

Ogun State and Environmental Pollution: The Place of the Church

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Abstract

Climate disasters are on the rise with pollution as one of the major causes. Around 70 per cent of disasters are now climate related – up from around 50 per cent for more than two decades ago. The study explored the issue of environmental crises which is one of the major concerns for humanity. These environmental pollution related disasters take a heavier human toll and come with high impact. The cost of responding to such disasters has risen tenfold between 1992 and 2008. Destructive sudden heavy rains, intense tropical storms, repeated flooding and droughts are likely to increase, as will the vulnerability of local communities in the absence of strong concerted action from all quarters. Therefore, this paper concluded that an environmental and ecological crisis, pollution in particular, demands the active role of the Church for solution in such a way that it will foster development. To tackle these identified environmental pollutions and its attendant ecological crises like depletion, desertification and deforestation, climate changes, drought and floods and other natural problems with pollution topping the list threatening life on earth, this paper recommended among other things that stemming environmental and ecological crisis demands that the Church take into account ecological norms as part of the mandate of Jesus in Matthew 28: 19-20 which is to preach the good news.

Keywords: Church, Climate, Environmental Pollution, Ogun State, Pollutant, Religion.

Introduction

Little works were written about the synergy between the Environment and Religion vis-à-vis man's exploitative tendencies and their resulting effects until White's lecture, 'The historical roots of present-day ecologic crisis' was delivered on December 26, 1966, at the Washington meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). In the article that was later published in the Journal 'Science' in 1967, White conjectured that 'the Christians' influence in the middle Ages were the root of ecological crisis in the 20th century' (Alabi, 2017). White's article was based on the premise that 'all forms of life modify their context,' that is: we all create change in our environment. He believed man's relationship with the natural environment was always a dynamic and interactive one, even in the middle ages, but marked the Industrial Revolution as a fundamental turning point in our ecological history. He suggested that 'at this point the hypotheses of science were married to the possibilities of technology and our ability to destroy and exploit the environment was vastly increased.'

Nevertheless, he also suggested that the mentality of the Industrial Revolution, that the earth was a resource for human consumption, was much older than the actuality of machinery, and has its roots in medieval Christianity and attitudes towards nature. He further suggested that what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Citing the Genesis creation story he argued that:

Judeo-Christian theology had swept away pagan animism and normalized exploitation of the natural world because: (1) The Bible asserts man's dominion over nature and establishes a trend of anthropocentrism. (2) Christianity makes distinction between man (formed in God's image) and the rest of creation, which has no soul or reason and is thus inferior.

Driving his point home, he posited that these beliefs have led to an indifference towards nature which continues to impact in an industrial, 'post-Christian' world. He concluded that applying more science and technology to the problem won't help, that it is humanity's fundamental ideas about nature that must change; one must abandon superior,

contemptuous attitudes that make man willing to use the earth for his slightest whim.' White suggests adopting St. Francis of Assisi as a model in imagining a 'democracy' of creation in which all creatures are respected and man's rule over creation is delimited (Alabi, 2017).

However, brilliant his views and accurate he thought he was, White's ideas set off an extended debate about the role of religion in creating and sustaining the West's destructive attitude towards the exploitation of the natural world. It also galvanized interest in the relationship between history, nature and the evolution of ideas, thus stimulating new fields of study like environmental history and eco-theology. However, many saw his argument as a direct attack on Christianity and other Bible commentators think his analysis of the impact of the Bible, and especially Genesis is misguided. They argued that Genesis provides man with model of 'stewardship' rather than dominion, and asks man to take care of the world's environment.

It is well established that everything in this universe, including the sun, moon, stars, and galaxies are created by God with a purpose and in a balanced way. The Bible in Genesis 1: 1-3 states categorically about the proportionate nature of everything created by God. It also informs that the environment is not meant for human beings alone, but for all of His creatures. This may be beautifully summarised as follows: And every kind of thing is produced on the earth in due balance and measure. The mineral kingdom supports the vegetable and they in their turn support the animal, and there is a link of mutual dependence between them. Excess is eliminated; the waste of one is made the food of another, and vice versa. And this is a chain of gradation and inter-dependence.

Attempts are being made at different levels to check the menace of environmental pollution in recent times. The June 1972 world conference on human environment in Stockholm which was attended by 112 countries and which consequently led to the creation of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) marked the beginning of such steps. Twenty years after, in June 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) met at Rio de Janeiro and came up with some principles which are relevant to sustainable development. In Nigeria, the 1987 dumping of toxic waste in Koko village in Delta State forced the Federal Government to promulgate the Harmful Waste Decree 42 of 1988, which led to the establishment of the then

Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA). The Agency and other relevant Ministries were later merged to form the Federal Ministry of Environment in 1999. To address the challenges of effective enforcement of environmental laws, standards and regulations therefore, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) was established in 2007 (NESREA, 2013).

The Environment

However, recently the role of environment in the survival of human race became better understood and it became clear that environment is a global common heritage which is only on lease to any particular human generation and therefore must be used with utmost care for generations following to be able to meet their environmental and developmental needs. Defining the environment, Alabi opined that:

Environmental Pollution is any discharge of material or energy into water, land, or air that causes or may cause acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term) detriment to the Earth's ecological balance or that lowers the quality of life. Pollutants may cause primary damage, with direct identifiable impact on the environment, or secondary damage in the form of minor perturbations in the delicate balance of the biological food web that are detectable only over long time periods. Recorded evidence has also shown that the environment represents a wide range of the external circumstances, conditions and the things that affect the existences and development of an individual organism, group, and or society (2017: 10).

In another development, quoting Bajah and Youdeowei Alabi (2017:15) simplify the term environment as follow,

Environment is about the things which we find around us. These things are important and affect our lives in many ways. It is the area around us. Our environment contains many things; some things in the environment are living while other things are non-living.

The above simplification of the environment seems to lay more emphasis on the fact that the environment belongs to both man, animals,

and plants. They further aver that many factors contribute to the environmental changes around us. As human beings act, some of the actions cause changes in the environment and these changes affect lives in many ways because all created beings depend on the environment for almost everything.

Environmental Pollutant

Ahmad, Hashim, and Al Hachim (1997) identified five major pollutants of the water, land, air and atmosphere: natural phenomena like sunshine; toxic chemicals and gases; fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil; minerals like mercury; and the nuclear explosion. There are scientists, however, who preach the gospel of anthropogenic (man-made) carbon dioxide-generated global warming. Some human factors attributed to environmental degradation include deforestation, industrialisation, urbanisation, conflicts and overpopulation, among others. Relying upon this, Ologunorisa (2011) identified four salient causes of climatic variation ascribed to human activities: increase in the CO₂ content of the atmosphere; artificial generation of heat; interference with the ozone layer by pollution; and alteration in the earth's albedo.

From the above, it could be seen that the emission of greenhouse gases is due largely to an ever increasing rate of human population which culminates in human struggle for survival through agricultural and industrial activities which consequently lead to ecological degradation, global warming and greenhouse gases emission. The new religious movements in Nigeria, however, have joined the band of environmental polluters in their evangelisation bids and serious competitions among themselves through acquisition and clearing of vast land for camp purposes, with no regard for their adverse implications on the environment. This paper aims at studying how religious activities have resulted in excessive burning of fossil fuels, artificial generation of heat and deforestation and land clearing, all of which are the causes of environmental pollution. The focus of this study is on Ogun State in particular and Nigeria in general where adherents of Christianity and Islam compete in exploiting the environment. There are also the African Traditional Religion practitioners who carry out activities that cause environmental degradation.

Ogun State and Pollution

One of the areas hit by Pollution is Ogun State, South Western part of Nigeria. This can be attributed to the degradation of the cattle waste, cattle feed, burning of cow skin and horns using tyres and hot discharges, which are mostly oxygen demanding. Vehicular emission from the busy express road which is washed by rain and run into the water is a major contributor of heavy metals and other oxygen demanding substances in this area. Gasoline, heavy-duty oil and lubricating oil are all supplemented with additives, such as metallic soaps and organic metal compounds e.g., tetraethyl lead in gasoline and molybdenum sulphide in lubricating oil. These metals then found their ways into the environment when the oils are combusted or disposed of in an environmentally inappropriate ways.

For instance, Ogun river around the cattle market, Isheri, along Ibadan-Lagos express road is presently being overstressed by pollution loads mainly from the cattle market and the pollutants can be said to be from the cattle waste, feeds, slaughter houses and run-off from the busy express road etc. Hence, the water around the market is presently been polluted. This needs to be checked since accumulation of the pollutants over time will have detrimental effects on the Lagos lagoon, which is the final sink.

Although, river purify itself through the process of dilution and mixing, sorption and sedimentation in physical processes, solubility, acid-base and redox reactions, digestion, respiration and photosynthesis in biological processes. It is never restored back to its pristine freshness due to the type of pollution, the type and quantity of the biomass, the river profile, the geometry of the bio-top, pH, temperature, depth and availability of dissolved oxygen and also, trace metals which are not usually eliminated from the aquatic ecosystem by natural processes, in contrast to most organic pollutants. Thus, they tend to accumulate in bottom sediment from where they may be released into water by various processes of remobilization and in changing form especially during mining can move up the biologic chain, thereby reaching human beings where they produce chronic and acute ailments.

Increased levels of nitrogen and phosphorus were observed around the cattle market and the N:P ratio was calculated and found to be around 91%. This will have a negative impact on the water, since

phosphorus concentration in excess of 0.015 mg LG^l and nitrogen concentration of about 0.3 mg LG^l are sufficient to cause algal bloom. Again, Phosphorus is the limiting nutrient in fresh water aquatic systems and it functions as the growth-limiting factor because is usually present in very low concentration. Excessive concentrations of phosphorus can quickly cause extensive growth of aquatic plants and algal blooms. Concentration of phosphate was higher than that of nitrate in most points around the cattle market. Atmospheric nitrogen also rains down into streams, lakes, rivers and coastal waters and the increased nitrogen then contributes to the algae blooms that deprive fish and other aquatic organisms of oxygen (Oketola and Osibanjo, 2006). Thus, high nitrogen and phosphorus in water leads to algal bloom and eventually, eutrophication, which is excessive enrichment of water body with nutrients whose consequences are detrimental to the life forms in the water.

Religion, a Factor in Pollution

There also exist various religious injunctions concerning man's interaction with the environment for sustainable development. However, it seems that both the divine laws and man-made laws on environmental preservation are not respected by the so called "men of God". The story of Joseph narrated in the Bible is highly relevant here. Joseph received a report that Pharaoh, the then king of Egypt had a dream where he saw seven lean cows devouring seven fat cows and seven green ears of corn, and then seven withered ones (Genesis 41: 1-7). Joseph interpreted the dream to mean seven years of abundant harvest to be followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41: 25-32). To ensure sustainable food and economic development, Joseph suggested that "for seven years you shall sow continuously, then what you reap leave it on the ear, except a little whereof you eat" (Gen. 41: 33-37). In essence, Christianity enjoins that unless the excesses in utilization of the resources are checked, no sustainable development can take place. Religious bodies are therefore expected to save for the rainy days and to think of the future generation. As Taeb and Kambu (2008, p. 25) explained, "the quest for sustainable development is to ensure the future generations to enjoy life as much as we do." This is also the essence of the Brundtland Report which sees sustainable development as a development that "meets the need of the

present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Reid, 1995). The proliferation of places of worship may be seen as a sign of development, but if spirituality is downplayed, such a development is not sustainable. Spirituality should be such as to affect the mind and spirit, and reflect in the actions and deeds of those who profess the religion.

Religion has been considered by scholars to be relevant to any climate change discourse. This, according to Coward (cited in Posas, 2007), is for three reasons. One, religion is a major part of human civilisation and its wisdom may offer guidance. Two, many people believe in one or another religion, and hence an appeal for individual environmental responsibility could be affected by using the instrumentality of religion. Finally, religion can also facilitate diverse states to cooperate at international level to tackle environmental problems such as global climate change. Yet, adherents of religions are contributing directly and indirectly to environmental pollution. The proliferation of places of worship, retreat camps and religious villages has influenced different religious bodies to adopt means of exploiting the nature in order to meet their objectives. It has been observed that most of these activities are carried out for commercialisation rather than spiritualisation. Rev. Mathew Kukah is highly critical of the insincerity of the Pentecostal pastors and the merchandising of religion. According to him, “many prosperity pastors today have no time for those on the periphery of our national life where the poor are. The main focus of these brands of religion now is fellowship and business with religion sprinkled to add flavour” (Kukah, 2007, pp. 38-39). That church owners compete among themselves for land acquisition and construction of multi-million naira churches is beautifully captured by Abioje (2011) in such newspaper headlines as: “Prophet T. B. Joshua’s Synagogue Splashes N18m on 38 Plots of Land: Plans to Build Multi-million Naira Cathedral”; “Pastors Bimbo & Taiwo Odukoya Buy N250 Million Land”; “Bishop Mike Okonkwo Renovates Church with Millions of Naira”; and “Kris Okotie Squanders N30m on Presidential Project: Cannot Pay His Workers.” Many so-called religious luminaries prefer, according to the Catholic Bishop of Issele-Uku Diocese (Waapela, 2006) to remain in the “business of religion” because it is more lucrative than being an editor of a newspaper. There are other religious activities in Nigeria that lead to environmental pollution which need to be discussed.

Public Address System and Noise Pollution

Just as manufacturing equipment in industries, vehicles, aircrafts and guns are sources of noise pollution in the environment; mounting of amplifiers during religious programmes is also considered to contribute to noise pollution. Using amplifiers to call devotees to *ṣalāh* (daily obligatory prayers), is understandable. Its use, however, for non-obligatory purposes may lead to noise pollution. It is not sure whether these religious bodies are conversant with the dictate of their religion on neighbourliness. The Qur'ān, for instance, enjoins thus: "And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking, and lower your voice. Verily, the harshest of all voices is the braying of the asses" (Adebayo, 2013).

Likewise, there are many churches that use powerful loudspeakers and other musical instruments during vigil, open air crusade service, Sunday service and others causing disturbances and inconvenience for those living in the vicinity of these churches. This has forced some people, especially the tenants, to abandon their homes and relocate to other less-noisy areas. Adesupo, (2011) reported that in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, a landlord abandoned his home and relocated to another area as he could no longer tolerate sleepless nights as a result of vigil programme of a nearby church which used powerful public address system and musical instrument. Those who could not vacate their homes are forced to endure and tolerate the noise from places of worship, all in the name of God. Noise pollution is also caused by conferences of different religious bodies, especially the New Religious Movements situated along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway. As described by Falako, (2010) noise pollution is also occasioned by heavy traffic during conferences, sirens from V.I.Ps who attend religious programmes, mobile record players and jingles during mobilization for religious programmes, generating plants and indiscriminate blowing of horns by drivers who become impatient and aggressive on the highway during such programmes. The annual *Mawlud Nabiyy* celebration organised by the Tijaniyyah brotherhood of Shaykh Muhammadul-Awwal in Omupo, Kwara State causes traffic congestion and hardships to people. In addition, during the prayer sessions of many churches and Muslim organisations, powerful public address system is used. Indeed, noise pollution has been identified as the source of hearing impairment, sleeplessness, stress, high blood pressure and other cardiovascular problems and nervous disorders (Abdur-Raheem, 2010).

It is worth noting that the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) were established as a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Housing and Urban Development. The Agency enacted a noise standard and control regulation to ensure “a healthy environment for all Nigerians, the tranquillity of their surroundings and their psychological well-being by regulating noise level, prescribing the minimum permissible noise level from a facility or activity to which a person may be exposed” (NBF News, 2012). However, this Agency seems unable to enforce their rules in places of worship. The Kwara State Town Planning Authority did demolish many shops and houses at Tanke area in Ilorin early March 2013 for their closeness to the main road. However, churches and mosques close to the main road were left untouched.

Religious Festivals

Environmental pollution is also caused by religious festivals. Despite Islam’s emphasis on modesty in everything, be it religious or otherwise, and on avoiding harm to others, Muslims continue to celebrate festivals in a lavish and extravagant ways. During celebration of Mawlid Nabiyy and such socio-religious programmes like naming, marriage and fidā’ (post funeral prayer) programmes, roads are blocked and loudspeakers are used causing hardships to many. Of particular note is September 10, 2001, a woman drove through a public road barricaded by a group of Muslim worshippers during a Friday service which led to communal riots which claimed many lives and property in Jos, the capital of Plateau State (Adebayo, 2012).

In the month of December every year, during which Christmas is celebrated with a series of threatening and frightening explosions of bangers and thunder-like knock-outs. Such celebrations often cause motor accidents and unnecessary tensions which are not favourable to human health. The December 26, 2012 inferno at Jankara Market, Lagos, was traced to a spark from a fire cracker warehouse. Explosions from the “knockouts” of the warehouse was said to have added more to the panic of the residents in the area who thought it was a bomb that exploded. The incidence claimed one life, razed eight buildings and injured forty persons. Eventually, the State Government banned the sale of such explosives in the State.

Deforestation

It is well-known in Nigeria that serious damage has been done to the nation's ecological system by different religious bodies through indiscriminate felling of trees on the vast area of land acquired for camps or retreats. Felling a tree has implications on the climate, as trees are preservers of human climate. They maintain a balance in global temperature and climate by absorbing carbon dioxide, gases and releasing oxygen for human consumption. They also provide shades for man and serve as speed breaker for winds. It is therefore not a surprise that the Prophet enjoined planting of trees and forbade destruction of trees, saying, "even if you fear that the world would end tomorrow, you should plant a tree". Falako (2010)-identified eighteen different religious groups that occupy vast areas of land from the Old Ibadan toll gate to the Lagos end of the road.

Filth Hazard

In addition, another serious threat to the ecological system caused by abuse of religion is filth hazard from human wastes, nylons of sachet water popularly called "pure water" and other wastes. Places where religious programmes like Mawlud Nabiyy, revivals or retreat take place are littered with different types of filthy human wastes and nylons of sachet water. Organisers of such religious programmes do not make adequate provisions for human and material wastes. These are left at the discretion of those who attend them. Though the provision for water for ablution is taken care of by organisers of religious programmes, no provision has been made for adequate disposal of human wastes. Similarly, many mosques leave their urinals channel to the nearest gutter which causes not merely offensive odours but also provides breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

In African traditional religion, sacrifices and offerings are crucial. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) identified some categories of sacrifice in West African religion and materials offered to divinities in the form of sacrifice. Such items like sheep, goat, fowl, cow, pigeon, egg, yam, rice, porridge and other food items are used for different categories of sacrifice. Such sacrificial items are thrown into the river to appease the divinities of the waters, rivers, lakes and streams and thus pollute water. The consumption of water from such source leads to dysentery, typhoid, cholera and other water-borne diseases. Sacrifices made and presented to

the idols in their shrines or at cross-roads also constitute health hazard, as they are mostly left to decay and become contaminated.

As a step further, it has been observed that religion is being dragged into communal feud, political favouritism and some other ideological misconceptions in Nigeria. During such religious conflicts, burning of people's property and places of worship no doubt adds to emission of hazardous gases. The religious conflicts are either between Muslims and Christians or between Muslims and the traditional worshippers. Salisu (2009) identified instances of bloody clashes between the Muslims and the traditional worshippers of Egungun in Abule-Okuta, Bariga suburb of Lagos; and the Muslims and Orò worshippers in Ìjebú-Ode, Ogun State. Such clashes had led to obstruction of commercial activities, marauding, looting of merchandise and blocking of traffic flow. During any of such religious clashes, tear gas and other threatening instrument are used by the law enforcing agencies to bring normalcy to the crises areas, while soldiers with armoured tanks are seen patrolling the streets and sirens blown all over the areas. Added to this is the high rate of the migration of people from trouble spot to places of safety. This no doubt constitutes another means through which hazardous gases are burnt to the air.

Conclusion

Ernest Haced, the German biologist, who coined the term "environmental pollution, defined it as the comprehensive science of the relationship of the organism to the environment. Naturally, the relationship, if not interfered with is an aesthetic pattern of exhilarating harm. This harm a theologian described as what God was talking about in the context of socio-religious reflection Deuteronomy 23: 12 – 14. It is evident that man and the environment are partners in progress. The environment is subjected to man to use to his satisfaction but man must, in return, render services to the environment as he is dependent on it. The implication of this, in the opinion of Omer, (2004), is that man will witness no peace in a situation where his attitude towards nature and the natural environment is based upon exploitation, aggression and war. The world is in a State of environmental disarray: a state in which living organisms can no longer survive on their natural habit because the abiotic support has been damaged in the name of human economic and social development.

Way Forward

- 1) The way forward is that, people need to come back to God's commandments to be able to solve any of the environmental crises.
- 2) The Church should revisit the Biblical teachings of Jesus Christ on discipleship as stated in Mathew 28 verses 18 to 22.
- 3) Church leaders should as a matter of urgency lay more emphasis on the rapture, as this will prepare the minds of Christians and remind them of the importance of holy living to the larger society.
- 4) Beliefs should become lights of divinity in the kosmos, social system of men. They should be the opposite of all darkness.

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