



ENGAGING YOUTHS IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS ADVOCACY THROUGH CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: *Human beings occupy a prominent position in creation. They are positioned on the surface of the earth as “managers” who oversee, care for other creations, and exercise dominion over them. However, several human activities such as deforestation, desertification, unregulated application of chemicals on plants, and so on have led to the degrading state of the environment, leading to natural disasters like storms, erosion, global warming, and so on. The resultant effects of these unguarded activities have severe implications on the lives and health of humans. This paper examined how Christian educators can employ Christian Education to engage youths in securing the degrading environment from further damage and bringing it back to life. Secondary sources were used to collect data, and a descriptive approach was used to analyse the facts collected. The study gathered from the review of related literature that the Bible plays a crucial role in creating environmental ethical awareness in youths. Also, Christian Education can leverage agents of socialisation to instil environmental moral consciousness in youths through environmental advocacy campaigns, workshops, and discipleship programmes on environmental ethics awareness. In addition, special training on maintenance culture and environmental ethics advocacy among youths are essential assignments Christian educators can carry out by including such programmes in the church curriculum and through periodic public awareness. Therefore, this paper submitted that engaging youths in environmental ethics through Christian Education is viable for creating a sense of proper stewardship. The result of this would make our environment a better place to live in.*

KEYWORDS: Human Beings, Environmental Ethics Advocacy, Youths, Christian Education.



INTRODUCTION

God, in His prerogative, created man to live on the surface of the earth. The creation story reveals that everything that comprises the environment was created before man, but by divine arrangement, man was put in charge of the rest of the creation. However, it is unfortunate that man, the crown of God's creation, has not cared for the environment as expected. Man's engagement in various activities has been detrimental to the environment, such as deforestation, indiscriminate dumping of refuse, and unregulated application of chemical substances to plants, to mention but a few—the fallout, which has brought the environment into a deplorable state. The resultant effects are now grave on humanity as storms, erosion, global warming, earth tremors, and so on are wreaking severe havoc worldwide.

Against this background, this paper seeks to create an environmental, ethical consciousness in youths through Christian Education. This paper examines the nexus between man and the environment. It explores the degrading state of the environment and looks at how Christian Education as a discipline engages youths in environmental ethical advocacy.

Man and the Environment

Man, in this sense, is explained in generic terms with no regard for sex bias. Akande (2014) defines the environment as the “totality of space, time, biological, socioeconomic and physical dimensions affecting the well-being of organisms, especially man.” This definition suggests a level of relationship between man and the environment. It is seen from the definition that all the factors mentioned affect human well-being. Additionally, Adedapo (2014), while analysing the doctrine of creation, asserts that it is fundamental that man interacts physically with the environment. This position reflects the creation order given to man in Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15. Man was instructed to care for the environment and use the creation.

More so, the definition of environment given by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA, 1989), as quoted by Oyeniya (2017), offers the inclusion of all-natural resources such as “water, air, land, plants, animals and human beings and the inter-relationship that exist among them.” Giving a general understanding of the relationship between man and the environment, Ogundipe (2014) maintains that the human environment combines the cultural environment, physical environment, and man's interactions with these environmental factors. He further states that man's interactions with the environment can also be seen as “feeling and touching, seeing and tasting, and moving and caring” (Ogundipe, 2014, 2). Other human activities such as farming, mining, construction of many kinds, and transportation, to mention but a few, are also ways humans interact with the environment.

Faniran (2014), in his view, construes the kind of relationship between humans and the environment to be both a privilege and a responsibility on the part of humans. In effect, man should understand that his interactions with the environment are a prerogative of God and the duty to care for it. While examining the nexus between man and the environment, Ishola-Esan and Amoran (2016) aver that life and the existence of humans primarily connect with the environment. This statement is true because every component of the environment offers benefits of sustenance to humankind. Man lives on the earth's surface, uses water for domestic and economic purposes, breathes in the air, and uses vegetation for food and herbs. These and others also serve economic purposes.



From Christian theology submission, as enunciated by Oladejo (2017), man as the zenith of creation does not only share in the nature of God, he is also on the surface of the earth in relationship with the rest of the creations. It presupposes that man, as the image of God, is placed on earth to interact with the environment as he exercises godly dominion over all that God has created.

Because of the above argument, one can safely submit that the relationship between man and the environment is essential, especially for the sustenance of human beings. Sadly, human beings who benefit immensely from the environment have not been managing environmental components with every sense of responsibility it deserves.

Degrading State of the Environment

This paper has established a nexus between man and his environment, as humans constantly interact with every environmental component. Akpan, Bashar, and Zamre (n.d, 1) opined that this relationship is advantageous to man. However, it appears that over the years, man has been using his vested authority to ill-treat the environment, subjecting it to an unfortunate condition that does not only affect the environment but also has grave consequences on man and the entire cosmos. It is also observed that despite the benefits man derived from his relationship with the environment, it is unfortunate that man has not lived up to his divine responsibility of caring for the environment.

While arguing from a Christian theology standpoint, Oladejo states that other creations find purpose as they serve man. Adedapo (2014) says that the command to “have dominion” and “subdue the earth” in Genesis 1:28-30 implies that man receives a divine mandate to relate in a positive sense with plants and animals in the environment toward guiding against activities that are hostile to environmental care and preservation. However, Nwosu (2001) submits that the loose interpretation of this passage, especially with an emphasis on “subdue the earth,” has brought about an uncontrolled desire for “materialism and capitalism.” Consequently, it has led to how man ill-treats the environment with his selfish interest and has brought nature into degrading and distorting conditions.

Also, the deplorable state of the environment is not unconnected to the ungirded activities of man on the environment. As argued by the likes of Orimoogunje and Ekanade (2017) and Faniran (2017), the agricultural engagement of man has resulted in the conversion of the forest into farming purposes. Deforestation is taking place at an exponential rate without consideration for re-afforestation. Apart from deforestation, the indiscriminate application of chemicals on plants and other actions of man on the soil have grave consequences on biodiversity.

Commenting on the effects of human activities on the environment, Akpan, Bashar, and Zamre (n.d) state that engagement of man with the environment has brought a devastating transformation to the environmental components such as vegetation, water, soil, and air with resultant effects on the physical and biological characteristics. They state that these changes have led to substantial environmental pollution with adverse health implications for human lives. In addition, Cavicchioli, Ripple, and Webster (2019) also comment that the activities of humans and their effects on the climate and environment have caused severe harm to animals and plants. In addition, Akpan, Bashar and Zamre (n.d) also connect the rapidly depleting state



of the ozone layer, meant to protect the earth and its inhabitants from uncontrolled human activities in the environment.

Fatubarin (2014) also opines that even though man's interactions with the environment benefit man, his unregulated way of interacting with it has also negatively affected nature. In tandem with this, Adejuwon (2016) maintains that environmental crises are associated with how humans manipulate nature purposely for their self-interest.

Furthermore, Shende, Janbandhu, and Patil (2015) lament that the unfettered activities of man have resulted in severe alteration of the ecosystem, causing a threat to biodiversity. Although the word biodiversity has various interpretations by experts, it is generally used to explain the varieties of species on earth, be it plants, animals, or other microbes (Naeem, Chazdon, Duffy, Prager & Worm, 2016). The threat human activities have caused to biodiversity has been attributed to the lack of or inadequate education and environmental consciousness of humans (Shende, Janbandhu & Patil, 2015). Despite the significant contributions of biodiversity to the sustenance of humans, the effects of uncontrolled activities of man, as opined by Shende, Janbandhu and Patil, have grave implications on the aspiration of humanity in general, especially posterity. Therefore, creating environmental ethical consciousness in humans, especially the youth, is essential.

Creating Environmental Ethics Awareness Through Christian Education

From the foregoing, it has been established that humans interact with the environment for living and sustenance. Also, it was stated that uncontrolled activities of man have resulted in the squalor of the environment with its serious effects on human beings. To secure the environment from further damage and bring it back to life, it is essential to create a sense of environmental ethics in man, especially youths, to help them act responsibly with the environment. While several avenues to advocate environmental ethics abound, this paper considers Christian Education potent to engage youths in environmental ethical advocacy. Thus, it concentrates on Christian Education's activities to engage youths in environmental ethics advocacy.

This paper considers this venture necessary because youths occupy an important place in the development of any nation. They form a considerable part of the population of any country (Borojevic & Petrovic, 2014). Also, the youthful stage is characterised by vigour, exuberance, adventures, curiosity, and so on. In addition, they will play a more significant role in the distant future and have better access to information by engaging more in information and communication technology devices. Note that in any country, youthful stage is regarded as the workforce stage. In view of this, they must be well informed and have the proper orientation on environmental ethics.

Authors and environmental scientists have variously described environmental ethics. Verharan et al. (2021) construe environmental ethics as moral guidelines prescribing living standards to preserve the well-being of humans and other organisms concerning the environment. Ceylan (2019), in his opinion, describes environmental ethics as a way to live harmoniously with nature by paying deserved attention to it. He enunciates further that environmental ethics aims to remind humans of their responsibilities to properly manage the use of nature by not forcing their wills and skills on it, leading it to extinction (2019). The two descriptions of environmental ethics above carry the idea of cultivating the habits of proper utilisation of



natural resources without causing harm or depletion to them. It is developing a suitable style to manage environmental components and sustain the human standard of living.

Suffice it to assert that one vital avenue to create environmental ethics awareness in youths is Christian Education. Christian Education means Christ-centered education, which directs people to live responsibly towards God and other creations. Wilhoit considers Christian Education to assist people in finding meaning in life through highly personal teaching ministries. He avers that Christian educators, through “preaching, counselling, worship, mission, evangelism and social service,” can help youths to contribute to a person’s sense of purpose” (Wilhoit 1991, 17). In Ishola (2016)’s opinion, Christian Education refers to all teachings that point people towards the knowledge of God and obedience to His instructions. Therefore, it can be inferred from the above definitions that Christian Education, as both moral and spiritual teachings, can create environmental ethical awareness in youths.

Christian Education has an overarching framework to create environmental consciousness in youths through various programmes and activities. The Bible is the first and essential instrument to develop environmental ethical awareness in youths. Through the efforts of Christian educators, Christian Education engages the scripture to teach and re-teach youths the essence of being responsible stewards of God’s creation. Adejuwon (2014) also elucidates that Christian youths, as stewards of creation, should live with the consciousness and acknowledgement of God as the owner of all things and recognise themselves as responsible stewards to manage and care for other creatures on the planet earth.

Through Christian Education, Christian educators can create awareness through agents of socialisation such as home, school, church, marketplace, and social media to instil environmental and ethical consciousness in youths by organising programmes like ecological advocacy campaigns, design workshops, and disciples programmes on environmental ethics awareness. Adejuwon (2014) refers to this as regular education and awareness through messages and drives in the community. Christian educators can also organise advocacy campaigns targeting youths on proper dumping of refuse and waste management in schools and market place. Articles and write-ups on social media on the need for environmental ethics are other strategies Christian educators can use to encourage youths to cultivate environmental ethical consciousness.

Similarly, training on waste recycling can also be advantageous to teaming unemployed youths. It can be an avenue to turn waste into a fortune. Areo (2018) avers that the challenge of unemployment, food insecurity, and poverty is not unconnected with the citizenry’s negligence and ignorance. Proper orientation on using and managing environmental resources can create job opportunities and alleviate poverty in the land. Hence, Christian Education, through the efforts of Christian educators, can partner with Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) to organise training on recycling waste into useful material. Adejuwon (2014) supports this idea and argues that recycling household materials demonstrates good stewardship.

It is also germane to educate young people to express their feelings and dissatisfaction through peaceful means other than riotous protests that can destroy the environment. In addition, Christian educators can organise special training on maintenance culture to create a sense of proper maintenance of the environmental resources in youths. In line with this, Adejuwon (2014) counsels that youths should make good use of the available resources without waste.



Enlisting and training volunteers for youth environmental ethics advocacy is also an assignment Christian educators can carry out. This can be done by including such programmes in the church curriculum and periodic public awareness campaigns. Adejuwon (2014) also advocates for developing and demonstrating love for nature and using prayer and an act of humility as effective means to combat government policies, principles, and political propaganda that may be damaging to good use of the environment.

In addition to the above, this writer proposes four-fold ethical principles using the acronyms CARE that Christian educators can use to engage youths in environmental ethics consciousness. These are:

Principle of Consciousness: Youths should be taught to develop environmental management consciousness from home. This is necessary because an adage says, “charity begins at home.” When youths have a good sense of ecological consciousness beginning from home, the demonstration would be evident in how they relate to the environment.

Principle of Accountability: Christian educators can instil a sense of accountability in youths through teachings on responsible living. Young people should be taught that they are accountable to God as stewards of how they use and manage the environment.

Principle of Rejuvenation: Christian educators can engage youths by teaching them the necessity of rejuvenating the environment through innovative and creative ideas. It is important to note that youths can cultivate planting flowers and trees. They can also develop means to bring lost green space back to life.

Principle of Exemplary Living: It is also pertinent to note that youths must be models to children and teenagers in how they use and relate to the environmental components. This is an excellent example of how they dispose of waste in the vehicle, on the road, at home, or wherever they find themselves.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the nexus between man and the environment. It also explored the dissipating state of the environment and submitted that the ungirded activities of man is the principal factor responsible for degrading the state of nature. Therefore, the paper argued that the effective engagement of youths in environmental ethics through Christian education is a viable tool to create a proper sense of stewardship in young minds, the result of which would make the environment a better place to live in.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, it is therefore recommended that:

1. Human beings, especially youths, should be more educated about their relationship with their environment;
2. Christian Education should be introduced in secondary and post-secondary institutions as a required subject in which teenagers and young adults will be educated about their roles as caretakers of other creations;
3. Youth should live exemplary lives of being good stewards of their environment; and
4. As mentioned above, young people should be educated that they are accountable to God as stewards of how they use and manage the environment.

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