrament that connects to God. This truth is expressed in the admirable life of Saint Francis of Assisi over time, from whom humanity can learn that with a loving and pure heart, we can perceive the connection with all of creation. I think that this interconnection is not just emotional; it is deeply spiritual, and offers a sense of community and redemptive continuity, and also a profound expression of identity and compassion with all of creation in the ecosystem.

Therefore, while interacting with the ecosystem, human beings are to bear in mind that they have been entrusted with this extraordinary gift for their own flourishing: to help us treasure this goodness of God since it is a product of love. Henceforth, we need to desist from maltreating the ecosystem. Mindful of this, we can substitute capitalistic consumerism and carefree wastefulness with a spirit of sharing and discovery, so giving and not always taking from the Earth, our Common Home. The invitation is to acknowledge the Earth as a sacrament of communion where we encounter God, and also share with our neighbors this divine gift of cosmic kinship.

Bibliography

- Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. New York: Orbis Books, 1997.
- Chardin, Pierre Teilhard de. *The Divine Milieu*. New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1960.
- Cho, Hyun-Chul. *An Ecological Vision of The World: Towards a Christian Ecological Theology for Our Age*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2004.
- Clifford, Richard J. "The Hebrew Scriptures and The Theology of Creation." *Theological Studies*, 1985: 507-523.
- Cook, Bernard J. *Christian Sacraments and Christian Personality*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.
- Haught, John F. *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose*. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.
- Himes, Michael J. Himes and Kenneth R. *Commonweal*. January 26, 1990.
<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/sacrament-creation-toward-environmental-theology> (accessed November 5, 2020).
- Kaufman, Gordon D. *In Face of Mystery: A Costructive Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Klassen, Walter. *Pacifism, Nonviolence, and the Peaceful Reign of God*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Magesa, Laurenti. *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*. Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2014.
- Pope, Francis. *Fratelli Tutti: Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020.
- . *Laudato si': Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.
- Sachs, John R. *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1991.

Chukwunonso Obiora, SJ

White, Lynn. "The Historical Root of Ecological Crisis." *Science*,
1967: 1203-1207.

Chapter Six

ALA DEITY IN IGBO-AFRICAN RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1977-202X

Executive Summary

The interconnectedness of reality is a major characteristic of the Igbo world. This interconnectedness is the reason why an imbalance in some aspect of nature could have resounding consequences in other areas where it might not be expected. The Igbo world is divided into two spheres: *uwa ndi mmuo* (the world of the spirits) and *uwa ndi di ndu* (the world of human beings). The two worlds are interconnected and continue to influence one another. The living act carefully so as not to upset the spirit world and cause imbalance in the order of things, while the benevolent spiritual forces work to ensure that the world remains in balance. In the spiritual world are *Chukwu* (the Supreme Being), the ancestors (the living dead), malevolent spirits (bed spirits), primordial spiritual forces like *Anyanwu* (the sun god), *Amadioha* (the god of thunder), *Agwu* (the god of divination), *Mmuo Mmiri* and *Igwe* (the sky god). However, in the earth is *Ani/Ala* goddess, who is believed to reside in the earth. While there are a few papers written on *Ala* deity, there is hardly literature that discusses its relationship with the eco-system or its ecological relevance. This paper, therefore, focusses on *Ala* deity, which is one of the most important gods in the pantheon of Igbo gods and goddess, especially before the encounter of the

west with the Igbo-African people in the 19th century. It studies the place of *Ala* deity in the approach of the Igbo traditional society in preserving the environment and how this indigenous approach can be of help in our age of ecological crisis. The phenomenological and analytic methods of investigation were employed during the course of this research. It discovered that through belief in *Ala* deity, Igbo traditional societies were able and can still maintain a respectful relationship with the environment.

Keywords: *Ala* Deity, *Nso Ala*, Environment, Ecology, Ecosystem, Sustainability

Introduction

The Igbo world is one of interconnectedness: everything is connected to everything and there is no aspect of reality that is independent of the other. An imbalance in nature could, therefore, have consequences even in areas where not expected. The world is divided into two spheres: *uwa ndi mmuo* (the world of the spirits) and *uwa ndi di ndu* (the world of human beings). The two worlds, as a result of their interconnectedness, continue to influence one another. The living act carefully so as not to upset the spirit world and cause imbalance in the order of things. In the spiritual world are *Chukwu* (the Supreme Being), ancestors (the living dead), benevolent spirits, malevolent spirits (bed spirits), primordial spiritual forces like *Anyanwu* (the sun god), *Amadioha* (the god of thunder), *Agwu* (the god of divination), and *Igwe* (the sky god). However, in the earth is *Ala* the earth goddess, who is believed to reside in the earth.

This paper focusses on *Ala* deity, which is one of the most important spiritual forces in the pantheon of Igbo gods and goddess, especially before the encounter of the West with the

Igbo-African people in the 19th century. Her stamp of authority made many customs and traditions valid. Actions that ran contrary to these traditions and customs were known as *nso ala* or *nso ani*, and were regarded as desecration of the earth which is her dwelling place. Based on this indigenous approach, the Igbo-African people were able to protect and preserve the environment, especially the resources connected to the earth. With the advent of modernity and Western consumeristic approach, exploitation of nature took the center stage and the spiritual relationship between the Igbo-African and the mother earth degenerated. This paper, therefore, studies the place of *Ala* deity in the sustainability of the environment, especially in our age of ecological crisis.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that will be employed for this work so as to determine its framework is the indigenization theory. It is a concept that is very popular within anthropology, and simply means making something more native so that it suits the local culture or people. This transformation is considered necessary when what is being indigenized has been taken from an external culture. It was first used in 1951 in relation to the work of Christian missionaries among local people in India (Oxford English Dictionary 2021), with reference to making the Christian church indigenous to the Indians (Butler 1951). It has been used generally in relation to the adoption of the English language and the colonial culture. Schineller (1990), while proposing what should constitute the relationship between Christianity and local cultures, describes indigenization thus:

The local community, with its own indigenous leadership, has the primary responsibility and task of developing the teaching, liturgy, and practice of that local Church. Outside help may be needed at the beginning and at key

stages, but the major work is done by the local Church as it develops its own identity based on its own cultural heritage and situation. (p. 18).

In the area of eco-spirituality, African eco-spirituality is a process of the indigenization of eco-spirituality. While eco-spirituality is general, indigenization is the particularization of eco-spirituality. It is in this regard that the incorporation of African traditional religious thoughts and images such as *Ala* deity is introduced into the discussion on eco-spirituality. The purpose of this is to communicate eco-spirituality in the language that the Igbo-African understands, using categories that are common to him or her, or a part of his or her worldview. For a better understanding of the process of indigenizing eco-spirituality through the employment of *Ala* deity as an Igbo-African religious category, there is the need to understand what *Ala* deity stands for in Igbo traditional religion.

***Ala* Deity in Igbo Religion**

Ala also referred to as *Ani*, depending on the Igbo dialect, is the most important deity in Igbo public and private cults this is because her sphere of authority extends to virtually every field or aspect of human endeavor. Everything that was done in Igbo traditional society had a bearing to the earth. She is the sole daughter of *Chukwu* and is believed to have made the ground and the vegetable kingdom. In the contention of Ogbukagu (2008), *Ala* as the most important deity in Igbo traditional religion:

The *Ana* is *ipso facto*, the earth-divinity of the Igbo speaking peoples. It is the great mother goddess, the spirit of fertility and the queen of the under-world. It is generally believed to be the most powerful of all divinities who is also the custodian of public morality, assisted by the ancestors. (p. 385)

Onwu (2002) further describes *Ala* thus:

Of all the divinities, *Ala*-the Earth goddess is generally worshipped in Igbo land as the arch-divinity and seen as the goddess of fertility and guardian of Igbo morality, a power which controls - divinities and a force which brings fortune and economic prosperity. (p. 2).

In some places, Kalu (2003) observes that beautiful shrines or worship places are made for *Ala*:

Decorative shrines are built for the goddess. In other places, with plentiful expanse of agricultural land, a non-descript mound may serve. But in all she guards customs and morality. She arbitrates disputes because a false oath in her shrine could be dangerous (p. 35).

According to Odigbo (2012), there is a bond between every child and the *Ala* deity, which determines further relationships between the deity and the member of the Igbo community:

There is a relationship between the child and the goddess of the land. In fact, children were bonded to the land during some rituals and ceremonies. It is for this reason that such a child would be warned not to swear any false oath with the land or commit the stated taboos or all such things. Under such environments too, lands are worshipped as goddess of fruitfulness. Such goddesses make conception possible even for crops to grow to maturity to provide food for its inhabitants... it is almost as if there is a covenant between every child of the community and the goddess of the land. This relationship is spiritual and eternal. Therefore, whenever anything affects this relationship by means of grievous sin or crime then, it is considered an abomination. (p. 451).

The earth goddess has the function of exposing those who secretly commit evil and the evils they commit. It is in this regard that the Igbo say:

- a. *Ani tukwa gi* – may the earth expose you.
- b. *Ani bokwa gi ji n'aja* – which literally means “may the earth put yam and sand on your head”. This means, “may the earth goddess render you miserable and expose your shame”.
- c. *Ani jukwa gi* - (may the earth reject your corpse).

In Igbo land, the earth is holy, and from it, God produces all living things, including human beings. It is also through this earth that human beings rejoin their maker – *Chineke*. When a man therefore, commits a crime, he is said to have “*Meruo Ala*” (defiled the earth). If such a person dies without having “*Mejuo Ala*” (pacified the earth), the earth goddess whose function it is to expose people’s atrocities will reject the corpse of such a person. When the person is buried, the earth goddess throws up the corpse out of the belly of the earth. In this case, the bereaved are left with the option of cremation. The implication being that the soul of the person is destroyed and will never reincarnate. For such a soul, the Igbo would say: *enu erughi ya aka, ani erughi ya aka*, meaning that he has no share in the sky or earth. They end up as wicked spirits (Kanu 2015). Among the offences against *Ala* deity from the perspective of Achebe (1958) and Ilogu (1978) include:

- a. **Suicide:** Life is sacred and must be treated as such. When suicide is committed, the *Ala* goddess must be appeased for the restoration of balance to the earth.
- b. **Incest:** This is a grave sin to *Ala* and the consequences include deafness, blindness, paralysis, extreme poverty to death.

- c. **Stealing:** It is a sin against *Ala* to take what belongs to another without the consent of the owner.
- d. **Murder:** Spilling of the blood of another person is a sin against *Ala*. Especially when it has got to do with an innocent blood.
- e. **Fornication:** *Ala* forbids sexual relationship between persons who are not married or between persons who are married but are not spouse to each other.
- f. **Exploitation of nature:** Nature is considered sacred, the exploitation of it is frowned at by *Ala* deity. Nature in this context include some animals, streams, rivers and forests, etc.

While *Chukwu* is in charge of creation, *Ala* is in charge of conserving that which is created. While *Chukwu* is the giver of the moral law, *Ala* is the enforcer of the law. *Ala* is also the “womb” that holds and nurtures and renews when necessary. This explains why she is always depicted in diagrams as though she is pregnant:

The *Igbo*, an agrarian people, regard her as the “mother” of all crops. Before planting and harvest, they hold days of ritual ceremonies to appease *Ala* so that she will facilitate the growth of healthy crops or to thank her for making possible the abundant harvest soon to begin. In a year of drought or other agricultural misfortunes, the people undertake ritual processes meant to examine how they may have angered *Ala* and caused her to withhold her blessings. After they look for wrongdoing on the part of humans, they seek scientific explanations for crop failures. When religious and natural explanations conflict, mythical narratives are used to overcome contradictions (Kanu 2013).

Ecological Significance of *Ala* Deity

The preservation of the ecosystem by the Igbo occupies a fundamental place in the life, religion and culture of the people (Afigbo, 1975a; Jones, 1961). This explains why *Ani*, the Earth, occupies an important place in the Igbo story of religion and rituals. The *Ani*, as a deity when provoked could destroy the central life of the Igbo which is hinged on agriculture. Afigbo (1975a) writes that the provocation of *Ani* could:

... cause the harvests to fail and men to die prematurely to the Igbo two of the worst disasters imaginable. It imposed innumerable laws and taboos to guide conduct between man and man, as between man and itself. The transgression of any of these rules known as *omenala* was promptly punished (pp. 42-43).

While the centrality of agriculture could account for the important place that *Ani* occupies among the Igbo, the land is also used by the Igbo for buildings, constructions, infrastructural developments, etc., (Kalu, 2003). There are also scholars who attribute the importance of *Ala* in Igbo society to the scarcity of land especially in the Northern part of Igboland (Afigbo, 1981; Allison, 1962; Hartle, 1967; Ijoma, 2002) which was the first part of Igboland to be occupied by human beings as far back as the Neolithic age or 3rd Century BC (Ezechi 2018; Hartle, 1967). With the important place that this deity occupies in Igbo life, it is difficult to discuss ecological issues without reference to her.

As a result of the relationship between the land and *Ala* deity, keeping the land sacred is a prerequisite for maintaining balance in the earth. The land is not just a solid part of the universe, it is a mother that is the abode of the living and the dead as human beings come from it and are buried in its belly. It is also regarded as a person and not just a thing to be used when needed. It is a person deserving of respect and care. This idea of person comes

from the Igbo understanding of the earth as a manifestation of a great spirit that dwells therein, that is, the *Ala*. What *Ala* deity does for the earth and its relationship with the human person is that it gives the land or earth a personal identity that has consciousness, which is fundamental for a healthy relationship with the earth.

This spiritual understanding of the earth and the world around helped the human person believe that people belong to the land and not the land to the people. Understanding the earth as a mother, they also saw the land as a source of life which nourishes, supports, and teaches. It provides people with resources for their survival and gave a sense of future to their life as life came from within the earth.

As a person, the earth has great representation among the Igbo people, and as such can speak through her representatives in the human world, that is the sacred personalities that serve the *Ala* deity. The land can also be heard since these sacred personalities speak in the language that the Igbo-African understand. This representation helps the human community to feel the land and relate with the land in such a manner that the balance of the earth is maintained. Within the context of representation, given that the earth is represented or is a manifestation of a great spirit, it receives an attention worthy of the great spirit it manifests.

In this relationship between traditional Igbo society and the earth, the understanding of the earth as mother brings in a new dimension to this relationship. Motherhood introduces the concepts of respect, love, care, empathy, support, patience, etc., in the relationship between human beings and the mother earth. These qualities, especially love, empathy, care, respect, etc., are indispensable for the promotion of the good health of the earth

in our modern world, given the very nature of the ecological crisis at hand. These concepts of care, respect, support, empathy, etc., which are missing in the current relationship between human beings and nature are at the heart of the ecological crisis. Another understanding of the earth goddess that has helped the Igbo traditional society to maintain balance in the earth is the understanding of themselves as tenants in a world whose landlord is *Ala*. And as tenants, one must be of good conduct so as to avoid been thrown out of the earth. This brings in the idea of obedience and submission in the relationship between human beings and the earth, not in such a manner that the human person becomes passive, but rather in such a manner that the human person enters into dialogue with the earth in his or her relationship with it. A very important principle that sustains the respect that the Igbo has for the earth is the understanding that whatever the human person sows, that he or she would reap at the end of the day. If the human person sows exploitation, he or she would reap the fruit of disaster. This makes environmental preservation a way of life at different levels: at the family level, community level, age grade level (Orji 1999, Abduftai et al 2014, Afigbo 1992, Odogwu 2013, Egboka 2000, Ogbonna 2009).

A concept used by scholars to express the Igbo-African connection to the earth is the image of the umbilical cord. It is the umbilical cord that links a child to its mother in her womb and cannot survive without this connection to the mother in the womb. Outside of the womb when the child has been born, the umbilical cord is buried immediately in the earth without which the child cannot survive in the world. Thus Megasa (2015) avers that “In many African cultures, when it is cut after the birth of a child, the umbilical cord is buried in a special place in the homestead, to signify the belonging of the new-born not only to the clan and its spirits, but also to the ancestral soil from which

it should normally not be alienated” (122). Just as a woman carefully carries the fetus linked to her through the umbilical cord, the human person is also linked to the mother earth. While in the womb, the death of the mother implies the death of the child, in the same way, while on the earth, the death of the earth spells the death of the human person. In the implication of destroying the mother earth for Magesa (20156) is “the death of humanity in the long run. By destroying nature, humanity slowly loses belonging. It has nowhere to belong to, no other place to call home, and no ambiance to deeply and meaningfully connect with in life and with which to enter into communion after death” (pp. 122-123).

Conclusion

The present work is an academic commitment or engagement on an issue of global concern, which is the relationship between the human person and the natural world, with specific attention on the earth. In dealing with this issue, is accorded the earth a powerful agency and influence in the physical and spiritual worlds, and therefore, worthy of respect and care; it also reveals the intricate connection between the Igbo traditional society and nature. This piece is more than a cultural conception of the earth among the Igbo-African people, it reveals the limitedness of the Western approach to issues of ecology and the need to build a more dynamic and inclusive approach towards the saving of the earth.

What the Western world simply calls ‘nature’ and defined in its broadest sense as the physical or material world or universe, in African traditional religion now becomes a spirit to be related with and respected. What is simply referred to as earth in Western understanding becomes the manifestation of a great spirit. What is seen as a thing to be exploited and used for

economic increase, now becomes in Igbo traditional society a mother who cares and who must be respected; a mother who loves, and who must be supported; a womb that carries the living-dead and thus must be venerated. This is the new perspective that an understanding of *Ala* deity brings into the global discussion on the sustainability of the environment.

References

- Abduftai et al (2014). *Review of gully erosion in Nigeria: Causes, impacts and possible solutions*.
<http://www.pubs.sciencepub.com>
- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958.
- Afigbo, A. (1975). Prolegomena to the Study of the Cultural History of the Igbo - Speaking Peoples of Nigeria. In F. C .Ogbalu & E. Emenanjo (Eds.), *Igbo Language and Culture* (pp. 28 - 34). Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Afigbo, A. (1981). *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.
- Afigbo, A. E. (1992). *Ground work of Igbo history*.
<http://www.booksgoogle.com>
- Allison, P. (1962). Historical Inferences to be Drawn from the Effect of Human Settlement on the Vegetation of Africa. *Journal of African History*, 3, 241-249
- Butler, J. F. (1951). The Indian research series. *The Occasional Bulletin*. 11. 2. 1-8
- Egboka, B. (2000). *Gully erosion in alaigbo*.
<http://www.umuigboland.com>. Vol. 4. Washington.
- Ezechi, J. C. (2018). *Idols or Symbols*. Enugu: Enugu Diocesan Printing Press.
- Hartle, D. (1967). Archeology in Eastern Nigeria. *Nigeria Magazine*, 93, 134-143.
- Ijoma, J. (2002). Igboland: A Historical Perspective. In G.E.K. Ofomata (Ed.), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation* (pp. 39-54). Onitsha: Africana First Publishers.
- Ilogu, Edmund. *Christianity and Ibo Culture*. Boston: Brill, 1974.
- Jones, G. (1961). Ecology and Social Structure Among the North Eastern Ibo. *Africa*, 1 (31) 117-134.
- Kalu, O. (2003). *The Embattled Gods: Christianization of Igboland, 1841-1991*. New Jersey: African World Press Inc.

- Kanu, I. A. (2013). The Dimensions of African Cosmology. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. 2. 2. 533-555.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- Kanu, I. A. (2015b). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- Magesa, L. (2015). African Spirituality and the Environment: Some Principles, Theses, and Orientations. *Hekima Review*, n. 53, December 2015, 119-129.
- Odigbo, Ikechukwu M. *Aspects of Igbo Cultures and Traditions from the Perspective of Umulumgbe Town*. Enugu: Dulacs Co. Ltd, 2012.
- Odogwu, E. (2013). *As erosion brings Anambra to her knees*. <http://www.punchngr.com>
- Ogbonna, R. (2009). *Erosion: Communities at the brink of extinction*. <http://www.nairaland.com>
- Ogbukagu, IK N.T. *Traditional Igbo Beliefs and Practices: A Study on the Culture and People of Adazi-Nnukwu*. Enugu: Snaap Press, 2008.
- Onwu, E. N. (2002). *ỤzỌ ndỤ na eziokwu: Towards an Understanding of Igbo Traditional Religious Life and Philosophy*. <http://ahiajoku.igbonet.com/2002>.
- Orji, M. O. (1999). *History and culture of the Igbo people*. Nkpor: Jet Publishers
- Oxford English Dictionary (2021). *Indigenization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schineller, P. (1990). *A handbook on inculturation*. New York: Paulist.

Chapter Seven

LAUDATO SI' AT 5: RECEPTION IN AFRICA AND DECADE-LONG ACTIONABLE GOALS

Raymond Olusesan Aina, MSP, PhD

The National Missionary Seminary of St Paul,

Gwagwalada – ABUJA

roamsp@yahoo.co.uk

Executive Summary

This work presents *Laudato Si* in such a manner that increases our awareness that we co-belong with the earth. *Laudato si'* calls us to consider what will happen if the earth reaches an irreplaceable level of damage and crises, knowing full well that the earth is a planetary island with no outside help. In an increasingly interconnected world, the discernment of choices before us to creatively discover how we can reconstruct a new world built on holistic co-belonging must be done collegially with scientists, theologians, politicians, and people at the fringes working together. Five years on, the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology followed up with *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home*. It submits that we need to collaborate among ourselves to cope with present-day ecological concerns. The expository and analytical methods were employed.

Keywords: Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, Africa, Actionable Goals, Ecology, Environment

Introduction

On May 24, 2015, Pope Francis issued the Encyclical letter *Laudato si'*, on the care of the common home.¹ *Laudato si'* proposes to offer adequate medical care for all, to feed international solidarity, to fight the culture of waste, to study, to build together new more equitable economic and financial systems, to commit ourselves to dialogue, peace, and the rejection of violence and war. On May 31, 2020, the Interdicasterial Working Group on Integral Ecology published a document for the commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the encyclical.² The document offers the methods and means of implementing the Holy Father's vision of integral ecology. The document is the fruit of "collaboration across all Vatican departments."³ These first-ever guidelines are intended to be operational. The document suggests concrete ways for the Church to implement Pope Francis' encyclical on the care of our common home.

Despite Pope Francis' passionate intervention since *Laudato si'*, the ecological crisis persists, and the state of the earth becomes more precarious. Indeed, as Mark Graham says in *America: The Jesuit Review*, "*Laudato si'* was not enough. The Vatican needs to

¹ Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home (Encyclical Letter - includes Discussion Questions)* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015).

² Tavolo Interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sull'ecologia Integrata, *In Cammino Per La Cura Della Casa Comune: A cinque anni dalla Laudato si' – Celebrazione del V Anniversario dell'Enciclica Laudato si'* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020). English edition: Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home: Five Years after Laudato Si' – Celebration of the Fifth Anniversary of the Encyclical Laudato si'* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020). *I will be referring to the English edition.*

³ "Vatican issues sweeping new environmental guidelines," Global Catholic Climate Movement, June 18, 2020, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/vatican-issues-sweeping-new-environmental-guidelines/>.

prioritize climate change.”⁴ Therefore, the Interdicasterial Working Group on Integral Ecology offers clearly and concretely what we can do to stimulate conversion, and the action plans we can execute. If we must overcome the ecological crisis, we must embrace interdisciplinary and operational dialogue at all levels, from the most local to the international. Additionally, we must develop an educational process that leads to an integral formation of conscience.⁵

The Reception of *Laudato Si'* in Africa

Does it not seem that *Laudato si'* is sounding like a distant echo just five years after, especially in the wake of *Amoris Lætitia*? Although the environmental challenge poses immediate and longstanding dangers, we seem to be responding more vociferously to the dangers spotted in *Amoris Lætitia*. Why? There is an argument from a Harvard psychologist that seems to make sense to me as I ponder on the fate of *Laudato si'* because of *Amoris Lætitia*.

Daniel Gilbert offers four reasons for human inertia and why certain issues provoke decisive moral outrage, while some human-made and structural challenges do not.⁶ First, to be provoked into action, threats must be perceived to be deliberate, aimed at harming the one who feels threatened. Second, the threat must be perceived as an affront to one's moral framework and honour code. Third, the threat must be

⁴ Mark Graham, "Laudato Si' was not enough. The Vatican needs to prioritize climate change," *America: The Jesuit Review* (May 18, 2020). <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/05/18/laudato-si-was-not-enough-vatican-needs-prioritize-climate-change>.

⁵ Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care*, 6-7.

⁶ Dambisa Moyo, *Winner Take All: China's Race for Resources and What It Means for Us* (London; New York, NY: penguin Books, 2012), 212-13.

felt as imminent because of the configuration of the human brain, which is “structured to care more about things occurring today than sometime in a hazy future.”⁷ Fourth, following from the previous three conditions, the threat that will elicit swift reactions must be seen to be instantaneous as opposed to a danger that is perceived to be occurring over some time. Prime examples are our reactions between terrorist acts and structural poverty: terrorism provokes emotions that urge one to immediate and decisive actions. On the contrary, more globally impacting threats like ecological crises do not command the same reaction and decisiveness because their effects and dangers are spread over a long period.⁸ Inferred from Gilbert’s thesis, the central problem *Laudato si’* addresses does not appear to be as pressing and dangerous to the Church as the perceived moral ambiguities in *Amoris Lætitia*. While *Amoris Lætitia* is enjoying springtime of theological and pastoral reception all over the world, with several dioceses and Episcopal conferences issuing guidelines for the application of the document, *Laudato si’* appears to be a spent force already before it is even theologically and pastorally received.

As of August 12, 2021, a Google check on *Laudato si’* reveals a news report on *Laudato si’*’s fifth-anniversary commemoration by the Network of Young Catholic Carers for the Environment in Nigeria (NYCCEN) in collaboration with the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF). By jointly hosting a webinar on June 11, 2020, NYCCEN and NCF commemorated the 2020 World Environment Day (WED) and the 5th anniversary of *Laudato si’*.⁹ I should say a word about the Network of Young

⁷ Ibid., 212.

⁸ Ibid., 213.

⁹ "More NGOs to Work with the Youth in Restoring Nature – Catholic Archbishop of Lagos," Nigerian Conservation Foundation, accessed November 13, 2020,

Catholic Carers for the Environment in Nigeria (NYCCEN). This network of young Catholics, who are passionate about the environment, is an initiative of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos to domesticate the demands of *Laudato si'*, especially with the youths. Archbishop Alfred Martins officially launched the Network on December 6, 2019.¹⁰

There is a Facebook page called '*Laudato si* Circle Nigeria'. It has the following as its objective: "This page stands to promote events on every aspect of Pope Francis' encyclical. Care for our common home. lifestyle, environment, soil, plants etc."¹¹ This Facebook page belongs to the Global Catholic Climate Movement Nigeria, a member of the Global Catholic Climate Movement's network, which was established in 2015 to promote the vision of *Laudato si'*. There are officially five member organisations in Nigeria: Climateaid Initiative (Lagos), St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity of Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (Enugu), and Fr. Christopher Amaubosi (Port Harcourt).¹² Others are Caritas Gboko, Catholic Institute of Development Justice and Peace (Nigeria).¹³ This is quite instructive. The Global Catholic Climate Movement had a modest beginning:

<https://www.ncfnigeria.org/component/k2/item/404-more-ngos-to-work-with-the-youth-in-restoring-nature-catholic-archbishop-of-lagos>.

¹⁰ Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, "Circular Letter to All Priests and Religious Working in the Archdiocese of Lagos, and the Lay Faithful (No. 087)," news release, December 2019, <https://lagosarchdiocese.org/newslet/g86.pdf>.

¹¹ "Laudato Si Circle Nigeria," accessed November 13, 2020, <https://web.facebook.com/Laudato-Si-Circle-Nigeria-108000344410278/about>.

¹² "Movement Map," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/movement-map/>.

¹³ "Member Organizations," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/member-organizations/>.

Starting as a small online network of Catholic organizations and leaders from all continents, founded during the Pope's visit to the Philippines, it has grown into a global movement that brings together a diverse group of over 700 Catholic organizations (religious orders, lay movements, youth groups, Caritas agencies, diocesan offices, etc) and thousands of Laudato si' Animators who lead parishes, schools and other communities to 'Live Laudato si'.¹⁴

Global Catholic Climate Movement has become a global network of 737 Catholic organizations working together to respond to Pope Francis' words: "Hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor".

1. **Ecological Conversion:** Catalyzing a change of heart of the Catholic faithful, to motivate more passionate care for our common home.
2. **Sustainability:** Working towards greater sustainability in our homes, communities, and institutions to lead by example and demonstrate that change is possible.
3. **Prophetic Advocacy:** Advocating within and beyond our Church to encourage leaders to care for our common home and those hit first and worst by the climate crisis.

¹⁴ "Intervento del Signor Tomás Insua," in Holy See Press Office, "Conferenza Stampa di presentazione del Documento dal titolo 'In cammino per la cura della casa comune – Acinqueanni dalla Laudato si'', elaborato dal Tavolo Interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sull'ecologia integrale," news release, 18.06.2020, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/06/18/0345/00782.html>.

Member Organisations bring *Laudato si'* to life in the following ways:

- Promoting and participating in major annual initiatives such as Earth Day, *Laudato si'* Week, and the Season of Creation along with their networks.
- Supporting outreach efforts by sending emails and by sharing social media posts and blogs.
- Joining online meetings in the lead-up to major initiatives.
- Participating in optional strategy meetings, special projects, or working groups.¹⁵

Only 5 entities and persons from Nigeria are part of this primary Church initiative (movement) to realise the vision of *Laudato si'*. Even Caritas Nigeria is not listed, while several Caritas organisations of other nations have keyed into it. There is none in the Federal Capital Territory; none within the Abuja Archdiocese. Caritas Gboko is the only one in the whole of Northern Nigeria. Surely, we can do better. Our reception of this encyclical must be more convincing, practical, and inspiring in the Archdiocese of Abuja, Nigeria's seat of Government. However, the latest entries on *Laudato si'* and Nigeria, as of August 12, 2021, includes the celebration of *Laudato si* week by Sisters of St Louis, Nigeria Province,¹⁶ and the latest update on the celebration of the *Laudato si* week among its members in

¹⁵ "About Member Organizations," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-Fdk5b9gezO0ow5-1ezZqsn8hYiavpsV/view>.

¹⁶ "Celebration of *Laudato Si'* in Nigeria Province by Nigeria Province Social, Justice and Integrity of Creation Committee," *Musings – Newsletter of the St Louis Family*, no. 108, May 27, 2021, <https://sistersofstlouis.newsweaver.com/Newsletter/fdq372ojkdh?lang=en&a=2&p=59455794&t=19890255> (accessed 12.08.2021).

Africa, including Nigeria.¹⁷

Still, on my Google search, I found an intervention by Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, wherein the emeritus Archbishop of the Archdiocese avers that *Laudato si* is an encyclical for Africa.¹⁸ While several African prelates have been active at conferences before and after the two synods of bishops that led to *Amoris Lætitia*, voicing in strong terms the dangers posed by certain movements regarding church doctrine and discipline at stake, I am not sure we have had the privilege of having the same organisation, articulation and public advocacy regarding the dangers posed by the environmental challenge as developed in *Laudato si'*. If those who live far away from the FCT want to assess the *Laudato si'*'s reception and impact, they will simply do a Google search.

On August 12, 2021, I did a Google search on '*Laudato si* Catholic archdiocese of Abuja'. It yielded just two entries. There is little evidence online that the Archdiocese as a particular church or its various parishes and organisations has done anything in the last five years to promote and realise the vision of *Laudato si'*. Yet, the Archdiocese has done some things.¹⁹ Of course, some parishes have done one or two things based on anecdotal

¹⁷ Global Catholic Climate Movement, "Reflection and contemplation on *Laudato Si'* from Africa," April 6, 2021, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/reflexion-y-contemplacion-laudato-si-desde-africa-en-news/> (accessed 12.08.2021).

¹⁸ John Cardinal Onaiyekan, "Climate Change: Now is the Time to Live *Laudato Si'*," *The Africa Report*, August 3, 2016, [https://www.theafricareport.com/1058/climate-change-now-is-the-time-to-live-laudato-si/#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20is%20truly%20inspirational.&text=Francis%20reiterates%20that%20humans%20are,\(Genesis%202%3A15\).](https://www.theafricareport.com/1058/climate-change-now-is-the-time-to-live-laudato-si/#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20is%20truly%20inspirational.&text=Francis%20reiterates%20that%20humans%20are,(Genesis%202%3A15).)

¹⁹ I will return to the two Archdiocesan activities on *Laudato Si'* in the final part of this contribution.

evidence, or eyewitnesses' accounts. However, these are not known. This shows a weak area that needs to be strengthened going forward. Our parishes do not make sufficient use of cyber technology. How many parishes have functional and interactive websites? How many have ICT units that push out the various activities going on in the archdiocese? It is not too late to restart an active reception of *Laudato si'* in Nigeria and Africa. In the rest of this contribution, I shall present, in broad strokes, the action plans offered by the Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology.

The Importance of Networking and Actionable Goals

As stated in the beginning, the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology's *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home* programmatically sets out to make the Catholic Church and her 1.2b members walk the talk of *Laudato si'*. Vision without strategy is empty. Furthermore, in the spirit of *Fratelli tutti*,²⁰ the five-year plan laid out in this document impresses upon us that it is impossible to carry on with indifference without responding to the sufferings of the poorest of the poor and the exploitation of the common home. The vision laid out in *Laudato si'* and *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home* offers "a comprehensive framework for understanding and responding to today's great challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the other environmental, human and socio-economic challenges of our time."²¹ However, to tackle those ecological problems today, the Church accepts that she does not have all the answers. The Church, equally, does not

²⁰ Francis, *Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father on Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Vatican City: Holy See, October 3, 2020).

²¹ Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care*, 10.

impose its visions and insights. On the contrary, she always seeks the path of dialogue:

The Church does not have a ready-made list of solutions to provide, much less to impose. Rather, she offers her experience over the centuries and in various geographic contexts, a body of social teachings, contents and principles worked out over time, and a methodology for reflecting together on these solutions: the methodology of dialogue. Genuine willingness to dialogue requires that, without losing their own specific identity, individuals do not insist blindly on their own point of view, no matter how positive or constructive it may be. It is necessary to enter into a conversation with all those men and women, organizations and institutions that share responsibility for the care of our common home, blending different and complementary perspectives: the richness of faith and spiritual traditions, the demands of scientific research, activism and concrete efforts to achieve a fair and sustainable integral human development.²²

Hence, we are called to seek out “COOPERATION BETWEEN CHURCH, GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE ENTITIES TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE POOR AS INHABITANTS OF THE EARTH”. THERE ARE TWELVE MAJOR AREAS WE MUST SEEK COOPERATION, PARTICULARLY IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS. The twelve ecological challenges outlined in *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home*²³ were developed from what the Holy Father articulated about the state of our common home in *Laudato si’s* chapters one and three. These challenges have to do with the kind of choices we make today and for tomorrow. It is about letting go of some things because

²² *Ibid.*, 11-12.

²³ *Ibid.*, part II, chaps 1-12.

some other things are very important due to love, just like God gave up his Son out of love for humanity (cf. John 3.16).

Of course, this raises the whole challenge of (re)distribution of the earth's resources and the burdens of cleaning up the earth. Who lets go of what? What are the criteria for letting go? These are tough questions, which no one group or single approach can settle. Yet, Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* has courageously tackled these questions (chapters 5 and 6). He wraps up his proposals with a suggestion about mystical spirituality. This spirituality seeks to articulate what God means for us in this resilient but fragile earth (LS 216-245). This spirituality challenges us to question some of the religious traditions and narratives that have prevailed in our worldview and structures (e.g. a certain interpretation of Judaeo-Christian's 'subdue the earth and conquer it'). We need to collaborate among ourselves from various religions to develop an inter-religious mystical spirituality, which can and should, in turn, inform the kinds of structural changes and social-cultural values to cope with present-day ecological concerns. How should we see the urgency of these crises? It is through the face of Christ in the suffering (the poorest of the earth) due to these ecological problems - these range from kids sacrificed on the altar of progress to indigenous peoples and their cultures that are destroyed like the Amazonians of Brazil and Bushmen of Kalahari desert in Botswana.

Hence, the Holy Father calls for 'ecological conversion' (LS 219). Beyond personal conversion, the question and task are how to target this class or other culpable categories for social and ecological conversion. There appears to be a leeway for this when LS 219 states that community networks must address social issues rather than individuals. Hence, "ecological conversion

needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion" (LS 219).

Twelve Areas of Cooperation and Action Goals

The Twelve areas are power supply, water, energy, ecosystems, deforestation, desertification, land use, and seas and oceans. Others are the circular economy, work, finance, urbanisation, institutions, justice, and public administration, health, and climate.

1. Food and Nutrition

Some of the action plans which we can look at include strengthening the right to food and a balanced diet; contributing to food security; promote adequate access to methods of farming especially for women and young people. Others include training in increased farm production skills, community organisation, especially in rural areas. Cooperate at the level of the production of organic fertilisers and pesticides. Promote inclusive debate of all stakeholders on the subject of innovations in food products deriving from genetic research (GMOs - genetically modified organisms) and fund various lines of independent and interdisciplinary research that can bring new light.

- a) Give particular concern to the areas affected by natural disasters, conflicts, large migratory flows, favouring access to seeds and food, and ensuring the transition between care and rehabilitation to support the recovery of rural areas after the crisis.
- b) Adopt and disseminate awareness programs, education, and cooperation to avoid food waste, also affecting production chains, distribution, and catering, including post-harvest losses.

- c) Educate the awareness that a diet inadequate, especially during pregnancy and moles first years of life, has repercussions for the entire human development, encouraging a nutritional style quantitatively and qualitatively nutritious, healthy and balanced, based on the best knowledge of the products, their origin, their properties, and the various food traditions.²⁴

2. Water

There is a growing water shortage around the world today. This is because the population of the world has increased. Also, climate change and pollution have become serious challenges for the poor of the earth getting clean water.²⁵ Accordingly, we are presented with 13 action plans. I will highlight some. These include:

- a) Education and awareness programs about the preciousness of water, so that we are more careful about how we consume water, and promote recycling of water.
- b) We must ensure broader access to water including for farming.
- c) Teach communities how to adequately manage and monitor high-quality rainwater, for irrigation, domestic use, and toilet use.
- d) Put pressure through advocacy on the state for a regular and constant supply of economically accessible and affordable water.
- e) Minimise the use of disposable plastics.
- f) Work with various organisations to ensure that access to water is a fundamental and universal human right.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 119-23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

- g) Work towards having water tariffs such that water supply is guaranteed to everyone, even those who are unable to pay it.
- h) Promote "drop by drop" irrigation which allows you to avoid a large waste of water.
- i) Combat the water pollution it reaches rivers, oceans, and groundwater.²⁶

3. Energy

Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home notes that many people in Africa and their functional buildings like schools and hospitals are still without electricity; they are still using kerosene lamps.²⁷ Consequently, we are presented with 13 possible areas of cooperation for action. These include:

- a) Advocacy on behalf of the poor for clean energy, which does not harm the environment.
- b) Promote more clean energy by setting up, for instance, "Diocesan Green Energy Procurement Project...equip all parishes with solar panels...phase out fossil fuels completely and to purchase certified green electricity."²⁸
- c) Encourage daily choices, in the styles of life, aimed at decreasing energy consumption, especially in the richest regions of the planet.²⁹

4. Ecosystems, Deforestation, Desertification, Land Use

Humans have hurt our common home so much in the last 100 years especially. To turn things around, we need some action plans. We are offered 8 action plans:

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 129-31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 138-41.

- a) Promote lifestyles and consumption patterns, which respect ecosystems and limitations of natural resources.
- b) Promote a widespread education in ecological citizenship.
- c) Encourage non-polluting production systems and based on solidarity and promote reforestation (tree-planting) projects.
- d) Seek ways to indigenous peoples, their human rights, and protect against the abusive exploitation of their territories and the destruction of their habitat.
- e) Address the problem of wastewater management.
- f) "Education initiatives for proper soil management, like those promoted by the Namibian Bishops' Conference or in some dioceses of Sierra Leone."³⁰
- g) Protect biodiversity.

5. Seas and Oceans

Out of 12 action plans, under the care of seas and oceans, I shall highlight the following five:

- a) Reduce the amount of polluted water and plastic in the oceans, avoiding using the seas and oceans as a landfill.
- b) Avoid intensive fishing that does not allow regeneration and which is uneconomical and destructive, as well as fishing for endangered species.
- c) Adopt rhythms and fishing methods that respect biodiversity, in particular by avoiding fishing trawl, where it can damage the seabed, and
- d) Creating the conditions for traditional fishermen to have access to sufficient fish resources to live on with dignity.
- e) Organise beach/river cleaning activities or in the construction of walls (mangrove plantations, fences,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

sandbags) to stem the tide of rising sea levels in riverine areas.³¹

6. Circular Economy

The world today runs an economic system that is based on social exclusion and environmental devastation. It is a system where the richer gets richer and the poor get poorer; and when the poor cry for their right, the rich use the power of the state to crush the poor.³² To reverse this unchristian kind of economic model, there are nine (9) action plans. Some of these are:

- a) Ensure a person-centred approach, attentive to the dignity of work, and a just transition of the employment sectors for workers and community.
- b) Promote the reuse and recycling of resources natural already in the economic circuit, encourage reuse of the various organic waste
- c) Stimulate beach and beach cleaning activities.
- d) Aim for the adoption of easy recyclable or biodegradable packaging.
- e) Encourage vehicle sharing (for example with car-sharing systems) or other equipment, as well as the second-hand markets.
- f) Promote the process of reforming subsidies to fossil fuels and to taxing the emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂).³³
- g) "Education activities and collaboration with government agencies" on waste management and pollution.³⁴

7. Work

Work is a significant way "to preserve what has been given us and to cultivate it by cooperating with God."³⁵ Based on this, there are

³¹ *Ibid.*, 154, 55-57.

³² *Ibid.*, 159-60.

³³ *Ibid.*, 163-64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 165 [*italics original*].

14 action plans to promote and protect this God-given vocation of work.

- a) Promote decent work and respect workers, rejecting any discrimination, acknowledging the equal dignity of women.
- b) Guarantee a fair salary, adequate to the needs integral of families, countering child labour.
- c) Creating jobs in the most backward countries whose population tends to emigrate and guarantee conditions for these people to live working with dignity.
- d) Promote the social and economic value of motherhood. It can then be better protected.
- e) Allow workers to organise and do hear their voices with spaces for free and respectful discussion.
- f) Prevent and eradicate new forms of slavery, especially human exploitation, human trafficking, and prostitution.
- g) Reaffirm and protect the primacy of the person about machines and new technologies.³⁶
- h) Create occupational opportunities (especially cooperative and thrift societies) and jobs especially in economically disadvantaged areas, or areas with a high crime rate.³⁷
- i) Replicating *The Future of Work After Laudato Si'*. This project "brings together various institutions to strengthen the voice of the Church in the world of work through: 1) forms of cooperation and networking between ecclesial institutions as a means of improving cooperation and knowledge-sharing; 2) reflection and research into current and future challenges so as to develop specific responses in the field of work; 3) skills training for active participation in dialogue on labour issues."³⁸

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 170-72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

8. Finance

We have a financial system that is hooked on short-term profit; it sees profit as an end in itself. Thus, this system excludes proper consideration of the human person, especially the workers. Accordingly, there are possible action plans. Notable among them are the following:

- a) Spread the use of criteria for investments ethical, avoiding the support to companies harmful to human or social ecology (example abortion and weapons), and for environmental ecology (e.g. fossil fuels).
- b) Strengthen awareness through networks and universities to ethics, the common good, and responsibility in the banking and financial intermediation sector.
- c) Increase investment in infrastructure functional to the real economy by banks development multilateral and other financial institutions development, paying particular attention to social inclusion and environmental protection.
- d) Reorganize financial institutions and markets because of the common good and integral human development, providing appropriate and effective forms of a supervisory authority.
- e) Adopt investment evaluation criteria more “integral” financials; that is, taking into account the dimensions of environmental sustainability and not just the expectations of future returns (ESG criteria).
- f) Promote responsible investment in terms of social and environmental, evaluating for example the progressive divestment from the fossil fuel sector.
- g) Examine carefully and according to ethical criteria the proposals put forward by civil society and the private sector about crypto-currencies (e.g. the BitCoin) and alternative currencies with local validity.

- h) Bridging the gap between those with access to credit, especially through micro-credit schemes.
- i) Promote the management of the assets of the Church inspired by transparency, coherence, and courage.³⁹
- j) Organise conferences and enlightenment programmes on ethical investments and religious beliefs.⁴⁰

9. Urbanisation

For years to come, people will keep migrating from the rural areas to the cities and large towns. Unfortunately, these urban centres continue to have limited resources to keep up with rapid growth. To counter the hard life of the cities, there are at least 10 action plans. Some of these are:

- a) Promote adequate construction to encourage social and economic inclusion and a better connection to the job market, the creation of affordable housing in the cities.
- b) Encourage policies that promote access to clean energy in cities.
- c) To develop an ecological and economically efficient transport system that offers access to the opportunities for everyone (including pedestrians and cyclists), and the strengthening of public transport.
- d) Take into account, in the planning of cities, the increase in public parks, green areas, and urban gardens for social purposes.
- e) Carrying along all the inhabitants, in particular of poor neighbourhoods, in matters that affect the rehabilitation and development of their neighbourhood projects.⁴¹
- f) Launching something like *Ecological Penance Movement*. This asks anyone taking air travel to contribute a small

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 178-80.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 184-86.

fraction to a special fund. This fund is used to create and maintain green areas by some parishes, especially in cities. This takes inspiration from the action of an Archdiocese of Jakarta (Indonesia) in 2016 as part of its response to *Laudato si'*.⁴²

- g) Design and architectural innovation used for Church buildings that are eco-sustainable, like the Apostolic Nunciature in Malaysia.⁴³

10. Institutions, Justice and Public Administration

If *Laudato si'*'s vision will be realised, then all organs of the state and the civil society must be so organised that they carry out their fundamental service to the common good.⁴⁴ Our primary text offers us at least 12 action plans. Some of these are:

- a) Spread the Message every year for World Peace Day.
- b) Organise special training moments for political, economic, industrial, and military leaders and associations, with particular attention to principles, values, and methods of integral ecology.
- c) Train all citizens to understand democratic mechanisms and their contribution to decision-making processes.
- d) Promote the work of the various agencies in the Church that work with the most marginalised and isolated people.
- e) Promote dialogue between local Churches and legislative bodies, so that laws can be studied that promote the common good and human rights rooted in Christian anthropology.⁴⁵

⁴² *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 187-88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 192-93.

- f) Catholic Episcopal Conferences of individual states or regions with local authorities on legislative safeguard for “integral ecology, air quality, access to water, environmental health, response to natural disasters, energy efficiency, and response to pollution.”⁴⁶
- g) Establishing at national levels a good practice like “the *European Laudato Si' Alliance* (ELSi'A), for the purpose of adapting the approach of *Laudato Si'* to the European context and in particular to the institutions of the European Union.”⁴⁷

11. Health

Health is wealth. Without systemic health, we cannot help ourselves; talk less of helping the poor. Systemic health refers is anchored on “a human ecology that pursues *the integral well-being of the human being*.”⁴⁸ There are at least 12 areas of collaborative actions to achieve systemic health.

- a) Invest in the diagnosis and treatment of malformations and diseases already identifiable in the womb, instead of promoting the diagnosis because of the selection and elimination.
- b) Educate health care workers to a good conscience, starting from the medical faculties and courses for nurses, taking care of a human formation, moral, pastoral, spiritual, and religious.
- c) Raise awareness about the risks of addiction, too from IT devices, starting with the accompanying medical and spiritual assistance.
- d) Submit projects in advance to an environmental impact assessment concerning the working conditions and

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.

- possible health effects physical and mental of people, on the local economy, on safety.
- e) Promote palliative care as a system of integrated assistance to the human person in illness, as well as the training of health professionals to medical, human, and spiritual accompaniment always respectful of human life from conception to natural death.
 - f) Promote inclusive access to healthcare primary as a fundamental human right, since it is closely connected with the right to life and human dignity.⁴⁹
 - g) Organise something like the “Medical Student and Resident Boot Camp” programme. It offers “an integral ecology standpoint with the challenges that young Catholic medical students face while studying and practising modern medicine.”⁵⁰

12. Climate: Challenges, Responsibilities, Opportunities

The poorest of the earth are most affected by climate change, because “they have the least adaptive capacity (possessing fewer resources).”⁵¹

- a) Promote the kindergarten level awareness of caring for our common home and its climate, with emphasis on some concrete examples through which children could help protect creation for the present generation and the future one.
- b) Promote teaching at school level interdisciplinary based on integral ecology, on how to solve the problems of climate change and sustainability.
- c) Promote teaching at the university level on the problems of climate change and environmental degradation.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 199-201.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

- d) Encourage the private sector and other realities non-state to transition to more environmentally friendly economies sustainable, for example by promoting activities to promote renewable energy sources and strategies for climate-resilient development; improve energy efficiency; reduce waste; promote a culture sharing, recycling, and reuse.
- e) Support the international process, aimed to jointly address the problem of change climate, striving for effective implementation of existing international instruments on that theme.⁵²
- f) Publish resource materials for “Climate Action for the Common Good”. This resource should help “governments and other stakeholders to reflect on how they should respond to the challenges of climate change in light of *Laudato Si'*.”⁵³

***Laudato Si'*: Special Anniversary Year (24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021)**⁵⁴

The Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development published a year-long programme to celebrate 5 years of *Laudato Si'*. It laid out plans for a 7-year journey to total sustainability in the spirit of *Laudato Si'* for various institutions in the Church. Some of the programmes can offer us some inspiration.

- **Read the Bible Contest** (Contest on Social Media about the Bible, with special focus on *Laudato Si'*)

⁵² Ibid., 208-10.

⁵³ Ibid., 206.

⁵⁴ Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Laudato Si'*: Special Anniversary Year (24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021) (Vatican City, May 16, 2020), accessed November 18, 2020, from <http://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/documenti/FINAL%20EN%20-%20Laudato%20si'%20Anniv%20Year%202020-2021.pdf>

- **Laudato Si' Awards:** Conferment of annual *Laudato Si'* Awards
 1. **Outstanding Laudato Si' Leader**
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* Global Leader
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* Local Animator
 2. **Outstanding Laudato Si' Family**
 3. **Outstanding Laudato Si' Educational Institution**
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* School
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* University/College
 4. **Outstanding Laudato si' Faith Community**
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* Parish
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* Diocese
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* Religious Community
 5. **Outstanding Laudato si' Action Initiative**
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* People's Movement
 - Outstanding *Laudato Si'* Youth Initiative
 6. **Outstanding Laudato si' Economy/Finance/Business/Health/Labour/Agriculture Initiative**
 - in the area of the circular and shared economy, regenerative farming, holistic health practices, etc.
 7. **Outstanding Laudato si' Communication Initiative**
 - Academic publication, artistic production, etc.

Measuring Integral Ecology in the Spirit of *Laudato Si'*

1. Response to the *Cry of the Earth* (greater use of clean renewable energy and reducing fossil fuels to achieve carbon neutrality, efforts to protect and promote biodiversity, guaranteeing access to clean water for all, etc.)
2. Response to the *Cry of the Poor* (defence of human life from conception to death and all forms of life on Earth, with special attention to vulnerable groups such as

- indigenous communities, migrants, children at risk through slavery, etc.)
3. Ecological *Economics* (sustainable production, Fair-trade, ethical consumption, ethical investments, divestment from fossil fuels and any economic activity harmful to the planet and the people, investment in renewable energy, etc.)
 4. Adoption of *Simple Lifestyles* (sobriety in the use of resources and energy, avoid single-use plastic, adopt a more plant-based diet and reduce meat consumption, greater use of public transport and avoid polluting modes of transportation, etc.)
 5. Ecological *Education* (re-think and re-design educational curricula and educational institution reform in the spirit of integral ecology to create ecological awareness and action, promoting the ecological vocation of young people, teachers, and leaders of education, etc.)
 6. Ecological *Spirituality* (recover a religious vision of God's creation, encourage greater contact with the natural world in a spirit of wonder, praise, joy, and gratitude, promote creation-centred liturgical celebrations, develop ecological catechesis, prayer, retreats, formation, etc.)
 7. Emphasis on *Community involvement and participatory action* to care for creation at the local, regional, national, and international levels (promote advocacy and people's campaigns; encourage rootedness in local territory and neighbourhood ecosystems, etc.)

The Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja's 7-Year Plan

On November 19, 2020, the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja organised a conference on the theme, "Co-operation between Church, Government and Corporate Entities to Improve the

Lives of the Poor as Inhabitants of the Earth". The Conference had three objectives:

1. To assess the reception and impact of *Laudato Si'* in Nigeria/ Abuja Archdiocese;
2. To articulate the cooperation between the Church, Government and Non-State Actors on *Laudato Si'*'s vision;
3. To develop actionable paths for improving the lives of the poor as entitled to universal goods of the earth, as inspired by *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home* (2020).

The conference had participants and interventions from the Church (the Archdiocesan prelates, the plenary speakers), the State (the Minister for Women Affairs, the National Environmental and Standard Regulatory Enforcement Agency), and the Non-State Actors (Catholic Relief Services). The Conference had two plenary papers, panel discussions, and general discussions leading to suggestions and recommendations on the way forward. At the end of the Conference, an initiative of the Abuja Archdiocesan Theological Commission, the People of God resolved to begin its 7-year journey of integral ecology in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*. They resolved to adopt some of the Church's plans and programmes for the care of the earth, our common home, and for the poor of the earth. On June 19, 2021, the Archdiocese gathered again for the conclusion of the year-long celebration of *Laudato Si'*. During the Mass at the Church of the Archangels, Lugbe Abuja, the Local Ordinary, Most Revd Ignatius Kaigama, unveiled the *Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja*.⁵⁵ The following paragraphs outline this programme, as

⁵⁵ See Evans Kipkura, "Nigerian Archbishop Seeks Government Partnership in Environmental Conservation," *ACI Africa*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/3714/nigerian-archbishop-seeks->

an example of how various particular churches should approach the adaptation of Pope Francis' deep ecology.

'Deep ecology' refers to the perspective that in confronting ecological issues, one goes beyond the symptoms. One has to unearth the layers of ecological issues to discover the roots of the problem if we must heal the problem from the root. This is a holistic approach. Deep ecology, therefore, goes beyond the binary ethical division of relativism vs. deontology. Deep ecology is based on a metaphysical conception of the world which demands a thick ethical approach. This is what we see in *Laudato si'* from a Catholic perspective. This helps us to appreciate that *Laudato si'* is based on solid multidisciplinary research following the genealogy of deep ecology from Aldo Leopold.⁵⁶ The distinctive accent of *Laudato si'* is its emphasis on the connection between human moral and cultural decline, seen in the way the structures of the world mass produces an economy of exclusion, thus producing more victims of a cruel economy. These victims of human moral decline are called the poor (humans and the environment) (LS 162).

The Archdiocese has committed itself to develop a studied approach to *Laudato Si'* on the journey towards care for our common home at various levels. It committed itself to capture

[government-partnership-in-environmental-conservation](#)

(accessed

12.08.2021).

⁵⁶ In his *A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There* (1949), Leopold included a chapter, titled "The Land Ethic". Leopold argues that an emerging argument for earth conservation in the forties was not thoroughgoing enough. Leopold proposed an ethic of the land, which affirmed thinkers since Ezekiel and Isaiah that "the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong." Cf. "Our Relationship to the Environment: Aldo Leopold, *The Land Ethic*," in *Western Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. John Cottingham (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 585-590, quotation on 586.

current thinking about the social fraternity, civic friendship, environmental justice, and the role of the Church. The *Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja* has eleven focal points, taking its cue from the twelve areas of cooperation and action goals that the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology's *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home: Five Years after Laudato Si* outlined. The *Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja* has a tripartite division. Each of the focal points is stepped down from the Archdiocesan level to Deanery/Parish and Educational Institutions levels respectively. In each case, the Archdiocese identifies each action to be undertaken and the statutory body/agency responsible for ensuring implementation. At the Archdiocesan level, the following are the twelve focal points⁵⁷:

<i>Archdiocesan Celebration of World Day for the Care of Creation:</i> Annual celebration in the calendar of archdiocesan events, etc.
<i>Archdiocesan Commission for the Care of Creation:</i> To draw up actionable plans and programmes for the ongoing domestication of LS in our archdiocese
<i>Promulgation of Ecological Week:</i> Ecology-themed activities
<i>Food & Water Policy:</i> Biodegradable disposable products only in Archdiocesan functions, Care/Feeding of the Poor (mandating one Sunday in the month in all Archdiocesan parish communities)
<i>Energy Policy:</i> Diocesan Green Energy Procurement Project; Annual Award for Best 'Green Catholic School'
<i>Ecosystem Policy:</i> Wastewater management initiatives and innovations

⁵⁷ See the attached appendix for the comprehensive *Actionable Goals for the Implementation of Laudato Si in the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja*. Used with permission.

<p><i>Work & Labour Policy:</i> Archdiocesan policy on the decent and fair work environment, equal work and equal pay for women and men; Archdiocesan minimum wage policy</p>
<p><i>Urbanisation & Ecological footprint Policy:</i> Policy on Eco-sustainable architectural innovation used for Church buildings</p>
<p><i>Policy on Institutions, Justice and Public Administration:</i> Mandate to read on a particular Sunday the Holy Father's Message for World Peace Day; Translation of the Holy Father's Message for World Peace Day into the languages spoken in the Archdiocese</p>
<p><i>Health Policy:</i> Constitute Archdiocesan Environmental Impact Assessment Team</p>
<p><i>Climate Policy:</i> Periodic interface with the private sector and other non-state actors on transitioning to more sustainable and environmental-friendly economies</p>
<p><i>Special Laudato Si Archdiocesan Initiatives:</i> Read the Bible Contest; <i>Laudato Si'</i> Awards</p>

- A. At the deanery/parish levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecosystem Policy, Work & Labour Policy, Urbanisation & Ecological footprint Policy, Policy on Institutions, Justice and Public Administration, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.
- B. At the church levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Policy on Institutions, Justice and Public Administration, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.
- C. At the Archdiocesan schools (Primary and Secondary) levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecology and Climate Policy, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.
- D. At the Catholic Chaplaincies of Secular Tertiary institutions level, the following are domesticated: Food &

Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecosystems Policy, Ecology and Health Policy, Ecology and Climate Policy, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.

- E. At the Church-owned tertiary institutions' levels, the following are domesticated: Food & Water Policy, Energy Policy, Ecosystem Policy, Ecology and Health Policy, Ecology and Climate Policy, and Special *Laudato Si* Archdiocesan Initiatives.

A Proposal for a Compendium on Catholic Church's Interventions on Eco-Related Issues in Nigeria

The final instalment of this contribution relates to a challenge to theological/research institutes in Nigeria. I restate what I pointed out in a previous contribution:

We are busy recycling other people's intellectual endeavours. Recycled goods are what we are proudly displaying as what we are producing. Several works on Christian eco-theology that we are copying from today are compilations or compendium of what churches in several locations around the world have said about ecological challenge. Do we have one yet?⁵⁸

Let me give an instance. Some years ago, precisely in March 2016, I took delivery of some copies of a *festschrift* for Most Revd Lucius Ugorji.⁵⁹ As I flipped through this big volume, I came across an entry titled "Bishop Ugorji's Moral Theology of Environmental Stewardship". It is an extensive commentary of

⁵⁸ Raymond Olusesan Aina, "Laudato si' on Ecological Crisis: What Manner of Theological Ethical Reasoning?," in *Theology and Ecological Issues*, ed. Luke Ijezie, Stephen Audu, and Agnes Acha (Port Harcourt: CATHAN Publication, 2017), 317-34.

⁵⁹ Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu, eds, *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji's Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji) (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015).

Bishop Ugorji's 1995 Pastoral Letter Care for the Environment.⁶⁰ Bishop Ugorji was ahead of his time. As far as 1995, he already saw that the context of our faith was changing. Hence, we are not just "concerned with the salvation of souls but also of the sustainability of the ecosystem."⁶¹ The point here is that if this festschrift had not been published and Igboanusi's article included I may not have known that we have a bishop with far-seeing eyes that saw the ineluctable connection between human fate and the state of the earth. As far back as 1995, when many scientists, politicians, and religious leaders all over the world were still in denial of ecological crisis, there was a Nigerian bishop that devoted a whole pastoral letter awakening human responsibility to caring for and preserving our common home, the earth.⁶² His position, which is a combination of teleological ethical approach and transcendental natural law approach, yielded an integral ecology perspective that can conveniently fall under the 'deep ecology' school of thought.

Various research institutes in Nigeria can take up the challenge earlier thrown to the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria since nothing is happening from that angle. They can institute "a research grant for commissioned original research among scholars. For instance, research should be commissioned with a full or partial grant for the compilation and publication of a compendium of the Catholic Church's interventions on

⁶⁰ Edmund Igboanusi, "Bishop Ugorji's Moral Theology of Environmental Stewardship," in *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji's Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji), ed. Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 109-133.

⁶¹ Kekong Bisong, "Anthropocentric Castles and the Imperative of Ecotheology," in *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji's Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji), ed. Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 165-181, at 166.

⁶² Igboanusi, "Bishop Ugorji's Moral Theology," 126.

ecological issues and environmental problems in Nigeria.”⁶³ This present volume, by the Augustinian Province in Nigeria, is a step in the right direction.

Conclusion

To our deflated ego, we are becoming increasingly aware that we co-belong with the earth. *Laudato si'* calls us to consider what will happen if the earth reaches an irreplaceable level of damage and crises, knowing full well that the earth is a planetary island with no outside help. In an increasingly interconnected world, the discernment of choices before us to creatively discover how we can reconstruct a new world built on holistic co-belonging must be done collegially with scientists, theologians, politicians, and people at the fringes working together. Pope Francis in *Laudato si'* has courageously offered us some (chapters 5 and 6). Five years on, the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology followed up with *Journeying Towards Care For Our Common Home*. We need to collaborate among ourselves to cope with present-day ecological concerns. May the various levels of the Catholic church in Nigeria, and in Africa, take a cue from the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, and begin a studied and programmatic approach to a decade-long journey of integral ecology in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*.

⁶³ Aina, "Laudato si' on Ecological Crisis," 331.

Bibliography

- "About Member Organizations," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-Fdk5b9gezO0ow5-1ezZqsn8hYiavpsV/view>.
- "Laudato Si Circle Nigeria," accessed November 13, 2020, <https://web.facebook.com/Laudato-Si-Circle-Nigeria-108000344410278/about>.
- "Member Organizations," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/member-organizations/>.
- "More NGOs to Work with the Youth in Restoring Nature – Catholic Archbishop of Lagos," Nigerian Conservation Foundation, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.ncfnigeria.org/component/k2/item/404-more-ngos-to-work-with-the-youth-in-restoring-nature-catholic-archbishop-of-lagos>.
- "Movement Map," Global Catholic Climate Movement, accessed November 14, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/movement-map/>.
- "Vatican issues sweeping new environmental guidelines," Global Catholic Climate Movement, June 18, 2020, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/vatican-issues-sweeping-new-environmental-guidelines/>.
- "Celebration of *Laudato Si'* in Nigeria Province by Nigeria Province Social, Justice and Integrity of Creation Committee," *Musings – Newsletter of the St Louis Family*, no. 108, May 27, 2021,

<https://sistersofstlouis.newsweaver.com/Newsletter/fdq372ojkdh?lang=en&a=2&p=59455794&t=19890255>
(accessed 12.08.2021).

“Intervento del Signor Tomás Insua,” in Holy See Press Office, “Conferenza Stampa di presentazione del Documento dal titolo ‘In cammino per la cura della casa comune – A cinque anni dalla Laudato si’, elaborato dal Tavolo Interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sull’ecologia integrale,” news release, 18.06.2020, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/06/18/0345/00782.html>.

Aldo Leopold, *The Land Ethic*,” in *Western Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. John Cottingham (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 585-590, quotation on 586.

Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, “Circular Letter to All Priests and Religious Working in the Archdiocese of Lagos, and the Lay Faithful (No. 087),” news release, December 2019, <https://lagosarchdiocese.org/newslet/g86.pdf>.

Dambisa Moyo, *Winner Take All: China's Race for Resources and What It Means for Us* (London; New York, NY: penguin Books, 2012), 212-13.

Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *Laudato Si’: Special Anniversary Year (24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021)* (Vatican City, May 16, 2020), accessed November 18, 2020, from <http://www.humandevlopment.va/content/dam/sviluppoumano/documenti/FINAL%20EN%20-%20Laudato%20si'%20Anniv%20Year%202020-2021.pdf>

Edmund Igboanusi, “Bishop Ugorji’s Moral Theology of Environmental Stewardship,” in *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji’s Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji), ed. Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 109-133.

- Evans Kipkura, "Nigerian Archbishop Seeks Government Partnership in Environmental Conservation," *ACIAfrica*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/3714/nigerian-archbishop-seeks-government-partnership-in-environmental-conservation> (accessed 12.08.2021).
- Francis, *Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti of the Holy Father on Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Vatican City: Holy See, October 3, 2020).
- Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home (Encyclical Letter - includes Discussion Questions)* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015).
- Global Catholic Climate Movement, "Reflection and contemplation on *Laudato Si'* from Africa," April 6, 2021, <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/reflexion-y-contemplacion-laudato-si-desde-africa-en-news/> (accessed 12.08.2021).
- Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care*, 6-7.
- Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, *Journeying Towards Care*, 10.
- John Cardinal Onaiyekan, "Climate Change: Now is the Time to Live *Laudato Si'*," *The Africa Report*, August 3, 2016, [https://www.theafricareport.com/1058/climate-change-now-is-the-time-to-live-laudato-si/#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20is%20truly%20inspirational.&text=Francis%20reiterates%20that%20humans%20are,\(Genesis%20%3A15\)](https://www.theafricareport.com/1058/climate-change-now-is-the-time-to-live-laudato-si/#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20is%20truly%20inspirational.&text=Francis%20reiterates%20that%20humans%20are,(Genesis%20%3A15)).
- Kekong Bisong, "Anthropocentric Castles and the Imperative of Ecotheology," in *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji's Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji), ed. Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015), 165-181, at 166.

- Mark Graham, "Laudato Si" was not enough. The Vatican needs to prioritize climate change," *America: The Jesuit Review* (May 18, 2020). <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/05/18/laudato-si-was-not-enough-vatican-needs-prioritize-climate-change>.
- Raymond Olusesan Aina, "Laudato si' on Ecological Crisis: What Manner of Theological Ethical Reasoning?," in *Theology and Ecological Issues*, ed. Luke Ijezie, Stephen Audu, and Agnes Acha (Port Harcourt: CATHAN Publication, 2017), 317-34.
- Tavolo Interdicasteriale della Santa Sede sull'ecologia Integrale, *In Cammino Per La Cura Della Casa Comune: A cinque anni dalla Laudato si' - Celebrazione del V Anniversario dell'Enciclica Laudato si'* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).
- Uzochukwu Jude Njoku and Simon O. Anyanwu, eds, *Shepherd and Teacher: Celebrating Lucius Ugorji's Episcopal Silver Jubilee* (FS Lucius Ugorji) (Owerri: APT Publications, 2015).

Chapter Eight

THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

Godwin Aturuchi Eche PhD

*Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port
Harcourt*

Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria

godwineche1@gmail.com

&

Stephen Egwuatu Amadi

*Department of Religious and Cultural Studies Ignatius Ajuru
University of Education Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt*

Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria

Stephenamadi05@gmail.com

Executive Summary

Human existence would have been a farce without the environment just as without human beings, there would be nothing known as the environment. In fact without the environment, there wouldn't be a place where human beings can exist and without human beings tending and caring for the environment, it would have been a waste land without any benefit. The environment and human beings complement each other. This work attempts to bring to the fore the fact that one cannot talk about human beings and the environment without giving religion its pride of place especially with regards to the vital role God played in creation. In most parts of the world especially in Nigeria, the environment have been polluted due largely to the activities of the same human beings who ought to, and is expected to preserve it. The method used in data gathering

is basically the secondary source of data collection while the descriptive phenomenological approach of data analysis was adopted. Our findings revealed that religion has solution to every challenge human beings face in the world including environmental problems. The study proved that religion provides the most viable means through which effective environmental management can be achieved in Nigeria, since the three main religions practiced in Nigeria are rooted in environmental ethics and values. This work, therefore, maintains and concludes that managers and policy makers, government and non-governmental agencies; collaborating with religious leaders should lay more emphasis on religious values to achieve the sustenance of the environment for the good of humanity at large.

Keywords: Religion, Environment, Sustainability, Nigeria, Africa, Waste, Preservation

Introduction

The earth and its treasure base, is experiencing a siege from all aspects of human endeavors ranging from misuse and degradation of the environment that have become so easily spotted. These wanton disruptions go on every day and almost everywhere. Environmental degradation and its sustainability has become a major global concern owing to the fact of its importance to the continued survival of humanity and other living and non-living creatures. Nature, according to Pope John Paul 11, is one and indivisible reality such that a harm to one affects the other “because of the mutual connection in an ordered system” (Laudato Si’, 2015).

The unchecked activities of man has continued to degrade the integrity of the natural environment destroying its biodiversity and stripping it of its natural forest fauna, wastelands, waters, air, humidity and temperature. At the global level, the challenge is with persistent climatic change occasioned by global warming with the constant rise in sea level due mainly because of the concentration of the greenhouse gases. The situation is made worse on account of the development models based on the intensive use of fossil fuels which has remained the core element of the global energy system. Global warming is also a factor in the melting of the polar ice caps which can lead to the dangerous release of the methane gas and also responsible for the decomposition of frozen organic material which increases the emission of carbon dioxide (Laudato Sí', 2015).

The Nigerian nation is not isolated from this widespread concern about sustainability of the environment. This concern is made worse as a result of increasing environmental degradation in the country. There is no doubting the fact that environmental degradation and poor sanitary conditions have affected Nigeria in recent years. These are particularly expressed in terms of environmental pollution, desertification, deforestation, and other adverse environmental conditions.

The human greed and insatiable appetite for exploration and exploitation of the environment and its resources via the false superintendence of scientific prowess have brought this calamitous situation for which it obviously lacks the capacity to proffer any desirable results cum solution. The question now is what strategy can be formulated to protect the environment and keep it intact for the present and future generation. This paper is of the view that attention must of necessity turn to religion as the final arbiter since it has the interpretative scheme to define the

place of nature and its ultimate meanings. This paper therefore is intended to explore the nexus between religion and environmental sustainability and the role religion can play in reversing the anomalies.

Conceptual clarification

The term **ecology** is derived from the Greek OIKOIC which means “living relation’. Ecology is defined as the ‘study of how organisms interact with one another and with their physical environment”. Their inter-relationship and distributions is shaped by both biotic and abiotic factors. Ecosystem however encompasses the community of living and non-living organisms such as air, water and mineral soil (Wikipedia 2010). It is concerned with creation and all within it especially the natural environment for the prime purpose of achieving their ultimate aim as destined by the creator and entrusted to man against the backdrop of responsible accountability and stewardship. Inferring from this, Chibuko (2016) opined that ecology underscores the interdependence of all creatures: animate and inanimate creatures of which without the support of the other organisms within the same system, living will largely be jeopardized. Such interdependence implies that predators and preys, fire and water, food and shelter, etc., remain in equilibrium with each other and with the environment around them.

According to the World Bank (1991) cited in Ogboru et al (2015), the environment is the natural and social conditions surrounding mankind including future generations. The environment as posited by Bayode, and Sogbon (2011), is made up of biophysical and natural environment of land, water and air. It also includes all layers in the atmosphere, inorganic and organic matters,

socio-economic components and processes of human endeavors. The elements mentioned here have a symbiotic relationship, any distortion of which could impact negatively. Emmanuel and Alakinde (2006), lending credence to the above asserted that land and associated resources, structures, sites, human health, nutrition and safety are also inclusive. Environment therefore is the natural habitat of man with several components within which various kinds of activities and processes occur.

According to National Conservation and Environment Protection Act (1987), environment include the physical factors of the surrounding of human beings, land, soil, water, atmosphere, climate, sound, odor, taste and the biological factors of animals and plants. Similarly, The Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act (1992) deposed environment to include water, air, land, and all plants and human beings, or animals living there in and the interrelationships which exists among these or any of them.

Sustainability has become the central focus in development studies and echoes notes of inter-generational equity in environmental resource utilization. The concept is diverse in application and meaning depending on the orientation and professional framework being used. Of central value to the concept are economic, technical, ecological, environmental, material and human resource base. The origin of the sustainability concept is traced to the Club of Rome Report titled "*Limits to Growth*" published in the early 1970s; the Brunt-land Report titled "*Our common future*" published in the 1980's and the "Agenda 21", a declaration of the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 are significant contributions to the development of the subject of sustainable development. According to International Union for the Conservation of Nature

(IUCN, 1980), the concept of sustainable development was first used and developed in the World Conservation Strategy. The document focused on three specific areas which have to do with the maintenance of ecological processes, the sustainable use of resources and maintenance of genetic diversity (Ogboru, 2015).

Sustainable environment involves the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment. Sustainability therefore, is the balance between every component of environment – the human and the bio-physical environment (Wikipedia, 2009) in such a way as to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long term environmental quality. From the foregoing, sustainable environmental management is the one that recognizes the linkages between human and natural environment and integrates the well being of humankind and the other organisms. **Religion**, as a concept, has a considerably large number of definitions. All the definitions however emphasize certain aspect of religion and exclude others. While, some definitions tend to be too inclusive and easy to qualify as a religion, others are too exclusive and difficult to pass for a religion. According to Emile Durkheim (1912) “Religion is a unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things, that is, things set apart and forbidden. This belief unites into one single community all those who adhere to them”. Here Durkheim makes distinction between the sacred and the profane. Sacred objects produce a sense of awe and respect which leads to veneration for which profane objects do not. As plausible as this functional definition may appear, it missed the link between religion and its transcendental origin which is very essential in drawing the line of demarcation between the sacred and the profane realms and in challenging some secular ideologies threatening religion,

which environmental degradation is one of them (Olumati, 2017).

For Robertson (1970) however, religion is viewed in terms of supernatural belief - it refers to the existence of supernatural being that has governing effect on life; while Spiro (1965) combined both supernatural element and institutional aspect of religion to define it "as an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally patterned superhuman beings". Although, none of the definitions given above is all embracing, it reveals, however, that religions comprise of sacred, supernatural and institutional elements. Thus, we can view religion as the system of culturally patterned faith that is based on the existence of sacred or supernatural.

From the foregoing, religion provides more general guidelines for action in the form of beliefs, values, and system of meaning which is necessary for value consensus, social order and collective conscience. Every society or group evaluates the behavior of its members as appropriate or otherwise through the acceptable concepts about what is good, right or desirable, known as value. The concept of value is defined by Tukur, (1999) as "a conception of the desirable which influences or guides in the selection of one from any number of available means and end action". Schaefer (2004) also sees values as collective conception of what is considered good, desirable, and proper, or bad, undesirable, and improper in a given culture. It is logical to assert that values influence people's behavior and serve as criteria for evaluating the action of others. Religious value, therefore, can be explained as the conception of desirable standards or principles dictated by the belief system.

Lessons from Genesis and *Laudato Si'*

Like every myth of origin, the two Genesis stories of the beginning of all things (Genesis I: 1-2, 4 and 2: 4-25) have been used to explain and justify the ways human beings relate to one another and to the non-human world. As narratives of how things came to be and depictions of how things were and presumably ought to be, these creation stories have been elaborated into cosmologies and theories of the soul and twisted into ideological support for male dominance and industrial exploitation.

The first of the two stories has been the basis of both the overlordship and stewardship images for the role of humanity in the natural world. God proclaimed:

Let us make the human being in our image and likeness ... God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fertile and increase; fill the whole earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and all the living things that move on the earth' (Gen. 1:26 and 28).

Part of the human being's likeness to God is the exercise of dominion over the rest of creation. The twin images of being given dominion and being commanded to subdue the earth and all the creatures which fill it are closely connected with sovereignty. God's sovereignty is asserted often in the Hebrew Scriptures. Here the image and likeness of God, the human being, is entrusted with sovereignty. From the perspective of the first creation myth in Genesis, without such dominion and power over the rest of creation, the human being would not be 'like God'.

This is a central theme of the second creation myths recorded in Genesis 2:4b-25. The dominion motive is depicted in the first human being naming all the animals that God has made and led before him 'to see what he would call them' (Gen. 2:19). All other creatures will be what the human being says they are - certainly an extraordinary statement of the power over creation given by God to humanity. But the context of this conferral is the human hunger for companionship. In the first of the creation myths, the first divine judgment on humanity is that it is 'very good' (Gen. 1:31). That judgment is made on humanity that was differentiated into male and female, and as relational beings. The first judgment of God regarding human beings in the second myth makes this even more explicit. Having fashioned the human being from the dust of the earth and breathed the divine breath into him, God announces that 'it is not good for the human being to be alone' (Gen. 2:18). Again there is the insistence that human beings are meant to be in relationship to one another. Thus, in this second creation story, companionship is the explicit ground given for the creation of the two sexes. But it is important to note not only human beings are intended for relationship to one another. This is also the reason for the creation of 'the various wild beasts and birds of the air' (Gen. 2:19). The natural world is not merely intended for subjugation by human beings but for companionship.

In keeping with the spirit of this scripture, Pope Francis declared that the earth existed before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (Genesis 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This of course is a contradiction of the intentions of the creator which as a matter of fact must be

forcefully rejected. The notion of our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth does not in any way justify absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are therefore to be read in their proper context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing injunction to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (Genesis 2:15). 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. 'The earth is the Lord's' (Ps24:1); to him belongs 'the earth with all that is within it' (Deut. 10:14). God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me".

This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibrium existing between the creatures of this world. The scripture was also explicit to indicate that these relationships are not only among individuals but also with other living beings. 'You shall not see your brother's donkey or his Ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help... If you chance to come upon a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young' (Duet. 22:4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so "that your ox and your don-key may have rest" (Ex 23:12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures (Laudato Si' 2015).

Dominion over the earth and all that it contains the command 'to fill the whole earth and subdue it' certainly this conveys power. Such a claim to power by human beings over all non-human creation contains the possibility, all too often realized, of mindless domination and exploitation of the earth. Clearly the claim to power must be balanced by the call to responsibility, which no doubt include consistent traditional appeal to stewardship. The relationship between humanity and the rest of creation has often been as that of a caretaker, which is, being charged by God with the maintenance of the earth. The non-human world has been given to human beings for our good, to be used responsibly for our self-development, as co-creators and to answer to our purposes and thus to fulfill God's purpose in creating it as the First Cause. To be sure, this stewardship image prohibited wanton wastefulness, the mere exploitation of nature by humankind. The world is presented as a garden given into our care to be tended and nurtured. But undeniably the role of stewardship carries the implication that non-human creation is to be used.

The theme of companionship, the relationship which exists not only between human persons but between humans and non-humans, has been largely submerged in the stewardship theme. We need to recover it. Companionship implies mutuality. It excludes the reduction of either side of the relationship to a tool of the other's purposes.

Effects of environment on religion

If the mythology of the Hebrew Scripture as given in the creation account of the Book of Genesis 2: 7-20 is to be taken as already stated above, the foundation of the interactions between man and the environment becomes very explicit and relevant. From this biblical narrative, man is a product of the earth (sand), "then

the lord God formed the man of dust from the ground” (Genesis 2:7), and he received life through the gift of air. “And he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”. The narrative went further to state that “out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food”. Here lies the basis for the relationship between religion, man and the environment. Man and his environment is from one and the same source – God. At his expiration like all other mortals, he returns to the same dust (not unmindful of his ultimate destiny) adding to the nutritive value of the soil of the environment for its sustainability.

The environment serves the needs of man, including his religious need. There is nothing in religion that does not come from environment. In Christianity and in particular the orthodox churches, Christ crucified on the Cross is the hallmark of Christian faith always represented symbolically in the ‘wood of the Cross’. This wood is made from plant trees. Other religious images/status, artifacts, including alters and ambos, pews and the entire church buildings are products of the environment. In the liturgical setting as in the Catholic Church as in most Protestant Churches like the Anglican Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church etc, the Eucharistic species like the bread and wine are made of wheat flour and vine grapes respectively. The Olive Oil for the anointing of the sick, baptism, confirmation and Sacerdotal Ordinations are sourced from the olive tree plant. Still from the plant trees, the palm fronds is used for the ritual celebration of Christ triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-48) otherwise known as Palm or Passion Sunday. The dried palm fronds used for the Palm Sunday are burnt to produce ashes marked on the foreheads of Christians on Ash Wednesday to mark the beginning of the Lenten season. It

is also used to mark the thanksgiving for the fruitful annual harvest. In some African independent churches, (Cherubim and Seraphim and Celestial Churches) and the traditional African religion, it is used for exorcism. Some masquerades do wear palm fronds as part of their paraphernalia in most African communities. This is true of the *Eri Wangbe Olo and Obi-Okirika*, masquerades among the Ubima people of Ikwerre in Rivers State, Nigeria. The *Mini Nnumu* worshippers in Ubima community and traditional medicine doctors also use the palm fronds in decorating their shrines. This is also common among almost all Nigerian communities.

Water is another religious element used among the three major religions in Nigeria and beyond. There are notable passages in the Judeo-Christian scriptures on the use of water for religious purposes, as can be discerned with Neman the Leper and the miraculous cure (2 Kings.5). It is used for Christian initiation, baptism (Matthew 3:13-17). Water is used in Islam before *salat* for ablution (*wudu*) and '*mauda*' (ablution fountain) which is a central feature of each mosque, and placed strategically for the *Umas*. In African traditional religion it is also used for ritual cleansing.

African traditional healers collect water from rivers and streams since they are believed to possess healing powers from the spirit residing in them. Some water bodies are also dedicated and believed to have healing powers (Fatubarin, 2014). The members of some Christian religious sects also have Prayer Mountains, which they occasionally frequent, to offer prayers. This is a practice in imitation of such Patriarchs like Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, who while on their mission on earth did occasionally visit some mountains and deserts for private prayers and fasting (Mt.3;1, 4;1-11, Isaiah 40;3). These prayer

mountains continue to exist among Christian people as they often move to lonely and deserted places for prayers and fasting, to say the least, pilgrimages. It must also be mentioned that some religions, and in particular, African Traditional Religion, dedicate certain forests as sacred forests and sacred groves.

Some positive effects of Man's interaction with the environment

The interactions of the natural environment with man, is expectedly, not a one-way affair. Man is not only benefitting from the natural environment, he too is also blessing the natural environment in different ways.

Such benefits as noted by Fatubarin (2003), includes the following:

- Boosting the biological productivity of the natural environment, through his activities in plant biodiversity in such things as crop production, forestry and horticultural activities and his activities in animal biodiversity, in such things as livestock production, poultry, fisheries and wildlife management.
- Conserving the biological resources in form of plant and animal biodiversity and the non biological resources such as rocks, mineral resources, petroleum resources, natural gas and the atmospheric resources of the biologically important gases such as oxygen, carbon dioxide and nitrogen and the rare gases.
- Mankind has succeeded in controlling a large number of diseases, parasites and pests afflicting his biological resources of plants and animals.
- Mankind has adopted strategies such as a forestation, crop rotation, land reclamation, establishment of shelterbelts among others, to conserve the terrestrial environment and

planting of stream banks with appropriate species of plants and specialized engineering works along coastal areas, to conserve aquatic environments.

Some negative effects of Man's interaction with the environment

Nigeria has one of the worst environmental records in the world (Butler, 2008) due to mindless exploitation which has led to the depletion and degradation of the environment. The impacts are manifested in widespread social and environmental problems ranging from oil spillage, biodiversity, desertification, pollutions, urbanization, de-forestation and so on. The combined effects of these and many other environmental features have resulted in a visible and alarming rate of degradation in its environment, causing great damage to the land and bringing sorrow and poverty to many Nigerians.

Oil spillage is a common environmental challenge of the Niger Delta. The region has had the worst effect of oil spillage. There are numerous instances a case in hand is the Exxon Valdez in Asaka 1989, one of the worst oil spillage in history. This gives the Niger Delta the 'honor' of being one of the polluted places in history due to oil exploitation. Ogoniland is not left out as one of the severely damaged area of the region (UNEP, 2011). The UNEP report has it that the Benzene levels 900 times higher than World Health Organization recommendations and with oil in the soil five meters below the surface.

Desertification is common in the northern region of Nigeria with the desert encroachment on land that was once fertile. The features to deserts are barren lands, waterless and treeless (Omofonwan and Osa- Edoh, 2008). The states affected by desertification accounts for about 38% of the country's total land

area (Agagu, 2009). In these areas, population pressure, resulting in overgrazing, over exploitation for fuel wood of mangrove land and aggravated drought due to global warming have accelerated the rate of desertification (Ogunkan, 2015). This challenge is made worse by the massive water impoundment and irrigation schemes. It is estimated that Nigeria is losing 0.6 kilometers of land to desertification each year. The reports from FORMECU (1997, 1998 cited in Ogunkan, 2015) show the increase in the total areas lost to sand dunes from 812 sq km in 1976 to 4829 in 1995. Desertification is a serious environmental problem which has led to famine, diseases, and destruction of crops, livestock and man. Environmental pollution has been categorized into three groups: The air or atmospheric pollution, aquatic or water pollution and land pollution (Omofonwan and Osa- Edoh, 2008). However, municipal and industrial pollution constitute the two major sources of pollution in Nigeria. It is disheartening that most Nigerian cities lack proper solid waste management scheme and the monitoring of industrial waste is inefficient (Agagu, 2009). Despite the low level of industrialization in the country, industrial waste pollution still poses a major threat to Nigerian environment. This is made manifest in the percolation of effluent from industrial process into public drains and rivers thereby contaminating the surface or ground water. It is imperative to say that petroleum industry contributes a significant quota to Nigeria's environmental pollution (Agagu, 2009). This is manifested in incessant oil pipeline spill incidents, equipment malfunctioning, corrosion of aged pipelines, sabotage of oil installations by militants and oil thieves.

Deforestation increases water flow over the land surface, as rain will fall directly to the ground, no longer being impeded by vegetation cover. This will probably lead to the magnitude and

frequency of flooding, soil erosion increased sediment loads in rivers, slopes instability, and degradation of adjacent lands (Ityavyar and Tyav, 2012). As noted by Agagu (2009), Nigeria is among the countries with the world's highest deforestation rate of primary forest today as half of its primary forest has been lost to deforestation in the recent past. In 2006, UNEP estimated the annual deforestation in Nigeria to have covered 663,000ha with an annual national deforestation rate of 0.76%. It also affirms that the deforestation rate in southwestern geopolitical zone doubles that of national average. The major cause of this problem is the rapidly growing population with attendant higher demand for agricultural land, livestock production and fuel woods. The repeated cultivation of crops on cleared area of plant also plunders the forest and exhausts the soil and its mineral contents (Omiegbe, 1998). The increasing global demands for agricultural developments, urban growth, industrial expansion, and pressure from increasing population have had profound impact on the deforestation in Nigeria. This has ultimately reduced the extent, diversity and stability of the Nigerian forest.

Erosion is one of the most critical environmental pollution affecting different parts of the country and this is particularly expressed in two types: soil erosion and coastal erosion. Soil erosion is particularly severe in parts of the Nigeria underlain by sandy formation and are said to be prevalent in the states like Edo, Anambra, Imo, and Enugu. (Agagu, 2009). This problem is aggravated by such factors as increased agricultural activities, civil construction works, and deforestation, bush burning, over grazing, drainage blockage, poor waste management, urbanization and increased population pressure. On the other hand, coastal erosion is highly visible on Nigeria's coastline as 853km along Nigeria coastland are prone to coastal erosion (Agagu, 2009). This constitutes a series of ecological concern

especially because a large percentage of Nigeria's population and economic activities are located within coastal zone.

Religion as the conscience of the society on environmental sustainability

There is no doubt from the foregoing that the environment is of great benefit to humans in their continued survival; just as humans are to the environment for its sustainability. There is however the need for religion to be involved and take the lead far more than it has been, in the affairs of man in his environment. Religion can take advantage of its spread and influence in society to positively engage in environmental advocacy. It has influenced the culture of the people as well as their education. This call is urgent because, it is only through the timely intervention of religion on environmental issues, that humankind can be restrained from certain activities that are inimical to the environment. To stem the tide of things in relation to diverse ecological challenges of the natural environment brought about by humankind; religion has an enormous role to play (Kanu 2015). This is due largely to the following:

- Religion as a major institution among the people, has a large followership in virtually all countries of the world; and so has an influence over a large number of people.
- It is an institution in which enlightened people and even professionals are present in their large numbers.
- It is an institution that has much influence over the people and governments which is positioned to make positive influence to bare on the attitude of people towards their environment.
- Since the environment has a vantage role to play in human existence irrespective of their level of education, economic status, sex or religion, believers of different faiths naturally

are thrust with responsibilities towards environmental management for its sustainability.

Having identified the influence religion have on the society vis-a-vis the environment, it can go further to impact on the environment by way of advocacy in the following area:

- Educating, Enlightening and creating awareness on diverse issues that relate to the environment. This can be effective through admonition from the pulpits and various other religious gatherings.
- Participation in different activities within the environment aimed at tending, nurturing and managing the same.
- Bringing to the limelight the implications of certain social vices that has direct and indirect adverse effect and its subsequent implications on the environment.
- Encouraging political leaders and the people they lead to appreciate and offer the people good governance and its impact on the environment.
- Admonish the people on certain programmes that have positive impact on the environment, bearing in mind that they will possibly stand before the Creator of all things; including the environment, to give account after this mortal existence.

Conclusion

The global environmental crisis is certainly as a result of lack of self discipline of scientific knowledge propelled by greed. There is no doubt that the scientific knowledge disregards the perennial wisdom of the world's religious or spiritual traditions while laying emphasis on rights over obligations particularly in the context of natural environment. A cursory glance at Nigerian environmental profile presents a heartrending situation. Nigeria is confronted with enormous environmental challenges. For instance, Nigeria has been identified to have one of the worst

environmental records in the world (Butler, 2008). Agagu (2009) also confirmed Nigeria to be one of the worst environmentally stressed region in the world. This abysmal record underlines Nigeria's vulnerability to environmental risks and lack of effective environmental management strategy to respond to the threats in a sustainable manner.

As effective environmental management in Nigeria remains elusive, this study has proved that religion provides the most viable means through which this could be achieved. The three main religions in Nigeria no doubt are rooted in environmental ethics and values which could be an all important solution to achieving sustainable environmental management in Nigeria.

Therefore, in their bid to solve the seemingly intractable environmental problems in Nigeria, environmental managers and policy makers, governments, non-governmental organizations, religious leaders and general public are encouraged to lay more emphasis on the religious value as it relates to sustainable environment. This will go a long way in formulating an effective and acceptable environmental management strategy in the country (Nigeria) in particular, and the world at large.

References

- Agagu, O.K. (2009) "Threat to the Nigerian Environment: A Call for Positive Action" Lecture Delivered at 7th Chief S.L. Edu Memorial Lecture (2009).
- Bayode, O. J; Emmanuel, A. A. & Sogbon, O. (2011) "Environmental implications of oil exploration and exploitation in the coastal region of Ondo state Nigeria: A regional planning appraisal" in *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*. 4 (3) pp 110 -121
- Butler, J (2008) "Nigerian environmental Profile". Retrieved from www.nigeriaworld.com on 20/4/2018
- Durkheim, E. (1912) *The Elementary forms of Religious life*. Free Press
- Ebong, R.D. (2001) "Appraisal of Knowledge and Attitude of Akwa Ibomites towards a Sustainable Environment in Nigeria" in *Journal of National Institute of Environment Health science*, 2001
- Emmanuel A. A & Alakinde M. K (2006) "Nature of Environmental Science" in *Monograph of department of Urban and Regional Planning*
- FORMECU (1998) "The Assessment of Vegetation and land use changes in Nigeria between 1996/98 and 1993/95
- Haralambus, J & Alburn, M (2007) *Introduction to Sociology*; New York; McGraw Hill
- Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- Kanu, I. A. (2015b). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria

- Omofonmwan, S. I & Osa-Edoh, G. I (2008) "The Challenges of Environmental Problems in Nigeria" in *Journal of human Ecology* 23 (1) Pp 53 - 57
- Omiegbe, O. (1999) "Bush burning and its effect in Africa: A case study of Nigeria" in *Journal of Environment Education*, 1(1): 10-20(1999)
- Parsons, T. (1964) *Social Structure and Personality*; Free Press
- Robertson, R. (1970) *Sociological interpretation of Religion*; Schocken books
- Pope Francis (2015) *Encyclical Laudato Si' On the care for our common home*. St Paul Publication
- Schaefer, R.T (2004) *Sociology: A brief Introduction 5th Edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill
- Spiro M (1960) "Religion" in M. Bather (Ed) *Anthropological Approaches to the study of Religion*. London: Tavistock
- Sponsel L. Leslie, E. P. Casagrande, D (2007) "Religion, nature and environmentalism" in J. C. Cleveland (Ed) *Encyclopedia of Earth*. Retrieved on 4/9/2007 from [www.eoearth.org/article/religion,nature and environmentism](http://www.eoearth.org/article/religion,nature_and_environmentism)
- Tukur, M. (1999), *Leadership and Governance in Nigeria: The Relevance of Values*; London: Hudahuda; Hodder & Stoughton.
- White Jr., L (1967) "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *Science* .155 3767. p. 1203- 1207
- World Bank (1991). *Environmental Assessment sourcebook*, Washington D. C World bank Technical Paper

Chapter Nine

AMADIOHA IN IGBO-AFRICAN RELIGION AND THE QUEST FOR ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1977-202X

Executive Summary

In African traditional religion, in virtually every facet of its expression there is an emphasis on the environment or the world in which humanity has found herself or herself as a gift from the Creator and ultimately His property. This introduces the sense of stewardship and responsibility on the part of the human person in his or her relationship with the environment. This is a gift reserved for the human person as a result of his or her distinctive spiritual nature, of which when properly harnessed will lead to the achievement of the purpose which the Creator has ordained for humanity; however, if not well managed could lead to the destruction of the peace of humanity. Human beings form a dialectical totality with the the environment with each side affecting, and being affected by, the other. The elements of the universe are understood as manifestations of great spirits with which the human person must negotiate for his or her own existence. This relationship and negotiation is possible because of the spiritual point of contact between the human person and nature. One of such elemental forces is *Amadioha*, the God of lighting and thunder. It occupies a very important place in Igbo religion. While there are a few papers written on *Amadioha* deity, there is hardly literature that discusses its relationship with the

eco-system or its ecological relevance. The question that burdens this work, therefore, is its contribution to the preservation of the environment in precolonial Igbo society. This piece will, therefore, study *Amadioha* as a spiritual force among the Igbo-African people and its ecological relevance. For the purpose of this piece, the phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches were employed. It submits that the relationship of the traditional Igbo society with *Amadioha* communicated a concept of nature in which the human person and the material world and other dimensions of the universe constituted a dialectical totality.

Keywords: *Amadioha*, Nature, Environment, African Eco-spirituality, Ecology, Balance

Introduction

In African traditional religion, in virtually every facet of its expression, emphasizes that the environment or the world in which humanity has found herself in is a gift from the Creator and ultimately His property. This is a gift reserved for the human person as a result of his or her distinctive spiritual nature, of which when properly harnessed will lead to the achievement of the purpose which the Creator has ordained for the human person; however, if not well managed could lead to the destruction of the human person. Referring to the ecological spirituality of indigenous traditions, Gottlieb (2006) avers that:

Indigenous traditions for the most part saw the natural world as “peopled” by beings with whom it was necessary to cultivate mutually respectful relationships. Daoism viewed humans as an essential part of nature, eschewing as well any fixed distinction between the mind or soul and the body. In Hinduism the entire universe is God, and for Buddhism reincarnation as an animal in a

future life is fully compatible with being a human in this one. And in any case the goal of a realized Buddhist (at least in the Mahayana tradition) was to ease the suffering of “all sentient beings,” not just of people (p. 1).

Recent developments showing itself in global climate change, the accumulation of chemical, heavy metal, biological and nuclear wastes in many places, overuse of chemical agriculture and the destruction of forests, the decimation of habitats through expanding human settlements, logging, mining, agriculture, pollution, killing of animals for sport, loss of wilderness, devastation of indigenous peoples (Buell 2004 and Gedlicks 1992), unsustainable patterns and quantities of consumption, etc., have generated the fear that the earth may not be healthy for habitation in the near future (Joanna 1991). Gottlieb (2006) argues that these problems have arisen as a result of a wrong understanding of nature outside the spiritual parameter:

The sheer scope of this crisis means that *nature* – however it was thought of before this time – has been transformed into something new: the *environment*, that is, a nonhuman world whose life and death, current shape and future prospects, are in large measure determined by human beings (p.1).

Within the context of African traditional religion, there is no distinction between the human person and the environment. Human beings form a dialectical totality with the the environment with each side affecting, and being affected by, the other. The elements of the universe are understood as manifestations of great spirits with which human persons must negotiate for their existence. One of such elemental forces is *Amadioha*, the God of lighting and thunder. It occupies a very important place in Igbo religion. The question that burdens this piece is its contribution to the preservation of the environment in traditional Igbo society. This piece will, therefore, study

Amadioha as a spiritual force among the Igbo-African people and its ecological relevance.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that will be employed for this work so as to determine its framework is the Africanization theory. Africanization simply means 'to make African', and this could be applied in various contexts like Christianity, naming, civil service, etc., depending on what is being africanized. In relation to naming, it implies the modification of the names of places in such a manner that they reflect the African identity. For instance, Dahomey Republic was africanized to Benin Republic, Zaire to Congo, Middle Congo to Congo, Spanish Guinea to Equatorial Guinea, Gold Coast to Ghana, French Sudan to Mali, Northern Rhodesia to Zambia and Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, etc. Regarding the civil service, africanization is the process of incorporating indigens into the civil service.

In relation to the indigenization of Christianity in Africa, Mwasaru (1978) points out that Africanization is not all about replacing personnel, as in having indigenous bishops, priests and sisters, it is not all about putting Africans in the positions formerly held by the whites, it is a process that will involve living and expressing the Christian message in accordance with African traditional cultures. He agrees with Mihayo (1970) who sees Africanization in terms of Africans establishing their own forms of ministry best suited to their own way of life.

In the area of eco-spirituality, African eco-spirituality is a process of the Africanization of eco-spirituality. It is in this regard that the incorporation of African traditional religious thoughts and images such as *Amadioha* is introduced into the discussion on eco-

spirituality. The purpose of introducing *Amadioha* into the discourse is to communicate eco-spirituality in the language that the Igbo-African understands; thus, using categories that are common to him or her, or a part of his or her worldview. For a better understanding of the process of Africanizing eco-spirituality through the employment of *Amadioha* as an Igbo-African religious category, there is the need to understand what *Amadioha* stands for in Igbo traditional religion.

***Amadioha* in Igbo Religion**

Amadioha also known as *Igwe* is the son of *Chineke*, and sometimes referred to as the husband of *Ala*. In some parts of Igboland, it is referred to as *Amadiora* or *Kamalu*. The colour of this deity is red, its symbol is a white ram and its day for worship is the *Afo* market day. This explains why during sacrifices to *Amadioha*, a white ram is always preferable. It is a god of justice, in that it carries out vengeance for the weak; it is the god of love, peace, unity and the messianic hope of those who are in great need; and also, the god of enterprise that brings personal wealth.

Amadioha stands for the collective will of the people. This is derived from its etymology which means ‘man of the people’. Its associate is the *Anyawu*, the god of the sun, and the sun, astrologically, is its governing planet. This explains why, while *Anyawu* is popular in the northern part of Igboland, *Amadioha* is well revered in the southern part of Igboland, however, *Amadioha* remains a very popular deity in the entire Igboland. It is similar to the god Shango in the Yoruba religion, who is also considered as the god of thunder and lightning, and also *Sokogba* (Nupe) *Ogiuwu* (Edo); *Eto*, *Itiri*, *Egba* (Urhobo) (Kanu 2015).

Amadioha is considered the “Owner of the Sky.” Whenever lightning kills a person or strikes an object, the event is often

considered a sign or message from *Amadioha*. Lightening was believed to have its track and so the Igbo would always avoid those tracks. It is also referred to as the husband of *Ala*. Just as a husband fertilizes his wife so does *Amadioha* fertilize his wife *Ala* through rainfall. *Dibia*, or priests, are, therefore, asked to determine what wrong has been committed by the victim or the owner of the object. Not minding the violent image that thunder and lightening carry, *Amadioha* is presumed to be a gentle deity who gets violent only when provoked.

Amadioha is an agent of *Chukwu* against undetected crimes and who brings divine blessings to people. Through his intercession, *Chukwu* nourishes the green vegetation of the earth, sees to the health of the living, lightens up the world and gathers evidences as well as bears witness for good deeds and against evil deeds. It can pull down or up trees that have evil hidden in them, and such events is usually understood as an exposure by *Amadioha*. It can also destroy farmlands where people have buried charms to harm their enemies or kill their opponents. It ensures that the natural order as set by *Chukwu* is not upset. Its principle is simple, 'eye goes for an eye and a tooth goes for a tooth'. Whatever one sows, one will reap" (Kanu 2013). *Amadioha* is, therefore, referred to as the deity that manifests the wrath of *Chukwu*.

Apollos (2002) avers that in the shrine of *Amadioha*, there is usually a long bamboo pole normally suspended horizontally in the air by two strong big forked sticks, one on each side. Some charms and medicinal grass are tied to the suspended pole, smeared by blood of a fowl, and pasted with feathers. It is believed that any evil doer can never pass under it and go free without being struck to death or afflicted with an incurable

disease. Big trees and thick bush normally surround the *Amadioha* shrine, with antiquated objects like broken pots, boxes, bottles, mirrors, iron pots and cups found inside the grove. Other special instruments found in the shrine include: *Ogu* (hoe), *Mpi Okpu* (animal horn), *Opi ele* (antelope horn), *Igbugbo* (metal gong) and *Nma* (knife). Animals dedicated to *Amadioha* include: *Ebulu Amadioha* (ram of *Amadioha*). *Aturu Amadioha* (sheep of *Amadioha*); *Ehi Amadioha* (cow of *Amadioha*). These are regarded as the daughters and property of *Amadioha*. Nobody dares harm or kill them to avoid the wrath of *Amadioha*.

Ecological Significance of *Amadioha*

Amadioha is not just a deity among the Igbo people. It is *Amadioha*, symbolized by the Sun that owns the Igbo people. This explains why the Igbo are referred to as the Children of the Sun, who will always rise again. By 1970 when the Nigerian Civil War ended when there was a declaration of No Victor No Vanguished, the Igbo let down their arms and left the trenches with feeling of excitement. When they headed to the houses they build in different cities in Nigeria, their property were declared abandoned property that has been shared as spoils of war; when they headed to the banks where they saved their money, they were handed over only 20 pounds each no matter the millions they had saved. When they went back to their jobs, they were turned away as their former positions were already filled up with all kinds of personnel. They were, therefore, homeless, penniless and jobless. However, today, as children of the Sun, they have risen, germinated, grown stronger and better.

The ownership of the Igbo people, the Children of the Sun by *Amadioha*, introduces the sense of stewardship and responsibility in the use of the earth as every Igbo will have to give an account of his use of the environment. In fact, in some Igbo traditions,

Amadioha is considered a Creator God who made human beings through bolts of lightening sent down to the earth to strike *Ani*, the Earth Mother. This sense of stewardship provides a basis for a more balanced and healthy relationship between human beings and nature and so helps the human person to assign non-instrumental identity to natural realities but spiritual, aesthetic and cultural values (Callicot 2013, Worrell and Appleby 2010, McShame 2007, Barrel and Grizzle 1999).

The consequences of the mismanagement of nature staring us all at the face is an indication that religion has a responsibility as an alternative approach, that is, if a remedy must be gotten. For hundreds of millions of people, religion remains the arbiter and repository of life's deepest moral values. It is in this regard that basic elements in African traditional religion, which is very fundamental to the African people is introduced into the discourse on ecology. This importance becomes clear when we know that *Amadioha*, the deity studied alongside the need for the preservation of the eco-system is the most popular Igbo deity among the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria.

The symbol of *Amadioha* is the ram, and often represented in the form of a man carrying a sledge hammer. And although represented in the planetary form of the sun, *Amadioha* is referred to as 'the man of the people' and 'the will of the people'. This expresses that *Amadioha* is a part of the people, and not far from the people. The sun might be in the sky but it is a part of the people's daily life. Thunder and lightening might strike with terror as a sign of the activities of *Amadioha*, but it is depicted by the people in the form of a human being. At some point, it is understood as the hope of the people, since it is a god of justice. That *Amadioha* is symbolized with the sun, a ram and a human

being shows that human beings and nature constitute a dialectical totality.

Amadioha provided protection for nature in traditional Igbo societies. The *Afor* day (the third market day in Igboland) was a day dedicated to *Amadioha*, and on that day several human activities that infringed on nature were not engaged in, therefore, providing an opportunity for nature to recuperate from over use. This protection was provided through the taboos that were associated with *Amadioha*. All the taboos associated with *Ani* deity regarding the land was enforced by *Amadioha*. What gave force to these taboos was the power of the force associated with it. Thus, people kept these taboos because they feared the consequences that would come from *Amadioha*. This encouraged a sense of responsibility in the use of the environment.

Conclusion

The advent of modernism, with its relations of consumerism and capitalism, belief in these sacred beings began to diminish, and as this belief diminished, so did the human society become sick ecologically. The death or disbelief in these divinities meant spiritual death for the African people, for life was ignited in their world through the presence of these deities (Burger 1990). In the contention of Dickie (2005):

With the arrival of modern colonialism and the Europeans, major impact took place on the indigenous people. Fueled by consumerism, the colonizers brought with them invasion, disease, violence, loss of home, urbanization, discrimination, and an attack on cultural, religious, and personal identity. Soon to follow, the indigenous people become caught between their traditions and the changing surroundings. Not only was the impact felt on a humanitarian level, but it was

detrimentally felt by the land and sea, through such actions as transmigration, deforestation, reaping of the resources, economic occupation, damming, logging, and mining (p. 1).

The emergence of eco-spirituality in the West is only a sign that in spite of the fact that she has colonized and destroyed indigenous cultures, the west is truly craving for something more, something lasting, something beyond the material world: it is a craving for the spirit. This spirit is found in African eco-spirituality where nature, the great spirit is in a perpetual embrace with the human person. In *Amadioha*, we see again as before that nature is a spirit to be related with, respected and preserved for the preservation of the life of the human person.

References

- Apollos I. (2002). *Amadioha: The Igbo traditional god of thunder*. Retrieved 25/7/17 from <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/09/amadioha-the-igbo-traditional-god-of-thunder/>
- Barrett, C. B. and Grizzle, R. E. (1999). A wholistic approach to sustainability base don pluralistic stewardship. *Environmental Ethics*. 21. 43-61
- Buell, F. (2004). *Apocalypse to Way of Life*. New York: Routledge
- Burger, J. (1990). *The Gaia atlas of First People*. London, BC: Gaia Books Limited
- Callicot, J. B. (2013). *Thinking like a planet: The land ethic and the earth ethic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Dickie, R. A. (2005). Indigenous traditions and sacred ecology in Pacific Islands. *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research*. VIII. 1-9.
- Gedicks, A. I. (1992). *The New Resource Wars*. Boston: South End
- Gottlieb (2006). *Religion and Ecology: What is the connection and why does it matter?* <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195178722.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195178722-e-1>
- Joanna Macy (1991). *World as Lover, World as Self*. Berkeley: Parallax
- Kanu, I. A. (2013). The Dimensions of African Cosmology. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*. 2. 2. 533-555.
- Kanu, I. A. (2015a). *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria

- Kanu, I. A. (2015b). *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria
- McShame (2007). Why environmental ethics should not give up on intrinsic value. *Environmental Ethics*. 29. 23-42
- Mihayo, A. (1970). *The priest in Africa today*. A paper presented at the AMECEA Conference, Lusaka.
- Mwasaru, D. (1978). The challenge of Africanizing the church. *African Ecclesiastical Review*. 16, 8. 285.
- Worrell, R. and Appleby, M. C. (2010). Stewardship of natural resources: Definition, ethical and practical aspects. *Journal of Agriculture and Environmental Ethics*. 12. 263-277

Chapter Ten

AN ECO-THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NIGER-DELTA REGION

Princess Omovrigho Idialu, Ph.D

Wesley University, Ondo

Ondo State, Nigeria

idialuprincess72@gmail.com, idialup@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

In the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, like some other geographical areas, modern technology has brought several challenges which also inhibit the process of growth and development of mankind, leading to global warming. Anthropogenic release of green house gases and chemical pollutants like carbon-monoxide and other combustible elements, disposal of lubricating oils from machines into rivers, crude oil exploration and pipe-line vandalism all lead to environmental degradation and contribute to global warming. These pollution-intractable problems affect communities and have serious health, economic, and social implications. Reasons adduced for allowing multi-national companies to continue degrading the environment are: that if there are civil rights protection at all they are dead letters; again, people do not think that members of a poor community will fight back or that anyone would listen and there seem to be a kind of collaboration between government and the extracting companies that make it possible for the plundering of the land. The church needs to sensitise people that they have obligation not just to one another but to the land. Thus, emphasizing the intricate interdependence

of soil, water, flora and fauna, in which humans also belong and that God commands that we protect nature. The church should devise strategies to ensure that the mentality of our leaders change so that they can state and implement strict penalties for toxic dumpers and ensure that oil companies operate in ways in which care for the environment and the people are given due priority. When the church works with the community and the government, there may be better prospects of ending this self-destructive perpetration of exploitation and pollution of the environment.

Keywords: Pollution, Toxic waste, Toxic mog, Environment, Eco-system, Conservation

Introduction

Eco-theology is a form of constructive theology that focuses on interrelationships of religion and nature, particularly in the light of environmental concerns. It begins with the understanding that there is a nexus between human religious/spiritual worldview and the degradation of nature. It emerged as a result of the increasing awareness of the environmental crisis wrecking the world, bringing about profound religious reflections on the relationship between the human person and the earth (Kanu 2017&2018). It generally started from the premise that a relationship exists between human religious/spiritual worldviews and degradation of nature in association with the emergent scientific field of ecology. It is about human activity altering many biological processes and environmental life. Eco-theology guides Christians' interaction with the environment, addresses the value of other creatures and God's intent for the cosmos. Practical issues surrounding human need for sustenance from agriculture – fisheries, animal husbandry etc, encourage

constructive engagement with environmental problems and inspire us to better environmental care.

The need for an eco-theological appraisal of the plundered ecosystem is brought to fore by Abe (2009) when he emphasised that it is important that the Church is adequately informed and equipped with environmental knowledge as well as dynamics of the global capitalist system and its hegemonic influences. The Church's understanding of these issues is imperative because as Alokwu (2009) points out, they affect the environment and impoverish the people. The church has environmental responsibility that it needs to live up to in practical ways. Phenomena such as vector-borne diseases, flooding and landslides, ozone depletion, gully erosions, climate-induced migrations, desertification and all forms of violence to the environment through industrialisation and wars should be a primary concern for Christians because God created the world; it belongs to Him and he has delivered it to us. Thus, we have the responsibility to maintain it and give a good stewardship of it. Moreover, our humanity and wellbeing depends on the environment. This according to Dreibelbis (2005), makes it imperative that people are alerted of the importance of working for and with God in the process of repairing creation. Indeed churches have been eco-justice advocates based on the conviction of the integrity of creation, responsibility to steward God's creation and conviction that justice, peace, and environmental protection are linked. According to Pope Francis:

We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of the species as a painful

disfigurement. Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.

An eco-theological appraisal of toxic smog, waste and other forms of pollution is a dire necessity because, in Genesis chapters one and two, God saw that everything that He created was good. It follows, therefore that God's original plan and intention for us humans was to live in a healthy, nourishing and peaceful environment. And our duty, as Chartres (2011) emphasises, is not just to care for creation, but we are to be co-creators with God in protecting the fruit of the earth and the work of human hands. Climate change induced environmental hazards militating against natural and socio-economic security, by affecting soil fertility and water and forest resources need intervention, not only from world governments, but by Christians as well. In fact, Obasola (2013) opines that different forms of pollution and climate change should become central to national planning processes and development assistance. A mind-set that embraces individualism, accumulation and consumption provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. Such negative mindset need to be re-educated for positive outcomes in the fight to maintain the earth and be co-creators with God. Thus, we need to take action to ensure man's responsible stewardship over nature.

The Niger Delta, which is the focus of this paper, covers 20,000km² within wetlands of 70,000 km² formed primarily by sediment deposition. Home to 20million people and 40 different ethnic groups, this floodplain makes up to 7.5% of Nigeria's total land mass. It is the largest wetland and maintains the third-largest drainage basin in Africa. The Delta's environment can be

broken down into five ecological zones: Mangrove Swamp forest and Coastal Vegetation Zone, the Freshwater Swamp Forest Zone, the Lowland Rainforest Zone, the Derived Savannah Zone and the Montane Zone (Adebanjoko 2017). The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893 when it was expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate.

This incredibly well-endowed ecosystem contains one of the highest concentrations of biodiversity on the planet, in addition to supporting abundant flora and fauna, arable terrain that can sustain a wide variety of crops, lumber or agricultural trees, and more species of freshwater fish than any ecosystem in West Africa. The region could experience a loss of 40% of its inhabitable terrain for the next thirty years as a result of extensive dam construction in the region. The carelessness of the oil industry has also precipitated this situation.

In the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, like some other geographical areas, modern technology has brought several challenges which also inhibit the process of growth and development of mankind, leading to global warming. Anthropogenic release of green house gases and chemical pollutants like carbon-monoxide and other combustible elements, disposal of lubricating oils from machines into rivers, crude oil exploration and pipe-line vandalism all lead to environmental degradation. Deforestation – a form of forest degradation reduces biodiversity, that is, the range of habitat, species and genetic types, contributing to regional and global climate imbalances, leading to excessive storage of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and contributing to global warming.

Onwumere (2007) reiterates that challenges in the Niger-Delta are myriad, such as, poor waste management leading to contamination of fresh water sources, technical advancement accelerating decline in the quality of the environment and ability to sustain life, poultry smells, inadequate storm drains, dumping refuse in drainages and natural waste channels, leading to destruction of aquatic life, and harmful to flora and fauna, which are the mainstay of most rural folk. Oil industries are allowed to operate, unmindful of environmental hazards and ecological threats because of none or ill regulated industrial activities. Again, due to industrial activities and deforestation, toxic waste dumping, even from developed nations and other pollution-intractable problems affecting communities and urban centres, there are serious implications to humanity which according to Abodurin (2009), include a dangerously high degree of abuse of nature, posing a serious challenge to human life and existence, integrity of the whole creation and peace on earth. Theologians and scientists should have keen interest in addressing the issue of ecological and environmental crises, especially the spiralling effect of the environmental crises in Nigeria.

Air pollution is an emergency situation in the Niger Delta. Vanguard July 31 (2011) reports that Oil revenue is central to Nigeria's economy, accounting for about 70% of government earnings and 90% foreign exchange. Decades of exploration, spills, pollution of farmlands and fish in the maze of creeks across the Niger-Delta has greatly affected the health and social-economic status of people in the region. About 94% of Nigerians are exposed to air pollution implication levels that exceed World Health Organisation guidelines.

Smog (one of the key words in the work) is a type of air pollutant. The word 'smog' was coined in the early 20th century as a portmanteau of the words smoke and fog to refer to smoky fog, because of its opacity and odour. This kind of visible air pollution is composed of nitrogen oxides, sulphur oxides, ozone, smoke or particles among others (less visible pollutants include carbon monoxide, CFCs and radioactive sources). <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smog>.

Human-made smog is derived from coal emissions, vehicular emissions, industrial emissions, forest fires and photochemical reactions of these emissions. It is usually highly toxic to humans and can cause severe sickness, shortened life or death. It may be formed when air pollution levels are high and there isn't much wind, so a combination of particles and ground level ozone builds up to create a yellowish or black fog. The particles that can form smog can include dust, soot, diesel fumes or aerosols.

Toxic waste is hazardous wastes that are poisonous by-products of manufacturing, farming, city septic systems, construction, automotive garages, laboratories, hospitals and other industries. The waste may be liquid, solid or sludge and contain chemicals, heavy metals, radiation, dangerous pathogens, or other toxins. It is any material in liquid, solid, or gas form that can cause harm by being inhaled, swallowed, or absorbed through the skin. It is a discharge or by-products of industrial processes such as cyanide compounds, chlorinated compounds, and heavy metals known to cause physiological damage when ingested or breathed in by humans; and causes serious injury to animals, and plants if disposed indiscriminately in the environment. They pollute the air, and contaminate soils and water.

Toxic Waste in West Africa

The business of toxic waste is a gigantic and satanic activity that observers according to Onwunmere (2007) call an arm of the Devil's Trinity, including hard drugs and illegal arms deal. All over Africa, toxic wastes within the nations and those shipped in from developed nations constitute a threat to the health of the people. For instance, Goodman (1990) in reporting for the Centre for Investigative Reporting in New York Times, writes about the Colbert brothers from New Jersey who labelled hazardous waste as AID products from government's USAID with the logo of handshake signifying friendship, and sent loads of toxic waste to Zimbabwe, Shipping waste as "aid-relief".

Nahigyan (2008) reports how Netherlands dumped toxic waste in Cote D'Voire. Another junk exporting scenario was that reported by Brooke (1988) when a ship named Kian Sea which carried 2,000,000 tonnes of toxic matter from Philadelphia Asia, from Panama to Guinea Bissau in West Africa. Benin Republic reportedly had a contract on January 12, 1988 with a British company affiliated to South Africa to dump 5million tones of waste yearly for a fee of \$2.50 per tonne from Sesio Gibraltar, the company behind the deal (Onwumere 2010).

Toxic Waste in the Niger-Delta

Now to examples of toxic poisoning in the Niger-Delta; let us start with the environmental criminality perpetrated by Gianfranco Rafaelli who approached 67 year old Sunday Nana to dump waste in his compound in Koko, in the then Bendel State. Eight thousand drums of polychlorinated biphenyl sulphate (PCBS), methyl melamine, dim ethyl ethyl-acetate were deposited in Koko Village in present day, Delta State. The residents including Nana drank water from the toxic waste

drums oblivious of what it contained. The result was that many pregnant women according to Doctor Solomon Ogbemi, had their pregnancies aborted. People were poisoned and came down with disease and some lost their lives. When the problem was discovered by the then Babangida Administration, they brought in an advisory team from the United States, two from Britain and another from Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency, (IAEA) who confirmed that the waste contained resins, solvents, pigments and chlorine which were harmful to humans, wild life, plants and aquatic life. The waste was shipped back to Italy but many of those who were engaged to clear the mess came down with chemical burns, nausea and paralysis; and their lives were saved by the skin of their teeth even though they wore masks, protective clothing and other equipment to clear the mess.

In February 14, 2017, Vanguard Newspaper reported that the “Garden City” of Port Harcourt started experiencing black soot falling from the sky in November, 2016, scaring and annoying residents of the oil hub because nothing was done to protect their health. People’s clothes, bodies and floors were “tarred”. Traders covered their wares with umbrellas; people wore protective masks, but could not escape accumulating dark phlegm in their lungs and throats and black particles in their nostrils. Cars were also covered in dust.

Burning tyres for scrap copper and illegal refineries were some of the speculated causes of the smog. Hash tag #stopthesoot# was all over the social media. There were photographs of hands and feet covered in dust and protest marches were organised.

Again, under the guise of recycling waste, the Rivers State government fenced and prepped a refuse dumpsite which it latter called Rivers State Semi-Sanitary Landfill. The toxic waste dump was at Obigbo, in Oyingbo Local Government Area along Port Harcourt-Aba Express Way and popularly dubbed “Amaechi dustbin” (named after the governor at the time). The toxic dumpsite was next to peoples’ homes, schools businesses and health centres. With the heavy stench emanating from the site, those who could not move out were forced to endure the man-made environmental disaster. There were no equipment for waste sorting, processing, and onward forwarding for recycling contrary to what the State Government had made the people believe. The poor folk who had the unfortunate luck of having the dump as an unwelcome neighbour suffered in silence for fear of retribution.

On April 9th 2010 a Maersk Line vessel, operated by American President Line, APL, a wholly owned subsidiary of a Singapore based Neptune Orient Lines, arrived at the Federal Ocean Terminal at Onne in Rivers State and discharged some toxic waste; it got to Lagos on the 11th loaded with 70 storage (lead) batteries classified as Basel Code A1180 and broken televisions. On a tip off it was arrested by members the Nigerian Ports Authority - NPA and the Nigerian Customs Service - NCS exposing this cruelty of people to their fellow humans. Onitsha, in May 2016 was said to have the world’s worst levels of PM10 particles, microscopic particles in the air, measuring between 2.5 and ten thousand of a millimetre or micrometres from smokes, dust, soot, vehicle exhaust and industries.

Gas flaring and oil spillage in most parts of the Niger Delta are common occurrences. Till date clean potable water is a luxury in

a place like Bayelsa State. The land has been so polluted that drilled boreholes do not yield water fit for drinking. One of the resultant effects of this is that water for drinking and cooking is imported (packaged in plastic bags) from neighbouring states at exorbitant prices as a result of the high cost of transportation added to the cost of water. The poor and vulnerable who cannot afford the luxury of such imported water are left to make do with what polluted natural water sources have to offer them with obvious negative health implications.

Moreover, many rural dwellers that rely on fishing and farming have been thrown out of businesses and the youth especially are rendered restive. As far back as 2011, John Vidal an environmental editor in Guardian News Papers noted the following about the Niger Delta:

- i. Community drinking water contains dangerous concentrations of benzene and other pollutants.
- ii. The soil contamination is more than five metres deep in many areas.
- iii. Most of the spill sites that oil firms claimed to have cleaned are still highly contaminated.
- iv. There is evidence of oil firms dumping contaminated soil in unlined pits.
- v. Water is coated with hydrocarbons more than 1,000 times the level allowed by Nigerian water standards.
- vi. There is failure by Shell and others to meet minimum Nigerian or own standards.

Just recently (23rd May, 2018), it was in the news that crude oil spillage wrecked havoc in Delta communities. A devastating oil spillage, caused by equipment failure, on the 24 inches Trans Rasmus crude oil pipeline owned by Shell Petroleum

Development Company affected 50 communities under Odimodi Federated Communities in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State. Julius Pondi, the House of Representative Member representing the area, visited the place for on-the-spot assessment of the situation. He expressed concern that Shell had not shown any commitment to the plight of the people. The spillage had polluted the entire area, destroying aquatic life and fishing nets, which has made fishing which is the major occupation of the people impossible. Farmland was also affected, destabilising the economic life and the health of the people and desecrating the ecosystem.

Some people have fought against this desecration of the ecosystem in the Niger Delta. One of such personalities is Ken Saro Wiwa who was human rights and environmental activist, a poet and a great intellectual from the Niger Delta. He was a winner of the Right Living Award and the Goldman Environmental Prize. He organised the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People that developed a nonviolent campaign against environmental and social exploitation by multi-national oil companies. He spoke against environmental damage from decades of indiscriminate petroleum waste dumping. He was unhappy about the reluctance of the Nigerian government to enforce environmental regulations on the foreign petroleum companies operating in the area. At the peak of his non-violent campaign, he was alleged to have masterminded the killing of some chiefs. He was tried by a special military tribunal under the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha and hanged in 1995 at the age of 54 years.

Others that have formed coalitions for the fight against environmental degradation are: General John Duku - Coalition

of Niger delta Agitators; John Dudu (Niger Delta Watch Dog); Ekpo Ekpo (Niger Delta Volunteers); Osarolor Nedam (Niger Delta Warriors); Henry Okon Etete (Niger Delta Peoples Fighters); Asukwo Henshaw (Bakassi Freedom Fighters); Ibinabo Horsfall of the (Niger Delta Movement for Justice); Duke Emmanson (Niger Delta Fighters Network); Inibeghe Adams (Niger Delta Freedom Mandate); Abiye Tariah (Niger Delta Development Network) total devolution of power and fiscal federalism.

New movements are NDA – Niger Delta Avengers; the Red Egbesu Water Lions, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS) and the Adaka Boro Avengers in 2016.

Causes of Environmental Degradation

Several reasons have been attributed to why toxic merchandise thrives in nations and the lack of will for waste management in the Niger Delta. One of the reasons is that there is no civil right enforcement protection. If there are at all they are dead letters, with the rules unchanged for many years to suit modern realities. Again, people do not think that members of a poor community will fight back or that anyone would listen. Even though, the people of the Niger-Delta are showing their discomfort about the status quo and many people (especially the youth), are beginning to express themselves through the formation of many Militant Groups. Pressure Groups like The Niger Delta Avengers and Movement for the Actualisation of the Niger Delta Development have been formed over the years, but the unfortunate thing is that in their bid to get across to the government and the various multi-national companies who help to degrade the environment, they end up adding to the destruction in the ecosystem, thus

making life more unbearable for the indigenous poor people who get their livelihood from the rivers and land.

The West wrongfully thinks that since most developing nations seem to care very little about their environment, maybe they could just use them as dump sites. This is a wrong notion that is borne out of human depravity, leading to the strong overpowering nations oppressing the weak. The government of the nation is not also helping matters. The government does not see environmental degradation as too important as they do not understand the implications of the attack on the environment, so they don't take it seriously.

Ash soot and smog are known to be caused by the following activities - burning tyres for scrap copper, from illegal refineries, the use of generators and from petrol containing high levels of sulphur. Toxic smoke from burning of rubbish is a legacy of absence of adequate municipal waste evacuation services.

The past and present administrations seem to be indifferent to the implementation of policies that safeguard and protect the environment because the multinational companies have a stake in funding some political parties and are greatly influential in ensuring those that will become political leaders. There is, therefore, a kind of collaboration between government and the extracting companies that makes it possible for the plundering of the land that we now experience.

Impact of Environmental Degradation

A lot of Nigerians, especially from the Niger Delta, according to Bob-Manuel (2017) suffer health problems that can be linked to the activities of oil extractors. It begins with running down the

ecosystem by compromising the environment with all sorts of hazards ranging from extinction of species, air, water and land pollution, leading to respiratory diseases such as breathing difficulties, including pneumonia and asthma. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) estimates some 600,000 people die in Africa every year as a result of air pollution. Again, environmentalists have been sounding the alarm that the soot contains sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide which cause acid rain when combined with moisture. It is common to see people with burning eyes, and sore throat, and with few and sometimes no health facilities in some places, the trauma the people experience is difficult to express.

The loss of biodiversity to maintain a balance of the ecosystem by restoring soil nutrients, protecting water resources and stabilizing the climate has led to the extinction of marine life. All these have not just made the impact of global warming not only excruciating but has also killed the tourism industry which was a means of economic empowerment for the people of the Niger Delta Region.

Exposure of fish to heavy toxic metal, sediments in rain, and in drinking water, have been implicated in the high incidence of prostate enlargement among the residents of the Niger-Delta region Kadafa (2012). There is also the issue of unemployment for the locals whose major means of livelihood is fishing and farming. Land and water pollution have made it impossible for the people to fish and farm. There is also noise pollution as a result of the activities of oil and gas companies. The economic impact of the cost of cleaning up oil spillage and stopping flaring is high and many of the extracting companies are not ready to do

the right thing probably because the government is not responsible enough to hold them accountable.

Lack of accessibility to basic education, underdevelopment and unemployment, have contributed a lot to youth restiveness leading to formation militant groups, prostitution. Thus, we have negative impact of pollution (due to the activities of the oil companies) ranging from destabilisation of the ecosystem, to health hazards, noise pollution, economic crippling through unemployment, leading to poverty that is intensified by lack of provision of infrastructure. The cumulative result of all this is low standard of living.

Solution

The church has a role to play especially in the creation of awareness that land is not a commodity belonging to us but that we should see land as a community to which we belong. Bauckhan 2010, sees human life as not a self-contained affair, but takes place in relationship both to the creator and to the rest of the creation. Thus, the intricate interdependence of soil, water, flora and fauna, in which humans also belong will help to emphasise that humans have obligation not just to one another but to the land (land here, meaning, the soil, water bodies, air etc). God reminds us in Leviticus 25:23-24 that the land belongs to Him and that we as tenants must provide for the redemption of the land. Christ's holistic ministry is to perpetrate the gospel which not only saves from sin, hunger and poverty but also freedom from environmental degradation and human rights abuses. If we do not consider the environment as the basis for the survival of humanity but place economic and financial considerations above environmental issues then we are destroying ourselves. Quoting U. Utah Philips, Owusu-

Koranteng (2010) states, “The Earth is not dying – it is being killed. And the people killing it have names and address” (p. 20). These killers are mostly the big multinational companies.

The voice of the church must be loud, because our faith demands that we protect nature as instructed in Genesis 2:12, to cultivate and care for god’s creation. We have to state a strong opposition to the environment, human rights abuses and the exploitation of our natural wealth which ends up impoverishing the masses. For this to be effective, the church should devise strategies to ensure that the mentality of our leaders change so that they can state and implement strict penalties for toxic dumpers and ensure that oil companies operate in ways in which care for the environment and the people are given due priority. Gleaning from Oviasuyi and Uwadiae (2010) and Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2017) certain suggestions come to mind.

The church could work with communities to take part in the process of discussing their problems and suggesting possible solutions. The people of the grassroots that feel the pinch the most in the communities need to be involved. Village councils, family heads, non militants and militants, activists, community leaders, elders, religious leaders, youth leaders should be engaged by the government in collaboration with the multinational companies, in interactive study workshops, designed to suggest possible solutions and strategies for implementation.

As part of the creation of awareness, of the crises that are affecting society in recent times, Christian communities could observe the celebration of environmental days which are usually at national and internal levels. This will create in the people the

need to be agents of change. Moreover, seminars and retreats that focus on environmental stewardship could be used to redefine the people's understanding about the relationship of humans and nature. Even liturgical songs that are of environmental concern could help to communicate messages oriented towards environmental protection. Through the use of both print and electronic media, the church can preach its position and advocate for environmental care and sustainability.

Institutions of government and development intervention agencies should fast track process of environmental remediation and ecosystem restoration. Transparency and accountability should be taken seriously. Health risk communication process can be improved as a means of advancing understanding, practice and policy. Legislation, decrees and enactments that are disempowering should be reviewed and where necessary abrogated as they continue to serve as impediments to peace and security.

Topics like the use of environmentally sound technology, proper method of farming, bush burning control and the use of chemicals as detrimental to the soil fertility, avoidance of the use of harmful chemicals for fishing, proper waste disposal, recycling of waste material. The church could establish funds from which scholarships could be awarded to relevant students to pursue courses on environmental management, environmental theology and agriculture. The church could also provide financial support or partner with environmental agencies and departments to ensure environmental sustainability.

Give voice to the socially excluded through involvement of Community Based Associations, so that representatives from the ordinary people can participate in the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and executing of projects. Transnational oil companies should reserve a percentage of job openings for qualified and employable youths in the host communities.

The church should prompt the government ensure that transnational oil companies modernise infrastructure and equipment and replace aging and corroding pipes as a prevent measure against frequent oil spillage and to ensure implementation of memoranda of understanding that are signed with host communities. In addition, there should be construction of roads and other amenities provided by the multinational companies.

Pastoral letters that promote eco-justice should be translated into local languages and discussed in small Christian communities. People should be informed and education. Education is key to reorient them. Theological schools, seminaries and academics could also teach stewardship of all creation in order to deepen the ethical and theological understanding of the causes of global warming. By this future ministers will become aware of the reality of the ecological crisis and how to respond to it.

Apart from the church's contribution in health and education, each Christian must consider the implication of an ecological theory for their life and the application of ecological concepts is possible in diverse fields of employment and personal interests. The church could help to demand cessation of the production of all toxin, hazardous waste and radioactive material, protection

from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water and food.

The United Nations and African leaders should help Africa by enacting strict laws that would prevent these waste merchants from shipping these unwanted wastes into Africa. All over Africa, pollutants like toxic ash smog, toxic wastes within the nations and those shipped in from developed nations, oil spills, and pipeline vandalism. Asphalt processing plant belching out thick smoke from its operations.

The United Nations and African leaders should help Africa by enacting strict laws that would prevent these waste merchants from shipping these unwanted wastes into Africa. Development priorities should be set by local priorities, clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature. All past and current producers should be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production. Collaborators should be dealt with; if there are no collaborators there will be no perpetrators. Emergency measures should be taken to clean up drinking wells, and companies working in the Niger Delta should overhaul the way they operate.

References

- Abe, G. O. (2009). Biblical Bases for Environmental Concerns. In C. U. Manus (Ed), *Biblical Studies and Environmental Issues in Africa*. A Publication of Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS) Western Zone; Ibadan: Alofe Press.
- Abodurin, A. O. (2009). Anti-pollution Laws According to Deut. 23:13-14. In C. U. Manus (Ed), *Biblical Studies and Environmental Issues in Africa*. A Publication of Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS) Western Zone; Ibadan: Alofe Press.
- Abraham, C. K. (1994). A Theological Response to the Ecological Crisis. *Ecotheology*. Hallman, 65-78. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications.
- Adelakun, (2009) Thy Will is Done on Earth: A Re-reading of Matt. 6:10b and its Implications for Nigeria on Environmental Issues. In C. U. Manus (Ed), *Biblical Studies and Environmental Issues in Africa*. A Publication of Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS) Western Zone; Ibadan: Alofe Press.
- Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. (2017). Towards ending conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region: a collective non-violent approach. *African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes*.
- Alokwu C. O. (2009). *The Anglican Church Environment and Poverty: Constructing a Nigerian Indigenous Oikotheology*. A Ph.D thesis in the School of Religion and Theology, University of Kwazulu- Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Anglican Conservative Mission. *The Five Marks of Mission*. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>. may 25, 2011.
- Bauckhan, R. (2010). *The Bible and Ecology*, London. Baylor University Press.

- Berry, R. J. (200). *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*. Downers Grove: Inter-Vasity.
- Bob-Manuel, I. (2017). *Four Largest Threats Facing Niger Delta Today*. Ijaw Youth Congress at London Conference July 3.
- Bookless, D. (2008) Christian Mission and Environmental Issues: An Ecological Reflection. *Mission Studies*, 25, 37-52.
- Brooke, J. (1988). *Waste Dumpers Turning to Africa*, In New York Times. www.nytimes.com.
- Brooke, J. (1988). *Waste Dumpers Turning to West Africa*
- Chartres, R. (2011). *Church of England on Climate Change*. <http://www.london.anglican.org.-home>. Accessed March 2013.
- Dreibelbis, M. (2005). A Call to Christian Environmentalism Revisions: *A Journal of Christian Perspective*, 1 (2).
- Dyk, P. V. (2009). Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology. University of South Africa, Pretoria Department. www.researchgatenet.
- Gay-Waye, A. (1997). *Environmental Adult Education: A Factor in Sustainable Development on the Eve of a Third Millennium*. In H. Hinzer et al. (Eds), Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education, Germany.
- Goodman, W. (1990). *Trade in Toxic: Global Dumping Ground*. Centre for Investigative Reporting, New York Times. www.nytimes.com.
- Hessels D. T. and Radford R. (2005) *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Humans*. Reuther, Harvard.
- Kadafa, A. A. (2012). Environment Impacts of Oil Exploration in the Niger Delta. *Global Journal of Science Frontier Research. Environmental and Earth Sciences*. Vol. 12 Issue 3. Version 1.0.
- Kakaire, K. M. (2008). *Environmental Challenges in Sub-Saharan: Possible Solutions*. Florida: Boca Raton.

- Kanu, I. A. (2018). The Implications of Igbo-African Eco-Bio-Communitarian Spirituality for Global Concerns. In Mahmoud Misaeli, Sanni Yaya and Rico Sneller (Eds.). *African Perspectives on Global on Global Development* (pp. 75-91). United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Kanu, I. A. (2017). *Sacred Trees in Igbo-African Eco-Bio-Communitarian Theology*. Ejezie L. E, S. Audu and A. I. Acha (Eds.). *Theology and Ecological Issues* (pp. 280-287). Nigeria: CATHAN Publications.
- Kyomo, A. (2001). *The Environment Crisis as a Pastoral Challenge in Africa in Christian Theology and Environmental Responsibility*, Nairobi, Acton. 57-63.
- Langmead, R. (2002). *Ecomissiology* (30). University of Divinity.
- Moyo, F and Ott, M. (2002). *Christianity and the Environment: Care for What You Have Been Given*. Blantyre: Claim.
- Mwabazambi, K. (2010). Environmental Problems in Africa: A Theological Response. *Ethiopian Journal of Environmental Studies and Management*. Vol. 3. No. 2.
- Nahigyan, P. (2008). *The Biggest Toxic Waste you have Never Heard of*. www.palnetexperts.com.
- National Mirror Dec. 29, 2012, *Koko Toxic Waste Dump*.
- Nwaomah, S. M. (2008). Water in the Bible Context of the Ecological Debate in the Niger Delta. *Journal for Faith, Spirituality and Social Change*, 1(2), 187-204.
- Obasola, K. E. (2013). *Environmental Issues and the Greenhouse Effects in Nigeria: The Church's Approach*. Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Ogundipe, S. (2017). *Emergence of Dangerous Black Carbon*. Premium Times.
- Onduku A. (2001). *Environmental Conflicts: The Case of the Niger Delta*. A Presentation of the One World Forthnight

- Programme Organised by the Department of Peace Studies University of Bradford, United Kingdom.
- Onwumere, O. (2007). *Toxic Waste Dumping: Africa at the Mercy of God*. iNigerian.com.
- Onwumere, O. (2010). *Toxic terrorism by Americans and Europeans –The Nigerian Voice* in <https://www.thenigerianvoice.com>
- Oviasuyi, P. O. and Uwadiae J. (2010). The Dilemma of The Niger Delta Region as Oil Producing States in Nigeria. In *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*.
- Owusu-Koranteng, D. (2010). *The Role of the Church in Promoting Environmental Stewardship*. Features Article, April, 2010.
- Piotrowicz, L. M. (2012). *An Eco-theology to Inform the Relief and Development Work of the Primates World Relief and Development Fund*. A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Theology, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto School of Theology.
- "Smog - Causes". The Environment: A global Challenge. Retrieved 25 October 2013 from Wikipedia. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>.
- "Smog - Who Does it Hurt? What You Need to Know About Ozone and Your Health (EPA-452/K-99-001)" (PDF). United States Environmental Protection Agency. July 1999
- Testerman, D. E. (1992). Missionary Earthkeeping: Glimpses of the Past, Visions of the Future. *Missionary Earthkeeping*, Calvin B. Dewitt and Ghilleen T. Prance, eds PP11-44. Macon, G.A: Mercer University Press.
- The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural literacy, Third Edition. Copyright @ 2005. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Van Geest, W. *God's Earthkeepers: Biblical Action and Reflection on the Environment*, 2nd Edition. Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. <http://files.efc->

canada.net/si/environment/God_s_Earthkeepers.pdf

Accessed Oct. 30, 2011.

Vanguard July 31, 2011. 1,07900 Tonnes of Toxic Waste, Drums of Death.

Vanguard News May 23, 2018. Crude oil spillage wreaks havoc in Delta communities.

Vidal, J. (2010) Nigeria's Agony Dwarfs the Gulf Oil Spill. The US and Europe Ignore it. *The Observer* 30/5/2010.

Williams, R. (2011). *Renewing the Face of the Earth: Human Responsibility and the Environment*.
<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org./2351>.

Williams-Ebor R. (2009) *Renewing the Face of the Earth: Human Responsibility and the Environment*. A lecture given at New York Minster. <https://scholar.google.com>

Wink, W. (1993) Ecobible: The Bible and Ecojustice. *Theology Today* 49:465-477.

Wright N. *Christianity and Environmental Justice*
www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org Access 3th September, 2017.

Chapter Eleven

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND BIBLE-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Onyemauwa, Veronica Uduak, Ph.D

Department of Religious Studies

Imo State University, Owerri

onyemauwaw@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

Economic growth, social progress and sustainability are dependent upon the health of the natural environment and ecosystems. The ecosystems and their environmental assets such as fertile soils, clean water, forests and biodiversity are God's gift to mankind, source of income and support for livelihoods. They provide services to the society, such as contributions to public health, help drive economic growth, and maintain the biological foundation for human and non-human life. Thus this imposes great responsibility for effective management and sustainability. In view of this, traditionally, Africans effectively protected and safeguarded their natural habitat and ecosystem based on sound African environmental ethics. However, in recent times, the reverse has been the case. Instead of effective management and sustainability of the ecosystem and environmental assets, there are frequent cases of abuse, mismanagement and exploitation. This makes one to wonder as to what has become of the old African environmental ethics and why Africans are now experiencing acute environmental challenges which have impacted negatively on humanity and the rest of the ecosystem. A sociological research undertaken reveals that the interplay of multiple variables such as overarching human greed, materialism, selfishness, capitalism, wasteful consumption

patterns and reckless disposal of waste are the major recipes for environmental crisis in Nigeria. Aside all these anthropogenic causes of environmental crisis, a new dimension to the crisis has emerged. It revolves around some category of human beings who have lost their sense of human values, morality and decency. In their bid to 'dominate' and 'subdue' the earth have reduced the planet's ability to provide a healthy environment for the present and future generation. This calls for serious concern. Forestalling or mitigating further harm is the major thrust of this paper. Premised on Integrated Natural Resources Management (INRM) principles, the paper posits restoring effective environmental management strategy to forestall further environmental crisis. Eco-theology is advocated. It promotes accountability, positive lifestyle, and caution against wastage. It provides the key to abundance and absence of scarcity based on biblical principles. It is interdisciplinary and interreligious with a global perspective. It is revolutionary and engenders sustainable use and management of natural resources.

Keywords: Environmental, Ethics, Bible-Based, Management, Crisis, World, Change.

Introduction

Environmental concern remains one of the major focuses of national and international contemporary scholarship and this trend is bound to persist far into the future. This is because of the inextricable relationship between man and his environment, and the unpleasant abuse, exploitation, degradation and mismanagement of nature's gift to mankind in recent times. However, worth mentioning is the fact that, nature's gift to mankind calls for celebration, judicious use, preservation, protection and sustainability; not reckless exploitation and

wastage, in due recognition of this fact, traditional Africans observed environmental ethics that help in regulating their interactions with the natural environment (Shastri et al; 2002:2). Thus, contributing significantly to the conservation, management and sustainability of natural resources.

Unfortunately, in recent times, reverse is the case as African nations, Nigeria inclusive are submerged in severe environmental crisis. This is as a result of man's desire to modify his environment to satisfy his needs and demands; heedless of any moral consideration. The process of achieving this implies an encroachment on the constituents of the ecological balance which breeds 'conflict' rather than 'peace'. Consequently, the earth which is our 'sister' cries out because of the harm inflicted on 'her' by our irresponsible use of the gifts God has bestowed on us. The situation is depressive and man (the architect) is in a moral situation.

The endemic challenge of environmental crisis in the world today and the general state of helplessness on the part of human beings have generated thought provoking questions of where religion (Christian religion in particular) has been and why so late in addressing the situation. Has issues of personal salvation superseded all others? Has divine-human relations been primary? Has anthropocentric ethics been all-consuming? Has the material world of nature been devalued by religion? Does the search for otherworldly rewards override commitment to this world? Did Christian religion simply surrender its natural theologies and concerns with exploring purpose in nature to positivistic scientific cosmologies? In beginning to address these questions, I make bold to say that, one does not need to underplay Christian religion's potential for ethical persuasiveness.

The role of religion in the quest to ameliorate environmental crisis cannot be overemphasized. This is especially because religion in a very crucial way pertains to the question of existence and the nexus between religion and existence is inseparable (Mbiti, 1999:15). Religion has rules of conduct that guide life within a social group and is often organized and practiced within a community (Agbiji, 2013:1 cited in Amolo and Onyemauwa, 2017:76). In this regard, the rules about conduct relate to the ethical provisions that religion provides to society and which help to sustain the social group or society. In effect, these ethical provisions are connected to socio-political, economic and environmental concerns of the community and can be derived from the Christian faith.

From the perspective of Christian faith, Christian religion has shown itself capable of championing the environmental cause. Its attempt to articulate a systematic theory and praxis of human interaction with his environment is what is generally referred to as eco-theology. At the centre of this faith is the Bible seen as the record of God's self-revelation and intervention in human history. Hence, this paper presents Christian environmental principles as contained in the Bible to tackle environmental crisis in Nigeria. Integrated natural resource management (INRM) approach which demands the involvement of men and women in environmental management would equally serve the purpose. This is because in solving environmental issues and problems, people need to help and follow an appropriate "moral basis" for dealing with the environment.

An Ethical Appraisal of Environmental Crises in Nigeria

This section appraises the environmental condition of Nigeria nation due to man's 'relationship' with the environment; as every relationship goes with its challenges that of the human person and his environment are not devoid of challenges. Thus, the environmental degradation witnessed in recent times can be traced to man. A tour of some of the states in Nigeria shows the magnitude of the damage inflicted on the earth, ranging from pollution to deforestation. Human interaction with the physical environment in Nigeria has given rise to serious environmental concerns. The historical use of natural resources to meet various human needs and development have seriously depleted and degraded the resources and the natural environment as a whole. Among the most common environmental problems in Nigeria today are climate change, the persistent loss of biodiversity, deforestation, pollution of soil and land quality, desert encroachment, declining marine resources, water pollution and scarcity. For instance, the UN-REDD Report (2013) indicated that, Nigeria has lost more than 50 percent of its forest cover since 1990 and currently less than 10 percent of the country is forested. The deforestation rate in Nigeria is estimated at 3.7 percent, one of the highest in the world. The increasing number of oil producing companies, gaseous emissions and toxic effluents from companies have led to the pollution of the atmosphere, streams, rivers and land. One will not fail to mention the uncontrolled poaching for wildfire otherwise called *bush meat* in Nigeria.

In today's Nigeria, urban areas have become big refuse dumps as un-recycled municipal and industrial wastes, both solid and effluent are competing for space with people. Poor sanitation and the general absence of appropriate sewage disposal systems in the urban centers as well as unsafe drinking water sources in

most of the rural communities have contributed to the spread of many diseases. Many environmental experts and ethicists have warned against the dire consequences to humans and ecosystems should the quantity and quality of water continue to deplete. But unfortunately, they are overlooked. Paradoxically, blessed with abundance water resources yet thousands of Nigerians suffer from water scarcity and deadly pollution due to inability to properly manage, use and protect water resources for socio-economic development and environmental sustainability (Onyemauwa, 2018:4).

The menace of erosion and terrible landslide especially in the eastern part of Nigeria are also part of these increasing environmental crises. Gully erosion sites are almost everywhere around the southeast geopolitical zone but not limited to this area alone. Most of human activities which occur on daily basis tend to increase the occurrence of soil erosion and gullies in the various communities. Settlement patterns, the nature of housing and infrastructural development contribute to the propagation of gullies. According to Iwuoha (2017:266) settlements are not planned; houses are built indiscriminately without consideration to natural flood paths and drainage systems. Sand excavations are recklessly carried out by individuals along existing road sides by road construction companies. These excavated sites eventually develop into huge gullies as rainwater continues to impact on them. Large portions of the vegetation cover are cleared annually for farming purposes, thereby exposing the top soil. With the soil exposed, it is no longer capable of resisting the erosive actions of the rain water. These activities essentially result, in many ways, to the continued degradation of the environment. Other specific human activities that cause erosion include: poor solid waste management practices; poor road

construction practices; poor home construction practices; construction of undersized and inappropriate drainage systems; and poor infrastructural development practices.

These factors contribute to the rate and magnitude of soil erosion in Nigeria. The mono-sector economy has created an over dependence on crude oil with its environmental consequences. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria for instance, environmental degradation has been compounded by the unethical explorative and productive activities of multinational oil companies in collaboration with corrupt and influential Nigerians. In the past sixty years the region has witnessed many cases of oil spills and gas flares with untold consequences like loss of productive land, surface and ground water pollution and soil contamination. The poor and dispossessed at times vandalize pipe lines in order to make ends meet, thereby leading to further environmental damage and more poverty. Therefore, as rightly observed by Nwagbara et al, (2012:6 cited in Naseri, et al, 2017:113), there is no basis of comparison between meager and recyclable waste generated by the poor and the huge amount of good consumed and ecologically debilitating wastes generated by the rich class. For instance, the gas flaring and oil spillage in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria that have wrecked untold havoc on land, water and air, were the results of the activities of the rich Nigerians and their multinational corporations counterparts.

Increasing population growth in some Nigerian communities means reduction in the number of arable land per capita. As farmers cultivate a parcel of land longer than necessary with little or no fertilizers or even alternative lands to farm, the soil fertility of the available farmland continues to dwindle thereby increasing their poverty level and degrading the land further.

The same can be said of other natural resources like non-timber forest products, water quality and availability, air quality.

Furthermore, the biting poverty in most local communities does not allow for a sustainable use of the environment, neither does the excessive materialism of the affluent and rich encourage a lifestyle that is eco-friendly. As earlier pointed out, over concentration of basic amenities and jobs in the urban centres, has brought rapid urbanization with its undue strain on the urban environments. The changing patterns of land use to provide food for and accommodate the infrastructural needs of an increasing population has also brought about significant changes in the land cover in many areas with various forms of ecological implications. Environmental degradation has made it impossible for many poor people who depend directly on the land, the forests and the rivers/streams for their livelihood to break out from their circle of poverty. In the bid to make ends meet, the poor also engage in unsustainable use of these resources that tend to worsen their degraded and depleted state. The link between power, wealth, institutional and market failures working side by side have been shown to compound these environmental problems in Nigeria.

The Integrated Natural Resources Management (INRM) Principles

In today's world, there is a broad spectrum of initiatives, activities and advocacies geared towards maintaining the vitality of nature's gift to mankind; this is known as sustainable natural resources management. The sustainable use and management of natural resources therefore demands the optimal use of these resources, especially through increased efficiency in exploration, extraction, production/processing or manufacture,

consumption, reuse, recycling and decrease in their demand (Chiras, 1995:23).

The quest for the sustainable use and management of natural resources has been pursued from the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives of the physical, social sciences and the humanities. However, in this paper, the Integrated Natural Resources Management (INRM) approach is adopted; it has been defined as an approach to managing resources sustainably by helping resource users, managers and other stakeholders accomplish their different goals by consciously taking into account and aiming to reconcile and synergize their various interests, attitudes and actions. These goals include increasing production, enhancing food security, creating value, maximizing profitability, minimizing risk, building up and maintaining various natural and other assets, and conserving the natural resource base (Frost, et al, 2006: 30).

According to Attah-Krah (2006: 6-9) the INRM approach seeks to meet human needs for survival and development while at the same time maintaining environmental balance and sustainability. Human needs, their livelihoods and their rights, and how these needs interact with management of the natural resources lie at the heart of INRM. This approach emphasizes the finitude, the interrelation, the depletion and degradability of natural resources in the ecosystem. It also emphasizes the involvement of many stakeholders. These stakeholders include government, private sector, and the individual prospector of these resources, the immediate communities where these resources are found as well as the global/international community. The local communities for instance must be made to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility in the management of the resource, and in the benefits that accrue from its use.

Whatever management and control system is put in place is likely to face barriers in implementation, if it ignores the community role and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Oftentimes this creates conflicts situations in the management of natural resources.

Integrated Natural Resource Management also takes into account the need to reduce the rate of exploitation of these natural resources, the need to avoid wasting the resource through efficient production and consumption patterns and the need for proper disposal of the final waste arising from the use of the resources. Consequently, there is need to manage these natural resources in a holistic and integrated manner. Such holistic management must pay attention to all dimensions of the ecological crises. The Integrated Natural Resource Management shares conceptual affinities with the Integral ecology approach proposed by Pope Francis (*Laudato Si*, art. 139-162).

Eco-Theological Principles for Sustainable Natural Resources Management

In Christianity, as a theological discipline of the Christian faith, practical theology engages by 'focusing on global, local and particular issues with the intention of doing something about the reality and problems confronting society' (Hendricks, 2010:284). In order to respond adequately to the current environmental threats and injustice, Christianity has applied the ecological wisdom latent in Biblical tradition. She has also reinvestigated, rediscovered and renewed this tradition in the light of the challenges posed by these environmental crises. This double attempt at offering theological critique of the values, culture and habits underlying the destruction of the ecosystem by human activities as well as a critique of the Christian tradition in the

light of the contemporary global environmental crises, awareness and consciousness, is what is referred to as 'Ecological Theology'. Eco-theology seeks also to review every aspect of the Christian faith. It seeks to make the entire life of the church to include an ecological dimension and vision. It draws its general principles on environmental sustainability from the Bible and Christian tradition and applies them to contextual situations of different environmental problems (Conradie, 2006 3-4 cited in Naseri, 2017:120-121).

Furthermore, as rightly observed by Bisong (2015:165-181), eco-theology has become a viable option in the quests for answers to the contemporary environmental challenges for the following reasons: it appeals to religious sentiments in the care for environment, it is an extended theology, it is interdisciplinary, it is pluralistic, it is interreligious with a global perspective and it is revolutionary.

The Biblical Principles about creation/environment

- i.** Human beings and non-human creation are all creatures of God, therefore "brothers and sisters" in the broader sense. They all together build the ecosystem where the parts depend on the whole. The Christian view is not anthropocentric nor bio-centric but God-centred. Therefore, as God's creatures together, all have a sacred and inviolable dignity and bear the blessing of God for eternal life.
- ii.** Taking care of creation is an integral and important part of Christian faith. Human beings as created "in the image of God" (Gen 1:27) are called by God "to have dominion ... over every living thing that move upon the earth" (Gen 1:28). They then have the ability to transcend other creatures and the right to use resources. But at the same time, it combines with a special responsibility "to take care of it" (Gen. 2:15)! This combination

demonstrates the “dominion” as servant- management that is to accomplish the will of God the Creator, not the people themselves. The good King in the Old Testament was the King who served the people. The incarnation of Jesus Christ and his obedience to the Father has set up a model of taking care of the creation. Exploitation and destruction of the environment violates God himself and his name and is opposite to the Christian faith. Environmental protection is for Gods glory, but also for the -interest of human beings who cannot survive without clean air, drinking water, fruitful soil and existing forests.

iii. A key instrument to increase respect for creation and caring for the resources is to worship and praise God by songs, prayer and dancing, such as the song. With the image of God is the prerequisite and guarantee for men to take care of the creation. In worship and praise to God, men are in God and God is in men and then the task of caring is accomplished.

Characteristics of Bible-based Environmental Protection

1. Sustainable Development: Human and non-human beings are all guests on earth. The guests who are invited by God to attend the wedding banquet in the eternal life do not include only human beings, but also non-human beings; not only the current generation, but also the future generations. Therefore, we should use resources with an attitude of fear and respect for all other guests (present and future). On the one hand, like the “good servant” (LK 19:11--27), we keep the earth resources prolific; on the other hand, according to the principle of manna (Exodus 16), we consume resources in a sustainable way so that the future generations can also benefit.

2. **Green Economy:** Christian Environmental ethics can of course not be separated from Christian economic ethics and both of them work on the shift of economic model from the modern to the ecological on the duty of taking care of the creation. In ecological economy, the environment will become one of the decisive factors. At the same time, the stimulating economic leverage will be shifted from human consumer demand only to the needs of all creatures on earth. In ecological economy, the dignity of life and well-being of existence for all creatures will become the basic framework and behaviour guidelines of human economic activity.
3. **Be Hopeful:** Compared with the eco-pessimists, Christians believe that the covenant of God with his believers and his creation is not broken and still exists in Jesus Christ: God wants to do everything to save the earth as his garden and gift to humankind. Therefore, it is never too late to take part in God's actions to save the planet earth. However, compared with eco-optimist, the earth in history is a land standing up the cross of Jesus Christ so that there is no any possibility for human beings to build an ecological paradise. Because of it, Christians put their hope on the second coming of Jesus Christ and then have more courage in struggling for the dignity of all lives.
4. **Trustworthy in small matters:** Christianity as a way of life is characterized by doing little things with big love, which is based on the greatest commandment of Jesus Christ. In environmental protection, this feature is reflected in all levels and directions in the relationship between people and environment. The financial and personal means are often little, especially for small and medium enterprises SMEs. But God knows that we have limitations. But we can do the small steps that we can: waste recycling,

healthy food, reducing air pollution in transport and selecting clean energy etc.

5. Pursuit of Ecological Justice: The purpose of environmental protection for Christians is not just to comply with existing laws and regulations related to the environment, but to focus on the promise of God for all of creation. Meanwhile, ecological justice for Christians is not based on people's own view of the ought-to-be of the relationship between men and environment, but in the relationship between men and God. Therefore, in the function of the society as a whole, Christians should represent all creatures to pursue their right of existence and the dignity of life; and in the daily life, Christians should become the Good Samaritan of their various neighbours (human and non-human).
6. Peaceful and Joyful: The presence of God determines the characteristics of orderly and joyful in Christian life. In Old Testament, Jewish people lived in a rhythm of Sabbath and Jubilee according to God's commandment which means work and rest, production and relief; debts and forgiveness. Jubilee (Lev 25:8-54) has a social and also an environmental meaning: every seventh year and every fifth year (the year after 7x7) should be a year of jubilee where financial and other debts are forgiven and the soil should rest, without agricultural work so that the "tired" soil can recover. Also on the seventh day of the week, the Sunday, animals should rest as workers in order to get new strength. Therefore in biblical terms the wellbeing of human and non-humans beings was never separated but always seen as two sides of the same coin. In Christian life, Church Year and Lord's Day become the basic rhythm and order. However, in modern world, because of the

pursuit of profits in an isolated way we have brought the earth into modern ecological crisis; and also because of the belief “time is money” we brought ourselves into a disordered and non-cease fast-food life. Christians believe that wealth is attributable to God and the responsibility of every entrepreneur just takes part in the management of God in the given share. Thus, there is nothing too much on shoulder and there is nothing in mergence for feet. What we should do is to learn in the participate process to enjoy the peace and happiness in God being with us. Therefore, the life itself of Christians will become light and salt in construction of ecological life model.

Conclusion

From the face value, this paper reveals God’s attentiveness to human needs as well as his divine provisions of abundance resources. This attest to God’s loving and caring attributes to mankind. However, the present ecological situation is an indication that there is great danger; this definitely calls for solutions to deliver ourselves from the spiral of self-destruction which we have entrapped ourselves with. As a way out, this paper proposes appropriate moral basis for action. God’s word found in the Holy Bible becomes imperative, as it provides moral principles that guide human conduct. Environment is God’s creation, special gift of God to mankind, owned by God and not by humans. Although human beings are in the center of the environment, it does not mean they can use them in an anthropocentric way. Rather, in our use of it, we have responsibility towards God (the creator), the earth, the future generations and towards humanity as a whole. Hence, the dominion granted to man by the creator is not an absolute power to “use and misuse,” or to dispose of things as one pleases. Rather, it is for good usage, maintenance and preservation. The

Onyemauwa, Veronica Uduak, Ph.D

seemingly inescapable inference from all this is that environmental care is embedded in the heart of biblical faith: it is a responsibility imposed on us all from time of creation. Environmentalism is not one among many priorities or options, but an obligation laid on all-and one which demands a response. Looking after creation is an integral part of religious commitment. Let the revolution begins!

References

- Agbiji, O.M. (2012) Development-oriented church leadership in post-military Nigeria: A sustainable transformational approach; Doctoral Dissertation, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch.
- Amolo, H. and Onyemauwa, V. (2017), Environmental crisis in Nigeria: A religious approach. *International Journal of Religion and Culture (INJOREC)*, vol. 2, No 1.
- Attah-Krah, K. (2006) "integrated Natural Resources Management and Genetic Diversity: Two Sides of the Coins for Sustainable Livelihoods and Development," in *Integrated natural resource management in practice: enabling communities to improve mountain livelihoods and landscapes*, T.Amedeet. al, (eds.) Kampala: African Highlands Initiatives.
- Bisong, K. (2015) "Anthropocentric Castles and the Imperatives of Eco-Theology," in *Shepherd and teacher*, U.Njoku and S.Anyanwu (eds.), Owerri: APT Publications.
- Chiras, D. (1995) *Environmental science: a framework for decision making*. Merlo Park: The Benjamin/Cumming Publishing Coys).
- Conradie, E. (2006) *Christianity and ecological theology: resources for further research*, Stellenbosch: SUN Press. Available: <http://www.africansunmedia.co.za>. (Accessed May 28, 2018).
- Frost, P., Campbell, B., Medina, G. and Usongo, L. (2006). "Landscape-Scale Approaches for Integrated Natural Resource Management in Tropical Forest Landscapes," *Ecology and Society* Vol. 11 No. 2, 30. Available: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol11/iss2/art30> L. (Accessed May 28, 2018).

Iwuoha, C.M. (2017) The theology of nature and erosion quagmire in Nigeria. In L. Ijezie, S. Audu and A. Acha (eds.), *Theology and ecological issue* (pp. 265 – 266). Port Harcourt: Cathan Publication.

John Paul 11, *On Social Concerns [Sollicitudo rei Socialis...]*, no.34.

Mbiti, J.S. (1999) *African religion and philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann

Naseri, C., Bassey, P. and Owol, O. (2017) “Biblical paradigms for the sustainable use and management of natural resources in Nigeria: interpreting John 6:1-15 from an eco-theological perspective,” in *Theology and Ecological Issues* L.E. Ijezie, S. Audu and A. I. Acha. Port Harcourt: Cathan Publication.

Pope Francis *Laudato Si*, art. 139-162.

Chapter Twelve

THE SCRIPTURE AND CHURCH IN FORESTS CONSERVATION

Steve Orseer Akullah

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

Federal University Wukari, Nigeria

steveakullah@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

The great danger that stares man in the face consequent upon forest destruction can better be imagined than felt in the real sense of the word. Forest and forest products provide so much for the benefit of humanity and yet all that man does is to destroy this natural resource freely given to him by his creator. Today in Nigeria and most countries of Africa and the world, the vegetation cover and forests have been deeply depleted posing serious climate conditions on the people. Two key words in the Hebraic Genesis account; *רָדָה*, *radah*, raw-daw, Gen 1:26 is rendered "to rule, have dominion, and *כָּבַשׁ*, *kabash*, meaning: to subject, subdue, in Gen 1:28 have either been read out of context or may not have been understood and therefore misinterpreted and misapplied by readers to warrant the destruction of forests and forests products. It is in regard to this wrong notion and conception that this work seeks to closely examine to find out what God really meant when he said that man should rule over his created world and source from "every tree that has fruit with seed in it, his for food" (NIV, Gen 1:29).

Keywords: Forests, Deforestation, Afforestation,
Desertification, Global Warming

Introduction

Forests and forest products have been of great value to humanity since creation. There is a symbiotic relationship between forests and humanity as none can exist without the other. As forest trees give oxygen to humanity so does man give to forests carbon dioxide for survival. However, in recent years there has been a gradual depletion of forests by mankind and this has given birth to consequential results. Humanity, contrary to tending this cherished natural resource for sustenance has turned forests into a pitiable object that must be depleted by all means. The rapid growth in population has not helped matters. This is because while population grows exponentially, there has been no corresponding growth in forest trees. On the contrary there is an inverse growth relationship between forests and mankind. As a consequence, to this ugly scenario, today the world over, there has been a gradual rise in temperatures causing global warming, depletion of ice in the arctic zone of the world with resulting high water levels causing massive floods in many countries of the world including Nigeria.

In this paper, the causative factors for forests depletion will be examined, the consequential effects of such monumental destruction will be analyzed and the economic importance of forests will be x-rayed with a view to forestalling the wanton destruction of this prized natural resource. Highlight will be given on the economic contribution of forests to the wellbeing of man and on the need to conserve forests.

Finally, Biblical and Church response in stemming the dreaded scourge of forests destruction will be given so that forests and forest products will be conserved for the well-being of humanity.

Conceptual Framework

The Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines forest as a large area of land that is thickly covered with trees. Forest can also be defined as renewable of natural resources with timber or wood and other forest products for homes and industrial uses, food, shelter for animals and aesthetic values (Orji, 15-18). Forest products include wood and wood materials such as water, fauna and flora species used for medicinal, ornamental and religious purposes, wild edible mushrooms (Pegler and Pearce, 475). Other forest products include gum, Arabic kola and honey (Seif el dim and Zarragoug, 176-180).

Biblical scholars agree on the fact that forests are a creation of God. In his creative work, God commanded the land to produce the vegetation, seed bearing plants and trees that bear fruit with seed in them on the third day of creation. After this great act of creation God declared that this was good. God intended that the seed bearing plants and the trees that had seed in them be food for the man he had made in his image on the sixth day (Gen 1:29). As God's steward on earth man was instructed to subdue the earth and to rule over it in a manner that would give glory to God and also manage it for his sustenance for food. The natural vegetation is part of God's creation given to man wherefrom he derives his food. Today however, most of the natural forests across the globe have been depleted and are on verge of extinction with attendant consequences on the environment and on man.

Writing in his article, Egbogah argues that effective spirituality should be holistic i.e. the African Christian should not only aim at what pleases God, but also what provides the ultimate good of man to his neighbor and the conscious promotion of ecological balance in the whole creation(3). In other words, man while

maintaining the vertical relationship with God must as well have a horizontal relationship with both man and God's creation. This means that the traditional approach to spirituality of prayer, bible study, meditation, contemplation and retreat without regard to humanity and vegetation has to be discarded for holistic spirituality.

Some facts about Nigeria forests include:

- I. Forest cover thins out as one moves from the south to the north;
- II. There are two broad types (Forests and Savanna);
- III. Plant diversity: Over 4,600 plant species identified (Ranked 11th in Africa);
- IV. The forests have over 560 tree species with a range of 30 to 70 species per hectare.

Deforestation

Deforestation is the process of cutting down or burning the trees. It is also defined as the removal or destruction of forest vegetation unaccompanied by deliberate effort at its replacement (Oguntala, 262-272). Deforestation involves not only the cutting of trees but also the removal of plants and shrubs. Oguntala gives the reasons for deforestation to include the conversion of forest lands for agricultural practices, indiscriminate bush burning, and unsustainable logging (262-272). Sobowale et al add that infiltration of forests by Fulani cattle herdsman for grazing, farming activities within forests and fuel wood for cooking and heating as reasons for deforestation (51-56). It is reported that Fulani herdsman usually set bush fires to encourage regrowth of fresh grasses for grazing of cattle and because of scarcity of kerosene and its high cost when available makes peasants to rely on fuel wood for cooking. Of recent, Nigeria's forests and

savannah wood have witnessed a monumental pressure due largely to population growth, thus the demand for agricultural land, timber, fuel wood, bushfires and overgrazing have been on the increase. Esuene corroborates these claims by adding that these illegal activities have led to the fall in productive capacity of arable lands with the result that the vegetation structure and composition of forest lands have altered from what they used to be (9-10).

The Causes of Deforestation

The management of forests in Africa and Nigeria in particular has been poorly given attention to by the governments of the various countries. This has given rise to land degradation in many forests across the continent leading to destruction of forests species. It is widely known that government funding of forests has been on a steady decrease especially in states where large sums of revenue are derived from forests products with little plough back into the management of forests (Akindele, 70-79). This lackluster attitude by government has heightened the destruction of forests. The causes of forests depletion include the upsurge in population growth thus putting enormous pressure on forests reserves, logging timber, farming, forest fires, and fuel wood. This fact is corroborated by Kio who agrees that 86% of the respondents in a sample population of 100 interviewed in six states of Nigeria said that agriculture was the major cause of deforestation. This is followed by shifting cultivation with 59% of the respondents Fuel wood has 55% of the respondents while bushfires have 41% as the cause of forest depletion (35-43). Serious forest depletion has taken place in the last ten years in Nigeria due largely to lack of monitoring by forestry staff as a result of poor funding from government. Forestry staff are alleged to connive with loggers and poachers who carry out these nefarious activities for small tips.

The Effects of Deforestation

Deforestation of forests in the Northern Guinea and Sahelian Savannah of Nigeria whose states include Sokoto, Kebbi, Jigawa, Katsina, Kano and Bauchi has caused severe wind erosion with attendant large sand dunes. These sand dunes have in turn destroyed houses and covered farmlands stretching kilometers of surface lands making them unproductive wastelands. In the rainy season water erosion silts the rivers and streams thus again covering water bodies, destroying aquatic life and fish, etc. The destruction of farmlands by sand dunes and the siltation of sources of water for human and animal consumption has caused the migration of Fulani herdsmen into the hinterland of the country thus causing the skirmishes between indigenous farmers and the herdsmen. At present Fulani herdsmen are causing havoc in the entire length and breadth of Nigeria. There have been constant killings in the states of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Southern Kaduna, Oyo, Ogun, Enugu, Anambra, Oshun, Ekiti, Kwara, etc. by the herdsmen who arm themselves with sophisticated weapons, killing thousands of innocent farmers, burning their houses, eating up crops while destroying farmlands while the government watches helplessly. Indeed, the herdsmen scourge has assumed a disturbing trend such that some people are beginning to think that another Boko Haram is in the making particularly with the seeming helpless action of the Buhari government to stem the tide of wanton killings and destruction of property running into billions of Naira.

In the dry season, the poor vegetation cover owing to deforestation leads to harsh hot weather whose excessive heat waves cause diseases like meningitis, smallpox, chicken pox, measles, conjunctivitis and malaria (Igboanugu, 34-38). Scholars say that deforestation leads to a decline in rainfall, increase

surface temperature and alters the local hydrology (Adedire, 270-271). Deforestation increases the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere. This is because the trees that would have converted the CO₂ emitted into the atmosphere into their food through photosynthesis have been destroyed thus promoting excessive heat waves. Okojie posits that global warming is a result of emission of fossil fuels in the atmosphere and deforestation. According to Ausceanac, greenhouse is associated with forest degradation. This has a direct consequence to the depletion of the ozone layer that shields the earth from direct heat waves from the sun. Fierce winds as a result of deforestation increase the loss of moisture and water requirements for human and animals. This causes animal blindness and even death when the winds are dusty and sandy hot (Baumer, 250). Forest depletion has led to the extinction of many animal species such as elephants, lions, tigers, and hyenas as corroborated by (Oloyede, 12-13).

The economic importance of forests

Humanity benefits immensely from forest products and services. The measure of economic value of forest products and services is relevant to individual's willingness to pay for such benefits. These values can be classified into direct usage values and indirect usage values. The direct usage values include timber, fuel wood and tourism, while the indirect usage values include the protection of watersheds, and the storage of carbon.

1. Timber values. This has to do with the felling of trees for timber products such as poles for domestic consumption and for export to attract foreign exchange. Kio (2000) reports that Timber contributes to the income of individuals and even governments. Timber extraction was a major source of revenue earner in Nigeria for domestic

use such as roofing, furniture, motor vehicle bodies and canoes and export.

2. Fuel wood and charcoal. Fuel wood is the primary source for cooking and heating among the poorer countries of the world. Large percentage of this fuel wood comes from the forests. Kio says that 55% of the respondents in his survey agreed that fuel wood is a major contributor for cooking and heating in Nigeria (35-43).
3. Agriculture. With the increasing growth in population in many African countries the demand for land for agricultural activities is overwhelmingly on the increase. Land situated in the forests is usually very fertile for farming as there are proven cases of product high yields. Other benefits include;
4. Poaching of animals for bush meat for local consumption and for export
5. Sourcing of fish, crustaceans such as crabs etc., birds for local use and for export.
6. Taking tree products such as roots, bark of trees, leaves for medicinal use.
7. Taking latex from rubber trees, wild cocoa, honey, gum Arabic, nuts, fruits, flowers, seeds, spices etc. for subsistence.
8. Forests help in maintaining soil quality.
9. Forests help in controlling water and wind erosion.
10. They modulate siltation and flooding.
11. They protect waterways and marine resources from accelerated siltation.
12. Forests protect watersheds.

Omiyale adds that the economic importance of forests to farmers include:

- The increase in land productivity due to improved soil fertility.
- The contribution of income among small scale farmers from the sale of forest products such as fruits, nuts, seedlings, poles, fuel wood and charcoal.
- The protection of productive potential of a given site and the improvement of the environment (1-8).

Plotkin argues further that forests offer a range of benefits to humanity and these range from medicines against incurable diseases to varieties of economically important plants whose resistance to disease or productivity may be incorporated into crop varieties (108-110).

Biblical Response to Forest Conservation.

In the genesis account of creation, we observe that God after creation handed his created work to man to “rule” over it (NIV, Gen 1:26) and to “subdue” creation (Gen 1:28). It must be understood that God’s created work was declared good so the whole creation was without sin until the fall of man in the garden. However, since the fall, man has continually disobeyed the instruction of God to rule and to subdue the earth to mean total destruction of the creator’s work. This is seen in the destruction of nature’s beautiful forests. As God’s stewards on the earth the command to rule or have dominion and to subdue the earth did not mean to destroy God’s creation. It is senseless to imagine that a Holy and righteous God would after creating a world which he himself would declare to be good, hand it over to man to destroy as being misunderstood in the usage of the verbs to rule or have dominion and to subdue it. This is more so when man is told that his food would come from “seed bearing plants...and every tree that has fruit in it” (Gen 1:29).

The Hebrew verb *רָדָה* {raw-daw'} in Gen 1:26 is rendered "to rule, have dominion" dominate, tread down, to have dominion, rule, or to subjugate. It is pertinent to observe here that the right to rule is not a right to tyrannize or destroy the beautiful creation of God as enshrined in the vegetation. It is a right to service and to tend the vegetation as commanded by the creator for the benefit of man which includes his source for food. This right extends only to such duties as are consistent with the powers of the servants, and with the place which is assigned to them. All power is of God, and can only be lawfully exercised when exercised according to His designs. That likeness to God in which we were originally created, should remind us that justice, and goodness, and mercy, are the chief distinctions after which we should aspire; and that our dominion was designed, like that of Him who designed it, to be exercised with wisdom, rectitude, and compassion.

In the same vein, the Hebrew verb *כָּבַשׁ*, kabash, meaning: to subject, subdue, force, keep under, bring into bondage in being misunderstood and misinterpreted to mean to annihilate, to destroy and to deforest. This can only be far from the truth as God would not just create and hand over to man to destroy, then there would no justifiable reason for creation in the first place. God's creation is for the benefit of humanity. The verb *כָּבַשׁ*, kabash, simply means to have control over God's creation as stewards. This verb is used in Joshua 18:1 with the sense of the land being "conquered, overcome, overpowered." TEV translates "bring it [the earth] under control"; SPCL says "Fill the earth and govern it." Subdue and have dominion over are parallel expressions with reference to the plants and animals that God has put on the earth. This is not a command to go to war, but for the first people and their offspring to "take control, be in charge,

have direction over." Have dominion over... is translated by FRCL "Be masters over...", and by TEV "I am putting you in charge of..." In some languages subdue is expressed idiomatically as "make everything in the world come underneath your hands," and have dominion as "you will be boss...."

The creation of man in the image of God was so that he would carry the image of God in his assignment on earth as his ambassador protecting the forests which are part of his created work. As God's stewards over God's creation man is like a business manager in an organizational setting whose functions include those of planning, directing, organizing, supervising and controlling the assets and liabilities of the organization for growth and profitability. It would, therefore, be absurd and meaningless for the shareholders of the organization after setting up their business concern to now hire people who would come and mismanage the business let alone destroy it. Man was, therefore, created to have dominion over God's creation (Gen 2:26, 28). Adam and Eve were the first regents over God's creation (Ps 8:6-8). "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth He has given to the children of men" (NKJV, Ps 115:16).

Sadly, though, when Adam and his wife believed Satan's lie and ate of the forbidden fruit, man lost this dominion over the earth and began to destroy God's creation; and now sin and death reign over the earth (Rom 5:12-21). The good news is that the coming of God's son, Jesus Christ, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), to earth, the Lord Jesus restored the dominion that the first Adam had lost. He did by demonstrating that He had authority over the fish (Luke 5:1-7; John 21:1-6; Matt 17:24-27), the fowl (26:69-75), and the animals (Mark 1:13; 11:3-7). When He died on the cross, He conquered sin and death, so that now grace can reign

(Rom 5:21) and God's people can "reign in life" through Jesus Christ (v. 17). One day, when He returns, Jesus will restore to His own the dominion that was lost because of Adam (Heb 2:5 ff).

We must observe that Adam and the animal creation were vegetarians until after the Flood (Gen 1:29-30; 9:1-4). Isa 11:7 indicates that the carnivorous beasts will return to this diet when Jesus Christ returns and establishes His kingdom on earth.

The following passages show the high premium God places on his creation and forests inclusive and the literary figures of speech; personification and metaphors, etc., that have been employed to sing, exalt, praise and to adore God:

- I. Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel. (Isa 44:23).
- II. Let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- III. (Psa 96:12).
- IV. Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth. (1Ch 16:33).
- V. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees (Ecc 2:6).
- VI. As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste (Sol 2:3).

Indeed, not only does the lord love his forests but he loves all that he has made as the psalmist declares "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made" (Ps 145:17). So then how can a righteous and loving God who loves all that he has made give out his forests for total destruction?

The Role of the Church in the Preservation Forests

The response of the church in the preservation of forests has to be an urgent concern not only to church leaders but the entire Christendom. For God's original mandate for the care and tending of the natural forests and vegetation has been disobeyed and misconstrued for total destruction. God never intended that his natural and beautiful forests be raped but rather man is even to source his food from the forests. The church therefore has to rise up and protect these natural resources as this would be seen as pleasing the creator of the universe. There has to be a vertical, loving relationship between man and God, horizontal loving relationship between man and man and between man and his environment. The effects of forest depletion are what we are witnessing in global warming, Fulani herdsmen attack on peasant farmers, el Niño, i.e. lack rainfall, crop failures and so many other devastating effects. This is because of sin against God, sin against humanity and sin against the environment. The church leaders should therefore preach:

- I. Correctly and interpret the Hebrew verb *רָדָה* *radah* in Gen 1:26 rendered "to rule, have dominion" dominate, tread down, to have dominion, or to subjugate, and the Hebrew verb *כָּבַשׁ* *kabash*, meaning: to subject, subdue, in Gen 1:28 in its appropriate context as meaning to control, to tend, to govern, to look after as contrary to what is happening now in the total destruction of forests and forest products.
- II. The message of repentance to its members informing them of God's original mandate for the care and tending of the forests and not to subdue forests in the sense of destruction. God told his obstinate children the Israelites saying "When I close up the sky so that it doesn't rain, or command locusts to devour the land's vegetation, or send a plague among my people, if my people, who belong to me, humble themselves, pray, seek to please me, and repudiate their

- sinful practices, then I will respond from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land(2 Chr. 7:13-14).
- III. The message of God's love not only to humanity but to also to God's vegetation.
 - IV. The message that deforestation is sin against God and humanity.
 - V. The message that deforestation leads to many side effects such as global warming, lack of rainfall, poor harvest yield, and massive floods etc.
 - VI. The message that increasing heat waves as a result of deforestation causes diseases to humans (meningitis, small pox, conjunctivitis and malaria etc.) and animals (blindness and even death).
 - VII. The church leaders should lead in tree planting campaigns liaising with local, state and federal government to get plant seedlings, fast growing and economic trees for planting.
 - VIII. A standing policy that for every tree cut down there must be a replacement.
 - IX. Alternative usage of gas and kerosene stove instead of firewood fuel for cooking.

Conclusion

Forests and forest products are a creation of God and handed over to man in his ambassadorial capacity as steward to tend it for food and for his economic use. Forests when destroyed without replacement of trees give rise to hazardous consequences. These hazards may include rise in temperatures, global warming, rise in water levels causing floods, irregular weather cycles, desertification, short and distorted rainfall cycles causing crop failures which leads to famine, extinction forest wild life and so on. Therefore, for humanity to have maximum

benefit of the eco system, there must be a reciprocal respect and value re-orientation placed on forests and forest products without wantonly destroying the good work of the Creator as forests destruction will ultimately lead to human destruction.

Works cited

- Adedire, M.O. "Environmental Implications of Tropical Deforestation." *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology*. (Ed) J. Deffers(2000) 270-271. Print.
- Akindele, S.O. "Review in Management Requirement for Forestry Management for Nigerian Forestry." *Proceedings of The 27th Annual Conference of the Forestry Association of Nigeria*. (eds) A.Popoola et al.Abuja.(2001) 70-79. Print.
- Ausenac, G. "Interactions Between Forests and Climates." *Journal of Sustainable Forestry Management*.1997.
- Baumer, M.*Agroforestry and Desertification*.(1990)P 250.
- Egbogah, Dennis. m"Holistic Spirituality." *African understanding of Christian Spirituality.TCNN Research Bulletin* No 35. (2001) 3-5.Print.
- Essuene, H. "Goodwill Message to the Minister of Environment: Workshop on Geo- Confirmation in Nigeria. Imperatives of Space Technology for Sustainable Forest Management in Nigeria. March 4-6 Abuja,(2006) 9-10. Print. <http://www.greenfacts.org/en/forests/indep108-110>.
- Igboanugo, A.B. "Deforestation and Environmental Quality. A Case Study of Some States in The Northern Guinea and Sudano- Sahelian Savannah Zones of Nigeria." *Journal of Forestry Research and Management*5,(2008) 34-38. Print.
- Kio, P.R.O.*Forestry and sustainable agricultural development in Nigeria*.(2000) 35-43. print

- Oguntala, A.B. "Effect of Fire wood collection and logging on the environment" UNESCO MAB Regional training workshop.(ed) A.Afolayin. Akure, Nigeria,(1995)262-272. Print.
- Okojie, J.A. "Misuse of Renewable and Natural Resources" Africa Year of the Environment. Abeokuta, 25th June 1991. Print.
- Oloyede, I.O. "Afforestation and Reforestation." A paper presented at Unilorin. Dec 15-17. (2008)12-13. Print.
- Omiyale, O. "Importance of Forests: Historical Perspectives to Agroforestry in Sierra Leone." Benin City 29th Oct Vol 1 (2009) 1-8. print
- Orji, E. Utilization of Resources. 1982. PP 15-18.
- Pegler, D. A. and G.D. Pearce. "The Edible Mushrooms of Zambia." Kew Bulletin No 35 (1980)475.
- Plotkin, M.J. "The Outlook for New Agriculture and Industrial Products from The Tropics." E.O. Wilson (ed) Biodiversity, National Academy Press. Washington 1998.
- Siefel, A.g. and M Zarroug. "Production and Commercialization of Gum Arabic in Sudan." R.B.K. Lekay et al (eds) Domestication and Commercialization of Gum Arabic. Nairobi, Kenya. (1996),176-180. Print.
- Sobowale, A. et al "Forest Depletion" Land Degradation and Forest Depletion in Forest Plantations of Guinea Savannah Zone of Nigeria. *Journal Forestry Research and Management*4,2007. Print.

Chapter Thirteen

QUERIDA AMAZONIA AND ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Gesila Nneka Uzukwu, DMMM, PhD

Nasarawa State University

Faculty of Arts

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

gesynneka@yahoo.co.uk

Executive Summary

This chapter focuses on the ecological concerns in *Querida Amazonia*. It attends to the following questions: How do we manage our environment? How do we challenge our political and religious powers to address the social realities of the people, from justice in debates on the use of the environment to justice in the demand for good living? It focused on care of the earth, missionary vocation, and harmony of difference.

Keywords: *Querida Amazonia*, Ecology, Pope Francis, Amazon, Environment

Introduction

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation '*Querida Amazonia*' (Beloved Amazon) was released by the Supreme Pontiff - Pope Francis on 12th February 2020. It was written at the conclusion of the synodal process of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region, which was celebrated in October 2019. *Querida Amazonia* (QA) is a 111-paragraph text that outlines the environmental, ecological, economic, religious crisis facing the Amazon region.

A Brief Introduction of the Amazon Region

The Amazon region cuts across 9 countries in South America (Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Guyana. Others are French Guiana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela). It has a population of “33.6 million inhabitants, of whom between 2 and 2.5 million are indigenous.”¹

Background to Synod:

The Amazon has become an endangered region in the light of the "crisis" of the Amazon rainforest's deforestation. Culturally, the region is diverse with the indigenous populations grouped under at least 305 ethnic groups and 274 diverse languages. Geographically, the Amazon region has a landmass of 7.5million square kilometres. It means the Amazon forests are 40% of the global tropical forests. Surely, any adversity on the Amazonian forests has impact on the earth.² Life in the Amazonian region has been precarious in recent decades (a) deforestation – as a result of cattle ranching, large scale cutting down of trees for stake holders and businesses, and Amazon fire is destroying Earth's largest rainforest. Hence, the Synod became a moment of discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Church regarding this endangered region.

The Key elements treated *Querida Amazonia*: Care of the Earth, Missionary Vocation, and Harmony of Difference.

¹ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region, “The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology - Final Document,” Vatican (26 October 2019), no. 6, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20191026_sinodo-amazonia_en.html (accessed 18.12.2019).

² Antonio Spadaro, “Why a Synod for the Pan-Amazon region?,” 6; “Greater commitment for the rights of the indigenous: Fifth and Sixth General Congregations,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 44 (18 October 2019), 9.

Care of the earth

The synod was truly a *kairos*, a moment of grace, for the Church to be reconciled with the Amazonian peoples. For a long time, the indigenous peoples of the Amazon region are often called “the forgotten and without the prospect of a peaceful future.”³ The type of business that takes place in the Amazon, the Pope says destroys one of the Earth's critical ecosystems and disenfranchises its indigenous peoples who for centuries have served as its caretakers. The pope decries it as a form of injustice and crime to the earth and humanity: How do we manage our environment? How do we challenge our political and religious powers to address the social realities of the people, from justice in debates on the use of the environment to justice in the demand for good living? QA presents us with some schemes, in the form of dreams, from which we can draw lines of action.

A: The Social Dream: *I dream of an Amazon region that fights for the rights of the poor, the original peoples and the least of our brothers and sisters, where their voices can be heard and their dignity advanced.* (7)

The social dream decries the ecological and human injustices melted on Amazonian people and calls for a genuine social motivation to “build networks of solidarity” and promote “a globalization without marginalization” [QA no. 17]. Any form of activity within the region, either environmental or business (local or international) must be established based on a dialogue among the various stake holders, a dialogue where the victims take the lead.

³ Antonio Spadaro, “Why a Synod for the Pan-Amazon region? Contributing to the reflection ahead of the Assembly,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 39 (27 September 2019), 6.

B: The cultural Dream: *I dream of an Amazon region that can preserve its distinctive cultural riches, where the beauty of our humanity shines forth in so many varied ways.*

The cultural dream affirms that no culture is superior to the other and no culture is in a permanent state to suppress the other. In the cultural dream, the document notes how the growing industrialisation and development has led to the overcoming of indigenous cultural identities and values so considered uncivilised, in exchange for culture that isolates the people from cultural roots that gave them a sense of dignity and identity, and the loss of the values that had previously sustained them. Pope Francis dreams of an Amazon region that can preserve, harness, and foster the richness of the 'different cultures and others forms of civilization' that mark the Amazon rather than destroying them [no. 28].

C: The Ecological Dream: *I dream of an Amazon region that can jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its rivers and forests.*

In the ecological dream, the pontiff decries the destruction of the ecosystem on a global scale that in turn is destroying humanity. At this point, the Holy Father launches into poetic hymn in praise of the life-giving waters of the Amazon. The hymn is full of wonder, but it also recognizes the painful cry of the earth when it suffers from violence at the hands of humans. (47)

The ecological dream invites the Amazonians to jealously preserve its overwhelming natural beauty and the superabundant life teeming in its rivers and forests [no. 7]. The care of the people and the care of the ecosystems are inseparable,

he argues. Putting the environment at risk by “the conquest and exploitation of its resources” is tantamount to putting human life at risk [no. 48]. In the same way, treating the environment with much respect and care will reduce the human sufferings, and restore the good of the Amazon and of humanity at large [no. 48]. Thus, the Pontiff dreams of protecting the whole ecosystem in a combination of ancestral wisdom with contemporary technology and a legal framework to fight environmental injustice [nos. 49-52].

D. The Ecclesial Dream: I dream of Christian communities capable of generous commitment, incarnate in the Amazon region, and giving the Church new faces with Amazonian features.

The ecclesial dream calls the Church to “journey alongside the people of the Amazon region” in faith and love, spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ and God’s love for every man and woman [no. 61]. The Pontiff advocates for the inculturation of the Christian message in the Amazonian culture, such that, the message of Christ not only becomes a part of the culture but also refines and purifies the goodness that already exists in Amazonian cultures, bringing it to fulfilment in the light of the Gospel [no. 66].

In the Ecclesial dream is our Missionary Vocation.

According to the introductory report on Amazon Synod, by the General Relator of the synod, Cardinal Claudio Hummes, OFM, the reality of Amazonian cultural diversity challenges the Church to be open to inculturation, intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and preferential attention to the poor. The exhortation acknowledges the role of the Episcopal Conferences in making use of the document in way that can suit their needs. In the ecclesial dream, the Pontiff left the action plan

for the episcopal conference to dissect the important things and address them according to their peculiar needs. It also advocates for “the growth of a specific ecclesial culture that is distinctively lay” [no. 94].

The Church’s missionary mandate has to be felt anew in the Amazon. Hence, the Church had to consider new paths to missionary outreach in a region that is grossly deficient in ecclesial personnel. The need for renewed missionary passion in the Amazon connects to inculturation. If the faith will grow and be sustained in the Amazonian region, it must take root and become flesh. Taking the flesh of each missionary context, we must be open to diverse ministries and services that might be peculiar to each context. This is how we can understand some of the synod’s resolutions like instituting a female lay ministry considering that women currently lead about 60% of local Church communities in the Amazonian Region.⁴ The missionary mandate and the shortfall of personnel equally informed the somewhat controversial resolution of *virī probati*. ‘*Virī probati*’ refers to the recurring suggestion of ordaining reputable married men in the Amazonian region in order to make the expansive Catholic communities celebrate the Eucharist more.⁵ Presently, more than 80% of the peoples only have a priest to celebrate the Mass for them once in one and a half years.⁶ So, the Church must transit from the model of ‘pastoral visit’ to ‘pastoral presence’.⁷

⁴ “Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region Concludes,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 44 (1 November 2019), 4.

⁵ “Defence of Human Rights,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (11 October 2019), 11.

⁶ “Eleventh and Twelfth Congregations: Pastoral action to defend mankind and the planet,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 42 (18 October 2019), 11.

⁷ “Defence of Human Rights,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (11 October 2019), 11.

This is an admirable move to motivate the bishops to involve various portions of the People of God, especially theological institutions, to come up with more contextually suitable approaches to the works of evangelisation and evangelical witnessing. However, what are the processes that could be set in place to realize the dreams? What does a genuine collaboration in the context of the ministry involve? More importantly, where every believer is given the opportunity to collaborate in the mission, will the Church and its activities still be priest-centered?

Harmony of Differences: A Synod beyond Regional Impact

According to the Pope, unity can coexist with diversity. Pope Francis draws on a favored image, the polyhedron, to illustrate how unity can coexist with diversity. He dreams of intercultural encounter and education that preserve the beauty and uniqueness of indigenous cultures, while allowing for fruitful development. The exhortation challenges us beyond the synod of the indispensability of harmony in the face of differences. We must not be afraid of differences. United with and under the Pope, our distinctness can be harmonised without negating unity, inspired by the doctrine of the Trinity, three Persons in one God. In a region that has several cultures, traditions, and languages, the synod first focus challenges the Church to embrace interculturality. Hence, the message that the Church must have “an indigenous, peasant and afro-descendant face.”⁸ It is a Church that must draw peoples at the peripheries to the centre of our faith. This message extends beyond the Amazonian Region. It relates to the demands in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

⁸ Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region, “Final Document,” no. 27.

Amazonian Synod and Challenges to the Mission Churches

I. *A Church with an Indigenous Face*: The way the value of indigenous theology took central place at during the Synod tells us in the mission territories of the importance of what Pope Francis desires. According to *L'Osservatore Romano* report on the synod on October 18, 2019, the Pope desires “a Church with an indigenous face, in a way that repropose the essential elements of the Catholic universe with an indigenous hermeneutic.”⁹ The pope is restating the Church’s commitment to inculturation. This is the process of adapting and adopting indigenous symbols and modes of expressions to communicate the unchanging truths of our faith. Inculturation is a way of fostering a faith that is truly Catholic, and truly indigenous. Inculturation has always been the way of the Church. Mission territories must never be content with just receiving the universal truths. Mission territories must attempt to make the kerygma and its basic doctrines meaningful to the people’s lived experiences. The Amazonian synod challenges the mission territories, especially the pastors, the local leaders and theologians, to resist the temptation of homogeneity, or what Pope Francis, at the opening of the Synod, called “‘homogenative’ centralism” that “has not allowed the peoples’ authenticity to emerge.”¹⁰ Mission in the Church always goes with heterogeneous expressions and celebrations of the faith. The Amazonian synod calls all mission territories to be courageous. They must possess what the Holy Father calls the Holy Spirit’s “own

⁹ “Fifth and Sixth General Congregations: Greater commitment for rights of the indigenous,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 42 (October 18, 2019), 9.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, “Indigenous peoples: protagonists of their history,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (11 October 2019), 10.

daring prudence,"¹¹ in renewing the paths of the Church in mission territories.

II. *Caring for Our Common Home*: The Amazonian synod challenges the Church, particularly in mission territories, about ongoing disastrous environmental activities, and the need for integral ecology anchored on ecological conversion. Some activities, especially in natural resource rich communities, have destroyed lots of ecosystems. They have impacted negatively on the host communities. The Church must always act prophetically on behalf of the people of God at the peripheries who do not have voices. We must increase our responsibility to care for our common home; we must be more conscious of our 'ecological citizenship'.¹² We must help the movements that resist a globalisation that simply cares about extracting natural resources, from forests and water to oil and minerals, without caring about the poor people who feel the brunt most. The peoples of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria know exactly what it feels like in the Amazon. What the Church has done on a global scale for the Amazonian peoples should inspire similar ones for the peoples of the Niger Delta, the mining towns of South Africa, for the coastal towns around East Africa's Lake Victoria, and the endangered indigenous peoples across the world.

"Today the Church can be no less committed," he writes. "She is called to hear the plea of the Amazonian peoples and 'to exercise with transparency her prophetic mission of speaking up.'" He presents a vision of the Catholic Church in the

¹¹ Pope Francis, "May God preserve us from the greed of new forms of colonialism," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (October 11, 2019), 8.

¹² Michael Czerny, "The prophetic commitment to the dignity of all," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 31 (2 August 2019), 9.

Amazon united in defence of its tribes, trees, tradition and tributaries, offering an example for the wider church to adopt in other corners of the globe. "The beloved Amazon region stands before the world in all its splendor, its drama and its mystery," Querida Amazonia addresses the whole world" in an effort "to help awaken our affection and concern for the land which is 'ours,' and to invite us to value it and acknowledge it as a sacred mystery." The institutional destruction and endangerment of life and environment is an open-ended debate. Environmental crises relate to the urgency of caring for our Common Home as a part of our faith. The Amazonian forests are as important as the ice caps of the North Pole that continues to shrink due to climate change. The indigenous peoples of the Amazon bear the brunt of the negative actions on the forests. They have been suffering in silence because they are poor and peripheral. So, the Amazonian synod was a prophetic moment of the Church. With the Church bringing the fate of the Amazonian peoples to global attention, the Church is prophetically standing up to its commitment of preferential option for the people at the peripheries.

Concluding Remarks

We must remember the big picture beyond the hue and cry about the Amazonian synod. Inculturation remains an urgent task for the church in mission territories for the church to have an indigenous face everywhere. We must consider the words of an African theologian, Fr Laurenti Magesa in his *Anatomy of Inculturation*, "If anything, the lesson here is that the church must learn to be flexible. It should not fear inculturation as an attack against the integrity of the faith." Going forward with faith, we accept the counsel of St Augustine, which we find in the closing

chapter of Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. St Augustine says, "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and Charity in everything."

Bibliography

- "Defence of Human Rights," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (11 October 2019), 11.
- "Eleventh and Twelfth Congregations: Pastoral action to defend mankind and the planet," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 42 (18 October 2019), 11.
- "Fifth and Sixth General Congregations: Greater commitment for rights of the indigenous," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 42 (October 18, 2019), 9.
- "Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region Concludes," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 44 (1 November 2019), 4.
- Antonio Spadaro, "Why a Synod for the Pan-Amazon region?," 6; "Greater commitment for the rights of the indigenous: Fifth and Sixth General Congregations," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 44 (18 October 2019), 9.
- Michael Czerny, "The prophetic commitment to the dignity of all," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 31 (2 August 2019), 9.
- Pope Francis, "Indigenous peoples: protagonists of their history," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (11 October 2019), 10.
- Pope Francis, "May God preserve us from the greed of new forms of colonialism," *L'Osservatore Romano*, no. 41 (October 11, 2019), 8.
- Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region, "The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology - Final Document," Vatican (26 October 2019), no. 6,

Gesila Nneka Uzukwu, DMMM, PhD

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20191026_sinodo-amazzonia_en.html (accessed 18.12.2019).

Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for the Pan-Amazonian Region, "Final Document," no. 27.

Chapter Fourteen

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND GLOBAL ECOLOGICAL CRISIS: AN ECO-THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

Ekpenyong Obo Ekpenyong, Ph.D
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
University of Calabar
Calabar, Nigeria
ekpenyongobo.e@gmail.com

Executive Summary

It is powerfully documented that man's hostile attitude to nature is not a new development. Humans have for all time seen their environment as something to be degraded, exploited and dominated. These human activities are accountable for the loss of bio-diversity and disruption of bionetwork processes which has led to the lessening and obliteration of the number of species of plants and animals in the ecosystem. Every religious tradition describes or outlines its relationship to the natural environment very clearly. This relationship is based on how we have made up our mind in a deep and hard think about the natural environment affects the very way we live in it. This work has shown that African Traditional Religion (ATR) has the potential to situate humans in relation to both the natural and human worlds with regard to meaning and responsibility (stewardship), through its taboos, proverbs, sanctions and moral authority and institutional power that help effect a change in attitudes, practices and public policies in respect to addressing the urgent environmental problems of contemporary society and sustainability.

Keywords: ATR, ecology, taboos, proverbs ethics and eco-theology.

Exordium

Every religious tradition describes or outlines its relationship to the natural environment very clearly. This relationship is based on our opinion about the natural environment. How we have made up our mind in a deep and hard think about the natural environment affects the very way we live in it. Human activities have wielded very large or great influence on the environment, unchangingly, which has resulted in the depletion of both biological and biodiversity. This is why some of the most serious problems facing human life today in this twenty-first century are ecological crises and environmental problems.

According to Ekpenyong, “these problems have now formed contemporary issues of serious concern with everyone realizing how much the earth within which we live and work is slowly losing its ability to support a worthwhile existence. It will not be wrong to say that, this is the greatest problem and crisis being faced by mankind in both under developed and developed nations of the world today” (136). In the similar vein, Schama explains that “one can hardly think of a natural system that has not been considerably altered, for better or worse, by human activities. This is not the work of the industrial centuries. It is coeval with the entirety of our social existence. And it is this irreversibly modified world, from the polar caps to the equatorial forests, that is all the nature we have” (7). Human activities are in a direct way responsible for the deteriorating condition of biodiversity, many times or often times slowly or impossible to see or notice steps of flora and fauna get greatly reduced or devoured over time.

This disruption of the ecosystem processes by human activities, and over exploitation give rise to massive destruction of plants and animals. In the environment, animals serve as sources of fabrics, refuge, food, power, medicine, creative, trade and industry and religious attitude. Truly speaking, human behaviours such as using toxic chemical in agriculture, dumping of refuse, toxic chemicals in illegal fishing, over harvesting of wildlife, logging, tree felling, mining, gas flaring, etc have had a terrible impact on the biodiversity (Ekpenyong 136). In his primitive life, man readily made use of the available “natural resources only to sustain life i.e. only to satisfy his basic needs for air, water, food and shelter. However, with the dawn of industrial revolution, man started utilizing his ability to gather resources from beyond his immediate surroundings and process these resources into different versatile forms in order to satisfy acquired needs i.e. other needs beyond those associated with survival” (Dhameja 30). Dhameja further posits that “rapid industrialization, development, consumerism and population explosion has (sic) upset the ecological balance. Affluent sections of the population increase pollution levels in the process of raising their living standards whereas the poor destroy their immediate environment in order to survive by cutting down forests and letting their livestock to overgraze the grasslands” (1).

These problems have become contemporary issues that cause earnest worry which breed realization that the world in which we live and labour in is step by step losing its aptitude and vigor to sustain life. Discussing in this line, Ekpenyong observes that “ours is a period when the human community is in search of new and sustaining relationship to the earth amidst an environmental crisis that threatens the very existence of all life-forms on the

planet earth" (1591). In the journey of man's desire to meet these acquired needs, he is prompted to overgraze the green lands and over-exploit the natural resources with no careful thought to the astronomical or very great harm being caused. Some other factor that is fast reducing and devouring the natural resources is the accelerating and escalating human population that causes over-exploitation of the existing natural resources, by that means serving as a cause or begetting catastrophic and devastating repercussion due to the environmental imbalance. Thus, genetic resources and the biological diversity are lost as the ecosystems are degraded. It is in this vein that this work seeks to find out what role African Traditional Religion plays in shaping humans' mind-set to the natural world most specially, in this twenty-first century when the special effects of environmental problems and climate change have turned out to be very noticeable than ever before in mankind history on earth. Some of the existing literature on the authority of religious beliefs on a person's attitude towards the natural environment emphasize the richness of classic religion such as Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Jainism, Buddhism and Judeo-Christianity on care and protection of the natural order, but the viewpoint of African Traditional Religion in this regard is often ignored.

The Powerful Effect of Human Activities on Environment

The problem the world is facing today is the environmental degradation crisis. The biblical order to suppress the earth is what mankind has completely acknowledged. Forests and fields are being converted completely into buildings and arterials, the earth dynamism exchange systems have been changed into the harmful condition of biodiversity, toxication of the environment, and contaminable soil and water systems of the world. Ecologists in their numbers have put the blame on Christian religion as the very serious cause of the ecological wreckage. Humankind has

misconstrued the authority to subdue and have power over the earth as a theological backup used for ecological destruction (Ekpenyong 138). Affirming the assertion, Bebia posits thus: “the world is faced with an unprecedented loss of biodiversity as we experience the largest wave of extinction, and this threatens to undermine environmental, economic and social goals. The impact of human ecological footprints on the planet has culminated in climate change with its concomitant global warming which have altered the geophysical support systems of the world” (130). This means that the impact of global environmental catastrophe is a brother to no adherent of any religion as its effect is felt by all. Since the global environmental catastrophe is a friend or a brother to no religion, it is the conviction of this work therefore that as a matter of urgency, the world religious and spiritual traditions should take immediate action to protect the biodiversity with their unusual and tremendous power to persuade and to inculcate in their adherents’ behaviour, an attitude that can serve as a tool to protect biodiversity. If this is done, the resultant effect will be that it will fast-track the progression in the direction of a safer and better world as the adherents of each religion will encourage one another in the task of becoming aware of and carefully look out for new methods or systems that can be used to advocate and foster nature conservation for global environmental sustainability.

Human activities have unchangingly exerted very large or great impact on the environment, resulting in the depletion of both biological species and climate change. Becoming a threat to life on this environment as well as to the nature itself, is our development processes and technological practices. Commenting on this threat to life, Ignacimuthu writes thus: “The

threat is constituted by large-scale devastation of the environment, damage to water, air and soil, and to genetic diversity; by destruction of rain forests, extensive soil erosion and desertification, by massive use of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides which deplete and poison the soil, by the squander and destruction of sea resources, mangrove swamps and coral reefs, by anarchic and profligate industrial production and overconsumption as well as overuse and waste of nature's scarce and non-renewable treasures; by the ambiguities of nuclear technology, the horrors of nuclear weaponry and the hazards of radioactive waste" (22).

These environmental crises caused by human activities are many times depicted or delineated in terms of the depletion of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, acid rains, loss of biodiversity, death of rivers and lakes, extinction of species, diseases and death from chemically and radioactively contaminated food, water and air, extinction of water resources, global warming, and denuding of rain forests. There is no doubt that today environment is quite different from what our environment was twenty or thirty years ago. And it is in this that species of both plants and animals go into extinction and never to be recovered. The rate of loss at which this happens is forecastable to go faster 10 fold by 2050. The "millennium Ecosystem Assessment Report of United Nation released in January 2006 attests that many mammals and plants population have declined in numbers, geographical spread or both" (Bebia 130). Accordingly, or as a result of this, human activities and their results on the earth have hastened loss in species of both in type and number, in environmental degradation and climatic change just to mention a few.

African Traditional Religion and Ecology

African Traditional Religion (ATR) “is called ‘African’ due to certain reasons. First, it is called ‘African’ because it is indigenous, aboriginal, and foundational or handed down from generation to generation” (Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 19). Forming the most major influence in the life of a good number of Africans is religion. This is so because in a typical African man religion penetrates into each aspect of the African’s life and it cannot in isolation be studied. It goes closely connected with the study of the people who put the religion into practice. When we speak of African Traditional Religion, we have in our mind or intend to express the indigenous African religious beliefs and practices. ATR is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is being practiced today in a diversity of shades and intensities by a very great number of Africans, including persons who claim to be Muslims or Christian (Awolahu 1; Kanu 15). We can briefly state or express our observation that African Traditional Religion is entrenched in the African world view and in the people’s norms and values.

One of the major crises of the contemporary world today is the environmental crisis which without any form of doubt produces an effect upon the health of individuals and society of large. Despite the fact that environmental crisis is commonly held to be majorly caused by scientific and technological misdeed and misapplication of natural resources, in his work, “*The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*”, Lynn White alleges for the first time that “World religions are the root cause of environmental problems. In his work, he stresses that what people think about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply

conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny, that is, by religion” (Deuraseh 524). White still argues again that “the dualistic nature of monotheistic religions has caused the separation of human beings from the rest of nature and thereby paved a way for the beginning of environmental crisis” (Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 1593). Supporting this assertion, Arnold Toynbee in his work: *“The Religion Background of the Present Environmental Crisis”* argues thus:

Some of the major maladies of the present day world-for instance the recklessly extravagant consumption of nature’s irreplaceable treasures and the pollution of those of them that man has not already devoured can be traced back in the last analysis to a religious cause and that this cause is the rise of monotheism (144).

From the foregoing, it is very obvious that: that which communities and individuals do to their environment to a great extent or degree hinges on how they see themselves in relation to nature. We can conclude from here that, the conventional environmental crisis is not completely but mostly as a proceed or arises as a consequence or effect of man’s way of thinking about life and his attitude towards nature, these have strong roots in his culture and religion. The ecological crisis that faces or challenges the world today is not undoable or impossible to overcome. But regrettably, the work done to find a way to deal with and end the problem of ecological crisis is majorly through modifying the existing institutional mechanisms through laws and public policy and not to make a radical difference in or transform man’s attitude and beliefs. All the efforts put forward by the government are not turning out to be producing a result that is wanted, that is the decided, decisive or desired effect; as religion is the only institution with the institutional power and moral authority that are well situated to effect a change in attitudes, practices and public policies in respect to

environmental sustainability. It is to this end that ATR and non ATR scholars after carefully watching and noticing the retard or lacking in readiness effect in finding a way to deal with and end the current ecological crisis, come to be more and more involved in religious teaching with the intention of finding out the solution to ecological crisis.

Human beings are a component of the environment in African religious thought and philosophy. African Religion scholars like J. S. Mbiti, P. a. Dopamu, E. I. Ifesieh, E. I. Metuh, J. O. Awolalu and others have made it very obvious and free from doubt in their several different writes up that God created the environment and it consists of two balancing worlds namely the physical and spiritual worlds. This physical world is made up of the earth, populated by humans, animals, birds, reptiles and material surroundings. Others include: forests, land, valleys, rivers, lakes, oceans, grasses, seas, mountains and so on. The spiritual world on the other hand, is consists of the ontological beings like the Almighty God or Being, the divinities, deities, ancestors, and spirits (Gbenda 16). God made available all the natural resources as provisions for mankind's benefit. Man's obligation is to discover, build up and raise with moderation all available natural resources to enhance well being. Giving credence to this, Apenda and Adega opine thus: "Nature is created on the principles of balance and all the systems in nature must exist and function in harmony with their balance" (387). The understanding of every traditional African is that all that exists or all that is related to the ecosystem and the environment is very strongly felt or deeply-seated religious; and multifold things on earth are seen to have as a mark of distinction or are kept back in high esteem from use for religious reasons; specially, while or during the time that they are thought to be

spirits' dwelling places. Deeply rooted in African's attitude toward environment is the belief that God created all things. In addition everything in the environment is assumed or required to canorously work for the interest and betterment of man now and hereafter.

The recent years' theses on this area have shown that African Religion across-the-board, attaches huge or agreeably importance to the protection of the environment and wildlife. Lending credence to this viewpoint, African theologians like John Smith Mbiti, E. I. Metuh, P. A. Dopamu and E. I. Ifesieh just to mention a few have argued as is to be expected or ineluctably that African indigenous religions' main traits are set firmly or entrenched in environmental and cultural feelings or interests. For instance, Mbiti in his thesis title: "African Religion and the World Order" attests thus:

Another basic element of African religion concerns human relations with the world of nature. Humans are not masters over nature to exploit it without feeling or treat it without respect. Instead people are one with nature, responsible toward nature, able to communicate with nature, and the chief priests of nature (368).

This is to say that the worldview for a normal African religious person entails and approves of or endorses a positive environmental ethic. This Africans' worldview is anthropocentric, which shows that all things are seen in terms of its relation to mankind. Mbiti has carefully classified this African viewpoint into five sections, namely, God, Spirits, man, animals and non-biological life (166). In African religions almost all parts of nature are seen as family, blessed with consciousness as well as the ancestral spirits' power. To Africans life force passes or spreads through the universe that is, interpenetrates every area of the universe. In African worldview mankind and environment

are fastened together by one moral order. This moral order is man-centred, even though it has connection with the sacred powers, to ancestors and to nature.

We can contentedly infer that in African indigenous religions, nature is sacred by the reason that it is God's creation. Thus, in African Indigenous religion human being is a vital fraction of the environment, because it is part of God's creation.

African Tradition Religion and Eco-theology

Before now, "local people have developed a variety of source management practices that continues to exist in tropical Africa, Asia, South America and other parts of the world" as Appiah-Opoku had said (93-99). In the same vein, Shastri et al attest thus: "Traditional African Societies also go after ethics so as to often help them regulate interactions with their natural environment(cited in Ekepopara and Ekpenyong 22).

The symbol of sacredness is depicted mainly in proverbs which are transmitted down from generation to generation. Echoing this in their work "Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays" Getui and Obeng write thus: "in African religiosity creation represents the works of God in his architectural being. If an individual violated nature in any form or practice, that could endanger the livelihood of the whole community. Taboos and proverbs, are formulated to reinforce god's (sic) power and greatness" (19-21). The taboos and proverbs within indigenous African societies are a set of rules followed by the African people(s) in order to enhance their relationship with nature and thereby preventing exploitation of species, rivers, forests, streams, medicinal plants, mountains and overgrazing of the grassland. Kanu has this to say, "the sacred trees are used

particularly in covenant making between individuals, also it can be used as the place to gather for meetings/ settling disputes and also for the demarcation of land between families, the purification and fortification of community leaders” (40). Hence, it becomes abomination to cut down any sacred trees used as demarcation or covenant. The main source from African indigenous people’s perspective of all things alive and dead that wields a significant role in influencing the behaviours of beings towards the natural and wild world amidst African peoples is the concept of God.

It is widely held in African traditional religion that human spirits inhabit trees. This is because in certain African societies, trees like Iroko, Mahogany, silk cotton, afara and so on are considered as having taken spirits and are respected and venerated. This is why in African religious thought man is seen as one of the components of the environment “As a result of the importance attached to trees and adjoining biodiversity, African communities used to designate certain forests as sacred. The religious or cultural designation of an area as sacred, especially those which are relatively natural, may either intentionally or coincidentally promote the conservation of its associated biodiversity” (Bebia 135). It is in this vein that Asante posits thus: among the Asantis, forests were highly revered because they were considered as places of abode of the gods and felling of trees, and other anthropogenic were considered as taboos and forbidden. Any abuse of the forest ecosystem attracted punishment from spiritual deities” (1). In this way, forest resources were successfully conserved. Many people in African traditional societies believed that forests and trees were the sign that shows or one of the forms in which the power of the Supreme Being was being manifested. These things were seen as exactly right places to contact or to come face-to-face with their

Supreme Being. Traditional African Societies had multifold shrines, which were being associated with trees like Mahogany, minosop, silk cotton trees, iroko, afara, fig trees baobabs and so on. These trees were preserved together with the vegetation that surrounded them as sacred places for worship and consultation of the gods. In Biase and Boki, there are evil forests at Okpara in Ikot Abiom and Iruan and Arangha, these evil forests are where bad or evil people in the community are sent to go and die. Here, no activity of human in any form is carried out as it is seen as the abode of the spirit and the spirit will not take it kindly with anybody that disturbs their peace. In Bateriko, some area of the forest is strictly kept back or set aside as the dwelling of the gods, no one is allowed entrance into that part of the forest.

Among the Shona there is a strong belief in sacred forests and mountain forests. Lending credence to this, Gelfand who carried out research work among the korekore Shona authenticates this belief when he posits:

So strong is the feeling among the Shona that one entering a strange area in a forest, a mountain or a beautiful spot is not allowed to comment on it least he upsets the ancestral spirits (vadzimu) of the region (54).

Traditionally, such sacred forests are called *rambatemwa*, meaning woodlands that cannot be cut (Mvududu 152). Infact it is morally wrong in Shona to cut down any tree in these areas. Building materials and firewood are gotten from areas other than these sacred places. Multifold plant and animal lives are secure in this way.

In traditional African societies, high premium is placed on most sacred trees. For instance among the Yala people of Cross River State of Nigeria, it is believed that there are certain number of

trees that are sacred and should never be cut down by any person. These trees include silk cotton trees, iroko trees, and mahogany, just to mention but few. These trees are often known as totem trees and are revered and venerated. They are attributed to or endowed with broad symbolic and spiritual significance. Sacred groves are found throughout traditional African societies which originally had religious and cultural bases. These sacred grove areas in indigenous African societies were usually protected and secured by the customary laws and rules as they were contemplated or perceived to be the home of the gods. Thus, sacred groves were places designated and revered in most African societies. These sacred places help protect watershed resources like springs, soil fertility and moisture and ecosystem processes such as nutrient cycling.

It is in this vein that Onah posits thus:

Among the Ekprinyi community of Yala LGA of Cross River State, it is also believed that there is a sacred river called Okpuoole; no one is ever allowed to fish in that river. It is believed from time immemorial that if by chance any fish is harvested from that river, it automatically means the death of a son or daughter of that community. This sanctity and sacredness are still maintained till date (129).

Groves and shrines of Akombo (mystical forces) located in the forests or rivers were forbidden. They constitute natural reserve whose vegetation has not been disturbed by human interference. From ecological point of view, restricted land and areas of the natural world retain their original flora and fauna. The forests set aside for religious purposes, constitute natural reserves, in which vegetation is primary and where the ecosystem has not been disturbed by human interference. Rare and threatened plant and animal species of the ecology could be found (Gbenda 67-68).

Rivers and streams in traditional African society are considered as hallowed by those who dwell in that area. Since their faith is that the river gods dwell in the forests and rivers, the surrounding environments are conserved, and logging and cultivation are prohibited. Citing an example, Gbenda writes thus:

The Asao Akosua stream in Ashanti region is said to be inhabited by a beautiful woman goddess. The deity is worshipped and cloth washing and farming are not allowed. Communities located close to lakes and sources of warm spring water venerate such formations if evidence of curative property is associated with the water e.g Ikogosi spring in Ikogosi Ekiti (55-56).

Obviously speaking, sacred groves have made reputable impact in contributing to conservation of wildlife, forest and other biological resources. They also serve as watersheds for protection of sources of drinking water in catchment areas.

Conclusion

The African Traditional Religion (ATR) can supply or make available the chemistry or any of the fundamentals for a current environmental model of living in harmony with the natural world. A.T.R acknowledges the value or significance of all life, including the life of all biological and biodiversity on the earth. In ATR there is no cutting of the human being from the natural world. Environment is not perceived as raw material for mankind use which has to be used or changed by artful or unfair means so as to serve their purpose or exploited in whatever manner people choose. On the contrary, it is filled with spirits' presence and therefore must be revered and respected.

It is in this stand that Ignaumuthu writes: “their relationships with the natural world tend to preserve biological integrity within natural communities. These are engaged in relationships of mutual respect, reciprocity and caring with an urge to consider fellow beings as alive and self conscious as human beings” (45). Such relationships were made known and eternalized by the traditional African cultural elements and religious belief and ceremonial ritual. A very central belief which appears consistent through multifold traditional African religion is that the earth is a living conscious being that should be handled with respect and reverence as well as loving care. The stewardship position given to man therefore positions him in accord with the environment, thereby making him in the end answerable to God for their running and controlling of human and environmental affairs. Hence ATR has all it takes to shape our attitude towards the natural world and to situate human-earth relations in a more balanced mode, most especially in this 21st century when the effects of environmental crises and climate change have become more glaring and alarming today than any other period in the history of the world or mankind.

Works Cited

- Apenda, A. Z. and Adeg, A. P. "Tiv cultural and environmental conservation in the 21st century" in Olayemi Akinwumi, sati U. Fwatshak, Adoyi Onoja, Akin Alao, C. B.N. Ogbogbo and Okpeh, O. Okpeh Jr. editors. Technology knowledge and environment in Africa: A perspective from nigeria, Zaria: Ahmadu Bello UP., 2009.
- Asante, E. A. The use of wood in different cultures. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/ap001c03.pdf>, 2011.
- Awolalu, J. O. "What is African Traditional Religion?" Retrieved from: <http://www.studiesincomparativereligion.com> on 20/03/2012.
- Bebia, Boniface E. "Religion and the Prevention of Biodiversity Loss" in Etim E. Okon (ed), Readings in the Scientific Study of Religion. Calabar: African Pentecost Communications 2011, 130-149.
- Deuraseh, N. "Maintaining a healthy environment: An Islamic Ethical Approach" *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(4): 2009, pp. 524-531.
- Dhameja, Suresh K. *Environmental Studies*. Darya, Ganj, New Delhi: S. K. Kataria & Sons, 2009. Ekpenyong, Obo "African Traditional Religion and National Development in Nigeria" in *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 22, 2016, pp. 19-28.
- Ekeopara, Chike Augustine and Ekpenyong, Ekpenyong Obo "African Traditional Religion and National Development in Nigeria" in *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 22, 2016, pp. 19-28.

- Ekpenyong, Ekpenyong Obo “Islam and Global Ecological Crisis: An Eco-Theological Review” in *International Journal of Asian Social Science*. Vol. 3 No. 7, 2013.
- “Eco-Theology and Sustainability: An Appraisal” in Emeka C. Ekeke (ed). *Methods, Theories and Issues in the Study of Religion*. Calabar: Stiffaith Print & Co., 2021.
- Gbenda, J. S. *African Religion and Christianity in a Changing World: A Comparative Approach*. Enugu: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2006.
- Gbenda, Joseph S. *Religion and Ecology: A Comparative Study*. Wadata, Makurdi: Obeta Printing and Publishing Co., 2010.
- Gelfend, M. *Shona Religion*. Cape Town: Juta, 1972.
- Getui, M. N. and Obeng, E. A. Editors. *Theology of Reconstruction: Exploratory Essays*. Nairobi: Actim Publishers, 2003.
- Ignacimuthu, S. J. *Environmental Spirituality*. Nagasandra, Bangalore: St. Paul Press, 2010.
- Kanu, I. A. *A hermeneutic approach to African Traditional Religion, philosophy and theology*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria, 2015.
- Kanu, I. A. *African philosophy: An ontologico-existential approach to classical and contemporary issues*. Augustinian Publications: Nigeria, 2015.
- Kaoma, K. J. *The Creator’s Symphony, African Christianity, the Plight of Earth and the Poor*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publication, 2015.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.
- Mbiti, John Smith “African Religion and the World Order”, in P. M. Mische and M. Merkling editors. *Towards a Global civilization: The Contributions of religions*. London: Heinemann, 2001.

- Mvududu, S. S. "Management of Indigenous Woodlands", in R. R. Ruether, *Women Healing Earth; Third World Women on Ecology, Feminisms and Religion*. London: SCM Press, 1996, 143-160.
- Onah, Gregory A. "Religion and Environment" in Emeke C. Ekeke Editor. *Methods, Theories and Issues in the study of Religion*. Calabar: Stiffaith Print & Co., 2021.
- Schama, S. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Toynbee, Arnold, *A Study of History*. London: Oxford Up, 1961.

Chapter Fifteen

LAUDATO SI AND THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT

Jude I. Onebunne, PhD

Department of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

juno.anyi@gmail.com

&

Chinwe F. Nwakwesiri

Department of Educational Mgt & Planning

Faculty of Education

University of Uyo, Akwa-Ibom

Chinwefrancisca95@gmail.com

Executive Summary

Laudato si (Praise Be) is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. The encyclical has the subtitle *on care for our common home*. This common home is our environment. In it, the Pope *critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming*, hence, calls all people of the world to take *swift and unified global action*. In Africa, environmental crisis is getting worse each day due to different nefarious human activities towards nature. Using the method of critical analysis, the researchers aver that broken environment we live in shows our broken humanity. Therefore it's prerequisite to protect, value and appreciate our African environment.

Keywords: *Laudato Si*, African Environment, Ecological Crisis, Ecology, Pope Francis

Introduction

It is now six years since the release of the encyclical letter, *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home*, by Pope Francis on May 25, 2015. In the Encyclical, Pope Francis calls on all people to be united by the planet that they share and be involved in creating a new dialogue about the future of the planet. The damages done by the industrial and agricultural activities are well known. These include ozone layer depletion, deforestation, unjust exploitation, etc. Africa is the most vulnerable region to the effects of climate change and this is partly because of the people's harmful actions towards nature.

An Overview of *Laudato Si*

The Papal Encyclical letter *Laudato si* by Pope Francis is the most comprehensive Vatican document to date on environmentalism, ethics, and Christian faith. The document is intended for all people, Catholics and Christians alike. It's arguments are founded on theological convictions (Francis, Pope; 2016)

Laudato si represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day and warns of unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequence for all of us if prompt climate change mitigation efforts are not undertaken. The encyclical highlights the role of fossil fuels in causing climate change. It's an urgent challenge to protect our common home to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. Pope Francis' *Laudato si* is a text of such landmark significance that it may well become one of the most important sources of Catholic Social Teaching since its inception with Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. Both the title of the encyclical (On Care for Our Common Home) and its opening quote from St. Francis's canticle establish the focus of this text (O'Malley, Sean, 2015). After a

comprehensive introduction, the encyclical divides into six chapters, each examining different aspects of the rupture between humans and creation and the prospects for healing this relationship.

The first chapter, “What is happening to our Common Home”, looks at the various symptoms of environmental degradation. The impacts of climate change are considered alongside issues of the depletion of freshwater and loss of biodiversity. There is no substantial discussion of the science of global warming; instead, it simply points to the overwhelming consensus concerning the negative impact of carbon-intensive economies on the natural world and human life: Caring for ecosystems demands farsightedness, since no one looking for quick and easy profit is truly interested in their preservation.

The encyclical firmly posits that a truly ecological approach is also inherently social, an approach that simultaneously hears the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. The social and environmental impacts of mining are cited as a prime example of this. In many places within the text, Francis lauds the achievements of the environmental movement, while at the same time, he critiques elements within it. He forthrightly dismisses the idea that population growth is to blame for environmental damage; such a suggestion is often a way of refusing to reduce overconsumption by the affluent. Later on, the encyclical states that abortion can never be viewed as a justification for the protection of nature. The second chapter, “The Gospel of Creation”, considers the world the way that God intended it. The chapter surveys the rich scriptural traditions to show that there is no biblical justification for “a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.” Likewise, there is no room for misanthropic versions of environmentalism since reverence for

nature is only authentic if we have compassion for fellow humans. A person who is truly concerned about the trafficking of endangered species is automatically concerned with the trafficking of humans.

The third chapter, “The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis”, examines the twin notions of what it calls the “technocratic paradigm” and a “modern anthropocentrism” borne out of a view that sees nature as a mere given, devoid of any spiritual or transcendental value. These notions have led to the misplaced ideas that the earth’s resources are infinite and that economic growth and technology alone can solve global hunger and poverty. In reality, however, a purely materialistic view of reality has not only resulted in disregard for the environment, but also undermined the worth of a human life, especially those forms viewed as having little or no utility - human embryos, the poor, or people with disabilities. At the heart of consumerist and profit-driven economic ideologies is a wrong-footed idea of dominion. The result is exploitation, and a throwaway attitude towards nature and human life itself. The encyclical calls for a bold cultural revolution in our attitude to development and progress. It puts it rather bluntly: “Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur.”

In the fourth chapter, “Integral Ecology”, the encyclical charts a path to recapture awareness of the interconnectedness of creation. To do so, it is essential to appreciate the impact of environmental degradation on “cultural ecology”, such as those social networks and ways of life which are bound up with the

environment in which communities are placed. The experience of indigenous peoples is specifically referred to in this regard. The fifth chapter, “Lines of Approach and Action”, sets out various international collective actions needed. It highlights the imperative to switch from fossil fuels to renewable, with the use of government subsidies where appropriate. It identifies the need for international agreements and legislation not only in relation to climate change but also biodiversity and the oceans. Carbon credits are criticized as “an expedient which permits maintaining the excessive consumption of some countries and sectors.”

The sixth chapter, “Ecological Education and Spirituality”, shifts attention to the individual believer, families and communities, and invites them to make a difference in small but tangible ways. Consumer choices, the cultivation of ecological virtues such as reducing wastefulness, and environmental education for the young are explained as practical steps leading to a deeper, spiritual “ecological conversion” through which the follower of Christ recognizes the true worth of all created entities. The statement “God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore” stands in the hallowed natural law tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas that every creature has in its nature an end, a telos, which humans should respect and honor. The intrinsic value of non-humans is noted when the encyclical states that the “ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us” but rather in the Risen Christ who embraces all things. (Pope Francis 2015).

Catholic Social Teaching on the Environment

St. Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI in line with the immemorial traditions of Church Teaching maintain a firm stands on the environment. Pope Benedict XVI places ecology in

the context of a larger Catholic worldview, and he proposes the only ecology that will ultimately save planet earth is the one that follows God's plan for creation. However, the *green pope* does not stand alone. He stands in the line of a rich tradition of Catholic teaching on creation and the good stewardship of that gift. Although the term ecology was coined in 1866, the green movement has been strong only in the past 50 years. Advances in sciences have helped people to become more conscious of the many ways in which their actions affect creation. These discoveries entail new responsibilities in the good stewardship of the earth. As understanding of the environment and the impact of humans has grown, so the Popes have slowly applied the Catholic tradition on creation and stewardship to the new findings of ecology. For example, in 1961 Pope John XXIII made a plea against *destroying nature*. Also, in 1971, Pope Paul VI expressed concern that by *an ill-considered exploitation of nature* especially through *pollution* and the environment is at risk of becoming intolerable for future ages.

Pope John Paul II and the Moral Dimension of Ecology

In a striking way, Pope Benedict XVI's predecessor, St. Pope John Paul II, understood that environmental problems are ultimately grounded in moral problems, especially the problem of consumerism. The papacy of St. John Paul II was marked by his promotion of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. With respect to the environment, the late pope holds the unique distinction of dedicating entire papal texts to ecological concerns. On the World Day of Peace, January 1st of 1990, St. John Paul II was supposed to speak about peace, but surprisingly he spoke about the environment, indicating that they are related issues. Like Benedict, St. John Paul II saw environmental concerns only within the larger context of human good. Deane-Drummond, (2016) maintains that Pope St. John Paul's claim is that the lack

of peace in the world and the lack of environmental stability spring from the same root, which is human sin. In other words, the ecological crisis is, at its root, a moral problem. 291

Human Roots of Ecological Crisis

In this area, Pope Francis summarizes the human roots of the ecological crisis (LS 101 - 136). This he does in three categories; firstly, by indicating the link between technology, creativity and power; secondly, by demonstrating how the technocratic paradigm has been globalized and the ever-changing meaning and application of techno science and thirdly, the crisis and effects of anthropocentrism. The main question that begs is; 'What role does the human being play in advancing the ecological crisis?' But first, what is ecology? McIntosh states that ecology is a relatively new science, first introduced by German biologist and philosopher E. H. Haeckel (1834-1919). Going back historically, the term is derived from the Greek word for home (*oikos*) and so strikes an explicit resonance with the subtitle of Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*.

However, the meaning of ecology in the narrower biological sense refers to the interrelationship between different organisms and their natural environment, otherwise described as "niches." Pope Francis acknowledges human origins of ecological crisis. He proposes its focus on the dominant technocratic paradigms and the place of human beings and human action in the world. The 'roots' highlighted here are perhaps beyond the technology and techno science aforementioned. Man's unnecessary and irresponsible and carefree-irreplaceable acts on nature and our environment are simple the roots of most ecological crisis. Against such is the single rewarding decisions of many ecological value-oriented acts.

The African Environment

The continent of Africa is simply blessed with natural and great human resources. Nature and her occurrences seem to be very clement with African continent. Sub-Saharan Africa suffers from some serious environmental problems, including deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, wetland degradation, and insect infestation. But continental African is hallowed with dependable and fruitful humane environment. There isn't much natural disaster. Instead there are great potentialities and untapped natural minerals and vegetation in African. Most environmental degradation in African is a result of man's uncontrolled and often annoying interference in nature. Efforts to deal with these problems, however, have been handicapped by a real failure to understand their nature and possible remedies. Africa is the world's second-largest and second-most populous continent, after Asia in both cases. At about 30.3 million km² (11.7 million square miles) including adjacent islands, it covers 6% of Earth's total surface area and 20% of its land area. Despite her great concentration of wealth especially with regard to natural and of course human resources, recent economic expansion and the large and young population make Africa an important economic market in the broader global context.

However, Africa's climate is dominated by desert conditions along vast stretches of its northern and southern fringes. The central portion of the continent is wetter, with tropical rainforests, grasslands, and semi-arid climates. Temperatures are about the same as those in the desert regions. (Boyes, and Stanis 2011). The continent is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Isthmus of Suez and the Red Sea to the northeast, the Indian Ocean to the southeast and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The continent includes Madagascar and various archipelagos. It contains 54 fully recognized sovereign

states (countries), eight territories and two de facto independent states with limited or no recognition. Algeria is Africa's largest country by area, and Nigeria is its largest by population. African nations cooperate through the establishment of the African Union, which is headquartered in Addis Ababa. Today, Africa remains the poorest and least-developed continent in the world, hunger, poverty, terrorism, local ethnic and religious conflicts, corruption and bribery, disease outbreaks (OECD 2006). All these were simply orchestrated by inherent bad leadership and long years of Europeans interference in Africa.

Ecological Crisis in Africa

African environmental issues are caused by anthropogenic effects on the African natural environment and have major impacts on humans and nearly all forms of endemic life. Issues include for example deforestation, soil degradation, air pollution, climate change and water scarcity (resulting in problems with access to safe water supply and sanitation). Nearly all of Africa's environmental problems are geographically variable and human induced (Hansen et al. 2013). Thus, they include natural and human man-made disasters. Some of such issues are:

Deforestation

Large scale felling of trees and the resulting decreases in forest areas are the main environmental issues of the African Continent. Rampant clearing of forests and land conversion goes on for agriculture, settlement and fuel needs. Ninety percent of Africa's population requires wood to use as fuel for heating and cooking. As a result, forested areas are decreasing daily, as for example, in the region of equatorial evergreen forests. According to the United Nations Environment Program, Africa's desertification rate is twice that of the world.

Nigeria has the highest rate of deforestation of primary forests. Deforestation in Nigeria is caused by logging, subsistence agriculture, and the collection of wood for fuel. According to the Reid Charles (2016) deforestation has wiped out nearly 90% of Africa's forest.

Soil Degradation

The erosion caused by rains, rivers and winds as well as over-use of soils for agriculture and low use of manures have resulted in turning the soils infertile, as for example, in the plains of the Nile and the Orange River. A main cause of soil degradation is lack of manufactured fertilizers being used, since African soil lacks organic sources of nutrients. The increase in population has also contributed when people need to crop, as a source of income, but do not take measures to protect the soil, due to low income. The current methods create too much pressure on other environmental aspects, such as forests, and are not sustainable. According to Igboin (2012), there are also ecological causes of the poor soil quality. Much of the soil has rocks or clay from volcanic activity. Other causes include erosion, desertification, and deforestation. Another source of soil degradation is the improper management of waste, lack of facilities and techniques to handle waste lead to the dumping of waste in soil, therefore causes soil degradation by process such as leaching.

Degradation of African soil causes decreased food production, damaging ecological effects, and an overall decrease in the quality of living in Africa. This issue would lessen if fertilizers and other cropping supplies were more affordable and thus used more. The United Nations has commissioned a Global Assessment of Human Induced Soil Degradation (GLASOD) to further investigate the causes and state of the soil. Access to

information collected is freely available, and it is hoped that awareness will be raised among politicians in threatened areas.

Air Pollution

The air in Africa is greatly polluted due to multiple reasons stated below. The primitive method of farming that takes place in most areas in Africa is certainly a causal factor. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimate that 11.3 million hectares of land are being lost annually to agriculture, grazing, uncontrolled burning and fuel wood consumption. Combustion of wood and charcoal are used for cooking and this result to a release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which is a toxic pollutant in the atmosphere. Also, due to the poor supply of power, most homes have to rely on fuel and diesel in generators to keep their electricity running. Air pollution in Africa is coming to the forefront and must not be ignored. For example, in South Africa the mercury levels are severe due to coal combustion and gold mining. Mercury is absorbed from the air into the soil and water. The soil allows the crops to absorb the mercury, which humans ingest. Animals eat the grass which has absorbed the mercury and again humans may ingest these animals. Fish absorb the mercury from the water, humans also ingest the fish and drink the water that have absorbed the mercury. This increases the mercury levels in humans. This can cause serious health risks.

It is expected that Africa could represent the half of the world's pollution emissions by 2030, warns Cathy Liousse director of research of atmospheric sounding of the CNRS, along with many other researchers. According to the report, sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing a fast increasing pollution, derived from many causes, such as burning wood for cooking, open burning of waste, traffic, agro-food and chemical industries, the dust from

the Sahara carried by the winds through the Sahel area, all this reinforced by a greater population growth and urbanization.

The World Health Organization reports of the need to intervene when more than one third of the total Disability Adjusted Life Years was lost as a result of exposure to indoor air pollution in Africa. Fuel is needed to power lights at night. The fuel being burned causes great emissions of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Because of the increased Urbanization in Africa, people are burning more and more fuel and using more vehicles for transportation. The rise in vehicle emissions and the trend towards greater industrialization means the urban air quality in the continent is worsening. This is also the case in many megacities in Nigeria where the key contributors to poor air quality include vehicle emissions, industrial emissions and solid waste burning. Seasonal variations in pollution also exist with the highest levels of air pollution occurring during the dry season (November to March). In many countries, the use of leaded gasoline is still widespread, and vehicle emission controls are nonexistent. Indoor air pollution is widespread, mostly from the burning of coal in the kitchen for cooking. Compounds released from fuel stations and nitrogen and hydrocarbon released from airports cause air pollution. Carbon dioxide other greenhouse gases in the air causes an increase of people with respiratory issues.

There is a common relationship between air pollution and population. Africa is widely diverse between areas that are overpopulated versus areas that are scarcely populated. In regions where there is little industrial development and few people, air quality is high. Vice versa, in densely populated and industrialized regions the air quality is low. Addressing the air pollution in big cities is often a big priority, even though the

continent as a whole produces little air pollutants by international standards. Even so, air pollutants are causing a variety of health and environmental problems. These pollutants are a threat to the population of Africa and the environment they try so hard to sustain.

Climate Change

Climate change in Africa is an increasingly serious threat for Africans as Africa is among the most vulnerable continents to climate change. Anthropogenic climate change is already a reality in Africa, as it is elsewhere in the world. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the vulnerability of Africa to climate change is driven by a range of factors that include weak adaptive capacity, high dependence on ecosystem goods for livelihoods, and less developed agricultural production systems. The risks of climate change on agricultural production, food security, water resources and ecosystem services will likely have increasingly severe consequences on lives and sustainable development prospects in Africa. Managing this risk requires an integration of mitigation and adaptation strategies in the management of ecosystem goods and services, and the agriculture production systems in Africa (Pidwimy 2006).

Over the coming decades, warming from climate change is expected across almost all the Earth's surface, and global mean rainfall will increase. Regional effects on rainfall in the tropics are expected to be much more spatially variable and the sign of change at any one location is often less certain, although changes are expected. Consistent with this, observed surface temperatures have generally increased over Africa since the late 19th century to the early 21st century by about 1 °C, but locally as much as 3 °C for minimum temperature in the Sahel at the end

of the dry season. Observed precipitation trends indicate spatial and temporal discrepancies as expected. The observed changes in temperature and precipitation vary regionally.

In terms of adaptation efforts, regional-level actors are making some progress. This includes the development and adoption of several regional climate change adaptation strategies e.g. SADC Policy Paper Climate Change and the adaptation strategy for the water sector. In addition, there has been other effort to enhance climate change adaptation, such as the tripartite programs on Climate Change Adaptation, Mitigation in Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA-EAC-SADC).

As a supranational organization of 55 member states, the African Union has put forward 47 goals and corresponding actions in a 2014 draft report to combat and mitigate climate change on the continent. The Secretary General of the United Nations has also declared a need for close cooperation with the African Union in order to tackle climate change, in accordance with the UN's sustainable development goals.

Water Scarcity

Water scarcity in Africa is predicted to reach dangerously high levels by 2025. It is estimated that about two-third of the world's population may suffer from fresh water shortage by 2025. The main causes of water scarcity in Africa are physical and economic scarcity, rapid population growth, and climate change. Water scarcity is the lack of fresh water resources to meet the standard water demand. Although Sub-Saharan Africa has a plentiful supply of rainwater, it is seasonal and unevenly distributed, leading to frequent floods and droughts. Additionally, prevalent economic development and poverty issues, compounded with rapid population growth and rural-

urban migration have rendered Sub-Saharan Africa as the world's poorest and least developed region.

The 2012 Report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations indicates that growing water scarcity is now one of the leading challenges for sustainable development. This is because an increasing number of the river basins have reached conditions of water scarcity through the combined demands of agriculture and other sectors. Impacts of water scarcity in Africa range from health (women and children are particularly affected) to education, agricultural productivity, sustainable development as well as the potential for more water conflicts.

Prevention of Ecological and Environmental Issues

According to Chawla (1999) recycling of wastes entails a lot so as to maintain and balance our environment. It entails conscious conservation of water and other important resources through proper implementation. Such recycling habits into ones daily life is one of the most effective ways to help lessen landfill waste, conserve natural resources, save habitats, reduce pollution, cut down on energy consumption, and slow down global warming. The tips you see below seem like no-brainers; however, it may take to become more aware of your unconscious habits.

These habits are summarized thus: Switch off anything that uses electricity when not in use (lights, televisions, computers, printers, etc.). Unplug devices when possible; even when an appliance is turned off, it may still use power. Remove chemicals inside of the house; research companies that use plant-derived ingredients for their household cleaning products. Remove chemicals outside of the house; use eco-friendly pesticides and herbicides that won't contaminate groundwater. Consider signing up for a renewable energy producer that uses 100%

renewable energy to power homes. Volunteer for cleanups in your community. You can get involved in protecting your watershed, too. Educate others on the importance and value of our natural resources. Public enlightenment is one of the major preventive measures. Knowledge illuminates light into the ignorance of the people. Conserve water. The less water you use, the less runoff and wastewater that eventually end up in the ocean. Buy less plastic and bring a reusable shopping bag. Use energy efficient light bulbs reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Also flip the light switch off when you leave the room! Plant a tree. Trees provide food and oxygen. They help save energy, clean the air, and help combat climate change. Deforestation is harmful. Afforestation is also a solution. Don't send chemicals into our waterways. Choose non-toxic chemicals in the home and office. The development of theories about environmental problems will help to checkmate human activities.

Conclusion

The papal teachings have only caught up with African environmental ethics. However, they lend credibility and prominence to each other's approach and to their common message towards safeguarding our environment. They employ us to consider the common good as a cosmic good wherein each creature deserves respect and possesses the right to exist for its good and the good of all. Respect for the environment reflects and reinforces our moral compass as well as represents the veritable beacon for a more equitable global society and a sustainable economic future. Therefore, we should forge a better and more global framework for safeguarding the Earth, our common home.

References

- Boyes, E., and Stanis Street, M. (2011). Environmental education for behavior change: which actions should be targeted? *International Journal of Science Education*
- Chawla, L, (1999) Research methods to investigate Significant life experiences: a review and recommendations. *Environmental Education Research*, 4 (4) 383-398
- Deane-Drummond, Celia (2016). *Laudato Si* and the natural sciences: An assessment of possibilities and limits. *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 392-415.
- Francis, Pope (2015). *Laudato si*. Vatican City: Vatican Press, May 24: w2.
- Hansen, J., et al. (2013, December 3). *Assessing 'dangerous climate change': Required reduction of carbon emissions to protect young people, future generations and nature*. PLOS ONE. Retrieved from <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0081648>.
- Igboin, B. O. (2012). African Religion and Environmental Challenges in Post-Colonial Africa. *llorin Journal of Religious studies*2, no.1:17-38
- O'Malley, Sean P. (2015). *Laudato Si: 'Our Common Home' and the Dignity of the poor*. *Spirituality*
- OECD (2006). *Details of more than 5,000 DFID Research programmes and their results can be found on the DFID's research portal: www.research4development.info*
- Pidwimy, M. (2006). *Causes of Climate Change*. In *Fundamentals of Physical Geography*, second edition (<http://www.physical>

geography.net/fundamentals/7y.html).Retrieved on
17th April, 2015

Pope Francis 2015 '*Laudato Si*' 'On care for our common home'
Huntington: Our Sunday visitor.

Reid Charles 2016 Poe Francis, The common good and climate
change. *The Hunffington post* (June 13)

Chapter Sixteen

RELIGION AND THE CONTROL OF ENVIRONMENTAL CRISES IN NIGERIA

Chinedu Jonathan Dick, PhD

*No. 1 Chief Ezeogor Close, Ogbor-Hill
Aba Abia State, Nigeria*

&

Victor Ifeanyi Ede, PhD

*School of General Studies, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Abia State Nigeria*

victorifede@gmail.com, ede.victor@mouau.edu.ng

Executive Summary

This work argues that religion plays a vital role in formulating moral framework on how the human person should relate with other people and the environment. Religions fashion the attitudes and values that shape and influence people's concepts of nature. Environmental crises or ecological crises are fundamentally crises of values. This chapter submits that it would then mean that religions which are the primary source of values in any culture may play a vital role in the decisions made regarding the environment.

Keywords: Religion, Environmental Crisis, Ecology, Ecosystem, Nigeria, Africa

Introduction

It has been observed in recent times that the role of environment in a nation's development process cannot be relegated to the background. Apart from being the physical surrounding for natural habitats, the environment provides the basis for

agricultural, industrial, commercial, technological and tourism development of a society. For this and several other reasons, environmental issues now occupy a centre stage in academic discourse and other public debates both at the national and international levels. Recorded evidence has also shown that the environment represents a wide range of the external circumstances, conditions and the things that affect the existence and development of an individual, organism, group and society (Isaichei, 1999).

In Nigeria for instance, environmental issues did not gain official recognition until the 1988 Koko toxic waste-dumping brouhaha, which highlighted the urgent need to establish the Nigeria Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA), Federal Ministry of Environment and other relevant agencies, ostensibly to tackle environmentally related issues, in the country. These include issues such as environmental pollution, sanitation, depletion of ozone layer, desertification, flooding, erosion, poverty, bush burning, deforestation, and soil conservation. Environmentally minded scholars, such as Ocheri (2003) and Aja (2005), have associated environmental crises with human activities and albeit persistent human interaction with the environment. Researches have also shown that as the population of a country grows/increases with attendant pressure on the environment especially in the wake of improved technologies, environmental abuse and pollution are nevertheless heightened with corresponding effects on lives of people and other living organisms (Ocheri, 2003; Hausers, 1971). Also, man, through industrial, agricultural and the ever-increasing urbanization process, security and terrorist activities tend to directly and/or indirectly pollute the environment. Jande (2005) and Aja (2005) in their separate observations, also in tandem with the foregoing agree that unrestricted use of pesticides, insecticides, herbicides

and indiscriminate dumping of refuse, excreta and animal dung as well as spillages from refineries, large scale bush burning etc are perceived as some of the leading factors of environmental crises in Nigeria.

Religion plays a vital role in formulating moral framework on how man should relate with other people and his environment. Religions fashion the attitudes and values that shape and influence people's concepts of nature (Gbenda, 2006). Moreover, environmental crises or ecological crises are fundamentally crises of values. It would then mean that religions which are the primary source of values in any culture may play a vital role in the decisions made regarding the environment.

Much of the attention given to the environmental problems both at the global and national levels and especially in Nigeria has been secular approaches. For example, modern land use decrees or acts have been made in Nigeria without serious consideration to the religious influence on land and the whole environment. Scholars such as Udodora (2011), Mbiti (1976), Thompson (1970), Calder (1968), had observed that all religious traditions whether elementary, pre-literate or advanced, are environmental friendly and teaches environmental preservation and protection. Udodora (2011) summed up the views of all the myths of creation in world major religions. According to him, although man is created last, he is given the highest responsibility and authority to take care of and rule over all creatures including the earth surface (the land mass) on which he dwells. He is also to take care of the sea and all the creatures living in it. All religion teaches that the creator (God) is the owner of the world and everything that is in it including man. Therefore, man is only a steward given the authority to take care of what belongs to the creator.

Indeed, Nigerians are notoriously religious. With the postulations of some sociologists of religion about the death of religion, religion has till today remained the most vibrant institution and vital force that integrates, unites and constructs the people's value and moral systems. The moral imperative and value systems of religion are very important in mobilizing the sensibilities of people towards preserving, protecting and conserving the environment for human sustenance and for future generation (Udodora, 2011). Nigeria is populated by adherents of three major religions namely: Traditional Religion; Islamic Religion; and Christian Religion. It is therefore imperative that religion should be seen as a strong factor in issues relating to the environment.

African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Environmental Control

Just as Africans have grown over the ages, so also is the Africa Traditional Religion. African Traditional Religion means the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans before and even after the coming of western religions in Africa. However, there have been serious arguments on whether one could legitimately speak of one African Religion in the singular (Mbiti, 1976). Whether African Traditional Religion (s) is/are plural or singular, one thing that must be noted about it is that they have traditionally expressed some ethical concerns for the environment and creatures. They have also accorded some moral significance to other creatures and equally proposed some ethical responsibilities on the part of humans. They have the understanding that earth has some kind of religious significance or religious values, while humans have some religious obligations to care for the earth. Grim and Evelyn (2013) affirmed this by maintaining that most religious traditions have

developed attitudes of respect, reverence, and care for the natural world that brings forth life in its diverse forms.

ATR began as a set of code of conducts and ethics guiding the activities of man in his society. In an attempt to enforce the precepts of this new ethics and code of conduct, the community members charged with the enforcement of these rules, code and ethical behavior formed themselves into an association, where their rules, code of conduct and membership was widely jealoused and accepted. As time progressed, communicating with the ancestors to guide human existence became expedient, so a chief priest will always elect a serving priest who teaches the community the way of the gods and also how to make incantations and appease the gods, so this new apprentice takes over the duty of divination in the event that the chief priest is no more or he is seriously ill (Ester and Seruen, 1992).

ATR teaches that some natural entities such as rivers, hills, mountains, stones or rocks, lakes, trees, and many others possess spirits and demand respect just like humans. It teaches that natural environments are inhabited by spirits hence, adherents allowed these natural entities to remain in their sacred groves. Because of this understanding, some forests, rivers, lakes, mountains, stones or rocks, and others were kept intact, treated as scared abodes of gods, and preserved out of reverence for the deity that inhabited them. Henshey (2011) posited that in traditional African societies like Nigeria, Ghana, and many others, many people believed that rocks, trees streams, ponds and forests were the manifestation of the power of the Supreme Being. He saw these things as ideal places to meet their supreme being or the gods. Deb and Malhotra (1997) concluded that these trees together with the vegetation around were preserved as sacred places for worship. Africans did not just attach much

importance to trees and herbs just for spiritual purposes, but also because trees, herbs and plants in general are useful in enhancing human life. Tree leaves, bark, roots and grasses provided herbal medicines to human beings and to wild and domestic animals. Trees were also seen as being symbols of god's presence among people. Rocks, ponds, lands, streams and other part of the environment were also the abodes of the gods, so shrines, sanctuaries, temples and sacred groves were all meant for the worship, consultation and appeasements of the gods.

Furthermore, as part of traditional religious beliefs or teachings, man is seen as a component of the environment, which means that any harm carried out against the environment is invariably against man, because environment is the basis for man's existence. Any harm done on ecology will bring untold hardship and problems to mankind. Man should therefore explore, develop and use with moderation all the available natural resources to enhance his being. Greed and destructive tendencies are condemned, while restraint and protection are affirmed by Africa Tradition Religions. The moral frameworks and ethical systems and values constructed by African Tradition Religion enabled the people to cooperate with nature, treat their environment well and trod lightly on earth. It was difficult then to acknowledge any disjunction between principles and practices. This explains why there was no mention of global warming, climate change, desertification, depletion, gas flaring, deforestation, coastal erosion, and many others when traditional religion was the only religion in the soil of Africa. The adherents understood that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect, which is basically lacking today in our interaction with nature (Enwereji, 2004).

Consequently, the teachings of traditional religions were totally embraced, accepted, practiced and strictly adhered to by the traditional people and thus, implemented in the decisions made regarding the environment. Nevertheless, as these values were erased from the minds of the people through the instrumentalities of western education and western religions, the adherents of African Traditional Religion began to see some of those natural entities believed to be the abodes of gods and which engendered the attitudes of respect, reverence and care for natural world in them as nothing but ordinary entities without divine presence anymore. The result is demolition and destruction of shrines, trees forests, rivers, mountains, stones and lands that were formally regarded as sacred. And this may have contributed to the current environmental crises of today.

Islamic Religion and Environmental Control

Islam is the name of religion that emerged from the revelation and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Islam is the Arabic term for “submission”. Muslim is the name given to one who adheres to the religion of Islam. It means “one who submits” (Marin, 1997). However, according to Omoregbe (1999) Orthodox Muslims do not accept that Islam was founded by Muhammad, nor do they accept that they are Mohammedians. Islam, they claim was not founded by Muhammad but by Allah himself. Muhammad was only a messenger through whom Allah made his messages known to mankind. They reject the appellation “Muhammedians” because it seems to imply that they worship Muhammad an idea which is incompatible with the rigid monotheism of Islam.

Islam is one of the major religions of the world which is completely different from Christianity. It is the second largest religion of the world next to Christianity. The population of the

adherents in the whole world is estimated between 1.3 billion to 1.8 billion. Islam has penetrated into countries of the world such as the whole of Arab world, China, Russia, Spain, Caribbean, Indonesia, United State, Asia and Africa. Large communities of Muslims are found in Nigeria especially in the northern part of Nigeria. Muslim faithful all over the world claim Allah as their God and Muhammad as their prophet (Gbenda, 2006).

Islam in its environmental control teaches that humankind is created by God and shall one day return to him to give account of his actions. This means that we are answerable for all that we do both the good and the evil. As God's vice regents on earth, at the last judgment, man will be called to account for how he acted towards the trust, and how he treated it. 'So glory to him in whose hands is the dominion of all things: and to him will you be all brought back (Sura 36: 83). This message explains the hereafter. All things were created by God and were maintained by him, and will go back to him. Man will also be brought back to God and is answerable to him and to him alone.

The earth is also considered by Islam to be a place of purification and worship of God. According to God's messenger Muhammad, the earth was made a place of worship and purification for me and Muslims (Berry, 1996). This is shown when Muslim faithful use the earth for canonical ablution whenever there is unavailability of water before worship. God's messenger emphasized more on this when he said "God is beautiful and he loves the beautiful. He is generous and he loves generosity; he is clean and loves cleanliness" (Berry, 1996). By implication, God enjoins his trustees to keep the earth and the environment beautiful and clean without destroying and polluting and even defacing it. The trustees must keep the

common environment clean and avoid anything that will upset and disturb others in any circumstances or any places.

There is no place in the Holy Qur'an and Hadith, where Islam endorses that man should destroy and spoil the ecological balances and the order of the natural system, which are signs of His existence. Islam teaches that such vice-regent should not disrupt the natural equilibrium nor betray the trust of the one who created the world with a particular order, balance and harmony. Rather he is to enjoy the provisions (of Allah) therein the earth according to the will and in service of Allah who admonishes him not to "perpetrate mischief on the earth, which has been established with order, but call on him with fear and longing (in your heart) for the mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good" (Qur'an 7: 56, 7:85).

One of the most important aspects of protecting the environment and ecology taught by Islam is the conservation of trees, forest, woodland, countryside, and all the living creatures whose habitats are such areas (Ozdemir, 2013). It is very possible to observe from the practices and in several of Prophet Muhammad's Hadiths the importance he attaches on the planting of trees, protection of existing ones, planting of fruits, as well as conserving the existing ones. For instance, in His Hadiths, it is asserted that if you have a sapling, if you have the time, be certain to plant it, even if doomsday starts to break forth (Futato, 2000).

Furthermore, Islam enjoins the followers to treat the animals of all species well by protecting and extending kindness and compassion to them. Prophet Muhammad in strong terms forbade cruelty or wanton killing of animals. Muhibbu-Din (2003) observed that the Islamic law has prohibition against the

tormenting of animals, except when slaughtered for food in a humane manner. It is not permitted to even overburden an animal with heavy loads beyond its capacity, or to compel it to walk or run beyond its power. The Hadith of Prophet records that if without good reason anyone kills a sparrow or creatures less than that even, the living creatures will put his plans to God on the Day of Judgment saying so-and-so killed me for no purpose. The Prophet prohibited torture and abuse of animals. He also condemned hunting for sport (Muhibbu-Din, 2003).

From the foregoing, it could be seen that the tenets from the glorious Qur'an of Islam if strictly adhered to or put into practice as it ought to be by the faithful, would result in a harmonious and natural equilibrium of ecosystems. In Nigeria, the population of the Muslim faithful is found more in the Northern part of Nigeria where we have recurrent ecological problems such as drought, flood, desertification, and many others. It could be possible to argue that on the basis of the teachings of Islam discussed above, one is expected to see a free ecological problem zone in the northern part of Nigeria populated by about seventy-five to eighty percent of the adherents of Islam. Thus, the presence of environmental problems in the north calls into question the religion "Islam" since it is the primary source of values that determines the adherents' decision regarding the environment. In fact, Islamic religion is being implicated in view of the fact that the decisions of its adherents on anything that pertains to life and natural environment are based on the value systems and ethical principle from the religion. Worst still, it could be possible that some Muslim faithful are ignorant of the teachings of Islam on environment.

Christian Religion and Environmental Control

Christianity has had profound influence on the human society and culture. The presence of Christianity in Africa has drastically rooted out the traditional institutions and principles, supplanting them with Christian traditions and principles. It is a monotheistic religion and it draws much of its inspiration from the Holy Bible, the revelation of God, and the traditions of the church (the early fathers). The Holy Bible (both Old and New Testaments) remains the principle source of law for Christianity. Christian Religion, in controlling environmental crises, enjoins her followers to do more to rebuild the earth than to tear it down. This is highly needed now that humans have destroyed and polluted the earth they are given to take care of. Of course, renewal is part of our responsibility to take care of the earth. When we commit ourselves to helping to renew the earth's natural resources, the issue of ecological crises would be drastically reduced to barest minimum.

Christianity has a historic concern for nature and the natural world. At the same time, ecological concerns operate in tension with anthropocentric values, such as the Biblical notion of human dominion over the Earth. (Gen 1:28) A broad range of Christian institutions are engaged in the environmental movement and contemporary environmental concerns. Latter Day Saint movement Mormon environmentalists find theological reasons for stewardship and conservationism through biblical and additional scriptural references including a passage from the Doctrine and Covenants. "And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion" is one of such references (Anderson, 1984).

In examining the Christian Religion in controlling environmental crises, the first place to begin from is the creation, that is, how everything came into existence. In the biblical understanding, God created everything that exists. This doctrine stands clearly at the opening of the Bible; “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The expression ‘heavens and the earth’ is simply a Hebrew idiom that means “all that exist” (Erickson, 1993). Everything that has existence is inclusive in this creation, both the visible and the invisible. The same doctrine was also recorded in other parts of the Old Testament. The Holy Bible records: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). The same understanding permeated the religious practice of the Hebrew believers as expressed thus; “the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handwork” (Ps. 19:1). It is evident from this Psalm (19:1) that the Hebrew believers are here giving their thanks and praise to God for creating or bringing the entire universe into existence.

Bohlin, (2002) stated that while God intended us to live in harmony with nature, we have more often than not been at odds with nature. This reality tells us that man has not fulfilled his mandate. The source of our ecological crises lies in man’s fallen nature and abuse of his dominion. Man is a rebel who has set himself at the centre of the universe. Man has exploited created things as though they were nothing in themselves and as though he has an autonomous right to do so. Man’s abuse of his dominion becomes clear when we look at the value we place on time and money. Our often uncontrolled greed and haste have led to the deterioration of the environment.

There are three important principles taught in the Bible which Christians need to remember and practice. They are principles of

preservation, conservation and restoration. The principle of preservation is all about keeping things beautifully. This can be observed in some of the statements God made to Adam and Eve concerning the Garden of Eden and everything therein. God told them “to work it and take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). We are told that the Garden of Eden was a beautiful garden, and to keep the beauty, God instructed them to work and take care of it. Principle of conservation is the principle of utilizing resources to their fullest (McCain, 2000). Conservation is the management and sustainable use of the natural environment and natural resources for ethical reasons and the benefit of humanity. This principle can be illustrated by the supernatural feeding of the Israelites in the wilderness with manna after they left Egypt. While supplying them with manna, God instructed them to take just enough for their needs (Ex. 16:13-21). They were to take no more and no less. They were only to take the one that will satisfy them for that particular day, but not to store for other days. The Bible (God) expects us to use only what we need not to accumulate wealth for our generations to come. Lack of these principles (conservation) has plunged the world into recurrent ecological problems, we should make these principles part of our everyday life style. The last principle, the principle of restoration is all about returning natural things to their original condition. God is the God of renewal. He renews both human beings and also the face of the earth: “you renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30). If God is a God of renewal and He has made us in His image, we should be involved in renewal, that is, renewal of the resources God has given to us. This renewal is highly needed now that humans have destroyed and polluted the earth they were given to take care of.

Furthermore, as part of God’s command and principles proclaimed by Christian Religion regarding nature, Christians

are enjoined to care and treat nature or environment with caution. Apart from treating nature as having value in itself and being careful in exercising dominion, the Bible enumerates various examples of the care with which humans (Christians) are expected to give to the environment. In Leviticus (25:1 - 12), God told Moses on Mount Sinai to tell the Israelites to care for the land. God said it specifically that the land is to have a year of rest. Job 38:25-28 speak of God's nurture and care for His Creation; "who cuts a channel for the torrent of rain, and a path for a desolate wasteland and make it sprout with grass? Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew? And Jesus spoke on two occasions on how much the father cared for even the smallest sparrow (Mathew 6:26; 10:29).

Conclusion

From the foregoing it is clear that the three religions are not arrogant towards the environment and therefore should not bear any burden of guilt for the current ecological crises. All religions in essence are eco-friendly and supposed not to be implicated or blamed for the ecological problems. But the problems lie on the adherents of these religions, that is, their total disobedience and lack of compliance to the teachings of these religions on environment. Despite the fact that religions are the primary source of values in any culture, it could be seen from our discussion that the various attitudes of the adherents of these religions, or otherwise, the values of these people which determine their decisions regarding the environment, are not sourced out from or constructed by these religions, and so, both religions are exonerated from any implication. We should remember that the responsibility given to us by God to carefully manage the earth goes with accountability. How we manage the earth as stewards or caretakers will be accounted for on the Day of Judgment.

References

- Aja, J. O. (2005). Environmental Education as a panacea for a sustainable development in Nigeria: Schools environment in focus. *African Journal of Environmental Laws and Development Studies*, 1 (1): 114-127.
- Anderson, B.W. (1984). *Creation in the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress. Print.
- Berry, T. (1996). *Ethics and Ecology*, A paper delivered at the Harvard Seminar on Environmental Values Harvard University, April 9, 1996.
- Bohlin, C. (2002). *Christian Views on Environmentalism*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_views_on_environmentalism
- Calder, R. (1968). *Man and the Cosmos*. New York: NY Mentor.
- Deb, D. & Malhotra, K. C. (1997). Sacred Grove Relics as Bird Refugia. *Current Science Journal*, 73 (4): 815-817.
- Enwereji, S. O. (2004). *Ethics and Ecological Crisis in Nigeria*. (Ph.D) Thesis, Department of Religion and Philosophy, University of Jos.
- Erickson, M. J. (1993). *Evangelical Mind and Heart: Perspective on Theological and Practical Issues*. Grand Rapids: House, Print.
- Ester, P. & Seuren, B. (1992). Religious beliefs and environmental attitudes: An empirical test of the Lynn White hypothesis in fourteen nations. *Sociale Wetens chappen*, 35(1): 20- 39.
- Futato, M. (2000). *Creation: A Witness to the Wonder of God*. New Jersey: P and R. Print.
- Gbenga, J. S. (2006). *African Religion and Christianity in a Charging World: A Comparative Approach*. Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers.

- Grim, J. and Evelyn, M. (2013). The Emerging Alliance of World Religions and Ecology. *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs* 2013. Accessed from www.carnegiecouncil.org/publication
- Hauser, P. M. (1971). World Population: Retrospect and prospect. In National Academy of Science (Ed.) *Rapid Population Growth: Consequences and Policy Implications* (Pp. 103-122). Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Henshey, L . (2011). *Religious and Spiritual Mysteries Examiner*. Texas: Grant Press.
- Isaichei, A.O. (1999). Management of the Nigerian Environment in the next millennium. In Okogie and Ojo (ed) *National Strategies for Promoting a Better Society*. Nigerian Leaven Club International.
- Jande, G. G. (2005). Legal mechanisms for the control of pollution on the high seas. *African Journal of Environmental Law and Development Studies*, 1(1): 1-13.
- Marin, W. (1997). *The Kingdom of Cults*. Minneapolis, Minnesootat: Bethany House. Print.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1976). *African religions and philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Muhibbu-Din, M.A. (2003). Development, Exploitation and Management of the Natural Environment: An Islamic Perspective. In Ade Dopamu *African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thouht*. Ilorin: African Centre for Religion and Science (ACRS). Print.
- Ocheri, M. I. (2003). *Environmental health hazards and national survival and stability: A need for education*. *Benue State University Journal of Education (BSUJE)*, 4 (2): 167-174.
- Omogbe, J. I. (1999). *Comparative Religion: Christianity and Other World Religions in Dialogue*. Lagos JOJA Educational Research and Publishers.

Ozdemir, I. (2013). *An Islamic Approach to the Environment*. Accessed from www.Islamawareness.net/nature/environment

Thompson, F. W. (1970). *West African secret societies: Their organization, officials and teachings*. Westport: Negro University Press

Udodora, R. O. (2011). Religion and land use: A threat to global peace. In Adesewo, M. A. (ed). *Religion and Land Issue* (pp. 3140). Ilorin: NASRED.

Chapter Seventeen

LAUDATO SI': THE CRY OF THE EARTH AND THE CRY OF THE POOR IN NIGERIA

Mary Winifred Gloria Eche DMMM, PhD
Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary, Makurdi
Benue State
winieoge@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

The core principle of *Laudato Si* was the call to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Following St Francis of Assisi, *Laudato Si*, speaks of the earth as our sister 'who cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her'. He speaks of the poor calling out to us for justice and a share at the table. Today, in Nigeria, this principle is being violated in various ways. The earth is crying because of innocent blood that is being spilled everyday, farms are being destroyed, which has caused a lot of hunger to the poor and the vulnerable. This goes against another principle of this encyclical, which is the common good. Therefore, this paper is a call to Nigerians to care for our common home and improve our relationship with our natural and social environments.

Keywords: *Laudato Si*, The Earth, The Poor, Nigeria, Pope Francis, Ecosystem, Common Home

Introduction

In the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis relates the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Literally, cry is a metaphor with different meanings. It can mean the feeling of pain and suffering, the experience of sadness and loss calling out for relief and

sympathy.¹ The emphasis made in this work is that there is no difference between the cry of the earth and that of the poor. Both are linked together in the encyclical. There is an Igbo adage which says, 'when the eyes are crying, the nose cries as well'. That is exactly the case as pertains this paper.

Laudato Si, is the second encyclical of Pope Francis. It has as the subtitle 'On care for our common home'. In it, the pope critiques consumerism and irresponsible development, laments environmental degradation and global warming, and calls all people of the world to take swift and unified global action.

Laudato Si (Be Praised) presents a special intuition of Pope Francis. An approach of the encyclical highlights that everything is closely interrelated. "If everything is related, then the health of a society's institutions has consequences for the environment and the quality of human life. "Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment".²

In fact, the cry of the earth is not different from the cry of the poor; nor is the ecological crisis different from social crisis. "The second goal of *Laudato Si*' is thus a call to respond to the Cry of the Poor defending life in all its forms, with special attention to

¹ Canceran, Delfo Cortina (2019) "Climate Justice: The Cry of the Earth, the Cry of the Poor (The Case of the Yolanda/Hayain Tragedy in the Philippines)," *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1 , Article 5. Available at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/solidarity/vol8/iss1/5>

² *Laudato Si*, §142

vulnerable groups such as indigenous people, migrants, unborn children and children at risk of modern slavery”³.

It is obvious that many people believe that the ecological crisis implies climate crisis. This is “because the climate crisis is one of the most pervasive manifestations of the ecological crisis”⁴. It is not possible to talk about protecting the environment while we are consciously neglecting the needs of the Earth’s most vulnerable people. If we want to protect the future of the earth, *Laudato sí* calls or demands that we look at the environmental crisis also as an issue of social justice, which hitherto encourages that we safeguard and protect the interests of our brothers and sisters especially the poor and the vulnerable. “The actual ecological crisis is thus a spiritual crisis, too. The ecological conversion and the care for each other and for creation needs a spiritual conversion. Pope Francis, therefore, speaks of an integral ecology, that is environmental, economic, social, cultural, and daily life ecology, that is a human ecology (LS138-155)”⁵.

The Core Principles of *Laudato Si*

‘*Laudato Si*’ discussed extensively on the principle of common good. “Human ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. According to the Pope, common good means that “everything is interconnected, and that genuine care for our own lives and our relationships with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice

³ John Paul Pezzi, MCCJ., (2021). “The Cry of the Poor, *Laudato Si* 2nd Goal”. New York, **Jpic-jp.org**, *Translated by: Jpic-jp.org*. Available at <https://www.jpic-jp.org/the-cry-of-the-poor-laudato-si...>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

and faithfulness to others”.⁶ As Francis formulates this principle in *Laudato Si*, the Church Fathers of Vatican Council II offer a precise definition of common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment”.⁷ Some years ago, Pope Benedict XVI explained the Common Good as follows: “It is the good of all of us, made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity.”⁸

The Catechism of the Catholic Church presents common good as the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily. Common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence especially those who exercise the office of authority. Common good consists of three essential elements: First, the common good considers that everyone deserves to be respected as a person. Therefore, in the name of the common good, public authorities are bound to respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of each person. Second, the common good promotes the social well-being and development of the group itself. Development in this sense becomes the epitome of all social duties. And finally, the common good requires the stability and security of a just order, which brings peace in the community. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable

⁶ Carol Seagar, St Thomas More’s Catholic Primary School available in www.stm.tas.edu.au/newsletters. July 30, 2015 accessed on 7/12/2015

⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 26

⁸ *Caritas in Veritate*, 7

means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defence....⁹

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis writes “the principle of the common good immediately becomes logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters. This option entails recognizing the implications of the universal destination of the world’s goods....”¹⁰ Indeed, according to brother Richard, “the Common Good makes clear how we are all connected, and responsible for the well-being of others.”¹¹ He went further to point out that “Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis both have made clear that this responsibility extends to the future generations (LS159), and our common home: earth. Contributing to the Common Good is not only something that we can do out of our own abundance, but something that will come at our own expense. Real almsgiving, wrote Pope Benedict in 2007, might mean giving all. But then again, isn't that what our Lord has done for us? ”¹²

The human person is endowed with some basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It also has to do with the overall welfare of the society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups when the principle of subsidiarity is applied. The common good thus calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice. Whenever this is violated, violence always

⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, (1906-1909)

¹⁰ *Laudato Si'*, §158.

¹¹ Richard Steenvoorde, O.P. available in English.op.org/godzdogz/laudato-si-common-good, Oct 20,2015. Accessed on 6/12/2015

¹² Richard Steenvoorde, O.P

ensues. Society as a whole and the state, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.¹³

Apart from the principle of the common good, there is also the principle of responsibility for maintaining the integrity of creation which the Pope linked with the creation account. In the book of Genesis, the creation accounts contain in their own symbolic and narrative language, deep teachings on human existence and its historical reality. They disclose the fact that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: relationship with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself. As presented by the Bible, these three vital relationships have been broken by man both outwardly and within us. The harmony that existed between the Creator, humanity and creation was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our limitations. This brought distortion over the mandate given to man by God to have dominion over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), to till it and keep it (Gen 2:15). As a result of this, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. Gen 3:17-19).¹⁴

The Pope further illustrated the principle of responsibility in the following words: “we are not God. The earth was here before us, and it has been given to us.... The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing, or working, while ‘keeping’ means caring, protecting, overseeing, and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility

¹³ Laudato Si, §157.

¹⁴ Laudato Si, §66.

between human beings and nature".¹⁵ The principle of common good also links up with the principle of justice. If we don't take care of the common good invariably it translates to injustice. Here the Pope moves into the area of morality, equity, and justice. According to John Cardinal Onaiyekan, "the present situation of environmental degradation as a result of careless human activities is an issue of moral justice. This is because those who are messing up our common home are especially the rich and powerful nations. Unfortunately, therefore, greater impacts are being thrown on the poor and weaker nations while at the same time mortgaging the future of all nations."¹⁶

The Cry of the Earth

Man is a being endowed with freedom and some persons believe that their freedom cannot be hindered by anyone, that is to say that they are free to do whatever they want without interference, and, therefore, free to explore and exploit. Such exaggerated freedom is part of the problem which the encyclical is addressing. Pope Francis reminds us in the words of Pope Benedict asking us to "recognize that the natural environment has been gravely damaged by our irresponsible behaviour. The social environment has also suffered damage. Both are ultimately due to the same evil: the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless".¹⁷ He further pointed out that "we have forgotten that man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. Man does not create himself. He is spirit and will, but also nature. With paternal concern, Benedict urged us to realize that creation is harmed where we ourselves have the final word, where

¹⁵ *Laudato Si*, § 67.

¹⁶ Onaiyekan, J.O., message to United Nations' Secretary on Climate Change in Abuja on 24/08/2015.

¹⁷ *Laudato Si*, § 6.

everything is simply our property, and we use it for ourselves alone. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves".¹⁸

The Cry of the Poor

The word 'poor' means several things. It can mean a lack. This lack may be money, or necessary facilities for conducive living. One can be both materially and spiritually poor. Other dimensions of poverty can be viewed as "economic, social, political, and legal"¹⁹.

In this context, *Laudato Si*, refers to those being deprived of their welfare in the society, and their inalienable or basic human rights. For example every human being has right to live. But one of the serious crimes against humanity today is lack of respect for the human life. The poor is crying for social injustice meted on them. In many parts of the world, the basic needs of the people are neglected because of selfishness and greed. Therefore, Pope Francis in this encyclical spoke strongly about the principle of common good as explained above. For him the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice. And he went further to say that whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Thus, Society, and the state, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.²⁰

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Ellis, G.F.R. The dimensions of poverty. *Soc Indic Res* **15**, 229–253 (1984).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00668672>

²⁰ ²⁰ *Laudato Si*, §157

The Cry of the Poor and the Vulnerable in Nigeria

Who are the poor and vulnerable in Nigeria? The poor and the vulnerable in Nigeria are those who have been denied of choices and opportunities, those whose human dignity have been violated. They are those who lack the basic capacity to participate effectively in the society. The poor and vulnerable are those who do not have enough to feed and clothe themselves, those who do not have access to a school or clinic to go to; those who do not have any land on which to grow their food, simply because, their lands have been forcefully taken away from them, those driven away from their homes, which has led to the creating of IDP. Those that can be kidnapped at any time be it in their homes or on the street, etc. They are those who are denied their human freedom of worship. Those who have no job to earn their living, even though graduates. The poor and vulnerable are those who suffer from insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities. They are those who are prone to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. The poor and the vulnerable in Nigeria are those who defenceless.

Almost all the encyclicals that make up the social teaching of the Catholic Church are concerned about the poor and the vulnerable. One of the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching is known as 'Preferential Option for the Poor'. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis makes a subtle but significant advancement on this; he writes not only out of concern for the poor and vulnerable, but brings their concerns, their voice and their perspective right to the heart of the encyclical. The perspective of the poor is clearly seen in the document (*Laudato Si'*).

The Pope writes scornfully about those with power who are far removed from the poor, who never come into contact with them and experience their concerns. For Pope Francis, to help and love the most vulnerable means being close to them. Throughout the document, the fate of the poor and the planet are repeatedly linked as mentioned above. This is because they are the ones who most closely share in the pain of the earth. They cry out as it cries out, yet have done so little to cause it.

Actions to be taken to Achieve the 2nd Goal of *Laudato Si*

The 2nd goal of *Laudato Si* as mentioned above is a call to respond to the Cry of the Poor defending life in all its forms, with special attention to vulnerable groups. Pope Francis proffers ways to be taken to achieve the 2nd goal in his message for the 54th World Day of Peace (2021), '*A culture of care as a path to peace*'. In no. 6, he explains *the principles of the Church's social doctrine*.

First, he spoke about care as promotion of the dignity and rights of each person. The word person according to Pope Francis 'always' signifies relationship, not individualism. Since it signifies relationship, it, therefore, affirms inclusion, not exclusion, which buttressed uniqueness and inviolable dignity, in that case no exploitation. Following his argument, each human person is seen as an end in himself or herself, not as a means to be valued only for his or her usefulness. Human rights are derived from this dignity, so also do human duties. Everyone is our neighbor, near or far in space and time, whether white or black, Christian or Muslim, South or North.

Second was care for the common good. The Pope emphasized that the common good is the total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, no matter your status or your origin to reach their fulfilment more fully and more

easily. Our plans and projects should always take into account their effects on the entire human family, and consider their consequences for the present and for coming generations.

Third was the care through solidarity, which concretely expresses our love for one another.

Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. It means thinking and acting in terms of community. It means that the lives of all are prior to the appropriation of goods by a few. It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labour rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money... Solidarity, understood in its most profound meaning, is a way of making history, and this is what popular movements are doing.²¹

Solidarity shows togetherness, not as a vague sentiment but as a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to the good of all and of everyone, because we are all responsible for all. Solidarity also seeks for compassion. With compassion we feel the need and pain of our brothers and sisters, and the needs of every other thing created by God. In feeling the need and pain of our neighbours, the Good Samaritan comes to mind. The concept 'Good Samaritan' is a story between the lawyer and Jesus. In that story, the lawyer asked Jesus 'who is my neighbour?' (Luke 10:29). The story challenges us to risk being with the other, reaching out to the

²¹ Pope Francis, (2020). *Fraternity and Social Friendship (FRATELLI TUTTI)*. Vatican City State.

other, listening to what the other expresses both spoken and unspoken and to seeing what the other needs. Our tradition calls this solidarity. It means living in the world as it is. It means moving beyond our self-made worlds and entering the world God gives us.²² In the story of the Good Samaritan, compassion is what sets him for the wounded man who was abandoned on the road (cf. Luke 10:33). Likewise, we are expected to act like the Good Samaritan, to hear the cry of the poor, and the cry of the earth. This means that the climate crisis is a profoundly human and, therefore, a profoundly spiritual crisis.

*Fourth was on care and protection of creation. This is because all in creation is interconnected. If we constantly and attentively listen to the cry of the poor, the vulnerable, and to the cry of creation, which will eventually lead to effective care for the earth, which is our common home, and for our brothers and sisters in need. A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be authentic if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. The *compass* of these social principles, so essential for the growth of a culture of care, also points to the need for relationships between nations to be inspired by fraternity, mutual respect, solidarity and the observance of international law,' concludes Pope Francis. Deep ties binding peoples, 'Our planet is a homeland and humanity is one people living in a common home,' (LS 164), he keeps repeating. Social justice and the well-being of the planet are two sides of the same coin, 'We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one*

²² Dermot Farrell 2021. The Cry of the Earth – The Cry of the Poor. A Pastoral for the Season of Creation: The Climate Catastrophe-Creation's Urgent Call for Change. VERITAS. Archdiocese of Dublin

complex crisis which is both social and environmental.' (LS 139)²³

Conclusion

One may be forced to think or worry how things have deteriorated to this level in our generation. Many of us grew up relating and helping each other in our villages. During weekends, children go to farm both for their parents and for the elderly, especially those without children. And parents encouraged those things. We fetch water and fire-wood for the childless. Parents who are better of prepared meals and shared with their neighbors. Today, this beautiful culture of interconnectedness with one another and with creation has been lost. But our faith as Christians and Catholics through this document offers us a wonderful vision to rekindle these relationships, to renew our childlike sense of awe and respect, wonder and beauty, and thus set out in living the first commandment God gave to us, to be guardians and protectors of this beautiful world, not its polluters and destroyers. We are called to look out to the world and see that, 'soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God'.²⁴

²³ John Paul Pezzi, MCCJ., (2021). "The Cry of the Poor, Laudato Si 2nd Goal". New York, **Jpic-jp.org**, *Translated by: Jpic-jp.org*. Available at <https://www.jpic-jp.org>the-cry-of-the-poor-laudato-si...>

²⁴ Laudato Si, § 84

Works Cited

- Benedict XIV, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*. June 2009. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html
- Bishop Philip, Pastoral Message about *Laudato Si' and the Care of Creation*. Available in www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/docs/BoP-Message-about-Laudato-Si.pdf, Accessed 25/11/2015
- Canceran, D.C., *Climate Justice: The Cry of the Earth, the Cry of the Poor* (The Case of the Yolanda/Hayain Tragedy in the Philippines)," 2019. *Solidarity: The Journal of Catholic Social Thought and Secular Ethics*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1 , Article 5. Available at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/solidarity/vol8/iss1/5>
- Carol Seagar, St Thomas More's Catholic Primary School. Available in www.stm.tas.edu.au/newsletters. Accessed on 7/12/2015
- Catechism of the Catholic Church, (1906-1909)
- Dermot F., *The Cry of the Earth – The Cry of the Poor. A Pastoral for the Season of Creation: The Climate Catastrophe-Creation's Urgent Call for Change*, 2021. VERITAS. Archdiocese of Dublin.
- Ellis, G.F.R. The dimensions of poverty. *Soc Indic Res* **15**, 229–253 (1984). <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00668672>
- John P. P. MCCJ., *The Cry of the Poor, Laudato Si 2nd Goal*. New York, Jpic-jp.org, *Translated by: Jpic-jp.org*. Available at <https://www.jpic-jp.org/the-cry-of-the-poor-laudato-si...> 2021
- Onaiyekan, J.O., message to United Nations' Secretary on Climate Change in Abuja. 2015.

- Pope Francis. *Fraternity and Social Friendship (FRATELLI TUTTI)*. Vatican City State, 2020.
- Pope Paul VI. *Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Second Vatican Council. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html
- Richard Steenvoorde, O.P. available in English.op.org/godzdogz/laudato-si-common-good, Oct 20,2015. Accessed on 6/12/2015

Chapter Eighteen

CLIMATE CHANGE AND FARMERS/HERDERS CLASHES IN NIGERIA: SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENTALISM AND POPE FRANCIS' LAUDATO SI

Michael Muonwe, PhD

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Me.muonwe@unizik.edu.ng; makkymuo@yahoo.co.uk

Executive Summary

This chapter puts forward Christianity as a strong force to reckon with in providing theological and ethical foundations, the impulse and motivation needed to engender change in our attitude towards the environment. Even though there are some voices today who doubt the ability of religion to offer any meaningful impact towards an integral ecology and full development of humanity, the author believes that religion, especially Christianity, can offer a very significant and meaningful contribution to the situation. This is also the stance of Pope Francis and other Christian environmentalists whose thoughts and approaches are to be examined in the chapter. In his encyclical on the care of the environment, *Laudato si*, Pope Francis, just like many other Christian theologians, harps on the goodness of nature, gives it a theological backing starting with the Book of Genesis when God created the universe out of nothing and declared it very good. The pope observes that the damage we do today on nature is a manifestation that the relationship between human beings and other creatures has become confrontational and unfriendly.

Keywords: Climate Change, Farmers, Herders, Environment, Africa, Nigeria, Theology, Christian, Pope Francis

Introduction

Climate change can no longer be reasonably ignored in any serious analysis of, and research on, herdsman/farmers clashes in Nigeria. The changes occurring in rainfall patterns, availability of forage due to desertification and drought, and other extreme weather conditions engendered by human interventions in nature and consequent degradation of the environment readily induce forced migrations of population from one part of the country to another. The northern part of Nigeria, which is also the hottest part, experience the effect of these extreme weather conditions more than others. This has affected their traditional economic and social activities, especially the Fulani tribe, who are mainly cattle herders. Granted that the country has a long-standing traditional cause of conflicts among its different communities, tribes, and cultures, the question of climate change has worsened the situation. Even though the Fulani tribe has been traditionally known to wander from place to place with their cattle for grazing, which had hitherto been more regular and seasonal, extreme weather conditions caused by climate change has made their movement more irregular and disruptive, forcing them to move southwards on a massive scale looking for water and forage for their livestock.

This forced migration, among other factors, has brought about clashes between them and their host communities, as they struggle for scarce resources, like land, water and green vegetation. Sometimes, in the bid to feed their livestock, they wander into people's farms destroying crops on large scale. Many lives and properties have been lost in the continuous

feuds between the herders and farmers. It is not enough to merely deploy security operatives to quell such communal crises when they erupt, nor is it adequate to merely introduce legislations on the latest techniques in ranching as a solution. As good as these may be, without the government, companies, and individuals taking bold steps to improve on their attitude towards the environment thus curbing the unconscionable harm done to it, any solution could be nothing but tangential.

It is against this background that the this chapter is composed, putting forward Christianity as a strong force to reckon with in providing theological and ethical foundations, the impulse and motivation needed to engender change in our attitude towards the environment. Even though there are some voices today who doubt the ability of religion to offer any meaningful impact towards an integral ecology and full development of humanity, the author believes that religion, especially Christianity, can offer a very significant and meaningful contribution to the situation. This is also the stance of Pope Francis and other Christian environmentalists whose thoughts and approaches are to be examined in the chapter. In his encyclical on the care of the environment, *Laudato si*, Pope Francis, just like many other Christian theologians, harps on the goodness of nature, gives it a theological backing starting with the Book of Genesis when God created the universe out of nothing and declared it very good. The pope observes that the damage we do today on nature is a manifestation that the relationship between human beings and other creatures has become confrontational and unfriendly. According to him, “if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of master, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs” (par.

11). According to him, in so far as we do not have the courage, in spite of our uniqueness amidst other creatures, to call them our brothers and sisters and treat them as such, things are bound to get worse.

The author is convinced that the approaches to the environment espoused by Pope Francis and other Christian environmentalist could and should be adopted by our Nigerian society in order to mitigate the effects of climate change on its citizens and reduce the rate of communal clashes, especially between farmers and herders. This is especially true as Christianity is one of the two dominant religions in Nigeria.

From climate change to migration and conflicts

In recent times, researches have been conducted linking climate change to migrations, and then to conflicts in some parts of the globe, especially Africa. It has indeed been estimated that by 2050 the number of migrants resulting from environmental events and processes would have been between 200 million to 1 billion (Myers, 2002; Stern et. al., 2006). Linking climate change to migrations does not necessarily mean that displacement of populations is directly caused by climate change, which often merely introduces conditions that worsen a population's vulnerability and endangers their survival, thus, making them move elsewhere in search of better survival conditions.

One of the adverse conditions resulting from climate change is severe limitations on the availability and regularity of natural resources. It is true that, for nomadic cultures and pastoralists, periodic mobility has been part of their livelihood for centuries, in recent times, such movements that used to be somehow regular and had followed a definite pattern have been severely

disrupted by extreme weather events, like droughts, storms, floods, and environmental changes, like desertification and soil erosion. Martin (2009) expounds four different ways climate change can affect migration, viz., worsening of natural disasters; hotter weather and drought affecting crop yield and availability of clean water; rising sea levels that makes coastal areas uninhabitable; competition over resources that may lead to conflict and displacement. As Lazcko and Aghazarm (2009) affirm, even though slow-onset events and gradual degradations, like drought and desertification, may give people some time for decision-making as regards migration, they “can also directly threaten rural household income sources, especially those from agriculture, leading many rural agricultural families to diversify their income which may entail migration” (p. 24).

Whereas migrations induced by climate change could either be forced, as in case of natural disasters, it could as well be voluntary, especially where the effects of climate change is not sudden. In such cases, other factors which may be economic, social, or political could also play key roles (Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009). Besides, most environmental migrations happen internally within countries or from a country to its closes international borders, and those who lack the capacity to move usually stay behind and suffer the consequences (Laczko and Aghazarm).

Factors arising from climate change could drive a people permanently away from their base, leading to settlements among people of disparate cultures, competition over already stressed resources, and conflicts (Maxwell and Reuveny, 2000; Homer-Dixon, 2001). Because communities deprived of resources and

turned into environmental migrants are often less endowed to bargain with or confront the state, they usually vent their grievances on their neighbouring or host communities who may possess the scarce resources or other resources needed for their survival (Hendrix and Salehyan, 2012). Further, the less developed a place is, the severer the effects of climate change, because of huge dependence of their economy on climate-sensitive sectors and their low capacity to adapt to the changes (Laczko and Aghazarm, 2009).

In 2011, Nigeria had projected that, in near future, climate change “is likely to become a major driver of increased human conflict” (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2011). This has become a reality today. The effects of global climate change have actually affected the traditional pastoralism practised by the Fulani tribe, who live mainly in the northern part of the country. As Idowu (2018) affirms, Lake Chad, for instance, that had been a very strong driving force in the agricultural sector of northern Nigeria, which is the driest part of the country, has shrunk in less than three decades from 45,000km² to 3000km². This alone has led to the displacement of about 10.5 million people. This, coupled other factors, like unrestrained afforestation, desertification, and drought, have made the erstwhile seasonal southward movement of herdsmen with their cattle in search of water and forage very irregular and massive.

As a matter of fact, because of the environmental degradation in the north and its consequences for the livelihood and survival of the herders, many of them seem to seek for places in the south for permanent settlement. As they move with their cattle, they trespass farmlands of mostly subsistent farmers, destroying crops on large scale. In the bid to protect their farmlands, bloody confrontations with the herdsmen often erupt. These

have led to the killing and rustling of cattle, destruction of properties of receiving communities, as well as death of many innocent citizens. Their movement has had an enormous impact on the country's economic, social, cultural, and political potentials and prospects, even though little is done by the government to arrest its trend.

Orakpo (2021) laments that what originally were harmless quarrels over grazing routes between famers and herders had in recent times degenerated into bloody clashes that have affected such states as Plateau, Benue, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Taraba, and other southern states. Today, it has been given political, ethnic, and religious connotations and colorations. According to Orakpo, over 400,000 persons have been displaced from their homes on account of these clashes since 2018 when it escalated.

In Benue state, for example, the governor, Ortom (2021) asserts that there are about 1.5 million internally displaced people resulting from herdsmen/farmers clash in the state. According to him, the invasion of the people's farmlands by the herdsmen has resulted in unavailability of enough arable lands for farming activities, which had hitherto been providing a solid support to the state economy. This, he says, has also affected children most of whom no longer attend schools and are living under subhuman conditions.

Some environmental events and environmentally harmful practices in Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed severe environmental events as a result of climate change. Some harmful practices of indigenes have helped to bring these about. To be discussed below are some of

the most common of those events and harmful practices.

a. Deforestation

Forests have been receiving huge international attention in recent times due to their considerable importance in climate change debate. Availability of trees is a key factor in slowing the pace of climate change. It helps to preserve and support human life, wildlife, and in the maintenance of ecosystem. As Nunez (2019) points out, among other things, trees help to purify the air we breathe by absorbing the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. It also absorbs the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that human activities emit, which helps to increase global warming and climate change. Deforestation is one of the ways forests are cleared and trees are got rid of mainly by human activities thus endangering the lives of humans and other living creatures. It has been defined as the conversion of forest land to another use or the long-term reduction of this parameter below 10% threshold (Kanninen et. al 2007). Available scientific data show that deforestation is happening on alarming scale worldwide, especially in South America.

In Nigeria, forests are lost without adequate records. According to Ogunlele, Oladipo, and Adebisi (2016), some factors responsible for this include urbanization, overpopulation, developmental projects, agricultural expansion, mining, bush burning, logging, and fuel wood collection. These activities need to be checked through attitudinal change, proper legislation, and their enforcement.

b. Drought

National Geographic (2013) defines drought as a lengthy period of an unusually dry weather in an area or region, thus making it experience a level of precipitation that is below the normal. The

possible aftermath of such reduced precipitation include decrease in soil water, stream flow, green vegetation, crop production, as well as scarcity of drinking water, poor nutrition, and rise in communicable diseases. If left unchecked, drought may lead to disastrous consequences, like severe famine, involuntary migration, and violent struggle over residual resources.

The assessment of the Nigerian climate over the period 1941 to 2000 by the Nigeria Meteorological Agency (NiMET, 2008) shows that the length of the rainy season in most parts of the country was shortened, and the annual rainfall decreased by 2-8mm, even though it increased in few places, like Port Harcourt, by 2-4mm. Within the same period, there was evidence of increase in the long-term temperature in most parts of the country, especially in the extreme north-east, extreme northwest and extreme southwest regions where average temperature rise was 1.4-1.9°C.

The close link between desertification and drought has been noted by Olagunju (2015) and Oladipo (1993). Olagunju observes that these two agents, together with human activities, do transform fertile lands into deserts, thus becoming an ecological hazard to the human population. Hendrix and Salehyan (2012) have shown how drought can lead to conflict among population, because of scarcity of water needed by farmers, herders, industrialists, and other professions for greater productivity. Competitions over residual water may readily pitch them against themselves. A recent NASA study (National Geographic 2013) predicts warmer worldwide temperatures. This entails that some parts of the world will continue to experience increased rainfall while others will

experience its decrease. This will lead to both more flooding and more droughts worldwide, resulting in damage to habitats, loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, an increased risk from wildfires, over-farming, overgrazing, and deforestation, as the case may be. Things will therefore get worse if nothing serious is done.

c. Desertification

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, UNCCD (1994, part 1, art. 1) defines desertification as “land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climatic variations and human activities”. By such degradation, the biological and economic productivity of the land is seriously affected, making green vegetation and water very difficult to be found for livestock and other agricultural activities. Desertification has been a serious scourge in the northern part of Nigeria for decades. Arid and semi-arid areas in the region are becoming drier as Sahara Desert characteristics increasingly impinge on them. Continuous decline in rainfall in those desert-prone areas worsen the situation to a frightening proportion (Abubakar and Yamuda, 2013).

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2021), through the Minister for Environment, Dr. Mohammed Abubakar, recently reported that a total of 15 northern states of the federation, with the population of about 40 million have been hit by desertification and are suffering the effects. Part of the effects is lack of water and pasture for farming activities with its attendant consequences. According to Olagunju (2015), this phenomenon has been reported in Nigeria since 1920s and those places affected represent one-fifth of the landmass of the country, and are the producers of much of the food items consumed by the country’s rapidly burgeoning population. Olagunju further

points out some human activities that help to destroy the natural environment on which the desert encroachment feeds, viz., indiscriminate bush burning, deforestation for commercial purposes or for firewood, urbanization, and agro-activities on marginal lands. All these leave the land vulnerable and unable to withstand the forces of nature, making re-growth of vegetation on them impossible. Further, these also lead to loss of biodiversity, increase in diseases, water scarcity, reduced crop yield, economic downturn, as well as affect the soil's geochemical composition.

As affirmed by Hendrix and Salehyan (2012), once farmlands for farmers and pasture for herders are lost this way, the result is struggle for any available and productive land. This could easily degenerate into violent conflicts. The frequent and intense clashes between Fulani herders and farmers is a case in point.

d. Flooding

Deviations from normal rainfall patterns can easily affect users of land. For places that experience higher-than-normal rainfall over a long period of time, mudslides, flooding, crop damages, and rise in communicable diseases may result. It may also destroy critical infrastructure, like roads, in the affected communities, making access to them by government for intervention very much limited (Hendrix and Salehyan, 2012). Undoubtedly, this will affect the economic and social life of the people, leaving them vulnerable to exacerbate d anger, frustration, and violence. Due to crop damage and resultant food shortages, prices of commodities may hike. It is easy for pastoralists in drought zones to move to areas with excess rainfall because of availability of green pastures and water for their flocks in those places. This movement may lead to

encroachment on the already distressed farmlands resulting in feuds.

Climate change and Christian environmentalism

Environmentalism covers all efforts at the preservation, reestablishment, and enhancement of the natural environment and ecosystem. It explores how interconnected human beings are with nature, how our survival depends on it, as well as our duty of care and protection towards it (Weldon, 2011). As Peterson del Mar (2014) rightly puts it, it “dwells on the paradoxical relationship between prosperity and nature loving” (p. 2).

Despite the genuine efforts world over to see how humans could cater for our natural environment and avoid its wanton destruction, there are still some skeptics and critics who see the whole endeavor as merely elitist and political and as based on false assumptions. Gibson (2002), for instance, insists that environmentalism does not seek to offer solution to any specific problem nor does it attempt in any way to protect nature. According to him, it is merely a political doctrine, a worldview, and an ideology of the elites designed out of fear that invention and material progress by others would be a threat to their power and influence.

Such skepticisms notwithstanding, environmentalism has come to stay and has helped a lot in ameliorating the danger posed to nature by human beings world over. People of different religious traditions have also tried in diverse ways to identify elements in their tradition that address environmental and ecological concerns. In fact, there is strong belief in many religious circles that religious faith has an important contribution to make in the ecological movement, especially as

it concerns stimulating the movement from within by offering meaning and ethical foundations (Edwards, 2006). Hence, the formation of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, NRPE, by the different religions in America backed by their core belief that caring for the whole of creation is an integral part of religious life. Jointly and separately, these traditions promote values inherent in them that can stimulate human-friendly approach towards nature, as well as debunk ideas that favour nature's unbridled exploitation in the name of development and progress. Their commitment to this has made some leading environmentalists today see religious traditions as collaborators in protecting the world's ecosystem and halting global climate change.

Christian environmentalism is just one form of this religious concern for the natural environment. It is anchored on the idea that, in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, God is present among us, as well as he is in the grace of the Holy Spirit. The effect of this presence is expected to touch not only the human species but the whole of created reality, which St. Paul says is groaning awaiting redemption by Christ (Rom. 8:22). The task before Christian environmentalists and ecological theology is therefore to show the link between faith in Jesus Christ and the commitment to ecology. It involves devoting more time to developing more creation-centered theology and spirituality (Edwards, 2006). It is a call for what Pope John Paul II (2001), calls ecological conversion by which humans take side with nature that has suffered and is still suffering from human exploitation. This entails becoming more sensitive to the goodness of the environment and seeing it as moral obligation to cater for it, to protect, and to preserve it.

Nigeria has a lot to gain from Christianity (so much so from Islam and traditional religion) in its effort to address the challenges posed by climatic change, especially as Christianity is one of the two major religions in the country.

Approaches in Christian environmentalism

There is a growing body of literature among Christian theologians and environmentalists on the foundations of Christian commitment to ecology. This is a welcome development, because for many centuries, the prevailing attitude to the natural world among Christians, especially in the West, was that of domination and exploitation. Considering the preeminent position occupied by the human person amidst other creatures, many promoted an extreme form of anthropocentrism that sees humans not only as the centre of all there is but also as somehow separate from them. By the stress on human transcendence over the natural world and the intrinsic value of human life, Boslaugh (2013) notes, human beings were understood to be at liberty to use the natural world as they wished, so long as human selfish interests are upheld. The value of the natural world was therefore an instrumental one, thus, there seemed not to be any moral or practical justification for legislations against the exploitation of the natural environment.

It is unfortunate that one still finds some Christians in support of this position, and they justify their stance by referring to the biblical injunction given by God to our first parents to “have dominion” over other creatures and to “be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue” it (Gen. 1:28). But this is a grossly inadequate interpretation of the biblical text in question, and appears to have suppressed the biblical idea of the goodness of creation, the depiction of humans as images of God, and the

biblical injunction to care and cultivate the earth (Edwards, 2006). Such an interpretation and the attitude to the natural world that it engendered in the Christian West for centuries prompted White (1967) to remark that Christianity is the most ecologically and environmentally unfriendly religion.

It is encouraging that many Christians today adopt friendlier attitude to nature. They now see it as worthy of respect and as possessing intrinsic worth in itself. The different approaches adopted by them to communicate this reality are discussed below.

Kinship approach

This approach sees all creatures as forming one community a part of which human beings are. Further, all creature are believed to have one creator who is God and father of all. This approach does not stress the preeminence of humans among other creatures of God. Some theologians have utilized this kingship approach to argue for the extension of the love of neighbour taught by Jesus (Mtt 22:37-39) to include love of other creatures understood too as our neighbours in an expanded sense. As Edwards argues, it also entails “extending the love of enemies to involve creatures that confront us as other and inspire fear in us... loving and valuing others as God loves and values them. Ultimately”, he continues, “it is a God-centred (theocentric) view of an interconnected community of creatures that have their own intrinsic worth” (pp. 24-25). This helps us to realize that we have a lot in common with other creatures of God, that our lives, as Johnson (1993) would have it, are interwoven with that of stars, sea creatures and every aspect of creation.

This approach is akin to the ethical stance of biocentricism that focuses on the common life shared by humans and the natural world, therefore seeing human beings merely as one among other creatures. By challenging the prerogative of human beings over other creatures, biocentricism teaches that all life have equal moral value and deserve equal moral consideration (DesJardins, 2013). It also acknowledges the intrinsic value of the natural world independent of their exploitation by humans (Boslaugh, 2013).

But as good as biocentricism may appear, it has been judged as morally dangerous because it undermines the biblical notion of the uniqueness and distinctness of human beings among all other creatures. "If taken in an absolute sense," Edwards (2006) enunciates, "it fails to provide grounds for discernment between the moral value of a bacterium and that of a human person" (p. 22). Edwards therefore surmises that, our personhood and our having been created in the image of God must be recognized and should make us realize our responsibility, as distinctive creatures called to a higher vocation, of respecting and loving other creatures.

Stewardship approach

This approach goes beyond the kinship approach by not only specifying the interrelatedness of human beings with other creatures, but more so by clearly articulating human responsibility within the family – responsibility to cultivate and care for the rest of creation, employing his ingenuity and creativity (Edwards, 2006). According to French (2008), stewardship approach maintains the preeminence of human beings over the rest of creation, but with an added emphasis on the duty of care owed them. French discusses two versions of the stewardship approach, viz., anthropocentric and creation-

centered versions. The anthropocentric thinking promotes a human-centered ethic that not only acknowledges humanity's primacy over the rest of nature, but also its dependency on it. The creation-centered version, on the other hand, while remaining critical of the anthropocentric version of overly emphasizing human agency and objectification of nature, argues for recognition of the rest of nature as ends in themselves, with independent dignity and value.

Social justice approach

Some Christian scholars link the concern for the environment to concern for social justice. According to them, since the poor are usually the worst hit by ecological degradations, any attempt to quell or to stop such degradations is also an effort at promoting the rights of the poor and their concerns. Ecofeminists are within this group because they argue that sexism and anthropocentrism are closely linked just as the domination of women and the domination of nature are. Ecofeminists draw parallels between oppression of women and exploitation of nature, and argue for respect of the dignity of both. As MacGregor (2006) makes clear, by utilizing the concept of gender to analyze the relationship of humans to the natural world ecofeminists insist that any serious discussion on intrinsic value of creation must also address the full humanity of women. Liberation theologians are also gradually directing their reflections towards environmental concerns.

Pope Francis and the environment

In the encyclical, *Laudato si*, on care for our common home, Pope Francis (2015) expresses his deepest concern for the environment, discusses in detail the social, political, economic, and ethical consequences of its neglect and destruction, as well

as proffers solutions. In line with the logic of the Catholic social teaching, *Laudato si*, as Vogt (2020) understands it, proposes a strong and deep engagement with ecological problems and utilizes the resources of natural sciences, history, sociology, and political science to arrive at a broader perspective. Francis does not end at that, he also explains how the Christian faith is deeply committed to the care and preservation of nature and beckons on all and sundry to realize the “urgent need for us to move forward in a bold cultural revolution” (par. 114) to tackle the problem. Such a revolution, he is convinced, will challenge the logic of domination that has characterized much of our relationship with one another and with nature and replace it with the logic of love of God epitomized in Jesus Christ.

Pope Francis did not hide the fact that he got the inspiration to develop the theological foundations of Christian environmentalism from St. Francis of Assisi from whose canticle “*Laudato si, mi Signore*” (“Praise be to you, my Lord”) the pope got the title for the encyclical. As the pope states, through this canticle, St. Francis “reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and as beautiful mother who opens arms to embrace us” (par. 1). He reminds us that our bodies are composed of the dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:2) that we abuse and plunder.

Ethical and spiritual roots of environmental problems

Pope Francis is very much convinced that the environmental problems we have today are caused because of human neglect of his moral and spiritual responsibilities towards nature and towards God. What he describes as mechanistic and consumption mentality, he says, is at the root of the problems. According to him, “if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our

attitude will be that of master, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs" (par. 11). On the other hand, if human beings are able to appreciate and contemplate the beauty of creatures, they would be able to also know and appreciate God by whom all came to be (cf. Wis 13:5). Another factor responsible for the human destruction of nature, the pope points out, is the assumption that technology is always the solution to all problems. But this, he says, is not the case. Instead, it sometimes solves one problem and creates another. If human beings are able to control the rate of pollution, waste, and throwaway culture, they would also be able, to a greater extent, to take care of the natural world.

He also alludes to human greed and pride as drivers of the current situation. As human greed makes human beings exploit nature uncontrollably for material prosperity, human pride makes them forget their origin – God, by whom all came to exist. Pope Francis asserts that it is the forgetfulness of the preeminent place of God that has made humans arrogate to themselves absolute power, thus usurping God's place, and using it to claim "an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot" (par. 75). And since sin consists in the displacement of God in our lives, Pope Francis situates sin at the heart of the whole ecological issues. It disrupts the original harmony between humans, the creator, and creation. Ecological issues are therefore basically moral issues. It is the same sin, he says, that has made human beings attack nature without qualms. The way to God is to acknowledge and own up our sinful ways, repent, and restore God's place.

The point that Pope Francis keeps coming back to is the sacramental nature of creation. He insists that nature is a free gift

of God's love just as it is a manifestation of God. "Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world" (par. 77). This should therefore make us see them as deserving of our loving care. The pope cites a section of the Catechism that declares the intrinsic goodness in all creatures and their reflection of divinity: "Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection... reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things" (CCC 339). Other beings are therefore not mere objects, because the whole universe has its ideal fullness in God, already attained in Jesus Christ. As manifestations of God, we seek God in our relationship with all creatures. Their ultimate purpose is not to be found in human beings. They are all matching forward "with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things" (par. 83). Human beings, the pope says, are therefore, charged to lead all creatures back to their creator.

Link between ecological issues and social justice

Ecological issues has a strong link with social issues in Pope Francis' mind. His deep concern for the poor and the connection he makes between them and the environmental crisis is palpable in the document. As Turkson (2020) succinctly puts it, the pope "links the vulnerability of the poor and the fragility of the environment" (p. ix). Pope Francis is convinced that the poor is often at the receiving end of the ecological problems. And as the environmental degradation happens unchallenged so does it bring about the worsening of the situation of the poor and "rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from" its effects. (par. 25). According to him, we cannot allow the natural environment

to deteriorate without it having a corresponding effect on the human environment for both deteriorate together.

The link between ecology and social concerns is very well articulated in his concept of integral ecology by which the pope acknowledges that “We are faced not with two separate crisis, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis both social and environmental”, the solution to which requires an integrated approach that addresses “poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (par. 139). In such integrated approach, everyone should be involved, he says, “since the environmental challenge... and its human roots, concern and affect us all” (par. 14). He affirms, “we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation” (par. 48). Therefore there cannot be genuine attempt at care for the natural world without “fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others” (par. 70). They are all interconnected – people and the planet, plants and animals, because they came from a single creator – God.

The pontiff questions the rationale behind the quest for the preservation of the species that is not matched with a corresponding quest for the preservation of the life and dignity that we all share equally as humans. According to him, both must be taken seriously. Indeed, he argues that it is a deep concern for the welfare of our fellow human beings that should prompt our real concern for other creatures. “It is clearly inconsistent”, he enthused, “to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted” (par. 91). For

the pope, the voice of the poor, the unborn, and the disabled must be heard in order to hear better the cry of nature itself, since they are all closely linked. That is why he clearly states that concern for the environment cannot rightly exist with support for abortion.

Conversely, the way we treat other species, Pope Francis notes, would sooner or later be reflected in the way we treat our fellow human beings. These three, he says, are interconnected: peace, justice and preservation of creation. The bottom line of the pope's submission is that every ecological approach undertaken by any individual or state must take social concerns into consideration; the welfare of the poor and the underprivileged must be seriously thought of. *Laudato si* "therefore tackles the pressing challenges of today including not simply ecological issues but the causes of breakdown in social and community life..." (Mannion, 2020, p. 61).

The pope's further remarks that to heal our relationship with nature and environment requires healing of our interpersonal relationships, which includes our openness and relationship with God. Failure to do this, he says, would be nothing more than "romantic individualism dressed up in ecological garb" (par. 119). He therefore surmises that "There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without adequate anthropology" (par. 118).

The danger of false anthropocentrism

One of the dangers that confront human beings today in their relationship with the environment is what Pope Francis terms modern anthropocentrism. This anthropocentrism seems to prize human, selfish interest over and above any other concern,

technological development over any moral or ethical considerations. He laments that “Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality”, thus compromising the dignity of the world (par. 116). Such false anthropocentrism, he maintains, easily leads to practical relativism that “sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interest” (par. 122), and this only continues to bring about degradation to our environment. According to the pontiff, such practical relativism makes one take advantage of another person without qualms, see and use another as mere object to be sexually exploited, judge the elderly as disposables, and practice capitalism without restraint amidst all other sorts of crimes. It can also lead to what he terms dominant “technocratic paradigm” which he says sees maximization of profit as a sole aim in life without second thought on impact on human beings.

On account of the inherent problems associated with such misguided anthropocentrism, some people, the pope says, easily yield to biocentrism as an alternative, which again is another extreme position that, though it emphasizes the common life humans share with other creatures, fails to accord human beings the unique value they possess among them. It also robs humans of their unique and corresponding responsibility to the world – “Human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognized and valued” (par. 118).

According to Pope Francis, correct interpretation of the Genesis account of creation should serve as a corrective to such tyrannical anthropocentrism, because the account already gives a clear-

cut understanding of the place and responsibility of human beings among other creatures. God gave our First parents the injunction to “till and keep” the garden of the world (Gen 2:15). To till means to cultivate, plough, or work. To keep means to care and protect, oversee and preserve. This accords humans some responsibility over the earth, in so far as the earth also has its own responsibility to humans. It is therefore a call for mutual responsibility between humans and the earth. The pope also makes allusion to some other Old Testament passages to show that the Bible is environmentally friendly, like Deut 22:4-6 where care for birds, mother with eggs and the young is enunciated. Besides, God decreed rest for the land every 7 years in Israel (Lev 25:1-4) and Jubilee year at the end of 49th year (Lev 25:10). This, according to Pope Francis, was made to “ensure balance and fairness in their [that is, Israel’s] relationship with others and with the land on which they lived and worked” (par. 71). The Bible also shows that Sabbath rest is not only made for man but also for the donkeys (Ex 23:12). The pontiff emphasized that “Clearly the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (par. 68).

The place of Christ in ecological struggle

Pope Francis maintains that, for there to be a revolution in our relationship with the environment, there is also a need for “a change of humanity” (par. 9). This change is what he terms “ecological conversion”; a term already employed by Pope John Paul II, as earlier noted. This conversion, according to Pope Francis, should involve profound interiority that “is essential to a life of virtue” and should not be seen as “an option or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience” (par. 217). The ecological conversion that he advocates is also Christological conversion involving encounter with Jesus Christ, with the effects of such encounter being evidently manifest in our friendly

relationship with nature on the personal and individual level, and in our social and political engagements.

Ecological conversion entails looking up to Jesus, whom Pope Francis puts forward as a model for emulation in his attitude to nature. Jesus, he stresses, is someone who is at home with nature, an attitude that made people astonished, especially as they see that even the sea and the wind obey him (Mtt 8:24). He worked with human hands as carpenter's son (Mk. 6:3). He utilizes parables that contain allusions to flowers, land, shepherd and sheep, field and cultivation, fig tree, vine vineyard, and other natural phenomena. Jesus, he says, shows God's revolutionary love in his life and ministry, and invites us "to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world" (par. 97). Jesus' love for creation is phenomenal, and as the pope clearly points out, we must therefore respond appropriately to his call "to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures" (par. 96).

Even much deeper and truly radical, the pope notes, is the mystery of the incarnation by which heaven and earth are joined and divinity, by entering the depths of materiality, "embraces and penetrates all creation... directing us to be stewards of all creation" (par. 236). Incarnation of Jesus, he maintains, signals in a special way God's identification with the natural world. By it, "the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy" (par. 99). In Christ, therefore, divinity takes upon itself worldly and fleshy worries. In Jesus, divinity experiences the worldly pain and effects of human wickedness and brutality, especially by his death on the cross. By his death too, he showed stiff resistance needed by us against oppression, injustice, and domination of all kinds, including that of nature.

Conclusion

The effects of climate change have had its toll on Nigeria, and have contributed to forced migration of its citizens, increased the number of internally displaced people and provided conditions that have brewed feuds and violent clashes. The author believes that part of the reasons the Fulani herders move southwards today at a rate, and with such an irregularity, never witnessed before in the history of the country is the negative impact that extreme environmental events, like drought and desertification and other environmentally harmful human practices have on their agricultural potentials. As they move southward in search of forage for their livestock, clashes often erupt between them and farmers due to trespasses on farmlands and destruction of crops by the livestock. This has resulted in loss of lives and property and disrupted social activities of communities.

This paper is written with the conviction that religion has answers to the question of climate change. Christian environmentalism is therefore discussed in the paper as a strong force in providing not only the much-needed theological and ethical bases for integral ecology, but also the impulse and motivation to stimulate change of attitude towards nature among Nigerians. Pope Francis epitomizes this in his encyclical, *Laudato si*, a priceless document that articulates the Christian attitude to the environment and how Christian faith can offer meaning and adequate care for it. Even though the document does not stipulate concrete public responses, which is the provenance of the government, public officers, and policy makers, it however advocates for individual and systemic changes that will have a far-reaching positive impact on the environment when heeded.

References

- Abubakar, L.U and Yamuda, M.A. (2013). Recurrence of drought in Nigeria. Cause, effects and mitigation. *International Journal of Agriculture and Food Science Technology*, 4(3), 169-180.
- Boslaugh, S. (2013). *Anthropocentrism*. Retrieved 10 October 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anthropocentrism>.
- DesJardins, J. (2013). *Biocentricism*. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 20 July 2021, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biocentrism/additional-info#history>.
- Edwards, D. (2006). *Ecology at the heart of faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Federal Government of Nigeria. (17 June 2021). 15 Northern states with 40m population affected by desertification. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/15-northern-states-with-40m-population-affected-by-desertificationsays-fg/>
- Federal Ministry of Environment. (2011). *National Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change for Nigeria (NASPA-CCN)*. Abuja: Building Nigeria's Response to Climate Change (BNRCC) Project.
- Francis. (24 May 2015). Encyclical letter, *Laudato si, On the care for our common home*. Retrieved 27 August 2021. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.
- French, W. (2008). Ecology. In W. Schweiker (Ed.), *The Blackwell companion to religious ethics*, (pp. 469-476). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

- Gibson, D. (2002). *Environmentalism: Ideology and power*. New York: Nova Science.
- Hendrix, C. S. and Idean, S. (2012). Climate change, rainfall, and social conflict in Africa. *Journal of Peace Research*, 49(1), 35–50. DOI: 10.1177/0022343311426165.
- Homer-Dixon, T. (2001). *Environment, scarcity, and violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Idowu, O. (2018). *How climate change influences herdsmen in Nigeria*. Retrieved 20 October 2021, from <https://www.climatecorecard.org/2018/05/how-climate-change-influences-herdsmen-in-nigeria/>
- John, M. and Reuveny, R. (2000). Resource scarcity and conflict in developing countries. *Journal of Peace Research*, 37(3), 301–322.
- John Paul II. (17 January 2001). *General Audience*. Retrieved 5 November 2021, from https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117.html.
- Johnson, E. (1993). *Women, earth, and creator spirit*. New York/Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist.
- Kanninen, M., Murdiyarsa, D., Seymour, F., Angelsen, A., Wunder, S., & German, L. (2007). *Do trees grow on Money?: The implications of deforestation research for policies to promote REDD*. Jakarta: Center for International Forestry Research.
- Laczko, F. and Aghazarm, C. (2009). Introduction and overview: Enhancing the knowledge base. In F. Laczko and C. Aghazarm (Eds.), *Migration, environment and climate change: Assessing the evidence* (pp. 7-8). Geneva: International Organization for Migration.
- MacGregor, S. (2006). *Beyond mothering earth: Ecological citizenship and the politics of care*. Vancouver: UBC press.

- Mannion, G. (2020). Pope Francis contra twenty-first-century capitalism: The power of joined-up social ethics. In D. O'Hara, M. Eaton & M. T. Ross (Eds.), *Integral Ecology for a more sustainable world: Dialogues with laudato si* (pp. 57-75). Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Lexington.
- Martin, S. (2009). Managing environmentally induced migration. In F. Laczko and C. Aghazarm (Eds.). *Migration, environment and climate change: Assessing the evidence*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration.
- Myers, N. (2002). Environmental refugees: A growing phenomenon of the 21st century. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B, Biological Sciences*, 357(1420), 609-13.
- National Geographic (2013). *Understanding droughts*. Retrieved 10 November 2021, from https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/understanding-droughts/?utm_source=BiblioRCM_Row
- NiMET (2008). *Nigeria climate review bulletin 2007*. Abuja: Nigerian Meteorological Agency.
- Nunez, C. (2019). *Deforestation explained*. Retrieved 10 November 2021, from <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/deforestation>.
- Ogundele, A. T., Oladipo, M. O., and Adebisi, O. M. (2016). Deforestation in Nigeria: The needs for urgent mitigating measures. *International Journal of Geography and Environmental Management*, 2(1), 15-26.
- Oladipo, E. O. (1993). A comprehensive approach to drought and desertification in Northern Nigeria. *Nat. Hazards*, 8(3), 235-261.
- Olagunju, E. T. Drought, desertification and Nigerian government: A review. *Journal of Ecology and Natural Environment*, 7(7), 196-209.

- Orakpo, E. (27 April 2021). Herdsmen/farmers crises: How desertification, climate change trigger bloody clashes. *Vanguard*.
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/04/herdsmen-farmers-crisis-how-desertification-climate-change-trigger-bloody-clashes/>
- Ortom E. (9 August 2021). Interview by Channels TV.
- Peterson del Mar, D. (2014). *Environmentalism*. London: Routledge
- Sorrell, R. (1988). *St. Francis of Assisi and nature: Tradition and innovation in western attitude towards the environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stern, N. (2006). *The Economics of climate change: The stern review*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Turkson, P. K. (2020). Preface: The evolution of the concept of integral ecology in papal teachings. In D. O'Hara, M. Eaton & M. Ross (Eds.), *Integral ecology for more sustainable world: Dialogue with Laudato si* (pp. xi-xxiv). The Rowman and Littlefield.
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. (1994).
https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/relevant-links/2017-01/UNCCD_Convention_ENG_0.pdf
- Vogt, C. P. (2020). *Laudato si: Social analysis and political engagement in the tradition of Catholic social thought*. In D. O'Hara, M. Eaton & M. Ross (Eds.), *Integral ecology for more sustainable world: Dialogue with Laudato si* (pp. 17-23). The Rowman and Littlefield.
- Weldon, M. B. (2011). *Fundamentals of practical environmentalism*. London: CRC.
- White, L. (1967). The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science* 155, 1203-1207.

Chapter Nineteen

SAINT AUGUSTINE AND THE ECOSYSTEM: SUMMA CREATIO

Felix Gabriel Zombobah
Department of Philosophy
Pontifical Urban University, Italy
gzombobah@hotmail.com

Executive Summary

The topic of ecosystem is a compelling but complex concept. This paper therefore aims to suggest that Augustine's voice requires greater hearing in the current debates on ecology. Even though, regardless of his fame as one of the most important figures in Western theology, Augustine is not famous in current theological conversations on ecological issues. He made four distinct efforts to lay out a clear and coherent interpretation of Genesis 1. His first attempt was his allegorical interpretation in his work *On Genesis against the Manichaeans* (389 A.D.), next, he made an unsatisfactory effort to give a literal interpretation in his *Letter of Genesis: Unfinished Book*, written in 393 A.D. but was later published with some revisions in 426. To complement his earlier effort, he later expressed his views at a greater length in his new task *The Letter of Genesis* (401-415 A.D.), between 413-427 A.D. he summarized all his previous works with some adjustments in *The City of God*. There might not be direct argument against the possible misrepresentation of submissions by some contemporary theologians who have solid ecological concern in this paper, however, it will surely provide a flipside interpretation of Augustine that will possibly shed positive light on classical doctrines which can help promote the so-called "ecological conversion" today.

Keywords: Saint Augustine, Ecosystem, Environment, Allegorical, Literal, Interpretation, Doctrine

Introduction

The advent of the concept of ecosystem has resulted in a paradigm shift in the ethical and social foundations of the conservation of biodiversity¹, from the conservation of nature because of its inherent value to the particular emphasis on anthropocentric use values. I have been fascinated by creation from childhood, because some of my happiest moments have been going to the stream to swim, hunting around the mountains, and playing at night at the beauty of the moon. I have also been captivated by the intelligence of our livestock knowing what time to return home and move into their respective habitats. I have come to realize therefore, that whoever forays any short distance into the academic circle will probably understand what Aristotle means when he said: "The more you know, the more you realize you don't know."² Stewart Lee, in an interview with *The Guardian*, August 10, 2010 said that to participate in further education entails embarking on a "quest to enlarge the global storehouse of all human understanding". This is possibly true, however venturing into academia means that the more answers you acquire to challenging scientific puzzles, the more questions spring up. And that is the circle of academic endeavor.

The thought of St Augustine has always been outstanding and has as well been one of the most significant set of ideas in Christian history. He has been captivated by a desperate search

¹ By this I mean the huge variety of life on Earth, i.e., every living thing - plants, bacteria, animals, and humans.

² William Wians, "Aristotle and the Problem of Human Knowledge". *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 2 (2008): 41-64, p. 43.

for Truth. While realizing that Truth is basically the face of reality, he sought to discern the nature of the universe in creation itself. As Augustine understood the Christian doctrine of creation, he immediately found the beginning, the explanation and the end of man. The doctrine of creation is one of the most controversial and yet much neglected. And still it has very enormous practical relevance – there are hardly any spheres of life that are not enriched by thinking about *createdness*, and it is very useful in treating the areas that neglected: arts, vocation, culture, even things like exercise and diet and sleep. Most times, our concern is in terms of being a sinner, being a Christian, and we tend to forget to reflect in terms of being human.

To engage a very important pre-modern thinking like Augustine would be a very important step to confront the idea of creation (ecosystem), with the view of bolstering the neglected areas as well as calming and directing the contested areas, bearing in mind some facts in Augustine that I find interesting about creation.

*Augustine's conversion to Manichaeism was largely influenced by his perception that Genesis chapter 1 is unrefined, and his realization of alternative, less "literalistic" interpretations of the same Genesis 1 was influential in his return back to orthodoxy, thanks to St Ambrose's allegorical homily.

*The first chapters of the book of Genesis were not so easy for Augustine as he struggled with them in his entire theological career. For that he had to write five distinct commentaries on them and also inserting them widely in his other works and sermons, engaging creation at the deepest existential level. For him, it is the key to understanding the deepest longings of the human heart.

*Christianity as a whole made sense to Augustine because of how he approached creation in line with the *apologetics*' concerns.
*One view that was greatly influential on the medieval Church was Augustine's adoption of a kind of framework interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, where he rejects the idea that days had 24-hour periods of time.

*The question of whether Adam and Eve were symbolical was considered by Augustine, thereby developing a nuanced and literally sensitive approach to this particular question defending their historicity while also acknowledging stylization and symbolization in the second and third chapters of Genesis.

The target of this paper therefore would be to explore the meaning and significance of Augustine's thought regarding the issue of the relationship of human beings and the natural world, i.e., the ecosystem. The paper will also discuss as a classical Christian thinker, offering a reasonable, insightful and a sensible ecological insight towards the environment that is also decidedly God-directed. Though Augustine did not use the term ecology in the same way as it was done in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but going through his major works there is evidence of a huge acknowledgement of the ultimate value of God the Creator with a significant but subsidiary valuation of the created order. Augustine supplies much to believers concerning the environmental problems that the contemporary world faces, aiding us to appreciate nature without eventually falling into idolatry. Augustine offers something different and special by virtue of a *methodology of conversion*³. He does that by way of

³ Majority of those who read the *Confessions*, usually read it as a spiritual autobiography of an early Church father who had gone through a series of enthusiasms in his early life before what is conceived as his dramatic or final conversion to orthodox Christianity. Augustine's exclamation that "our heart

representing an encouraging model of openness to a different attitude and reflection about creation amidst human crisis. In his scheme, only the Creator has intrinsic value, which is value in and of himself. Creation has inherent value derived from the Creator which is dependent upon the level creation is tilting toward, i.e., the original design of the created order. Augustine proffers a profound insight about the nature of creation in virtue of the emphasis he lays on the intrinsic and irreversible goodness of creation that comes into being from an all-good Creator. We are greatly encouraged by this doctrine of the spotless goodness of creation to think in terms of an ethical attitude toward the environment – we see the environment as something innately dignified and to be valued for its own sake. Augustine continually reflects on the goodness of creation, he however, does not neglect the destruction that humans have often experienced in their encounter and connection with and to nature. One obvious fact we must acknowledge in Augustine is that his thought is balanced and he takes into consideration the real, and often ambivalent, human experience of nature. As modern people, writing in terms of our own modern attempts to reflect on nature, we have so much to benefit from the interplay of Augustine’s *methodology of conversion*, giving his deep conviction about the ethical demands of nature in many of his

is restless until it finds rest in you,” and also triggered by the “tolle lege: take up and read” of the child in the garden. This does not mean Augustine’s conversion to Christianity, because he had long considered himself to be a Christian. Because by definition, conversion would mean a decisive change whereby a person abandons a previous practice or belief and adopt exclusively a new one. It requires a ‘turning which implies a consciousness that the old way was wrong and the new is right.’ Conf. James O’Donnell, *Augustine, Sinner and Saint: A New Biography*, London: Profile Publications, 2005, p. 3. What he converted to after the encounter at the garden was abstention from sex and worldly ambition.

writings – since it is generated spotless from an absolutely good Creator.

To contextualize Augustine's thoughts in this paper, I shall first look at some of the common accusations of dualism, seeking to clarify and demonstrate that he is not. I shall take a look at some of Augustine's writings that show an essentially nature-affirming outlook (inherently dignified and eschatologically destined for fulfillment. Relying mainly on my two principal sources, *Confessions* and *City of God*, I shall outline a more contemporary understanding of value of the ecosystem and connect it to Augustine's arguments about the value of creation.

Dualism in Augustine

Going through the anthropology of Augustine, he pays some attention to the mind-body dualism which at the end, seem to shroud automatically any positive thing he would say regarding matter and the created order. Rowan Williams writing to defend the bad name Augustine has among ecotheologians says, "It is difficult to construct any profile of what unites the anti-Augustinians of contemporary theology, but it is probably true that they hold in common radically anti-Cartesian perspective."⁴ Here obviously he means that Augustine is being accused of the dualism that should have been rightly placed at Descartes' feet. Thus Williams clearly shows that Augustine cannot simply be indicted with inventing or reinforcing a simple matter-spirit dualism. The accusations did not end here, Colin Gunton has been very critical of Augustine as well. His accusation is so strong that he did not just lay the charge of mere environmental degradation, but also of contemporary skepticism and unbelief

⁴ Rowan Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation," *Augustinian Studies* 25, (1994): 9-24.

on Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity.⁵ He continues with the charges, claiming that Augustine has "either a modalistic conception of God, or two competing sources of knowledge which tend to discredit each other."⁶ Gunton's argument that the unity in the Trinity is so over accentuated in Augustine that modalism is the result, otherwise there will be a divide between the Creator and creation whereby the Creator is essentially unknowable by human beings.⁷ I think these interpretations are remarkably damaging to Augustine's legacy and his suitability as a source for environmental ethics in particular. These critics tend to picture Augustine as tilting towards the side of valuation that denigrates the ecosystem to magnify the spiritual.

To give some insight or correction to the critics. It is very possible and beneficial to rethink our gaze more on the fact that Augustine is continually open to conversion in his thinking rather than just focusing on his preference for things that are strictly spiritual. Yes, Augustine tends to bring dichotomy between the material and spiritual realities, the material is subordinated under the spiritual, but that should not be taken as a primary teaching of Augustine with regards to Christian thinking about environment. This only leads to realize that Augustine's teaching was progressive and he eventually came to see nature as having a divine plan that resembles what we conceive of nature's evolution toward some ultimate fulfillment. We should always be careful not to be guilty of materializing the

⁵ Colin E. Gunton, "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1990): p. 33.

⁶ Colin E. Gunton, *Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West*, p. 35.

⁷ In the *City of God*, Augustine wrote: "The whole Trinity is revealed to us in creation." Conf. Augustine, *The City of God*, trans., Marcus Dods (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2013): 11.24, p. 331.

spiritual just as Augustine was spiritualizing the material. Augustine tried to acknowledge and appreciate creation as it is, likewise as it will be. Giving that creation is advancing to some abiding beautiful form, Augustine has always seen its present beauty as a mysterious gift of the promise of its future. This does not mean that creation as we have it and as it has evolved with time is bad in the strict sense of being evil; it only suggests that it is provisional, as we experience it, while evolving to some mysterious fulfillment, but it is difficult to discover the exact shape. Augustine has this to say: "... the eyes shall possess some quality similar to that of the mind, by which they may be able to discern spiritual things, and among these God – a supposition for which it is difficult or even impossible to find any support in Scripture – or, which is more easy to comprehend, God will be so known by us, and shall be so much before us, that we shall see Him by the spirit in ourselves, in one another, in Himself, in the new heavens and the new earth, in every created thing which shall then exist; and also by the body we shall see Him in every body which the keen vision of they of the spiritual body shall reach."⁸

One other aspect of Augustine to dwell on is to reevaluate the presumption that he negates and sublimates the natural and the created order. Augustine's assessment of the beauty and goodness of creation should be seen always in line with his understanding of eschatology and protology (nature's inherent dignity as rooted in God from the beginning of time to the end of time) as evolving toward a recreation in the future, as well as the fulfillment and glorification of its hopeful destiny. Santmire notes that Augustine presents the inherent goodness of creation always against the foil of its future glorification and realization

⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII.29

in God in the following lines: "... Augustine's development can be schematized as a movement from a radical dominance of his thought by the metaphor of ascent to a mutually reinforcing formation of his thought by the metaphor of fecundity and migration to a good land. In Augustine's theology, then, we witness a metaphorical metamorphosis of profound scope, which saw him move from radical adherence to the spiritual motif on the one hand, to a thorough going adherence to the ecological motif on the other."⁹ Apart from the central role Augustine played in the development western Christian theology, that was vehemently opposed by the ecofeminists as patriarchal, Gunton's view of Augustine as a dualist somehow gives a backing to their arguments. He says, "It is well known that Augustine was suspicious of the material world. With the Platonists, he found it difficult to believe that the material and sensible realm could either be truly real or the object or the vehicle of knowledge."¹⁰ There will certainly be minimal hope for recovering Augustine as a fount of environmental ethics. The compelling passage in contradistinction to the one Augustine avowed above, concerning his desire for "God and soul alone," is found in the *Confessions*. We see him conforming himself with the order, harmony and goodness of creation, and not over and against matter and nature: "I did not now long for better things, because I considered them all, and with sounder judgment I realized that while the things above were than those below, all things together were better than those above would be by themselves."¹¹ He continues: "There is no wholeness in those

⁹ Paul H. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, New York: Fortress Press, 1991, pp. 59-60.

¹⁰ Colin E. Gunton, *Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West*, p. 36.

¹¹ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, VII.13 trans. Hal M. Helms, U.S: Paraclete Press, 1986.

who are displeased with any part of your creation, no more than there was in me when I was displeased with so many things that You had made."¹² One good thing Augustine did was to develop, reconsider and even change his notion about his estimation of the dignity of creation. He was not rigid in his dualistic cosmology that only understood matter and the body as evil, while the spirit and the soul as the only *summum bonum*. He eventually acknowledged greatly the goodness of creation on its own merit. Regardless of his inability to understand every reason behind seemingly insignificant parts, Augustine came to see all of creation as good in his commentary on Genesis 1:24-25: "And you, O God, *saw everything that You had made, and behold, it was very good*. Yes, we also see the same, and behold all things are very good."¹³ Gradually Augustine is coming to see that the diversity of creation, the fecundity of nature, is truly part of the design and will and blessing of the Creator: "how highly he prizes unity in multitude."¹⁴ Quoting Psalm 46:9 Augustine exhorts: "Come behold the works of the Lord, what prodigies He hath wrought in the earth."¹⁵

Thanks to the revision of the understanding of Augustine as a strict dualist by recent scholarship. There is seemingly a more careful reading of the works of Augustine, as well as a more gracious allowance given him for the possibility of change and theological maturation. Again, this is also as a result of Brown's biography of Augustine, which seems to focus mainly on platonic influences on Augustine.¹⁶ This means that the first step

¹² Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, VII.14.

¹³ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, XIII.28.

¹⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII.22.

¹⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII.27.

¹⁶ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, p. 497.

in restoring Augustine's legacy is to reread Augustine in light of what he wrote, when he wrote it, and allow for legitimate changes in his understanding of doctrines. This explains why Rowan Williams argues against the view that Augustine is a dualistic Neo-Platonist. His argument was primarily pointing toward Augustine's positive attitude toward creation. Here is Augustine's argument, "A good God made [the created order] good; and that the things created, being different from God, were inferior to Him, and yet were good, being created by none other than He."¹⁷ Inasmuch as Augustine believes that everything, all visible creatures in particular, are created as a blessing for humanity, this by no means exhausts their *raison d'être*, as far as he is concerned... Instead, for Augustine, the most fundamental *telos* of the entire creation is beauty, and the glorification of the God who wills such a magnificent community of being, each part of which has its own divinely validated integrity.¹⁸

Creation Debates Finding "Rest" In Augustine?

At his late teen age, Augustine relocated to the city for studies. He became convinced in school that the first chapter of Genesis is no longer consistent with the most sophisticated intellectual trends of his day. That led him to denounce the Christian faith in which he was raised, so that his 20's was given to youthful sin and worldly ambition. At some point, he encountered Christians who held unto a different interpretation of Genesis 1, and his intellectual critique of Christianity was undermined. His mother Monica never ceased to pray for him, and after much personal struggle, he had an extraordinary conversion experience. This is Augustine's brief testimony. He was arguably the most influential theologian in the history of the Western church.

¹⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.23

¹⁸ Paul H. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, p. 61.

However, in its broad outline, it is a narrative that seems to replay itself again and again in our days. The details are definitely different, for instance, our threat today comes from naturalism, while Augustine's came from Manicheism. But the overall scenario is only too familiar to us, especially because today it lacks a happy ending unfortunately.

Creation at the Heart of Augustine

Most people are ignorant of the influence Genesis 1 had in the conversion of Augustine, and most still would not identify the doctrine of creation as the *capo lavoro* (masterpiece) of his theology. Thinking of Augustine, the first things that come to mind is the emphasis he lays on divine grace, or his high doctrine of the church, or his penetrating insights into the Trinity. But in many ways, his doctrine of creation was at the core of who he was, both as a theologian and as a Christian. If Augustine had not listened to Ambrose preaching allegorically on Genesis 1 in 384, he might never have come to wrestle Donatism or Pelagianism. More importantly, he fought continuously with the doctrine of creation all through his life, and it became an integral part of his entire theological endeavor. Augustine did not only write three distinct commentaries on Genesis, but the doctrine of creation comes up at very essential moment in what are probably his two most important works, *Confessions* and *The City of God*. He wrestled with the doctrine of creation at a profoundly existential level. At the risk of overstatement, it might be suggested that creation was to Augustine what justification was to Luther, or liberalism was to Barth – a particular area of doctrine which, because of a theologian's own personal journey, comes to an especially vigorous expression and is visible in almost all their writings.

What Augustine teaches us today

What we know for sure is that Augustine totally cared about creation. But the question is, should we who are interested in creation care about Augustine? Of course, does it not seem like a mere academic nostalgia to think that a figure from the 4th/5th century can help us address challenges that are predominantly related to scientific discoveries of the last few centuries? Let us not forget that Augustine was a man of his own time. Because Augustine approached the doctrine of creation long before the challenge of modernity, his teachings can helpfully reframe issues and reorient us to a broader range of concerns. This is another way to locate avenues of thought that can move us beyond the polarization that characterizes much reflection on the doctrine of creation. We must watch against the hubris that every knowledge comes through smartphones. The same thing C.S. Lewis termed “chronological snobbery.” Augustine is exceptionally a deep thinker, for that reason we have so much to learn from his wisdom, insight and sincerity. We may even find him to be of great help to correct us against some of the characteristic blind spots of our own time. A perfect description of this experience would be travelling to another country. You come to realize the peculiarities of your own culture when you visit other cultures. In this, the question is, what a generous-minded person would regard as a disinclination to learn from that which is foreign as a sign of progress, rather than narrowness?

The Relevance of Augustine today

In his lifelong commitment to this aspect, Augustine has shown a peculiar sensitivity to many of the concerns that are evident in contemporary debate about the doctrine of creation (ecosystem). There are three special ways Augustine can assist us today:

Expanding Our Vision: Augustine pulls us into a new orbit of concerns within the doctrine of creation.

Modeling Humility: Augustine provides a good of how to neither retreat from, nor bow down before, the claims of natural sciences.

Nuancing "Literal": Augustine encourages the reading of Genesis 1-3 that is humbly receptive while remaining sensitive to the nuances and complexities of this portion of the Scripture. Just as a recap that will be useful to refresh the story of Augustine, but in his own words: "In Milan I found your devoted servant Ambrose... Unknown to me, it was you who led me to him, so that I might knowingly be led to you... I listened attentively when he preached to the people... I began to believe that the Catholic faith, which I had thought impossible to defend against the objectives of the Manichees, might be fairly maintained, especially since I had heard one passage after another in the Old Testament figuratively explained. These passages had been death to me when I took them literally, but once I had heard them explained in their spiritual meaning I began to blame myself for my despair."¹⁹

What we do not remember

What is the conception of Genesis 1-3? Sometimes it is viewed as a form of exposition to the biblical narrative. Usually when we engage the doctrine of creation more directly, our gaze tends to be myopic, and our questions are normally science-faith based: what is the nature of the days in the first chapter of Genesis? Are Adam and Eve of Genesis 2-3 historical figures? Are they the first human beings, and the progenitors of all modern human beings?

¹⁹ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, V.13-14.

They are all very important questions. But if we approach these three chapters as more than a mere preamble or preface to the biblical story, we are likely to find that the material contribution of these chapters to Christian theology would not be sufficient exhaust these concerns. This is so because these part of the Scripture offers a holistic framework for how to live as creatures of God in God's world, it helps us fuse every aspect of our existence – from relationship to work, laughter, music, and play – as people who bear God's image. A lot of times we lay such much emphasis on our lives as Christians in the church with no reference to life as a human being. However, the categories of sin and salvation are only intelligible in the light prior category of creation – when for instance a person says, "I am a sinner" is a further specification of the assertion, "I am a creature." Therefore, engaging Augustine's doctrine of creation is a way to widen our horizon of concerns within the doctrine of creation.

The two types of reality

Being forged in the context of apologetic debate, Augustine's doctrine of creation does have a kind of philosophical flair. His exegetical works as well devote considerable space and energy to digressions regarding the origin of the soul, or the nature of memory. More so, Augustine drew upon the idea of creation *ex nihilo*²⁰ to distinguish the Christian view of creation from various Manichean, Parmenidean, and Platonic alternatives. For example, the Christian God is not similar to the demiurge of Plato's *Timeaeus*, who shapes the world from pre-existent chaos. Given that God freely brings creatures into being out of nothing, they therefore owe their existence wholly to Him. It means that

²⁰ Simply put, it means "creation from nothing." This doctrine provided Augustine with an implicit means to define the character of created being as finite and mutable, and drawing a crucial ontological distinction between the Divine Nature and that which the Divine creates.

to an extent they are “less real” that the God who created them. Joseph Torchia aptly summarizes thus, “creatures occupy a mid-rank which situates them between the plenitude of Being found in God and absolute negation.”²¹ Meaning, for Augustine, creaturely existence is a participatory act not autonomous; so it necessarily requires relation, for the only kind of being that any creature enjoys is from the One who is Being itself.

The Turning Point

Augustine is moved to suppose a radical dependence of creatures on the Creator, regardless of the stain of sin. Jared Ortiz says, “for Augustine, creation has a ‘conversion torque,’ a dynamic orientation toward God, indeed, toward salvation.”²² Of course, sin has brought a fundamentally new problem by disrupting the link between the Creator and the creature. However, because of the radically contingent status of creation, Augustine emphasized a continuity between our redemption from sin and our corporeal, creaturely life. Redemption then for Augustine is not an intrusion into our creaturely status, but its deepest realization. Augustine proclaims that the perfection of every created thing can only occur in Him from whom it derives its being in the first place. For him each created thing “finally coming to rest” in God as the attainment of the “goal of its own momentum.” This momentum he has in mind here is generated by creatureliness i.e., the inherent tilt of all creatures toward God. Augustine continues by distinguishing between two different termini of creation this way: “The whole universe of creation... has one terminus in its own nature, another in the goal which it

²¹ Joseph N. Torchia, *Creatio Ex Nihilo and the Theology of Augustine: The Anti-Manichean Polemic and Beyond*, American University Studies 205, New York: Peter Lang, 1999, p. 236.

²² Jared Ortiz, “*You Made Us for Yourself*”: *Creation in Augustine’s Confessions*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016, p. 230.

has in God ... It can come to no stable and properly established rest, except in the quiet rest of the one who does not have to make any effort to get anything beyond himself to find rest in it. And for this reason, while God abides in himself, he swings everything whatever that comes from him back to himself, like a boomerang, so that every creature might find in him the final terminus and goal for its nature, not to be what he is, but to find in him the place of rest in which to preserve what by nature it is in itself."²³ For Augustine, all of creation that comes from God must return to him through redemption, like a boomerang. And until then, it is "restless." And this "restlessness" calls to mind, for sure, the famous prayer of Augustine at the beginning of the *Confessions*, which is another way of summarizing the whole of his theological vision: "you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."²⁴ The particularly obvious thing for Augustine's conception of human experience and longing is the significance of creation. He insists that the deepest human reality is our profound "restlessness" i.e., the loss of everything for which we have been created, and nothing else but God can fill the void. There is basically no particular area of theology that does not have a connection to this meditation on the implications of such a vision, and it will be rather unfortunate if we bypass these important considerations too quickly in our rush just to determine how old the universe is.

The Importance of Humility in Creation Debates

As observed earlier, Augustine fell in love with the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. He wrote continuously and re-writing commentaries on these chapters, that for fifteen years, he worked on a kind of "Summa Creatio" i.e., his finished

²³ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 4.18.34, trans. Edmund Hill (The Works of Saint Augustine 1.13), New York: New City Press, 2002, p. 260.

²⁴ Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, p. 14.

commentary on the literal meaning of Genesis (*De Genesi Ad Litteram*). This work on creation is second to no other work among the church fathers. However, Augustine himself is very modest about his inputs. His description of his hermeneutical method was more of “asking questions rather than making affirmations;” he concludes his finished commentary by emphasizing its “many uncertainties;” in Augustine’s *Retractions* he calls it “a work on which more questions were asked than answers found; and of those that were found only a few were assured, while the rest were so stated as still to require further investigation.”²⁵ Whoever slogs through Augustine’s commentary work will perceive a genuinely reverent quality to such great works. Augustine believes that creation was a deeply mysterious doctrine, and can only be approached through the kind of awe that a child feels while looking up at the stars on a cloudless night.

Humility before Scripture

Augustine is usually concerned to treat the Scripture carefully. Often, he warns against the danger of “rashness” – *temeritas* in Latin; a word that comes up very often in his commentaries. One of his usual maneuvers is to canvass a number of interpretative options, clue toward a possible answer, but ultimately withdraw from needing a definitive position from his reader. For example, Augustine suggests two possible ways of understanding the “expanse” of Genesis 1:7, and he exhorts, “you may choose whichever you prefer; but avoid asserting anything rashly, as well as something you don’t know as if you did; also remember you are just human investigating the works of God to the extent

²⁵ Augustine, *Retractions* 2.24, in Saint Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (The Works of Saint Augustine 1.13) New York: New City Press, 2002, p. 167.

you are permitted to do so.”²⁶ Humility before Scripture for Augustine meant a certain willingness to countenance multiple exegesis of unclear passages that we think is open to only one interpretation. “Let us never,” he kindly warns, “throw ourselves head over heels into the headstrong assertion” of our personal opinion of a biblical passage, so that we put ourselves forward as “championing what is not the cause of the divine scriptures but our own, in a way that we want it to be of the scriptures.”²⁷ Augustine is astutely aware of how easy it is to proclaim to defend the Scriptures when in reality we are only defending ourselves.

Humility before Science

Another call from Augustine, but this time the call is for topics we would categorize as natural sciences – astronomy and geology, what the ancients considered as part of philosophy. While working on his commentaries, he sought to comprehend current opinions about subjects like the cycle of the planets and the phases of the moon – he however warns, that it is not the intention of the Bible to answer all human curiosities on such issues. He famously declared: “There is knowledge to be had, after all, about the earth, about the sky, about other elements of the earth, about the movements and revolutions or even the magnitude and distances of the constellations, about the predictable eclipses of the moon and the sun, about the cycles of years and seasons, about the nature of animals, fruits, stones, and everything else of the kind. And it happens frequently that even non-Christians will have knowledge of this kind in a way that they can substantiate with scientific arguments or experiments. Now it is quite disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on

²⁶ De Genesis ad litteram liber unus imperfectus 9.30, in Saint Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, p. 133.

²⁷ De Genesi ad litteram 1.18.37, pp. 185-86

one's guard against at every costs, that they should ever hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics, and talking such nonsense that they can scarcely contain their laughter."²⁸

Augustine's compelling concern here is obvious in his hyperbolic language, which conjures up an almost cartoonish image of Christians rambling in ignorance while non-Christian "scientists" are doubled over in an uncontainable laughter. What for Augustine is more disturbing about a scenario like this, is that it misrepresent the Christian faith itself. He writes: "And what is so annoying is not that misguided should be laughed at, as that our authors should be assumed by outsiders to have held such notions and, to the great detriment of those about whose salvation we are so concerned, should be written off and consigned to the waste paper bin as so many ignoramuses. Whenever, you see, they catch some members of the Christian fold making mistakes on a subject which they know inside out, ad defending their hollow opinions on the authority of our books, on what grounds are they going to trust those books on the resurrection of the dead and the hope of life eternal and the kingdom of heaven, when they suppose they include any number of mistakes and fallacies on matters which they themselves have been able to master either by experiment or by exact calculations? It is never possible to say what trouble and pain such rash, self-assured know-alls cause the more cautious and experienced brethren."²⁹

²⁸ De Genesi ad litteram 1.19.39, p. 186.

²⁹ De Genesi ad litteram 1.19.39, pp. 186-87.

Humility: Conviction or the Lack?

When discussing the issue of humility there is a possibility of someone arguing that, “it is all-too-easy to trump for humility in areas considered less weighty. But if what we are talking about is concerning the deity of Christ, you wouldn’t have to be warning about the dangers of rashness!” Even at that, Augustine did not consider humility as an antonym to conviction, as if to be humble requires adopting a vaguely deferential mindset on all issues. He made a clear distinction between the clear/central aspects of creation, on one hand, and the relatively murky/peripheral, on the other – what he called ‘certainties’ versus ‘opinion.’ For Augustine, humility signified an unflinching allegiance to the former as much as a prudential discretion about the latter. For example, at the beginning of his unfinished commentary on Genesis, Augustine advocates for a questioning posture toward the doctrine of creation, because the “rash assertion of a person’s uncertain and dubious opinions... can scarcely avoid the charge of sacrilege.”³⁰ But he continues to caution that our doubts and questions must never exceed the rule of faith, offering an extended account of the Apostles’ Creed in its African form (with occasional references to the Nicene Creed) as a criterion for “the bounds of Catholic faith.” The particular places he lays more emphasis as inviolable are Trinitarian agency in creation, non-eternality of creation, the goodness of creation, and the redemption of creation through the work of Christ.³¹ Humility for Augustine therefore, within the doctrine of creation concerns the kind of methodologically self-conscious balance, whereby we are as eager to affirm the weighty matters of orthodoxy as we are circumspect in our private judgments about the debated areas. To summarize punchily, humility does not

³⁰ De Genesis ad litteram liber unus imperfectus 1.1, p. 114.

³¹ De Genesis ad litteram liber unus imperfectus 1.1, p. 116.

signify saying “I don’t know” to every question. It means rather, saying “I don’t know” when, in truth, you don’t know.

Ecosystem at the center of Augustine’s thought

To approach the topic of ecosystem in Augustine, the *City of God* offers the contemporary Christian thinking on creation a great positive influence. This is so because it concerns the current state of human relationship to the rest of the entire creation. Augustine says: “I speak only of this particular life which we know, and which we now are. [Who] can describe the gifts of God’s goodness that are extended to the human race even in this life?”³² We can see that he gives an empirical approach. For this reason, he invites us to find the answers but reflectively looking at our life’s experiences. Augustine’s major contribution to aid understand better the inherent problems with our interaction with the rest of creation centers around his view of the autonomy or the dignity of nature. Again, Augustine is ever ready to vehemently point out that human experience of nature in itself offers us no answer to the inner value of their fundamental dignity. He seriously points out: “What man can go out of his house without being exposed on all sides to unforeseen accidents? And while returning home sound in limb, he slips on his own door-step, fractures his leg, and never recovers. What can seem safer than a man sitting on a chair? Eli the priest fell from his own, and broke his neck. How many accidents do farmers, or rather everyone, fears that crops may suffer from weather, or the soil, or the ravages of destructive animals? Commonly they feel safe when the crops are gathered and stored. Yet, to my certain knowledge, sudden floods have driven

³² Augustine, *The City of God*, XII.22.

the laborers away, and emptied the barns clean of the finest harvest.”³³

We can see a narrow equivocation between human experience of creation and creation itself that makes our judgment about the relationship prejudiced or biased. To put it another way, our experience of creation, frequently thumping at our perilous existence as it does, naturally makes us to have an anthropocentric concern or bias toward nature. This makes us become more concerned about our own comfort and continued survival than our treatment of nature. This experience we have of creation makes us a bit uncertain about it. This is because creation is both a blessing and a curse in our histories, myths and experience. The environment enhances and sustains our life, but it can as well reek havoc upon us and take away our life. In theory, our relationship with creation is influenced by the bias of self-concern. Of course, Augustine is so much aware of the risk of judging creation from this biased, self-concern perspective, even given the worst case scenarios, he considers it as non-valuable or bad in itself. He is also careful not to spiritualize or deify creation, but makes great attempts to think of it for its created God-given reality and as an objective empirical fact. Failing to remember the blinding, unthinking presumptions of self-concern – survival instinct – we either forget that we cannot understand the mysterious organic portrait of creation, of which we are part of, or we fail to remember that God created all of the natural order as good. For Augustine, nature gets its intrinsic value and dignity, not in virtue of its inherent mystery, but in light of being created by a good Creator and in constant connection to the Creator from the beginning through to the end of time, regardless of human experience and human judgment.

³³ Augustine, *The City of God*, XII.22-23.

Hear Augustine: "... beauty does not strike us, because by our mortal weakness we are so involved in part of it, that we cannot perceive the whole, in which these fragments that offend us are harmonized with the most accurate fitness and beauty. And therefore where we are not so well able to perceive the wisdom of the Creator, we are very properly exhorted to believe it, lest in the vanity human rashness we presume to find fault with the work of so great an Artificer... the natures themselves displease men, as often happens when they become hurtful to them, and then men estimate them not by their nature, but by their utility; just as in the case of those animals whose swarms scourged the Egyptians. But in this way of estimating, they may find fault with the sun itself; for some criminals or debtors are sentenced by the judges to be set in the sun. Therefore it is not with respect to human convenience or discomfort, but with respect to their very nature, that the creatures are glorifying to their Artificer... For [humans] wish to see [by the light of the fire], but not be burnt. But they forget that this very light which is so pleasant to them, does not go well with and hurts weak eyes; and in the heat which is disagreeable to them, some animals find the most suitable conditions for healthy like. All natures, therefore, inasmuch as they are, and have a rank and a species of their own, and a kind of internal harmony, are definitely good."³⁴

The notion of Augustine on creation in connection does not rely heavily on biased human self-concern and judgment, which is vague and connected to self-interest; it is rather on the presupposition that the Creator of creation is good and therefore created a good creation in totality regardless of human experience and testimony. This is not something we may see because of our lack of objective distance and our consideration

³⁴ Augustine, *The City of God*, XII.4-5.

of nature based on utility, rather than in its essence. Augustine continues his teaching: "For what else is to be understood by that invariable chorus, "And God saw that it was good," than the approval of the work I its design, which is the wisdom of God... there is just one source of everything, and that no nature which is not divine can exist unless originated by that Creator... accept with a good and simple faith this is so good and simple a reason of the world's creation, that a good God made it good."³⁵

The wisdom of God is seen in the creation he made which is good. This is to say that we may not always have a clue as to how certain aspects of creation are in fact good, but we can be certain they are because a good God created them. As a basis to respect the inherent dignity in creation, Augustine lays down this foundation. In essence, creation has an inherent dignity, set in stone, if you will, by the mysterious order and design of the Creator of creation. In addition, we can say with Augustine that God is not just unintelligible, but so is God's handiwork that shows forth the mysterious hiddenness of God through God's creativity.³⁶ In any case, although nature mediates and reflects the goodness and mystery of God, created is not God. This should help Christians not to be afraid of exalting nature to divine status in a pantheistic mood. Even in this facet, the autonomy of creation is not only separated and appreciated apart from humans, but is distinguished from God, the Creator, and therefore definitely allowed a goodness of its own accord: "He governs all things in such a way as to allow them to perform and exercise their own proper movements. For although they can be nothing without him, they are not what He is."³⁷ God is God; creation is creation. The world becomes a standing miracle,

³⁵ Augustine, *The City of God*, XI.21&23; see also *Confessions*, XIII.28.

³⁶ Augustine, *The City of God*, Cf., X.12, XI.24&XII.24.

³⁷ Augustine, *The City of God*, VII.30.

foreshadowing the wonderful fullness of creation in the future.³⁸ The corruption of created nature is not in its nature, since nature is created by a good God; corruption comes from the perversion or abuse of nature, and carries with it its own punishment.³⁹ Augustine seem to press the dignity and integrity of the inherent goodness and value of the created order to an extreme position, to the extent of teaching that the most malicious of natures is naturally to be considered good: "There is a nature [God] where evil does not and cannot even exist; but there cannot be nature in which there is no good. Consequently, not even the nature of the devil himself is evil, in so far as it is nature, but it was made evil by being perverted. Thus he did not abide in the truth, but could not escape the judgment of the Truth; he did not abide in the tranquility of order, but did not therefore escape the power of the Ordainer. The good transmitted by God to this nature did not screen him from the justice of God by which order was preserved in his punishment; neither did God punish the good which he had created, but the evil which the devil had committed."⁴⁰

Augustine's "Literal" Reading of Genesis

The various theories on creation today are mostly summarized in terms of whether one takes the biblical "literally" or not. Augustine's greatest achievement on the doctrine of creation was the work on the "literal" commentary on Genesis 1-3. We should bear in mind that what Augustine means by "literal" is very different from many modern uses of the concept. The great theologian Inigo Montoya said: "you keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

³⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, Cf., X.12&XII.23.

³⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*, Cf., XII.3, XIV.3&XV.22.

⁴⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, XIX.13.

Allegorical to Literal Interpretation

Augustine's description of his later works on Genesis as "literal," was intended to differentiate them from the earlier two-volume work on Genesis against the Manichees. They included such ideas as taking the days of the first chapter of Genesis as 7 epochs of redemptive-historical history, and 7 stages of the Christian life.⁴¹ With Augustine's turn to a "literal" commentary, he wants to move from such allegorical meanings of the text to its historical signification. For this reason, in his *Retractions*, he qualifies the word "literal" in the theme *The Literal Commentary on Genesis* as meaning "not the allegorical meanings of the text, but evaluation of what actually happened."⁴² The fine-tuning of the interpretative strategy did not mean a rejection of allegorical exegesis wholesale – as Yoon Kyung Kim figures out, in the course of his development of Augustine's understanding of how the literal meaning progresses to encompass the allegorical too.⁴³ We can find in Augustine's literal commentaries affirmations of the validity of allegorical interpretation,⁴⁴ so too the repetitions of specific allegorical interpretations found in his earlier works.⁴⁵ What we see in Augustine thus far, is that his usage of "literal" has to do with historical referentiality, not with the particularly literary genre or style in which that history is recounted. Augustine did not use the "literal" to exclude the possibility of language that is metaphorical, figurative, pictorial or poetic.

⁴¹ De Genesis contra Manichaeos 1.23.35-1.25.43, in Saint Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, pp. 62-68.

⁴² *Retractiones* 22.24, p. 167.

⁴³ Yoon Kyung Kim, *Augustine's Changing Interpretations of Genesis 1-3: from De Genesi contra Manichaeos to De Genesi ad Litteram*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006, pp. 163-167.

⁴⁴ De Genesis ad litteram liber unus imperfectus 2.5, p. 116.

⁴⁵ De Genesis ad litteram 2.9.22, p. 202.

The Days of Creation for Augustine

What exactly does Augustine think Genesis 1 “literally” means? In Augustine’s completed literal commentary, he lays much emphasis on the ineffability of the creation act, and our difficulty in grasping what it means: “it is of course an arduous and extremely cumbersome task for us to get through to what the author meant with six days, however concentrated our attention and lively our minds.”⁴⁶ At the end he accepts that the ordinary 24-hours days “are not at all like [the days of Genesis 1], but entirely different.”⁴⁷ For Augustine, God creates all things in accordance, and the 7-day construct in Genesis 1 is an accommodation⁴⁸ in which “the Scriptural style comes down to the level of little ones and adjusts itself to their capacity.”⁴⁹ Specifically, Augustine affirms that the ordering of Genesis is not according to temporal sequence but the ordering of angelic knowledge.⁵⁰ Hence, Augustine did not only differentiate the days of Genesis 1 from ordinary 24-hour days, he distinguished God’s initial creative act as well from his subsequent activity in creation: “When we meditate upon the first establishment of creatures in the works of God from which he rested on the seventh day, we should not think either of those days as being like these ones governed by the sun, nor of that working as resembling the way God now works in time; but we should

⁴⁶ De Genesis ad litteram 4.1.1, p. 241.

⁴⁷ De Genesis ad litteram 4.27.44, p. 267.

⁴⁸ Augustine has a thoroughgoing appreciation of the notion of accommodation i.e., the very idea that God has adjusted his revelation so that it might be comprehensible to the specific people to whom he is communicating. For example, he speaks of Scripture speaking “in a weak and simple style” when communicating to the weak and simple (*De Genesi ad litteram* 5.6.19), or compare biblical language to a mother teaching a toddler how to walk (*De Genesi ad litteram* 5.3.6).

⁴⁹ De Genesis ad litteram 2.6.13, p. 198.

⁵⁰ De Genesis ad litteram 4.25.56, 275.

reflect rather upon the work from which times began, the work of making all things at once, simultaneously.”⁵¹

Augustine’s Inspiration

In spite of the fact that Augustine was aware of the wider philosophical concerns in his context, his interpretation of Genesis 1 was ultimately rooted in certain exegetical problems. For instance, Augustine grappled with the nature of the light in days 1-3 before the creation of the luminaries on day 4. Observing the phrase in Genesis 1:14, “let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,” Augustine questioned, “who can fail to see how problematic is their implication that times began on the fourth day, as if the preceding three days could have passed without time?”⁵² This problem destabilized Augustine. At the end, he identified the pre-solar light of day 1 with the spiritual/angelic creation. For him, angelology is a significant complicating feature of interpreting Genesis 1, for example, he correlated the morning/evening structure of Genesis 1, and the phrases “let there be” and “thus it was,” with different modes of angelic knowledge.⁵³ Augustine earmarked angels a significant role in the oversight of creation; at one point, e.g., he ponders whether the stars are “enspirited” by angels or merely “directed” by them.⁵⁴

One further textual difficulty Augustine faced was the problem of relating Genesis 2:4-6 to the week of creation in Genesis, particularly the different usage of the term “day” in chapter 2:4 and the apparent dischronology introduced in 2:5 (“when no shrub had yet appeared”). He dedicates the whole of Book 5 of

⁵¹ De Genesis ad litteram 5.5.12, p. 282.

⁵² De Genesis ad litteram 2.14.28, p. 207.

⁵³ De Genesis ad litteram 4.23.40, pp. 264-65.

⁵⁴ De Genesis ad litteram 2.18.38, 214.

his literal commentary to how Genesis 2:4-6 “with all their problems, confirm the view that creation was the work of one day.” Expecting the charge that this particular notion of instantaneous creation draws so heavily on Sirach 18:1 in the Old Latin version (“he who remains for eternity created all things at once”), Augustine appeals to the textual proximity of these verses: “now we get evidence in support, not from another book of holy Scripture that God created all things simultaneously, but from next door neighbor’s testimony on the page following this matter.”⁵⁵ Again, Augustine drew attention to God’s rest on the Sabbath after the completion of creation in Genesis 2:1-3. He insists that “God did not delight in some kind of temporal period of rest after hard toil,” he argued that this language must be read analogically.⁵⁶

Conclusion

Pope Francis in his Encyclical Letter *Laudato sì* admonishes that in relation to the present ecological crisis, “there is a need to take into consideration deeper and transcendental questions”⁵⁷, he exhorts that the question of ecology is not only a matter of external and environmental issues, it is above all an interior matter – the ecology of the human soul. This is well in line with Pope John Paul II’s thoughts on ecology, when he points out the problem of consumerism and man’s failure to look at natural environment far more than its utility as the main culprit, and he calls for the so-called “ecological conversion.”⁵⁸ It is true that the ecological sensitivity we experience today did not exist during

⁵⁵ De Genesis ad litteram 5.3.6, p. 279.

⁵⁶ De Genesis ad litteram 4.14.25, p. 256.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis. Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Sì*, (04.09.2015). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 107 (2015).

⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II. Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, (04.03.1979). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979).

the time of Augustine, his thoughts on creation however, are extremely rich and seemingly 'futuristic' that today they can effectively help us comprehend and discover vital aspects of the universe leading us to reflect with greater and sincere profundity on the ecological crisis we face today. Augustine's thinking is directly connected to story of his conversion, and that bears a very strong mark of an intellectual content and emphasis and it is also born of a crisis-ridden environment. This is the point I have tried to present in this paper, along with crisis context of both Augustine's day and ours, as metaphorical (and even paradigmatic) virtue. We should have a rethink about our relationship with nature in terms that represent a position in-between the denigration and total denial of the dignity and rights of nature on one hand, and a spiritualization of creation (pantheism) that stands outside the context of Christian tradition on the other hand. It remains true anyway, that the teachings of Augustine do not provide any systematic treatment of our relationship with the environment that we may call Augustinian. But his teachings can help with an intelligent conversation about the environment more than an intellectual conversion about certain issues. It is very important to note that Augustine's thought on creation is heavily based on the Word of God. The in-depth reflection of Augustine on the scriptural story of creation, warranted him to design a clear picture of the creator as a Triune God whose impact on creation reflects the concrete works of the three divine Persons in the world, of what place and relation we should have with other creatures, and of the fact that the entire creation has a common orientation towards the fullness of peace and perfection God has designed in all eternity.

Augustine in his life and teaching warns against thinking that we are, or even have, the ultimate reference point when it comes to concerns about the whole of creation. Creation glorifies God in

its very nature. The created world for Augustine is like an open book which tells the story of God's beauty and greatness. He describes it as a book which everyone can read because it is not written with ink and paper, but with a living and nonliving, tangible realities which don't cease proclaiming and praising the greatness of their creator. In this Augustine's perspective, the care of the created order does not only have a practical and material intent of gratifying man's need in the present and for the future, but more importantly because the whole of the universe has a sacred value - it is more or less a form of a sacrament that manifests the presence of God and invites all men to raise their eyes and hearts to the transcendent truth so that they may not remain locked in the material goods of this world. His collective vision of all of history embraces the history of all created order. Furthermore, creation for Augustine, does not only speak of God through its beauty and harmony. His interpretation of Wisdom 11:20 helped him to conceive how creatures have inherent value in themselves as they participate in the divine reality through their measure, number, and weight, thereby making them a concrete manifestation of God, who is in Himself, a Trinity. For this reason, every creature notwithstanding its usefulness, size, and perfection, is not superfluous and is worthy of respect and care because it originates from God, it bears the reflection of God somehow, and vestiges of the creator; and is ceaselessly desired and sustained by God.

Summarily, we are reminded, in Augustine's doctrine of creation of our special place and what role we must play in the created world. Man for Augustine, is the curator of creation - not its owner - because it was God who created and put all things at the service of man. As an administrator, gifted with creativity, intelligence and self-transcendence, man has an exalted responsibility to care and guide creation, so that they may

remain fruitful and faithful to their appointed purpose; and most importantly, that they may continue to be a sign of God, who created them not out of necessity, but by the outpouring of “the largeness of His bounty” (*abundantiam beneficentiae*).⁵⁹ Creation therefore must not be exploited for any selfish reason and interest, but should be used moderately and rationally (*uti*), and that only in view of man’s love for God that it must be enjoyed (*frui*). As a way of concluding Augustine’s compelling work on ecology, I will love to say that “ecological conversion” which we should all have, is before all else, a “conversion of the heart” as we meditate on nature and our place in it as Augustine exhorts: “Observe the beauty of the world and praise the plan of the creator: Observe what he made, love the One who made it [...] because He also made you, His lover, in His image.”⁶⁰ Let us bear in mind that not only does the rejection of science by many Christians especially in this our present day of climate, change the planet over which we maintain stewardship as well as future generations to come, it can cause Christians to become stumbling blocks, undermining the very reason of the Great Commission.

⁵⁹ De Genesis ad litteram 1.7.13, p. 42.

⁶⁰ Augustine, *Sermons* 68,5. in Saint Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, p. 201.

Bibliography

- Andrew J. Brown, *The Days of Creation: A History of Christian Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3* History of Biblical Interpretation Series 4; Dorsett, UK: Deo, 2014.
- Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Hal M. Helms, U.S: Paraclete Press, 1986.
- Augustine, *The City of God*, trans., Marcus Dods, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2013.
- Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis 4.18.34*, trans. Edmund Hill (The Works of Saint Augustine 1.13), New York: New City Press, 2002.
- Bradley Green, "Augustine, Genesis, and the Goodness of Creation". May 10, 2017: <https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/05/augustine-genesis-the-goodness-of-creation/>
- Chaffey Tim, "An Examination of Augustine's Commentaries on Genesis One and Their Implications on a Modern Theological Controversy". *Answers Research Journal* 4 (2011): 89-101.
- Colin E. Gunton, "Augustine, the Trinity and the Theological Crisis of the West," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 1 (1990).
- Dunham A. Scott, *The Trinity and Creation in Augustine*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018.
- Ellingsen Mark, "Ancient African Insights about Creation and Nature which Relate to Modern Physics: Augustine and Dionysius of Alexandria". *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 42 (2016): 63-72.

- Felix G. Zombobah, "Augustine on Memory". *AMAMIHE: Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 18. No.5. (2020): 184-199.
- Felix G. Zombobah, "Augustine's Anthropology: Homo Capax Dei". *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 3. No. 5. (2020): 470-479.
- Fredrick L. Miller, "Creation and Life's Purpose: Augustine's Quest for Truth". *The Journal of Christendom College*, Vol. IV, No. 2. 1978.
- James O'Donnell, *Augustine, Sinner and Saint: A New Biography*, London: Profile Publications, 2005.
- Jared Ortiz, "You Made Us for Yourself": *Creation in Augustine's Confessions*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016.
- Joseph N. Torchia, *Creatio Ex Nihilo and the Theology of Augustine: The Anti-Manichean Polemic and Beyond*, American University Studies 205, New York: Peter Lang, 1999.
- Markus A. Austin, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- McGowan, "To Use and to Enjoy: Augustine and Ecology". *St Mark's Review* 212 (2010): 89-99.
- McFague Sallie. *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age*, London: SCM, 1987.
- Muller Earl, "The Dynamic of Augustine's *De Trinitate*: A Response to a Recent Characterization". *Augustinian Studies* 26 (1995): 65-91.
- Paul H. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*, New York: Fortress Press, 1991.
- Rist M. John, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Rowan Williams, "'Good for Nothing'? Augustine on Creation". *Augustinian Studies* 25 (1994): 9-24.

- Rowan Williams, *On Augustine*, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.
- Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
- Pope Francis. Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Sì*, (04.09.2015). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 107 (2015).
- Pope John Paul II. Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, (04.03.1979). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979).
- William A. Christian, "Augustine on the Creation of the World". *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 46. No. 1. (1953): 1-25. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1508839>
- William Wians, "Aristotle and the Problem of Human Knowledge". *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 2 (2008): 41-64.
- Yoon Kyung Kim, *Augustine's Changing Interpretations of Genesis 1-3: from De Genesi contra Manichaeos to De Genesi ad Literam*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.

Chapter Twenty

IMPLICATIONS OF THE POSTMODERNIST CHRISTIAN ATTACKS ON SACRED HISTORICAL PLACES AND OBJECTS IN SOUTHEAST (IGBO) NIGERIA

Maureen Nwando Onyejegbu, Ph.D

Institute of African Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Nwando.onyejegbu@unn.edu.ng

Executive Summary

Across the country Nigeria, communities, ever since time immemorial have traditions, customs, and heritage materials handed over to them by their forefathers which they observe and revere. Each community has a number of sacred places and cultural objects they respect and use as a medium for their traditional worship. The concept of postmodernist Christians becomes clearer from the destructive activities which the overzealous Christians wage against historical cultural objects and shrines in the southeast part of Nigeria. The investigation carried out in selected communities in Igbo land has revealed the magnitude of erosion of heritage of the people by the activities of this new form of Christians. From the findings, the paper discussed the importance of checkmating this outrageous damage to Igbo cultural objects, groves, and shrines which forms the basic foundation of the traditional belief of the people. The paper further recommends the need for traditional leaders to protect their sacred objects and places in their area due to their historical content.

Keywords: Implications, postmodernist Christians, objects, sacred places, Igbo land.

Introduction

Historical cultural objects of the African people are uncommon, unique and are considered a vital feature that made the continent solid and worthwhile through the ages. The people of this continent are attuned to rich cultural heritage hence the handover of tradition and culture from one generation to another. Here, objects matter because they are symbolic and are identified with all sectors of human life – religion, political office, economic and socio-cultural life. It is basic to clarify also that the culture of the people, both tangible and intangible, works together in providing considerable harmony to the people within their diverse communities. Ahmad (2006) defined culture as a whole complex of distinct, spiritual, emotional, and material features which define a particular society. Now, natural influences often have limitations in which they can attack man's environment while man's deliberative and destructive attacks on the environment, if not checked, are often gruesome and detrimental.

The world today is continually facing challenges in all segments of its existence. Change, they say, is constant and has in a way posed a challenge to all that concerns man and his environment. But then, if the harmful activities of man are allowed to influence uncontrollably the human environment whose immediate environment is made up of natural culture and man-made culture due to change in belief and modernization, then the environment will be an inhabitable place to live in. The two H words, H₂, meaning History + Heritage are two important words that are intertwined with the past and formed the foundation as well as serving as a major reference point to man's

present life. Good enough, in these two words are embedded the explanations to our heritage objects, sites, monuments, and sacred places. Unfortunately, there are, most recently, some prowling ignorant, shallowly minded people in the postmodernist churches who do not understand the fundamental meanings of heritage resources. Prentice (1993) said that heritage is an inheritance or a legacy, things of value which have passed down from one generation to another, and Grenz (1996: 84) has also observed that the modern world was not built in a day as neither was the postmodern rejection of modernity. Thus, challenges have been on the human environment, but, it is left to the people to curtail the destruction and carting away of their sacred places and cultural heritage objects respectively and begin to preserve them and harness the benefits attached with these gifts. At this point, this issue has become a major concern of many culture-loving people in Africa, southeast Nigeria precisely, and beyond. In observation of Burgess (2008:8), the public role of African religious movements has been a subject of recent debate.

Before the emergence of Christianity in many Igbo communities, traditional ways of worship and doing things have been in practice. In the people's cultural and traditional everyday living, they make use of objects in worshipping the gods of their land, in praying, in their traditional governance, and in celebrating life events generally. Traditional politics, religion, festivals, and events were systematically observed using objects or carried out especially in designated sites and sacred places. Most of the objects, sites and monuments in these Igbo communities have been used, preserved, and handed down to them by their forefathers for continuity. Today, the opposite seems to be the case as, according to Mills and Graften (2003:40), the force of

conversion has threatened peace and serenity of the people's heritage resources and their future potentials for tourism growth. Somewhat, this type of experience has been experienced in the Igbo community during the period of colonial rule as the imperialists labeled their traditional ways of worship dirty and backward.

Nevertheless, over the past years to the present time, the heritage hand downs have not been seen in any way as a curse to the traditional natives by the people if not that some have been manipulated by some sectional Christians for their interests and selfish purposes. Belief and respect in traditional religion made the community thrive in considerable harmony devoid of great crimes and anarchy. The crime was reduced and fear of disobedience to *ala*, the earth goddess, is practicable. *Ala*, stood as one powerful and unmovable object that has the power to destroy when angered. Thus, fear of going contrary to its stipulated rules of *nso ani* was able to reduce crime and considerable order was maintained. Those who tried to manipulate the people or the society in secret often die, but not before they do what the Igbo people call *isa asisa* (open confession) publically. Apart from the earth goddess, the Igbo people are somewhat privileged to have many other deities and objects which each community is either associated with or noted for, and which they revere so much.

The existence of these things helps in social control and in curtailing excessive acts in society. Ogbaa (1995:13) observed that the Igbo people, in spite of their society being patriarchal, also believe in the dualism of things, such as man and woman, *elu* and *ala* etc. In essence, Igbo people have distinct cultures and traditions distinct to their race what with their sacred places, objects, sites, and monuments dear to them and full of historical

meanings. In the Igbo palaces of the kings and chiefs, shrines, homes, and villages are often found objects which are the heritage of the people. Most of these objects serve political, cultural, economic, and religious purposes. Why then should some extremists take it upon themselves to wage wars in present days against the things that unite the people as one? This paper tends to find out.

Concept of Implication

People's culture is their living identity. When allowed to be abused or seen as worthless, there will be implications. Implication as a word means the consequence of what can come out of something when the right thing to be done is not done. Heritage preservation, and immeasurable security consciousness towards cultural heritage, natural and man-made, are most vital nowadays what with the rapid changes the world is facing which are also challenging as well as interfering with the ways of life of the people. There is a fundamental clash and struggle presently going on between modernization and cultural progress. There is also confusion and misunderstanding in the midst of modernization, Christianity, and the desire to still clutch to old things that make up the people's tradition. Mustapha and Ehrhardt (2018:2) affirmed that some seek to understand the encounters between these transnational religions in terms of a 'clash of civilizations. They also observed that neglect of preserving cultural-religious objects can conflate economic crises. However, if there is adequate protection to today's cultural objects, sacred places, old sites, and monuments, the implication is that tomorrow will be progressive in Africa. Likewise, there will be a negative implication when these are allowed to be trampled upon as there will be no evidence for future generations. It will also grossly affect the tourism

potentials of the given community. Robinson and Picard (2006:9) have observed that tourism is today a global phenomenon.

Postmodernism concept and the postmodernist Christians

Many a time we have heard that 'our strength lies in our diversity and that 'our cultural diversity is to the nation's advantage'. People's strength, style, and quality lie in their cultural heritage which when collectively brought together with other cultures becomes a distinctive culture in its own diversity. How then do we explain the liberty taken by some ignorant extremists who call themselves religious extremists or postmodernist Christians to mar the fundamental things that make up our heritage? How then do we explain the dire destruction of that segmental cultural diversity of the Igbo people by some shamus? How then do we not speak out and stop the arrogant destruction of these Christians who has left the four walls of their churches to interfere with the roots that hold the people and made them? What is postmodernism and who are the postmodernist Christians of today?

The word postmodernism comes after modernism. Postmodernism has been described as a word that is very difficult to decipher. The *post* preceding modern in postmodernism indicates that it is a word that came after modernism. According to Smith (2006:15), postmodernism tends to be something of a chameleon portrayed as either a monster or saviour. Postmodernists have the opinion that does not complement the modernist worldview in opinion and in belief. Postmodernism condemns everything that is modern. Postmodernists can be found in most organizations or communities of the world. Their major work is criticism. They challenge the modernist style of life, influence drastic changes on what they feel is bad, and bring in their change which they

believe to be the best. Furthermore, they believe in the destruction of what they feel is not in line with their belief system thereby interfering with other people's cultures and personal beliefs and even without thinking that they are harming the people. To this class of people, things must be done or channeled to be done only from their own point of view. Westphal (1999:45) said that these postmodernists are anti-modern in their rejection to enlightenment and to reason.

Postmodernist Christians love to influence changes they feel are right in their own view of society. They are the overzealous pastors, priests, and 'men of God' of today who for the past few years in Igbo land are bent on criticizing the people's traditional faith and in destroying their sacred places and objects. Their thoughts are often superficial because they fail to think deeply that the cultural heritage of the people means a lot to them and are the things that sustained them till the present. To gain fame, the popularity of being strong and be seen as highly spiritual as well as win more converts, they take to taking wars of destruction against communities' traditional sites and objects. Mbiti (1991:24) affirms that shrines, sacred places, and religious objects are outward and material expressions of religious ideas and beliefs. They help people in practicing and handing down their religion. In the eyes of the postmodernist Christians, anyone who is not in their religion or sees things their way is treading on the unsafe ground which must be uprooted. A good number of these people is seen among the Pentecostal Christians. As Rio, MacCarty and Blanes observed (2017:12) Pentecostalism problematizes relativism and translation and according to Nwauwa and Anyanwu (2020:3), regrettably, the activities relating to Pentecostalism-trend of miracle crusades and prosperity tendencies-have contributed immensely in the

bastardization of the *nto ala*. Famous theorists of postmodernism include Jean- Francois Lyotard.

In today's churches, postmodernists exist both in the Pentecostal and Orthodox churches such as the Catholic churches where they have the postmodernist priests often labeled as 'radical priests' and in the Pentecostal churches and new generational churches where they are referred to as 'powerful pastors or men of God' all aiming at bringing drastic changes to the cultural institutions and belief of the people in the name of delivering the land. They introduce crusades, conversion, and deliverance programmes in Igbo communities and castigate the cultural objects, sites, shrines, and monuments of the local people. A popular case study of where this wanton destruction has taken place most noticeably in recent times in Igbo land is Enugu-Ezike community near Nsukka in Enugu state. Gordon (2009:12) said that the term conversion is often used to refer to a change from one religious tradition or denomination within a tradition or world religion. Thus, by their overzealous preaching, they chastise both the good and the bad. In their desire and radicalism in trying to destroy the labeled negative and unproductive religious and cultural beliefs of the people, they include in their destruction, the good and fundamental cultural heritage of the people, both tangible objects and non-tangible cultures. Smith (2006:18) said that the notion of postmodernism is invoked as poison within the contemporary church and to some post-modernity, is the bane of Christian faith.

Igbo land

A regular scholar need not be introduced into the explanation of who the Igbo people are or where Igbo land is located. Nevertheless, for the less informed in this regard, Igbo land is in the southeast part of Nigeria and is the home of the Igbo people.

According to Falola (2001: 5), the major ethnic groups in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. Five states presently make up the states in Nigeria and are inhabited by the Igbo people. These are Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Abia, and Anambra states. The popular language of the Igbo people is the Igbo language. The Igbo language has different dialects distinct to each state. An important fact has been narrated by Ogbaa (1995:15) about the Igbo people when he said that 'as a result of the Igbo's worldview their religious life influences their secular life very much'. The people are culture-loving, hospitable, hardworking, and hospitable. These are just a few of their characteristics. Europeans first introduction into the Igbo hinterland was typically based on three factors namely Christianity, trading, and administration. The Igbo people are traditional people who value their customs, traditions, and values very much. Ellong and Chehab (2019:13) note that religion gives even fewer arguments to explain the form of ousung and that numerous are both pagan and monotheist places of cult that are built, or not built. In some cases, the variation of forms follows that of religions. They have reverence for their ancestors. Many communities have sacred sites, shrines, and traditional objects used for traditional healing, communication with their ancestors, or for divination purposes to determine the way forward for their life and that of their community. These practices are part and parcel of their history, heritage, and culture in which they were very comfortable with. Lowenthal (2003:31) expatiated that heritage starts with what individuals inherit and bequeath. On conversion, Peel (2015:2) note that religious process, went with the adoption of a whole complex of values.

Sacred places and cultural objects in Igbo Land

Africa has a very rich heritage of what past generations of African people thought or did, experienced, and passed on to their children. This heritage forms a long life that links African forefathers and mothers with the descendants who now feel proud of it (Mbiti, 1975:1)

Many things are given by nature to define man and complete his life and ecosystem as earlier mentioned. These are the natural and cultural sites, shrines, monuments, objects targeted to make human society livable and complete. Without sentimental attachments, human society is programmed by nature to be the way they are. Any external influence targeted or bent on destroying them will leave the environment incomplete and vulnerable. Culture and all the cherished heritage products of the people, both tangible and intangible, provide the basis for the continuation of a community's identity in a given place or a given ethnic race. With the continuous global changes and challenges, it becomes imperative that folks decide which of their affairs handed down to them by their ancestors as heritage stays or be allowed to be influenced, trampled upon or be destroyed by external influences.

Before attempting to discuss the influence of the postmodernist Christians on our cultural heritage, it becomes imperative we discuss and understand cultural objects and shines and other natural cultural sites and objects given to man by nature. It is also important that indigenes understand what tourism is all about as their rich cultural heritage sites and objects can be fully harnessed for greater tourism growth. Robinson and Picard (2006:57) has stated that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations' (UNESCO) aim for tourism, culture and development agenda is to contribute to the

creation of a discerning type of tourism that recognizes the principles of cultural diversity, the preservation of fragile, cultural and natural resources'. Societies and religions of the world often have cultures distinct to them and a medium through which they consult their ancestors or the supreme creator. They also have natural habitats and sacred sites devoted for spiritual and cultural worship in their society. Sharply and Telfer (2002:126) said that sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the quality of the future generations.

Igbo people believe in the supreme God *Chi-ukwu* (the great God, residing in the heavens), then in their local gods, residing amongst them in their communities; and in their ancestors, who lives in the land of the spirit and watches over them. They venerate their local gods and ancestors through rituals and sacrifices using traditional objects. Deities are classified in degrees and are figuratively referred to as either man or woman in Igbo land and are believed to possess supernatural powers. Usually, the people in such communities are convinced that these supernatural forces have the power to influence their life and society. Thus, they serve as social control and solve the people's problems. They also believe that *Chi-ukwu* or *Chukwu*, the Almighty God, is the one who created and bestowed some elements of power of operation in the deities located in groves, shrines, and special traditional objects. In Enugu-Ezike, for example, such places exist and thrive in harmony with the people. Oftentimes, shrines are located in calm and isolated places to avoid interference with the human inhabitants. Many cult objects abound in such places and are real cultural heritage objects because they are handed down from one chief priest to another, generation after generation. It is usually the inhabitants

of the community who need solutions to life problems that seek help in the shrines and sacred places. According to Falola and Heaton (2008:17) the history of social interaction in this region, however, is certainly not meaningless or non-existent before the consolidation of the modern state of Nigeria.

Igbo people's use of objects in the veneration of their ancestors also reaches their various homesteads. Most traditional Igbo men in typical Igbo communities have ancestral altars in their homes where they venerate their personal gods and ancestors. Usually, different symbols of traditional worship such as *Ikenga*, *ofo*, etc., are found in such homesteads. White, red, and black cloths, etc., are significant, represent something deep in Igbo traditional life, and are found in private shrines and in community shrines. There is usually a chief priest who serves as a messenger to huge shrines and in the family setting the eldest man sees to the affairs of the home shrines because, at times, the position is usually by succession. The people and the community thrive normally with these practices and as Rapoport (1977:318) observed, the environment functions as an expression of culture. Further symbols and objects are for chieftaincy purposes or for cult groups such as *ozo* chieftaincy group. Thus, the people who wage wars of destruction on sacred places and objects fail to realize that these places hold the history of the people or they know but are blinded by their own selfish interests of gaining fame and popularity.

The concept of tourism

Tourism can be defined as a planned journey for recreation from one town to another or from one place to another. In the words of Sharpley (2006:5), travel and tourism is said to be the world's largest industry now. Page (2011:8) observed that tourism is all about pleasure and enjoyment. Every state or community

naturally has gifted sites and distinct objects as their heritage which other cultures will love to come to see if well harnessed. This can be referred to as heritage tourism. Also, included amongst the things that will promote heritage tourism of a given community in Igbo land are music and dancing, locally made crafts, major festivals, masquerades, etc. Lickorich and Jenkins (1997:1) stated that tourism requires an input of economic, social, cultural, and environmental nature. In fact, foreign tourists and researchers love rich communities whose cultures, sites, monuments, sacred places, and shrines have not been tampered with and which has considerable popularity. Briassoulis and Straten (2013:2) observed that tourism is considered an obvious social necessity and right for all people in both the developed and the developing world. In the opinion of Jayapalan (2001:3), travel gives good experience to the people. Such experiences gained through travel have a profound effect upon the life of the individual as well as upon the society as a whole and brings about an appreciation of other people's lifestyles.

Unnecessary destruction of heritage objects in Igbo communities: implications

Having understood that cultural heritage is called 'heritages' because they are carefully selected by the forefathers and seen as invaluable and worthy to be labeled 'cultural heritages', seen as objects enough that contribute to values and customs of the people, one can now list the implications of being loose and allowing few zealous citizens to destroy these cultures and traditions that have existed for a long time. Even if there are aspects of the local traditions and cultures which are negative and a threat to human society and their culture, the decision to do away with such cultures can only be decided by the people and their elders collectively. Only then can they be terminated

peacefully. There should be unanimous agreement when taking decisions on collective heritage. Lowenthal (2003:2) said that religious analogy extends to modes of belief... heritage relies on revealed faith rather than on rational proof.

Though this prevalent problem of overzealous conversion of the people by some pastors, priests and men of God are rampant in most Igbo communities, the activities of postmodernist Christians in recent times pertaining to tampering with cultural objects in shrines in Enugu-Ezike for instance was somewhat disturbing at a time. This community and many others in Igbo land have many elderly people who still believe in traditional religion. Thus, the worship of the gods in shrines where sacred objects abound exists. The perception of the postmodernist Christians towards shrines and groves in Igbo land is that they all have demonic influences. Quest for forced conversion of indigenes to Christian religion has led to this manipulation and brainwashing. Destruction and nonchalant attitudes towards the preservation of the people's history and their heritage objects are dangerous to tomorrow's future history especially at this time when Nigeria is trying to organize herself culturally and otherwise. Hartle (1972:57) observed that:

During the recent civil war, we lost all of our equipment and library, all of the ethnographic collections, and most of our antiquities. The present and the future are not quite so dismal, however, and we are now "picking up the pieces" acquiring new collections and rebuilding.

Destruction of cultural heritage sites and heritages is harmful now and will devastate the history of the Igbo people within and outside Nigeria as well affect their tourism potentials. More so, it will reduce the quality of their natural environment and make their natural communities superficial and with no cultural

substance. Further implications is that it will reduce the level of evidence materials that will be shown to the children as real facts when telling them stories of their forefathers in the future. It further degrades the entire natural environment in Igbo communities and makes them lose balance. In tourism growth and in education, it leaves the community bare that tourists and researchers will no longer find them attractive to come and explore. Briassoulis and Straten (2013:40) mentioned that the relationship between tourism and the environment can be regarded in the broader context of economy-environment and relationships while Holden (2000:2) mentioned that the idea for travel for pleasure, for example, to visit beautiful landscapes demonstrate religious piousness which is also a recent phenomenon.

Some of the specialist fields of knowledge who fundamentally understand the value and the need for the preservation of Igbo cultural heritage both tangible and intangible include archaeologists, historians, African studies students, cultural custodians and the likes. These people see the need for the safeguarding of all cultural sites and objects and hate the wits of the topical, half-baked and overzealous priests and pastors who are too eager to preach heaven through destroying the things that hold the people together. They failed to observe that forceful conversion of people into new religion like Christianity does not bring out the best in such people and often brings confusion into the society. The postmodernist Christians of today have also failed to realize that even the colonial masters who brought Christianity into Igbo land did not force all the community members with a whip to go to the church as seen in Achebe's (1986) work.

Factors that encourage the postmodernist Christians

Folks should understand that some of the factors leading to the destruction, attacks and carting away of their cultural objects in the shrines, sites and monuments are as a result of selfish interests, quest for fame and too much respect given to the pastors, ministers of God, priests , prayers warriors and their likes. Often times, some of the desires of such people listed are based on falsehood designed to lure the people away from their cultures and traditions given to them by their forefathers by preaching fear into them. It is postulated that the bad traditions of the people be done away with the collective community decision while the positive ones remains. Decisions must not come from the postmodernist Christians who love to superimpose their decisions on other people's culture. Often times, ignorance, lack of enlightenment and confusion due to civilization clouds the people's reasoning and make them to allow strangers of the new age to label all their heritage and cultures evil and demonic. Another truthful fact is that, according to Forshee (2006:130), people often consider natural and supernatural spirits as the primary causes of misfortunes.

It is also an unfortunate reality that most of the core traditionalists and custodians of cultures in these communities in Igbo land have either died or are too aged to fight for their rights. Civilization and rapid developments in recent times is also a great challenge to the people's cultural heritage because most of the young men and women in these Igbo villages have either gone away from the villages to schools elsewhere in the towns or have gone to seek their future means of survivals through trading in developed cities of Nigeria and beyond such as Onitsha, Enugu, Lagos and so on. Most Igbo communities are now very quiet and devoid of able-bodied men who can fight for their elders and their rights. This has created a problem to the

preservation of their cultural heritage. Such quiet communities, therefore, become vulnerable and always the first port of call to newly evangelists trying to prove their spiritual powers and efficiency.

Positive gains of preserving sacred places and shrines

Leads to community development - Preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage handed down to each community in Igbo land by their forefathers often leads to community development and also promotes cultural identity of the people. When the activities of the postmodernist Christians are not checked and when they are allowed to destroy at will and without respect the heritage of the people, it brings about confusion and low self-esteem to the people. It equally brings dishonour to the ancestors who handed these things down for preservation for the sake of future generations. When a community preserves its cultural heritage, other communities will have more regard for them. Aligwekwe (2008) affirm that Igbo cultural phenomenon embodied a complexity of social, moral economic, political, and philosophical explanations.

It leads to tourism development in a given community - instead of allowing the postmodernist Christians to go on with their unwanted and uncontrolled destruction of our cultural heritages in the Igbo communities, efforts will be put in place to check this negative incident in Igbo communities like Enugu-Ezike. These heritage sites and objects can be well preserved and when awareness is created, tourism outlets will be opened. In other words, historical monuments, objects, sites, can be preserved and maintained to yield resources for the communities through tourism development.

It boosts pride and self-esteem in one's culture - Preservation of the cultural heritage of the people is beneficial because it builds self-esteem and confidence in one's culture. It is important for communities in Igbo land who are facing the annihilation of their culture to put a drastic stop to these postmodernist Christians who are supposed to mind the four walls of their churches and not leave it to destroy people's tangible cultures and heritage objects. When culture and all that makeup culture such as shrines, sacred places, objects, and so on are safely protected and guarded jealously, it will create originality and beauty of the environment and balance to the ecosystem.

Cultural heritage and need for Security

Everything created by God and made by man is important and matters for the survival of human beings. Likewise, traditional ways of living and worship have their positive benefits. They bring harmony to society. Also, the rituals, fears, respects, and taboos associated with them bring some levels of sanity to the villages. It limits crimes and evils in societies where the environments have been allowed to remain the way they were created. Thus, just as children rely on parents for their foods, clothing, and schooling; just as societies look upon the law of their lands for the system to operate smoothly, in the same vein, indigenes look upon their cultural objects, sacred places, and sites together with their chief attendants and traditional medicine healers for solution to their spiritual, emotional, physical and social problems. For generations, the people's faith and belief in these places and objects have sustained them and improved their lives. In recent times, it has been proved that the number of cultural custodians in most Igbo communities joining the Christian folks to the detriment of their cultural heritage and their preservation has increased. This is a problem and needs to be checked now as the security of cultural history and heritage

of the people is at stake. Awareness has to be created in this regard.

Recommendations

The activities of the postmodernist (new) Christians in most parts of Igbo land are worrisome. Butter (2002) discussed the key ideas of the postmodernists. He sees those involved in postmodernism as members of loosely constituted and quarrelsome political parties. For assurance, safety and proper preservation of the remaining Igbo cultural heritage objects, sacred places, and monuments, these recommendations are listed: a) There is a need for government to make laws that will restrict these Christians who comes to villages to impose forceful conversions and subsequent destruction and burning of groves, shrines and sacred objects. Government must join hands in safeguarding the culture of the people and see it as a top priority towards the preservation of the people's cultural heritage. b) The traditional rulers, chiefs, and citizens in Igbo communities experiencing this devastating occurrence must wake up to their duty and stop allowing themselves to be pushed around by postmodernist Christians because Bass and Riggio (2006) is of the opinion that better leaders are transformational more frequently while less adequate leaders are passive. Naturally, there is a place for culture and there is a place for Christian religion. While a community is defined by the elements of cultures mentioned in this paper, the Christian religion is defined by the church, and therefore all religious activities, conversions and deliverance must be strictly held within the church and in the church premises, c) Now, because there seems to be some mix up in the midst of culture, religion, and civilization, there is, therefore, need to create awareness

programmes for the young ones to intimate them on the value of their tangible cultures.

Conclusion

The paper has been able to show that the activities of the postmodernist Christians are evil and interferes with the cultures and ways of life of the people. Nature made each community what they are. It made them unique with invaluable objects, sacred shrines, places, monuments, and sites. Many Igbo communities today such as Enugu-Ezike are being exposed to the danger of attacks in the name of modern religion called Christianity. It is also jeopardizing the tourism potentials in the communities they attack. Tourism is an avenue and new outlet that is generating money for well-composed communities that have natural habitats, shrines, objects, historical sites, and monuments. If these are well managed and properly showcased to the world, they will yield income. It, therefore, needs the intervention of the local government, the Federal government, and custodians of cultures in these Igbo communities that are affected to wake up and preserve what has been given to them by nature and by their ancestors. Sharpley and Telfer (2002:81) said that tourism is frequently justified on the basis of its potential contribution to economic development. There should, therefore, be a rule between the postmodernist Christians and the limits they will be allowed to come into Igbo communities and villages to convert the traditional people and convince them into coming to their churches for deliverance and miracles. Conversions into the Christian faith must be natural and not forced or manipulated.

References

- Achebe, C. (1986). *Arrow of God*, London: Heinemann
- Ahmad, A.G. (2006). *Cultural heritage of southeast Asia: preservation for world recognition*, J. Malaysian town plan,3(1):52
- Aligwekwe, P.E. 2008, *The continuity of traditional values in the African society* Xlibris corporation
- Bass, B. & Riggio, R.E. (2006). *Transformational leadership*, Lawrence Erlbaum associates publishers
- Briassoulis, H. & Straten J. (2013). *Tourism and the environment: regional, economic, cultural and policy issues*, Springer science and business and business media
- Burgess, R. (2008). *Nigeria's Christian revolution: the civil war revival and its Pentecostal progeny (1967-2006)*, Regnum books international
- Butter, C. (2002). *Postmodernism: a very short introduction*, Oxford university press
- Ellong E. & Chehab, D. (2019), *The African dwelling*, McFarland & co. Inc. Publishers
- Forshee, J. (2006). *Culture and customs of Indonesia*, Greenwood publishing group
- Gordon, G. (2009). *Conversion in the age of pluralism*, Brill
- Grenz, S.J. (1996). *A primer of postmodernism*, Eerdmans publishing
- Hartle, D. D. (1972). 'Antiquities in Igbo land', In Alagoa, E.J. and Awe, B. *African notes*, *Bulletin of the African studies*, University of Ibadan, Ibadan: Institute of African Studies
- Holden, A. (2000). *Environment and tourism*, London: Routledge
- Jayapalan, N. (2001). *Introduction to tourism*, Atlantic publishers

- Lickorich L.J. & Jenkins, C.L. (1997). *An introduction to tourism*, Oxford Butterworth-heinemann
- Lowenthal, D. (2003). *The heritage crusade and the spoils of history*, Cambridge University Press
- Mbiti, J.S. (1975). *Introduction to African religion*, Heinemann
- Mills, K. and Graften A. (2003). *Conversion: old and new*, University of Rochester
- Mustapha, A.R. & Ehrhardt, D. (2018). *Greed and grievance: Muslim-Christian relations and conflict resolution in northern Nigeria*, James Currey
- Nwauwa, A.P & Anyanwu, O. (2020). *Culture, precepts, and social change in Southeastern Nigeria understanding the Igbo*, Lexington books
- Ogbaa, K. (1995). *Igbo*, Rosen publishers
- Page S.J (2011), *Tourism management: an introduction*, Elsevier Ltd.
- Peel, J.D.Y (2015). *Christianity Islam, and Orisa-Religion: three traditions in comparison and interaction*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.8>
- Prentice, R. (1993). *Tourism and heritage attraction*, Routledge
- Rapoport, A. (1977). *Human aspects of urban form: towards a man environment approach to urban form and design*, Peramon
- Rio, K MacCarty, M & Blanes, R. (2017). *Pentecostalism and witchcraft: spiritual warfare in Africa and Melanesia*
- Robinson, M. and Picard, D. (2006). *Tourism, culture and sustainable development*, Unesco: Culture sector
- Sharpley, R. and Telfer, D. (2002). *Tourism and development: concepts and issues*, Clevedon: Channel view publications
- Sharpley, R. (2006). *Travel and tourism*, London: SAGE
- Smith, J. (2006). *Who's afraid of postmodernism? the church and postmodern culture*, USA: Bakar academic publishing
- Westphal, M. (1999). *Postmodern philosophy and Christian thought*, Indiana university press



A Publication of
Association for the
Promotion of African Studies