AFRICAN RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN POST COLONIAL AFRICA

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Abstract

The relationship between religion and the environment has been one of contest. But in African belief it is a rested argument because the cosmos is conceived as a whole and subsumed under God, the creator. This traditional belief has come in contact with serious Western ideologies on the environment that calls for a re-evaluation of the role of the moral agency in African Religion, namely, the ancestors. It is argued that in spite of the Western influences that have vitrified the traditional belief in the place and potency of the ancestors, a transformative-ecozoic model, with its all-compassing moral, social, cultural and educational contents, provides African Religion with challenges it must rise up to in the context of the comity of global religions. Through analytical and contextual framework, the paper argues further that African Religion still has crucial roles to play in the maintenance of the environment in the 21ˢᵗ century, but that these roles are anchored on its ability to match academics with praxis.

Introduction

No one today can contemplate the state of late twentieth-century humanity on this planet earth without a sense of deep foreboding and of hope deferred. The breakdown of the communist empire of the USSR has but taken off the lid of the Pandora's box of long-repressed ethnic hatreds, many of them fueled by religion, and the planet itself is groaning under the burden of pollution generated by a burgeoning human population that is augmented by religious imperatives and motivations. The catastrophic effects of these and many other evils are, if anything enhanced by the irresponsible application of the

technology that science engenders. Moreover, the international comity of nations in their various assemblies seems impotent to decide or to act effectively in the face of these and other critical challenges to the general life of humanity on this planet.[1]

…unbridling individual human passions without regard to valuing human community let alone the ecosphere as a whole has led to a wanton pollution of our environment and the competition that has put us on the brink of thermonuclear disaster. All of this…is blamed on the modern mind…. The modern mind can no longer find God in nature. The world around us has ceased to become a mode of divine presence.[2]

The submissions above capture squarely the present state of our environment, which has been ossified by the globalization influences. Traditionally, these submissions would not have concerned or applied to Africa but today, she is an inescapable part of the whole world process. The changes and challenges that the global influences have poised to her, particularly the negative effects of technological advance on the environment, remain a burgeoning one that her religious belief seems incapable of steering. Understanding the post-colonial African cosmos requires a global perspective because of the intense interaction with, and influence from outside her shores. Thus, the definitive operationalisation of terms constantly has to be interwoven within the global parenthesis as it affects values in religion and technology. But the 'postmodern' insistence on secularism, which brackets out the value of religion in the preservation and maintenance of the environment necessarily calls for worry in Africa. From the quotations above, the first appears that both religion and technology are incapable of remedying the environmental problem, but the second insists on the relevance of religion in the quest to find a lasting solution to the problem.

Engaging the African Traditional Worldview
    One of the attempts to prove the existence of God was undertaken by William Paley, who, after examining the coordinated functioning of a watch made an analogy with the world. The orderliness and regularity of

the world underlie purposiveness. This world could not have come to be by chance or evolution. There must be a conscious, intelligent designer, from who the teleological or design argument derives. In the West, the argument has attracted a lot of criticisms.[3] Yet it seems appealing when it is supported by the African perception of the world.

The existence of God is a given in Africa. One does not have to engage in abstract philosophical arguments to reach the conclusion that He exists. One only needs to look at the world around him/her, the beauty, the orderliness and regularity, the mysteries, galaxies, mountains and other cosmic phenomena, and come to the conclusion that God exists. That God created the world, and none else, is a consequence of the religious tradition that nature and the environment are suffused with the numinous. The environment, as it were, oozes out the reality and constant presence of the Supreme Being. That being the case, the sacred cosmos and humanity are intertwined: there is no separation between the profane and the sacred. "Nature is so permeated by the sacred that every part of it is believed to possess a touch of sacrality. Through nature, pre-modern Africans had caught glimpses of divine reality at work and had perceived the presence of God in ecological terms."[4]

According to Chris Manus, this is not suggestive of the belief that Africans do not have the idea of profanity.[5] In fact morality is jealously and stringently guarded, not only by the living but also the living dead, the ancestors. And ecological morality is inclusive. As a result, "nature is …not an empty impersonal object to be thrashed and recklessly exploited but one filled with numinous significance for the wealth and mind of all beings."[6] God's self disclosure is a reality that nature crystallizes. This does not lead to the belief that God is nature or nature is God. Rather, the numinous is immanent and at the same time transcendent.

The fore going has faced serious challenges as a result of the interaction with the outside world. The sacrality of nature and the environment has been demeaned so practically that one questions whether the purposiveness of creation still holds sway. Environmental degradation or rather, man's de-creation of divine creation is a global problem, which is threatening the continued existence of life, including humans. The case of Niger Delta region in Nigeria is a quintessence. No responsible person or government will feign ignorance of the deleterious consequences of environmental pollution that pervades that region. It is a stark reality that the incessant restiveness in that region is a characterization of the neglect of the consequences of environmental exploitation and degradation. This

has resulted in hostage of several petroleum workers in recent times by the militants.

But the question is: why do the ancestors watch helplessly as the environment is depleted? Answering this question requires us to investigate whether the ancestors are themselves still given the pride of place they used to enjoy in the scheme of things. If they are not, as the post-colonial realities sadly portray to a large extent, do the Nigerians leave the environment in the hands of greedy exploiters? While the eco-theological model, which critically examines human dealing with the environment, with the hindsight to create a consciousness for the care of nature and environment, is needful, it must be complemented with transformative-ecozoic approach, which impels us to take into crucial cognizance the realities of post-colonial Africa, and, of course not forgetting traditional religious values. But it is necessary to explore briefly the African response to the various concepts of environmental studies.

Nature and Environment

When the term 'natural' is used, the mind quickly goes to what happens independently of human agency. This is contrary to artificial effort or exertion; it has nothing to do with human skill or artifice. This term, as a whole, constitutes a single world of nature. This means that it is broader than the sense it is used in "natural history": it refers not just to natural objects that are visible, but also to the underlying principles that guide their being and organization.[7] J.S. Mill argues to the contrary. To him, there is a sense in which everything can be said to be natural. As he puts it:

> It thus appears that we must recognize at least two principal meanings in one word 'nature'. In one sense, it means all the power existing in either the outer or the inner world and everything which takes place by means of those powers. In another sense, it means not everything which happens, but only what takes place without the agency or without the voluntary and intentional agency of man.[8]

John Passmore's discourse in the difference between nature and environment is apt here.

> I shall of necessity, be using (nature) in the sense in which
> it includes everything except man and what obviously

bears the mark of man's handwork. For what is in question is: "Is man's moral relationship to a nature well defined?" In another fundamental sense of the word – 'whatever is subject to natural law' – both man and man's artifacts belong to nature; nature can thus be contrasted, if at all, only with the supernatural. And sometimes, it will be necessary to use the word in that broader sense. The word 'environment' is often subtitled for the collective 'nature'. But other people, their actions, their customs, their beliefs are the most important ingredient in our environment.[9]

We can deduce from Passmore's argument that nature and environment are not synonymous. This new dimension that Passmore introduces entails for example, that "natural environment" is different from "built environment". Used in this sense, environment will mean "environment for some creature or collection of creatures, whether plant or animal."[10] Further than this, environment is used to cover the entire natural world, from ecosystem to biosphere that includes humans, plants and animals. In this sense, environment is not coterminous with nature because nature, on its own, is characterized by different definitions.

Cambridge Encyclopedia defines environment as "the system of abiotic, biotic and social-economic components with which man interacts and at the same time to which he adapts and transforms and uses in order to satisfy his need."[11] Here, environment is an embodiment of both animate and inanimate beings, which exist for human use. The moral thrust is how humans use the environment.

In traditional African sense, it would be difficult to separate nature from environment because of the strong belief in the numinous. It is believed that spirit permeates everything, whether natural or built environment, insofar as religion is the basis of every human and non-human element. Thus, natural phenomena and places are regarded as spirit-possessed and therefore, held in sacrality. Human's use of the environment has often been a controversial issue.

Preservation and Conservation

Though reservation and conservation are often used interchangeably, they are not exactly the same. Preservation is the philosophy that says "do not use these natural resources but preserve them for future generations to come."[12] In other words, it is the

philosophy which implies that the resources should be left precisely as they are, without human interference.[13] It is within the preservation principle that we can appreciate the establishment of parks and game reserves which are consciously guarded from human intervention. Conservation, on the other hand, has to do with the management of natural resources through human interference or intervention. The conservationists encourage humans to manage resources in such a way that "some are left for future generations."[14] When human intervenes in natural resources for consumption, but saves some for the future, it is conservation. When natural resources are being saved from "the adverse effects of human action"[15], we might call this preservation.

According to Passmore, the practical relationship between preservationists and conservationists is never cordial. As he puts it:

> On a particular issue, conservationists and preservationists can no doubt join hands, as they did to prevent the destruction of forests…But their motives are quite different: the conserver of forests has his eye on the fact that posterity, too, will need timber, the preserver hopes to keep large areas of forest forever untouched by human hands. They soon part company, therefore, and often with that special degree of hostility reserved for former allies. So it is as well that they should be clearly distinguished from the outset.[16]

Connelly and Smith explain this relationship further. "For preservationists, the natural world is assigned a value in itself, an intrinsic value, for conservationists the concern is with its value for human purposes."[17] While the conservationist philosophy appears to be more appealing given that humans cannot completely steer clear from intervening in nature, at least, for survival, it is difficult to calculate the quantum of interference that will be safe, not only for his/her consumption but also for the general well being of his/her specie or kind in relation to the environment as natural or as built. The deleterious effects of conservationist interference with natural world are becoming increasingly unsafe for the whole ecosystem. It is as a result of this that a new ethic is being sought in order to tame the tide. The fact is that among all living organisms, it is only the human's impact on nature and environment that has had inestimable negative effects on the universe. Connelly and Smith capture this fact squarely in their argument:

Although we are natural in origin, we cannot hide behind the 'natural' and deny the responsibility for our actions and their consequences. Our capacity for reasoning does not lift us clean out of the natural world, but it enables us to do what those without this capacity cannot: to reason about the natural world and our place within it. The ability to manipulate the natural world in accordance with our own ends goes together with the ability to reason about our responsibilities still lags behind our ability to manipulate nature, we are currently faced with the challenge of generating an ethic suitable for our predicament.[18]

For the Nigerians, the belief used to be that nature should be preserved substantially for posterity. Thus, responsible engagement with nature was encouraged and indeed practised. This called for ethics for environment. In the light of the above, we shall shortly review the three moral traditions they advanced. It is imperative to state that the moral traditions are essentially Western. They are useful here because, as we have said earlier, the interaction of Africa with the outside world has influenced its opinion and ideology in significant ways.

Moral Responses to the Environment

Being environmental sensitive can be stimulated by an appropriate ethic backed by intellectual reasoning. The responsibility to conserve nature and preserve resources for future generation cannot be over-emphasized. As we mentioned earlier, the problem of measuring the quantum of human interference with nature that is sufficiently necessary for sustainability is an irresolvable riddle. The quest to subdue nature has ever been the motivating factor especially in the technologically advanced West. The effects of these explorations, unfortunately, do not stop with them but spread to other parts of the world with which they interact. This is not to assume that it is only the West that is engaged in environmental pollution.

The need to preserve nature now does not just emphasize on humans only, it also extends significantly to other biotic and abiotic organisms and natural phenomena, which are faced with the threat of imminent extinction. The need, an urgent one, to save even the sentient being cannot be jettisoned. It will only alter human's scale of values in which not only will he/she put his/her survival as human first, but also the

consideration of the preservation of the sentient beings: animate and inanimate. This calls for ethical re-orientation.

Utilitarianism and Environmentalism

Utilitarianism is an ethical model that judges the consequences of actions instead of their intrinsic rightness. It places high premium on pleasure and the avoidance of suffering or pain; it is the greatest aggregate benefit for the greatest number.[19] In this case, utilitarian ethic appears to have been primarily concerned with the humans. Nevertheless, in applied sense, in relation to the environment, granted that it interests itself in the greatest welfare of the society, and that the health of the environment is a *sine qua non* of healthy welfare of the society in a way, utilitarianism concerns the feeling of pleasure and pain, now, not only by humans but also non-humans. Because animals do feel pain and suffering, even though we are not intrinsically equating them with humans, they deserve to be included and treated in environmental ethical policy. According to Singer,

> If a being is not capable of suffering or of experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. This is why the limit of sentience (…a convenient shorthand for the capacity to suffer or experience enjoyment or happiness) is the only feasible boundary of concern for the interests of others.[20]

Singer's argument is against exploitation of animals for human purposes. This does not mean in any sense that animals are equal with humans. Rather, there should be some level of respect for the sentient beings. The thrust is that since they also have the capacity for pain and suffering, they should be reckoned in connection with our moral responsibility for the welfare of the whole. Nevertheless, Singer's argument cannot provide adequate premises for an environmental ethic. Where resources can be channeled towards maximization, utilitarianism expects humans to exert their force. The traditional African response would be that whatever was held sacred should be so regarded in spite of the human demand for it. Thus for example, groves and totems were held sacred maintained until the contact with Christianity and colonialism when there began an avid iconoclasm, desecration and de-creation.

The Respect for Life in the Environment

The argument for respect for life or "reverence for life" in the West can be tightly associated with the life and work of Albert Schweitzer. This 'ethic' as it relates to life in the environment is characterized by a lot of problems. Insofar as we need to eat to live and therefore have to kill in order to eat, the sympathy for the pain and suffering the sentient beings undergo cannot prevent this act. This is not to suggest in any form the indiscriminate killing for consumption. This 'ethic' in its truest sense cannot be an injunction against eating, but one that elicits the feeling for the value of life and sustains us.[21]

In a sense, life as understood here may be limited. Unless we grant 'honorary life' to inanimate objects that as 'right' are part of the environment, the argument cannot go further. In the honorary thesis therefore, Gaia hypothesis is handy. Gaia hypothesis as propounded by James Lovelock presupposes that "the world as a whole is a living self-regulatory biosystem comparable with other biological organisms" which confers life ethic on "the Earth and to every part of it, including those parts of it usually regarded as not living."[22] The validity of this argument depends on the tenability of the Gaia hypothesis.

However, Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" introduces a broader spectrum. As he declares: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it does otherwise."[23] Here, significant reference is made to biotic community that helps to escape the logjam of the honorary life status awarded to non-living beings. The only danger is that it accords little value to the individual and too much value to the whole, which is the direct opposite of Gaia hypothesis that confers too much value on the individual and too little value on the whole.[24] The reaction of the Nigerians would be that lower beings, both animate and inanimate, deserve preservation from human rapacity. This could be understood from the prism of sacrality as referred to above.

Human Stewardship and the Environment

Humans have come to realize that they are stewards here on earth. This realization is sharpened by the Christian tradition, not only in the West but also in places where the religion has been adopted. Christian attitude towards nature is two-dimensional, namely; that the world is "essentially for man's sole instrumental use; and another in which we have duties of stewardship to the natural world."[25] The "scientific

revolution" in the West has significantly altered the Genesis notion of the world. For science and technology, the natural world is there for humans to use. This attitude towards the Genesis account has laid the foundation of the environmental crisis in contemporary world. Contrary to this exploitative interpretation is the view that even though man/woman is the master of the natural world, there appears to be no reasonable basis for his/her rapacious attitude that is causing untoward environmental problems today. Man/woman's dominion of the world should therefore be in a sense of stewardship towards God to dress and cherish the garden, which is the command given to him *ab initio*. This means that we own the world not on absolute, exploitative reasoning, but on trust. Even though man/woman is given the responsibility to have dominion over the world, it is certainly not clear that he/she is given an unlimited right. The term, dominion, contextually should be interpreted as "the granting of trust to humans, giving them stewardship to look after nature on behalf of God."[26] Watson and Sharpe have this to say:

> Stewardship is today the generally accepted understanding within Christianity…of the role given to humanity in creation, in its relation with the rest of nature. This can be interpreted as co-worker with God in creation, but in no sense as co-equal. For it signifies that humanity's position is that it is tenant and not owner, that it holds the earth in trust for God and for the rest of creation, present and to come.[27]

It is within this all-encompassing sense that we shall view the African religious view. Before then, it is important to say that the principles of stewardship include responsibility to the world, solidarity of all humans and a pungent need to have long term view on our environment. These three cardinal principles, webbed together under stewardship and trust towards God, place this ethic high and above the other two views previously considered.

African Religionist View on the Environment

African Religion (AFREL) is the religion of the African people before the advent of the mission religions especially Christianity and Islam. It is the religion autochthonous to the people into which they are born, not converted. However, it is the sea from which missionaries have become fishers of men and women. In Afrel, the spirits avowedly police the natural world. This inspires fear, reverence or awe, not only to God

who is believed created the world but also objects believed to be divine. Because the world is a manifestation of God's power and benevolence, humans therefore have a moral responsibility towards it. It is in this direction we can appreciate the reverence accorded some natural phenomena: they are not worshipped but believed to symbolize or represent the Divine.[28]

According to Magesa, the African universe is divine, human, spirit, animate and inanimate being, arranged in hierarchical order with intensive interaction. The beings are visible and invisible. This gives the idea of the invisible and visible spheres of the universe.[29] Justin Ukpong disagrees with the two-world notion of the African universe in which one is visible, the other invisible. Rather, he argues that the African universe is one with two dimensions. According to him, the two worlds of the African is a Western dualistic dichotomy. The correct African perspective, as he puts it, is "only one world with visible and invisible dimensions."[30] This is borne out of the belief that this world is the drama-scene of the visible and invisible elements.

Another feature of the African universe is that everything, including the natural world has a metaphysical dimension. Again, everything is considered to be 'alive' and connected one with another by a single life force, which Placide Tempels calls "vital force."[31] When translated to environmental ethic, we discover that the belief in the sacredness of natural objects and phenomena has a strong preserving force of the environment. The taboo, as ethical principle in Afrel, makes it mandatory for the adherents to regard certain natural phenomena and places as sacred. Some animals are regarded as totems and therefore preserved. Some rivers are believed to be sacred and they are not polluted. The evil forests are held sacred and the games and trees there are safe from exploitative rapacity of humans. Greed is the cause of the abuse of the universe. But there are consequences for this moral wrong doing towards the universe.[32]

The idea of holding the environment in trust is embedded in the communal life of the Nigerians. The kings held the land in trust for God and on behalf of the people. This means that Nigerians believed that they do not have an unlimited power over the natural world. Their abuse of nature and environment was definitely punished, if not by human, certainly the ancestors, who were believed to have great powers to implement the morality on the living. The reference to supernatural power in the maintenance of the ethics of nature and environment had helped the

African world in no small way to preserve the ecosystem. But the question is: do the ancestors still wield such powers and influence as they did in pre-colonial Africa?

The realities of post-colonial Africa do give the impression that the ancestors are still potentially relevant in the preservation of the African nature and environment in the urban settlement. They appear to have been abandoned. They seem to cry daily for recognition and restoration. In this situation, the ancestors are only pre-occupied with the struggle for personal relevance or recognition among the living. Kofi Awoonor captures the mood of the post-colonial African ancestors in the following words:

> The gods are crying, my father's gods are crying for burial…for a final ritual….
> But they that should build the fallen shrines have joined the dawn-marchers singing their way towards Gethsemane…
> The gods cried, shedding clayey tears on calico,
> The drink offering had dried up in the harmattan and the fetish priest is dressing up for the Easter service.[33]

The influences of missionary religions – Christianity and Islam on Western cultures and technology, globalization and politics, capitalist orientation as opposed to communal-agrarian life of the pre-colonial Africans, socio-economic pressures, modern transportation link with the whole world among others seem to have consigned the relevance of the ancestors to the pre-colonial era. Since the ancestors, the repositories of morality, and the overseers of the activities of the human in the cosmos are yearning for relevance from many of their children especially in the urban areas, who have turned their back at them, it is doubtful if they (the ancestors) can still preserve the environment. Kwame Gyekye's conclusion is worthy of quote here.

> But we must not expect them to bestow favour on their descendants. The post-colonial problems of Africa clearly show that the ancestors cannot be helpful. The greatest reverence we, the descendants of the ancestors, can show to them is to let them rest in peace.[34]

This conclusion, though back-stabbing, is indisputable if we juxtapose the activities of the early Christian missionaries and now the 'voracious chopping' of the environment by Africans themselves.

> To a Christian, a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. For nearly two millennia missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in them.[35]

The Christian missionaries were given the evil forests to build their churches with the belief that the gods would kill them. Unfortunately, the gods were driven away and churches were established. This singular act, among others, shows that the ancestors are unhelpful in the preservation of the environment from dereliction. Two, the Christian enthusiastic jumps on the forests, coupled with the Western materialistic mind, has rendered the revered land bare. The Afrelists on their own are not excused. Sacred or evil forests hitherto revered have been encroached by the adherents themselves. Cases abound where struggle for the possession and ultimate destruction of such 'natural environment' have led to loss of lives, with the ancestors watching helplessly. Many of African kings are also no longer altruistic. They have been found to use their position to acquire land supposedly held in trust on behalf of the community and contract it for material purposes, always to the detriment of the people.

In spite of the summation that the post-colonial ancestors are helpless in themselves, recourse to cultural heritage by the people is one phenomenon that is stubborn. Regardless of the various laws promulgated to preserve or conserve the ecosystem, traditional Nigerians, whether or not they are aware of such promulgations, still act in the way their past generations acted. An example or two will make our point. Traditional Nigerians throw their refuse to refuse dumps until heaps or mountain of dump is made. This practice dies hard. Urban places have witnessed and are still witnessing such mountainous dumps. An excursion to cities like Lagos before the emergence of Governor Fashola, Benin City, Kano, Ibadan and many other major cities reveal this position. Olaniran captures this fact when he writes about Ibadan:

> Where the open space has not been converted to a refuse dump, the valley floor (of streams) become the obvious dump…. The roadsides are other obvious refuse dumps. These dumps often take over several roads and damage others as a result of accelerated rate of weathering.[36]

Bush-burning is an annual ritual which adverse effects are not readily dispensed with. The joy of picking dead games is romanticized with the long-term effects of desertification and deforestation. Aside the delicacy of the games, much importance is laid on those individuals who excel above others in the hunting spree. This annual and customary activity has seriously affected the biotic life.

In Northern Nigeria, rapid desertification caused by incessant cultivation and over-grazing is a problem. This part of the country is witnessing a serious shift from grassland with bushes to expansive areas of sand. Ukpong reported that Nigeria is losing about 351,000 hectares of its landmass, to desertification per annum.[37] In the Niger Delta region for example, a recent study carried out by the National Space Research and Development Agency which covered between 1986 and 2003, reveals "that over 21,000 hectares of the mangrove forest in the region has disappeared." The mangrove, which is the largest in Africa, is a direct source of livelihood to hundreds of communities. The factors responsible for the disappearance of the mangrove, the study says, include rapid urbanization, land clearing for oil and gas exploration, production and over-land pipe transportation, etc.[38]

The effects of the de-creation of the ecosystem cannot be over-emphasized. Many citizens have become landless. Being dispossessed of their land, they are inevitably confronted with poverty. This has further compounded the pressure on urban areas and youth restiveness. More seriously, "Africans perceive a covenantal bond as existing between human beings, nature, and the divine realm."[39] By de-creating the ecosystem, the covenant with the divine has been broken, and as it were, things have fallen apart, the chord between the supersensible world and the mundane world can no longer hold. It has been worsened by the sad realization that the ancestors can no longer help in maintaining and resuscitating the environment.

Recommendations for Consideration

Olaniran suggests that Nigerians should develop the sense of ownership towards the environment, which is a replacement of the myths: resources are inexhaustible and environmental management is government business. According to him, great deal of cultural re-orientation is needed to put the people back on track.[40] For M. A. Izibili, the solution lies in right-mindedness towards the environment. When we have the right mind guided by some normative criteria of an

environmental ethic, which includes minimizing human impact on the environment, he argues, we will have a safe ecosystem.[41] Both suggestions have human approach. Olaniran's cultural re-orientation requires a critical re-evaluation of the human's impact on nature and the environment in contemporary times with the hindsight to adopt the minimal exaction on the ecosystem, which pictures that of pre-colonial Africa. The results of such exercise should be contextualized for the future handling of the ecosystem. However, depraved minds cannot evaluate objectively. This is where Izibili's right-mindedness comes in. Here, the mind must be guided by some ethical models, which when adhered to, will result in a transformation of the ecosystem.

Umejesi suggests that environmental pollution and the attendant problems especially as evident in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria require a religious approach. This paradigm is within the context of Afrel in which taboo plays a significant role in the maintenance of morality.[42] But it seems difficult to rely on religion alone in the face of the reality that the adherents are in the throes of survival, thus also scrambling for the soul of the environment. Morality in Africa is believed to have been enforced by the ancestors. Now that they have been consigned to the past, it seems difficult to rely on them for the observance of morality in the society. For Segun Ogungbemi, the restoration of the ecosystem does not lie in religious adherence. The restoration hinges on existential warrant that incorporates reason, experience and will. This, he has termed "nature-relatedness."[43] The philosophy behind this moral and pragmatic approach stems from the fact that nature can do without humans, but humans cannot do without nature. Since human beings depend on nature to survive; it is their duty as conscious and rational beings to safe-guard the survival of their specie. Thus, it becomes imperative for them to find rational ways or means of co-existing peacefully with nature.[44] This is in conformity with Passmore's ethics of care of nature. According to Passmore:

> The traditional moral teaching of the West, Christian or Utilitarian, has always taught men, however, that they ought not so to act to injure their neighbours. And we have now discovered that the disposal of wastages into sea or air, the destruction of ecosystems, the procreation of large families and the depletion of resources constitute injury to our fellow men, present and future. To that extent, conventional morality, without any supplementation

whatsoever, suffices to justify our ecological concern, our demand for action against the polluter, the depleter of natural resources, the destroyer of species and wilderness.[45]

In spite of the universality of this ethics, the question is: how do we measure the quantum of what human beings actually need when avarice is rife?

According to Edmund O' Sullivan, "transformation as a focal point in human dealing with nature and the environment is to make the choice for a sustainable planetary habit of interdependent life forms over and against the pathos of the global competitive marketplace."[46] Put differently, transformative-ecozoic vision is a planetary consciousness devoid of materialistic drive. Rather, it is a vision that opens up new vista for the understanding and appreciation of plenitude embedded in nature that goes beyond human vision of the marketplace. In developing this model, it is imperative that the educational curriculum should contextualize planetary vision. "What we are working toward in transformative vision is an articulation and presentation of a cosmology that can be functionally effective in providing a basis for an educational program that would engender an ecologically sustainable vision of society in the broadest terms, what can be called a planetary vision."[47]

Apart from that, it must also incorporate, as it were, a broad cultural context. To consign the approach to the lofty height of abstract educational pursuit would exclude the mass of the people who live very closely to the natural environment, who in the first instance need more enlightenment and mobilization than the educated, yet stubborn ones will still disregard the ethics of the environment. This idea becomes necessary because the implementation of transformative-ecozoic model cannot be isolated from the people who constitute the mass of the population. This is one area many government policies have not been authentically implemented. That society and culture are dynamic should not be romanticized with the fact that the people want to change at the pace scheduled outside. The people need to be carried along. With the cultural contents in the implementation of the transformative vision, the literate and the illiterate can be carried along. It is however a truism that human mind needs to be guided by the ethics of sustainable environment. Otherwise, we can release the power of terror or nature to our disadvantage. Herein lies the significance of transformative-ecozoism to "keep concerns for the planet always at the forefront." [48] In so doing we

can gradually glean the age long belief that the environment and nature as animated by the numinous, is a creation of God that requires that we do not exert force that will further deplete it irreparably.

Such solution cannot be complete if the eco-feminism is missing. In fact, it is one contemporary global ideology that African Religion has to contend with in order to keep its place in the comity of global religions. This is because patriarchy which has been seriously attacked in modern times is strong in the evolution and maintenance of African culture, belief and society. As an eco-theological ideology and movement, eco-feminism is "a social and political movement which points to the existence of considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism."[49] Eco-feminists are of the view that there is a strong affinity between male oppression in the family and the degradation of the ecology. Therefore, the movement aims at "restorative and preservative work" towards the women and the declining global ecological space. Eco-feminism tends towards Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which makes an urgent call to all in the effort towards sustainable development and environmental protection. It works in line with Bruntland Report that "the need for meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."[50]

The thrust of the fore going considerations is clear: the need for both religious and practical approaches to environmental problems. It is apodictic that religion cannot stop poisonous gas emissions that result in dangerous stratospheric and atmospheric depletions, noise pollution that impairs psychological health, flooding arising from poor maintenance of drainage and channels, indiscriminate felling of tree which causes global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, which causes skin cancer, atmospheric heat which negatively affects the climate and thereby resulting in poor agricultural productivity and natural stability of seas and oceans, etc. This does not rule out the value of religion in safe-guarding the environment; religious leaders and adherents have the onerous duty to tackle environmental challenges. It may seem that the post-colonial African Religion can be academically confined to the realm of abstract thought, but in spite of this, the reality is that though Christianity has influenced most of the people, yet the strength of the religion cannot be wished away from them.

That the ancestors cannot be useful in the preservation of the post-colonial African environment as espoused in the fore going appears to be

academic in comparison with empirical reality among most Nigerians. Bolaji Idowu has argued correctly that African life is religious and that ethics is derived from God. According to him, "the sense of right and wrong, by the decree of God, has always been part of human nature."[51] The objection to this position is mainly from the West. But as it stands, especially with reference to the environment, it is important that Nigerians have recourse to their religious injunction as a basis for the implementation of the pragmatic approach so made popular by post-colonial influences.

What the fore going views point to is that at every level of the strata every one has his/her place and responsibility toward safe-guarding the environment. We should therefore, as rational, moral and responsible individuals, be committed to the project of safe-guarding the environment irrespective of our leanings. This has become crucial in the reality that argument about who is right or wrong cannot practically solve the problem, even though it is pertinent. But the moral pungent assignment is to be committed to the course.

Conclusion

The problem of environmental degradation is not limited to a particular society, race, religion or geography. Different responses have been canvassed. This enterprise appraises the functionality of the ancestors in a post-colonial Africa. It discovers that the high regards for the pre-colonial African ancestors has been eroded by the influences of the missionary religions. This is not to conclude that this belief is universal within the African cosmos. For one, there are still sacred groves and holy places preserved by the pathos of the belief in the potency of the gods.

The stewardship morality has been attacked seriously by the opening up of industrialization, politics and other socio-economic pressures. However, we align with O' Sullivan's restorative thesis, which incorporates the stewardship morality, educational policy, eco-theology and cultural context in the transformative-ecozoic vision. It is the belief of this paper that if this vision is adopted faithfully, not only will Nigerians, both high and low re-orientate their minds towards restoring nature and environment through cultural praxis, but also lay a new and enduring foundation of an environment that will be bequeathed to posterity. The strength of transformative-morazoicism lies in its ability to incorporate and integrate the different opinions towards a positive response to nature and the environment in the 21st century. If

transformative-ecozoic vision must be irenic in the face of the ecological danger human beings have placed themselves, it must take into critical consideration the cultural context of each ecological geography that is autochthonous to it, and a scientific/educational policy that is capable of harmonizing the differences between the uneducated and the educated. Then, it takes the form of intensive reorientation through education that intensively puts the value of the numinous in serious consideration in order to carry all along in the struggle to restore the environment. African Religion can therefore, not be isolated from this challenge, because, for the Africans the universe is created by God and maintained by His agency, so, it is the neglect of religious warning that gave birth to the environmental problems *ab initio*.

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