

# Philosophy, Religion and the Environment in Africa: The Challenge of Human Value Education and Sustainability

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Religious environmentalism is fast becoming a growing academic discipline with concerns on how to manage the human environment and save man's resources for the future generations. Religious environmentalism has also become a catchphrase for a philosophy of desired value extraction and application of the core valuable principles of religion and philosophy to achieve the sustainable management of the human environment known to as the earth with its extractive resources. The environmental crisis facing the African continent is increasingly seen as a crisis of values and, religion, a primary source of human values (NASR, 2011), also seen as critical in the search for sustainable solutions to the crisis. The problems of man in the African environment are many. The efforts to use the frameworks of religion to design strategic frameworks for their solution have become problematic as a result of the theoretical and philosophical inability to evolve sustainable frameworks for the sustainable management of the environment in Africa to achieve the ends of poverty reduction and sustainable livelihoods for its inhabitants. This problem is assumed by the article as challenge of further elucidation of the concepts of human value and sustainability as found both in religion and philosophy. Attempts to evolve a new set of programs for the sustainable environmental management in Africa will be made under the philosophy and tenor of religious environmentalism pulling disciplines as varied as religious ethics, religious sociology, philosophy of religion and environmental philosophy.

*Keywords:* Religious Environmentalism; Religious Ethics; Religious Sociology; Philosophy of Religion; Environmental Philosophy and Sustainability

## Introduction

The thematic thrust of the 2013 conference "religion and sustainable environment" has brought into focus the statement which Odey Onah (2013: p. 8) ascribed to Seyyed Hossein Nasir, the Iranian-American philosopher, who observed that "the environmental crisis is a fundamentally a crisis of values and that religions, being a primary source of values in any culture, are thus implicated in the decisions humans make regarding the environment". Much of what we know about religion today is problematic, disastrous and troubling as the violent conflicts and wars of sectarianism and terrorism continue to bombard our ears daily about the Boko Haram; ritual murder for money purposes; the Arab spring, and the ongoing wars of democracy in Syria, Egypt and the last one in Mali. It is heartening to know that religion has been man's best friend in terms of reclaiming his lost divine image and heritage. Religion marked the beginning of man's noble ascent to glorious civilization through the march of refinement and numerous values that underpin the religious enterprise. However, Religion has been abused and misused for the selfish purposes and political plans of greedy and zealous elites in Nigeria, Africa and globally. The misappropriation of the noble philosophical and metaphysical essence of religion to serve the mundane machinations of man and his narrow groups does not reduce the true essence and values that could derive from the religious experience, which the physicist Albert Einstein, defined as "the experience

of wonder-he who has it not is dead". Outside philosophy, considered as man's first discipline, religion is man's first natural calling before anything else, for it takes man back to his God and defines the proper rules and guidelines that should undergird the relationship between men, his creator and his fellows. How do we use religion to manage our environment sustainably? In other words, this paper challenges us to seek critically for the best frameworks of applying the abstract values and norms as found in religion to manage the African human environmental challenges in a manner that will release us from the present fears and crisis of environmental pollution, degradation, despoliation and climate change threatening the present and the future.

Our environment has been created by God to serve our present and the future needs of Africa; it was not created for us to destroy and desecrate in perpetuity. We are facing diverse environmental challenges and crisis in Africa which have negative socio-economic consequences in our lives and that of the unborn generations. It is not for want of knowledge or lack of an abiding sustainable template that we keep on abusing and misusing our God-given environmental resources and wealth. It is the greed of the governing and cultural elites coupled with the poverty of the mass consciousness and recessionary economic fortunes that African countries continue to suffer; to continuously exploit her environment and its resources in an unsustainable manner to the detriment of the present and the

future. The thematic thrusts of the conference also coincided with the intellectual core thrusts of the theoretical understanding of this paper because, just like the Conference's basic queries, my presentation also seeks to make the following enquiries posed by the president of your Association today in his opening statement viz:

-What do you think religions can foster moral thinking and acting about the environment?

-What kind of contributions might they best they might make best to environmental initiatives?

-Do you believe that you have a religious responsibility to protect the environment? To encourage others to do so?

-Are western religions the cause of environmental problems?

-Can religions discover a moral voice on environmental issues?

-Prove that the earth is sacramental?

-What is meant by the global, trans-religious phenomenon "The greening of religion". As I pondered over my research work and the questions posed by Onah Augustine Odey (Phd), your president, I was doubly encouraged by the work I have done before today's conference, since having met him for the first time it does appear that the Nigeria Association For the Study of Religion (NASR) did not make a mistake in commissioning me to present the outcome of my research work that brings together a multi-disciplinary collection of social science scholarship under philosophy, psychology, religion, political science, environmental management, and education. In its disciplinary rigor, it has compelled my presentation to draw the best human values for these disciplines that could be tailored towards the achievement of religious environmentalism or what is being described today as "the greening of religion". Permit me, however, to start the task of delivery by indulging in the necessary intellectual tasks of conceptual and philosophical elucidations of the key concepts involved in my paper.

### Conceptual and Philosophical Elucidations of Key Concepts

This paper will, at this time, introduce the basic philosophical definition and clarification of terms and expressions to enhance a theoretical understanding of the trajectory of the paper.

#### Philosophy/Philosophy of Religion

According to Omeregbe (2002: p. xi) "philosophy could be seen as a free rational inquiry into the nature and meaning of reality; a search for meaning, a search for understanding of reality" In this search for understanding the basic tool of philosophy is logical reasoning that seeks to expose the nature of challenges and problems that face man such as the environmental dilemmas faced today by Africans. Seen as the mother of all disciplines and sciences, philosophy has an ally in religion leading to the establishment of the philosophy of religion, which in itself, is seen as "the unprejudiced investigation into the nature, meaning and purpose of religion and the true value of religious tenets" (Omeregbe: p. xii). The values of these religious tenets in the context of African traditional religion we shall further explore.

#### Environment-Meaning and Applications

*The word environment is used by people in different fields of knowledge to talk about many things, and as result, they use the word differently. According to Oxford Advanced Learners dic-*

*tionary, Fifth edition, the word "environment" is defined as "condition, circumstances, etc. affecting peoples' lives, (2) natural conditions for example, land, air and water in which we live". According to the meanings ascribed in www.siemens.com/Green-City-Index, environment is a noun that describes the "the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal, or plant lives or operates or the setting or conditions in which a particular activity is carried on". Business Dictionary.com sees environment as "the sum total of all surroundings of a living organism, including natural forces and other living things, which provide conditions for development and growth as well as of danger and damage.*

In psychology and medicine a person's environment is the people, physical things, places, and events that the person lives with. The environment affects the growth and development of the person. It affects the person's behavior. It affects the person's body and mind. **Environment** means all of the outside forces, events and things that act on a thing. A person's environment is made up of everything that surrounds him or her, including houses, buildings, people, animals, land, temperature, water, light, and other living and non-living things. Living things do not simply exist in their environment. They constantly interact with it. Organisms change in response to conditions in their environment. The environment consists of the interactions among plants, animals, soil, water, temperature, light, and other living and non-living things. The views of the World Bank capture all the foregoing and give a sustainable dimension that links the environment, development, poverty reduction and the future together in the following observations:

The environment is the complex set of physical, geographic, biological, social, cultural and political conditions that surround an individual or organism and that ultimately determine its form and the nature of its survival. The environment influences how people live and how societies develop. For that reason, people, progress, economic development and the environment are closely linked. The environment can also pose risks. Air pollution, waterborne diseases, toxic chemicals, and natural disasters are some of the challenges the environment presents for mankind. Natural resources, land, water, and forests are being degraded at an alarming rate in many countries—and once they are gone, they are irreplaceable. For development to be sustainable—meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs—countries must take into account environmental concerns in addition to economic progress. Concern for a sound global environment is essential to fighting poverty, as the poorest people tend to live in the most vulnerable places.

In summary, the environment is the earth we dwell in as well as the surrounding biosphere. In the context of African traditional cosmology and metaphysics, the environment of Africa is our mother earth. In the perspective of Igbo cosmology, the earth is our mother, mother earth, "ala"—the mother that gives birth, feeds, sustains and welcomes us back. In the framework of this paper, we are hugely indicted for abusing our mother and misusing her resources in Africa. When you abuse your mother and she curses you, you are in trouble. For mismanaging our environment and her rich resources Africa is cursed with its environmental crisis. How does religion see this challenge?

#### Religion—A Philosophical Exploration

The word religion derives from three latin words as its roots,

namely, “ligare” (meaning to bind); “relegere” (meaning to unite, or to link; and “religio” (meaning relationship). From this definitional sourcing, the etymology of the word “religion”, according to Omeregbe “shows that it is essentially a relationship, a link established between two persons, namely, the human person and the divine person believed to exist”. From this we can further intuit that religion is about the relationship between the human person and his creator; between man and his fellows; between man and his environment and between man and his future. In this context, religion should have sustainable solutions to give us about managing our relationship with our environment in Africa in manner that will help us to solve the environmental crisis in the continent. Religion, inspite and despite its foreign connotations and morphological imputations, is essentially culture and culture is a way of life of a people with its inherited principles of managing its environment inclusive in its cosmology and ontological templates. Nevertheless, the word religion comes with a lot of serial interpretations and derivatives. This perspective gives a lot of relevance to not only the western religions but also the African traditional religions as we know them. Different religions according to Metuh, (1991: p. vii) developed in widely different contexts. My application of the religious framework in the search for sustainable solutions to African endemic environmental challenges would be principally African in scope, nature and its recommendations. However, African traditional religions have peculiar problems of their own. Accordingly these problems have been identified by Metu and Kanu (2010) as:

1) Its non-scriptural nature—there are no documentary sources handed down by tradition as authentic sources of their religious beliefs. The societies in which these religions are found are preliterate societies;

2) There are many African tribes, cultures and religions with language and cultural barriers for researchers and interpreters (Mbiti, 1961: p. 1). This explains why the foreign religions under colonialism could not despite their best efforts discover the true essence of African religion and its similar human values. Here we are affirming according to Victor Krishnan Kanu (2010: p. 34) that despite the differences, “African traditional religion is as authentic as any foreign religion, if not superior to them with the supreme Being as a deity of monotheism and a source of Africa’s abiding humane value system”.

3) African traditional religions are part and parcel of the whole fabric of African cultural life cutting across its social, psychological, environmental, political, philosophical and ethical systems. People who fail to see this interwovenness encounter the problems of interpretation and reductionism when they see the African religious motifs in the light of the western models.

We can see that the “contents and beliefs of people of simple cultures, according to Durkheim (1980) should be studied in the broader framework of their “weltanschauung” or worldview. As argued by Evans-Prichard (1956: p. 313) “after the study of a number of such African philosophies, the work of classification and comparison of their different religious tenets among themselves and similar concepts in western philosophy and theology can fairly begin”. According to Prichard, the African religious thinker, like the scientist, is “engaged in making models to explain his vast and varied experiences” in managing his life, his trials of life and the challenges of his environment. It is in this context that we will apply the model of human values drawn from the African religious experiences to make sense of

the environmental dilemmas facing Africans today. This conceptual model should be explored more to answer the traditional question-of what value is religion to man, his society, or as posed by this conference, to his environment? It comes down to the specific question how African Traditional religion can help man to manage the environmental challenges facing man today in Africa? For this response, it is relevant that we identify where the religion stands with nature and the environment of man in Africa. Professor Tagbo Ugwu (2013: p. 6) made the requisite observations in this direction, regarding the nature of the relationship of the religion and the attitude it inspires in its followers to encourage sustainable environmental management thus:

It is a religion founded on the African soil and its natural environment, interwoven with the culture of the people. The environmental friendly nature of the African Traditional religion is based on the fact that the religion finds expression in nature. This qualifies it to be categorized under the umbrella of nature religion which according to Beye (1998) is a “useful analytical abstraction referring to any religious belief or practice in which devotees consider nature to be the embodiment of divinity, sacredness, transcendence, spiritual power, or whatever cognate term one wishes to use. For instance, the indigenous religion of Africans involves the belief in natural spirits that inhabit natural elements like the skies which control the rain that is important to the raising of crops and animals...Hence the preservation and conservation of these ecological features are important to African Traditional Religion.

### **Pollution of the Environment—“Alu”, “Nso”—An Igbo Spiritual Concept of Environmental Impurity**

Man is born with and into an environment. The environment makes or mars him depending upon whether it grows into a positive or negative relationship between him and his environment. The environment is part and parcel of man’s metaphysical and cosmological heritage in African traditional religion. The environment being part and parcel of his mental, social and political psychology positively influences the mind and behavior of man. Each environment of man has a cultural typology that determines his outlook and religion, leading to a new set of human values that determine his attitudes towards life, nature and his environment (Kalu & Victor, 2012: p. 36). We have chosen the Igbo concept of the environment because it has more pragmatic significance to us in our environment. But what is said about the Igbo perspective in this paper applies to every other African tribe in a lesser or more degree. According to Metu (ix) Africans are quite capable of forming and do form abstract concepts which can be expressed in concrete terms. For the Igbo, environment stands for “*ALA*” (earth) and anything that violates the purity and harmony of “ala” desecrates, degrades and makes it impure. Both the violator and the violated earth and its parts must be cleansed and purified. For as noted by Monsignor Professor Obiora Ike (2001: p. 49) “ala remains the nearest and dearest, maintained to be a merciful mother, who increases the fertility of the soil and makes the fruit of the earth available to man’s livelihood” and understanding Africa’s earth or “*ALA*” or “*ANI*” is the foundation for ethics, religion and justice’.

“*ANI*” is thus the source and custodian of the sacred laws, customs and tradition, ethics and values of the community. As further observed by Ike (pp. 52-53): respect and fear of the laws

of Ala make people fair in their dealings with others for as the custodian of morality and the giver of “omenala” (good laws and ethics) demands good deeds and prohibits evil, which is termed “nso ala”; the igbo word for crime—“alu” or “nso Ala” simply means “offence against the land” or “desecration of the earth”. Thus African traditional religion, in the context of Igbo lore and rituals, are environmentally sensitive, friendly and sustainable. It has both positive and negative approaches to environmental cleanliness and sustainable management. The positive is achieved through human value socialization and education while the negative is attained through religious ritual cleansing. Thus “alu (pollution) is dirt and the reflection of on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being and non-being, form to formlessness, life to death. For the Igbo, alu is essentially a religious phenomenon” (Metuh: p. 87). The idea of pollution according to Douglas (1969: p. 337) is best understood in terms of the English word dirt, defined as “matter out of place”; implying “a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order so that, the pollution avoidance is a process of tidying up, ensuring that order in the external events conforms to the structure of ideas about the universe”. Metaphorically and environmentally speaking, the African universe is out of order, out of place and out of tune with the best religious human values bestowed upon us by our forefathers; and today, we stand on a precipice of endangering our environment and the future of generations yet unborn. What are the environmental problems facing Africa?

## **Environmental Challenges Facing Africa and Africans**

### **General Health Challenges**

Globally, we should be concerned about the despoliation and degradation of our human habitation and environment because each year, according to the World Bank, 2013 report:

- 3 million people die prematurely from waterborne diseases;
- About 200,000 children under 5 die from diarrhea alone;
- Around 1.6 million people die from exposure to cooking stove smoke inside their homes (Take note that most victims are children and women from poor rural families who lack access to safe water, sanitation and modern household fuels);
- A million people die from malaria, mostly in Sub-Saharan African countries;
- A million people die from urban air pollution;
- Respiratory infections, diarrhea and malaria account for more than 20% of deaths in developing countries, according to the World Health Organization’s Burden of Disease report.

### **Air/Sea/Other Environmental Pollutions Are Destroying the Purity of Our African Future**

Pollution has greater consequences as it leads to destruction of fisheries; Crops are damaged; higher production costs rise for industries that must filter dirty air or water to maintain product quality; extreme weather events (tornados, floods, hurricanes) are occurring more frequently and affecting more people than ever before. In all these, poor and indigenous communities, people are the most vulnerable to environmental hazards just as people move to cities from rural areas, environmental problems will increase and the challenge of managing our en-

vironment with human values becomes more intense.

### **Addressing Environmental Problems in Africa**

According to the 2012 report of the Africa Society, environmental problems constitute one of the key challenges on the African continent in the 21st century. Focus is gradually shifting from politics, wars, and poverty to environmental issues. This is mainly the result of the development of new technologies, which has generated an increase in solid mineral mining, oil exploration, an increase in the number of plants and factories, and the overall upsurge in the application of manufacturing tools. The quality and richness of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments have been polluted and subsequently declined. It is therefore safe to say that new developments in industry and manufacturing are the root causes of environmental degradation over the past three decades. This has been exacerbated by rapid population growth, urbanization, energy consumption, overgrazing, over-cultivation of lands, and industrial advancements engendered by globalization.

Environmental problems in Africa are therefore partly anthropogenic or human-induced, the result of the effect of selfish and corporate chemical and human wastes on all forms of ecological and human life. Natural causes as disruptive of environmental purity and harmony as anthropogenic. They consist of earthquakes (the Great Rift Valley is geologically active and particularly susceptible to this phenomenon); hot springs and active volcanoes are also found to the extreme east of the Rift Valley; erosion; deforestation; desertification; drought and water shortages resulting from the dry season.

### **Evaluating the Negative Impact of Environmental Pollution**

The socioeconomic impact of environmental deterioration on Africa continues to pose a major problem to development, stability, and daily lifestyles. Africa has contributed to greenhouse gas emissions, responsible for global warming and the continent is the most vulnerable to the negative consequences. Other dire consequences of this particular environmental degradation include: depletion of farming lands; reduction of natural habitat for the survival of aquatic and land animals; depletion in biological diversity (the variety of all life on earth, the complex relationships among living things, and the relationships between living things and their environment); Aquatic life pollution, adversely affecting the livelihood of fishing communities and destroying fish and other water creatures. Other negative impact include water pollution caused by oil transmission through shipping ports, poor water resources management, gas flaring, oil pipeline vandalization by oil communities; absence of effective national and regional basin development plans, and underestimation of the groundwater potential to supplement irrigation and drinking water supplies. On the other, land pollution, adversely affects the livelihood of farming communities.

Environmental challenges are caused and aggravated by many factors caused by man. A recent report by Schmitt (2011: p. 49) makes the following sad observation linking man as a causative agent in environmental degradation, least of all climate change globally:

On balance, climate change is most likely a result of the excessive waste of precious fossil resources such as oil, coal and gas, the destruction of humus and much more besides. This is,

in all probability, driven by the boundless greed for profit, the total indifference of the majority of consumers, who can often only be induced through their hip-pockets to change their behavior, and in the inability of politicians to finally apply the *polluter-pays principle* and charge fully for those damages caused to the environment by the exploitation of the treasures of nature.

Man's nature and his environment had been indicted as a causative factor in today's environmental crisis. Religion combines within its theoretical framework a philosophical and psychological tools for explaining man's bad behavior towards nature in Africa. Man's behavior and attitude toward nature could be delineated in the context of many factors. One factor that emanates from the human causative framework (as it affects Africa) is therefore unmanageable population growth in Africa. At approximately 2.2 percent annually, sub-Saharan Africa has one of the world's fastest growing populations. By the year 2025 the population of Africa is estimated to be over a billion. This means that environmental problems could double or triple. Poverty is another major problem on the African continent as it has negative implications for the environment and leads to a greater exploitation of natural resources which worsens the environmental problems: agricultural growth is disrupted with commercial speculation of arable lands coupled with the mismanagement of available water resources.

Energy consumption in sub-Saharan Africa is heavy leading to the domination of fuel consumption. The use of wood for fuel is common in both rural and urban locations and accounts for approximately 70 percent of total energy use, which ultimately causes another problem—deforestation and pollution of the African skies. To put the African environmental problem in proper perspective, we shall use the example of the dumping of useless electronic products on our shores in Nigeria and deforestation in Ethiopia.

#### **Foreign Dumping in Nigeria: Useless Electronics as Useful Electronic Products**

The Basel Action Network (BAN), a Seattle-based environmental group, has paid close attention to the e-waste exports to Nigeria and, in an October 2005 report, cited the manner in which such waste is used to fill up swamps. As the piles rise, they are periodically burned, spewing toxic fumes. This is in addition to the fact that people, mostly children, scavenge through the waste, sometimes in their bare feet, while goats and chickens that later end up in meals also roam through the heaps. The Network further makes the following observations on the e-waste environmental degradation in Nigeria:

As a vast arena for the repair and sale of imported second-hand electronics—computers, fax machines, cellular phones, Palm Pilots, televisions, and a number of other gadgets—the Ikeja Computer village in Lagos, Nigeria serves as a hub for the advancement of Information Technology. But according to the Computer and Allied Product Dealers Association of Nigeria, most of these electronics, about 75 percent in fact, are irreparable and, therefore, stylish junk. They subsequently end up in landfills and makeshift dumps, but the truth is they are not properly disposed of since Nigeria lacks the capacity to effectively handle electronic waste (*e-waste*). Even more disturbing is that a lot of this waste material is loaded with toxic metals and substances like lead, mercury, cadmium, arsenic, antimony trioxide, polybrominated flame retardants, selenium, chromium, and cobalt. When burned, especially those encased in plastic, they emit harmful gases like carcinogenic dioxins and polya-

romatic hydrocarbons, and leach chemicals such as barium into the soil. The Ikeja e-waste problem is not limited to Nigeria alone, as several African countries have become a dumping ground for outdated electronic equipment, in spite of the good intentions of donors and the fact that a good percentage of the items are relatively functional. The problem often arises from fraudulent shipping brokers who load containers with electronic rubbish, largely in a bid to avoid paying tariffs.

#### **Deforestation in Ethiopia**

In Africa, deforestation is taken to mean a phenomenon when the indigenous peoples, especially in rural areas or semi-urban settings deliberately clear forests for fuel (firewood), hunting, agriculture, housing development, or for religious functions. Deforestation is destructive as it entails removing the forest ecosystem by cutting the trees and changing the structure of the land to suit individual usage. With the second largest population in Africa, Ethiopia has been the victim of famine due to rain shortage and a depletion of its natural resources. Its low rainfall has been lowered even further by deforestation, which continues to worsen with population growth. Ethiopia, according to the UNEP report (2012) has suffered one of the worst environmental crisis as a result of deforestation over the decades. As observed by the report, the reasons why this crisis is so damaging to the environment integrity of Ethiopia could be explained by environmental philosophy:

From what we know in science and environmental philosophy, forests play a key role in preventing erosion, since the roots of trees protect the soil against washouts. Trees also retain soil water and, through the absorption of carbon monoxide, reduce global warming. Because Ethiopia lacks sufficient trees, the Blue Nile carries its soil and nutrients by water to the neighboring countries of Sudan and Egypt, where the land is very fertile.

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### **Prospective Sustainable Frameworks: An Exploratory Trajectory**

#### **A Philo-Religious Paradigm for Sustainable Management of the African Environment**

Under this framework, we shall apply the understanding that underpin the model that sees religion as the essential source of human values for the sustainable management of Africa's environmental challenges as identified in this paper. If the best model is the one that sees religion as the study of the ideal relationships between man and God; man and his fellows; man and his environment, then we look up to religion as the solution to the management of the environment problems confronting Africa. In this wise, we are looking at sourcing these human values and using the concept of human value education to protect and achieve environmental sustainability in Africa. We shall attempt therefore to create sustainable frameworks that could be applied successfully in managing the African environmental challenges.

#### **Philosophical Views/Values—Different Religious Views/Values Point To the Same Sustainable Ends**

The philosophical view of the religious significance in hu-

man environmental management has been put down to religious environmentalism in the context of both environmental philosophy and philosophy of religion. From this view point, we are led directly to issues such as crisis of values, wrong attitudes, unsustainable environmental character and behavior, and damaging human actions borne by selfish motives for profit that lead directly or indirectly to the pollution and degradation of our environment and resources in Africa. Each religion has its own environmental philosophy and creedal understanding of nature, ecology, conservation and sustainable management approach. The entire field of religious environmentalism revolves around the supposition and discovery that “the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values and that religions, being a primary source of values in any culture, are thus implicated in any decisions regarding the environment (NASR, 1997).

### **Religious Frameworks—African Traditional Religion-Values That Come from the Need to Save Mother Earth**

Omeregbe (pp. 297-304), in his epochal work, “A philosophical look at religion”, poses the fundamental question: “what is the value of religion”. I believe that we are not here, at this Conference, to question the value of religion to man—we have established that it has a positive role to play in the society, especially in man’s sustainable management of his environment. Nevertheless, Omeregbe (p. 303) went further to identify areas where religion contributes positively to the enhancement of societal good and development:

@ Religion and peace-religions contribute to peace except where religions is gripped by the “totally unjustified claim by each religion that it is the only true religion sanctioned or revealed by God—that all others are false..this kind of claim is simply the product of ignorance, a symptom of narrow mindedness, fanaticism, bigotry and ignorance... it is to be noted that African traditional religion was never contaminated with this contagion by which many other religions were infected since it has never claimed to be the only true religion favored or approved by God for all mankind.

@ Religion and morality-its highest value and its highest achievement is that of promoting morality in society. In this aspect, religion gives rise to the generation of positive human and humane values and attitudes that help man in his relationships; in managing his environment in a positive a manner to achieve a balanced attitude towards his environment.

Contextually, in his own seminal work, “Man and his religion in a contemporary society” Professor Tagbo Ugwu (2002: pp. 59-64) opines that “it is generally believed that religion aims at establishing and sustaining unbiased horizontal (man/God) and vertical (man/man) relationships. Religion therefore has some positive roles to play in any society”. Professor Ugwu identified some of these roles which could be leveraged upon to achieve environmental sustainability in Africa. From his position we could identify these roles as:

@ Positive roles aimed at fostering progress-religion as a dimension of human nature stands to inject fundamental and ultimate meaning and explanation into human existence and life.

@ Role of enlightenment, education and complacency-religion through its exhortation and program measure of actions helps to wipe out mass illiteracy from the face of the society. Most of the problems pestering us arise from ignorance such as

environmental blindness and filthy surroundings etc;

@ Cleansing and purification of the environment;

@ Channel of promotion and development;

@ The conscience of culture-reviewing harmful cultural practices and consolidating on the refined ones.

We could add to this template by further observing that religions could also act as the conscientious thermometer in formulating sustainable environmental policy by governments in Africa. Broadly speaking, religion has been seen variously by different scholars as the best friend of environmental sustainable promotion and management. Miroslav (2000: pp. 1-21), in his work “Man and Nature in World Religions”, discusses the origin of the relationship between man and his natural environment in world religions such as in the origins of the world in Hinduism, Buddhism, Hebraism, Christianity, and Islam. In Christianity, it felt that with the first man’s sin the balance of the relation between man and nature was disrupted. Acting irresponsibly may further lead to the destruction of the world and life itself. Many religions offer integral and sustainable solutions for overcoming the ecological (environmental) crisis. Hinduism especially emphasizes the way of love, and peaceful attitudinal change with moral activity (effects). Buddhism suggests that, in order to accomplish unity & harmony in nature, man must overcome his egoism and his selfish desperation to exploit and make profit out of nature. The Hebrew Old-Testament tradition brings to consciousness the concepts of subjugate, which implies that to cultivate & nurture the earth will lead to mutual happiness & contentment. Islam holds man responsible for the fate of Allah’s creatures. Though Miroslav gives no space for African traditional religion, its position we already know as pro-sustainable and unselfish management of the earth’s resources contained in the environment. The different religions however, have different attitudes and frameworks toward nature and, hence different environmental philosophies. Evidence of this finding and its data stability continue to shift and be debated by scholars. We shall examine them now. Robin Atfield (1983: pp. 369-386) in his ‘Christian Attitudes to nature points to the nature of this debate in his observation:

The conclusions of Lynn White, Jr., John Passmore, and William Coleman, who variously represent Judaeo-Christian attitudes to nature as despotic, anthropocentric and exploitative, are contested; just as frequently Christians have regarded human beings as stewards of creation, responsible for its care. A survey of the biblical, patristic, medieval and early modern periods suggests that evidence for gentle attitudes has been underplayed. Extra resources supporting an enlightened ethic thus become available.

Clinton Bailey (1982: pp. 65-88), gives an insight into the religious practices of the Bedouin in Sinai and the Negev and presents some of these practices, indicates their relatedness to the natural environment of Bedouins past and present according to him:

The Bedouins’ extreme exposure to the desert’s harsh environment and their scant recourse to help in the event of adversity have made their quest for the means to attenuate their fears particularly strong. This quest has led them to adhere to practices that give them the sense of exercising a degree of control over the recurrent afflictions of nature. Among these practices are fatalism, attempts to propitiate Allah, the concept of agents of evil, the creation of taboos, and belief in the power of magic.

Chris Ballard (2000: pp. 205-225) in his book, “The Fire Next Time: The Conversion of the Huli Apocalypse”, examines

the impact of Christian notions of the Apocalypse on the Huli speakers of the Southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea during the 1950s. Precontact Huli cosmology posited a moral constitution for the fertility of the universe in which the health of people & the land reflected the state of moral order in Huli society. Failure in social behavior, which could be gauged from the declining condition of the “skin” of the land, was attributed to an inexorable process of loss of the knowledge of customary lore. Human agency, however, was accorded a significant role in redressing this universal tendency to entropy, & ritual leaders claimed the ability to reduce an apocalyptic, earth-renewing fall of fertile soil from the sky. The adoption of Christian understandings of the Apocalypse as the revelation of divine will, & the abandonment of most of the precontact rituals, have had significant consequences for Huli conceptions of the role of human agency in history, & for the nature of their engagement with the land. Engagement with the land has been extended by some religious environmentalists such as Jon P. Bloch (1998: pp. 55-73) who, in his “Alternative Spirituality and Environmentalism” exposes the relationship between religiosity and with the following summary:

The relations between environmentalism and religiosity have previously been examined by studying conservative vs liberal Christian affiliation. Explored here are environmentalist attitudes among persons whose religiosity does not fit conventional patterns, i.e., the so-called “alternative” or “counterculture” spiritual community (e.g., New Age, Neo-Paganism). This network of individuals finds commonality & solidarity not through organizational ties or a singular theology, but through an overriding ideology that challenges the alleged rigidity & dualistic dogma of mainstream society, & so suggests a new form of social movement. Central to this critique of the mainstream is the notion that the Earth is just as sacred as the heavens, so by preserving the planet, one is being “spiritual”.

A discussion of the characteristics of both divine & human love for nature, relating traditional theological questions about love to Christian ecotheology was kicked further by Susan P. Bratton (1992: pp. 3-25) wherein she observes in her work ‘Loving Nature: Eros or Agape? The basic types of love used by man towards nature and the environment:

Two types of Christian love are analyzed: eros & agape. It is argued that, because agape is self-giving, it is preferable to eros in relationships with the environment. Further, it is spontaneous & unmotivated, creative, & indifferent to value, encourages fellowship between God & creation, recognizes individuality & freedom in nature, & produces action & suffering. This love should recognize the possibility of reciprocal interaction with nature, appreciate gifts of the natural world to humankind, & simultaneously consider the needs of both human & nonhuman neighbors. Continued philosophical & theological discussion of the role of reciprocity & sacrifice in love for nature is suggested.

As part of a growing environmental movement in Thailand, a small number of Buddhist monks engage in ecological conservation projects, teaching ecologically sound practices among Thai farmers & criticizing rapid economic development nationwide (which they see as one of the primary causes of the country’s environmental crisis) This religious movement towards environmental sustainability was captured by Susan M. Darlington (1998: pp. 1-15) in her book “The Ordination of a Tree: The Buddhist Ecology Movement in Thailand”.

Paul Dekker (1997: pp. 443-458) in “Religion, Culture and

Environmental Concern: An Empirical Cross-National Analysis” presents a comparison of 1993 International Social Survey Project data from 20 countries evaluating the environmental consequences of Christian religious beliefs, belonging to the Christian community, & post-materialist values. He seeks to link the biblical attitude of human dominance over nature held by the Judeo-Christian heritage with the responsibility for the current ecological crisis. He calls for a new model of environmental ethics with society’s search for postmodern environmental values and principles calling for an intergenerational values shift to make this happen. From a call for a new environmental ethics drawn from religion, we come to the level of the responsibility for stewardship given to man. In “Environmental Stewardship: Our Spiritual Heritage for Sustainable Development”, P. Dwivedi (1996: pp. 217-231), examines the concept of environmental stewardship, balancing concerns for environmental well-being against the pursuit of economic & industrial development. Arguing that protecting the environment is an interest inherent to all world cultures & spiritual traditions, it is suggested that the standards of sustainable development advocated by almost all the religions we have examined so far inclusive of African traditional religion. The idea of stewardship revolves around the idea of “Vasudhaiva-kutumbakam” (viewing human beings & all life on earth as belonging to one’s extended family) is advocated as a way of promoting an ecologically responsible approach to global change. It is argued that only through a universal charter of environmental stewardship can environmentalism be linked to long-term development (Dwivedi: p. 231). Thus we can see that the religions of the world have been concerned with ecology and the environment to varying extents, as can be seen by a brief overview of some of the basic attitudes of major religions toward the natural world, starting with the Greeks, indigenous African communities and other world faiths. An extrapolation of their religious philosophy and values reveal a concern to preserve and sustain nature and the environment in a manner to safeguard her resources for future generations. Thus we can see that religion could be “a major influence in the lives of people living in rural environments. This is examined in relation to the changing functions of the rural family” (W. B. Rogers & G. E. Buckmire, 1967: p. 22).

### Religions and Conservation

In September 1986 the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, 2012) celebrated its 25th anniversary by bringing together authorities from five major world religions to declare how the teachings of their faith leads each of them to care for nature. The event was instigated by WWF International President HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and took place over two days in the Italian town of Assisi, chosen for its association with St Francis of Assisi the Catholic saint of ecology. What resulted from this unprecedented project were the Assisi Declarations: separate calls from Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic leaders to their own faithful concerning their spiritual relationship with nature and sacred duty to care for it (WWF, 2012). After the Assisi event WWF continued to work with religious advisors to support the faiths in developing a wide variety of conservation projects through what was known as the Network of Religions and Conservation (WWF, 2012). By 1995 four more faiths—Baha’i, Daoism, Jainism and Sikhism—had produced declarations to accompany the original five and, with representatives of all nine religions, Prince Philip

launched the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), an independent NGO based in the UK and committed to linking the faith worlds of the major religions with the more secular worlds of conservation and ecology in the cause of conservation and sustainability (Green climate cities, 2012). It could be seen increasingly that there is a dialectical beneficial link between the religious mind of man and his belief in the religious values of his faith, no matter the differences from extremist faiths. The philosophy and psychology of man's religion lies in the power of faith and human values to achieve human transformation in his attitudes, character and behavior. In other words, one could entitle this presentation "*The power of religious psychology and philosophy to transform the present mind of the African personality towards achieving a sustainable management of his environment*". Mankind has achieved a synergy of spirit and research towards the end of this intellectual appreciation and social application.

It has been proven from above that religions have a global reach with psychological, social, cultural and political influence in driving the message that conservation of the natural world was a fundamental element and principle of faith. This element could be applied in enhancing the sustainable tremendous potential for the future of the environment and reversing the damages done by man on his environment. In 2011 the ARC network celebrated 25 years since the original Declarations with another conference in Assisi celebrating the thousands of faith-based projects and long-term plans for sustainability that the network has supported over the years. The event also launched the Green Pilgrimage Network, in recognition of the environmental impact caused by the estimated 150 million spiritual journeys undertaken by faith followers every year (May 23, 2012). Starting with 12 sites representing different faith traditions in Asia, Africa and Europe the commitment is to develop attitudes, resources and practices to minimize negative environmental impact and even, if possible, harness the efforts of pilgrims to generate a positive impact instead (Wikipedia, 2013).

### Philosophical Framework

The philosophical framework captures the best human values that undergird and underpin environmental philosophy and its sustainable framework. It draws its parallel from a cosmological and ontological deification and respect for nature that sees good in the temperate usage of nature's prime resources to serve not only the present but also the future. It is a peaceful application of religious values of truth, peace, righteousness, nonviolence and love (The five values of the Sathya Sai education in human values) in the management of the environment. It is a religious model of behavior and attitude that draws from the nodality of man being at peace with his creator and nature. The hypothetical tinge is that the present environmental degradation results from man being out of tune with God and nature. Man, it says can only draw back from the precipice only when he starts to love and respect nature and the earth. In his "Gandhi, Deep Ecology, Peace Research and Buddhist Economics" Thomas Weber (1999: pp. 349-361) agrees and gives more insight into this philosophical perspective that enjoys the core values of true African religiosity:

The central importance of Mohandas Gandhi to nonviolent activism in the environmental protection campaign is widely acknowledged. There are also other significant peace-related

bodies of knowledge that have gained such popularity in the West in the relatively recent past that they have changed the directions of thought & have been important in encouraging social movements, yet they have not been analyzed in terms of antecedents, especially Gandhi an ones. The new environmentalism in the form of deep ecology, the discipline of peace research, & what has become known as "Buddhist economics" very closely mirror Gandhi's philosophy.

### Educational Framework-SSEHV/ Curriculum-Nursery/Tertiary School System

What is education in human values, EHV? The education in human values framework for environmental sustainable management is a direct derivative of religious intervention and ethical mediation in solving one the problems confronting the global educational system-imbalance between secular as against spiritual education. The savant and avatar, Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba evolved this foremost educational system in human values considered by the international education committee as the crown jewel of education systems. Man today has witnessed the radical transformation of his physical environment by science and technology; this has given him the power to control, modify or destroy his natural forces. In Africa we are consequently allowed the alternatives of either regressing to a primitive level of environmental destruction through an undisciplined use of technology, or adapting the same technology to achieve the peaceful of environmental resources. To achieve the goal of the MDGS and that of sustainability in environmental management, we have to recreate the African society societies and their values. The interdependence of the major elements of the African ecosystem and environment, linked to our Africa's sustainable growth, poverty reduction and wealth creation at the religious, philosophical, educational, social, technological, economic and political levels—dictates that we have to start a new character formation and reformation at the personal and collective levels of action towards environmental management. For as agreed to by a Bahai Faith environmental assessment this human value character reformation has become inevitable if we are to achieve environmental sustainability:

We are beginning to see that integration of life on the planet requires unified action on a scale we have not yet achieved. Partial solutions seem only to prolong the difficulties; yet we hesitate to adopt a new and workable system of values for the world. For until there is unity at the most fundamental level—that of human values—social problems, simple or complex, will remain unresolved.

### The United Nations, Regional and National Frameworks

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), is the United Nations flagship organ which has been bestowed the challenge of meeting up with the target of the 7th goal of the MDGS—to integrate the principles of environmental sustainable management globally before 2015. This gives UNEP the charge of global environmental governance and ecosystem management. Klaus Töpfer, the United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), launched an action program in a booklet—*Africa Environment Tracking: Issues and developments*—which was intended as a key resource for policy mak-

ers in Africa to drive the frameworks for the region and national governments. With its Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) framework, there is no doubt that it has become a substantive tool for African policymakers to use in the assessment of the pressing environmental issues facing the region. Two of the policy options highlighted in the first African environmental outlook report were the need for the African Union, as a regional body, to persuade the international community to adopt the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and to improve environmental information systems as a basis for sound decision-making. Both policy recommendations have since been implemented. NEPAD has been endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly and UNEP. The issue of environmental information systems is being addressed through the Africa Environment Information Network (AEIN), a sustainable framework that has served the two objectives of achieving regional and national environment review while making it possible to track environmental developments on a regular basis and to try and establish trends. It is through such tracking and determining trends that reliable information can be provided to policymakers for strategic decision-making (UNEP, 2006). We have earlier identified ignorance of current developments in sustainable management of the environment as one of the challenges facing the African in his environmental crisis. This global and regional framework will give vital information about ongoing threats to Africa's environmental crisis.

### Private Sector Frameworks

Through the increasing recognition of the role of the private sector to carry out its partnership responsibilities in achieving environmental justice and sustainability, it has readily become obvious that through corporate social responsibility more human value based behavior are being evolved in managing environmental challenges in their operating environments. This is a deduction from the more religious and philosophical attitudes of their operational personnel and a new environmental philosophy that endorses a new personnel attitudes towards the environment of operation.

### Indigenous Community/Women Led Frameworks

In this context, it recognizes that "culture-people + civilization + knowledge" controls and directs how people manage their environment. The religious dimension to the culture of African people constitutes a philosophical and psychological aspects of the intangible management of their environmental heritage as recognized also by UNESCO (200 UNESCO Convention). Indigenous Traditional Knowledge systems emanates from the African traditional religion of the African indigenous peoples, as earlier recognized by this presentation. The ATR contains human values that could underpin and drive the sustainable management of its environmental frameworks. However, despite this knowledge system being excluded in the current efforts to achieve sustainable environmental systems, it has been observed that the biggest challenges facing the present environmental crisis in Africa is the marginalization of indigenous communities, and the exclusion of women and girls in the efforts to overcome the crisis (Bahai, 2012). This means that there is an environmental gender and indigenous discrimination that excludes both women and indigenous community interests in such efforts. This issue of marginalization, espe-

cially of women, has also been well noted in a Bahai environmental management documentation (2011):

One of the most pervasive social challenges besetting communities around the world is the marginalization of girls and women—a condition further exacerbated... they represent perhaps the greatest source of untapped potential in the global effort to overcome climate change. Their responsibilities in families, in communities, as farmers and stewards of natural resources make them uniquely positioned to develop strategies for adapting to changing environmental conditions...

### Recommendations

1) Psychological: Attitudinal/character. In the context of African traditional religion, Asian Buddha peaceful management of nature, Schmitt (2011) has observed that the antidote to man's endemic wrong behavior towards nature and his environment, which could be termed by psychology as an irreligious behavior or by ATR as an "Nso Ani". The sustainable solution could be enmeshed in the observation made by Schmitt as an attitudinal change in the human person:

But the most effective weapon against environmental injustice as well as misguided developments is still to maintain within oneself, a respectful basic attitude that is Furthering to nature and man, and which rejects any form of exploitation because such thoughts and attitudes have a strong effect on all those who likewise want to be constructive.

2) Religious input into environmental policy;

3) Integrating environmentalism as basic curriculum in tertiary religious education;

4) Imparting human value education and sensitivity to secondary and primary school students;

5) Formation of religious friends of the environment in higher institutions;

Other recommendations would include:

6) Religious organizations partnering with NGOS/CBOS for environmental protection;

7) Organizing an annual environmental religious summits by inter religious council in Africa;

8) Promoting Sustainable Use of Natural Resources;

9) Protecting Forest Resources;

10) Establishing partnerships between educational faculties with the African institute for Sathya Sai education in human values;

11) Conserving Biodiversity;

12) Protecting the Environment While Helping Communities relive their traditional worship system;

13) Spreading the application of famine early warning systems (FEWS) across the length and breadth of Africa (FEWS-2011).

### Conclusion

Challenged by Lynn White's sharp criticism of Christianity's responsibility for earth's ecological crisis, both Ian Barbour and Philip Hefner have proposed theological anthropologies based upon the imago Dei that supports an ecological ethic that defines the application and useage of the 5 human values as the model for sustainable religious environmentalism in globally. Russell (2003: pp. 149-159), while supporting the ecological ethic, turns not to human value/religious dimension of ecology which I consider to be indispensable to any considerations to

secure the future in Africa. A human value religio-philosophical model should be reconstructed to provide an African mass incentive, ending the exploitation of man's environment and prevent his own self-destruction. This reconstructed religious environmentalism will lead to a socially transformed character with human values that will be environmentally sensitive and responsive to the identified environmental problems in Africa.

**Postscript commentary**—*This paper was first presented as a lead paper by Dr Ani Casimir Kingston Chukwunonyelum, a senior lecturer at the Department of philosophy and senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, during the 34th Annual Conference of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR-3rd-6th September, 2013) at the University of Nigeria.*

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