

THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA ANGLICAN COMMUNION AND THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, JUSTICE AND HUMAN SURVIVAL.

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Abstract

Nigeria's escalating ecological crisis, evident in pollution, flooding, deforestation, land degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate-related vulnerability, posed significant threats to human flourishing and raised pressing theological and ethical questions for the Church. Although the Anglican tradition recognized creation care as integral to Christian mission, a gap persisted between theological affirmation and its translation into sustained ecclesial teaching, institutional practice, and public engagement in Nigeria. This article examined the theological, ecological, ecclesiological, and missiological resources available to the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion for responding to environmental degradation, environmental injustice, and threats to human survival. Historical Institutionalism provided the theoretical framework, while a qualitative historical-theological methodology was employed to analyze Anglican documents, historical materials, theological scholarship, and literature on African Christianity, environmental ethics, and missiology. The findings indicated that the Church's historical structures, theological traditions, and patterns of social engagement provided substantial resources for ecological action, but these resources had not been sufficiently integrated into a coherent environmental ethic and institutional strategy. The study argued that environmental responsibility should be understood as an integral dimension of Anglican mission rather than a peripheral social concern. The study recommended strengthened ecological theological education, environmental discipleship, prophetic advocacy, responsible institutional practices, and collaboration with affected communities and relevant organizations..

Keywords: Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, environmental ethics, ecological theology, creation care, human survival.

Introduction

The ecological crisis has become a defining challenge of the twenty-first century, with

consequences that extend well beyond environmental degradation. Climate change, flooding, pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, land degradation, and climate-related displacement increasingly affect livelihoods, public health, food and water security, economic stability, and the conditions necessary for human flourishing. In Nigeria, climate-related risks are already closely connected to development outcomes, including agricultural productivity, infrastructure, poverty, disaster vulnerability, and livelihood security (World Bank, 2026). The ecological crisis is therefore not exclusively a scientific, economic, or governmental problem. It also raises fundamental theological and ethical questions concerning the relationship between human beings, God, and the created order. Christian Scripture presents creation as belonging to God and locates human beings within, rather than outside, the created order (Gen. 1:26–28; 2:15; Ps. 24:1). Anglican Christianity in Nigeria emerged through the missionary work of the Church Missionary Society, with the establishment of the Christian mission in the nineteenth century, and subsequently developed into an indigenous ecclesial institution with its own Episcopal leadership, diocesan structures, theological institutions, educational networks, and forms of social engagement. Its historical development illustrates the broader process through which Christianity in Africa moved from missionary establishment toward indigenous leadership and contextual ecclesial identity. Anglican engagement in Nigerian society has historically included education, healthcare, social welfare, moral formation, community development, and other forms of public ministry. These activities demonstrate that the Church has not operated solely as a worshipping institution but has repeatedly negotiated the relationship between Christian faith and the social conditions within which Nigerian communities live. The problem, therefore, is not simply whether the Church acknowledges environmental concerns. It is whether its inherited theological traditions, institutional structures, and established patterns of social engagement can be intentionally adapted to address an ecological crisis whose consequences increasingly affect livelihoods, health, social stability, and human survival.

Conceptual clarification

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework that brings environmental ethics, ecological theology, human survival, ecological sustainability, and historical inquiry into conversation. Environmental ethics concerns the moral relationship between human beings and the natural world. It asks what obligations humans have toward the created order and whether non-human life, ecosystems, and the natural environment possess value beyond their usefulness to human beings. (Manyonganise & Matutu, 2024). Human survival extends beyond physical existence to include access to adequate food and clean water, healthcare, sustainable livelihoods, secure and habitable communities, human dignity, peace, and social wellbeing. In its 2018 Standing Committee communiqué, the Church of Nigeria expressed concern about communities affected by flooding, including deaths, displacement and loss of property (ACEN 2019). Rather than treating flooding simply as an unfortunate natural event, the Church called for greater attention to climate change, public enlightenment and avoidance of

building along waterways. Ecological theology refers to theological reflection on the relationships among God, humanity, and the created order. It examines how Christian doctrines of creation, salvation, stewardship, sin, redemption, and human responsibility shape attitudes toward the environment. African ecological theology has challenged forms of Christianity that have prioritized an otherworldly understanding of salvation while neglecting the material and ecological conditions of human existence (Golo 2013). The Anglican Communion's environmental programme explicitly connects creation care with Christian discipleship and responds to the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.

Ecological sustainability refers to the capacity of human communities to meet present needs without undermining the ecological systems and resources required by future generations. It therefore involves responsible resource use, ecosystem protection, climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and intergenerational justice. Creation care provides the practical expression of these theological and ethical commitments. It encompasses the protection of ecosystems, conservation of natural resources, reduction of environmental harm, sustainable patterns of consumption and production, ecological education, and advocacy for environmental justice. The study employs a historical-theological methodology, supported by documentary and contextual analysis. The central analytical premise is that environmental responsibility cannot be separated from Christian mission when ecological degradation directly threatens human wellbeing and community survival.

Historical Institutionalism theory

Historical Institutionalism provides a framework for examining how the Church of Nigeria has inherited, maintained, and potentially transformed institutional responses to social and environmental challenges. The study used Historical Institutionalism to trace how the Church of Nigeria's historical formation has shaped its institutional capacity to respond to ecological challenges (Mahoney, 2000). It examines continuity, path dependence, critical junctures, and institutional adaptation to determine whether contemporary environmental pressures are reinforcing established ecclesial patterns or generating new directions in Anglican theology and mission. The Church of Nigeria did not emerge in an institutional or theological vacuum. Its contemporary identity has been shaped by successive historical layers, including missionary Anglicanism, colonial structures, indigenous Christian leadership, theological education, Nigerian nationalism, ecclesial independence, and postcolonial transformation (Sanneh, 2008).

Development of Anglican Church in Nigeria

The history of Anglican Church in Nigeria provides an essential foundation for understanding the institutional and ecclesial character of the contemporary Church of Nigeria. Anglicanism emerged through the interaction of missionary Christianity with indigenous societies, colonial structures, education, and the gradual development of African ecclesial leadership. Its history was therefore not simply a process of religious

conversion; it was also a process of institutional formation, cultural negotiation, leadership development, and social transformation (Sundkler & Steed, 2000). From a Historical Institutional perspective, this development is significant because institutions are shaped by accumulated historical experiences. Structures established during the missionary period were subsequently reconfigured through African leadership, ecclesial autonomy, and changing Nigerian social conditions. The contemporary Church of Nigeria is thus the product of both institutional continuity and historical adaptation. Anglican Christianity became established in the territories that later constituted Nigeria during the nineteenth century, particularly through the activities of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Its expansion occurred within the wider context of British imperial expansion, the suppression of the transatlantic slave trade, commercial interests, and increasing encounters between European missionaries and African societies. Missionary activity consequently unfolded within both religious and colonial contexts (Babalola, 1976).

Contributions of the Anglican Church in Nigerian.

The Niger and Niger Delta regions became important centres of Anglican missionary activity. Churches, schools, mission stations, and translation initiatives provided the institutional foundations for the formation of Anglican communities. Missionaries also developed relationships with local rulers, communities, and emerging African Christian leaders, producing a complex process of religious and cultural interaction. Education was one of the principal instruments of Anglican mission in Nigeria. Mission schools provided literacy, Christian instruction, and formal education, while the translation of biblical and liturgical materials into African languages facilitated the communication and localisation of Christian teaching (Babalola, 1976). Education therefore became an important channel through which African Christian leadership developed. Anglican mission also became involved in healthcare, social welfare, and community development. These activities extended the Church's institutional presence beyond worship and evangelism and established a pattern of engagement with the social conditions of local communities. A concrete institutional example is Iyi Enu Mission Hospital in the Diocese on the Niger. The Church reports that the hospital has been transformed into a modern medical facility. The Diocese has also supported scholarship programmes and other social development initiatives. There is also empirical evidence of Anglican participation in preventive healthcare. A study conducted among Anglican churches in Lagos examined physical activity and healthy eating interventions in the Diocese of Lagos Mainland. The research involved church based medical committees and tested health promotion interventions within Anglican congregations. Another example provides an important bridge between healthcare and environmental ethics. Research on Anglican welfare programmes in 30 churches in Osun State between 1991 and 2012 found four major categories of intervention: healthcare delivery, vocational rehabilitation, micro-credit and women's empowerment. The programmes also included free health campaigns, widow-support workshops, and sensitization, counseling and social advocacy. These developments created institutional pathways

that continue to influence ecclesial structures, leadership patterns, theological priorities, and approaches to mission. The Church's public engagement also expanded during the postcolonial period. Anglican institutions continued to participate in education, social welfare, community development, peace building, and wider national discourse. An interesting example comes from the Anglican International Academy in Abuja. In reporting the development of the school, the Church of Nigeria specifically mentioned not only classrooms, hostels, boreholes and roads but also flower and tree planting as part of the development of the school environment. Although tree planting around a school should not be exaggerated into a comprehensive environmental programme, it illustrates an important point: Anglican educational spaces can become practical sites for teaching students that the physical environment is part of communal responsibility (CON 2025).

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS, JUSTICE AND HUMAN SURVIVAL

Current researches continue to document the extent and persistence of petroleum contamination in the region (Ewim et al., 2023). A recent scoping review further identifies links among oil exploitation, environmental degradation, food insecurity, economic disruption, and human health in the Niger Delta (Ewim et al., 2025). Flooding increasingly affects both urban and rural communities, damaging homes, infrastructure, agricultural land, and sources of livelihood. Deforestation and land degradation weaken ecosystem functions and agricultural resilience, while desertification remains a significant concern in northern Nigeria. Along the coast, erosion, changing sea conditions, and wetland degradation threaten settlements and livelihood systems. Inadequate waste collection, disposal, and wastewater management further contribute to environmental pollution and public-health risks. These pressures are compounded by climate variability and the limited adaptive capacity of economically vulnerable communities. The Anglican Communion's environmental programme explicitly connects creation care with Christian discipleship and responds to the interconnected challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. Nigeria's environmental crisis is increasingly intertwined with questions of human wellbeing, livelihood security, and social justice. The country faces multiple and overlapping environmental pressures, including oil pollution, flooding, deforestation, desertification, coastal erosion, inadequate waste management, and growing climate vulnerability. A research on Ogoniland, for instance, places environmental degradation within an explicit environmental-justice framework and highlights its unequal consequences for affected communities (Olunusi & Adeboye, 2025). Communities whose livelihoods depend directly on land, forests, rivers, wetlands, and coastal ecosystems are often the most exposed and least equipped to absorb environmental losses. Environmental degradation must therefore be examined not only as an ecological problem but also in terms of distribution, vulnerability, participation, and justice: who bears environmental costs, who benefits from natural resources, and whose interests are represented in decisions concerning environmental governance (Kalu, 2008). The Church of Nigeria's 2025 Abuja Synod expressed concern about deforestation, oil spills, plastic pollution and

illegal mining and called for reforestation and land rehabilitation. In Anambra state Anglican Dioceses provided relief materials, opened church facilities to displaced persons, offered medical and psychological support, and advocated for government responses during recurrent flooding (Afunugo 2024). During the 2018 floods, the Diocese of Mbamili reported that 45 of its churches were affected, showing that Anglican churches were themselves vulnerable to environmental disaster (Ujumadu & Nwaiwu, 2018). Diocese of Ogbaru made facilities available as temporary shelters for displaced persons, while the Church of Nigeria set up a relief committee to respond to members affected by natural disaster. The Diocese of Nnewi through the mothers' Union visited people affected by flooding in Anambra state and provided foodstuffs and clothing. Research involving church leaders across Anglican, Catholic, and Pentecostal traditions found considerable awareness of climate change, although perceptions of its causes and the churches' responsibilities varied across traditions (Nche, 2020). Anglican resolutions and initiatives have encouraged churches to strengthen climate advocacy, disaster preparedness, resilience, and support for communities vulnerable to environmental change (Anglican Alliance, 2024).

Findings

The findings suggest that the ecological challenge confronting the Church of Nigeria should not be understood simply as a new area of ecclesial responsibility. Rather, it represents a test of the Church's capacity to adapt historically established institutions and practices to changing social and environmental conditions. Historical Institutionalism provides an appropriate analytical lens because it explains institutional development through the interaction of continuity, path dependence, critical junctures, and institutional change. From this perspective, the ecological crisis raises not only the question of how the Church should respond, but also how its historical inheritance shapes the possibilities and limits of that response. Important foundations for ecological responsibility can already be identified within the Anglican tradition. The Church's longstanding involvement in education, social welfare, community development, public engagement, and human wellbeing demonstrates that Anglican mission has grown beyond worship and pastoral administration. This tradition of social engagement provides an institutional and theological basis for responding to contemporary environmental challenges. The Anglican Communion's Fifth Mark of Mission gives this historical orientation a more explicit ecological expression by calling the Church to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth (Anglican Communion, 2024). Ecological responsibility can therefore be interpreted not as a departure from Anglican identity but as an extension of established commitments to stewardship, justice, service, and the common good. Although elements of ecological responsibility can be located within the wider Anglican tradition, Nigeria's contemporary environmental conditions present challenges that have not previously occupied the same position within the Church's institutional agenda. Oil pollution in the Niger Delta, recurrent flooding, deforestation, desertification, coastal erosion, inadequate waste management, and increasing climate vulnerability have altered the

material and social conditions within which Nigerian communities live. Churches need to interpret these problems as matters relevant to Christian mission, public responsibility, human wellbeing, and social justice. Climate related disasters, environmental pollution, livelihood insecurity, and ecological health risks may compel the Church to reassess established priorities and modes of ministry. The central issue, therefore, is whether Nigeria's ecological crisis will generate a durable reorientation of Anglican institutional practice or remain a peripheral concern within existing patterns of ministry. The Church of Nigeria already possesses organizational structures through which ecological concerns can be incorporated. Theological institutions can strengthen environmental education; parishes can integrate ecological concerns into discipleship and community engagement; schools can promote environmental awareness; women's and youth ministries can support community mobilization; and diocesan structures can coordinate environmental advocacy and locally relevant initiatives. This approach preserves institutional continuity while allowing the Church to respond meaningfully to emerging environmental realities. The broader contribution of this study is therefore to locate ecological responsibility within the historical development of Nigerian Christianity rather than treating it as an external addition to Christian mission. Contemporary environmental challenges both operate through existing institutional pathways and place pressure upon those pathways to change. Historical Institutionalism makes it possible to analyze this interaction between inheritance and transformation, demonstrating how ecclesial institutions can preserve historical identity while adapting to new social and ecological realities.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Nigeria's ecological crisis presents the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) with both a theological challenge and a significant historical opportunity. Environmental degradation, climate vulnerability, oil pollution, flooding, declining livelihoods, and environmental inequality increasingly shape the social conditions within which the Church exercises its ministry. These developments require renewed consideration of how the Church's inherited theological commitments and institutional structures can respond to changing ecological realities. The analysis demonstrates that the Church of Nigeria does not encounter this challenge without substantial historical resources. Its development through missionary Christianity, education, social ministry, indigenous leadership, ecclesial autonomy, and public engagement has produced an extensive institutional infrastructure capable of accommodating emerging areas of responsibility. The Anglican Communion's Fifth Mark of Mission also provides an established theological basis for safeguarding the integrity of creation and sustaining the life of the earth. Historical Institutionalism provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between this institutional inheritance and contemporary change. The Church's historical development has generated patterns of continuity and path dependence, but these do not necessarily prevent institutional adaptation. Rather, inherited structures can provide the organizational resources through which new priorities are interpreted and incorporated.

The contemporary ecological crisis may therefore constitute a critical juncture in the historical development of the Church of Nigeria. Whether it produces substantive institutional change will depend on the capacity of ecclesial actors to recognize emerging environmental realities, reinterpret inherited commitments, and modify established practices. In conclusion Nigeria's environmental crisis constitutes a critical juncture in the historical development of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). Responding to this crisis does not require the abandonment of inherited Anglican traditions; instead, it calls for their creative adaptation to the ecological realities of contemporary Nigeria. Such adaptation would enable the Church to connect its longstanding commitments to education, social responsibility, public engagement, human dignity, and Christian mission with the environmental conditions that increasingly shape human survival and community wellbeing.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study proposes the following institutional directions: Seminaries and theological institutions should incorporate environmental theology, environmental ethics, climate justice, and creation care into ministerial formation and continuing theological education. Ecological responsibility should become part of Christian formation through programmes that connect Christian faith with responsible environmental practices and community engagement. Clergy and lay leaders should engage biblical themes of creation, stewardship, justice, neighbor-love, and human responsibility within preaching, Bible study, and Christian education. Dioceses should consider establishing appropriate structures to coordinate environmental education, research, advocacy, community engagement, and practical initiatives. Environmental responsibility should be incorporated into relevant diocesan and institutional policies addressing waste management, water use, energy consumption, land management, and sustainable development. The Church should use its public and prophetic voice to promote environmental justice, institutional accountability, effective remediation, community participation, and protection of vulnerable populations. Given the region's history of petroleum-related environmental degradation, Anglican institutions should strengthen community engagement around environmental health, livelihoods, justice, remediation, and sustainable development. Churches, schools, seminaries, offices, and other Anglican institutions should model responsible environmental practices through effective waste management, conservation, efficient resource use, and sustainable facility management. Partnerships with universities, research institutes, civil-society organizations, and relevant environmental agencies should be encouraged to strengthen access to scientific evidence, environmental data, technical expertise, and interdisciplinary research. Further research should investigate the historical relationships among Christian missions, land use, natural resources, environmental change, public health, community development, and ecological crises. Such scholarship would contribute to the development of environmental history as an emerging field within Nigerian Church History. These recommendations do not propose an entirely new institutional agenda for the Church. Rather, they seek to extend

and adapt existing Anglican institutions and traditions to contemporary ecological realities.

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