

RELIGION, MAN AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT: *The paper focuses on three main issues of religion, man and environment. Of the diverse environments, only the natural environment is dwelt upon in the paper, which also sheds light on how religion makes man to benefit from the natural environment. The interactions of man in the natural environment are discussed and the ways these interactions are adversely affecting its sustainability explained. The paper deposed that religion is about sustainability, which is the wish of God for the planet earth, as well as his wish for humankind and the environment. Religion should not only save the soul of man, but assure the sustainability of the natural environment created by him to sustain the life of humankind.*

KEYWORDS: Environment, Man, Religion, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Man that is variously known as humankind, human being and *Homo sapiens*, does not exist in a vacuum. This is because he is in what is known in ecology as an environment. This environment has in it certain other components besides man. Some of these components are living things called organisms, while others are non-living things, known as physical components. Man is like other organisms, a component of the environment. But unlike other living organisms, man is a unique being – a special creation that is composed of the physical, the social and the spiritual being (Adeboye, 2012). As a specially endowed spiritual being, he evolved the institution of religion, through which he is able to communicate with his Creator – the Almighty God. The interaction of man with his Creator has impacted in diverse ways, with his activities in his environment in the planet earth.

To appreciate the special nature of man, his interactions within the environment, which has carved a niche for him within the environment, so much so that the environment is specially designated as his environment, we need to know about man and his environment. We also need to know about religion, which he has evolved in the planet earth. Through a clear understanding of man, environment and religion, which are keywords in the title of this paper, we will then be in a position to understand the importance of the trio and how the duo of religion and man interplay, to shapen the course of happenings within the environment. This is what this paper is set out to achieve. First, by making clear what the trio man, environment and religion are, second, by underscoring their importance, third, by clarifying the diverse interactions between them and lastly, by discussing the various ways the interactions have impacted development and sustainability.

Environment

There is perhaps no better way of explaining the keywords in the title of this paper, than to start with the word environment. This has to be so, because the environment predates man in the planet earth. It is the creation of the Almighty God – the Supreme being – the being that religions exist to make humankind access in order to seek His face in their action. Genesis 1: 3–27, contain the story of creation – the creation of the environment and man. The creation of the environment demonstrates the thoughtfulness of God, in first creating all things man needs on the planet earth, before creating man. It demonstrates orderliness of the Almighty God, in the step-wise manner in which He created the non-living and the living things. It demonstrates the scientific nature of God, who saw the need to create light first, not just because He needed it to see His creations, but because of the significant ecological role, light plays in the planet earth, in making feeding and other metabolic activities possible in the planet earth. God created plants after He had created the sunlight they need for photosynthesis, so that plants will not starve to death. He also created the animals only after creating the plants. Again, He also probably did this, so that the animals will not only have food to eat, but also for those of them living on land, to have a place to live in, where they can have shelter and multiply.

This environment is what is today known as the natural environment. It is the environment into which God later created man in both sexes, male and female. The natural environment is what is today known by such terms as biological environment (Adesiyan, 2005), as well as ecological environment (Fatubarin, 2009a). This natural environment, has plants, animals, human beings and microbes, as their living things – the organisms – the biota. The plants are what are known as the flora, while the microbes among them, are known as micro flora, with examples being the bacteria, the algae, the fungi and the lichens. The animals are the fauna, with the microbes among them being protozoans and nematodes. The non-living things are the abiota. They include physical components such as climate, soils also known as edaphic components, the topography and all other non-living environmental components, such as topography, geographic location, the air or atmosphere and the water bodies (Gilpin, 1976 and Bellamy, 2007).

Other Environments

If one goes strictly by the definition of environment as “the surrounding of an organism in the place where it lives” (Fatubarin, 2009a), a number of other environments exist that satisfy this definition. These are:

- i. The socio-economic environment
- ii. The built environment
- iii. The political/governmental environment
- iv. The spiritual environment

The natural environment however differs from these other environments, in the sense that it is unlike others – a creation of the Almighty God, a feature it shares with the spiritual environment, which came into being, with the creation of man. The other three environments are creations of man. This is possible by the advancement in the evolution of man into the status of *Homo sapiens* and his further development that makes him live in populations. These afford him greater interactions as a social being and his development of suitable living places, as well as diverse systems of government.

Features of the diverse environments as well as their importance and diverse interactions, are discussed in a companion paper to this one on the title “**Religion and Environment.**” In this paper however, further discussions on the environment, will be limited to the natural environment, which is always the main focus in issues of “Man and His Environment.” It is also the focus of environmentalists in virtually all their deliberations and actions on the environment.

Man

Man as earlier noted in the introduction to this paper, is also known by such other names as mankind, humankind and human being. These are names which are all inclusive, in embracing both sexes – male and female of this species of organisms, known by the biological name of *Homo sapiens*, which means the perfect man. The name “perfect man” for man, reminds one that before man attains the state of “perfect man,” which man as known today is called, other forms of man precedes the modern-day man-*Homo sapiens*. These other forms of man include *Dryopithecus*, *Australopithecus*, *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*, among others (Fatubarin, 2008). These are other forms of man from which the modern man – the “perfect man” – *Homo sapiens* actually evolved from, as a result of what the science of biology calls organic evolution.

Let us assume that man in the form in which he is known today, is a product of creation – a creation of the Almighty God, who created him on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1: 26-31). The creation of man teaches human beings some lessons. First of this lesson, is that of cooperation. The bible in Genesis 1: 23, said:

“And God said, Let us make man in our image;”

This demonstrates beyond doubt that God cooperated with some other beings, possibly spiritual, in creating man. Another lesson is that God created man in his own image, as Genesis 1: 26 tells us. This is also further emphasized in Genesis 1:27, where the bible says:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him;”

It is really wonderful being created in the image of God – the Supreme being. Another lesson is that, the creation of man was accompanied by a responsibility of having dominion over other living things (Genesis 1: 26; Genesis 1: 28). God also gave man a charge-call it a command, to “*replenish the earth and subdue it*” (Genesis 1: 28).

God in Genesis 1: 31 looked at all His creation and He saw that “*it was good*”. From this statement, it can be assumed that the man created by God, is the “perfect man.” He is the man that fits the description of man, as a three-fold being of physical, social and spiritual being (Adeboye, 2012). It is this man that fits the special endowments, which Fatubarin (2009b), listed to include the following:

- i. A huge brain, which has a size that is almost twice that of his closest relatives – the highest of the apes;
- ii. Ability to stand erect – a feature that enables him to develop in a more powerful way, the distance senses of sight and hearing;
- iii. Ability to make speech;
- iv. Possession of enriched facial muscles, a feature that enables him to display a number of his feelings through facial expressions;
- v. Humankind displays bipedal stance, a feature that is made possible by the very powerful muscles of his femur bones, which help in supporting the rest of the body in an erect position;
- vi. Humankind has the capacity to make use of his hands, which have opposable thumbs, more effectively for manipulative purposes;

- vii. Humankind has developed a spiritual bearing;
- viii. He has besides his biological evolution, which took him through different physical forms of human beings, evolved spiritually, culturally, industrially, technologically and in such other aspects of life, as agriculture and information and communication technology (ICT);
- ix. Humankind also lives together in groups, called populations or communities.

As if to further underscore these above-listed peculiar endowments of man, First Bank in the 2013 Calendar of the bank, underscored the leadership attributes of man. The bank noted that every vital organ of the human body is endowed with a special ability. The brain, the bank noted is for dynamism, the eye for vision, the ear for listening and the mouth for communication. The back reflects dependability, while the spine is for support. The hand is for service, while the muscles reflect strength and the fingers are for care. Man has a soul as well as a leg for agility. All these work together, to make man a natural leader among other creations.

All the above traits as well as his three-fold nature as a being, make him the most highly developed of all animals-hence his being called the king of all species. It is these endowments, physical, social as well as spiritual, that enhance his dominance as an organism and as a special creation equipped with the wherewithal to “*replenish the earth; and subdue it; and have dominion*” (Genesis 1: 28) – a dominion over other creations. Man has employed his natural endowments to explore and exploit the natural environment in a way, which no other living thing is doing. So important is man’s role in the natural environment, that man has been described as the anthropogenic factor in the environment (Fatubarin, 2009c)

This detailed analysis on man is done, to let readers appreciate that man is created to be a balanced being. A being who is balanced in all the three aspects of his being, that is physically, socially as well as spiritually. It is a proper combination of these three aspects of human being that results in a balanced personality, which God wants every man to be. It is when certain individuals run into problem with balancing these three features of their being, that they become defective in behavior, with this affecting their interactions within their communities, societies and nations. This can have a great consequence, if such individuals are in leadership positions.

Religion

The dictionary definition of religion as “**people’s belief in the life of the spirit and usually in one or more gods**” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English), gives an insight into a number of things:

- i. That religion is a creation of man (with reference to “**people’s belief**”)
- ii. That the creation of religion by man, is probably made possible by his spiritual being (with reference to “**belief in the life of the spirit**”)
- iii. That through religion, man believes in the existence of god or gods (with reference to “**belief in one or more gods**”)

Through some religions, such as Christianity and Islam, it has been established that there is only one God – the Almighty God – the Supreme being, who created heaven and earth and all that today, constitute the natural environment of the planet earth. Many people also believe that the recognition of other gods by people, is borne out of ignorance. This is because many among such people, create such gods, which some even represent with non living objects, as

their own means of communing with the Almighty God, which they can not see. The bible recounts several incidences of such gods in it.

In Yorubaland, most people believe in the existence of this Almighty God as **Olodumare**. However, many of the people commune with this **Olodumare**, through **ogun** – the god of iron, **osun** – the god of river, **sango** – the god of thunder, among other gods. People of the Christian faith however believe in this God as existing as a trinity, in the form of God – the Father, God-the Son and God- the Holy Spirit. They also believe in the injunction of Jesus Christ which says of himself that “*I am the Way. No body reaches the Father, except through me*” (John 14:16). People of Islamic faith, however believe that it is only through Prophet Mohammed, that believers of this faith, can access the Almighty God, who they claim, has no child in the personality of Jesus Christ, as the Christians believe.

Accessing the Almighty God who is believed to be in the high heavens, is through the spiritual environment, where there are spiritual beings such as the angels that connect some people with God and the unholy beings which connect some others with satan and his cohorts.

The diverse religions however differ in the way they access the Almighty God, through the spiritual environment. While the Christians believe in accessing the spiritual environment through prayers, fasting, self denial, reading and meditating in the word as contained in the bible. Others the Christians believe, include doing good deeds for God, oneself and one’s neighbours and refraining from sins in thought, speech and deed. The moslems believe in accessing the spiritual environment through prayers, fasting, self denial, reading and meditating in the quoran. They in particular, believe in giving, in the form they call sakat. Most believers of the traditional religions access the spiritual environment through sacrifices. The **ogun** worshippers sacrifice unto their god of iron, by slaughtering dogs. Other worshippers of traditional religions use other objects, such as rams, goats, cola nuts and some other fetish objects, which they offer as sacrifices in road junctions, particularly junctions where three roads meet. The bible also contains instances of such sacrifices in the Old Testament. To believers of the Christian faith, the death of Christ on the cross has put an end to all sacrifices for believers. Hence, no mention of sacrifices is made in the New Testament.

The interaction in the natural environment

The natural environment operates a natural ecosystem. The natural environment is the surrounding of living things in the place where they naturally live. This place is their habitat. Inside this habitat, the different components of the environment interact. Clarke (1954), recognized three main groups of these interactions and he called them actions, reactions and coactions. **Actions** are those interactions involving the influences of the physical – the non-living things, on the organisms. **Reactions** are the reciprocal effects of the organisms on the non-living things. **Coactions** on the other hand, are the interactions between one group of organisms and another, within an ecosystem. It is these coactions that are also described as biotic interactions, biotic interrelationships, among other names (Fatubarin, 2009d). In the natural environment, several examples of each of these interactions exist. However, in this paper, only those interactions involving man are highlighted as done below:

Interactions involving man in the natural environment

The natural environment provides man with certain necessities of life, through its non living components. Examples of these are stated below:

- i. **Air** of the atmosphere, provides man with **oxygen** which is needed by man, for aerobic respiration. Other gases within the atmosphere, such as nitrogen and the rare or inert gases, also find use in many industries as raw materials for a large number of industrial processes. For example, nitrogen finds use in the process of producing nitric acid, a valuable ingredient in nitrate fertilizers and urea and a number of other valuable chemicals.
- ii. **Sunlight** is the ultimate source of energy in the planet earth. Besides providing illumination, solar energy provides heat energy, which keeps the environment warm.
- iii. **Temperature** makes possible several metabolic activities possible in man and other living things.
- iv. **Humidity** of the atmosphere cools the atmosphere and makes it conducive for life, particularly that of man and other living things in tropical environment.
- v. **Rainfall** provides the bulk of water needed in tropical environment. Such water is what replenishes that used from natural water bodies, such as rivers, streams, springs and wells. In temperate environment, water is also supplied from other sources, such as snow, ice and glaciers. It must be mentioned that it is not only man that benefits from these services of the non-living components of the natural environment. The wildlife species living within the natural environment as well as other animals such as the livestock species as well as farm animals, also benefit from them.
- vi. Other physical components of the environment such as soils, lands, rocks, solid minerals in forms of mineral ores and mineral elements, are put into diverse economic uses by man. Such uses include the following:
 - a. The soils are used for crop production;
 - b. The lands are used for land-utilizing projects, such as those involved in the built environment;
 - c. The rocks and solid minerals are put to diverse uses in industries, commerce and research activities.

The living organisms within the natural environment also provide diverse services for man. Such benefits are listed by Fatubarin (2003), to include economic benefits such as provision of food, sources of revenue, sources of souvenir and trade items. Plants of natural environment provide materials in form of planks, from which shelter is provided for man. The cotton plant provides clothing material. The plants are also of recreational benefit in providing planks for building boats used in some recreational activities. The natural environment is the abode of diverse plants and animals that are of aesthetic value in such amenities as game reserves, zoological gardens, parks and sanctuaries, botanical gardens and arboretum. A large number of plants and some animals are of medicinal value in producing drugs. The plants of natural environments also find use as sources of energy in the form of petroleum oil and natural gas, wood, coal and charcoal. The microorganisms of natural environment. are also been put to diverse uses in agriculture, industrial products, medicine, among several other uses (Fatubarin, 2006).

The benefits of man on the natural 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 benefitting the natural environment in different ways. Such benefits are listed by Fatubarin (2003), as including the following:

- i. 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.

- ii. 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.
- iii. Mankind has succeeded in controlling a large number of diseases, parasites and pests afflicting his biological resources of plants and animals.
- iv. Mankind has adopted strategies such as afforestation, 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.

Adverse influences of man in the natural environment

There is no doubt about the fact that man has had a large measure of positive influences on the natural environment, through the conservation and management efforts he has put in place, to improve on the physical and biological components of the natural environment. But when these positive influences are measured against the adverse influences of his, that are summarized below, it will be noticed that the positive interventions of man in the natural environment, is still relatively minimal in nature. This implies that a lot more still remains to be done by man, in improving the status of the natural environment. This is where religion has a lot of role to play, as will be explained later in this paper.

The adverse influences of man on the natural environment, varies from locality to locality. They also differ with the nature of the natural environment. The following can however be listed among the adverse influences of man on the natural environment: environmental pollution, burning and arbitrary use of fire, emission of green house gases and ozone-layer depletion. The natural environment is also being adversely affected as a result of over-exploitation of biological resources, land degradation, deforestation, poaching of wildlife in reserves, dumping of toxic wastes, illegal mining, gas flaring and damage in various forms, to aquatic life, among several others.

A look at these adverse influences of man in the natural environment reveals that while some of them are global in nature and have therefore been widely recognized as global challenges, others are still restricted to certain places among the developing nations of the world. Examples of the global ecological challenges of man in the natural environment are emission of greenhouse gases, ozone-layer depletion and environmental pollution (Fatubarin, 2009e). Those of the ecological challenges of man that are of restricted nature, in being confined mainly to developing countries, are burning and arbitrary use of fire, over-exploitation of the natural resources of the natural environment, land degradation, deforestation and poaching of wildlife in reserves. Others include dumping of toxic wastes, as was experienced in Koko port in Nigeria in 1988 (Gasu and Gasu, 2009), illegal mining and gas flaring. Some other adverse influences of man such as use of weapons of war cut across barriers and as such, are found in both developing and developed nations of the world.

It should be remarked that many of what are seen in the world today as major ecological challenges within the planet earth, are consequences of the adverse influences of man. These ecological consequences are manifested in such global ecological challenges as global warming, climate change, loss of biodiversity, drought and desertification, among others.

Religion and Its role in the all-important issue of Man and His Environment

In a companion paper to this on the title “**Religion and Environment**,” mention is made of the diverse roles religion is playing in the natural environment. Examples of these roles include the following:

- i. Use of palm fronds by Christians in the Palm Sunday celebration, commemorating the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem;
- ii. Use of these palm fronds by many Christians in decorating churches during their annual harvest occasions;
- iii. Use of the palm fronds by **ogun** worshippers to decorate the ogun shrines and their workshops where black smithery is carried out;
- iv. Use of the palm fronds by some Yoruba masquerades, an example of which is **Aladoko** masquerade, as part of their paraphernalia.

Others include the dedication of certain places, in the natural environment as “prayer mountains” by some Christian sects and some natural forests as sacred forest and grooves, by some traditional religion worshippers, with such forests in yorubaland, being termed **igbo oro, igbo igbale** and **ojobo orisa**. Some Christians still celebrate the Easter Monday in special locations in cleared places with the natural environment, which they visit as the Galilee. Some Christian sects still dedicate some natural water bodies, such as streams and pools, as healing waters, with an example being **Omi Arira** – a perennial stream close to the gate of Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeji Arakeji. This stream is at the site where Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola – the patriarch of the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), was called in early 1920s. Besides the CAC, the members of Cherubim and Seraphim (C & S) and Celestial Christian faiths are very prominent among sects of the Christian faith that patronize healing water bodies. Some Christian sects, even patronize the seas and oceans for their private prayers. Such people build tents and other places of worship on the beaches of these massive water bodies.

Many worshippers of diverse traditional religions, patronize diverse natural environments on land and in water, to meditate and derive some powers. Some also collect certain plant parts, which form part of their ingredients for the diverse concoctions they administer to people, either for healing or for obtaining certain special favours from their gods.

All the above, show that man is deriving some benefits from the natural environment. The derivation of these benefits dates back to the early days of religion and it still continues till today, in a number of religious sects. There is however the need for religion to be involved far more than it has been, in the affairs of man in his environment – the natural environment. This is because the institution of religion has come to stay among the people of all nations of the world. It has influenced the culture of the people as well as their education. The time is now right for it to play a by far greater role in the natural environment. This is because, it is only through a timely intervention of religion in the natural environment, that humankind can be restrained from his activities that are currently devastating the natural environment to such an extent, that is giving well-meaning people knowledgeable about the natural environment, much concern. Prominent among these activities are those of emission of greenhouse gases, deforestation and land degradation among others, all of which have been implicated among others in causing climate change – a global challenge of phenomenal dimension, already described as the greatest challenge ever faced collectively by humankind (Foley, 1991).

Asiodu (2013), in his chairman's remark at the Green Lecture on Environmental Action, noted that Nigeria that had well over 30% of forest vegetation cover in 1960, at her independence, now has just about 4% forest vegetation cover in 2013 – a far cry from the 25% average, recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations for sustainable environment. This state of affairs is probably a reflection of what things are in most other developing countries of the world. To stem the tide of things in relation to diverse ecological challenges of the natural environment brought about by man, religion has an enormous role to play. This is so because of a number of reasons:

- i. Religion is a major institution among the people, that has a large followership in virtually all countries of the world;
- ii. It is an institution in which enlightened people and even professionals, are present in large numbers;
- iii. It is an institution that has much influence over the people and their governments and as such, can make such influence to bare positively on the attitude of people to their environment and both the people and their governments to their natural environment;
- iv. Because the environment has a role for all people, irrespective of their level of education, economic status, sex or religion, believers of different faiths can have a role to play in different aspects of environmental management.

As highlighted above, religion has a role to play in the natural environment. This role should extend beyond benefitting from the environment; it should impact the environment through the adherents of the diverse religious sects. This impact can be through the following:

- a. Educating, Enlightening and Creating and awareness on diverse issues of the environment;
- b. Participation in different activities within the environments cuined at managing the environment;
- c. Admonishing people on the implications of certain social vices that have implications on the environment;
- d. Admonishing people on good governance its impact on the environment;
- e. Admonishing people on certain programmes that have positive impact on the environment.
- f. Admonishing people on possible accountability before the Almighty God, after translating from this world.

Religion and its role in educating, enlightening and creating awareness on diverse issues of the environment

Man has put in place diverse fora in the practice of religion, to educate, enlighten and create awareness on any issue that is dear to the heart of leaders of the diverse religions. Such fora include regular ministration, workshops and conventions. Others include production of diverse publications. All these fora should be explored by the diverse religions, to register the positions of the religious sects on diverse issues of environment. This should be done to assist in averting a large number of environmental challenges that could have been fore-stalled, through proper environmental education. Examples of environmental issues that could be made focus of environmental education by the diverse religious sects, include:

- a. The natural environment as God's gift to man;
- b. The benefits of the natural environment;
- c. The familiar problems of the environment, such as cholera outbreak, malaria attack, poliomyelitis attack, among others;
- d. The current challenges of the global environment, in such things as climate change, floods and desertification and those of the local environment in different countries;

- e. The dangers of not acting fast on these challenges;
- f. How individual believers and religious organizations can play important role in combating certain environmental challenges, mitigating their effects and the possible adaptations to these effects;
- g. How the religious organizations can impact their members and make them cooperate with different tiers of governments, in policies and actions taken on the environment.

Environmental issues that religion can make believers have proper education, enlightenment and awareness about, include:

- i. Deforestation and its adverse impact on the environment in such areas as soil, climate, biodiversity; as well as its consequences;
- ii. Burning and arbitrary use of fire and their adverse impact on soil, climate, biodiversity; as well as their consequences;
- iii. Poaching of wildlife and its adverse impact on biodiversity;
- iv. Environmental sanitation and its implication on environmental cleanliness, prevention of preventable diseases such as cholera, malaria and others dangers of the environment resulting from snake bites and bites by certain disease-carrying animals, called zoonosis;
- v. Climate change phenomenon, its causes, its seriousness, its manifestations in different regions of the world and possible steps being taken on it.

Religion and Its role in making the people participate in different activities within the environment

Religion has a way of making the adherents of the diverse religious sects, have a firm belief in their leaders, so much so that such adherents obey the instructions of these leaders as if they are from the gods. It therefore behoves such leaders to turn this to a major advantage, in making the adherents of their religious sects, to get fully involved in all the activities that are being put up in recent years to benefit the environment. Such activities include the following:

- a) Tree planting activities, being initiated by different tiers of government;
- b) Environmental sanitation exercises, which come up in many communities in Nigeria, on a monthly basis, with some places having such exercises once in a fortnight;
- c) Environmental beautification of the surroundings of all public institutions, such as Government Secretariats, Churches and Mosques, hospitals, dispensaries and other health-care delivery institutions and institutions of learning;
- d) Putting in place of laws and regulations that forbid illegal felling of trees, poaching in game reserves and arbitrary burning and use of fires in farmlands and in forest reserves
- e) Keeping off places reserved near communities as green belts, pipelines, electricity transmission lines etc;
- f) Making people intending to site projects in the natural environment, to make such places be subjected to appropriate environmental impact assessment, following which clearance can be given for such projects.

Religion and Its role in admonishing people on certain social vices that have implications on the environment

Certain social vices exist on different communities which a large number of religious sects preach against. Examples of such vices are greed, corruption, violence and diverse forms of injustice. Perhaps, if the religious leaders have continually made occasional reference to the implications of these vices on the natural environment, maybe the natural environment would have been a lot better for it! It is greed that makes people poach in the forest and game reserves for wildlife, which they call "bush meat." It is greed that makes hunters enter into

such reserves, to kill some animals that are under protection by law, from being killed for their meat and some other valuable materials got from them. Examples of such materials which are usually sold at high prices to would-be buyers, who encourage them to such crimes with monetary inducement, are the tusks of elephants, the skin of some animals, such as crocodile, lion, among others and the horns of rhinoceros and some other ungulates, with horns that show branching.

Corruption is also manifested in diverse cases of diversion of ecological funds and funds meant to secure erosion-proned lands from flood and wind erosion and those meant to combat desertification through the establishment of shelter belts. The same corruption is implicated in illegal tree felling in forest reserves and diversion of money earmarked for afforestation and reforestation in many communities. It is greed coupled with corruption that are playing out in bunkering and operation of illegal refineries, that have brought a lot of ecological disaster in the oil-rich delta region of the south-south geopolitical zone of the country.

Many out of ignorance and greed, have set fire to vegetation, to use such fire as a cheap means of clearing farmland or as a means of driving out animals hiding in such vegetation. This is a form of violence in the natural environment. Similarly, tumults and wars, have made people to use weapons such as bombs, that cause huge conflagrations in different vegetation types. The result of which has caused large-scale damage to fire-sensitive forest tree species and have inhibited the growth of many others. Many wildlife species have either been destroyed or have had their habitats, source of food and breeding sites destroyed.

Injustices have also been manifested in ritual killings in the vegetation of some natural environment and in some cases, ritual sacrifices have been placed near the base of some trees. In some cases, some animals have been hunted and their parts used for some ritual sacrifices and concoctions. All these are vices that expectedly have their own repercussions, which are presently manifesting in diverse avoidable sociological challenges among the people of affected nations. Our religion owes it a duty to admonish believers on these social vices, which have adverse impact on not only the perpetrators of these vices, but also their communities and even nations, with some of these challenges impacting the environment in such affected places.

Religion, good governance and its impact on the environment

As has been constantly mentioned in different forum where the environment is being discussed, many nations are not totally lacking in good laws put in place to regulate the happenings in environments. What has been lacking is the will to enforce these laws and regulations. In Nigeria for example, there are laws against illegal tree felling. There are laws against poaching in forest and game reserves. But several questions remain unanswered on good governance in relation to the environment in Nigeria. Among such questions are:

- i. Why is Nigeria unable to regulate gas flaring, several years after this has been going on in Nigeria?
- ii. Why the forest is reserves being depleted of valuable timber species, in spite of laws against illegal lumbering of timber in Nigeria?
- iii. Why do many timber merchants transport the timber logs in the night unchecked?
- iv. Why can Nigeria not check illegal poaching of wildlife species and watch helplessly, when these animals are sold along the major high ways as “bush meat?”
- v. How many bunkerers and illegal refineries have had their owners and operators apprehended and dealt with according to the laws of the land?

- vi. Several state governments are putting in place policies and programmes that are designed to bring about a turn-around in the state of the natural environment within their states. Why are other state governments, not copying these best practices?
- vii. What has been happening to the ecological fund since its introduction by an act of the national assembly?

We must find answers to these and many other similar questions, to assure the sustainability of our natural environment in Nigeria. Perhaps if our religious leaders ask such questions at appropriate places, the conscience of somebody somewhere, would have been pricked!

Religion and Admonition on good programmes that have positive impact on the environment

Religion should be made to impact the environment, through religious leaders selling good programmes that touch the environment to their members, particularly those in leadership positions, such as in all tiers of government. For instance, the programme of making all pupils and students right from the primary school to higher institution of learning, to learn about the environment, deserves being encouraged, embraced and publicized by religious leaders. The same goes for that mopping up a large number of youths roaming the streets and getting them engaged for environmental sanitation, environmental beautification and tree planting in some states of the country.

Our religious leaders should not wait until disasters happen before mobilizing their followers to assist the victims of such disasters, when such disasters could have been forestalled, through their timely intervention of alerting the governments, to be alert and alive to their environmental responsibilities.

Religion and admonition on accountability on all issues by man before the Almighty God

Most damages done in the environment, are usually not such that have their effects noticeable immediately. Being incipient in nature, most damages continue for long, without any effort to remedy them. It is when the damage has been done, that people realize the enormity of such damage. The atmosphere for decades, if not centuries, has continuously been polluted by greenhouse gases, before the world come to recognize climate change as a disaster! Similarly at the local level, Nigeria has over the last 50 years or more, been depleting the forest vegetation cover in different parts of the country. Now the result is the mere meager 4% forest vegetal cover of the country, in just about 50 years of silently depopulating the forest vegetation of the country! What legacy are we bequeathing to our unborn generations of Nigerians!

How shall we defend our position on the dominance God conferred on man over other creations! (Genesis 1: 26), and His admonition to man, to replenish the earth! (Genesis 1: 28).

CONCLUDING REMARK

As done in the companion paper to this one on the title “**Religion and Environment**,” where all the diverse environments are explored in the paper, any opportunity of a discussion on religion in relation any vital aspect of human existence, such as environment, provides an opportunity to remind ourselves as human beings on a number of things. First of this, is that the life of any individual in the planet earth is not for eternity. One day every human being

will translate to the world beyond, to meet with his Creator – the Almighty God. There, one will account for his role either as an individual or in any group one has had opportunity to operate, in relation to the environment. There, it will once again dawn on such a person that the Almighty God who gave humankind the reasoning power to put in place the institution of religion, did it for a purpose. It is to make religion serve as a constant reminder that one day; every human being will meet face to face with the Creator. Perhaps, if Adam and Eve had the opportunity of religion of a right type, the devil would not have had the opportunity of cheating them, to the extent of incurring the wrath of their Creator, which has brought about death not only on them but on all other human beings after them, among other punishments, for their disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

For man, religion is about God, it is about obedience. It is about man and his conscience. It is also about life after death. It is about sustainability as the Apostle Creed reminds us in the last phase of the last sentence: “**for ever and ever**” The Lord’s prayer similarly reminds us, in the last phrase of the last sentence “**for ever and ever.**” It is also about sustainability as the last phrase of the Grace reminds us: “**now and for ever more.**” Environment and development are two vital issues in which sustainability should be assured (Fatubarin, 2013). Religion is about obedience to the will of God, that man should nurture and sustain the environment for ever. Man is also mandated by God to exercise dominion over other creations. Man is through religion, admonished to eschew greed, corruption, violence and injustice in all ramifications. God demonstrated His aversion to these vices by sanctioning them with destruction in the bible, as He did at the world of Noah, when He destroyed the whole world with flood. Though the Almighty God in keeping faith with sustainability has promised as He did in (Genesis 8:21-22 and Genesis 9:15). That He will no longer destroy the world. This does not mean that he will not punish all sins of greed, corruption, violence and injustice. Who knows whether or not many of the strange occurrences in the environment, in such things as global climate change, floods, desertification and diverse hurricanes and tornadoes and such sociological challenges as wars and turmoils, that are affecting the natural environment adversely, are not manifestations of God’s disapproval of man’s inability to obey God’s injunctions!

Hope is however not lost for man to redeem his battered image in his actions in the natural environment. Humankind should recognize that he is a major force in the natural environment. He through each of his three-fold nature of physical, social and spiritual being, is endowed to play an unequalled role in his environment. Hence, his being recognized in ecology, as an anthropogenic factor in his environment. The paper asserts that religion which the spiritual being of humankind made man to evolve, should further complement his natural endowments in managing his environment. Religion should not only assure the salvation of our soul, but also assure the sustainability of our God-given heritage of the natural environment. A word is enough for the wise.

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