



Environmental Principles and Values in Africa: The Christian Response

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Abstract. This research is focused on Environmental principles and values in Africa: The Christian response. The environment is the habitation of man and all living and non-living things alike. It is being given to man by God to tend and control, however, human activities has greatly impacted it positively and negatively. It is clearer that we live in extraordinary times where human impacts on our environment has been so intensive or so far-reaching negatively. The future of the Earth's system and our society depend more critically than ever on the way we interact with the natural systems around us. Fundamental conditions in nutrient cycling, biodiversity, atmospheric composition and climate are changing rapidly in Africa. Understanding the African environment illuminate not only human-induced problem but tremendous opportunities we have before us for effecting positive change. This discipline draws upon the methods and findings of numerous established academic disciplines, from ecology to geology to chemistry to economics to political science to ethics and religion. This interdisciplinary pursuit stands at the vanguard of the current need to synthesize our increasingly narrow academic disciplines and to incorporate their contributions into a big picture of understanding the African world and our place within it. In the light of this paper, various authors have put forth definitions on environment, environmental justice and principles of environmental, environmental values in Africa via Christian response, African environment and sustainable development principle, the church response on environmental values in Africa. This research made use of analytical method as well as the utilisation of books, journals, internet sources etc., and recommends among others that humans should care for the earth with tenderness for its benevolence and to avert disaster.

Keywords: Africa, Christian, Environment, Justice, Principles, Values

1. Introduction

In general terms, the cosmic environment has suffered so much as humans try to explore and exploit it. Sometimes, humans do not think of possible ways in proffering solution to the damages and degradations they have caused. Christian cannot shy away from responding to this global problem that that has bedeviled the habitation of living things. We have in so many ways enslaved ourselves due to greed and selfishness. It is important to note that we are in a serious environmental warfare and the remedy is in our hands.

In defining the environment, Scott (2005) states that the environment includes the continents, clouds, ice cap, animals, plants, forest and farms that comprises the landscape around us. According to Imerbore (2008), "Environment is where we live, the ecological system subdivided into natural system, modified systems, degraded systems, cultivated system and built systems" (p. 3). Edame (2006) defined the environment as "the conditional circumstances and influences under which an organization or system exists, which may be described in terms of physical, chemical and biological features" (p. 369). For Okene (2009) "the environment consists of physical and non-physical features that can be found, observed and felt as land, sea and air, and every living and non-living organisms" (p. 78). Anubha and Kaushik (2008) defined environment as "the sum total of water, air and land and the inter-relationships that exist among them and with the human beings, other living organisms and materials" (p. 1). Ibeh (2003) defined environment as: The term generally refers to the earth system which surrounds man, wider than the term ecology, it is the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors that acts upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determines its form and survival. (p. 8).

Bonn (1999) defined environment as “the sum total of all processes and domains in which the interaction between nature and human civilization takes place, it encompasses all natural factors that influence or are influenced by human beings” (p. 9). Oyeshola (1995) defined environment as “the unit from which resources needed for human sustenance and development are obtained and into which human development is directed” (p. 3). From the above definitions, it is obvious that environment has to do with the climatic and physiological structures of a land-area, the living pattern of people and animals that dwell therein.

2. Environmental justice

Nature has given the earth to man to manage, sustain and use for his own good. But man has to use these nature’s gifts, including his environment within certain ethical specification, and thus preserve life, especially human life. On the contrary, some persons and agencies out of inordinate desire to make profit, even at the expense of the needs of humanity, have destroyed and shattered this environmental ethical order. Udechukwu (2007) saw environmental justice as “rendering to each man or human community their own due by natural right, and environmental regulatory provision” (p. 10). Environmental justice obliges those who use any productive process to compensate the owners of the land with remuneration and other valuables. It also demands that people’s environment be made habitable and free from pollution. It is term in social sciences used in describing in justice in the way natural resources are distributed. Taking cognizance of the violations and exploitations prevalent in our environments, it poses a great need to check and control wanton destruction of nature and the way natural resources are used.

However, it is a holistic effort to analyze and overcome the power structures that have traditionally thwarted environmental reforms. Central Eastern European Workshop (1991) on environmental justice asserts:

A condition of which exists when environmental risks, hazards, investments and benefits are equally distributed, without direct or indirect discrimination at all jurisdictional levels, and when access to information, participation in decision making in environmental related matters are enjoyed by all. (p. 42).

When the above is not the case, it becomes a violation of environmental justice. A glaring example of the violation of environmental justice is the case of Niger Delta. This is the continuation of the fight for liberation of environment and socio-ecological

transformation. According to Nnimmo (2023), “we do not see the earth and her bountiful resources/gifts as items that must be exploited, transformed, consumed or wasted” (p. 1). The understanding of the earth as a living entity and not a dead thing warns that rapacious exploitation that disrupts her regenerative powers are act of cruelty and ecocide.

17.1 Principles of Environmental Justice

Udechukwu (2007) vividly viewed several principles of environmental justice thus:

1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11. Environmental justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination

12. Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources

13. Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible, and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

3. African Environment and Sustainable Development Principle

This principle protects the planet from environmental degradation, preservation of biological, cultural and ethnic diversity and empowerment of citizens to have an influential voice in decisions affecting the quality of their environment. The common good principle applies where the State through subventions and other financial incentive intervenes in environmental protection efforts. This is particularly the case where it is difficult to identify particular perpetrators in certain cases. Ibeh (2003) says that "the aim of this principle is to mobilize and sharpen environmental consciousness and know-how of private and societal actors towards acceptance and implementation of set environmental protection measures" (p. 105).

The sustainability of African environment requires the preventive and precautionary laws to be put in action to stop further pollution or damage to the environment. Oyeshola (2008) says that international obligation

should not allow activities which cause damage to territories of other states and areas beyond national jurisdiction. This principle stresses that environmental pollution or damage should be completely or as much as possible be avoided. Ibeh (2003) stresses that it is a future –oriented measure of ensuring that the environmental protection is internalized in all the phases of production and distribution, so that present and future generations as well as the entire ecosystem are in no way adversely affected.

The principle of polluter must pay provides that the costs of environmental pollution should be borne by those whose activities were responsible for causing the pollution. Oyeshola (2008) states that at the specific level, it has been held that identified polluters should be required to pay the full costs of the rectification of any environmental degradation that has occurred as a result of their activities.

Ibeh (2003) opines that the aim of this principle is the avoidance or minimizing of environmental damage. Therefore, no one is immune from his moral and economic obligation to protect the environment. In this respect, policies promoting or perpetuating apartheid, racial segregation, discrimination, colonial and other forms of oppression and foreign domination stand condemned and must be eliminated in African environment.

4. The Place of Humans in Fostering Environmental Values in Africa

Africans have high value for the environment. This is manifest in shifting cultivations, allowing the farmland to go fallow for nutrients, keeping of certain bush as sacred as abode of the gods, etc. In Africa, it is a taboo for anyone to have sex in the bush as it is a desecration of the land which requires cleansings. However, the following are environmental values in Africa via Christian response

The Earth as God's Gift to Man:

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) article 2402 teaches that:

In the beginning, God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his needs and the

needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men. (p. 650).

Ikeke (2008) opines that God the Creator gave the goods of nature for the common good of all peoples. Onaiyekan (2008) cried out that much of the crisis in the Niger Delta is as a result of a callous and careless exploitation of oil without due regard for the environment today and the consequences for the years to come. According to Ikeke (2008) we take from nature and that makes animals and birds to be homeless, we should create places for them to dwell. On this issue, the Justice, Development and Peace/Caritas Commission (2006) enumerate:

The environment is our responsibility to care for. As good stewards we must use the resources of nature carefully for the benefit of all both now and for the future. The teaching of the Catholic Church on the integrity of creation emphasizes that what happens to the environment is our responsibility. It is our duty to protect the environment. (p. 103).

The earth is not to be dominated and conquered. Still on this the article 2415 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) enumerates:

The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation. (p. 689).

Man as Overseer of the Environment:

The Catholic teaching affirms that it is unjust and immoral to allow animals to suffer needlessly. The act of stewardship is very essential. To care for the earth is a reflection which authorizes an eco-theological reversal of Jesus' expression in Matt. 16:26: what then will a man gain if he wins heaven and losses the world? It then means that the journey towards heaven rightly understood as salvation involves taking care of the earth and environment. Nwachukwu (2010) says "if you do not love trees, you cannot love God" (p. 26). Definitely, we are going to be judged on the tenderness and respect we manifest towards nature as expression of the glory of God. The care for the earth has to be done through urgent practical and concrete actions. Ukwuije (2010) articulated the impact of religion on the environment thus:

To make the earth habitable beyond the present generation and to guarantee sustainable and responsible cares of the earth, we call upon the particular churches to: promote environmental education and awareness; persuade their local and national governments to adapt policies and binding legal regulations for the protection of the environment and promote alternative and renewable sources of energy; and encourage all to plant trees and threat nature and its resources; respecting the common good and the integrity of nature, with transparency and respect for human dignity. (pp. 26-27).

Gbenda (2010) states that religious scholars and theologians are taking up the common theme that environmental crisis are merely a symptom of a deeper spiritual crisis. The implication in the words of Fohz (2003) is that "whatever may occur within the realms of technology and politics, the environmental crisis cannot and will not be resolved unless its spiritual dimensions are addressed" (p. 9).

Man to Relate with the Environment:

Paul II (cited by Igbo, 2010) said that "humans are empowered that they should communicate with nature as guardians and stewards and not as heedless exploits and destroyers" (p. 50). Nwachukwu (2010) said that the created world exists as a network of lives woven from threads of dependence and interdependence. In their governance of created nature, human beings need wisdom to understand the interconnections that make up the integrity of the ecosystem and which enhances its generative potentials. Therefore, an attitude of domination and triumphalism over nature and nature's exploitation for humanity's immediate need is an environmental injustice against God's 'Shalom', against nature and against future generations. The consequence of this act of injustice is environmental disaster. The Justice, Development, Peace/Caritas Commission (2006) on this principle declared thus:

The goods of the natural order are collective good which God has created for us for our good. We have the spiritual responsibility to conserve non-replaceable resources of the environment such as oil and gas. In the same, we have the moral obligations to replenish the renewable resources of the environment such as trees and animal. We also have the responsibility to maintain a health surrounding through cleaning dustbins and waste heaps that can generate diseases. We must support and work with organizations that seek to improve and protect the environment because the environment is our collective good. (p. 104).

The above principles are not the only ones in existence that can help guide the management of environmental resources. But most of them can be subsumed under

the above. It behooves religious leaders to promote these values in their various local congregations and communities.

5. The Church Response on Environmental Values in Africa

Humans and Exploitation of the Earth:

Nwachukwu (2010) observed that the church has contributed immensely to the ongoing discussions and search for understanding, interpretation and provision of solution to the environmental crisis. Being a matter of great importance to the Christian faith, the Church Magisterium; through her social teachings, has given several teachings that articulate valid Christian response and contribution to the environmental discourse. Paul II (cited in Nwachukwu, 2010) avers that human exploitation of the earth brings about the negative effects of scientific discoveries in the areas of industry, agriculture and medicine. They highlight- especially the painful fact that where nature is violated, environmental crisis is sure to erupt. In describing environmental crisis, The Second Synod for Africa (cited in Ukwuije, 2010) states thus:

We observe that many human beings, at all levels, have continued to abuse nature and destroy God's beautiful world by exploitation of natural resources beyond what is sustainable and useful. There is an irresponsible degradation and senseless destruction of the earth, which is 'our mother'. In complicity with those who exercise political and economic leadership in Africa, some businesses, governments and multinational and transnational companies engage in business that pollute the environment, destroy flora and fauna, thus causing unprecedented erosion and desertification of large areas of arable land. All these threaten the survival of mankind and the entire eco-system. (p. 18).

Global Warming and Climate Change Occasioned by Human Activities:

Today the world is suffering from global warming and greenhouse which are also responsible for the ozone layer depletion. Benedict XVI (2009) called for a global solidarity in tackling the problem of climate change, desertification, deforestation, environmental degradation and pollution and the loss of biodiversity. Paul II (1990) in a "World Day of Peace" said that the ecological crisis in the Niger Delta is a moral crisis for all humanity, and the environment is ethnically significant in its own right. Nature has intrinsic value as God's creation. Today, the ecological problem (crisis) has assumed such proportion as to be the responsibility of everyone.

Gbenda, 2010) stated that the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs and Christian Association of Nigeria should put in place organizations of climate change action, in which every Muslim and Christian should be a member. In this way, the campaign for care and protection of the earth plane will reach the grass roots levels.

Humans must Respect the Environment:

Hart (2004) said that Pope Benedict XVI maintained that the respect for creation is of great importance because creature is the beginning and the foundation of all God's works. Its preservation is essential for pacific co-existence of mankind. Gbenda (2010) declared that the church is concern as an expert in humanity to call attention to the relationship between the creator, humans and the created order. He asked a vital question – can we remain indifferent before the problems associated with such realities as climate change? Hessel (2009) states the four basic norms of eco-justice ethics to include:

Solidarity with other people and creatures – companies, allies, victims in the earth community, reflecting a deep respect for creation; ecological sustainability– environmentally filling habits of living and working that enable life to flourish and utilizes ecologically and socially appropriate technology; sufficiency as a standard of organized sharing; requiring basic floors and definite ceiling for equitable or fair consumption and socially just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage community life for the good of the commons. (pp. 1-3).

Humans must not Use the Earth Wastefully:

Dorr (1990) said that when we use the resources of the earth wastefully, we are stealing from future generations and it is done at the expense of the poor. For the main breakthrough to come on the ground, the Christian communities and individual Christian must develop a spirituality which combines belief in God's providence and human salvation in Christ with a deeper sensitivity to the beauty, the energy, and the fragility of our world. In this way, we can play our part in saving the world.

Sibani (2022) posits that wastefulness of the resources of our environment are seen in the political actors in our African society. The manifestation of wastefulness is found in several abandonment of governmental projects such as abandoned roads, infrastructures like houses, schools, ministries, etc. There is always no continuity in completion of projects worth millions and billions of naira by succeeding administrations in Nigeria and most African countries. It is painful how politicians waste the resources of their States by spending millions of naira on one small bottle of drink

which if properly channeled could pay the school fees of the poor and educationally disadvantaged ones in the society.

Also, Sibani (2022) avers that the act of investing in an unrealistic project by humans are very common and counter-productive in any given society. We need to change our attitude towards humans and the environment as our actions are directly and negatively impacting on our environment and generations yet unborn. Some humans are very unfriendly and always throw away unused clothes, left-over food and valuables which can be beneficial to the less-privileged amongst them. We need to do away with wastefulness and care for the poor and hungry in the society.

Humans must Live Peaceably with the Environment:

The Christian religion says: “blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Environmental resources cannot be well managed in an atmosphere of hostility, conflicts, insecurity and so on. It is against this background that World Council of Churches (cited by Gbenda, 2010) states:

It is also the debt owed by economically and politically powerful national elites to marginalized citizens, the debt owed by current generations of humanity to future generations; and so on a more cosmic scale, the debt owed by human kind to other life forms and the planet. It includes social damages, such as disintegration of indigenous and other communities. (p. 170).

Sean (1986), Borry (1988) and Dorr (1991) agreed in one view that the church can make a major contribution on the issue of ecological crisis, degradation and pollution by developing, preaching and practicing a holistic spirituality which promotes partnership with nature rather than exploitation of its resources. This involves a notable change of perspective in Christian teaching. It means abandoning the other-worldly, escapist spirituality which was common until fairly recently.

6. Conclusion

Christianity has been influencing and is still influencing the environment. God gave man the environment to tend and care for and as well make it conducive for his habitation. No doubt, man in the spirit of exploiting the earth and as well as subduing it, has made the environment to react against humanity hence, the flood, air pollution, acid rain, environmental degradation, desertification, erosion,

deforestation and all forms of ills. Modern technology has led to the above. Christianity is a force that has been preaching and is still preaching against man’s selfish attitude to the environment. The Christian religion sees man at the center of the problems in the world today and calls for a right attitude as stewards of God to care, promote, love, keep and preserve the environment. Hence, the cry for afforestation and tending it will in no small measure give us the desired result and life will become an easy ride on earth.

7. Recommendations

- This calls for require remediation, restoration of all the degraded territories and pay reparation to the direct victims or their heirs
- End destructive extraction no matter the appeal of capital
- Recognize the right of Mother Earth and codify ecocide as rime akin to genocide, war crime and other unusual crimes.
- The church should urgently preach on environmental values in Africa and promote afforestation and discourage deforestation.

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