



TOWARDS THE MITIGATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION IN ABUJA (NIGERIA): A CHRISTIAN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Environmental pollution remains a critical concern in Abuja (Nigeria), posing multifaceted challenges to sustainable development and public health. This study explores the Christian ethical viewpoint pertinent to addressing and mitigating urban environmental pollution in this region. The primary aim of this paper is to examine Christian ethical principles and their applicability in developing strategies to combat urban environmental pollution in Abuja. The study employs a descriptive and analytical methods. Findings reveal the presence of rich ethical principles within Christian teachings that advocate for responsible stewardship of the environment. The perspectives emphasize the moral obligation of individuals and communities to protect and preserve the environment, reflecting on concepts of creation care, stewardship, and social responsibility. Recommendations derived from this study underscore the importance of integrating Christian ethical perspectives into policy frameworks aimed at addressing urban environmental pollution. Collaboration between religious institutions, governmental bodies, and community stakeholders is essential to formulate and implement effective strategies aligning with these ethical principles. Education and advocacy programs rooted in Christian ethics can foster awareness and behavioral changes necessary for sustainable environmental practices. This study contributes to the discourse on environmental ethics by highlighting the relevance of Christian ethical perspectives in addressing the complex challenges of urban environmental pollution in Abuja, providing a foundation for holistic and ethically guided approaches towards environmental sustainability.



Key Words: Pollution, environmental pollution, Christian ethics, environmental ethics

Introduction

The world faces a myriad of pressing environmental issues that demand scholarly attention across various academic disciplines in contemporary times. These challenges encompass a wide array of concerns such as the escalating global temperature, depletion of the ozone layer, pollution, soil erosion, habitat fragmentation, desertification, deforestation, acidification, burgeoning human population, and anthropogenic extinction, among others. Jiboye et al. (2019) assert that these environmental challenges stem primarily from natural forces, human activities, or a combination of both. Natural causes encompass climatic, geologic, atmospheric, disease-related, and biological factors. Conversely, human activities like mining, petroleum exploration, land reclamation, overfishing, overgrazing, deforestation, hunting, and the use of pesticides and herbicides significantly contribute to these environmental challenges.

Environmental pollution presents a significant threat not only to human health but also to the well-being of various other species (Fereidoun et al, 2007). Human actions, whether intentional or accidental, inflict damage on the environment, leading to evident daily deterioration and posing a significant risk to overall well-being. Categorically, environmental problems encompass three pivotal types—air pollution, water pollution, and land contamination. The burgeoning population in urban areas intensifies pressure on urban facilities and the environment (Mishra, 2003). Globally, the dumping of waste materials by individuals, industries, and local governments into water bodies like rivers, streams, and lakes contributes significantly to environmental pollution (Ogunbameru & Rotimi, 2006). Land pollution from refuse and sewage generates offensive odors and unsightly sights, impacting air quality and contributing to air pollution (EPHA, 2009).

The rapid urbanization of Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), has led to significant environmental challenges, particularly concerning pollution. As the city grows and transforms, the natural balance of its ecosystems faces unprecedented strains due to increased industrialization, population expansion, and changes in lifestyle. Urban environmental pollution has emerged as a critical concern, impacting air, water, and soil quality, thereby affecting the health and well-being of both the inhabitants and the surrounding ecosystem. In the context of Christian ethical perspectives, the relationship between humanity and the environment holds immense significance. Christian teachings emphasize stewardship and responsibility toward the natural world, promoting a harmonious coexistence between human activities and the environment. This paper seeks to explore and analyze these ethical perspectives within the specific context of mitigating environmental pollution in Abuja.



Concept of Environment

Various perspectives have shaped and defined the concept of the environment. This diversity in definitions and perceptions stems from the multidisciplinary nature of environmental studies, where each field develops definitions aligned with its specific interests (Talabi, et al., 2022). Abraham (1992) eloquently captured this diversity by highlighting the multitude of ways the term "environment" is used and understood across disciplines:

“The multiplicity of the usage and concept of the term environment have resulted in a variety of adjectival forms which include social environment, molar environment, physical environment, home environment, psychological environment, behavioural environment, and geographical environment” (Abraham, 99).

The term "environment" encompasses all the physical, chemical, and biological factors that surround and influence an organism or group of organisms. It includes the air, water, soil, sunlight, and all other living things that share the same ecosystem. The environment plays a crucial role in the survival and well-being of all living organisms, providing them with the resources they need to grow, reproduce, and maintain their health. More broadly, the term "environment" can also refer to the surroundings of a human society or culture. In this context, it encompasses the physical, social, and cultural factors that shape the way people live and interact with each other. The environment can have a profound impact on human behavior, social structures, and economic development. (Talabi, et al., 2022).

Environmental Pollution

Pollution represents the intrusion of harmful substances or disruptive elements into an environment, disturbing its natural balance and posing risks to the wellbeing of both the ecosystem and its inhabitants. These contaminants may take the form of chemical substances or diverse energy forms like noise, heat, or light. Whether arising from human actions or occurring naturally, these elements are classified as pollutants when their levels exceed the environment's natural thresholds. Pollution transcends geographical boundaries, being a pervasive global issue observed in various regions, including Abuja (Gautam et al., 2020). Its far-reaching implications for public health have garnered substantial attention and concern, as evidenced by extensive research (Kiman, 2007).

The environment fulfills three fundamental functions for humanity, as delineated by Schaefer and Lamn (1995). Firstly, it provides essential resources for life, including water, air, raw materials for shelter, transportation, and sustenance. Depleting these resources can lead to dire consequences. Secondly, the environment serves as a receptacle for waste products. Humans, more than any other species, generate diverse and copious waste materials, contributing to increasing pollution as the environment struggles to absorb and manage this excess. Finally, the environment constitutes the home for humans and all other living species, serving as the space where life unfolds. Humans rely on the environment for their dwelling and cannot exist in isolation from it.

A pollutant, in essence, is a waste material that contaminates air, water, or soil, with its severity influenced by its chemical nature, concentration, and persistence. Additionally, natural disasters



like hurricanes can cause water contamination through sewage or petrochemical spills. Accidents involving facilities like nuclear plants or oil tankers can result in hazardous releases, causing substantial environmental damage. Noise pollution, predominantly stemming from motor vehicles, contributes to about ninety percent of unwanted noise globally. Improper waste management leads to numerous environmental problems, obstructing drainage, causing flooding, and spreading air and soil-borne infections that lead to diseases. Water bodies get polluted, affecting aquatic life and posing health threats to humans. Household hazardous waste, including used batteries, pesticides, and paint, and municipal solid waste like product packaging, furniture, food scraps, and appliances, contribute significantly to environmental pollution and health risks when disposed of improperly (Kiman, 2007).

Types of Environmental Pollution

According to Khan and Ghouri (2011), environmental pollution predominantly manifests in three forms: air, water, and land pollution. Air pollution involves the introduction of harmful chemicals, particulate matter, or biological substances into the atmosphere, causing discomfort or harm to humans, other living organisms, and the natural environment. The atmosphere, being a dynamic and crucial gaseous system, is essential for supporting life on Earth. The depletion of stratospheric ozone due to air pollution poses a recognized threat to both human health and Earth's ecosystems. The World Health Organization underscores the severity of the issue, citing that 2.4 million annual deaths are directly linked to air pollution, with 1.5 million attributed to indoor air pollution alone. Epidemiological studies in the United States suggest that over 500,000 deaths annually are associated with cardiopulmonary diseases caused by inhaling fine particle air pollution. Additionally, research from the University of Birmingham establishes a significant correlation between pneumonia-related deaths and air pollution stemming from motor vehicles. Shockingly, globally, more deaths per year are attributed to air pollution than to fatalities from automobile accidents (Taiwo & Ajayi 2013).

The impact of environmental pollution, particularly air, water, and land pollution, is starkly evident in various parts of the world. In Europe alone, a publication in 2005 highlighted that approximately 310,000 deaths annually are attributed to air pollution. Direct causes of these deaths range from aggravated asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, lung and heart diseases to respiratory allergies. Measures such as changes in diesel engine technology proposed by the US Environmental Protection Agency are estimated to potentially prevent 12,000 premature mortalities, 15,000 fewer heart attacks, 6,000 fewer emergency room visits by children with asthma, and 8,900 fewer respiratory-related hospital admissions annually in the United States. (Taiwo & Ajayi 2013).

Air pollution has devastating effects globally, contributing to numerous deaths and health complications. Ozone pollution, for instance, leads to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, chest pain, throat inflammation, and congestion. In developing countries, water pollution claims approximately 14,000 lives daily due to untreated sewage contaminating drinking water. In India, where an estimated 700 million people lack proper access to toilets, around 1,000 children die from diarrhea every day. Similarly, nearly 500 million Chinese lack access to safe drinking water.



The toll of air pollution is striking, causing an estimated 656,000 premature deaths annually in China and 527,700 fatalities a year in India. Studies suggest that over 50,000 people could die annually in the US due to air pollution. Land pollution, a result of human activities such as improper waste disposal, urban and industrial waste disposal, mineral exploitation, and improper agricultural practices, poses significant health hazards. It involves the degradation of Earth's land surfaces and contributes to offensive odors that can be harmful to human health (Taiwo & Ajayi 2013).

Water pollution, affecting various water bodies globally, is a persistent challenge. In India and China, access to proper sanitation and safe drinking water remains a concern, causing widespread health issues. Even in industrialized countries like the United States, a significant percentage of assessed stream miles, lake acres, and bay and estuarine square miles are classified as polluted, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The far-reaching consequences of pollution underscore the urgency for global attention and collective efforts to address these critical environmental issues (Taiwo & Ajayi 2013).

Abuja Metropolis

Abuja FCT is situated in North Central Nigeria, spanning approximately between longitudes 6°46' and 7°37' E and latitudes 8°21' and 9°18' N, covering around 8000 km² with an average elevation of 476 meters above sea level (NGDPR, 2020). Geologically, this area belongs to the western province of the basement complex. The observed tectonic structures, trending N–S to NNE–SSW, result from the Pan African Orogeny, involving the collision between the West African craton and Pan African mobile belts.

The city's master plan divides Abuja into three phases. Phase 1 encompasses Central, Garki, Wuse, Maitama, and Asokoro. Phase 2 extends to areas like Kado, Durumi, Gudu, Utako, and Jabi, while Phase 3 covers Mabuchi, Katampe, Wuye, and Gwarimpa. Additionally, there are five suburban districts: Nyanyan, Karu, Gwagwalada, Kubwa, and Jukwoyi. Satellite settlements line the Airport Road, including Lugbe, Chika, Kuchigworo, and Pyakassa. Other settlements like Idu (the primary industrial zone), Mpape, Karimu, Gwagwa, and Dei-Dei (housing the International Livestock and Building Materials markets) are also part of Abuja's landscape (Magaji, & Hassan 2015).

The Central District in Abuja serves as the city's backbone, stretching from the base of Aso Rock to the Three Arms Zone at the southern edge of the ring road. It acts as a divider between the northern sector housing Maitama and Wuse, and the southern sector encompassing Garki and Asokoro. While each district maintains distinct commercial and residential sectors, the Central District stands as the primary Business Zone, accommodating nearly all parastatals and multinational corporate offices.

Contrasting the Central District, Garki occupies the southwestern corner, bordered by the Central District to the north and Asokoro District to the east. It presently thrives as Abuja's main business hub, hosting various noteworthy structures. Among them are the General Post Office, Abuja International Conference Center along the bustling Herbert Maculay Way, Nikon Luxury Hotel (formerly Abuja Sofitel Hotel and Le Meridian), Agura Hotel, and the Old Federal Secretariat Complex Buildings in Area 1. While Area 2 houses a zoological garden and the Garki Shopping



Center, it predominantly serves residential purposes. Additionally, along Moshood Abiola Way in Area 7, several banks and commercial offices are situated. Notably, the Nigerian Armed Forces' headquarters—the Army, Air Force, and Navy—are all based in the Garki District (Oyeniyi, 2011). Similar to the Abuja Central District, the Wuse District, positioned in the northwestern expanse of the city, neighbors the Maitama District to its north and the Central District to its south, also serving as a prominent business center. Noteworthy landmarks within Wuse include the primary Wuse Market, the city's secondary Post Office, Sheraton Hotel and Towers (Zone 4), Ibro International Hotel, the Foreign Affairs Ministry Headquarters (Zone 1), Nigerian Customs Services Headquarters, Corporate Affairs Commission (Zone 5), Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration (NAFDAC) (Zone 7), Wuse General Hospital, and the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation. (Oyeniyi, 2011).

Moving to the north of the city, the Maitama District, flanked by the Wuse and Central Districts to its southwest and southeast respectively, is renowned for housing the upper echelons of society and commerce, boasting an exclusive and expensive reputation. This area features impressive structures and offices like the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, National Communications Commission Headquarters (NCC), National Universities Commission (NUC), Soil Conservation Complex, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the British High Commission, Maitama District Hospital, and several European embassies in Nigeria. Asokoro District reigns as the apex among Abuja's districts. Situated east of the Garki district and south of the Central district, it accommodates the state's lodges and guest houses, the majority of federal cabinet ministers, the ECOWAS secretariat, and the Presidential Palace (Aso Rock). Due to the esteemed profile of the institutions nestled within, Asokoro stands as the most exclusive district in Abuja (Oyeniyi, 2011).

Environment Pollution in Abuja

Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), stands as a testament to the dynamic interplay between urban development and environmental sustainability. Since its inception as the capital in 1980, Abuja has witnessed unprecedented growth and transformation. Its emergence as a political, economic, and cultural hub has attracted a surge in population and rapid urbanization, fundamentally altering the city's landscape and socio-environmental dynamics. This rapid urbanization, while emblematic of progress and opportunity, has engendered a multitude of environmental challenges. The harmonious equilibrium between urbanization and environmental conservation has been disrupted, leading to profound consequences for the city's ecosystems and inhabitants. The hallmark of these challenges manifests prominently in the form of urban environmental pollution.

Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, grapples with multifaceted environmental pollution challenges, primarily stemming from rapid urbanization, industrial growth, inadequate waste management, and insufficient infrastructure. One of the most pervasive issues is air pollution, fueled by burgeoning vehicular emissions and industrial activities. The exponential rise in the number of vehicles traversing Abuja's roads has led to an alarming increase in harmful gases like carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides, compromising the city's air quality. Additionally, industrial



emissions, often unchecked, further contribute to this deteriorating air quality, releasing substances like sulfur dioxide and volatile organic compounds into the atmosphere.

Water pollution poses a significant concern, particularly due to inadequate sewage treatment facilities. The lack of proper sanitation infrastructure results in untreated sewage finding its way into water bodies, contaminating them with harmful pathogens and chemicals. This is compounded by the improper disposal of solid waste, notably plastics, which accumulate in water sources, endangering aquatic life and further polluting the environment. Noise pollution, another consequence of rapid urbanization, plagues Abuja's residents. The cacophony from heavy traffic, ongoing construction, and bustling commercial activities contributes to elevated noise levels, adversely impacting the well-being of the populace. Inadequate waste management exacerbates Abuja's environmental issues. Improperly managed landfills emit methane, a potent greenhouse gas, and pose risks of soil and groundwater contamination. Furthermore, the city lacks robust recycling infrastructure, leading to the accumulation of non-biodegradable waste and compounding the waste disposal problem. Abuja's rapid urban expansion has also resulted in deforestation and a reduction in green spaces. The encroachment upon natural habitats disrupts the local ecosystem and threatens biodiversity. Despite governmental initiatives such as policies aimed at waste management and emissions control, and the promotion of green practices, there's a pressing need for stronger enforcement and infrastructural development.

Christian Environmental Ethics

Christian environmental ethics is a branch of applied ethics that examines the relationship between humanity and the natural world from a Christian perspective. It draws upon biblical principles, theological insights, and Christian traditions to provide a moral framework for understanding and addressing environmental challenges. At the heart of Christian environmental ethics lies the concept of stewardship. According to the Bible, God created the world and entrusted it to humanity's care. This stewardship responsibility implies that humans have a moral obligation to manage the natural world wisely and responsibly, ensuring its sustainability for future generations. Christian environmental ethics also emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature. This means that the natural world is not merely a resource to be exploited for human benefit but has inherent worth and goodness in its own right. Recognizing the intrinsic value of nature calls for a respectful and non-exploitative approach to environmental interactions (Atoi, et al., (2023).

Nash (2009) emphasizes that God's valuation of all life forms and the world as a habitat for interdependent species sets the ethical tone for respecting and valuing what God values. Contrary to common misconceptions, the concept of dominion in Genesis does not endorse exploitative behavior or arrogance. Rather, it entails a responsible representation of God's benevolence and justice toward all creatures. This understanding reframes dominion as a call to nurture and care for creation, rooted in God's justice and love. This recombinant interpretation of dominion, as Nash suggests, transforms ecological abuse into a violation of this responsibility. Ethical considerations in the Christian tradition extend love beyond human boundaries to encompass all life forms,



echoing the boundless love of God. Similarly, Rolston (1993) argues that actions align with ethical principles when they contribute to preserving the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. Conversely, actions that disrupt these elements are deemed ethically wrong. The idea that land as a community is the fundamental concept of ecology further underscores the extension of ethics into our relationship with the land itself. Rolston asserts that inheriting promised lands requires extending Christian ethics into ecological stewardship. Petrescu-Mag et al. (2020) highlights the teachings within Liberal and Protestant denominations that underscore divinely ordained stewardship, as exemplified in passages like Genesis 2:7–15, where humans are placed in Eden to care for and cultivate the Earth. They advocate for a new paradigm in Christian ethical and theological thought that extends the love of God to encompass nature

Christian Ethical Perspective on Environment Pollutions

Christian ethical perspectives on environmental pollution revolve around fundamental principles ingrained in Christian teachings. Stewardship, a cornerstone, highlights humanity's responsibility to care for the Earth as a gift from God. This stewardship extends beyond dominion over nature to a mandate to responsibly manage and protect the environment. Christians perceive themselves as caretakers of creation, entrusted to preserve it for future generations. Consequently, environmental pollution is seen as a violation of this stewardship, neglecting the duty to safeguard and cherish God's creation. Central to Christian ethics is the concept of "creation care," underscoring the reverence and respect due to the Earth as God's handiwork. This belief advocates for a compassionate and loving attitude not only towards fellow humans but also towards the entire ecosystem. Pollution disrupts this harmonious relationship, inflicting harm on the environment, its inhabitants, and future generations. Therefore, addressing pollution is viewed as an expression of love and compassion towards both creation and humanity. Christian ethics also emphasize justice and equity, extending beyond human interactions to encompass environmental concerns. Pollution often disproportionately affects marginalized communities and future generations, emphasizing the need for justice in environmental decision-making. This perspective urges actions that ensure equitable access to a clean environment and fair distribution of environmental resources, aligning with the Christian principle of seeking justice for all.

Humility and gratitude are additional ethical pillars within Christianity that inform perspectives on environmental pollution. Christians are encouraged to humbly recognize their interconnectedness with nature and express gratitude for the gifts provided by the environment. This humility includes acknowledging humanity's role in causing pollution and the necessity to rectify these actions, fostering a sense of responsibility towards environmental conservation. In essence, Christian ethical perspectives on environmental pollution advocate for responsible stewardship, compassionate care for creation, justice in environmental decision-making, and humility in recognizing humanity's role in environmental degradation. These principles underpin a call to action for individuals and communities to address pollution, fostering a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment as an integral part of living out Christian values.



Conclusion

Environmental pollution in Abuja, Nigeria, poses a significant threat to the well-being of its residents and the integrity of the natural environment. From a Christian ethical perspective, addressing this issue is not merely a matter of environmental sustainability but also a moral imperative rooted in the biblical principles of stewardship and environmental justice. The concept of stewardship, deeply embedded in the Christian worldview, emphasizes humanity's role as responsible managers of God's creation. This responsibility extends to the preservation of the environment, ensuring its vitality for future generations. Environmental pollution, however, represents a dereliction of this stewardship duty, causing harm to both human beings and the natural world. Environmental justice, another cornerstone of Christian ethics, calls for the fair and equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. In the context of Abuja, environmental pollution disproportionately impacts marginalized communities, exacerbating existing inequalities. Addressing environmental pollution requires a commitment to environmental justice, ensuring that all residents, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have access to a clean and healthy environment.

Recommendations

In light of the Christian ethical perspectives discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are proposed to mitigate environmental pollution in Abuja:

1. Strengthen environmental regulations and enforcement: Implement stricter environmental standards for industries, businesses, and individuals. Enhance monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with environmental regulations.
2. Integration of Christian Ethics: Encourage policymakers to consider Christian ethical principles when formulating environmental policies and making decisions. This ensures that environmental protection aligns with Christian values.
3. Promote sustainable urban planning and development: Prioritize sustainable urban planning principles that incorporate green spaces, efficient transportation systems, and sustainable waste management practices. Encourage the use of renewable energy sources and energy-efficient technologies in urban development projects.
4. Empower communities and raise environmental awareness: Engage local communities in environmental protection initiatives. Foster environmental education and awareness programs to promote responsible environmental practices among residents.
5. Support environmental justice initiatives: Identify and address environmental disparities that disproportionately impact marginalized communities. Advocate for equitable access to clean and healthy environmental conditions for all residents.
6. Promote interfaith collaboration and dialogue: Encourage dialogue and collaboration among Christian and other faith communities to address environmental issues from a shared ethical perspective.



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