

# Environmental Sustainability through Effective Teaching of Christian Moral Education

Dr (Mrs) N.C. Njoku

Department of Arts and Social Science Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria, P.M.B. 053

## Abstract

Environmental sustainability through effective teaching of Christian moral education is a search for the role of moral and Christian education in preservation of man's environment. The study revealed that God created man and put him in charge of other creatures and man's inability to preserve the environment has been highlighted as major cause of environmental degradation. However, the study provided that effective teaching of Christian moral education in schools could help in control of the problem. Three principles were highlighted to serve as guide to preservation of man and his environment. The researcher however, is optimistic that effective teaching of Christian moral education in schools would equip future generation with better understanding of environmental preservation and hence sustainability of man's environment will be achieved.

**Keywords:** Environmental, Sustainability, Teaching, Christian Moral Education

## Introduction

The essential ingredients for human survival have been agricultural base and wealth from the sea. Population increase warranted high rate of consumption has rendered land that has been scarce rather more scarce. The increase in soil erosion and loss of farm land have posed a great challenge to human community in terms of sustenance of the whole biosphere especially with wide spread destruction of species and continuous loss of habitats. Efforts made to reverse these trends towards sustainability of nature were threatened and undermined by climatic change and environmental pollution. Allan<sup>1</sup> intoned that environmental degradation is caused by man's activities and environmental crises as a result of inappropriate agricultural practices and destruction of water sheds as well as road construction, barrow pits caused by mining, oil pollution from spillages, gas flaring related problems and industrial pollution occasioning waste generation decay, continuous exploitation of marginal lands, pollution pressure, drought or desertification and flooding.

The above condition of our environment according to Gbenda<sup>2</sup> is caused by man's quest for industrial, technological and economic advancement. This however brought about mass destruction and damage to man's environment. Environmental sustainability as a subject of study incorporates the process of maintaining and preserving the environment for onward co-habitation of future generation. Environmental crises have been globally viewed as a threat to man's existence and future development. In Nigeria in particular, there is high rate of flooding, erosion and desert encroaching into man's environment making it impossible for man to cultivate and make gain out of the scarce land. This problem has led to the search for environmental sustainability via the moral and Christian education.

**Key Words:** Environmental, Sustainability and Religion Education

## Major Conceptual Exposition

Moral education is an aspect of study that deals with how we ought to live. It is better described as norms; values and knowledge which are systematically selected and presented to learners to enable them manage and function well in their environment. Nucci<sup>3</sup> viewed moral education as an art of building into the mind of a learner knowledge or facts, values or principles, norms and ethics which could help him to live peacefully in any given environment. Christian moral education involves systematic presentation of the teachings and way of life of Jesus Christ. It is an assemblage of the teachings of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

Environment according to Keith<sup>4</sup> is a place where we live and work, that includes the physical conditions which affect the development of man's life. Ennens<sup>5</sup> described environment as man's surrounding that harbours the resources for human sustenance and development. Federal Environmental Protection Agency considers environment to include human beings, lands, waters, plants and animals<sup>6</sup>. Sustainable development simply means ensuring better quality of life which aims at protecting environment, enhancing social progress, prudent use of natural resources and maintenance of high and stable growth. While the phrase "environmental sustainability" denotes a process of securing and regenerating natural, human, economic and social resources to enable them harbour and nourish man as God planned. Environmental sustainability could be better understood as creating avenue or designing laws which could help protect and preserve human environment in order to improve the safety of life. Hoffman<sup>7</sup> defines environmental sustainability to include mapping out strategies for ensuring that the components of nature are taken care of. The above definition involves streamlining actions to enhance and maintain the quality of nature objects for effective co-existence. It also includes fashioning a way of caring for the nature world to protect it from being at risk, or having negative influence on human activities.

Therefore the maintenance of the balance among the natural object could be viewed as environmental sustainable process.

Environmental sustainability through effective teaching of Christian moral education simply suggests instructing and encouraging learners or young generation on how to groom, preserve, nourish and maintain their surroundings or nature world to enhance future development and avoidance of environmental risk. It could be described as a process of inculcating in the younger ones or learners those norms and values required to revitalize the natural resources using Christian precepts and practice so that they will serve man better in future. In the word of Nucci<sup>8</sup> sustaining environment through the teaching of Christian moral education include teaching or impacting on the learner a better approach to social and economic activities which are geared towards preserving man's environment in order to avoid deterioration. Udezo<sup>9</sup> maintained that the teaching of Christian religion will enhance re-orientation to younger ones on the principles of the scriptural demand.

### **Christian Moral Education and Environmental Sustainability**

Christian and moral education is interwoven and as such is inseparable. Christian Education dictates roles that could shape and foster human history and moral. When man lost their hold on religion, morality goes with it, and what is left is moral confusion, and societal decay set in. Religious laws be it Christian, Hinduism or Islamic religion are binding, permanent, absolute as such influence human behaviour. Moral laws however, are derived from religion and are also strengthened by religious sanctions.

Environmental crisis could be better understood as a result of a break in the fundamental laws. Man's inability to understand, interpret and observe the religious laws has been viewed by scholars like Nwaigbo<sup>10</sup>, Hoffman and Leslie<sup>11</sup> as major factor in man's failure to manage and preserve his environment. The biblical injunction in Genesis 1:28b states: 'be fruitful... fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over...' was misunderstood, hence the abuse and mal-handling of the environment. The biblical record of Gen 2<sup>15</sup> gave a description of the first abode of man while Gen.1:28 gave the principles and modalities by which the biosphere could be managed and sustained. The word 'subdue creation and have dominion over creation' could be simplified to mean putting man in charge of all creation as steward of the earth and not for exploitation. Gen. 2:15 projects clearly the view that man's ultimate role is to take care of other creations. Man however, as the head of all other creatures is expected to care and preserve the nature world. In Gen 2 :15 God's intention is made know; man should maintain, manage and milk the environment. However, man's activities these days suggest a misconception of God's command; hence a call back to God's ultimate command as a means of rebuilding the environment for future sustenance. The process of adopting religious teachings to revitalize and revalue nature so as to prevent its destruction marks a significant new phase in religious thought. Indeed as what is necessary at this present generation is comprehensive reevaluation of man's environment so as it will to continue as a viable species on a degraded planet earth. This means that religion has to adopt different answers that will differ from those that see nature world as a commodity to be exploited. Christian moral education encourages values and ethics of reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility and renewal for formulating a broader environmental ethics which include human ecosystem and other species. With the help of religion man advocates reverence for the earth and its long evolutionary trends and respect for the myriad species which share the plant with man (Ogunbodebe and Ikotun; p.259)<sup>12</sup>. Religious ethical laws of restrain guide the use of natural resources on which life depends, to secure equitable distribution of wealth, recognition of responsibility of human beings for the continuity of life and renewal of the energies for the greater work of building a sustainable earth community as contribution of religion in sustained environment. Christian religion offers moral definition to human conducts, and restructures them with ultimate values which join man with the supernatural world. From the teachings of Christian religion, Moral principles are drawn to help preserve human life and created order. The most essential value underlying the establishment of moral education is to instill in man respect for others and environment, hence every action geared towards protecting life and property is judged morally good and fundamentally rights.

### **Christian Moral Principles for Sustainable Environment**

All religions of the world have expressed some ethical concern for the environment and its creatures. Religion has accorded moral significance to other creatures and as such has some ethical responsibilities to care for them. Throughout history the world religions have understood the earth to have religious values and that human being has the obligation to care for the environment. These concerns are found in historical teaching of every world religion though it may not be in the actual practice for instance in the whole world religion, greed and destructiveness are condemned, while restraint and protection are affirmed by most religious traditions. Every religion view the earth as sacramental and this ideology compliments the conception of human stewardship ethics, hence the need for caution on how the nature world should be handled. Christian religion has offered man with some principles that could guide man in management of his nature world. The principles include:

1. Principle of justices and respect: These principles demand equal treatment for all creatures, except if there is significant reason for a shift. Justice entails fair play in every issues of life. It emphasize that one should act in ways that treat others equitable and fair, avoidance of discrimination or wickedness as well as ensures that both parties plays by the rules. Explicitly man owes moral obligation to act fairly to the nature world. Christian moral education teaches fairness and respect for others (creatures), man however is expected to be guided by these principles. Justice and respect demands that every action must be taken in accordance with the requirement of God's laws (creature law) hence any action that violates the universal rule of conduct is termed unjust and inhuman. Justice advocates fairness and transcendent in its totality and when applied it helps to shape man's activities which violates the society/environment. Justice and respect as aspect of Christian moral virtues demands total fair play and care for others as himself. It is a result of man's failure to be fair that lead to exploitation and domination of nature world; therefore fairness and respect have been considered as factor in growth and comfortability which are ingredient for environmental sustainability.
2. Principle of sustainability has also been seen as a major principle that guides environmental growth. This principle emphasize that man should be considerate and prudence in management of his environmental resources to ensure future development and growth. This implies making sure that man does not compromise the future generation's needs with meeting today's needs. Man should apply the principle of equitably balance as a key to sustainability of man environment.
3. Principle of sufficiency and compassion: These principles entails that all creatures are entitled to enough foods to live on earth and flourish. The principle discourages wasting and hoarding of resources which God has endowed in man's environment. The ethical norms of sufficiency is closely tied to the notion of moral significance, which means that everything is worthy of man's ethical concern. These principles complement the principles of justice and fairness. Moral and Christian education places greater emphasis on sharing and empathy and demand that man should have empathy for other creatures. Environmental ethics asserts that other animals, plants and elements are morally significant and man has the responsibility of ensuring that their needs are meet too. It is however impossible to consider one element in isolation to others, hence there will be environmental disaster because there are all tied together for the well being of each other.
4. Principle of solidarity and right of participation: These principles advocate man's relationship with other creature in a given environment. It assumes that other creatures are part of man's biological family or our local community and this challenges man to consider this full range of relationship between the earth and his environment. Solidarity in this case requires man to consider other creatures as his extended community, and act in such a way that reflects concern for the well being of them. Participation demands the idea of solidarity to make it practical. The demands of solidarity point to us the right of participation so that those that are affected by environmental decisions could help shape how it could be amended and manage. Participation here involves planning, organizing and evaluation of the impact of man's action on future welfare of human being as the chief manager of all creatures. Imperatively, Christian moral education advocates man's application of these principles in management of his environment to ensure environmental sustainability.

### Recommendations

Man does not own anything on this earth planet, man is a guest on the earth and should have respect for the earth that hosts him. As a result of the misinterpretation of the biblical text in Genesis 1<sup>28</sup>, many Christian presumes that man is superior to animals and nature, but Genesis 2<sup>15</sup> holds man as a steward to nature world in other word's man is to cultivate, manage and preserve the environment for posterity.

1. Man therefore, should work as a trustee of the creator, as the creator is being perceived from his creations.
2. Man should relate with nature world as an intelligent and noble master and guardian but not as a headless exploiter and destroyer. The mandate God gave to man have dominion over the visible world consist of priority of ethics over technology in the primacy of life.
3. Man is obliged to share in the lordship role of the creator over nature world in which he lives. In this way Christian religion mandates man to care for the environment as specific responsibility of his personal dignity, his life and also for his present and future generations.
4. The teaching of moral laws and Christian moral education should be used in the development of a more comprehensive worldwide ethics required for movement towards sustainability; whether from an anthropocentric or biocentrism perspective.
5. More adequate environmental laws should be formulated and passed as public policy to ensure fair management of the environment. Scholars of religions as well as religion leaders and laity should take part in the articulation process of the stipulation.

6. There is need for the government and scientists to work together with religion educationists in halting the loss of species, top soils and natural resources as well as to migration effect of climate change.
7. There should be ethical laws that would bind man from not only committing suicide, homicide, but also biocide and ecocide. The coalition of the above create ground for dialogue and creature partnership in envisioning and implementing long range sustainable solutions to most of the environmental problems.

The above recommendations are paramount and crucial because the attitude and values that shape people's concepts of nature comes primarily from religious world views and moral practices. Moreover, the moral imperative and value systems of religions are indispensable in mobilizing the sensibilities of people towards preserving the environment for future generation.

### **Educational implications of the Study**

The primary aim of education is to enhance man's existence and growth on earth. If man's ignorance of his role to protect and preserve his environment has resulted to environmental degradation and risk; it then implies that proper Christian moral education is required to put man aright. In this study, environmental degradation has been analyzed from religious perspective that showcased how Christian moral education could enhance proper enculturation of biblical principles and values required in the management of the environment could be implemented. It implies that adequate religious education of school children is a major factor in creating awareness and possible reduction of environmental risks. In view of the fact that environmental degradation is humanly induced, the solution to it lies in man's proper understanding of the injunction in Gen 1:28 and its proper implementation shall restore the earth community and guarantee human sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

Among other aims of moral instruction is the exposure it offers to the learners on the need to nurture man's environment for peaceful co-existence, while Christian religion offers moral definition to human conducts and re-structure them with ultimate values which join man with the supernatural world. Moral principles which are drawn from Christian religion are meant to preserve human life and environment; hence the most essential value underlining the establishment of moral education is to instill in man respect for his fellow human and environment.

Moreover, religion has been considered as the only subject that gives moral definition to human conduct and embellishes them with ultimate values, and consequently links them up with the supernatural world. Christian religion however has the potentials for smooth running of the society. Christian religion is an agent of good morality that produced love, compassion, empathy, truthfulness, respect, reverence, fairness and justice which governs the environment. These moral values could be adopted in management of environmental crisis in the present world. In this way, Christian and moral education offers the re-orientation packages that will shape human behaviour towards natural world.

Christian religion studies projects man as God's deputies whose mission on earth is to care for and maintain the world. In this way man has been entrusted with the duty of preservation of other creature; hence man does not have the authority to deprive even the animals of their rights.

It is therefore expected that man should find a balance between benefiting from the blessing that the earth has to offer and preserving the creatures as God commanded man to do to ensure future sustainability.

### **END NOTES**

- Allan, W. Ecology techniques and settlement partners. In man, "settlement and urbanism". Cambridge Mass: Schenkman 1972.
- Gbenda, S.J. Religion and Ecology: A comparative study. Markudi: Obeta Printing and publishing co. 2010.
- NUCCI, L. Moral Development and Character Education: A dialogue. Berkeley; Mucutchen press. 1989.
- Keith, D.W. A Short Course in environmental ethics. Silicon Valley: Jesuit University Press. 2009.
- Enenns, K.C. Protection and presentation of human environment. Guarantee to our common future. Onitisha: versity press. 2002.
- Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act; Section 38, Cap 131 Laws of the Federation, 1990.
- Hoffman, F.L. Christians are called to protect the environment: A scriptural perspective in all creatures' Christian living. Internet <http://www.christianveg.com>. 2006.
- NUCCI, L. and Weber, E. The dominion approach to value education: from theory to practice. In W. Kurtins and F.L Gewirts (ed) Hand book of moral behavior and development vol. 3.pp 251-266 New Jersey: Hillside. 1991.
- Udezo, B.O.S. Management of human environmental hazard in Nigeria. A Christian response. *In Nigeria journal of humanities and social science* vol. 1 No.1. 2007.
- Nwaigbo, F. Environmental management as an ethical responsibility. *Unizik journal of Arts and humanities* vol v. Nos 1. 2004.

- 
- Leslie Back. Is God an environmentalist ? religious role in sustainability. ~[www.en.org/climatechange](http://www.en.org/climatechange). Accessed on 10/09/2013. 2010.
- Ogunbodebe and Ikotun, S.I. Environmental determinism in the religious development: The Nigeria example. In K.A. Chepkwong Peter and M.J. Hess. Human views on God: variety not Monotary Eldorat: Moi University Press. 2010. P. 259.
- Ronald, J. S. Biblical foundation for creation care. The care for the creation: Focusing concern and action. England: intervarsity press 2000 P.4
- Abogunrin, S.O. Biblical study and environment. An international journal for biblical study vol. xxvii no 1, Ibadan: Nigeria association for biblical studies (NABIS) 2009.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

### CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

**Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

### MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

### IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

