

Humanity and Ecological Footprints: Christian Eco-Spirituality and Environmental Sustainability in Lokoja Metropolis

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Abstract

This study explores how humanity and ecological footprints impact environmental sustainability in Lokoja Metropolis, Nigeria through the lens of Christian Eco-spirituality. By understanding the local environment, the study provides a paradigm to measure the effect of humanity's environmental actions on local ecosystems. While the concept of Christian eco-spirituality is often employed in discussions about global environmental justice, this research expands the scope of its application to the local context. Firstly, it discusses the history of environmental degradation in the region and its correlation with human exploitation of the ecosystem. Secondly, it explores the potential for Christian eco-spirituality to provide a framework for addressing some of the most pressing environmental challenges facing the region. Using the data gathered from primary and secondary sources, the paper demonstrates that Christian eco-spirituality is a way to link religious practices with environmental stewardship. It therefore proposes a number of recommendations such as encouraging community-level environmental stewardship initiatives, and promoting dialogue between religious leaders and local policymakers. The paper concludes that Christian eco-spirituality provides a unique platform for spreading environmental awareness through its holistic approach to evangelism. It then calls for further research into the subject of Christian eco-spirituality as a potential model for sustainability in other similarly sized urban centers in Nigeria and across the globe.

Key Words: Humanity; Ecological Footprints; Christian Eco-Spirituality; Environmental Sustainability.

Introduction

In the modern metropolis of Lokoja, environmental conservation is becoming a more pressing concern, especially in view of its expanding population and the consequences of climate change. Numerous environmental issues have arisen as a result of people's careless exploitation of the environment. As a result, the city has been severely impacted by environmental problems such as erosion, floods, poor waste management, and water contamination. When catastrophic disasters take their lives, homes, farms, and other

properties and jeopardize their means of subsistence, they leave people homeless. In addition, the neighboring areas have experienced significant deforestation as a result of Lokoja's rapid expansion. As a result, the natural vegetation that is necessary for retaining water and preventing flooding has been destroyed. Flash flooding results from this quick inflow of water into the metropolis caused by heavy rains. Soil erosion brought on by a lack of trees also raises the danger of flooding. In Lokoja City, inappropriate waste management is a significant contributor to environmental degradation in addition to deforestation. This includes throwing trash into lakes, streams, and rivers. Waste builds up in these bodies of water, causing blockages and impediments. Water builds up in the city as a result of these obstructions in the water's flow. These careless environmental uses have further produced an unpalatable ecosystem. In light of this, the study aims to evaluate the environmental care provided in Lokoja metropolis in the context of Christian eco-spirituality, giving answers to the environmental problems the city has identified.

It appears that the use of eco-spirituality in environmental preservation in the region has not received adequate attention in earlier research on environmental management in Lokoja metropolis. The socioeconomic elements impacting households' trash generation and disposal behaviors in the Lokoja metropolitan area were investigated by Ige, Ademiluyi and Oluseyi (2019). The study discovered that households generally had inadequate disposal methods and that garbage creation was considerable. The effectiveness of eco-spirituality in environmental management appears to have been overlooked by the writers, who instead called for the development of recycling centers, public education and awareness campaigns, and rubbish bins. Ezenwaji, Ezenwaji and Agwu (2019) looked into how floods affected households' means of subsistence in the city of Lokoja. The research discovered that flooding was a common environmental issue in the city and that it significantly affected household livelihoods by posing a risk to health, displacing households, and causing property damage. The authors advocated for the implementation of flood risk reduction techniques, such as emergency relief, land use planning, and early warning systems. But they did not see eco-spirituality as a viable solution. Okereke and Ndubisi (2021) looked at the prospects and problems associated with sustainable development in the city of Lokoja. The assessment emphasized the city's environmental problems, such as waste management, deforestation, water and air pollution, and pollution in the air. The eco-spirituality approach was left out of the authors' recommendations for the adoption of sustainable development techniques, which included green infrastructure, eco-friendly transportation, and renewable energy sources. Adedokun, Akinola and Abdulkareem (2017) looked into the connection between the frequency of floods in Lokoja metropolis and rainfall variability. They discovered that the area was seeing more annual floods, with high rainfall serving as the primary culprit. To lessen the effects of floods, they advised that flood risk management

techniques be put into place in the region. They did, however, leave a vacuum in the field of eco-spirituality as a strategy for preserving the environment. Adeogun, Fagbohun, and Ogedengbe (2019) used GIS and remote sensing technologies to analyse the flood risk in Lokoja City. They determined which locations were most vulnerable to floods and suggested taking steps to lower the danger of flooding in these places. It's possible that the study imagined floods to be the only environmental issue in the region. In the Lokoja metropolis, Alhassan and Mohammed (2019) conducted a spatial analysis of the danger of urban flooding. They discovered that the majority of the area's vulnerable sections were found in low-lying locations, making the area extremely prone to flooding. They suggested that flood mitigation strategies be put in place to lessen the effects of flooding in the region, but they never looked into the possibility of eco-spirituality. Using GIS methodologies, Igwemmar, Alegbeleye and Okocha (2020) evaluated the flood vulnerability of Lokoja Metropolis. They determined which parts of the city were the most vulnerable, and they suggested using flood control techniques to lessen the effects of flooding on locals. Using remote sensing and GIS techniques, Ogundare, Adejumo and Adejumo (2019) assessed the flood danger and susceptibility of Lokoja City. They determined which locations were most vulnerable to floods and suggested taking steps to lower the danger of flooding in these places. Owocyte and Abayomi (2015) conducted research on urban environmental sustainability in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. Their emphasis was on the necessity for the study area to be upgraded through a rehabilitation/renovation method as well as the supply of urban basic services. This simply entails revitalizing afflicted regions of the area by retaining some structures that are retainable; rehabilitating existing buildings and structures, updating non-tarred roadways, and introducing more roads in order to open up the blighted districts. It also includes both improving current infrastructure and constructing new ones. For them, this model provides a future path that can maintain any improvement effort put in place to revitalize the neighborhood. There was no consideration given to eco-spirituality.

The environmental issues in Lokoja metropolis, including waste management, deforestation, and water and air pollution, have been brought to light by these research and evaluations. Together with suggested solutions, the researchers have also determined the socioeconomic elements causing environmental issues. These investigations offer a useful starting point for future studies on environmental protection in Lokoja City in the context of Christian eco-spirituality. Because of this, this study expands on earlier researches by investigating and facilitating a new and unique dimension to the discourse by exploring Christian eco-spirituality as an approach for promoting environmental justice and sustainability.

This research topic is distinctive in that it offers a full understanding by fusing religious thoughts with ecological viewpoints. This is due to the fact that, although environmental preservation is frequently considered a secular matter, Christian eco-spirituality provides a distinctive viewpoint on the significance of environmental stewardship. The components of the environment exist and interact in the same way that the components of a working system do. The ecosystem refers to the nature of the tight relationship and interrelationship between the elements within the environment. Ekong (2003), for example, described the ecosystem as the interplay of all living species and their natural environment. Turner (1994) describes the ecosystem as a system of relationships between life forms and their physical environment. The ecosystem, according to Robertson (1987), is a self-sustaining population of creatures within its natural context. The ecosystem is therefore defined by Akuko (2006) as “a functioning interacting system composed of one or more living organism and their effective environment, both physical and biological” (p. 304). In the end, the nature and functioning of the ecosystem, as well as problems within the ecosystem, will directly and inevitably generate equivalent problems within the social context. The interaction between the social environment and the ecosystem is inextricably linked, and one cannot exist without the other, resulting in what sociologists refer to as a systemic or functional interdependence. Eco-spirituality is therefore a type of constructive theology that takes into account how religion, the natural world, and environmental challenges relate to one another (Ituma, 2009). It is predicated on the idea that ecological degradation is linked to human spiritual worldviews and that the environment ought to be preserved and governed in a way that honours God’s holy creation. An approach to theology known as “eco-spirituality” centres discussion and interpretation on the ecosystem. It addresses and corrects human shortcomings using the Bible and theological ideas. Fundamental to eco-spirituality is the conviction that all living things are found on Earth and that God created all living things as well as their surroundings. As a result, eco-spirituality highlights how crucial it is to preserve and respect living things and their surroundings with kindness. It acknowledges the duty and care that people have for the planet and its ecosystems. Eco-spirituality recognises that environmental issues have significant spiritual and moral components in addition to being purely scientific or technological in character. It aims to advance a wholistic strategy that incorporates morality, religious values, and ecological consciousness. By doing this, eco-spirituality hopes to encourage people to live sustainably, support environmental justice, and contribute to the maintenance and restoration of the planet’s ecosystems. This study expands on the idea that Lokoja residents can be more environmentally conscious if they properly comprehend and use Christian eco-spirituality.

Lokoja Metropolis in Historical Perspective

Lokoja is a town in Kogi state's ancient Kabba province, near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. Lokoja was created in 1991 from the former states of Kwara and Benue. The town is situated on the Niger River's western bank, at an elevation of 45-125 metres above sea level. The Patti Ridge, a high plateau reaching 400 metres in elevation, dominates the northern side of the town (Lokoja Master Plan, 1974 - 2005; Alabi, 2007). Lokoja is located between the latitudes of 7°45' north of the equator and 6°45' east of the Greenwich Meridian. It serves as a link between Nigeria's northern and southern areas. Its boundaries are shared with Koton-Karfe (Kogi Local Government Area), Kabba/Bunu, Ajaokuta, Bassa, and Adavi Local Governing Bodies (Alabi, 2007). Lokoja has a total land area of 29,833 km² and is located between latitudes 7°45'0"N and 7°53'30"N and longitudes 6°43'0"E and 6°51'30"E. It is located around 160 km south of the new federal capital, Abuja, and crosses vital highways to at least five of the country's six geopolitical zones. The region's geography is characterised by dissected undulating plains on one hand and high hill masses and mesas on the other. The plains formed on the hummock of the Basement Complex as a result of erosion of overloaded Cretaceous sediments, whilst the hill masses and mesas arose from the sedimentary formation as a result of their resistant lateritic/ironstone capping. The star-shaped ridge rises 400 metres above sea level and, along with the Niger River, has simplified Lokoja into a linear pattern.

Lokoja was historically the British settlement in Nigeria. After the amalgamation of the northern and southern Protectorates into one country called Nigeria in 1914, it remained a convenient administrative town for the British colonial authority. Lokoja was a major slave trading hub in the 18th and 19th centuries. It later became a symbol of freedom when Samuel Ajayi Crowther led an anti-slavery movement in Nigeria and erected the Iron of Liberty near the site where slaves were released in Lokoja. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, Lokoja operated as a commercial rendezvous for its agricultural region as the principal inland port for European firms.

Lokoja is a melting pot of ethnicities and civilizations. Its residents include the Bunu, Kakanda, Nupe, Gbagyi, Ebira, Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, Bassa-Nge, and Igala. Furthermore, it has always had a small community of immigrants from the Gold Coast (Ghana), Sierra Leone, and Europe. The famed confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue, the grandeur of Patti Hill, which overlooks the town in the valley, and the contrast between the brownish Niger waters and the bluish Benue waters as they meet, are all key attractions. Other notable attractions in the town include Lugard House, the first primary school in Northern Nigeria founded by Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first Cantonment Church, the first hospital in Northern Nigeria, the Cenotaph (war memorial of fallen British and Nigerian officers in World War 1 and World War II), Iron of Liberty, graveyards of deposed northern emirs

banished to Lokoja, and Europeans' cemeteries. Lokoja has grown rapidly since becoming the state capital, and it now includes other rural communities on the opposite sides of Patti Hill. In 1991, the town had a population of roughly 77,516 people, which grew to 195,261 in 2006. The town's population has been drawn primarily by increased employment generated by many government departments, as well as the expansion of retail trade, iron ore/steel Company, and cement factory in nearby Ajaokuta and Obajana, respectively, and higher educational institutions, including the recently established Federal University Lokoja. In general, Lokoja has experienced a significant inflow of people from surrounding locations. This has led in rapid growth and expansion, resulting in significant changes to the landscape in terms of land use and development without considering related components like transportation, work, health, and other livable considerations. The metropolis is growing in all directions, resulting in large-scale urban sprawl and changes in urban land uses. This is seen in the city outskirts, where the built-up area has risen and land use patterns have changed. As a result of this circumstance, significant agricultural lands, natural forest cover, and anthropogenic encroachment on fadama lands have been lost, as have surface water bodies and biodiversity. According to Owoeye and Abayomi (2015) "The rapid increase in population, coupled with increase in the rate of urbanization, had lead to unplanned and uncontrolled expansion of Lokoja town; consequently, this scenario has caused tremendous pressure on civic infrastructure systems, generated housing problems and unkempt environment among others" (p. 179).

The annual rainfall is approximately 1150 mm. Rains begin in March on average and peak from June to September, with the dry season beginning around November. Every month, the average temperature is close to 300 degrees Celsius. Because of the high sensible temperature promoted by high humidity, the weather is perpetually damp. The Niger and its major tributaries are distinguished by flash floods that are superimposed on perennial flow. The Lokoja Niger floods begin in July, peak in October, and end in December. Smaller streams, on the other hand, are distinguished by flash flow superimposed on rainy season flow, or by flash flow occurring only during and for a short time after run-off-producing storms. The groundwater resources so far located in the area occur in a perched form, and that explains the high failure rate of wells and boreholes located intuitively. The communities around the channels and the confluence of these rivers, however, are the focus of this study because they are the most severely impacted by flood events and other environmental problems. Among these communities are Gadumo, Adankolo, Kabawa, Felele, Karaworo, Angwa-Kura, and Ganaja.

Environmental Disasters in the Metropolis of Lokoja River Inundations

The most frequent natural hazard in Lokoja is river inundations, which is expected to become more frequent, intense, and extensive as a result of climate change brought on by global warming. These changes include rising sea levels, more intense precipitation, and increased river discharges. River inundation is typically defined as a large volume of water overflowing or erupting over territory that is not typically submerged (Daniel and Udo, 2019). It is an extreme weather phenomenon that occurs naturally as a result of rising global temperatures. This temperature causes heavy rainfall, ocean thermal expansion, and glacier melts, all of which raise sea levels and submerge coastal areas. According to Ujene and Oguike (2020), river inundations result in flooding and harm humans, buildings, and infrastructure, in addition to plants and animals. In 2012, one of the worst floods to ever hit Lokoja city struck, displacing millions of people and causing several million in losses in terms of money. According to information from the Federal Government of Nigeria's 2012 Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), the flood devastated the lives and property of households in Lokoja City, affecting thirteen other states apart from Kogi. This incident is now a frequent occurrence that has caused a great deal of damage and casualties, which is reason for concern. The main reason Lokoja Metropolis floods is because of its strategic location at the meeting point of the Niger and Benue rivers. The city is vulnerable to frequent flooding during the rainy season because of its advantageous location, which has historically aided trade and transportation. These rivers' merger produces a delicate hydrological balance that is readily upset by prolonged periods of precipitation. Flooding is caused by an increase in water levels brought on by the annual rainy season. The danger is increased by the combination of hydrological complexity, seasonal variations, and geographic considerations. The rivers support the city, but when their flows become uncontrollably high, they also become dangerous, emphasizing the delicate balance. Faced with flood disaster in Lokoja Metropolis, a local farmer, Mrs. A. Emmanuel makes the following observations: we look forward to the rains for our crops, yet we fear the floods that follow them as well; true story, albeit one that is bittersweet (personal communication, July 16, 2023). Environmental geographer Dr. K. Ahmed continues, stating that there is a delicate balance to be struck between the advantages and disadvantages of being located at this intersection. Although rivers provide us with life, they can also cause havoc in our lives when their inundations go out of control (Personal communication, August 2, 2023). Floodwaters in the city of Lokoja have disastrous effects on the populace, commercial establishments, and public works. Property damage not only causes short-term financial difficulties but also has a knock-on effect that affects other areas of the city's economy as well. The general growth and development trajectory of Lokoja is hampered by this cascading impact. Inundations frequently force locals to flee their homes, and the elderly

and young in particular are more vulnerable to mental and physical health problems. Furthermore, the upheaval of communities may result in the collapse of social support networks, compounding the difficulties encountered by the impacted individuals. In addition, standing water left over from flooding provides mosquitoes that spread disease with plenty of places to reproduce. There are several cascading implications of ecological disruption: among the long-term repercussions are decreased biodiversity, deteriorated water quality, and disturbances in essential ecosystem services like flood control and water purification.

Ineffective waste management

Any product or material that is useless to the manufacturer is considered waste. Waste is any leftover material, surplus, or undesired item that needs to be disposed of because it is damaged, worn out, contaminated, or otherwise spoiled. Waste is divided into four categories: Municipal waste, which comprises waste from homes, businesses, and demolitions; Hazardous waste, which encompasses trash from industry; Special Hazardous Trash, which includes radioactive, explosive, and electronic trash; Biomedical Waste, which comprises clinical waste. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), often known as "garbage" or "trash," is the term used to characterize non-liquid waste products that come from public services, trade, business, residential, and agricultural activities. In cities and towns where disposal systems cannot keep up with the volume of waste created, the problem of disposing of solid waste is particularly urgent. In Nigeria, there are many variations in solid waste management practices. These practices are determined, among other things, by the availability of funding, well-functioning equipment, qualified staff, and robust solid waste management. The trash disposal method used in Lokoja is primarily dictated by the characteristics of the several zones that comprise the city. These peculiarities include the residential and commercial character of the town's zones, as well as the administrative and social standing of the city's communities. In general, garbage accumulation is typically minimal in the top residential communities. This is explained by the fact that residents of the area are aware of the risks associated with improper trash disposal and that waste management personnel pay particular attention to locations where society's middle-class and upper-class residents reside. Additionally, this explains why there are so many drums in the government reservation area. Conversely, places like Kabawa, which have a large number of illiterate residents, suffer from careless trash disposal. Similar to this, there is also sporadic trash dumping in Felele and certain neighborhoods of Adankolo, particularly the nearby Marine Quarters. For instance, 77 percent of all waste produced in Lokoja is disposed of in an open manner in Felele. In addition to the fact that garbage is produced regularly in the aforementioned regions, the people who live there are unaware of the risks

associated with residing in or disposing of waste in open spaces, drainage systems, and abandoned structures. Kabawa's status is so bad that the foul smell that emanates from the area always greets commuters travelling along Murtala Muhammed Road. One major element contributing to the unhygienic state of Kabawa is the densely populated residential sector, with an estimated 150 dwellings per hectare square.

Poor and ineffective garbage management in Lokoja has had a sociological and economic impact on the city's people throughout time. Lokoja is plagued with waste management issues or the control of unmanaged garbage heaps in several parts of the city. This has resulted in a reduction in human life quality and an increase in environmental degradation, poverty, and sickness over time. In Lokoja, improper waste management can also be blamed for the frequency of diseases like typhoid fever, paratyphoid, dysentery, and cholera. Furthermore, poor waste management in Lokoja has major consequences for aquatic life. The pollution of water bodies with garbage, such as rivers, lakes, and streams, results in the concentration of trace elements in water, which becomes poisonous for fish and other creatures in the unpleasant and noxious water. As a result, when too much water pollution is emitted, it overwhelms the biological mechanisms that typically digest it, and the forms of life in the water change. For the worse, this condition allows for the destruction and contamination of aquatic life.

Improper waste management also has some social consequences for the Lokoja Metropolis, as it has a detrimental impact on the broader concerns of violence and insecurity that frequently occur as a result of rivalry for open spaces for the disposal of rubbish in neighborhoods. The quality of common space has an impact on social interaction. When people have to use common neighborhood space on a regular basis, the volume of such activities can encourage anti-social conduct. In the context of Lokoja, common space appears to be a fight between deviant teenagers and older members of society, with repercussions for social cohesiveness.

The impacts of poor sanitation and waste management in Lokoja on children are another social consequence. Poor living conditions have far-reaching ramifications for children and adolescents, who are more vulnerable than adults to a variety of environmental concerns and are more likely to be affected in ways that have long-term consequences. Sanitation techniques that work for adults may be impractical for small children. A latrine 50 metres away from home might provide a serious challenge for young children who have difficulty waiting, especially when they need to use the toilet. Furthermore, many public latrines, like those in Lokoja, are frightening places; they are dark and stink. Pit holes, often known as latrines, are intended for adults. This could eventually be disposed of in the pit latrine, river, neighbouring shrubbery, or even unfinished buildings. The usage of bucket latrines is popular in Lokoja, particularly among women who, for reasons of privacy and pregnancy,

cannot queue openly for an inadequate open-pit toilet. As a result, such excrement was typically thrown into the river, which also serves as a source of domestic water and fish protein for Lokoja residents and others. This practice of dumping excrement into the Niger is widespread in Lokoja's Adankolo, Karaworo, Kabawa, and Angwa-Kura districts, among others. As of now, the restrooms have not improved but rather deteriorated. In certain communities, people must queue to use the restrooms as early as 5:00 a.m., and because of the stench, people need to change their clothes after visiting the place. Such restrooms are unlikely to be appealing to children. It is commonly known that a clean and well-kept neighbourhood not only benefits children's health but also provides them with possibilities for companionship, amusement, and social development. Furthermore, the environment acts as a forum for cultural rules and norms that guide actions and behaviour, which are reinforced and replicated through the repetition of daily activities in which people gainfully participate. One key consequence of this insight is that children's worldviews (in Lokoja) will be shaped in part by what they see in their neighbourhood. This may explain some of the youth's irresponsible polluting of the environment and their lack of awareness of proper hygienic practices. Because every child is a product of his surroundings, poor sanitation and housing conditions have major ramifications for communal life and prejudice. These include pollution and slum growth linked to ghetto mentality, both of which can lead to stigmatisation of such residents.

Precarious Climate Condition in Contemporary Times

In recent years, the looming spectre of climate conditions has cast an ominous shadow over Lokoja metropolis' vulnerability to flooding. The subtle yet profound changes in weather patterns and the intensified rainfall attributed to the precarious climate have played a significant role in magnifying the flood risk within the city. The effects of climate change can be seen in precarious weather patterns, with more frequent and heavy downpour events becoming the norm. Mr. A. Amana, a climatologist, elaborates on how nature's delicate equilibrium is being upset. The rains, which were once predictable, have become irregular, creating precipitation spikes that the city's infrastructure cannot handle (personal communication, August 2, 2023). The increased rainfall causes rising water levels in the Niger and Benue rivers. The increased flow of water swells their banks, inundating low-lying areas and inundating neighborhoods.

Struggling Drainage Systems

In the face of changing climatic circumstances, the city's drainage systems, which were built to divert water away from metropolitan areas, have become a bottleneck. Inadequate design and maintenance have transformed these systems into breeding grounds for flooding.

Mr. E. Okeke, a civil engineer, says that the drainage systems were not designed to manage heavy rainfall. They easily clog, causing water to pool in the streets (personal communication, August 3, 2023). As a result of the sluggish drainage, water collects, exacerbating the impact of severe rains and river overflow. What should have been tolerable conditions with functional drainage systems have now erupted into disastrous flood catastrophes.

Deforestation

Another cause of environmental degradation in Lokoja is deforestation. The once-verdant landscapes of Lokoja Metropolis are being rapidly deforested in the unrelenting pursuit of urban expansion and agricultural development. The uncontrolled clearing of vegetation and trees has thrown off the delicate hydrological balance that existed previously. Deforestation is akin to destroying the city's natural defences. Concrete and construction have replaced trees and plants, which have the potential to absorb and slow down water. Due to a lack of natural absorbers, the land's capacity to retain excess water is reduced, resulting in greater surface runoff. As a result, during rainstorm events, a torrential surge of water overwhelms drainage systems, increasing the flooding scenario.

Urbanisation

Rapid urbanisation in Lokoja Metropolis has ushered in an era of unregulated growth that ignores the city's natural floodplain dynamics. Building and infrastructure construction often take precedence over flood risk considerations. What happens in Lokoja City appears to be a chaotic stampede rather than a perfectly managed dance with nature. This unregulated growth encroaches on flood-prone areas and obstructs the natural channels that water should take during floods. As a result, water is funneled into small tunnels, amplifying its impact and wreaking havoc. The city's once-harmonious coexistence with its surroundings is tearing at the seams, and the effects are felt with each flood.

Historical Perspectives on Christian Eco-Spirituality

Various groups, including scientists, environmentalists, theologians, and others, have come together over time in an effort to establish an inclusive and collaborative strategy for addressing environmental and socioeconomic difficulties. As a result, there have been several multidisciplinary conferences, seminars, and workshops. The influence of Christianity on the modern anthropocentric perspective of nature has been criticised, with ecological theorists leveling two major charges. To begin, Christianity preaches that humans are divinely created to control and dominate nature, which makes it profoundly anthropocentric. Second, Christian texts and theologies, particularly those from Western

culture, tend to discount nature and matter in favour of the divine, which is equated with only the spirit (Alowku, 2017).

Tertullian and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, however, believed in the second century that God created Adam in the image of the incarnate Christ, foreshadowing the second Adam. As a result, God's transcendence over nature is shared by humanity. Many eco-spirituality researchers have attempted to express traditional theological notions about nature in order to build an all-inclusive ecological theology that safeguards the integrity of creation. A comprehensive survey of Christian thought about nature throughout history reveals key eco-spirituality topics that have affected Christianity at various times. Despite charges that Christianity is to blame for the worldwide ecological disaster, the religion has shown a real concern for environmental matters.

It is worth noting that Christianity's involvement in environmental issues is founded on biblical teachings about the world. The belief in God's act of creation in the Judeo-Christian tradition serves as the foundation for how Christians understand nature and humanity's interconnectedness with it. Numerous affirmative portrayals of nature in the Bible can be used to build a more constructive theological perspective on the environment. The Mosaic laws of the Old Testament include significant constraints on human interactions with other components of creation. These include bans on destroying fruit trees (Deut. 20:19–20), directions to leave the land fallow every seventh year (Lev. 25:1–7), guidelines against eating specified "unclean" animals and dietary requirements, and the notion of sparing a mother bird and her offspring (Deut. 22:6–7). The Bible also emphasizes animal welfare (e.g., Deuteronomy 25:4). In a morally relevant way, the Psalms (96:11–13 and 148:1–3) powerfully depict the natural world as vibrant and responsive to God (Alowku, 2017).

Furthermore, the New Testament has verses that support Christian involvement in environmental protection. We will look at a text from St. Paul that emphasizes the human relationship to the natural world. The first passage is found in Romans 8:22–23, where Paul says, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now". Not only have the creation, but humanity has the first fruits of the Spirit, groaned inwardly as humanity eagerly awaits adoption as sons and the redemption of their bodies." In this verse, Paul compares humanity's collective struggle to a birthing process, with the objective of achieving bodily and perceptible spiritual redemption. In a similar spirit, Paul Santmire uses Augustine's theology to emphasise the interconnectivity of all entities, both natural and human, each of which has inherent value. This Augustinian viewpoint, like those of other Christian traditions, emphasises the Christian need to labour for the betterment of both nature and society as a whole.

De Gruchy (2004) offers other grounds for Christianity's contemporary commitment to environmental sustainability. According to him, the primary basis for the church's involvement in environmental and poverty issues is its belief that God created and loves His planet. He values and cares for it apart from human existence. Because of this, it is anticipated that humans, bearing the image of God (especially Christians) and as a vital part of that creation, should imitate God's concern for the preservation and maintenance of the environment. Humans are supposed to live in a healthy connection with the rest of creation in order to avoid causing such harm that species, ecosystems, and even significant numbers of people are threatened. In this regard, De Gruchy (2004) cautions that we cannot commodify the environment *ipso facto* but must maintain its integrity and honour its creator and owner. Unfortunately, people's lack of respect for the environment, which is founded on a very strong anthropocentric attitude towards nature, is a major contributor to today's environmental and poverty problems (Alowku, 2017).

The Christian interpretation of the implication of the concept of stewardship is closely tied to the above reason why the church should be engaged in the contemporary "double earth crisis" of environment and poverty. According to McDonagh (cited in Alowku, 2017), God's mandate in Gen. 1:28 should be viewed as a fundamental passage in reshaping the human-earth relationship from a stewardship perspective. The mandate to exercise dominion over the rest of creation should not be interpreted as a licence to oppression and exploitation, as it has sometimes been. According to McDonagh, this mandate implies that humans, as stewards, have the responsibility of administering and preserving the creation for God.

According to De Gruchy (2004), another important reason for Christianity's strong commitment to environmental sustainability is the concept that caring for life implies caring for the environment. This idea originates from the realisation that humans are a part of the natural world and rely on it for survival and well-being. In other words, Christians believe that the environment is a vital and interrelated system that sustains all life on Earth, rather than a resource to be exploited for human needs. Thus, caring for life entails caring for the environment in which it exists. This view is founded on a number of biblical teachings, including the notion that all of creation is the work of God and that humans have been given stewardship over the environment. Furthermore, many Christian theologians see environmental deterioration as a sort of sin, a failure to complete our duty as stewards of God's creation. According to this viewpoint, environmental sustainability is a spiritual imperative anchored in the very core of Christian religion, rather than a practical requirement or ethical responsibility. It is regarded as a means of honouring God's creation, caring for the well-being of all living species, and carrying out our obligations as earth stewards.

Boff (2019) supports the church's involvement in environmental issues as part of God's redemption agenda, stating that the gospel is nothing more than the proclamation of God's reign, the full and total liberation of all creation, cosmic and human, from all its iniquities, and the integral accomplishment of God's design in the insertion of all things into his own divine life. The kingdom of God, then, manifests itself concretely in a universal communion of brothers and sisters in solidarity with one another in the use of the fruit of the soil and the work of human hands.

The church is obligated to care about the environment for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is God's relationship with creation. The first chapters of Genesis emphasize the similarities between humanity and the rest of the living creation. The same word is used in Genesis 2 to describe how animals, birds, and humans were produced from the ground. Humans were created specifically from the dust of the earth—hardly an acknowledgment of superiority. Humanity and other creatures share the same food, and both are given the same breath of life. Caring for the creation is thus caring for a system of which we are a part and on which we are completely dependent (Alokwu, 2017). The above implies that in the biblical story, human flourishing and the well-being of the rest of creation are inexorably interwoven. As a result, in order to experience the fullness of life that God has created, humanity requires the beauty of the world—the air, mountains, rivers, birds, and animals. Aside from aesthetic considerations, the truth is that humans require water, air, and food to survive. However, with the extinction of each species and the ugliness of pollution, humanity not only dehumanizes itself but also faces water scarcity and food security threats. As a result, according to Alokwu (2017), “how we respond to our neighbor and all living things is a pointer to our humanity. We demean ourselves when we insult the environment” (p. 17). A more in-depth examination of the current environmental disaster reveals that it is not the environment that is failing, but rather the dominating culture of economic expansion and indiscriminate use of nature's resources to meet human demands. As a result, the environmental crisis is a cultural catastrophe—a crisis of values, meaning, purpose, and vocation. The gospel addresses this dilemma, and if Christians are to preach a message, they must address the environment and how humans live in and with it.

Paradigm for Christian Eco-Spirituality in Lokoja Metropolis

The incorporation of Christian eco-spirituality within the framework of environmental care is a significant paradigm shift, expanding the discourse surrounding Lokoja's environmental crises. Christian eco-spirituality provides a unique prism through which to observe and address these issues, with solutions grounded in profound ethical and spiritual foundations.

Stewardship and Environmental Protection

The underlying principle of stewardship, which holds that humanity has been entrusted with the proper management of the earth's resources, is at the heart of Christian eco-spirituality. This viewpoint goes beyond a utilitarian view of nature as only a source of commodities, emphasizing the intrinsic value of all creation. Reverend Johnson, a prominent local religious leader, stated that the Christian religion sees the world as a gift from God, and Christians are called to care for this wonderful creation. Stewardship requires acknowledging the interconnection of all life forms as well as man's responsibility to protect and maintain them. This stewardship mindset meshes perfectly with the issues that Lokoja metropolis faces. Christian eco-spirituality can catalyse a change towards holistic and sustainable practices by supporting responsible use of natural resources, advocating for sustainable consumption patterns, and cultivating a culture of environmental consciousness.

Justice and Ethical Imperatives

The influence of Christian eco-spirituality extends beyond individual action to include greater societal and ethical imperatives. The teachings place a premium on the concept of justice, which includes protecting the rights of marginalised communities and vulnerable populations. This paper elaborates on the importance of justice in the context of environmental crises. The poor and marginalised bear a disproportionate share of the consequences of environmental deterioration, according to Christian eco-spirituality. This necessitates a commitment to environmental justice and the promotion of equitable resource access. The integration of Christian eco-spirituality can amplify the call for equitable resource distribution, just policies, and a concerted effort to alleviate the burden on vulnerable communities in Lokoja Metropolis, where the effects of environmental crises frequently exacerbate existing socioeconomic disparities.

Advocacy and Community Engagements

Christian eco-spirituality thrives in the realms of community participation and advocacy, utilising the power of faith-based organisations to effect change. Environmental education, awareness campaigns, and community-driven activities can be carried out through churches, mosques, and other religious organisations. Religious congregations provide a forum for information dissemination and action mobilisation. They can organise lectures, seminars, and tree-planting efforts to instill in their members a sense of environmental responsibility. This potential for community mobilisation fits in perfectly with the distinctive features of Lokoja Metropolis, where religious institutions wield tremendous power and may mobilise grassroots efforts towards long-term change.

Partnerships for Collaboration and Policy Advocacy

Christian eco-spirituality has the ability to establish collaborative collaborations across faith-based organisations, government agencies, and non-governmental organisations. These collaborations have the potential to raise the profile of environmental advocacy, influence policy formulation, and facilitate the implementation of stringent legislation. Faith-based organisations can help establish inclusive and sustainable policies by forming alliances with government institutions and non-governmental organisations. Their moral influence and broad reach can help put environmental issues on the public agenda. Such joint efforts in Lokoja Metropolis can pave the road for evidence-based policies addressing urban planning, waste management, and resource conservation.

Wholistic Approach and Spiritual Transformation

One of the unique characteristics of Christian eco-spirituality is its ability to instigate spiritual transformation, urging people to reassess their relationship with the environment. The natural world, according to Christian eco-spirituality, is an embodiment of divine beauty and creativity. This viewpoint inspires wonder and reverence, inspiring individuals to nurture and safeguard the land. This spiritual revolution in Lokoja Metropolis can herald a holistic approach to environmental care that transcends the compartmentalization of ecological, social, and economic components. Christian eco-spirituality can pave the path for a more harmonious cohabitation between humans and the environment by combining spiritual insights with practical actions.

Conclusion

The nexus of environmental care, Christian eco-spirituality, and the difficulties confronting Lokoja Metropolis have been investigated in this study. River inundations, precarious climate conditions, urbanization, resource overexploitation, and inadequate waste management were cited as the causes of environmental crises in the city. These crises have had a wide range of negative consequences for ecosystems, water supplies, public health, and vulnerability to climate-related risks. The environmental difficulties in Lokoja metropolis are intertwined, resulting in a web of problems with ecological, social, economic, and cultural elements. The consequences of these problems resonate throughout the city, hurting both the environment and the well-being of its citizens. Christian eco-spirituality has developed as a potential avenue for resolving these issues, guided by ideals of stewardship, justice, community engagement, and spiritual change. The incorporation of Christian eco-spirituality with environmental care provides a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the complicated relationships between humans, nature, and the divine. It

offers a framework for ethical decision-making, a demand for environmental justice, and a platform for social action based on spiritual principles.

Based on the findings, it is clear that Christian eco-spirituality may play an important role in tackling the environmental concerns in Lokoja Metropolis. Christian beliefs may guide individuals and communities towards sustainable practices and advocate for legislation that prioritises environmental justice by fostering stewardship, creation care, and ethical responsibility. Finally, eco-spirituality alters human thinking, making them feel more linked to nature and motivated to do better. However, there is still a lot of work to be done. The environmental concerns in Lokoja Metropolis remain and must be addressed immediately. Christian eco-spirituality can help us, but we must work together to achieve reforms that will genuinely bring this music to life.

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