



## **THE CONTRIBUTION OF RELIGION TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN SOME SELECTED TOWNS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Religion can play a vital role in influencing attitudes, behaviour, perceptions, modes of coping and actions in response to environmental problems, but it has been largely ignored in Nigerian ecological discourses. This essay therefore, examines the contribution of Religion to Environmental Conservation in Some Selected Towns in Kogi State, the study used primary and secondary data sources and careful observations of the contemporary environmental crisis in the study area. The study adopted historic, thematic and content constructive analysis. This study observed that the nature of environmental pollution in these towns include air, land and water pollution, and the sources of pollution were traced to the unhealthy practices and unfriendly attitudes of residents including butchers, householder, traders, transporters, farmers and students towards the environment as well as vehicular and industrial emission reducing the air quality in the city. This work reveals that the unhealthy practices have negatively affected residents' health issues, and argues that pollution in these towns have the tendency of not only affecting humankind, but the regional and global environments. It was also observed that, despite the fact that, all religions within the study area have ethical injunctions that geared towards environmental conservation, the efforts towards conserving the environment was not felt nor taught explicitly by her leaders. Hence, to reduce environmental degradation, this study submits that environmental degradation problems in the study area and somewhere else, can be effectively address through religious stewardship, eco-justice and creation spirituality, which are the emerging environmental ethical ideologies in contemporary Christianity and other religions.

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary world, two powerful forces, science, and religion, play pivotal roles in shaping our understanding of reality and influencing decision-making. Despite the perceived



inconsistencies, particularly in biological matters, there is a historical acknowledgment of the interdependence of science and religion. Albert Einstein, one of history's most esteemed scientists, emphasized this entwinement, declaring in 1940 that "science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind" (Taylor 3). Einstein argued that the separation of these realms hinders progress on critical global issues.

One such pressing issue is the environment, drawing concern from environmentalists and those who prioritize humanity. Worldwide, environmental problems are escalating, with decreasing clean air, dwindling resource availability, and diminishing biodiversity. Despite increased protected areas, biodiversity continues to decline rapidly. Researchers posit that the lack of progress in conservation results from a focus on technical solutions rather than resolutions aligned with people's values (3). Recognizing the urgency of environmental protection, a novel strategy is required, one that can resonate with individuals across diverse walks of life. This prompts an exploration of the legitimacy of religion as a potential motivation and tool for promoting environmental conservation.

Human activities, driven by a desire for comfort and benefit, have led to the rapid degradation of the natural environment. Industrialization, a monumental contributor to environmental impact, necessitates sustainable approaches to avoid catastrophic consequences. Climate change, attributed to human activities, is disrupting ecosystems, threatening lives, and prompting warnings from international organizations about a bleak future (Muazu 1). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasizes human-induced climatic changes, impacting precipitation, sea levels, and water resources globally.

Climate change's repercussions include decreasing agricultural yields, species extinction, and shifts in ecosystems, with dire implications for global food security. The consequences disproportionately affect the world's poor, who rely directly on the environment for their livelihoods. Environmental degradation, accelerated by human activities, poses a severe challenge, necessitating a shift in social values and behaviors. Social theory and research aim to understand and alter human behaviors contributing to climate change, recognizing the need for an effective approach to mitigate environmental problems (Leiserowitz 20, Stern 407).

While social theory and research have significant influence, religion also plays a crucial role in shaping human behavior. With a majority of the global population religiously affiliated, religion holds the potential to inspire environmentalism and real climate change action. Surprisingly, the religious foundations for environmental protection remain understudied, prompting a research focus on the contributions of religion to environmental conservation in selected towns/villages in Dekina Local Government Area, Kogi State. As humanity faces critical environmental challenges, the integration of science, religion, and social understanding becomes imperative for sustainable solutions and meaningful progress.

### **Environmental Conservation Vis a Vis Religion and climate change.**

Environmental conservation involves protecting, preserving, and responsibly managing natural resources and ecosystems. The goal is to ensure sustainable use while minimizing harm to the



environment and maintaining ecological balance. Rapid population growth and modern lifestyles contribute to over-exploitation of resources, leading to various environmental problems such as loss of biodiversity, pollution, deforestation, and climate change, (Mishra 187).

Religion, as a unique institution, influences human worldviews and behaviors, including attitudes toward environmental change. Major religions teach that humans are stewards entrusted with the care of the Earth. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as a prolonged alteration in temperature patterns. (Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay 256). Critics argue that global responses to environmental change focus too much on scientific solutions, neglecting cultural and social forces. Empirical research suggests that religious beliefs shape individual environmental attitudes and behaviors (Hitzhusen and Tucker 369; Smith and Leiserowitz 13).

Environmental degradation, encompassing natural processes and human activities, results in the deterioration of environmental quality. Climate change manifests in disrupted seasonal cycles, impacting ecosystems, agriculture, water supply, and contributing to socio-economic consequences. The cumulative effect on natural resources and the balance of nature is stressed (Akpomi and Vipene 132).

Human activities, including urbanization, industrialization, and deforestation, contribute significantly to environmental degradation. Inadequate waste disposal, inefficient industrial processes, and unsustainable resource use worsen the situation. Poverty emerges as a fundamental cause, leading to destructive practices for survival. The adverse effects of human activities on natural resources, ecosystems, and climate are outlined, emphasizing the urgency of proper management and conservation (Gichere 1; Bett 16; Gecaga 1999).

### **The Concept and Causes of Environmental Degradation**

Environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of environmental quality due to natural processes and human activities. Climate change has diverse impacts, affecting ecosystems, agriculture, water supply, and contributing to socio-economic consequences. Causes of environmental degradation include human activities like urbanization, industrialization, deforestation, and natural events like floods and droughts. (Baruah and Bhuyan 801)

Environmental degradation results from inadequate waste disposal, inefficient industrial processes, and unsustainable resource use. Poverty is identified as a fundamental cause, leading to destructive practices for survival. The text emphasizes the adverse effects of human activities on natural resources, ecosystems, and climate, with a focus on the need for proper management and conservation (Bentley 1).

### **Religious Intervention in Environmental Conservation**

In 1986, the first major attempt was made to bridge religion and conservation while celebrating the 25th anniversary of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) at the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, Italy. The key outcome of this meeting was each major religion committing to preserving the environment, this 6 included Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Each religion



composed a future plan of how to integrate conservation into its unique beliefs (Awoyemi et al 12). However, even if plans are proposed, it may remain difficult to have a successful result if the majority of religious teachings contradict conservation strategies. For a majority of religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous religions tend to strongly support connection with the environment. Yet, there is greater concern when it comes to the compatibility of Abrahamic religions and a concern for the environment.

Lynn White is credited with introducing a valuable critique of the Monotheistic religions; especially the Judeo-Christian tradition for holding ‘dominance-over-nature’ orientation, which he argues is the social consciousness that underpins the ecological crises of the time. White’s thesis argues that religious beliefs deeply influence how humans interact with the environment. White argues that Biblical injunctions in Genesis chapter 1 have encouraged anthropocentrism by giving unlimited power to humans to have dominion over nature. He concluded that the dominant view in the Judeo-Christian west is that this injunction gives license to humans to exploit nature without limit, a situation that leads to unrestricted growth in science and technology (Muazu 44).

White’s thesis suggests that an alternative environmentalist paradigm that promotes ‘stewardship’ is necessary to mitigate global ecological crisis. Many theorists (Haught; Johnson, McFague) follow White to argue that, at least in the last few centuries, the Christian world’s relationship with nature was essentially anthropocentric. In this conception, the ‘anthropocentric’ worldview is characterized by ‘materialist and exploitative perspective on nature’ which is responsible for environmental problems of contemporary societies (44).

A different theoretical position emerged to critique White’s thesis, stressing that a careful look at the religious scriptures show that humans have not been accorded with unlimited power to exploit nature. To the contrary, this position argues that some scriptural teachings of the Judeo-Christian faiths emphasize ‘stewardship ethic (45). Proponents of this thesis (e.g. Chryssavgis, Santmire and Cobb Jr,) argue that theologies in the Judeo-Christian tradition place emphasis on the sacredness of nature and human’s necessary role to care for God’s creation. They claim to have ‘discovered environmentally positive passages in classic texts, and that Judaism and Christianity are “really” more environmentally minded than they seemed at first glance’ (Gottlieb 8).

Another point of view calls for a distinction between Judeo-Christian Western tradition and other religions in discussing the role of religion in environmental crises. Like White, this point of view argues that, unlike western monotheistic religions, non-western religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and other traditional religious beliefs are characterised by pro-environment theologies that enabled indigenous peoples in many regions around the world to develop a mutual and friendly relationship with nature. Others (Ezzy, Tomalin) hold that Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) are the major world religions that hold ‘mastery-over-nature’ worldviews (Muazu 45). The majority of non-Abrahamic religions (e.g. Buddhism, Paganism) in their various forms have, by contrast, developed a ‘man-for-nature’ or ‘ecocentric’ orientation (46).

### **The Role of Some Selected Religions in Environmental Conservation**



In the contemporary world, the environmental crisis is a major concern with profound implications for individual and societal health. While conventional wisdom attributes the crisis to scientific and technological misapplications and the unsustainable use of natural resources, Lynn White, in "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," provocatively asserts that world religions are the root cause. White contends that individuals' ecological perspectives are deeply influenced by their beliefs about human nature and destiny, primarily shaped by religion.

White further argues that the dualistic nature of monotheistic religions has contributed to the separation of humans from the rest of nature, laying the groundwork for the environmental crisis. Arnold Toynbee echoes this sentiment in "The Religion Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," linking contemporary environmental issues to the rise of monotheism. He identifies the reckless consumption of nature's resources and pollution as major consequences traceable to religious causes.

The central thesis emerges: communities and individuals' environmental actions are closely tied to their perceptions of nature, heavily influenced by cultural and religious beliefs. Despite the urgency of the ecological crisis, efforts to address it have primarily focused on modifying institutional mechanisms through laws and public policies. Unfortunately, these endeavors have not yielded the desired results, prompting a realization that a radical transformation of human attitudes and beliefs is essential.

Religion, as a powerful institution with moral authority, is posited as a key player in effecting this transformative change. Scholars, both from African Traditional Religion (ATR) and other backgrounds, observe a lack of readiness in existing approaches and advocate for a more prominent role of religious teaching in finding solutions to the ecological crisis. This recognition aligns with the growing interest in understanding the role of religions in influencing attitudes and behaviors towards the environment.

With a majority of people worldwide practicing some form of religious belief, it becomes evident that religion provides a crucial lens for comprehending human worldviews and perceptions, especially regarding environmental issues. Religious beliefs and worldviews continue to shape people's actions and their relationship with the natural environment. This underscores the importance of investigating the role of religious leaders in mobilizing their followers to contribute to environmental conservation efforts.

Religions, according to the scholars, have a significant contribution to make in environmental conservation and management. They provide direction and contribute to the formation of new values that emphasize individual and collective responsibility towards the environment. As experts posit, understanding the impact of religions on environmental issues is crucial, and religious leaders play a pivotal role in ensuring their followers actively participate in environmental conservation projects. (Deuraseh 524; Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 1593; Hitzhusen and Tucker 370; Jenkins 285; Gerten and Bergmann 5).

### **The Christian Religion and Environmental Conservation**





The Christian perspective on environmental conservation emphasizes humanity's role as co-creators and co-workers with God, entrusted with the responsibility to guard and protect creation (Genesis 2:15). This stewardship obligation includes actions such as procreation, tree planting, safeguarding water catchment areas, and wildlife conservation, all rooted in the belief that the entire creation belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). The Catholic Church, in particular, views humans as integral parts of nature, seeking indications of God's existence and purpose in the natural world. Initiatives like the National Catholic Rural Life Conferences and the Catholic Relief Services underscore the importance of respecting the land, advocating for sustainable agricultural practices, preventing soil loss and water pollution, and promoting fair living conditions for those working the land.

Christianity's potential as a tool for conservation hinges on clarity regarding the creation story, as conflicting interpretations may hinder environmental concern. Evaluating Christian denominations worldwide based on their understanding of the creation story becomes crucial for effective conservation planning. Successful instances of utilizing Christianity for conservation, such as the collaboration between Advocates for Religious Conservation and the Mennonite Church in Lebanon, highlight the positive impact of partnerships between local government, non-profits, and churches.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical letter, emphasizes the Catholic Church's responsibility towards conservation, citing the need to protect the earth, water, and air as gifts of God meant for everyone. Other scholars argue that individual and collective efforts within churches are essential for tangible results. The church serves as a creation awareness center, educating congregations on their responsibilities toward the environment. Bennett stresses the Christian duty to care for the environment as stewards, considering land as a precious resource inherited from past generations. From a Catholic social teaching perspective, sustainable development is deemed necessary for the planetary common good, with moral imperatives to preserve and manage the environment for future generations. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation 'Laudate Deum,' acknowledges the undeniable impact of climate change and underscores the need for global cooperation to address the climate crisis. He criticizes the technocratic paradigm and calls for ethical sustainability, emphasizing the responsibility to care for God's creation.

In conclusion, Christians, particularly the Catholic Church, have a significant role to play in environmental conservation through their stewardship responsibilities and advocacy for sustainable practices. The alignment of faith with environmental consciousness, as demonstrated by Pope Francis, reinforces the urgency for collective global efforts to address the climate crisis (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 24:1; LD 6, 28, 43).

### **Islamic Religion and Environmental conservations**

In exploring environmental perspectives within the Islamic world, scholars like Foltz and Nasr note varying attitudes towards environmentalism. Some argue that there's limited awareness of anthropogenic causes of environmental change in Muslim communities, perceiving ecological issues as the 'will of God.' However, there is a growing awareness, with individuals recognizing



Muslims' shared responsibility for environmental crises due to greed and disrespect for nature. Recent movements seek to reintroduce Islamic environmental principles into discussions on environmental decline.

Islamic teachings emphasize environmental sustainability through the concept of guardianship, where humans are considered caliphs or guardians entrusted with God's creations for society and future generations. The Qur'an deems preserving the environment a religious and social obligation, not an optional matter. Prophet Muhammad's teachings discourage overconsumption, promoting sustainable behavior and moderation in all aspects of life. These teachings could raise awareness and willingness among the global Muslim population towards environmental sustainability.

Islam views essential elements of nature as belonging to all living things, not just humans. Islamic scholars argue that through *ijtihād* (independent legal reasoning), Islam can offer practical solutions to contemporary environmental challenges. The Qur'an and Prophet's Sunnah are regarded as guiding lights promoting sustainable development globally, emphasizing principles for preserving the environment and managing natural resources responsibly.

Islamic teachings stress the responsibility of humans as guardians over natural resources, ensuring their proper use without abuse or destruction. In a tangible example, Muslim fishers in Misali Island, Tanzania, ceased dynamite fishing, threatening turtle nesting sites and coral slopes, after workshops conducted by the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences emphasized the illegitimacy of this practice according to Islam.

In summary, Islam promotes environmental conservation through the principles of guardianship, moderation, and responsible use of natural resources, fostering an awareness and commitment to sustainability within Muslim communities globally (Muazu 8; Qur'an 5; 7).

### **African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Environmental Conservation.**

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is deeply ingrained in the African worldview and cultural norms, serving as a foundational belief system passed down through generations. ATR recognizes the interconnectedness of human beings with the environment, viewing humans as integral components of the natural world. Scholars like J. S. Mbiti and P. A. Dopamu emphasize the balance between the physical and spiritual worlds in African religious thought, where God created the environment comprising both realms.

In the African religious perspective, nature is considered sacred, with God providing natural resources for the benefit of mankind. ATR promotes the responsible discovery and moderate use of these resources to enhance well-being. The worldview is anthropocentric, perceiving all elements of nature in relation to mankind. Notably, Mbiti argues that humans are not masters over nature to exploit it without respect; instead, they are stewards responsible for nature's well-being (18).

The sacredness of trees, forests, rivers, and streams is emphasized in African indigenous religions. Taboos and proverbs are formulated to reinforce the sanctity of nature, preventing the exploitation of species, deforestation, and overgrazing. Trees like Iroko, Mahogany, and silk cotton are



believed to house spirits, and cutting them is deemed taboo. Sacred groves, designated as homes of the gods, serve as natural reserves and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity.

Sacred places such as rivers and streams are venerated, and activities like fishing, logging, and cultivation are restricted to maintain the sanctity of these environments. The belief in sacred groves and mountain forests is widespread among various African societies, contributing to the conservation of plant and animal life. The respect for sacred areas extends to catchment areas, ensuring the protection of drinking water sources.

African theologians, including Metuh, underscore the environmental importance embedded in African indigenous religions. ATR fosters a positive environmental ethic, emphasizing a moral order connecting mankind, nature, ancestors, and sacred powers. Sacred groves, shrines, and taboos are integral to African societies, promoting conservation and ecological sustainability (13). In conclusion, African Traditional Religion provides a foundation for a contemporary environmental model that advocates living in harmony with the natural world. ATR acknowledges the value of all life, fostering relationships of mutual respect, reciprocity, and caring. As environmental crises and climate change intensify, ATR's principles become increasingly relevant in shaping a balanced human-earth relationship in the 21st century (Ekeopara and Ekpenyong 19; Ekpenyong 273; Gbenda 67-68; Ignaumuthu 45; Mbiti 166; 368).

### **Judaism**

Aubrey Rose's edited work, "Judaism and Ecology," delves into the environmental perspective within Judaism, presenting the religion as monotheistic with a focus on two major sacred literatures. The book underscores that Jewish festivals, rooted in agriculture, celebrate the connection between the Jewish people and their land, emphasizing communal events rather than individual experiences (Rose 13).

The core principle highlighted by Rose is the Jewish responsibility to preserve and guard nature rather than destroy it. This sentiment extends even to wartime, where Jewish soldiers are cautioned against harming trees, particularly fruit-bearing ones. Maimonides, a medieval Jewish doctor, emphasized the prohibition of destructive actions against nature, aligning with the biblical injunction of "do not destroy" in Deuteronomy 8:9 (Rose 11).

The second part of the book explores Israel's environment and the imperative of environmental protection. Despite being a small, arid country with limited natural resources, Israel has faced population pressures and negative environmental implications due to industrial development and economic growth. The book stresses the importance of respecting the land, as reflected in the first five books of the Bible (Rose 84).

Addressing Israel's commitment to environmentalism, the book notes the establishment of about 385 nature reserves with over 300 rangers, emphasizing the preservation of human heritage. Israel has also invested in botanical gardens to conserve various flora, including flowers. The Noah Sanctuaries, formed in 1990, serve as an umbrella organization promoting environmentalism in Israel, based on biblical principles of human responsibility for environmental integrity (Rose 13).





The book concludes by highlighting the Noah Sanctuaries' efforts to issue an Architect's ecological code of ethical quality, aiming to improve the environment and quality of life. The sanctuaries emphasize the responsibility of individuals to ensure the well-being of man, domestic and wild life, and plant life in all urban, suburban, and rural projects (Rose 13).

In the final section, the discussion focuses on the importance of understanding ecological processes and the need for individuals to re-examine their attitudes towards the environment. Judaism encourages prayers for the environment as a means to foster a connection with God and avoid actions that may pollute nature. The religion's deep-seated beliefs align with environmental protection, considering nature as a manifestation of order and wise design. The dominion granted to humans in Genesis is seen as a responsibility rather than tyranny, emphasizing stewardship over the Earth. Talmudic and rabbinical sources further reinforce the biblical injunction of "do not destroy/kill," encompassing all elements with potential benefits to humanity, including the physical environment (Krznaric 8).

In summary, "Judaism and Ecology" provides a comprehensive exploration of Judaism's environmental principles, emphasizing the religion's commitment to nature preservation, ethical responsibility, and the interconnectedness of humans and the environment.

### **Buddhism and Eastern Mysticism**

The discussion on Buddhism and Eastern Mysticism highlights the contrasting biocentric perspective of Asian religions compared to the anthropocentrism of Abrahamic religions. Central to Buddhism is the concept of interconnectedness, emphasizing compassion and loving kindness not only towards human beings but also extending to animals, plants, and the earth itself. Buddhist environmentalists argue that the recognition of universal suffering (dhukkha) and pain (tanha) fosters a compassionate empathy for all forms of life (Krznaric 9).

The notions of karma and rebirth in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Eastern mysticism establish a profound link between humanity and other life forms, emphasizing the cyclical nature of birth, death, and rebirth known as samsara (Krznaric 9). The concept of ahimsa, or non-violence, encapsulates the concerns of Buddhism and Jainism for nature and the entire living world. This ethical principle permeates various aspects of Buddhist teachings, emphasizing abstention from killing as one of the first ten wholesome deeds and a core moral precept (Krznaric 101).

In Mahayana Buddhism, the ideologies of jinsei Bukkyo (Buddhism for living) and ningen Bukkyo (social Buddhism) manifest a compassionate spirit towards all living things, aiming to protect and enhance their ways of life (98). The historical commitment of Buddhism to ecological balance and environmental purification is evident in its teachings and practices.

The broader discussion includes pantheism, a worldview present in Hinduism and the New Age Movement, emphasizing the divine presence in all things. Pantheistic ideologies, shared by movements like Jainism and Buddhism, not only perceive reality as ultimately one and divine but also prioritize environmental concerns. This shared worldview, rooted in pantheism, contributes to the emphasis on ecological preservation within these Eastern mystical traditions (111).



In summary, Buddhism and Eastern mysticism offer a biocentric perspective, emphasizing interconnectedness, compassion, and environmental stewardship. The concepts of karma, rebirth, and ahimsa underscore the inseparable link between humanity and the natural world, promoting a harmonious coexistence with all living beings and the environment.

### **The Efforts of Religion in Combating Environmental Pollution in the Study Area**

Findings reveal that, religion has done little or nothing in the study areas as regards to the control of environmental pollution. Interviews with some residents in the study area from particularly the two dominant religions in the area which are Christianity and Islam reveal that, there is no much sensitization from the authorities. Asked if their leaders preached concerning the care of the environment, few responded that, planting of trees are encouraged by their leaders. On further enquiries for the reason of planting of trees, it was discovered that it's as a result of the economic benefits and not targeted for the prevention of environmental degradation.

It has been established earlier that human behavior is one of the main causes of environmental degradation. Coming from religious view point, it is imperative to state that nature is not an object for human exploitation because it came from the same source with human beings, that is, both humankind and the natural environment originated from the same source, God (Atoi et al 12) Citing Coste, Mwambazambi (20) observes that the will of God is that human beings commune with nature as intelligent and noble master and guardian, and not as exploiter and destructor denuded of any management. Respecting God's will requires taking values into account, especially ecological values such as, environmental protection; the protection of soil, forests, flora and fauna. In the light of Christian understanding of nature values, human beings do not possess supreme power or rights over natural environment, since they come from the same source and are interconnected in many ways. The trio of Christian stewardship, eco-justice and creation spirituality which are the emerging environmental ethical ideologies in contemporary western Christianity and other Christian ecological values inherent in the bible need to be utilized as models for addressing environmental degradation problems in Nigeria.

Religions should bring their adherents back down to earth because religions should be ecological. Nigerian religious leaders are expected to key into this ecological mission by admonishing and conscientizing the people on the need to protect the environment and avoid any act that will degrade environmental resources. Religious leaders need to awaken Nigerians from ethical slumber and point out to them their responsibility towards God and God-created nature. Mwambazambi (21) argues that the protection of the environment in which humans live should be taken seriously as part of the struggle for the restoration of the creation of God. The earliest understanding of humanity and its relationship with nature had a religious foundation and a moral theological base. The dominion and protection of the creation of God imply all aspects of the human life including the environment. There is no gainsaying that all Nigerians are creatures of God, as such, they ought to love and care for his creations as an act of reverence for him. According to Bookless (40), the creation is not our plaything or even our playground, but has intrinsic value



to God. Our use of natural resources in our lifestyles and our travel should be with restraint and respect.

From the Christian ethical point of view, it is crystal clear that caring for earth resources is a sign of fidelity to God. Nigerians, especially Christians are expected to show much respect for divine valuations. This simply means that they ought to value what God values with all seriousness, which include the earth and all its resources (Atoi et al 12). This is a moral duty that all human beings own to God for environmental safety. Nigerians need to protect and care for their environment by refusing to be polluting agents of the environmental space. Rather, they should treat every part of God's creation as having its own intrinsic value and dignity since God Himself has declared all creations good. According to Mwambazambi (41), God imbues all his creatures with his presence. This is why it is necessary to protect nature, as God protects his people and works for the welfare of all. Therefore, we must not treat any of God's creature (any element, plant or animal) recklessly but deal with them in a sensitive manner, with empathy and reverence. Therefore, it is reasonable to state here that anyone who harms the natural environment is indirectly harming the creator Himself (God). Religious leaders ought to join this band wagon with seriousness, advocating and creating awareness to their adherents for a positive change. Nigerian religious leaders are therefore expected to key into this ecological mission by admonishing and conscientizing the people on the need to protect the environment and avoid any act that will degrade environmental resources.

### **Conclusion**

This essay has examined environmental degradation in some towns in Kogi state and the role of religion in mitigation the menace. It was established that environmental degradation in these towns, just as somewhere else, has both natural and human causes. However, environmental degradation caused by human activities seems to be more than the ones caused by natural forces. This is probably the reason why the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development warned that unless humans change their life style, the world will face unacceptable levels of environmental damage and human suffering (Asaju and Arome 59). It was uncovered that humanity's failure to recognize the sanctity of the ecosystem and the irresponsible use of environmental resources by most people are the principal factors facilitating environmental degradation and ecological injustice in the study area.

This study therefore, submits that religious adherents should adhere to the principles of their religious environmental ethics and their leaders should conscientize their subjects on the need to protect the natural environment and use its resources responsibly as a matter of divine moral mandate. From the foregoing, public awareness and community participation are good areas where religion can leverage on since almost all members of the society adhere to one religion or the other and in some cases, two or more.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The researcher recommends the following



- i. Government should work together with religious leaders such that the religious leaders are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills and are made to carry out the campaign through environmental education of her adherents.
- ii. Since majority of the people are adherents of one religion or the other, they should be taught by their leaders to be careful in the use of the environment in order to reduce the rate of environmental degradation prevalent in the society today which has adverse effects on the people living within the environment. Religious leaders should advise their adherents on the use of the earth with the view that we are all stewards of God's creation and have the responsibilities of caring for it and must give account of how we use things giving to us to care for.
- iii. A good attitude towards the environment should be encouraged. Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists should develop a positive attitude towards the community and its environment. This may also be achievable through religious leaders.
- iv. There should be admonition for all to desist from dumping refuse indiscriminately in the community and elsewhere. All must learn to use government authorized means of refuse disposal in the community.
- v. Religious people should show good examples in this so that they can challenge their neighbours to do same.

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