

THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT ON AFRICAN RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEMPORARY TIME

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.31621.83688

Abstract

The environment is a sacred home created for both living and non-living things by creator-Animator to serve man's purposes. It is considered also a place where African and Christian religions are practised. God is the architect, focal and sacred object of worship, whose creative work manifest in the environment and spur deeper reflection and worship of Him in the universe among adherents of African and Christian religions. Climate change and environment have diverse lamentable impact on the duo religions as they are practiced in the environment which remained worrisomeness today. The aim of the paper is to examine the impact of climate change and environment on African and Christian religions in contemporary time, which is continually been championed by man's incessant degradational activities. The paper made use of historic, descriptive, comparative and analytic methods of research. Data were collected through participant observation and observer participant, and consultation of books. The paper unveils that, African and Christian religions have been dreadfully affected by climate change and environment as a result of man's incessant environmental degradational activities. The paper is of the view that, there is need for the two religions to foster preservation of the environment in order to curtailed impact of climate change and environment on African and Christian religions. African and Christian religions are part of nature, and all hands must be on deck to preserve them in order to sustain and foster harmonious utilization, preservation of the environment which is been affected by climate having lamentable impact on the existence and practice of the duo religions respectfully.

Keywords: African Religion, Christianity, climate change, environment and Phenomenology

Introduction

The environment is the creation of God. It is a habitat for both living and non living things and sacred manifestation of an orderly work of creation. Man is equally at the centre of religious universe, where natural phenomenal objects are ultimately associated to have been created by God. Furthermore, environment helps in providing food for man, shelter, security and it has religious relevance link with the concept of God especially the Cosmogonic myth which tells how the world came into being (Mbiti 48-50). The creation account in Gen 1:19 point to the fact that, creation and mandate of environmental control was divinely mandated by God to man to care for the environment, where his religious commitment to the Supreme Being transpired.

Man is an architect of modelling and even destroying the sacredness of environment instigated by climate change which also in turns affect religious practices of the two faiths. No doubt the environment is a home for both the living and the non living where African and Christians religions are practised. However, some of the most nagging problems facing human life today, at least in this twenty first century are basically environmental problems and ecological crisis which affects the existence and practice of religions (Gbenda, Religion and Ecology¹). No doubt the once sacred environment that was regarded as perfect creation of God, where both religions are practised is under serious siege, and having dreadful impact on the practise of religions.

The impact of climate change and environment on African religion and Christianity cannot be over emphasized because of the immediate and rampant degradational impact they have on both religions, which are lamentable as the quality and practice of both religions are diminishing on daily basis. Taking a cursory look around the environment, one must not be told how the efficacy of both religions have been dwindling on daily basis as a result of the impact of climate change and environment on both religions today. Impact of climate change and environment on African Religion in contemporary time remains a worrisome menaces we have to battle with them.

It is worth ascertaining without mincing words that, in the environment, religious activities are affected by climate change which are instigated by man's disregard for the conservation of nature leading to capricious climate change, a world nagging phenomenon (Busia²⁹⁰). Thus, the environment is part and parcel of African and Christian religious eco- theology, where climate change affects inter-play of relationship between the sacred and profane. It is evidently clear that, man is at the center of the environment, who is a religious being owing his creation from the Supreme Being. Man is also seen as an agent instigating the rise of climate change by his impunitive activities leading to environmental and climate change which have effects on African and Christian religions respectfully.

The work of nature calls for conservation, judicious use and reflection of the orderly and mighty works of the creator manifested in the universe, but due to man's reckless activities, the earth is reaped off of the is ardent care, where the effects of climate change and environment leaves no stone unturned to lament. Hence, climate change and the environment are under man's control, where man is at the centre and shares in the interplay of the two worlds; spiritual and physical which both religions recognised and shared in the creation and abundance of nature. No doubt climate change and environment have diverse effects on the environment where man relates with nature and also his fellowmen. Thus, man's religious acts are professed in the environment which recognised the orderliness and mighty works of nature being abused frequently leading to climate change as it has diverse effects on African and Christian religions.

It is in this regard as observed further that, climate change and environment have diverse effects on African and Christian religions, as they affect the serenity, sacredness and existence of religious experiences between the living and the departed. Since, environmental problems have become problems that affects the global world in all facets of socio-religious experiences, no doubt, the intensity of reverence to the works of God in nature is always abused having persistent effects on climate change and the environment where man and religion are considered part of nature (Anyacho, Religion in Society¹⁴⁶). Eco- theology of African religion is also revealed through nature and manifested in the religious culture of people (Gbenda, Religion and Ecology⁴³), which is under threat due today.

There is no doubt also that, as climate change and environment affects African and Christian religions, there exist destabilization of the ontological order, man's relationship with his creator, and also with his fellow men. Hence, man and nature cannot be separated as long as they emerged from the creation of God to serve Him. But due to man's injudicious use of nature, preservation of the sacredness of nature as tied in man's and profound relationship has been greatly affected. Thus, the environment is regarded as a religious universe where there are interconnections among the living and other sacred living beings (Mbiti52).

No doubt Gaiya asserts similarly also that, the environment formed part and parcel of the reflections of the two religions, where there is no dichotomy between the physical and spiritual, and climate change continues to have dreadful effects on the practice of African and Christian religions respectfully in the universe. In Christian perspective also, the work of creation is for man to reflect on the wonders of the c-creator, and to worship Him. Hence, the two worlds shape each other in man's relation to his creator, who is the focal object of worship (Gaiya7). In this essay, some of the effects of climate change and environemnt on African and Christian religions are going to be examined with the aim of preferring some recommendations to the menaces.

African Religion

African religion has been defined by various authors from different perspectives to mean the religion of the African people. It is the religion of the African people. Gbenda defines as the religious tradition of the African peoples that is based purely on their culture. The religion was initiated thousands of years ago and still being practised by many of its adherents across African countries (African Religion and Christianity4-5). In another related definition, Adasu defines it as "the sustaining faith handed to Africans from one generation to present "(1). For Shishima, it is the aboriginal faith handed to Africans by their ancestors many ago"(1). In another elaborate defination of African Religion in the Nigerian context, Ekwunife summed thus:

... living institutionalized religious beliefs and practices, which are rooted in the past... religious culture ; a religion that was transmitted to the present overt and covert ovaries by successive ... forebears mainly through oral traditions, myths and folktales, songs and dances , liturgies , rituals, proverbs , sayings and names, sacred institutions like sacred specialists and objects and religious works of art ;a religion win h is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new religious experiences through dialectical process of continuation and discontinuities (1).

Christianity

Is a religion founded by Jesus Christ. Anyacho also asserts that, "Christianity was established in Palestine through the person and activities of Jesus of Nazareth, which is popularly known as Christianity (Essential Themes in the Study of Religions180). In a nut shell, Christianity is one of the viral religions founded by Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was born of Mary and Joseph the carpenter.

Climate Change

Climate change refers to long tem shift in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural , such as through variations (WHO, 6ThMay 2023). In another similar view , climate change as a change that is attributed directly or indirectly to human activities that later the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability over

comparable time (as qtd in Gbenda, Religion and Ecology 213).

Environment

Environment comes from the Greek word *Viron* meaning circle, surrounding or circle around. The French word for environment also means encircle or surround (19). Environment is the sum total of the conditions within which organisms live. It is made up of the living and non living things which are called biotic and abiotic factors (20). Gudaku in another succinct view asserts that, environment means surrounding ;and everything that affects an organisms during their life time . He further adds that,the environment is the sum total water, air ,and land interrelationships among themselves and also with the human beings , others living organisms and property (73). In another related view also, environment is seen as the field of effective stimulation and interaction for any unit of living mater (Fairchild107).

Origin and Nature of the Environment

The environment was created by the God , who is been referred to as maker of heaven and earth. In another similar view as observed,God is responsible for the origin of the environment. He is indeed revered and referred to as the 'Mighty Designer ' who fashioned the environment and placed man at its centre to be in charge (Anyacho, Religion in Society167). Hence, the environment did not receive existence from man, but God. Despite the fact that man is a socio-religious being. In the beginning , we were told that God created heaven and earth. In the beginning man and woman lived in harmony with the universe (Adodo9)

It is not an exaggeration to say that,Supreme Being is the original author of the environment where man shares in His abundance. No doubt the environment formed an inseparable part and parcel of African worldview, where man relates in the universe (Gaiya7). In the environment, there is no sharp dichotomy between the spiritual and physical worlds. The two sharp realism shape into each other (Gbenda, Religion and Ecology16). The world did not give origin to itself. God created the universe and all that it contains (Gen1:11-12). Hence, humans are the youngest occupants of this created universe, which originated from God to be judiciously taken care of by man.

On the nature of the environment, it is composed of so many things , visible and invisible. Thus, nature which lies in the revered manifestation of sacredness of agents, totems which is considered mysteries and sacred, where teachings and taboos are meant to protect the environment from been incessantly damage by man (Ugwu40). However, the environment is made up living things and non -living. The former constitute the *iota*. They include, the plants, animals) and the micro organisms. The plants are often revered to as the flora;the animals are known as the fauna , while the micro organisms are simply addressed as microbes. The non living things of an environment constitute the *iota* or the physical factors , or physical components of the environment . They include the climate , soil, mountains, the topography, the air and water (Fatubarin2).

History of Climate Change

Man sees himself at the dented of the universe there fore the world exist for the sake of man (Anyacho,Religion in Society 168). Since 1800's, human activities have been the main driver of climate change;primarily due to burning of fuel, coal, oil and gas. Other human activities include the use of agro allied substances, mining activities and deforestation amongst it her activities are responsible for the rising cases of climate change.

Thus, burning of fossils fuel generates green house gas emissions that act like a blanket wrapped around the earth. It is interesting to also know that, emissions from green houses include causes of carbon dioxide and methane (WHO, 6th May, 2021). Furthermore, clearing of land and forest, tilling, over grazing, use of agro allied chemicals, release of carbon dioxide, transport discharge, mining activities, oil exploration, combustion engine discharge, industrial discharges are among the emitters of climate change today. Thus, harnessing of earth minerals resulted in massive rise in climate change as it affects the environment in facets of ways having practical bearing on the environment and African and Christian religions respectively (Gbenda, Religion and Ecology 213).

African and Christian Religions and Environment

African and Christian religions consider the earth as sacred creation of God with man at its centre, who is considered the most rational of all creatures who is part of the environment, where African and Christian religions are practised by their adherents. Thus, various teachings on the need for man to reflect upon the care of the environment by making judicious use of nature as the product of God's creation is evident. However, African ontology is firmly anthropocentric, and thus, makes man look at God and nature from the point of his relationship with them. Hence, we find many expressions which attribute human nature to God (Mbiti 48) as man reside in the environment as a sacred created home by God. African religion and environment are two sides of the same coin where the two shapes each other in their ontological relationship.

In another interesting excerpt, the traditional African perception of the environment is that, every thing that belongs to the ecosystem is profoundly religious and many things on earth, are held in high or for religious reasons, especially when they are thought to be dwelling places of spirits, ancestors and other spiritual beings. In Christianity, the book of Genesis 1:28 reiterates that "mankind is to practice" dominion "over the earth. Hence, humans in Genesis verse 2, provides an alternate creation story, one in which man is created from dust and placed in "the garden" to till and protect (or serve). Hence, the creation story has well described human duties toward the earth) (as quoted in Gbenda, Religion and Ecology, 139-140).

The Africa and Christian's attitude to nature is deeply engraved in the belief that, all things were created by God, and are supposed to work harmoniously for the welfare of man now and here after (Gbenda, African Religion and Christianity 103). For instance, in African religion, totems are considered sacred and must be protected. Life force exist and protected in the environment, and groves, forest, mountains, hills, streams are conserved as homes for spirits, ancestors and source of collecting herbs for healing and for consultation with the spiritual agents and even in worship of the Supreme Being (Ugwu 61). Everything in the universe is a language of life and an expression of life. Therefore, they are sacred and holy (Adodo 7).

Similarly as also observe the paper, the Koong tree in Dong' A' among the Mumuye of Dong in Lamma District of Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State is considered a sacred tree which has many branches and preserved as a religious pilgrim site because of its religious significance among the people. No doubt, the traditional life of the Africans is deeply religious because the empirical participation in the universe makes life a profoundly religious phenomenon which is more than any thing else (Mbiti 262). Furthermore, according to African people, man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God (1). Certain taboos are put in place to restrain interference with the natural state of the environment where climate change release its harmful effects, which also affects African and Christian

religions respectfully.

The earthly references in God's word strike us as enormously rich excerpt to reflect on the need to preserve the environment. For instance, in the creation stories in Genesis, we were told that the creator, God also brought into being those galaxies so many millions of light away from us. Hence, from this story, it vividly shows that earth has yielded what all its creatures need for life (Gbenda, Religion and Ecology 141). The earth is the creation of God, and man is a rational and profiled being whose image is seen in him been placed at the centre of universe to be in dominio, and where eco-theology is realised and fostered.

The eco-theology of African and Christian religions is revealed through nature and manifested in religious respect and practice by their adherents (43). It is common belief maintained in both religions that, every thing in the universe was created by the Supreme Being for man's reflection of Him. That explains why many things on earth are held in great esteemed for religious reasons, especially where they are thought of being sacred. No doubt, both religions hold in respect the attitude to nature as deeply rooted in the belief that all things were created by the Supreme Being for harmonious continuity as such there must be a relationship of mutual obligations between created things (46).

Effects of Climate Change and Environment on African and Christian Religions

There are related effects associated with climate change and environment on African and Christian religions, which are thus examined below:

- i. Effects of climate change and the environment on African and Christian religions in contemporary time is seen on the increase of drought, water scarcity, severe fire, raising sea level, flooding, melting polarized, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity with earth inhabiting spiritual beings and even affecting use of the earth resources and conducive environment for carrying out religious functions. Climate change and environment have direct effects on African and Christian religions because they disrupt the natural state of the environment, and it is costly to control these effects because they affect lives and practice of both faiths. Furthermore, climate change reduces the conducive atmosphere for the practice of both religions. For instance, the forest, streams, mountains, rivers and animal species are regarded as homes of some spiritual beings and places of religious activities but are degraded on daily basis by man. Also, various natural bodies which are considered totems and religiously sacred are polluted, and the environment getting desecralized. As the sea level rises due to climate change and environment, their dreadful impact on both religions remained pathetic.
- ii. People's health is also affected as a result of the effects of climate change and environment on African and Christian religions, where there is loss of members to the cold hands of death due to extinction of some medicinal plants which have been destroyed as a result of the degraded effect of climate change and environment. Thus, people suffer from the challenges of seeking required herbs for healing, protection and religious rituals because of the dreadful effects of climate change on the environment and on both religions. Furthermore, climate change also deteriorates health conditions of people, and also provoked spiritual agents from granting favours to the people.
- iii. Climate change and environment increasingly placed stress and shocks on the

capacity of health systems to prevent adaptable and response to increase health risk posed by shock and increase weather event (WHO, 2021) whose effects on African and Christian religions cannot be overemphasized but remained lamentable.

- iv. Another effect of climate change and environment on African and Christian religions is the relocation of places of worship due to industrialization and urbanization which constitute threats to already situated places of worship which are either demolished or relocated to other places due to over congestion or threatening or demand and proliferation of industries . Hence, this action has affected religious places of worship and observances due to pollution and health related challenges that may occur. However, sacred mountains, streams which provide Conducive atmosphere for religious reflection and functions are degraded due to industrial mining and other activities,which necessitate in climate change and environment having dreadful affects on African and Christian faiths.
- v. The demand of certain species of animals and varieties of plants necessitate them to go into extinction, which are some triggering factors of climate change and environment, which result in ecological imbalances for the two religions to survive with man fostering such imbalances and decay of total religious respect for the environment.
- vi. As the beauty of nature is been championed and harnessed incessantly by man, the serenity of religious reflection in the environment is affected due to the impact of climate change and environment on both religions.

Recommendations

Amidst some effects of climate change and environment on African and Christian religions in contemporary time, the paper makes the following recommendations:

- i. There should be reawakening of enviromental protection by relevant stake holders in order to salvage the environment from the dreadful effects of climate change which affects African and Christian religions today.
- ii. The environment is the ontological living habitat for spiritual and physical living beings , and man's heinous degradational activities should be curtailed and condemned by African and Christian religions in order to safeguard nature, and provide a nature friendly relationship between man and nature in the furtherance and appreciation of eco-theology.
- iii. Fuel production, over grazing, deforestation, use of agro chemicals, industrial discharges, mining activities, oil exploration should highly be curtailed in order to curtailed the rise of climate change in the environment and their effects on African and Christian religions respectfully . Hence, all hands should ensure safety of the natural state of the environment devoid of pollutants that can easily affect the existence and practice of African and Christian religions.
- iv. There should also be recycling of man the earth resources in order to mitigate the rise in climate change, which affect both biotic and abiotic factors in the environment in order to reduce the risk and ensure the survival of African and Christian religions on the planet.
- v. Government and well spirited individuals should assist in the control of environmental degradational activities which lead to climate change having diverse effects on African and Christian religions.

- vi. The earth should be respected and preserved as the abode of both biotic and abiotic bodies, and all necessary effort should be put in place to ensure there is inter-play of forces between the two worlds; physical and physical which have practical bearing on man and his religions in the cosmos.
- vii. All hands should be on deck to safeguard the environment from the dreadful effects of climate change in the environment, which has effects on African and Christian religions as they disruptive the quality of relationship between man and nature, where religion also practiced.

Conclusions

There is no doubt climate change and environment have dreadful impact on African and Christian religions in contemporary time. The environment is a system where everything is connected, changes in one area can influence changes in all others. Heraclitus once wrote "all things in the universe are in a state of flux" therefore, nothing remains permanent. In essence, change is inevitable as long as nature is concern. This applies to the effects of climate change and environment and their impact on African and Christian religions respectfully. Climate change is necessitated by man's impunity towards nature , whose ravishing impact on the environment is lamentable .

Religious spirituality, nature to man friendly tie is affected on daily daily basis because the degradational human activities which have no regard for the environment as a home for both biotic and abiotic factors. Climate change and environment affect the sustainability and efficacy of African and Christian religions in contemporary time. Man who is a socio, cultural and religious being is the architect of conservation as well as devastation of the ecosystem, whose activities continued to dwindle the natural and orderly state of the environment, thereby exacerbating climate change . It is only when climate change is drastically controlled in the environment, that we can talk of African and Christian religions having a conducive place to thrives.

In nut shell, the environment is under man's control, and climate change and environment have lamentable impact on African and Christian religions. However, man, is high time he championed the course of controlling the impact of climate change and environment on African and Christian Religions in order to foster the survival and existence of both religions in an age of environmental crises. We need a new beginning. A new way of relating to one another and to the universe. Climate change and environment are under man's control and there is need to safeguard the environment in order to have a safer and conducive place where African and Christian religions would sacredly thrive without threat from the impact of the environmental and climate change.

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