

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
TOWARDS COMBATING ECOLOGICAL CRISES IN
EKWULOBIA TOWN

EZENWAFOR, KOSISOCHUKWU SUNDAY
MATRIC NO. 12/0095

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ABSTRACT

One of the major threatening issues that has been of great concern to the whole world is the issue of environmental degradation or ecological crisis. It has been a thorn in the flesh to everyone irrespective of one's ideology, race, or religious inclination. The problem has risen to a threatening level that there has been calls globally to join hands together to fight this monstrous phenomenon. Though man has been blamed for this problem, it is quite unfortunate that the church has been seriously accused of promoting man's negative attitude to the environment. Thus, rather than taking care of, and beautifying the environment, man ended up devastating the excellent work of the creator. He failed in the task God committed to his hands. The focus of this research is to open human eyes to the actions and inactions that cause these environmental crises, the effects of such crises, how such crises can be combated and the roles of the church in protecting the environment. Ekwulobia town is used as a case study. This research established the existence of ecological crises which pose great dangers to the continuous existence of human beings on earth. It also embarked upon sensitizing the church, with focus on churches in Ekwulobia, on what her role(s) should be in protecting the environment from further degradation. The research observed that most Christians do not pay attention to issues of environmental protection and sustainability. It is also discovered that the Christian churches in Ekwulobia town have contributed little or nothing toward helping in combating the ecological problems in the town. The outcome of this work is targeted at showing that; first, Christians have a leading role to play in combating ecological crisis and protecting the environment from further devastation. Second, the role of the church in environmental protection can be moral, theological and educational in nature. Third, Believers in Christ Jesus are stewards but not exploiters of everything God created. Therefore, the recommendations of this research include: Christians in Ekwulobia should keep the environment as a trust and be role models to other citizens in terms of sustainable use of natural resources and proper disposal of wastes. The Church in Ekwulobia and the church at large should teach their members conservation principles and the dangers of unhealthy environment. The church should also embark on ecological campaign and action. The government at the local, state and national levels should work with the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOS) in sponsoring environmental conservation campaigns. Thus, the role of the church in combating ecological crises is important if the Christian witness should be complete.

5.2 CONCLUSION

There are overwhelming evidences that an ecological crises indeed exist. The biosphere is so polluted that ecosystems are in jeopardy; forms of life are becoming extinct and the general welfare of man is threatened. Uncontrolled population growth, untamed technological advancement and the exploitation of our natural resources have caused pollution, global warming and climatic change. Though, a number of environmental protection measures had been identified to save the good earth but a massive and conscious effort on the part of all people, government and religious institutions especially the church, is needed to cope effectively with the environmental crisis.

The earth is created and owned by God, who graciously gave it to man (Psalm 115:16). Therefore, as God's steward (Psalm 8:6-8), man has to take good care of what God has created and entrusted to him. This can be done by harkening to the various injunctions, prescriptions and warnings God gave him regarding man-nature relationship (Gen.2:15). Hence, the role of the church is crucial in environmental protection. The church should not only be concerned with the salvation of souls but also the salvation of nature from indiscriminate exploitation.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the present ecological crisis within and outside Ekwulobia town, the following suggestions on biblical and ethical roles of persons, religious organizations as well as the government are given. It is believed that they would be of great value for the management of the environment.

1. Christians in Ekwulobia and world over should be good stewards of the environment by setting good examples for other citizens. They should avoid indiscriminate dumping of refuse. By so doing, they will model environmental protection habits for members of their community.

2. Proper disposal sites should be provided by the concerned individuals or agencies, and wastes collected should be disposed properly (Ezekiel 32:13-14, Numbers 35:33-34). Christians should be conversant with God's sanitation law in the Bible:

Designate a place outside the camp where you can go to relieve yourself. As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and cover up your excrement. For the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and deliver your enemies to you. Your camp must be holy so that He will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you (Deut. 23:12-14)".

The law was designated for the welfare of the nations, and it is the duty of humans, especially Christians, to obey it accordingly.

3. The church, especially the church of Christ in Ekwulobia, and the government should give adequate education and enlightenment on individual's obligations to nature, complexity of environmental problems and the need to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Religious leaders should teach their congregation the need to take care of God's creation and not rape it.

4. Government should make and enforce stringent laws and decrees aimed at conserving the earth resources and preventing environmental pollution. This has to do with protecting and preventing the earth's resources from being damaged, wasted, exhausted and destroyed.

5. The churches in Ekwulobia and the church at large should engage themselves massively in awareness and enlightenment campaign on the dangers of environmental crises through the use of the media.

6. Government should also ensure that environmental ethics is taught at all levels of education. .
7. Churches in Ekwulobia and the church at large should actively participate in and partner with the government and Non-Governmental Organisations in fighting against environmental degradation and environmental crises.
8. The church, governments and individuals should embark on productive ecological campaign to restore the integrity of nature and rescue humans from environmental crisis. The church can observe Green Sunday/Ecological worship services to teach people. The government and the church can encourage the observance of World Environmental Day, June 5, on yearly basis. These opportunities will give room for proper awareness on environment-related matters.
9. Christian theological Institutions should make environment-related courses cut across every facet of their theological education and training.
10. Citizens, especially Christians should be encouraged to join organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Green Revolution, Conservation Education Association, Resources for the Future, among others. This will afford an individual the chance of becoming an agent of Environmental Restoration.
11. Christians as well as other citizens should develop the habit of planting trees within the residential areas. Flowers should also be planted around the houses, offices and schools to promote the aesthetic nature of the environment.
12. Religious houses such as church and mosque should desist from the use of external loud speakers (horn speakers) which are major sources of noise pollution in the cities and towns.
13. Citizens especially Ekwulobians should desist from building houses along river banks in order to avoid incessant experience of preventable flood.

14. Environmental Agencies such as Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) and National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) should provide useful tips on the effects of flood and its prevention for citizens living on seasonally flooded areas. They should also educate them on how they can develop and implement personal flood plan.