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THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION TOWARDS
COMBATING ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

God created the earth and everything in it and put man in charge to sustain them for His glory. As man inhabits the planet earth, he misused and abused the privilege of leadership that God gave him. He engaged in activities that are unhealthy for the generality of the creation. Man embarks on activities such as farming, fishing, waste disposal, transportation, deforestation among others in a bid to survive. Unfortunately, rather than beautifying the environment, he ended up devastating the excellent work of his Master. 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 have negative consequences on the environment called ecological crisis, the effects of such crisis, how such crisis can be combated and the roles of the church (God's People) in protecting the environment especially within Abeokuta Metropolis and the World at large. The purpose of this study is to create awareness of the existence of an ecological crisis which is posing great dangers to the continuous existence of human beings on earth. It was also embarked upon to sensitize the church on what her role (s) should be in protecting the environment from further degradation. The work is library research with pictorial evidences from the case study, Abeokuta metropolis. The outcome of this work shows 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, Christians 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 should teach her members conservation principles and the dangers of unhealthy environment. And government at local, state and national levels should work with the Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in sponsoring environmental conservation campaigns.

5.2 CONCLUSION

There are overwhelming evidences that an ecological crisis does 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 climate 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 man is inhabiting is created and owned by God, who graciously gave it to him (Psalm 115:16); it can therefore only best be cared for, protected, managed and preserved in cooperation with God. It means that as God's Steward (Psalm 8: 6-8), man has to take good care of what God has created and entrusted to him (Manus 22). 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 Abeokuta metropolis, the following suggestions on biblical and ethical roles of persons, religious organizations and government were given. It is believed that they would be of great value for the management of the environment to the concerned person or group of persons;

1. Proper disposal sites should be provided by the concerned individuals or agencies and wastes collected should be disposed properly (Ezekiel 32: 13-14, Number 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 to 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 nation, and it is the duty of humans to obey it accordingly.

2. 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 should be provided by government and religious bodies. Religious leaders should teach their congregation the need to take care of God's creation and not rape it.

3. Government should ~~make~~ and observe 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. The resources of the earth can be obtained and enjoyed if they are well protected from man's activities. All the earth resources add values to serve as means of medicine and other lucrative values. God is the owner (Psalm24:1, 4; Deut 20:19; Luke13:8).

4. Government should also ensure that environmental ethics is taught at all levels of education.

5. Christians should be good Stewards of the environment by setting good example for other Citizens. They should avoid indiscriminate dumping of refuse and throw away

method of disposal especially into water bodies, gutters and drainages. By so doing, they will model environmental protection habits for other members of their community.

6. The government, the church and the individuals should embark on the 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. On the other hand, Federal and State government can encourage the observance of World Environment Day (June 5) on yearly basis. These opportunities will give room for proper awareness on environmental related matters.

7. Citizens especially Christians should be encouraged to join organizations 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.

8. More trees should be planted within the residential area and flowers should also be planted around the houses, offices and schools to promote the ecstatic nature of the environment.

9. Religious houses such as mosque and church should desist from the use of external loud speakers (horn speakers) which are major source of noise pollution in the cities.

10. Media houses should broadcast environmental sensitization programmes which will contribute to environmental protection. Jingles and soap opera concerning the dangers of poor environment and how to achieve cleaner environment should be broadcasted on radio and television on regular basis. Religious bodies and private

