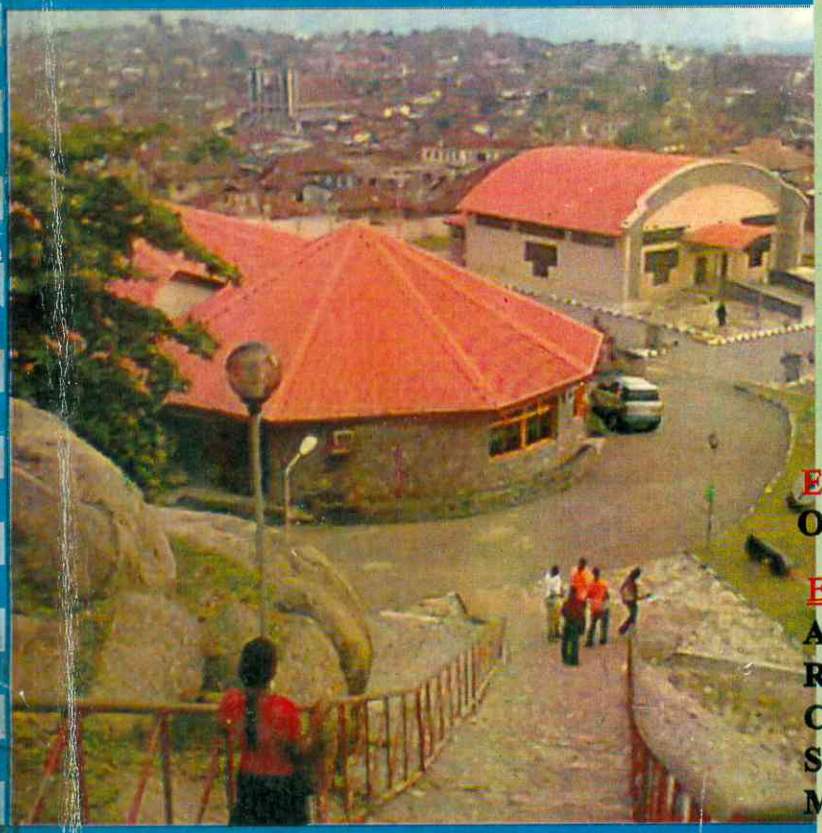
RELIGION, ETHICS and POPULATION DEVELOPMENT



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A publication of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR)

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We are immensely indebted to all Members of NASR whose interest in and support for the association have made it to fly high. Any association whose membership continues to dwindle cannot thrive. NASR has continued to grow and has been publishing regularly because of the growth in its membership.

There is the formidable debt of thanks owed to the editors of this book who responded speedily to the daunting task of editing the book at very short notice. Finally, we acknowledge Dr. Sunday Enessi Ododo of the University of Ilorin, for typesetting the whole work.

This book is designed for scholars, students and interested general readers. It is about topical issues in religion, ethics and population development. We believe that the book will enrich our understanding of these issues in contemporary society.

Professor Ade. P. Dopamu, KSC, FAR
General Editor, NASR Publications
September, 2007

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POPULATION EXPLOSION: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF GENESIS 1:28 AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE PATRIARCHAL AND NIGERIAN SOCIETIES

C.O. OGUNKUNLE

Introduction

The bible, especially the Old Testament is very clear on the issue of population. The Almighty God did the creation of the whole universe and everything in it within six days. Of all the things created, the creation of man was very unique as he is regarded as the crown of the creation. Man was particularly blessed by God in Genesis 1:28 to multiply and increase in number on the face of the earth. And incidentally, the blessing of God on Adam was also pronounced on each of the patriarchs.

The thrust of this paper which is on population explosion is an exegetical study of Genesis 1:28 and its application to the patriarchs, namely Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph and the Nigerian society. The basis of comparism of the above named societies is located in the fact that the patriarchal society, on the one hand, was highly favoured by God as demonstrated in the establishment of His covenant with each of the patriarchs. On the other hand, Nigeria is also a nation that is highly favoured by God. The nation is blessed with various natural and human resources which have made her a force to reckon with in the whole world general and in Africa in particular. The intriguing questions include: why did God pronounce a special blessing on man to multiply and increase in number at the time of his creation? Did God make enough provision for the growing population of the patriarchs? How can one relate the population growth at the time of the patriarchs with the explosive population growth in the contemporary Nigerian Society with its slow development? What are the factor(s) responsible for the population explosion at the time of the patriarchs and in the contemporary

Nigerian Society? What is the role of individuals, religious organizations and government on the issue of population in Nigeria?

The exegetical-comparative method is adopted in the paper. In other words, the exegesis of Genesis 1:28 is done with the help of Hebrew Lexicon and Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament. This is corroborated with the comparative study of population explosion at the time of the patriarchs and the Nigerian Society. All the biblical quotations are from the New Internation Version of the Bible.

Meaning of the English and Hebrew Words Connected with Population Explosion

Population is a term referring to the total number of human inhabitants of a specified area, such as a city, country, or continent at a given time[1]. There are five Hebrew words in Genesis 1:28 that are closely connected with population.
These are:

Parah - The verb Parah is used twenty-nine times in the Old Testament, most often in Genesis where it occurs fifteen times. It means to bear fruit or to be fruitful. Generally, the verb Parah either follows rabah as in Jeremiah 3:16 and Ezekiel 36:11 or more frequently, it proceeds it as in Genesis 1:28; 17;9:1, 7; 35:11; 47:27; Exodus 1:7 and Jeremiah 23:3[2]. The root Parah is connected with the name Ephraim (Gen. 41:52). The same promise of being fruitful came to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28:3; 48:4). Most importantly, this promise came to Abraham (Gen. 17:6) when he was 99 years old. It came to both Abraham and Sarah when there seemed to be no hope for them (Gen. 17:17).

Rabah- The word rabah means "to become much, many or great."[3] The word is used of people as in Exodus 1:10, 12, 20; Deuteronomy 6:3; 8:1; 30:16; Zech. 10:8.I Chro. 5:23. The word in used of animals as in Deuteronomy 7:22; 8:13; I Chro. 5:9; Gen. 1:22; 8:17. Finally, the word is used of things as in Deuteronomy 8:13: Ezekiel 31:5 and Exodus 11:9.

Male' - This verb which means "to fill or be full" speaks of the omnipresence of God. Jeremiah 23:24 says "Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him? Do not I fill heaven and earth..." In other words male' speaks of the universal presence of God and that His glory also fill the earth (Num. 14:21; Psa. 72: 19; Isa. 6:3). The word also

speaks of the visible presence of God in his glory in the cloud which fills the tabernacle (Exodus 40: 34-35; I Kgs. 8:10-11; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 10:3, 43:5; 44:4, etc)[4]. Most importantly, the word speaks of populating the earth and sea (Gen. 1:22, 28; 9:1).

Kabash- The verb kabash has three basic meanings namely to bring into bondage (Jer. 34:11, 16; II Chro. 28:10, Neh. 5:5); to subdue, force or rape a woman (Esther 7:8); and to subdue, dominate the earth (Gen. 1:28; Zech. 9:15)[5]. The word means to make someone serve by force if necessary. John N. Oswalt makes a perceptive observation on kabash as it relates to the creation:

> Creation will not do man's bidding gladly or easily and that man must now bring creation into submission by main strength. It is not to rule man. However, there is a twistedness in humanity which causes us to perform such a task with fierce and destructive delight. Try as we might, we cannot subdue this. But it can be subdued and this is the promise of Micah 7:10; He will subdue our iniquities.[6]

Radah - The verb radah which means "to have domination, rule or dominate" occurs twenty-eight times in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:28: Jos. 4:13 Ezek. 29:29; I Kgs. 5:4: Isa. 14:6; Psa. 68:28, etc). The verb is mostly limited to human dominion as in Psalm 110:2. The root is used of the rule of Israel over its enemies (Isa. 14:2) and of the Gentile nations.[7]

Interpretation of Genesis 1:28 in its Context

Having explained some key words that are connected with population, it is obvious that the concept goes back to the time of creation. Genesis 1:28 is located in the sixth day of creation where God created all animals, including man.[8] Incidentally, the creation of man does not take place through a word addressed by God to the earth, but as a result of divine decree. Thus man was created in the image of God, after his likeness. In other words, man shares in the communicable attributes of God which include life, personality, truth, wisdom, love, holiness, justice.[9] Man has the capacity for spiritual fellowship with God. Man was created to rule and have dominion over the universe. God pronounced His

blessing on the man, that is, both male and female to be fruitful and increase in number. Allen P. Ross notes:

> In Genesis, to be blessed was to be enriched and fertile. Such marvelous decrees of God would be significant for Israel that was God's representative on earth. She would enter the land of promise and would expect God's continued blessing.[10]

Therefore, the phrase "be fruitful and increase in number" allows man to fill the earth by reproduction. Man is empowered to reproduce and multiply. Also, he is empowered to subdue, control and rule over other creatures.

Population Explosion at the time of the Patriarchs

The term "patriarchs" is used of the ancestors of the Israelite nation. The term was specifically used of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Generally, the patriarchs, especially Abraham lived a nomadic life, grazing their flocks, living in tents, and moving from place to place. They possessed plenty of cattle of which Isaac (Gen. 26:12-15) and Jacob (Gen. 37) served as examples. They also had households of slaves and hired hands. In the New Testament, the term is applied to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Heb. 7:4), the sons of Jacob (Acts 7:8, 9), and David (Acts 2:29). The term is now commonly used to refer to the persons whose names appear in the genealogies before the time of Moses (Gen. 5 and 11). The phase "be fruitful and increase in number" which was pronounced on the man at the time of his creation is repeated on each of the patriarchs. Therefore, it is obvious that there was a steady growth of population at the time of the patriarchs.

Noah – Apart from the fact that Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD (Gen. 6:8), he was blessed with three sons, namely, Shem, Ham and Japheth. God specifically asked him after the flood to bring out every living creature so that they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it (Gen. 8:17). This was a new beginning after the flood. Genesis 9:1 says: "Then God blessed Noah and his sons saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth." Also

Genesis 9:7 says: "As for you, be fruitful and increase in number, multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

God instructed Noah in the above passages (Gen. 9: 1, 7) to be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth just as He had told Adam (Gen. 1: 28). Noah, like Adam, was to have dominion over animals (Gen. 9:2 cf. 1:26, 28). Incidentally, both Adam and Noah were given food to eat (Gen. 9:3 cf. 1:29; 2:16). In other words, there was enough provision for them to match the growth of the population.

Abraham – The fact that God is interested in population growth is established in the covenant which He made with Abraham in Genesis 12: 1-3. God, while confirming this covenant in Genesis 17:2 says: "I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers". In Genesis 17:6 God says: I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you." Furthermore, God says in Genesis 22:17: "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies." Obviously, the population explosion in the world in general and the Nigeria society in particular has its root in the Abraham covenant.

Isaac – The main idea in Genesis 26: 1-11 is that the descendants of Abraham would be blessed because of him (Abraham). The only thing is that they also would have to exercise faith in order to enjoy the promised blessing. Thus the covenant which God made with Abraham is also re-established and confirmed with Isaac the child of promise. God says to Isaac in Genesis 26:4 "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed".

The promised of fruitfulness and multiplication was given to Isaac in the context of famine that was felt at that time in the land of Philistines. God asked him not to go down to Egypt and that He (God) would bless him and increase him right there in the land of Philistines. The Abrahamic blessings, which God gave to Isaac include possession of the land, and posterity which would be as numerous as the stars cf. Gen. 12 2-3; 5:5-8; 17:3-8;22: 15-18; 28:13-14. Again, there was enough provision made for him.

Jacob – Jacob, one of the sons of Isaac had to spend a night on his way to Paddan Aram in the house of Laban. He had a dream that night where God reiterated to him the covenant with Abraham and Isaac.

Genesis 28: 14 says: "Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring." This promise was confirmed when Jacob returned to Bethel in Genesis 35:11 which says: "And God said to him, 'I am God Almighty: be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body."

Joseph – Joseph became prominent and powerful in the land of Egypt. And with the permission of Pharaoh, he settled his father and brothers in Goshen, the best part of the land of Egypt (Genesis 45: 10; 47: 6, 11). The Israelites acquired property in the land of Goshen and were fruitful and increased greatly in number (Gen. 47:27) as it happened to other patriarchs (cf Gen. 35: 11-12). The improved living condition of the Israelites in Egypt made their population to grow fast and indeed they were becoming a great nation as God promised the earlier patriarchs even after the death of Joseph as noted in Exodus 1: 6-7 "Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them."

In fact, the population explosion of the Israelites in Egypt became a major source of threat to Pharaoh and his people. This made him to come up with policies and steps that would reduce or control drastically the population of the Israelites. The steps taken include setting slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with force labour (Exodus 1:11); asking the midwives to kill the Israelites baby boys at the birth stool (Exodus 1: 15-16); and finally, ordering his people to throw into the Nile every boy that is born (Exod. 1:22). The fact that the population explosion of the Israelites in Egypt had divine connection is indicated in Exodus 1:12 which is the key verse of the Book. It says "But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites." Indeed, the population of the Israelites continued to increase rapidly during their sojourn in Egypt. As at the time of leaving Egypt, the men were about six hundred thousand men besides women and children (Exodus 12:37).[11] Interestingly, the Bible records in Exodus 12:38 that "many other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds." This means that God made enough provision for the Israelites population explosion that people of other nations, like the Egyptians, identified with them.

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Population Explosion in the Nigerian Society

Population growth has become very rapid in virtually all the African countries. For example, Nigeria is said to be the most populous country in Africa and the tenth in the world. According to the final figures of the 1991 census, the population of Nigeria at the time was 88.92 million. The projection of the population, using a 3.0 per cent growth rate, shows that the population of Nigeria as at July 2006 is 131,859,731 and the estimated population growth rate is 2.38 per cent.[12] There are three major factors that are responsible for the rapid growth of the population of any nation of which Nigeria is our point of reference. These are: one, increase in birth rate which is due to higher level of income, higher degree of immorality, importance attached to the large family and polygamy, limited use of birth control methods, etc.[13] Two, fall in death rate which is due to improvements in medical services and health facilities, better environmental conditions, improved standard of living, relative peace, etc.[14] Finally, is the issue of migration which has led to an increase in the population of Nigeria.[15]

There is no doubt that Nigeria is currently experiencing population explosion, which is dangerous to her existence in general, and the well being of millions of poor people in particular. E.A. Olofin notes:

> It is contended that what is making Nigerian population less of a resource for globalization are the rapid growth of youth population that outgrows the facilities for education and training, the poor funding of education, research and training, the resultant poor quality of education offered in the institutions, the resultant poor quality of education offered in the institutions, the resistance of a large proportion of the youth to be educated, as well as the poor health conditions of the increasing youthful population. This situation has resulted in a present vicious circle of poor education, poor primary health care, poverty, rural-urban drift and unemployment, leading to rural decay and urban squalor and a human development index of 0.393 on a scale of 0 to 1.[16]

Fortunately, Nigeria is endowed with various natural resources that when properly utilized can make life comfortable for everyone in the

nation. In other words, our population explosion ought not to be a threat if our natural resources and economy are properly managed. The abundance of natural resources in Nigeria is God's provision for everyone to enjoy. But unfortunately, the population of Nigeria is becoming a threat because of several factors, which include greediness, selfishness, corruption, etc. All these vices do not allow majority of the people to enjoy that which God has provided.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has been able to demonstrate that:

1. Population is of divine origin. God is deeply interest in the growth of population as seen in the phrase "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Gen. 1:28), which was repeated by God while confirming His covenant with each of the patriarchs.
2. Man is the crown of creation and the representative of God here on earth. Thus the purpose of God for every man is to fellowship with Him, honour and serve Him.
3. God has made enough provision for the population explosion especially as noted with the Israelites in Egypt. The fact that people of other nations joined them when they left Egypt is an indication of sufficient provision, which was made for them. Also, God has made enough provision for us in the Nigerian society as demonstrated in the abundance of natural resources in the nation.
4. Suffering and oppression tend to promote population explosion. This was the case with the Israelites in Egypt (Exod. 1: 1-22) and the Bible says " But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread ..." (Exod 1:12). Also, in the Nigerian society, it is generally noted that those who have contributed to population explosion are people with low-income earnings.
5. There is need for individuals, religious organizations and government to look inward and re-examine themselves on the issue of population explosion. Even though God has made sufficient provision for all, yet, individuals need wisdom to manage well, that which is allotted to them. Also, religious organizations must educate their people on the possible

dangers of population explosion. Finally, those whom God has placed at the helm of affairs in the nation should try to discourage vices like greediness, corruption, etc, which ordinarily will not allow God's provision to go round.

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