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PRODUCTS AND CRAFTS OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

By

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Abstract

An Esan adage says: “Ejaye Ole-akhor.” Meaning “One resembles his/her dwelling place or environment.” The message is that: “the environment makes the person” or “the person is a product of his/her environment and in turn makes the environment.” Environment here is understood as geographical, socio-ethical and cultural milieu. All that the senses explore and in particular, the physical environment. The opinion of this paper is that, human activities have impacted more negatively on the environment. The environment is reciprocating on a global scale and the consequences are dire for the lives of the elements in the universe, including human life. Humanity is tied in a web with the environment and its elements. Hence, there is need to pay attention to the importance of the environment, its health and the consequences of human relationship with the environment. The consideration is multiple approaches that reveal the complex nature of the human life and its realisation in a given physical community and its universal implication. Using the analytic-exposé and synthetic methods, this paper takes a cue from *Laudato Si* and aims at awakening consciousness about human discipline and integrity as beneficiary and craft of the

environment. The environment needs the attention of all as life is incarnate in it. The health of the environment impacts the well-being of the inhabitants. Therefore, for life to continue in the universe and flourish, all need to harmoniously work to preserve and maintain the health of the environment.

Keywords: Environmental Pollution, Life, Anthropology, Activities, Deforestation.

Introduction

One of the basic things that biology class teaches, is the complexity of the universe and its inhabitants. Complexity because of the interconnectedness of life and the indispensability of the elements in the universe. Furthermore, every particular element from animate to inanimate carry some degree of this complexity depending on its sophistication and the level such element occupies in the hierarchy of things. As particular and distinct as they could be, it is also intriguing to note that they are intertwined in an indispensable life-connection. The opinion of this paper is that, there is no amount of progress in human inquiry and in particular scientific and technological advancement that can obliterate the simplicity and the complexity of the universe. Another opinion that this paper asserts is that the continuous sustenance of the life of any of the elements and in particular on earth will continue to depend on the dynamics of the harmonic relationship of these elements. A harm done to earth is a gradual annihilation of life including human life.

The Problem

The problem is that the earth is bleeding as a result of human activities. Worse still is that today, there is so much information that it is not within the human capacity to keep pace with the events of inquiry including the problem of climate change. So, to even work for a stable solution becomes almost a mirage. The situation is compounded by the fact that social media have blurred the difference between common opinion and authority.

Anything goes.¹ and environmental degradation is on the increase. The gullibility is only frightening as information goes with speed of sound that there is hardly any control of what is consumed by any individual or group: the innocent, the young and old can have access to the same information with little or no moderation. Everyone is a potential professional irrespective of background or experience. More often, ambitions are self-centred and motivation excessive materialism orchestrated in most part by capitalism. It can be said to be a ding dung affair and a tug of war with everyone else. At best it is a chaos of opposites as ... people in different parts of the world today find themselves living in what one could call “a sea of words.” Moreover, global communications introduce what can at times seem like an oppressive overload of information.² What seems to compound it, is that one can conveniently claim that the mind has gone a long way trying to reach full capacity of its dynamic dialectics. Yet the human person is still lost in the maze of his search and his situation could be said to be akin to the pre-civilization period.³ “Human beings have always been brash enough to ask such questions but lacked the necessary gifts to answer them. At last, we are acquiring that ability. What we can’t yet know is whether we will wisely use the remarkable things we’re slowly learning.”⁴ Human activities on the environment has not indicated a prudent management of the vastness of its capacity and a wise use of the results of investigations. At this point there is a need for a tribunal of reason and a return to the search of a compass and indeed a global re-union in the manner of the proposal of Kuhn.⁵ Hence, it is a double-edged sword that can slip through humanity and grand it to flame or an opportunity to reform our priority. Who suffers? The earth, the home of all material (bodied) creatures and the inhabitants.⁶ The consequence of the malaise of the earth is that every element within its ambient will be adversely affected.

Solution

This paper proposes that the integrity of the universe be re-affirmed and the care of it incumbent on all investigators. The truth of reality is one, and all (philosophers, scientists and even theologians) without exception need to realize this truth. The role of the human specie as the centre of inquiry⁷ cannot be compromised and be so understood, however advanced the human mind. Science should continue to explore unrestrained within its method, but with the most august responsibility for the universe to enhance and promote human dignity. Exploration of the universe for economics and industrial purposes must be guided by a comprehensive understanding of its nature, content and ends. One cannot be oblivious of the effects of the reckless devastation of the earth and the repercussion for its life and the lives of the various elements that make up the earth. The goal of all solutions should be leaving a legacy of discipline and the perpetuation of meaningful and fulfilled life for generations to come. The environment is our nurture and we too must pay attention to it.

The Environment

The environment is everything that makes up our surroundings and has an impact on our ability to live on this planet.⁸ It is the totality of the interrelationships between flora, fauna, water, air, land, as well as humans and other living organisms and properties. It encompasses the entire physical and biological realities, as well as their interactions.⁹ It has been characterized as the conditions and circumstances that affect lives. It is the collection of physical, chemical, and biological elements that interact with an organism or ecological community to determine its form and survival.¹⁰ The biosphere is the only place on the planet where life is known to exist. However, we recognize the many efforts science is making to verify other possibilities.¹¹ Within the biosphere, humans arose and evolved. It affects our economy, civilizations, cultures, well-being and it can determine

a lot about our future continuous existence.¹² It's where we call home.¹³

What is our relationship with the environment?

The environment plays a crucial role in human life,¹⁴ as it has a direct impact on the health and the well-being of people, whether they live in cities or in the countryside.¹⁵ Both physical and mental human health are intertwined with ecosystem health. People throughout the world value nature as a source of identity and spirituality and exposure to it can help improve psychophysical health. Contact with nature is linked to improved sleep, less stress, and increased psychological well-being, according to a growing body of studies.¹⁶ Ecosystems help us regulate our climate, control extreme occurrences, prevent diseases, and endow us with water, food, raw materials, and natural spaces where we may relax and unwind. The environment absorbs our waste, supports economic sectors and millions of people's livelihoods, and nurtures our health, culture, and spiritual fulfillment,¹⁷ as well as providing ingredients for traditional medicine, biomedical research, and pharmaceutical development.¹⁸

The advantages that each habitat brings to the general ecosystem cannot be undermined. Water serves as the biosphere's lifeblood.¹⁹ The ocean, is the source of all life on the planet. It provides 90 % of the world's life-supporting space²⁰ and 50–80 % of the oxygen in the atmosphere.²¹ It regulates our weather and climate, provides food and medicine, and many indigenous and local groups see it as sacred and intrinsically valuable.

Farmlands are also necessary for human survival²² because, they provide us with food, fiber, and other necessities, as well as biodiversity habitat, economic opportunity, and spiritual and cultural advantages.²³ At least two billion people, primarily the poor and rural, rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, and land provides us with over 90 % of our calories and protein.²⁴

Forests are part of any nation's most significant asset since they provide habitat for variety of animals and microorganisms²⁵

They contribute to precipitation, regulate streamflow, increase rainwater infiltration and thus allow maximum recharge of groundwater resources and help to control flood.²⁶ True care for such assets of critical life possibility cannot be trifled with or any form of indifference and in fact negative relational disposition can point to many implications – including ingratitude, wastefulness and irresponsibility and then catastrophic consequences.

Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of the environment due to resource depletion, which encompasses all biotic and abiotic elements that make up our environment, such as air, water, soil, plants, and animals; ecosystem devastation; and the extinction of wild species.²⁷ It is also described as any modification or disturbance to the environment that is deemed harmful or unwelcome. It is a process in which the natural environment is harmed in some way, resulting in a reduction in biological diversity and environmental health.²⁸ Environmental degradation is a severe problem that has captivated the world's attention and has become one of the most widely debated topics locally, nationally, and internationally.²⁹ It is one of the ten biggest risks to the planet, as identified by the United Nations' High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change, which diminishes the environment's ability to meet societal and ecological aims and demands.³⁰ Our environment has been deteriorating for the past two centuries, and it has affected practically every corner of the globe in some way. It is therefore important to pay particular attention to the cause of such anomaly and mitigate it.

Causes of Environmental Degradation

While environmental degradation is commonly associated with human activity, the truth is that the environment is always changing. A few biological systems degenerate to the point where they cannot help the life that is supposed to dwell there, with or without the effect of human exercises.³¹ Landslides,

earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and wildfires can severely devastate local plant and animal communities, rendering them incapable of functioning. This can occur either as a result of physical destruction caused by a natural disaster or as a result of long-term resource degradation caused by the introduction of an invasive alien species to a new habitat. Humans are not entirely to fault for the latter, which frequently occurs after tidal surges, when reptiles and beetles wash ashore. The Earth itself is a source of ecological problems.³² However, such problems caused by natural degeneration and disintegration are not as fast devastating compared to human activities on the environment.³³ A fact that indicate that the world has its origin and goal towards which it tends.³⁴

Overpopulation, urbanization, intensification of agriculture, increased energy usage and transportation, deforestation, climate change, overfishing, and ozone depletion are just a few of the ways humans are wreaking havoc on the environment, all of which are having a significant influence on our planet.³⁵

Overpopulation and Deforestation

Rapid population increase places a demand on natural resources, resulting in environmental degradation.³⁶ On a global scale, because mortality rates have fallen, medicine has improved and industrial agricultural methods have been implemented; overpopulation has become an epidemic, keeping individuals alive for much longer and increasing the total population without corresponding plan of sustenance and because they need resources the environment is impacted and most times devastated.³⁷ This results in the most part is deforestation, which disrupts the ecosystem, resulting in loss of biodiversity, which increases CO₂ levels, destroying the delicate environment,³⁸ which has the potential to harm every living thing on the planet.³⁹

Agriculture Activities and Industrialization

Agriculture is a long-standing and widely practiced occupation, with significant shifts in farming patterns across time.⁴⁰ Some of these are positive, while others are negative. The use of heavy equipment and chemicals in form of fertilizers can devastate the land and poison waterbodies thereby leaving the environment with disastrous consequences.⁴¹ Plants, fish, and other animals start to perish. Acidity rises in the water. Lakes, like acid rain, become dead zones, with conditions so poisonous that no plants or animals can survive in them.⁴² All these are results of industrialization and imprudent exploitation of natural resources and the environment suffers.⁴³ In addition, industry smoke pollutes the air, and its loudness contributes to noise pollution⁴⁴

Pollution and Global Warming

Pollution is defined as the introduction of toxins into the environment,⁴⁵ and it is another source of environmental degradation that leads to a decline in the quality of natural biotic and abiotic elements.⁴⁶ When the environment is contaminated, it indicates that poisonous elements have made it unfit to live in. Pollution can occur from a variety of places and causes. Humanity continues to deplete essential resources such as clean air, water, and soil, which take millions of years to restore. These eventually lead to global warming as a result of the excess carbon dioxide that is constantly released in the atmosphere from these pollutants. Pollution and waste are unavoidable, from garbage, the millions of metric tons from factories, automobile emissions, agricultural runoff, and poorly managed natural resource harvests.⁴⁷ All these activities eventually heat up the biosphere and the result is environmental degradation.

Consequences of Environmental Degradation

When the earth's natural resources are depleted, degradation develops. Water, air, and soil are among the resources that are

impacted.⁴⁸ Humans, plants, animals, and microorganisms all suffer with environmental degradation.⁴⁹ The consequences of environmental degradation include sickness and mortality in both children and adults. Soil degradation can cause malnutrition in farmers, which can lead to early death,⁵⁰ as well as production losses owing to siltation of reservoirs, transportation channels, and other hydrologic investments, all of which have a direct impact on people's health. Floods triggered by glacial lake outbursts have been known to be catastrophic to human life, affect water supply and impact greatly on agricultural activities.⁵¹ Despite this, a third of the commercial fish stocks in our oceans are currently overfished⁵² and plastic pollution is predicted to diminish marine ecosystem and jeopardized marine life.⁵³ Coal burning is another pollutant to the environment. Sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO₂) are released into the atmosphere when humans burn coal, where they rise up and gather in clouds until the clouds become saturated and rain acid, wreaking havoc on the earth underneath them.⁵⁴ Toxins accumulate in the leaves of trees and plants that absorb the acid, causing leaf damage and the death of enormous swaths of forest. Ocean acidification also occurs and endangers human life and health by causing starvation and poisoning as a result of changes in food quantity and quality.⁵⁵

The risk of climatic natural disasters may grow as a result of global warming. Sea-level rise damages coastal investments, regional changes in agricultural productivity due to increased frequency of droughts, floods, and hurricanes, and increased incidence of pests, causing a food shortage, as well as disruption of the marine food chain, civil conflict, and decreased economic sources as a result of global warming.⁵⁶ Climate change disrupts the food supply, boosts food prices, and as a result, restricts access to nutrient-dense and healthful meals for some people.⁵⁷

The enormous expense that a country may have to bear as a result of environmental degradation can have a significant economic impact in terms of green cover restoration, landfill

cleanup, and endangered species protection and even loss of revenue from tourism.

As a result of the loss of biodiversity, ecosystem flexibility is reduced, resulting in the loss of genetic resources.⁵⁸ Furthermore, many new diseases, such as the continuing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, are the result of intricate interactions between wildlife, domestic animals, and humans, which are fueled by anthropogenic changes in land use, food production, and trade.⁵⁹ It is the first time that humanity is confronted with a global crisis.⁶⁰ Global environmental changes (GECs) are posing new hazards to human health, and immediate action is necessary to address these serious issues.⁶¹

Ways of restoring and preserving the integrity of the environment

One of the most pressing environmental challenges is its degradation and something concrete and significant needs to be done and without further delay. We must re-establish a balanced relationship within the ecosystems that sustain us in order to reduce future impacts on our environment which is our common home.⁶² However robust the plan for restoration and preservation may be at this time, there are some settings that may never recover depending on the extent of the harm. Nevertheless, the following are some of ways to reduce environmental degradation:

- **Utilization of renewable energy**

Renewable energy can help to reduce Green House Gas (GHG) emissions⁶³ as practical advantage of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in lower emissions and improved ambient air quality in many locations.⁶⁴ Using renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal heat, and biomass will reduce GHG emissions.⁶⁵ This adopted for both home use and transportation as it is the experience in some parts of the world will save our earth.⁶⁶

- **Industrialization that is long-term**

Flowing from the above is the question of the necessity of industrialization for economic development. In the Nigerian environment and in fact, global platform, it is time to be more concrete about the talk of long-term sustainability. We have sufficient amount of wind and sun energy for instance in Nigeria and elsewhere to sustain an environmentally friendly plan and ecosystems restoration.⁶⁷ Consequently, policies on industrial behaviour and best practices should be enforced. Construction of treatment plants for industrial effluents should also receive adequate funding.⁶⁸

- **Wastewater treatment/recycling and reuse of waste**

To address the problem of water pollution, there is a great need to maintain water sources, find ways of healthy harvest, create and improve on both industrial and municipal wastewater treatment to reduce waste and pollution.⁶⁹ Recycling of water is a popular practice today⁷⁰ and awareness must be created where they are lacking⁷¹ by government and other agencies.⁷²

- **Behavioral shifts in everyday life**

To help our environment and live healthier life, eating habits, disciplines about use of equipment and gadgets must be encouraged and modeled to represent our green revolution.⁷³

- **Ecotourism and ecological restoration**

Tourist attractions should be regulated to aid with ecological restoration. Furthermore, ecotourism should be bolstered in order to support long-term economic viability, cultural preservation, and biodiversity conservation.⁷⁴ Parks and public places should be planted with trees, as restoring green and blue spaces can contribute significantly to human well-being.

International cooperation is important

A combined international effort is required to achieve sustainable environmental goals and protect global environmental resources such as the global climate and biological diversity.⁷⁵ As a result, a responsible international body such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) should play a key role in developing time-bound policies, organizing international treaties, and coordinating global leaders for effective implementation.⁷⁶ Nations also need to be honest about the implementation of such policies for positive change.

Conclusion

Human actions have inherent in them consequences that can bring positive and negative benefits. Our environment is an endowment that has its dynamic dialectics and mechanic trajectorial evolution. The responsibility is on the human person who has moral obligation and environmental discipline to be deliberate and have the teleological consciousness to harness the resources of the universe and make the most of the gains of nature.⁷⁷ The capacity of science cannot be undermined but scientists must be wary of absolutising their capacity and constantly compare notes with all other parties in the exploration of our common home.⁷⁸ All alike must read the book of nature, understand it has an architect and must strive to conduct activities in such consciousness.

Captains of industries and commercial organizations should be open to common sense demands to be moderate and modest in their activities and recognize the ultimate goal of human existence and the role of the environment to transcend personal comfort and excessive materialism. The complexity of life is more than the immediate and the apparent. It goes to the core of the understanding of the need for dialogue that evokes a common concern for our common heritage and the care of our homeland because of its implications for our continuous existence. "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern

to bring the whole human family together to seek sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. ... Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home.”⁷⁹The will to accomplish this will make our destiny and the pursuit of it a dream worth the rigour and the fruits will be sufficient for a life both meaningful and transmittable in our common home.

Endnotes

¹Cf. one can call to mind the provoking epistemological anarchism of Paul Feyerabend.

²Cf. Williams B. Friend, *Creation and Its Beauty in Human Formation*, A Paper delivered at the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council for Culture, March 2006. Accessed, June, 2006.

³It looks evident that the human dynamism is returning to the pre-civilization era of tyranny and violent appropriation of property and ideas that led to the social contract theories and even in our time, the consequent arrogance of miscreants in the flex of arms and ammunitions.

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⁵Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1962-2012.

⁶Cf. Laudato Si.no. 8

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