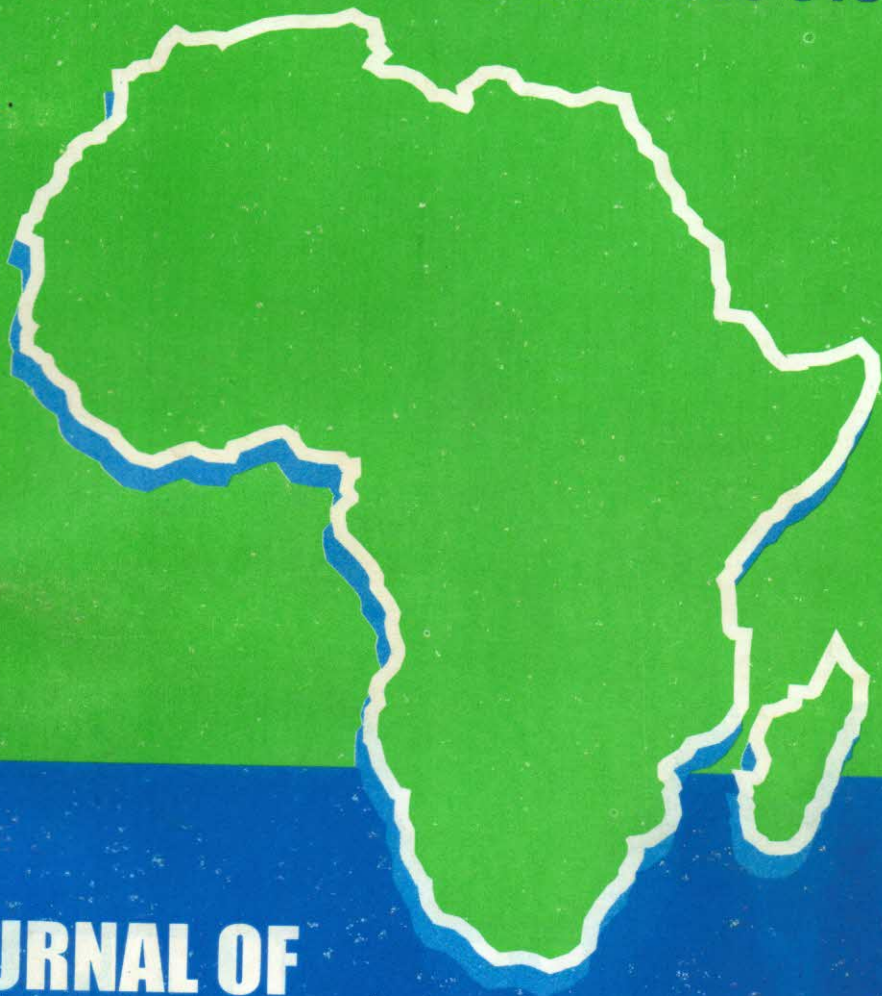


ISSN: 2315-8182



JOURNAL OF
AFRICAN
POLITICS AND SOCIETY

VOL. 2 NO. 1, JUNE 2013

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SPIRITUALITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: AN APPRAISAL

Patrick U. Nwosu, PhD*

Abstract

At the beginning of the third millennium, the natural environment faces a lot of pressure that seriously endanger the deeply complex balance that sustains the richly interrelated diversity of all forms of life. The environmental crisis is commanding the attention of people in various disciplines of life: politics, economics, health, religion, history and so on. Discussions on the concern for the environment and authentic human development revolve around areas of ecology. But less attention has been given to the historical causes and worldviews that have generated today's environmental crisis. Therefore, this paper adopts the historical and analytical approaches to investigate the root causes and worldviews that have made the environment to face serious challenges. The paper proposes a new spirituality of the environment that would enhance integral human development, and conclusively maintains that onslaught on the environment usually has multiple effects on the wellbeing of people. Hence, the urgent need to adopt new spirituality toward the natural environment.

Introduction

Spirituality, in the 21st century, has assumed a broad application beyond religious realm. The concept is no longer limited to only one area of study. Spirituality in this context, could be described as the quality of being concerned about certain salient issues.¹ In other words, spirituality points to the ways people appropriate ultimate values and express same in worship and lifestyle. Spirituality as well expresses a people's worldview. In Christian tradition, spirituality is the whole human efforts to live in the light of conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit and within a community². Spirituality, in other traditions, has personal and communal dimensions.

In this paper, we shall argue that any faith tradition, system or way of life that does not recognize the interconnectedness between creatures displays

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symptoms of spiritual emptiness. Thus, Reuther says, "if we tried to experience this relatedness and to keep it present in our awareness, an intense spirituality would flow from it"³. Intense spirituality flows because environment and humanity are interrelated. Environment, undoubtedly, includes everything living and non-living, human beings, air, water, land, animals, birds, fish, plants and even rocks among others⁴.

Environmental justice points to the direction of appreciating the earth as a gift from God which human beings must account for. The earth and all therein are precious gifts of God with breath taking beauty. Hence, Daniel Groody notes that environmental justice is a call to care for the earth. According to him; "making the earth a hospitable and peaceful home for the diverse members of the human family is one of the enduring challenges of this global village"⁵. This calls for environmental agenda that is positive in vision, sustainable in practices and renewable in use. It is in this regard that this paper sees environmental justice as fair, responsible, and reasonable treatment of the ecosystem that is relational rather than domineering.

Furthermore, the concept of "human development" expresses the things that enhance the realization of human happiness within people's environment. It includes the availability of the many real benefits provided in recent times by science and technology and freedom from every form of slavery.⁶ Yet, authentic human development has a moral foundation and orientation towards that which is truly good. Anything in the contrary is regarded as super development. Within this context, John Paul II argued that super development contradicts human development. According to him:

Super development consists in an excessive availability of every kind of material goods for the benefit of certain social groups... and multiplication of things already owned.⁷

This is to say that, authentic human development liberates the mind and makes people responsible enough to pursue common happiness; while super development is the culture of "consumption", which involves waste, degradation, and disregard for those who are poor. The paper submits that human development in Africa must go beyond economic prosperity to include the care of the environment or the earth, from which God forms human bodies (Gen. 2:7).

It is therefore, the objective of this paper to examine the historical roots and worldviews that have made the environment to face serious challenges. Environmental challenges today endanger the complex balance that sustains the richly interrelated diversity of all forms of life on earth. This calls for a new spirituality of the environment. Hence, this work aims at showing the nexus

between spirituality, the environment, and authentic development of the human person, especially in Africa. The paper concludes that onslaught on the environment usually has adverse effects on the wellbeing of people, regardless of culture or religion; and therefore, the need to adopt a more proactive approach regarding the natural world.

Theoretical Framework

At the outset of 21st century, humanity was struck by terror at the increasing vulnerability of the interconnective web of life in the face of the destructive consequences of the human practices that have inflicted severe blow on the environment. Today, people in various areas of life are coming to understand the central fact that the natural environment has to be protected and sustained⁸. As this awareness of the natural world increases, it becomes relevant to highlight the theoretical framework that gave rise to humans' disregard of the environment, and propose new spirituality for environmental concern.

In the context of contemporary environmental challenges, the theory of dualism comes to mind. The theory of dualism involves a dichotomy of principles that manifest themselves in the universe. In the Greek thought, Plato (428-347 BC) was the most prominent scholar of dualism and his work titled: *Timeus* has a purely dualistic foundations. For Plato, the human spirit belongs to the world of idea which is divine while the body which is mortal comes from the lower gods.⁹ Plato explains the presence of the immortal soul in this world with the doctrine of "the fall" of the soul; and the reason for this fall is non-reason. Pointing to the direction of environmental challenges, Bertrand Russel correctly notes that:

The truly real world, for Plato, is the world of ideas; for whatever we may attempt to say about things in the world of sense, we can only succeed in saying that they participate in such and ideas, which, therefore, constitute all their character.¹⁰

Over time, Platonic dualism came to have a long echo in the religious history of the Western world. Consequently, Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430AD) came up with the idea of two cities: heaven and hell.¹¹ As he notes:

There is the city of God, the community of saints; on the other, there is the earthly city, the community of lost souls. ... one is predestined to reign eternally with God, and the other to suffer eternal punishment with the devil.¹²

In the light of the above, Augustine concluded that the created world, the earth or the natural environment, just because it is a creature, cannot be perfect and must therefore contain some evil.

One of the clear results of the theory of dualism on Christian attitude to the environment is the view that the natural world is doomed to destruction by fire. Hence, most Christians who believe that salvation is only a matter of saving individual soul, do not care about the environment, creation and the world "beyond exploiting it for human gain or using it to prove the existence of God".¹³ So, the dualistic understanding of the natural order has resulted in humankind misusing God's creation. Yet, even when the society goes in the opposite direction and down play "the things of the world" due to religious influences, the environment continues to exert considerable influence on the integral human development in the world, particularly in Africa. Hence, consistent and persistent violation of the ecosystem amounts to environmental injustice.

The Historical Roots of the Present Environmental Crisis in Africa

Africa could be described as a compact of land mass with an area of about 29,952,000 square kilometers. This is approximately 22.4% of the whole land of the earth¹⁴. The vegetation of Africa ranges from tropical rain forest and mangrove swamps to mountain tundra, and the soil from tropical red earths to podols. It is on record that many of the world's largest rivers are in Africa with the Nile flowing for nearly 6,611 km. The continent possesses, in the Rift valley system of East Africa, one of the greatest fractures of the earth's crust, and, in the Drakensberg, one of the most magnificent of escarpments. In addition to diversity of land forms, Africa is blessed with rainfall that is characterized by its seasonal distribution. Everywhere in Africa, there are distinct wet and dry seasons. It is in the light of the foregoing that Cedric Mayson correctly notes that:

Africa had plenty of land, resources, and people to develop from prehistory to a modern educated and productive state in a century, ... The original root of Africa's wealth was its agricultural potentials, which could be developed to provide support for the vast move to the urban centers, where an industrialized population could turn Africa's mineral and manufacturing potential into the full experience of a people enjoying economic, cultural, and environmental liberation.¹⁵

Looking at Africa from an integral human perspective, one sees a continent that is rich in biodiversity, rich in aquatic and wild lives. In addition to these riches,

the continent of Africa is also endowed with oil, gas, and many other mineral resources, combined with indepth search for God expressed in African Religion (Afrel).

Unfortunately, modern foundational structures, and advent of new religions in Africa set in motion the present day environmental degradation and woes in the land. At the foundational base of contemporary African economic, political and social blocks is a strong systemic structure of poverty that has economic interest protection as an objective.¹⁶ In this regard, Donald Dorr notes that the situation in Africa is that in which "the economy ... is reorganized to serve the interest of the imperial powers".¹⁷ Not only were the outside boundaries of African countries decided by the West at the Berlin Conference of 1885, but the internal exploitation of the economy and environmental degradation have been designed by the West ever since.¹⁸ At the heart of environmental crisis, poverty and underdevelopment in Africa is the continued ownership and control of the resources by the imperial powers and unaccountable African elite. Furthermore, the coming of new religions to Africa consolidated the roots of the current environmental crisis. For instance, what did Christian missionaries tell people about their relation with the African environment? How did they treat sacred places and objects while propagating their new message?

In its Western form, Christian religion saw and still sees anything African as heathen, dangerous, and illogical. Armed with its inherited concept of dualism of humanity and nature, early missionaries set out to exploit the environment and nature in Africa in a mood of indifference to the feelings of their host communities. Africans have deep-seated respect for the environment. For example, in most African communities, particularly in Igboland, certain shrubs are regarded as sacred. Some of them provide shade for the village streams while some are used as medicines. All these trees are normally preserved. It becomes a taboo to cut trees in certain forests, farm on a particular land or fish in certain streams. But the whole concept of a sacred grove is alien to early missionaries and their Western ethos.

Hence, with the advent of the new religions in various traditional communities in Africa, the restrictions and ways of life aimed at protecting the natural environment no longer have a hold on people. Today, in the name of being "born again", people exploit the sacred forest, cut-down trees and use them as timbers to build religious houses. The lands that harboured the original ancestral flora and fauna shrines of some deities are no more. Thus, open environmental crisis ensued in Africa when missionaries began, in various ways to destroy and enter into lands and places where any form of human activity was

forbidden.¹⁹ In this regard, Onwubiko observed with sadness that, "the foreign religions ignited ecological and community crises, particularly in Nigeria".²⁰

Having said all these, it is noteworthy that what we do about environmental crisis depends on our idea of human-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get the world out of the present environmental challenges unless there is a new spirituality of the environment.

Worldview Issues and Development

Before now, the paper tried to differentiate integral human development from superdevelopment. It was noted that the availability of the benefits of science and technology is not the totality of human development. That is to say that, trying to achieve true development suitable, Africa must recognize the specific nature of human beings and the environment. This is because environment and humanity are interrelated.²¹ Within this context, Himes and Himes submit that:

integral human development does not necessarily mean increased consumption. It means greater responsibility to sacrifice in order to reduce pollution and to overcome poverty, raising the standard of the living of the poor to achieve long-term positive effects on the environment.²²

Therefore, the term development in whatever form indicates the goal of rescuing peoples from everything that prevents them from experiencing the fullness of life. According to Benedict XVI, the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, development that is sustainable means:

active participation on equal terms, in the international economic processes from the social point of view, it meant their evolution into educated societies marked by solidarity; from the political point of view, it meant the consolidation of democratic regimes capable of ensuring freedom and peace.²³

In other words, development that stresses only economic and technological skills is insufficient. Hence, sustainable development, particularly in Africa, needs to be true, integral, and all embracing.

This is important for Africa because industrial development has provided needed goods and jobs. But most times such development results in harm. For example, recently in some parts of Northern Nigeria, dams that provide irrigation flooded some states, depriving families of their homes, farms and businesses.²⁴ Agricultural chemicals control pests and increase profits but it can also pollute the environment. On these issues and many more, there is urgent

need of a new spirituality and consciousness among people about the impact of past abuses and the expressed intention to avoid such abuses from henceforth. Here a key concept is respect for the environment, for God, and respect for the rights of others. The integrated ecosystem is essential for sustainable development in Africa. To achieve this all nations need to re-evaluate their views on how the natural environment works.

People's view of the environment ultimately affects how efficient they apply development. There are different worldviews concerning nonhuman creation. Roger Elmore identified some of them as "theocentric, biocentric, and anthropocentric".²⁵ The implication of worldview issues is that no one can claim to be a passive observer of the environment. We constantly have an impact on it, and the impact is dependent on our worldview.

A biocentric worldview prioritizes nature and reduces humanity to an instrumental value. The approach elevates the ecosystem over humans. People who believe in this view tend to worship creation. This view is associated with some traditional religions and New Age Movements. Since this worldview of the environment puts humanity at odds with nature, it may not be the spirituality needed today.

While the biocentric worldview is inadequate, some people swing to anthropocentric view. This approach "over-values human power over the natural world".²⁶ The anthropocentric worldview exalts humans over the rest of creation. Hence, Hunt notes that:

One direct result of this worldview is the tendency to view the natural world simply in terms of price. This results in a focus on short-term actions and often near sighted approaches to ... natural resources.²⁷

Anthropocentric worldview assumes that forest, for example, is only valuable when humans can utilize them. This view does not recognize any intrinsic value in nature. It treats natural environment "as a mere resource for human well-being".²⁸ Treating the natural environment in this manner is to live a fundamentally flawed environmental ethic that has little or no regard for non-human effects.

From another angle, anthropocentric worldview of the environment can drive human being to "demand so much of the natural world's benefits that others are left with nothing".²⁹ Today, particularly in Nigeria, some politicians own vast tracts of land while the majority are left landless. God condemns such exploitation in no uncertain terms. Again, views of the end-time that emphasize the destruction of the earth also lead to neglect of environmental ethics. With

today's environmental challenges, it may be difficult for God to grant anybody entrance into heaven without the person giving due account of his/her environmental actions while on earth. God is not going to destroy the earth. He does not destroy the works of His hands; what He would do is to regenerate the earth because He is sovereign.

In line with the objective and aim stated earlier, the paper proposes a spirituality of genuinely relational and theocentric approach to current environmental crisis. Under this approach natural environment is understood as a "given" which gives the planet a sacred character that can be perceived. This is nearer to the vision of the creation stories in the Christian Bible. The vision is relational. Thompson captures the relational vision properly when he notes that:

in the creation myth... God... is present, calling humanity into relationship with God, with each other, and with other creatures. To be the image of God means that humans are relational, not sovereign.³⁰

Drivers of sustainable development in Africa ought to pay attention to this vision that occasions a relationship between humans and nature that is mutual at the same time. It is a vision or spirituality that anchors on the "I - Thou" category of Martin Buber.³¹ It is an "I-Thou" relationship between humanity and creation rather than an instrumental "I-It" vision. The approach includes all the creation with genuinely intrinsic value. Indeed, humanity and the natural world are in a mutually interdependent relationship. In fact, humans are more dependent on nature than nature is on us.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In using the things of earth for the good of all people, human beings in the present century are encouraged to also think of the damaging consequences of our actions on the environment. If nature itself has a unique way it continually renews itself, humans should cultivate a spirituality of constant reevaluation of actions. Again, various environmental agencies should increase their awareness campaign on the need to protect the environment. This approach of constant awareness would help in refashioning the earth. The new spirituality must be one that cherishes the earth, nurture its fruitfulness and foster its growth. In cultivating this approach, we live in harmony with the rest of the natural world and therein one encounters God.

In our life time, human understanding has opened upon the dynamisms of the microcosmic and macrocosmic order of the universe. And we have been struck by the deep wounds inflicted upon the ecosystem. Hence, the paper has established that there is a synergy between human and environmental

spirituality. We have equally seen that the subject of sustainable development is also closely related to the duties arising from our relationship to the natural environment. The environment is God's gift to everyone, and the use of it calls for proper application of worldview and appropriate development. If these are not done, the poor, future generation, and humanity as a whole stand the risk of more devastating ecological crisis. To prevent this from happening, the paper suggested a new spirituality anchored on "I-Thou" relationship rather than "I-It" interaction prevalent in the world today. Respect for the intrinsic balance of creation is not negotiable given the fact that the way people treat the environment influences the manner it treats itself, and vice versa.

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EVOLVING COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE SHANGE LA'MWEM MODEL

Dennis Teghtegh, PhD*

Abstract:

The language of a people does not comprise of only what is spoken, it transcends verbal exchanges. What may perhaps be used in describing a whole situation in five minutes can be understood through the use of proverbs which lasts less than a minute. Given this scenario, a phrase can spur up diverse progressive reactions. The term development does not enjoy a homogenous meaning. It differs from place to place. In Africa, development can be deciphered through diverse means, one of which can be through a proverb. This paper revisits a Tiv proverb-Shange la m'wem as a means of ensuring sustainable development in Tiv society. The paper also suggests a functional way of using this development model through drama to empower the society towards attaining sustainable development.

Introduction

The chequered history of the world has continued to reflect the crass manner in which the strongest continue to subjugate the weak through perceived and imaginary creation of opportunities to perpetuate their strength. The situation is presented in a manner that suggests monopoly of resources and even knowledge. This continuous foray into a people's affair, under the guise of development is a source of great worry for several pro-active groups especially in Africa. The most crucial issue that is not easily understood is the persistence of developed nations such as Britain, America and others to provide Aid to Africa even when it is clear that it is not working. In a similar vein, the concept of development espoused by donor agents about Africa is mostly froth with divergent models. These models to a large extent have not recorded successes as they are not rooted on African development models. Development goes by several definitions this has eventually made the word development have a hallowed meaning. Where this feeling is expressed, the developers have great difficulty in developing the so called undeveloped. The consequence is

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