



RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO ECOLOGICAL ISSUES: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Ecological issues have been a source of concern to some Nigerian experts and one of the greatest challenges of our time. Man as the inhabitant of the environment is a religious being who has a profession of one religion or the other. The environment as he sees himself has really affected him and also his relationship with the object of worship which is as a result of advancement in technology, modernity and man's quest to explore and control the environment. This work looks at how man interacts with his environment and how man as a religious being is been affected by ecology. It will further look at how some religious traditions are working towards helping in contributing to correcting some of these ecological problems prevalent in the society today with the aim of arriving at a better, conducive and healthy society. This work adopts a sociological approach in its study and is framed with the theory of crossing and dwelling. This work recommends that people should be careful in the use of the environment in order to reduce the rate of environmental degradation prevalent in our society today. It also recommends that religious leaders should advise their adherents on the use of the earth with the view that we are all stewards and must give account of how we use things giving to us to care for.

Keywords: Religious, Response, Ecological, Issues, Overview.

Introduction

In recent times, the problem of environmental degradation has been a source of concern to Nigerian experts and have generated discussions and consciousness of people around the globe. According to Eluu (2015), everyone is aware of the fact that the physical, chemical as well as the biological (ecological) nerve of the globe is being compromised on daily basis as the world continues to witness serious environmental disasters. The human impact on the environment which includes change in biophysical environment and ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources caused directly or indirectly by human including global warming, environmental degradation, mass extinction and biodiversity loss, ecological crisis and ecological collapse. Modifying the environment to fit the needs of society is causing severe effects which becomes worse as the problem of human overpopulation continues. Some human activities that cause damage to the environment on a global scale include human reproduction, overconsumption, overexploitation, population and deforestation to name but a few. All these problems are affecting man who is the inhabitant of the environment and as such affects his religion. This work therefore tends to examine how man as a religionist is been affected by these prevalent issues and how different religious traditions are responding in bringing a solution to them.

Conceptual Clarification

In a work of this nature, it is necessary to have an insight into some key words in order to have a full grasp of what is intended to be achieved. In this regard therefore, it will be pertinent to look at the word “Religion, Ecology and Environmental Degradation”.

Religion is a concept that has never been without controversy. According to Woodhead (2011), the definition of religion is generally agreed on and involves beliefs, practices, and rituals related to the sacred. Religion is not just a typical function or variable amongst others, but is rather the root from which the different branches of life sprout and grow and by which they are continually nurtured (Koenig, 2009). Accordingly, the increasing realization of the importance of religion in all facets of life, both in developed and developing societies is also giving ways to write ups on the importance of religion in addressing ecological challenges such as environmental degradation, global warming and the environmental crisis.

Ecology on the other hand is the study of the relationships between living organisms, including humans and their physical environment; it seeks to understand the vital connections between plants and animals and the world around them. Ecology also provides information about the benefits of ecosystems and how we can use earth's resources in ways that leave the environment healthy for future generations. Furthermore, ecology is the branch of biology that studies how organisms interact with their environment and other organisms. Every organism experiences complex relationships with other organisms of its species, and organisms of different species. These complex interactions lead to different selective pressures on organisms. The pressures together lead to natural selection which causes populations of species to evolve. Ecology is the study of these forces, what produces them, and the complex relationships between organisms and each other, and organisms and their non-living environment (<https://www.esa.org/esa/science/issues/>)

With the increase in the depletion and destruction of natural resources and habitants, the environment has in a large way been degraded which has in turn affected the religionist. Hence in this regard, we will look at the issue of environmental degradation and how it has affected the inhabitant which is the religionist that lives within the environment. It is on this background, that we will try an explanation of environmental degradation base on scholars' opinion and definition.

Environmental degradation according to Gale (2005) is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; the extinction of wildlife; and pollution. Johnson et al (1997) defined it as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable. As indicated by the I=PAT equation, environmental impact (I) or degradation is caused by the combination of an already very large and increasing human population (P), continually increasing economic growth or per capita affluence (A), and the application of resource-depleting and polluting technology (T) (Chertow, 2001).

Environmental degradation is one of the ten threats officially cautioned by the high-level panel on threats, challenges and change of the United Nations. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines environmental degradation as "the reduction of the

capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives and needs". Environmental degradation comes in many types. When natural habitats are destroyed or natural resources are depleted, the environment is degraded. Efforts to counteract this problem include environmental protection and environmental resources management (Terminology, 2004)

Environmental degradation prevents individuals from attaining their two most basic needs: physiological safety and security. Due to depletion of natural resources such as air, soil, water, etc. people are less likely to have clean food, clean water, and/or good quality air. In addition, the wide spread of disease and disruption of natural ecosystems do not provide a safe environment for people to live due to high risk of disease breakout or natural disasters; hence safety and security needs are also unfulfilled. These two basic needs are deficiency needs; if a deficiency occurs in any of them, individuals would directly try to eliminate it. Therefore, individuals will be reluctant to undergo any effort towards political, economical, social, or cultural reform unless their basic needs are fulfilled and sustained. (encyclopedia.com)

According to Ripple et al (2017), scientists are of the opinion that human activities have pushed the earth into a sixth mass extinction event. The loss of biodiversity has been attributed in particular to human overpopulation, continued human population growth and overconsumption of natural resources by the world's wealthy. (Pimm et al, 2014). Plumer, Vidal, and Waths (2019), assert that the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published by IPBES in 2019 posits that roughly one million species of plants and animals face extinction from anthropogenic causes, such as expanding human land use for industrial agriculture and livestock rearing, along with overfishing.

Causes of Environmental Degradation

It is clear that environmental degradation does not just occur, there are both human and natural elements that made it to be. It will be good now for us to look at some of these causes in this section.

Land degradation/disturbance

In the opinion of Etuonovbe (2009), land degradation is one of the worst environmental problems facing the religionist worldwide with over 40 million affected in Nigeria. The

intensification of the use of fragile and marginal ecosystems has led to progressive degradation and continues desertification of marginal agricultural lands even in years of normal rainfall. It is feared that the damage by drought and population pressure may have resulted in the genetic loss of a vast array of valuable plant species. Pressure on the dwindling resources in the arid prone areas has caused in a number of devastating socio-political and sectarian conflicts in the country with concomitant death, injury and heavy economic losses.

Furthering on this, Ukpong (1994) posits some of the causes of land degradation to include improper resources management, destructive logging of our forest, overgrazing and over – cropping of arable lands, flooding and wind erosion menace, strip mining in some parts of Nigeria, land degradation with pesticides and fertilizers, some known natural landslides and destruction of wetlands, marches for development, population growth and population influx, property ownership issues, lack of control, enforcement measures and jurisdictional overlap which are due to lack of authority and the use of inappropriate technology for farming and even for producing manufactured goods.

Pollution

Pollution according to Ukpong in Etuonovbe (2009) occurs whenever potentially harmful substances are released into the environment. It is normally caused by the activities of the religionist, though it can also be a natural process. It is usually classified according to the receiving agents of air as emission, water as effluent and land as dumps and disposal. Pollution can be categorized into three major types: air pollution, water pollution and noise pollution.

Oil spillage

Oil spillage is another potential environmental hazard. Most religious people in Niger Delta area suffer from the effect of oil spillage. The vast majority of Nigeria's oil and gas is produced in the Niger Delta which causes major environmental problems for the religionist and the ecosystem. Oil facilities and operations are located in key ecological areas, including important fishing grounds, mangroves and tropical rainforest. These areas are often heavily damaged by the oil leaks. Drinking water is polluted, people become ill and farmers lose their income because they can no longer cultivate the soil. More gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world.

The smoke released is damaging to people who live nearby such a flare. The flares affect their livelihood and expose them to an increased risk of premature deaths, child respiratory illnesses, asthma and cancer. Leaking pipelines, running through villages, farms, creeks and rivers in those areas are major source of pollution, sickness and economic ruin for the people of the area. Farmland polluted by oil is rarely rehabilitated, destroying livelihoods. Fish contaminated by oil causes sickness among the religionist and further economic ruin as fish stocks decline. The spillages are a regular feature of life in those places. They are rarely dealt with promptly. In some cases, minor leaks are left for months, resulting in major pollution (Etuonovbe, 2009).

Overpopulation

Rapid population growth puts strain on natural resources which results in degradation of our environment. Mortality rate has gone down due to better medical facilities which has resulted in increased lifespan. More population simply means more demand for food, clothes and shelter. You need more space to grow food and provide homes to millions of people. This results in deforestation which is another factor of environmental degradation (Etuonovbe, 2009).

Landfills

Landfills pollute the environment and destroy the beauty of the city. Landfills come within the city due to the large amount of waste that gets generated by households, industries, factories and hospitals. Landfills pose a great risk to the health of the environment and the religionist who lives there. Landfills produce foul smell when burned and cause huge environmental degradation (encyclopedia.com)

Deforestation

Deforestation as seen by Gale (2005) is the cutting down of trees to make way for more homes and industries. Rapid growth in population and urban sprawl are two of the major causes of deforestation. Apart from that, use of forest land for agriculture, animal grazing, fetching of fire wood and logging are some of the other causes of deforestation. Deforestation contributes to global warming as decreased forest size puts carbon back into the environment.

Global warming

Global warming according to Olumati and Edoghotu (2017) is the measurable increases in the average temperature of earth's atmosphere, oceans and landmasses. Purportedly, Etuonovbe (2009) opines that it is a continues build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. These gases, which include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and chlorofluorocarbons, block some of the heat radiated from the earth to cause a greenhouse effect. According to the inter-government panel on climate change (IPCC), the last two decades of the 20th century were the hottest on record (UN, 1998). Some of the major causes of increasing emissions of greenhouse gases are the burning of fossil fuels for energy and transport, the clearing of forest which reduces carbon dioxide absorption, cattle raising which produces methane emission as a by-product, and the use of technology that pollutes. Accordingly, global warming leads to the rise in seawater level and to soil erosion, flooding and drought.

Ozone layer depletion

The ozone layer in the words of Etuonovbe (2009) is basically found at a height of about 20 – 30km above sea level. The ozone layer provides a protective layer, which prevents the penetration of the sun harmful ultraviolet rays. The pollution of the atmosphere from the release of Chlorofluoro carbons (CFCS) gases cause the depletion of the ozone layers and this results to environmental degradation. Ukpong (1994) affirms that some of the skin diseases and the low productivity in agriculture are caused by ultra- violet rays. Also an increase in ultra-violet radiation affects water bodies, disturbs aquatic life, which supports the food chain, and causes the death of fishes that feed us. It also causes the deterioration of synthetic materials such as paints, and other products used in the building industry, invariably causing deterioration delivery to our ever- increasing human population

Erosion

Erosion according to Microsoft Encarta (2008) is the removal of rock and soil material by natural processes, principally running water, glaciers, waves and wind. Erosion transports rocky materials after the process of weathering has broken down into smaller moveable pieces. Erosion according to Olumati and Edoghotu (2017) is mostly a natural environmental degradation, not neglecting certain human influence through over grazing, deforestation and excavation. It has many adverse effects on the religionist and non living parts of the ecosystem. They furthered to posit that the devastating effects of erosion to the religionist is alarming. This is seen by the

washing away of ecological and economic lives of an area, cutting of roads which are located along such erosion sites, thereby making transportation difficult, washing away of houses and properties thereby rendering the religionist refugees in their homeland, carrying away the economic trees and even washing away the living organisms that exist in such soil

Effects of Environmental Degradation on the religionist and ecosystem

The effects of environmental degradation to the religionist and ecosystem is myriad of which space may be a constraint in pointing them one after the other. It has been observed from the above discussions that environmental degradation has massive effects on the people, plants and animals, marine life, aquatic life and the environment itself.

In agreement with this, Etuonovbe (2009) maintains that in Nigeria, the reduction in air quality we breathe is as a result of overcrowding, traffic congestion, and the general deterioration of our urban environment. Air pollution could degrade the environment; contribute to an increase in hospital admission, lead to absence from work and school and increase in mortality rate. Sulphur dioxide acts as a pungent suffocating irritant gas on the upper respiratory tract under moderate exposure, which could lead to the damage of the respiratory system. These sulphur compounds also affect visibility, reduction of sunlight, unpleasant smells, irritation and smarting in the eyes, nose and throat. Areas exposed to toxic air pollutants can cause respiratory problems like pneumonia and asthma. Millions of people are known to have died due to indirect effects of air pollution.

It leads to loss of biodiversity; biodiversity is important for maintaining balance of the ecosystem in the form of combating pollution, restoring nutrients, protecting water sources and stabilizing climate. Deforestation, global warming, overpopulation and pollution are few of the major causes for loss of biodiversity.

Ozone layer which is responsible for protecting earth from harmful ultraviolet rays is depleted. The presence of chlorofluorocarbons, hydro chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere is causing the ozone layer to deplete. As it depletes, it will emit harmful radiations back to the earth.

The deterioration of environment can be a huge setback for tourism industry that relies on tourists for their daily livelihood. Environmental damage in the form of loss of green cover, loss of biodiversity, huge landfills, increased air and water pollution can be a big turn off for most of the tourists.

Its economic effects can be seen as the huge cost that a country may have to borne in terms of restoration of green cover, cleaning up of landfills and protection of endangered species. The economic impact can also be in terms of loss of tourism industry.

Comparism of different religious traditions in handling ecological problem with emphasis on Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism and Shintiosm.

Christianity

According to the contribution on Christian's view on environmentalism as contained in wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, major Christian denominations endorse the biblical calling of our stewardship of God's Creation and our responsibility for its care. According to some social science research, conservative Christians and members of the Christian right are typically less concerned about issues of environmentalism than the general public. Many Christians, however, are environmental activists and promote awareness and action at the church, community, and national levels (Sherkat and Ellison, 2007). In the word of Peterson and Liu (2008), green Christianity is a broad field that encompasses Christian theological reflection on nature. Christian liturgical and spiritual practices centered on environmental issues, as well as Christian-based activism in the environmental movement. Within the activism arena, green Christianity refers to a diverse group of Christians who emphasize the biblical or theological basis for protecting and celebrating the environment. The term indicates not a particular denomination, but a shared territory of concern.

Furthermore, Christianity has a long historical tradition of reflection on nature and human responsibility. Christianity has a strong tendency toward anthropocentrism, as emphasized in the early environmentalist critique of Lynn Townsend White, Jr.. While some Christians favour a more biocentric approach, Catholic officials and others seek to retain an emphasis on humanity while incorporating environmental concerns within a framework of Creation Care. Christian

environmentalists emphasize the ecological responsibilities of all Christians as stewards of God's earth. As a result of the doctrine of stewardship, Christian environmentalists oppose policies and practices that threaten the health or survival of the planet. Of particular concern to such Christians are the current widespread reliance on non renewable resources, habitat destruction, pollution, and all other factors that contribute to climate change or otherwise threaten the health of the ecosystem. Many Christian environmentalists have broken with conservative political leaders as a result of these positions (Evangelical Environmental Network Archived, 2002).

According to McKenna (2016), Pope Francis in his speech on Paris accord, called for urgent action on Christians to stop climate change and proposed that caring for the environment be added to traditional Christian works of mercy such as feeding the hungry and visiting the sick. In a message to mark the Catholic Church's World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation that he launched in 2015, Francis said the worst impact of global warming was being felt by those who were least responsible for it which are the refugees and the poor. He further described man's destruction of the environment as a sin and accused mankind of turning the planet into a "polluted wasteland full of debris, desolation and filth". "Climate change is also contributing to the heart-rending refugee crisis. The world's poor, though least responsible for climate change, are most vulnerable and already suffering its impact."

The pope further said that the faithfuls should use the Holy Year of Mercy throughout 2016 to ask forgiveness for sins committed against the environment and our "selfish" system motivated by "profit at any price". He called for care for the environment to be added to the seven spiritual works of mercy outlined in the Gospel that the faithful are asked to perform throughout the pope's year of mercy in 2016. In his word, according to McKenna (2016), "we must not be indifferent or resign to the loss of biodiversity and the destruction of ecosystems, often caused by our irresponsible and selfish behavior. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, we have no such right." He also mentioned the assertion of Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Vatican's council for peace and justice that the first step of every Christian is to humbly acknowledge the harm we are doing to the earth through pollution, the scandalous destruction of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity, and the spectra of climate change. In our natural world, we refuse to turn away from the climate catastrophe and species extinction. For the Guardian, reporting on the environment is a priority. We give

reporting on climate, nature and pollution the prominence it deserves, stories which often go unreported by others in the media. At this pivotal time for our species and our planet, we are determined to inform readers about threats, consequences and solutions based on scientific facts, not political prejudice or business interests.

Islam

In the Islamic perception, environmental protection is an important aspect of Islam. Being stewards of the Earth, it is the responsibility of Muslims to care for the environment in a proactive manner. According to Al-Banna (2016), there is a definite purpose behind the creation of different species, be it plants or animals. Muslims are encouraged to reflect on the relationship between living organisms and their environment and to maintain the ecological balance created by Allah. Protection of the environment is essential to Islamic beliefs and mankind has the responsibility to ensure safe custody of the environment.

Accordingly, the Islamic perspective on environmental protection reflects a positive image about Islam and how it embraces every single matter the humans face on earth. The Islamic attitude towards environment and natural resource conservation is not only based on prohibition of over-exploitation but also on sustainable development. The Holy Quran says:

“It is He who has appointed you viceroys in the earth ... that He may try you in what He has given you.” (Surah 6:165). “O children of Adam! ... eat and drink: but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters.” (Surah 7:31)

Islam is against the cutting or destruction of plants and trees unnecessarily as is evident in the following Hadith: Abdullah ibn Habashi reported that Prophet Muhammad said: “He who cuts a lote-tree without justification, Allah will send him to Hellfire.” The lote-tree grows in the desert and is very much needed in an area which has scarce vegetation. The devastation caused by deforestation in many countries causes soil erosion and kills many of the biodiversity of the earth.

The approach of Islam towards the use of natural resources was brilliantly put forward by the Fourth Caliph Hazrat Ali ibn Abi-Talib who said “Partake of it gladly so long as you are the

benefactor, not a despoiler; a cultivator, not a destroyer. All human beings as well as animals and wildlife enjoy the right to share earth's resources. Man's abuse of any resource is prohibited as the juristic principle says 'What leads to the prohibited is itself prohibited' (Al-Banna, 2016),.

Going further, Al- Banna (2016) opines that when Abu Musa was sent to Al-Basrah as the new governor, he addressed the people saying: "I was sent to you by 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab in order to teach you the Book of your Lord i.e. the Qur'an, the Sunnah of your Prophet, and to clean your streets." Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) forbade that a person relieve himself in a water source or on a path or in a place of shade or in the burrow of a leaving creature. These values highlight Islam's stress on avoiding pollution of critical resources and importance of cleanliness.

Environmental awareness and protection of natural resources is an integral part of Islamic beliefs. As viceroys of Allah on this earth, we have to utilize natural resources in a sustainable manner in order to ensure that Allah's Bounties are continued. The principle of conservation is beautifully illustrated by the rule which says that while making ablutions (wudu) we should be abstemious in the use of water even if we have a river at our disposal. As humans, we are keepers of all creation, including soil, air, water, animals and trees. A major objective of Islamic teachings and Prophet (Peace be upon him) traditions is to build and maintain a healthy and clean environment which is devoid of any source of pollution and misuse (Al- Banna, 2016).

Buddhism

From a Buddhist perspective according to Yamamoto and Kuwahara (2008), solving and contributing to the eradication of environmental problems is part of its practice. In other words, solving environmental problems is a natural aspect of the Buddhist philosophy. One important example is the practice of the way of the Bodhisattva using the six paramitas. According to them, the six paramitas are composed of Dāna paramita (generosity), Sila paramita (keeping precepts), Kshanti paramita (patience), Virya paramita (effort), Dhyāna paramita (unwavering) and Prajñā paramita (wisdom).

In trying to proffer an explanation on the paramitas of the Buddhism, Yamamoto (2003) opines that Dāna paramita means giving a fortune, preaching a law or removing fear, i.e., doing

something good without regret for a person and nature, Sila paramita means keeping precepts such as not hurting or killing living entities and not stealing, Kshanti paramita means enduring sadness and pain, Virya paramita means doing your best and always making effort to do better, Dhyāna paramita means being unwavering or steadfast in all endeavors, and Prajñā paramita means obtaining true cognition of wisdom from the concepts of “dependent origination” and the “middle-way”.

Thinking concretely, the six paramitas from the viewpoint of practice for solving environmental problems: Dāna paramita (generosity) includes donating an environmental movement, making schools for the improvement of education in the developing countries, teaching whereabouts of environmental problems and methods to solution, contributing to technical co-operation and the development to decrease pollution, not giving fruitlessly fear of the problems but giving the precise knowledge and the sense of security, moreover offering appropriate living places for wildlife. Sila paramita means keeping precepts such as “precept of not killing” and “precept of not stealing”. As we have already examined these precepts, intentionally killing living beings commits “the precept of not killing” and destructing the living ground of wildflora and fauna by development and the destruction of nature offend against “the precept of not stealing”, therefore, it is necessary to suppress such acts (Yamamoto and Kuwahara ,2008).

Kshanti paramita (patience), Virya paramita (effort), and Dhyāna paramita (unwavering) mean that enduring and getting over much difficulty caused by acting to solve the problems without disturbing. Prajñā paramita (wisdom) means that learning of wisdoms from the concepts of “dependent origination” and the “middle-way”, and that obtaining truth recognition at a standpoint of correct views of nature and environment, or creating a method of solving the problems and practicing it. Therefore, actions and perseverance for solutions towards environmental problems corresponds to the Bodhisattva way very well. It is even more important to establish the true meaning of the six paramitas as an intuitive part of Buddhist practice, which is not something separate from protecting and conserving the environment. In other words, a Bodhisattva who practices the six paramitas is someone who is acting in accordance with protecting the environment and reducing environmental problems. Buddhists will be able to

contribute to solving environmental problems more positively if these codes of conduct and ethical norms are maintained in Buddhist practice. (Yamamoto and Kuwahara, 2008)

Confucianism

According to Tianchen (2003), Confucianism is distinguished by its concern for the cultivation of human relations towards a harmonious society rather than one's relations with the supernatural or natural. However, it would be a mistake to regard the civilization legacy of Confucius as purely humanistic. Confucianism is a philosophy which also contains profound environmental ethics through its inclusiveness of Heaven, Earth and the Human order. These form the traditional Chinese trinity which configures the ultimate harmony. Relations between people and the natural world are therefore of intrinsic interest to those who profess Confucian ethics.

With the planet's widespread industrial development and the rapid growth of population, ecosystems are in urgent need of ethical consideration. Tianchen furthered to say that saving the environment requires that we understand it, our place within it, and our responsibilities toward it. The environment's unprecedented exploitation, in the absence of practices of protection and renewal, now threatens future economic and social development. In other words, an impoverished natural environment impedes both the material standard of living and socio-cultural quality of life. To the Confucian mind, this problem originates in the misconstruing of relations between humankind and nature. The solution may therefore begin with people understanding how to conduct such relations.

In the words of De Bary and Bloom (1999), *the Doctrine of the Mean has it that all things exist together and they do not do harm to each other; all ways exist together, and they do not come into conflict. Therefore, 'saving' the environment requires more than physical preservation; it calls for reverence and duty to the environment's greater self and nature. This extension of humanity carries ethical concerns for the environment.*

He went on to say that the Confucian revival in the Song dynasty known as Neo-Confucianism, further entrenched the doctrine of the unity of Heaven and the human being, and hence ethical responsibility beyond the human environment. The Neo-Confucian philosopher, Zhang Zai made this clear in his celebrated essay, thus “Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which extends throughout the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions”.

Since the Industrial Revolution, there had appeared such problems as pollution of water, air and soil, as well as sound (noise pollution). Nowadays, ecological problems are clearly identified even if they are not convincingly contained or reversed. They include soil erosion, damage to the ozone layer, shortage of fresh water, and rapid decrease of forests and species. The Confucian ecological ethics does not give humans dominion over nature, nor does it sacrifice human development at the altar of pristine nature. Confucians maintain the oneness of humankind and nature, the harmony and unity between the two. The doctrine of the Mean says: “Attaining equilibrium, heaven and earth will be in their right places and all things will come into being”. In handling relations between the human and natural worlds, people need to observe the principle of equilibrium, so that the vitality and harmony of nature, the ecological balance of the natural environment can be maintained properly (Tianchen, 2003).

Furthering, it is worthy to note that Confucians maintain that human beings should control and restrict their desires, so that natural resources can be rationally exploited and utilized, and their production and consumption kept in balance. Indeed, Mencius advocated the idea of being "benevolent to the people and love all things", which reflected the Confucian teaching of attaching importance to all living things. Confucian thinkers understood that, only in this way, can all things exist and multiply in accordance with the laws of nature, while human beings can have living resources sufficient to their needs as a society. The simple rule is that society's productive activities must benefit the development of the environment, for when the environment develops so does the productivity of humans.

Hence the Confucian view holds humans to be part of nature and that they should respect and act in accordance with the laws of nature. The reality in our times, of course, has proved otherwise;

people's ruthless exploitation of natural resources has greatly damaged the natural environment, to the point where humankind is in dire need of environmental morality. He considered that all things in nature were the material foundation upon which human beings lived; hence people should take a friendly attitude towards them. He also thought that we ought to establish a relationship of 'love' with nature and take it as our friend, regarding it as unfilial "to chop a tree or to kill an animal at improper times." Hence, love and filiality towards humans should be extended to the protection of, and respect for the natural environment. This represents the full force of Confucian filial duty: we should be filial not only to our human parents but to mother nature, too. This is because we as humans are deeply related to Heaven and Earth, forming a triad of existence.

Taking the Confucian view that the current ecological crisis stems from the spiritual crisis in human beings, the solution to the ecological crisis ultimately rests with the spiritual regeneration of human beings. It is people who must cultivate their moral sensibility, for only those who have done so will be prepared to observe the regulations of environmental protection, and bear the responsibility and obligation they owe nature. Confucius identified this type of person as *junzi*, the morally noble person. Hence, Confucian ecological ethics can direct people in correctly understanding and handling relations between one person and another, one generation and another, an individual and society, people and nature, partial interests and overall interests, immediate interests and long-term interests. The crossroads of two centuries present a fitting occasion to pause and reconsider the eternal theme of how to achieve harmony between human civilization and nature (Tianchen, 2003).

Shintoism

Shinto tradition according to Gale (2005) acknowledges a deep debt to the blessing of nature and the spiritual power which brings about life, fertility, and prosperity. This life-giving power was called Musubi (divine power of growth), and perceived in all the workings of nature. Since the Japanese people felt the divine within nature, they came to hold the ideal of a life that was in harmony with and united with nature. Mountains peaks, deep valleys, and the wide ocean were viewed as dwellings for the divine, and other natural objects such as evergreen trees and huge rocks were considered to be symbols of divine spirits.

He is further of the opinion that the ancient Japanese considered that all things of this world have their own spirituality, as they were born from the divine couple. Therefore, the relationship between the natural environment of this world and people is that of blood kin, like the bond between brother and sister. It is true that an agricultural society based on rice cultivation like that of Japan cannot exist without unification and harmony among all things on this earth: mountains, rivers, the sun, rain, animals, and plants, not to mention cooperation among people. So, it was natural that people developed the idea that they could make their society flourish only when they worked together, fully performing their own role, but at the same time, helping and supporting each other. This gave rise to the spirit of revering various Kami, the land, nature, people, and, on top of that, the spirit of appreciation of harmony among all these aspects of Nature. Kami are the spirits or phenomena that are worshiped in the religion of Shinto. They can be elements of the landscape, forces of nature, as well as beings express, they can also be the spirits of venerated dead persons.

Furthermore, Shinto regards that the land, its nature, and all creatures including humans are children of Kami. Accordingly, all things existing on this earth have the possibility of becoming Kami. Nevertheless, revered status as Kami is limited to those that live quite extraordinary lives beyond human wisdom or power and that have a profound influence, for good or ill, on human beings. As to natural elements or phenomena that have such enormous power, there exist Kami of Rain, Kami of River, Kami of Thunder, Kami of Wind, Kami of Mountain, Kami of Ocean. All these Kami are involved in the life of a rice-cultivating agricultural society.

Speaking of the reverence toward Kami of Mountain, Gale (2005) posits that it started with people's awareness of mountains as an important source of water for rice cultivation. Then, people came to regard the mountain itself as a sacred object. This mountain faith prepared the ways not only for the preservation of mountain forests but also for conservation of the cycle of the ecosystem, given the fact that mountain forests supply rich nutrition to seas through the rivers, and support good inshore fishing. In ancient times, reverence toward a holy mountain was expressed by paying respect directly to the mountain itself. Nowadays, Shinto has a building, or a compound of buildings, where Kami spirit dwells permanently, and people worship by performing Matsuri – a festival to offer prayers to Kami – in these buildings.

Environmental issues, after all in the way of Shinto religion depend on our self-awareness of the problems and our determination to take responsibility. We often say that things look different depending upon one's viewpoint. So, Shinto suggests that we should shift our point of view and look at our environment with the spirit of "reverence and gratitude," that is, with the spirit of parental care for children or with the spirit of brotherhood. And if we can extend this spirit to our neighbours to our society members, to our country members, to peoples of the world, and to nature too, transcending differences of thought, ethics, and religion, then this spirit will serve to foster criteria and morals indispensable for keeping our human life healthy.

Conclusion

We have been able to see that there are so many things that affect our environment which results to environmental degradation of which the religionist is part of the contributing factors. We can however, take action to stop it and take care of the world we live in by providing environmental education to the people which will help them be familiar with their surroundings and as such, taking care of environmental concerns thus making it more useful and protected for our children and the future generations.

Apart from that, the adoption of the policy of sustainable development can also be a solution. The concept as defined by UN in Etuonovbe (2009) is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. To achieve this sustainable development in the opinion of Odiette (1993) involves a judicious use of natural resources such that the carrying capacity and the productive capacity are not overexploited. Also in order to survive our environmental degradation and maintain the earth as a place for habitation, we must reduce the massive pollution of the biosphere and other toxics that bring about unfulfilled destinies and premature death to the religionists. It is clear from this work that all the religious traditions studied in this research are in one way or the other contributing in fighting ecological problems because of its effects on the religionist and they have also helped in ameliorating the reoccurring decimal of environmental degradation because of its effects on the religionist. It can also be said that the issue of religion and ecology is vice versa in the sense that religion affects the ecology by the religionist's effort to exploit the natural resources and environment for his use and the environment in reverse affects the religionist who

lives within it by been unfriendly to him and his health because of been deprived of the essentialities that make for a healthy living.

Recommendations

This work recommends that people should be careful in the use of the environment in order to reduce the rate of environmental degradation prevalent in the society today which has adverse effects on the people living within the environment.

It also recommends that religious leaders should advise their adherents on the use of the earth with the view that we are all stewards of God's creation and have the responsibilities of caring for it and must give account of how we use things giving to us to care for.

It further recommends that the religionists should try to reduce the level of air pollution which could cause pneumonia, asthma and other deadly diseases to them by avoiding things that lead to it.

Government should try to look into damages caused to peoples' lives as a result of constant flame that comes with exploration of crude and device a more modernized and less harmful way of doing that.

This work finally recommends that government should also help in providing sources of good water supply and better standard of living for the people living within these oil areas that are suffering much of the issues which has often resulted to cancer and premature deaths.

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