

REORDERING CHRISTIANITY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTENANCE

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ABSTRACT

In recent times the environment has been the centre of attention amongst scientists, environmentalists, philosophers and other scholars. It is their belief that in our days the environment is being degraded at a pace unsurpassed in history. Problems like ocean acidity, ozone layer depletion, flooding, rise in sea level, global warming, climate change and a host of others are pointed at as the effect of this unruly plummeting of the environment. Patriarchy, capitalism, divisive mind-sets, consumerism and other causes have been put forth as reasons why humans are ever degrading the environment. While not disagreeing with these claims, this work places a greater blame on religion. The work therefore, intends to look at the impact religion (with special focus on Christianity) is having on the environment. The impact of Christianity on the environment would be assessed from the building she erects, the noise she generates and the teachings she spreads. This would be shown to have negative impact on the environment. The work would therefore, in the light of this, conclude that for a call for a sustainable environment to be visibly actualized, Christianity as well as other religions would need to restructure their teachings and ways of worship as well as control their expansion rate. The government should serve to regulate the activities of churches in order to channel them to the path that would lead to a sustainable environment. Unless this is done, Christianity would speed up the impending collapse of the world.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Impact, Environment, Noise Pollution, Church Expansion

INTRODUCTION

Christianity is a religious faith that started about 2000 years ago. It has spread to almost all parts of the world, thereby seemingly fulfilling Jesus' command that the gospel be preached to the ends of the earth. While the spread of the good tidings is commendable, it is regrettable that Christianity unconsciously is contributing to the current environmental crisis that is rocking the world today. This research wishes to show that the noise generated in the Christian churches have far reaching effect than merely disturbing human neighbours; her expansion is causing so much deforestation and her teachings is encouraging environmental degradation.

The environment is presently at the brink of collapse. There are cries of global warming everywhere in the world. The oceans are becoming more acidic; the sea level is rising, cases of flooding, tsunamis, hurricanes are increasing; the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing; the ozone layer is fast depreciating; biodiversity is speedily depleting; the climate is fast changing (Bisong constraining Mechanism 47). All these point to the possibility that in the near future, the world may totally collapse if urgent steps are not taken to reverse the trend.

Though efforts are being made to combat environmental degradation through means like phythostabilization, bioremediation, mycoremediation, phytovolatilization, stream restoration,

reforestation etc; it however appears to this researcher that one important contributor to environmental degradation has been ignored. Christianity is one big source of environmental degradation that has not been given adequate attention. For a meaningful success on environmental sustainability to be recorded, a comprehensive effort must be undertaken; all hands must be on deck; the Christian religion too would have a significant part to play towards this success.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

There are presently many reports emanating from the media, symposia, conferences, talks, journals, books etc of the level of degradation. Tropical forest that inhabited the earth until 1947 have now been destroyed (Nelson 35). Scientists postulates that if the present state of destruction continue, only 10% of the world forest would be left, with another 10% in a degraded condition and 80% completely lost (Wilson 4). Since depletion of forests increase the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere, the world is presently experiencing global warming and climate change. In May 2013, it was reported by scientists, that readings for carbon dioxide has surpassed 400ppm which has been the highest ever recorded (BBC Carbon dioxide passes Symbolic Mark).

As a result of the increasing carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere, it is said that the earth mean surface temperature has increased by about 0.8 Degree Celsius (1.4 Fahrenheit) (America Climate Choices 15). The effects of this global warming are believed to include droughts, heavy rainfall, ocean acidification, species extinction, rise in sea level and a change in the amount and pattern of precipitations, as well as probable expansion of sub-tropical deserts (Lu <http://www.atmos.berkeley.edu/~jchang/class/spr07/Geog257/week10/lu-hadley06.pdf>). Fossil fuel burning and deforestation are said to be the highest contributory causes of global warming (IPPC 7).

In addition to contribution to global warming, it is estimated that about 30-40% of the carbon dioxide released by humans into the atmosphere dissolve into the oceans, rivers and lakes helping to raise the acidity of the ocean. The carbon dioxide react with water to form carbonic acid, which would also react with water to form a bicarbonate ion and a hydronium ion; thereby increasing the oceanic acidity (Milero 662). Scientific reports shows that ocean PH has dropped from about 8.25 to about 8.14, which is an increase of about 30% of hydrogen ion concentration in the oceans, implying that oceanic acidity is increasing (Hall-Spencer 97). This rise in ocean acidity is believed to be capable of reducing metabolic rates in jumbo squid, depresses the immune responses of blue mussels, and makes it harder for juvenile clownfish to differentiate between smells of predators and non-predators. Increased ocean acidity also inhibits clownfish and other sea animals that make use of sound for echolocation from communicating or hearing sounds of predators because ocean acidity alters the acoustic properties of sea water and thereby increasing ocean noise (Dixson 68-75)

It is also estimated that up to 40% of the world's agricultural land is seriously degraded. The major causes of this land degradation are believed to include: overgrazing, land clearance, poor farming practices, urban sprawl and commercial development etc (Termisti <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/land-degradation#cite-ref.>). These activities and other industrial

activities are believed to contribute indirectly to the rate and severity of flood cases which is due to a rise in sea level. This is because, a warmer environment would mean a rise in sea level and a melting of ice bergs which would translate to a rise in flood level. These activities also contribute to the biodiversity threat that currently rocks the world. In 2006 many species were classified as rare, endangered or threatened and many more are at risk. About 40% of the 40,177 species which were assessed using the IUCN Red list criteria are now considered as threatened with extinction (Lovett http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/05/0502_060502_endangered.html). Studies also suggest that in 20 years, 25% of all mammals' species could be extinct. It is also believed that if the present rate of extinction is not halted, up to 30% of all species will be extinct by 2050 (Gabriel <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6432217.stm>).

The environmental crisis is real and need to be halted, if man wants to continually depend on the environment for sustenance. To halt this trend, a comprehensive action need to be taken. This paper intends to address one salient cause of environmental degradation which has tended to be ignored in most discourse on environmental sustainability. Christianity contributes to the present environmental crisis, through her teachings, generated noise and her rate of expansion and manner of buildings.

IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The Christian religion holds a belief that one day the world would come to an end. The date for the end of the world is not known. It is my belief that, if Christianity or simply the church does not look inward and examine herself, she would unconsciously make the world end faster than it would normally have ended. The church would need to reconstruct its belief and teachings and rework its expansion policy and rethink its method of dissemination of the gospel; this needs to be urgently done, so that it could align itself with the sustainable environment drive of the governments of the world. This paper will focus on the three essential points in the church that need re-ordering to enhance environmental sustainability.

Belief and Teachings of the Church and their Impact on the Environment

The church's teachings could be said to encourage environmental degradation. This assertion is supported by Schopenhauer, who avers with respect to the degradable use of animals, that:

Because Christian morality leaves animals out of account... they are at once outlawed in philosophical morals; they are mere things, mere means to any ends whatsoever. They can therefore be used for vivisection, hunting, coursing, bull fighting, and horse racing, and can be whipped to death as they struggle along with heavy carts of stone. Shame on such a morality that is worthy of patriarchs, Chandalas, and Melchas and that fails to recognize the eternal essence that exists in every living thing (96).

The Christian church sees man as the centre of the world; everything was created for him and not him for other things. He was created in the image of God and other things were not, implying that others do not have intrinsic value like him but merely instrumental value. They use Gen. 1:26 where

the Bible reports, “and God said: let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth”, as basis of their argument”.

This belief according to White separates man from nature. This is because if humans are created in the image of a God who is totally separate from nature, then humans by extension are separate from nature. This belief, White reasoned, encouraged the exploitation of nature and has influenced the way modern science sees nature. Modern Western science, he writes “was cast in the matrix of Christian theology, therefore it too inherited the orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature” (1207). I totally agree with White, a religion that sees man as possessing a divine command to have dominion and subdue the earth, breeds a morality that would pitch man against nature. This belief holds plants and animals to be soulless and would have no part in the world hereafter. They merely exist to service man needs. Thus, man is right to use them as he pleases. Man commits no sin according to Christian morality even if he sets the whole bush on fire, kills the whole animals in the area, infect rivers and streams with chemicals to kill fish, as long as he does not kill a human in that process. This morality leaves animals and other part of nature outside the domain of morality, thereby leaving them at the mercies of men.

This sort of morality would need to be revised if man must succeed in this present drive towards environmental sustainability. A morality that would sustain the environment needs to include non-human nature. In this morality an action is not only immoral and wrong if it affects humans but also if it affects the animals, or the plants. This would imply that previous standards for the judgement of who should be included in the moral community would need to be shifted. Christianity had always believed that man is the only being that is created in the image of God, and he is the only being that possesses a soul, implying that he is the only one that needs to be considered in morality. Peter Singer believes that the possession of a soul or moral capacity should not be the basis for equal consideration of humans and animals, rather this should be based on the ability to suffer which is common to both humans and animals (7-8). Taylor argues that all wild animals and plants should be regarded as having inherent worth due to the fact that they are members of the biotic community of a natural ecosystem, and as such are moral subjects to which duties are owed by moral agents. He writes, “Whatever its species may be, none is thought to be superior to another and all are held to be deserving of equal consideration” (79). We share the views of Singer and Taylor and challenge Christianity to look for a basis that is common to all the biotic community and build a morality that would encompass all the living things in the biosphere.

The Christian teachings that encourage, population explosion would also need to be revised. At present the human population growth rate is between 280000 and 300000 people daily. It is believed that an average of four to five children are born every second, while an average of two people die per second, meaning that there is a net gain of about 2.3 more people per second (Cunningham and Cunningham 75). This is alarming; if this trend continues, human population would grow to an extent that the environment would no longer be able to sustain them (Bisong environment as a phase 7). Over population would mean deforestation; it would mean increasing global warming, rise in sea level, increase in floods, droughts, ocean acidity etc. This is why scholars like Thomas Malthus, Paul Erlich and others have consistently called for population control. These calls for population

control have seriously been impeded by the Church's teachings against abortion and contraceptives. This is built on the belief that God gives children and thus it would be wrong to abort or hinder God's gift through the use of contraceptive. This belief is not rationally sound; it even contradicts the basic beliefs of Christianity like the belief that God is all-good, all-knowing and all-powerful. If God possesses these qualities and he is also the giver of children; it would be surprising that God would bless a Rev. Sister who was raped by armed robbers with a baby; it would be surprising that a good God would bless a girl who was raped by her father with a baby. It seems to me to be more logical to hold the belief that babies are creation of a man and woman and not a direct creation of God. Humans are procreators, that is, they are joint creators with God; they have been empowered to create, thus babies are their creation. Since creatures have the rights to create or not, humans have the right to choose whether to create babies or not. Thus, it would not be wrong for a couple to determine the number of children to create and when to do it. If a creator has the freedom to create or not to create, then humans because they are creators also have the freedom to create or not to. When they feel like creating, they can have intercourse with contraceptives, but when they do not feel like, they could use contraceptives. The church may not agree with my logic, but she still needs to revise her teachings to line up with global agitations for population control.

Dissemination of the Gospel and Noise Pollution: Its Effects on the Environment

Noise pollution aside from having dangerous side effects on humans also poses a lot of problems for the animals and plants. Noise pollution is the disturbing or excessive noise that may harm the activity or balance of humans or animal life (Hogan Latshaw internet). In animals, noise is believed to be capable of increasing the risk of death by altering predators or prey detection and avoidance, interferes with reproduction and navigation, and contributes to permanent hearing loss (<http://www/sound.fighter.com/noise-pollution-effects-on-the-environment-earth-day-2013/>).

Noise also makes species to communicate more loudly, thereby increasing the noise pollution in the environment. When one species communicate more loudly, it will somehow mask other species voices, causing them to communicate louder too, thereby adding to the volume of noise generated in the environment. Due to this noise pollution, species that depend on mating calls to reproduce are often not able to hear these calls, as a result there are unable to reproduce and cause declining population. Some other species require sound waves to echo-locate and find their way when migrating. Noise pollution disturbs their sound signals, thereby making them to get lost or not to migrate at all when they should. Moreover, Fletcher believes that long term exposure to noise can cause excessive stimulation to the nervous system and chronic stress that is harmful to the health of wild life species and their reproductive fitness (614).

Also, the National Park Service believes that noise has the potential to cause injury , energy loss, decrease in food intake, habitat avoidance and abandonment and reproductive losses (National Park Service, Report to Congress internet). By affecting animals, noise pollution indirectly affects plants and trees that depend on the noise-affected animals for pollination and for the spread of their seeds.

It could be said therefore, that noise pollution has an enormous effect on both animals and plants and is capable of reducing the biodiversity of the world. The best way to rescue species that are presently endangered due to noise pollution is to reduce the amount of noise produced. It is not an

exaggeration to assert that the church is one of the greatest sources of noise pollution. The Christian religion is one of the largest religions in the world. Its mode of worship involves music, prayers, preaching et cetera. These are mostly done in loud voices aided by instruments, microphones and speakers. The level of noise produced from these is very much. Thus, if they must be noise reduction, the church would also need to do something about the volume of noise it generates.

Church Expansion and Environmental Degradation

Christianity is the world largest religion which has spread to almost all quarters of the earth. New churches are being formed almost on a daily basis. Since the multiplication of churches involve erecting structures, the impact of church expansion on the environment could be very great. To build a structure, means some trees need to be cut down and some vegetation would need to be destroyed. This implies that the springing up of churches add to the problem of deforestation. The multiplication of churches and their attendant large structures that come with it adds to the woes of the environment. It is known that deforestation is caused by the clearing of trees for farming and for buildings. Therefore, the more the buildings, the more humans deplete the forest. The more the churches multiply, the more the level of deforestation. Roads, pavement, buildings et cetera are said to also be contributory factors for flooding, which invariably means that the church also has a hand in the increasing cases of flooding. It also has a hand in the global warming that is presently being experienced. It also shares the blame for the increasing rise in sea level. This is because, the more we build, the more we exploit the environment, leading to these negative effects that have befallen the environment and are threatening to bring the world to an untimely end. The church buildings are normally large and high, taking much space. This is so even when the members in the church are few and thus a smaller building would accommodate them. If a research is carried out to determine the total land mass covered by the church, it would be surprising how much of the environmental resources the church has consumed. It would be easier after this survey to agree that, the church needs to control the rate at which she multiplies. Buildings should be erected in an environmentally sustainable way. The churches do not need to compete with each other on the size of their churches. Rather the impact of these churches on the environment should be considered.

EVALUATION/CONCLUSION

If the present sustainable environment drive must yield fruit, all hands must be on deck. The church cannot stand aloof, it must also key into this sustainable drive to ensure that it is a complete success. For this to be so, the church would need to revise its teachings that promote the exploitation of the environment. The command of God to man to subdue and dominate the world should not be interpreted to mean that man is at the centre of the world, with everything in the world revolving around him. Rather this command should be seen as a charge to man to cater for the world; to tend and maintain the world. The things in the world are not made for man alone, man too is made for them. There is therefore, a complementary relationship between the environment and humans, they both need each other for completeness (Bisong, noetic prop 42-44). The environment needs man to cater for it, man needs the environment to cater for him. When this relationship is breached, the environment would be rendered incapable of supporting man. The environment would be incapable of rendering the best of service for man, if man does not render the best service to it.

The church as part of the human race would need to join hands to ensure that the environment is treated well; for if this gentle treatment is not given, we would get the boomerang effect, which we are actually getting now through the global warming, floods, droughts, tsunamis, ocean acidity etc.(Bisong, the boomerang 62-65). The church would need to help the animals and trees by reducing the level of noise made by humans. It would also need to control its rate of multiplication. Instead of building many churches, church services could be done in shift to accommodate the increasing numbers. Those who answer God's call should answer it and serve in their present churches instead of going out to establish new churches. I believe the government should help regulate the activities of the church to ensure that there are in line with the demands of environmental sustainability. The church is under the government and therefore should be totally regulated.

This work concentrates on the Christian religion, not because other religions are perfectly in tune with environmental sustainable moves. The Christian religion is the largest and could be said by that to contribute more to environmental degradation than other religions. However, other religions are also advised to examine their beliefs and activities to ensure there are environmental friendly.

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