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**“Green Gospel” As A Panacea For Environmental
Challenge In Nigeria.**

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Abstract

Environmental challenge is a global phenomenon which has generated discussions at different levels. The discussions focus on how humans can stop mistreating the ecosystem and create a sustainable environment. This discussion will continue as long as the attitude of people to the environment is still atrocious. The present state of the

environment in Nigeria is of utmost concern. This gruesome attitude could be as a result of erroneous belief that human beings are to exercise dominion over the earth. Changing this erroneous belief requires continuous intentional enlightenment on environmental sustainability. A Yoruba adage says, *bi ina o ba tan laso, eje kin tan ni eekanna* (As long as there are lice on one's clothe, there will be blood on the hands). Hence, Christians, by their God-given roles in Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15, which is to "till the land, keep it, rule over it and fill it" are to champion this enlightenment by preaching "Green Gospel." "Green gospel" is Gods' act of benevolence to human beings with regards to the environment and human beings' responsibilities as leader and manager of environment. "Green gospel" is aimed at raising environmental-friendly people. These are people who will preserve, conserve and care for the environment. Descriptive method is used in this paper. The paper looks at the views of different schools of thought and Christians on environment and concludes that a continuous preaching of "Green Gospel" by Christians will help in solving environmental challenge in Nigeria and the global world. "Green Gospel" should first be preached in the Church and Church members should in turn spread the Gospel to the "market place."

Keywords

Church, Ecosystem, Environmental Challenge, Green Gospel, Nigeria

Introduction

Environmental degradation and depletion of limited resources are global problems today. These have raised global concern because of the threat they pose to life. The sudden unusual high temperature in the world which is called global warming has been associated with the depletion of the ozone layer which was said to have been caused by the use of fluorocarbons and it is a threat to human health¹. Apart from the depletion of the ozone layer, there is also the case of deforestation which causes change in the ecosystem due to soil erosion and extinction of animals. Water, land and air pollution are common environmental crisis in Nigeria which the Federal Government has not been able solve².

Apart from the indiscriminate disposal of wastes generated by household and industries, religious organisations are also not exempted from this habit. They generate wastes especially at camp site which are not properly disposed. Indiscriminate disposal of waste has altered the food chain and also affected the ecosystem. Some of these wastes contaminate bodies of water which people drink and for washing thereby causing health hazard. Sometimes, the blockage of drainage system as a result of indiscriminate disposal of wastes has caused flood and erosion to take over some areas in Nigeria. Flood also causes an imbalance ecosystem. When the ecosystem is not balanced, it affects both non-living and living things

¹ Geisler, N. (1989). *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues*. Leicester: England.

² Konya, R. (2018). "Rural Dwellers, First to Suffer from Pollution." In *Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency*. www.lasepa.gov.ng. Accessed October 10, 2018.

including human beings that are the cause of ecological crisis.

There is a claim that the environment will be the most discussed issue in the future among states, organisations and consumers and this discussion will become very influential on the opinions and behaviour of individuals and societies³. This statement is true because the present ecological crisis is increasingly causing danger to living and non-living things. This calls for a move towards a “greener” or environmental responsibility and one of the ways to achieve this is through “green gospel.” Green gospel relates to Christian understanding of creation and humankind as stewards. Christians are expected to be more responsible with how they take care of the environment since they believe that God is the Creator of the world according to the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2. They are to seek for the well-being of the earth and everything in it to “achieve the right economic future for this generation and the future generations⁴. It is based on the expectation of God from human beings as a manager and leader creation that this paper seeks to examine Christian response to environmental challenges in Nigeria and to recommend green gospel as panacea to environmental challenge.

Environmental Challenges in Nigeria

³ Omofonwa, S & Osa-Edoh, G. (2008). “The Challenges of Environmental Problems in Nigeria.” In *Journal of Human Ecology*, 23(1).

⁴ Omomia, A. (2016). “Environmental Stewardship and Its Implications for Sustainable Development in Nigeria”. In) *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology*. XXI (1)

Environmental challenge is a global phenomenon. Many activities are going on in the world that is destroying the environment every day. Some of the activities causing environmental problems in Nigeria include:

1. Desertification: Desertification is the process by which fertile land becomes desert as a result of drought, deforestation, overgrazing, or inappropriate agricultural practices. Desertification is a form of land degradation. It is a significant global ecological problem⁵. Abogurin⁶ observes that most of the trees in the rainforest in Nigeria has been chopped down. People cut down trees indiscriminately for fuel and construction without planting new ones (Reforestation). Some Christian organisations are also guilty of this as they cut down trees and remove shrubs for the purpose of building of camps. In the words of Oderinde:

It has been observed that much of the forest on the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway has given way to religious camps. Quite a number of churches, for instance, Deeper Life Bible Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Assembly of God Mission, Gospel Faith Mission, The Lord's Chosen Charismatic Revival

⁵ Mortimore, M. (1989). *Adapting to Drought, Farmers, Famines, and Desertification in West Africa*. England: Cambridge University.

⁶ Abogunrin, S. (2008). "Key Note of Address." In C.U. Manus (ed), *Biblical Studies and Environmental Issues in Africa*, a Publication of the Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies, Western Zone.

Church, Methodist Church of Nigeria, The Upper Room Baptist Church, and many others have taken part in the deforestation along the Lagos-Ibadan expressway. The Church must be educated on the problem of deforestation and the need to save the forest.⁷

Deforestation is a huge problem and it is estimated that between 3 and 7 billion trees are cut down each year. If it continues at this rate all of the earth’s forests will be gone within 100 years ⁸. Deforestation is a major cause of desertification and other problems such as:

- a. Loss of land fertility constitutes danger to the natural ecosystem⁹. Leaves of trees and shrubs reduce the intensity of sun on soil, but removal of trees increases the effect of the intensity of sunlight on soil and thereby causing evaporation of soil water. This will eventually cause depletion of soil nutrient and eventual destruction of soil texture and composition, soil microbes and soil animals like earthworms which help soil composition

⁷ Oderinde, O. (2011). “Church and Environmental Degradation: A Re-reading of Luke 12:42-48,” in *Journal of Philosophy and Development*, Ago-Iwoye: Department of Philosophy, Olabisi Onabanjo University, pp. 135-142.

⁸ Greentumble, (2018). “How Does Deforestation Affect Animals?” <https://greentumble.com/how-does-deforestation-affect-animals/>. Accessed October 10, 2018.

⁹ Areola, O. (2007). “The Bible and Management of Biospheric Resources.” In Faniran, A. and Nihinlola, E (eds). *A Creation Sacred to God, Proceedings of 1st Sacred Earth Workshop*, Sacred Earth Ministry Monograph New Series 1.

- and fertility. Felling of trees impairs the processes of natural soil formation and soil conservation.
- b. Displacement of animals and destruction of some living and nonliving things: Deforestation exposes animals and makes them to feel insecure resulting in their migration to haven. Some of them are killed in the cause of deforestation¹⁰. The discomfort and killing experienced by animal are part of the causes of their extinction.
 - c. Erosion: Erosion causes soil degradation. It affects the topography of the land and washes off top soil nutrients.¹¹ Erosion can occur as a result of felling of trees. Trees serve as wind breaker and reducer of speed of runoff water.¹² Deforestation increases the rate of erosion.¹³ Erosion affects the environment by stripping away top soil on agricultural land, damaging delicate coastal areas and contaminating bodies of water with sediment that can harm plant, animal and human life. Erosion damages farm land by removing nutrient-rich soil needed to grow plants and by exposing lower-quality soil. It also damages crops and causes greater runoff of needed water¹⁴
 - d. Saturation of atmospheric air with Carbon (IV) Oxide (CO₂):CO₂emitted by human beings, vehicles and

¹⁰ Greentumble, (2018). "How Does Deforestation Affect Animals?" <https://greentumble.com/how-does-deforestation-affect-animals/>.

Accessed October 10, 2018.

¹¹ Slavikova, S.P (2018). "Major Causes and Effect of Soil Erosion on People and the Environment." <https://greentumble.com/causes-and-effects-of-soil-erosion/>. Accessed October 2, 2020.

¹² Arum, N. (2019). "Why You Must Plant Tree."

<https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/>. Accessed October 2, 2020.

¹³ Slavikoya, S.P. (2018).

¹⁴ Ibid.

industries is used by plants for production of food. Desertification reduces the number of plants that use CO₂ and this makes the atmosphere to be saturated with CO₂ which is a threat to the health of human beings and animals¹⁵.

2. Oil spillage: Land and water are damaged daily in oil producing area as a result of oil spillage. Spillages have negative impacts on the environment and the inhabitants of the host communities of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.¹⁶ The environmental problems caused by oil spillage has rendered plant and fish farmers jobless. Petroleum hydrocarbons and excess of CO₂ are dangerous to health of human beings and animals. Human beings who take in pollutants emitted by fossil fuel are inevitably the next set of casualties to fade off the face of the earth they call home¹⁷. This is the fear of residents in oil producing parts of the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.¹⁸ Oil spills in Nigeria dates back to the

¹⁵ Cao, L., Caldeira, K., and Jain, A. (2007). “Effects of Carbon Dioxide and Climate Change on Ocean Acidification and Carbonate Mineral Saturation.” In *Geophysical Research Letter*. Vol. 34.
<http://isam.atmos.uiuc.edu/atuljain/publications>. Accessed October 10, 2018.

¹⁶ Kingston, K.G., & Nweke, P.N. (2018). “Management, Remediation and Compensation in Cases of Crude Oil Spills in Nigeria: An Appraisal.” *Journal of Mineral Resources Law*. Vol. 8(1).

¹⁷ Poole, R. (2018). *Love and Sustainability: Climate change Great Threats vs Fossil Fuels Economy Great Scam*. Columbia: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform

¹⁸ Tijani, M. (2017) “Agoni in Ogoni: One Year after Flag-Off, not a Drop of Spilled Oil has been Cleaned.” skytrendnews.com. Accessed October 2, 2020.

1970s.¹⁹ It seems these people now have a date with death due to degradation of the ecosystem caused by oil pollution in the air, on water and land. Not so much has been done by both the Federal and State governments as well as oil companies to alleviate the suffering of the affected people.²⁰

3. Indiscriminate dumping of toxic wastes on land and water by companies and medical organisations causes environmental problems and affects the health of both animals and man.
4. Indiscriminate dumping of refuse into water-ways or drainage causes over flooding and the floods create health hazards which causes disease and death.
5. Poor drainage system and poorly planned villages and towns cause over flooding which destroys land and houses.
6. Overcrowding in cities. All available lands are built up without respect for environmental and building laws. People who are in search of “greener pasture” migrate to where they can find one. This gives reason why location of “greener pasture” is often overcrowded. Also, poor economic status of some people makes it impossible for them to personally rent an apartment. This causes overcrowding of people in a single room. Over population of a place will cause early degradation of the environment and destruction of facilities meant for few people.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Views about Environment

Just as there are different people with different world views about life, there are people who view the environment differently. The way they view the environment affects how they relate with it. This section focuses on Materialistic View, Pantheistic View and Feminist View of the Environment.

1. Materialistic View of the Environment

Eagleton²¹ views materialism as preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values. A person is said to be materialistic when the assets that are owned are at the center of the individual's life and constitute the main source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. People who are materialistic can be jealous, possessive, over ambitious and stingy. According to Geisler, some of them are atheists. They deny the existence of God, the Creator. In explaining materialistic view of the environment,²² He opines that materialists see the physical world as eternal and uncreated. One of the characteristics of materialists' world view is that there is unlimited existence of nature and its resources without being created.²³ They support this view with the first law of thermodynamics, which states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed.²⁴ The view that energy cannot be created implies

²¹ Eagleton, T. (2017). *Materialism*. London: Yale University Press.

²² Geisler, N. (1989).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

there is no Creator, and hence no divine imperative to use it in a particular way.²⁵ Those who hold to this view believe in “raping” the environment for the advancement of society through technology.

Negative effects of materialism on the environment include, depleting resources, pollution and waste. Companies that are solely focused on reaching their global goals of fuel worldwide, harm sustainable resources and damage the ecological system while they support economic development.²⁶ Materialism in market economies harms the environment because materialist values conflict with environmental protection values²⁷. Materialism is generally considered a pro-consumption value while environmentalism is associated with protection-oriented and anti-consumption values²⁸. Materialists are less conscious about the environment.²⁹

Contrary to world view of materialists about environment with regards to the world being eternal, Christians believe the world is not eternal, it will end one day. Jesus Christ emphatically declares, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). The claim that natural resources and

²⁵ Belk, R. (1985). “Materialism: Trait aspects of living in the material world,” in *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(2).

²⁶ Banerjee, B. & McKeage, K. (1994). “How Green is My Value: Exploring the Relationship between Environmentalism and Materialism.” *Advances in Consumer Research*, 21.

²⁷ Norman, R. (2004). *On Humanism*. New York: Routledge.

²⁸ Ergen, A., Baykan, B., & Turan, S. (2015). “Effect of materialism and environmental knowledge on environmental consciousness among high school Students: A study conducted in Istanbul province.” *International Journal of Human Sciences*, 12:1.

²⁹ Burroughs, J. & Rindfleisch, A. (2002). “Materialism and well-being: A conflicting value perspective.” In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(3).

energy cannot be used up is untrue. There is nothing created by God that cannot be used up. God expects human beings to preserve and conserve nature by replenishing and controlling it (Gen. 1:28). Geisler³⁰ posits that, the world will run out of precious metal and fossil fuel unless they are conserved. The view that natural resources cannot be used up is causing careless squandering of vital resources. Human beings are to replenish the earth and not rip it off. God affirms this in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

2. Pantheistic View of the Environment

Pantheistic view of the environment is a reaction against materialistic view of the environment. While materialistic view has led to literal rape of many natural resources, pantheistic view reserves environment. Dietz, Fitzgerald and Shwom³¹ argue that pantheistic view of the environment is distinctively anti-materialistic and mistakenly non-Christianly. Pantheists virtually worship nature. They regard nature as a manifestation of the sacred or divine. Devotees therefore revere nature because nature is divine. McHarg³² observes that this attitude is exemplified in animistic religions which see a sacred

³⁰ Geisler, N. (1989).

³¹ Dietz, T., Fitzgerald, A. & Shwom, R. (2005). "Environmental Values." *Annual Review of Environment and Natural Resources*, 30.

³² McHarg, I. (1969). *Design and Nature*. Garden City, New York: Natural History.

“*mana*” or soul in all things, including material things. Stern, (2000:407) adds that the devotees “believe that natural entities are endowed with spirits and with spiritual power.”³³

Pantheists also believe that human beings are one with nature and since human beings are one with nature and their environment, they should live in harmony with it and work corporately with it.

Although human beings are one with nature, they are not kings over nature but servants of nature³⁴. It implies that human beings do not have dominion over nature, they are servants of it. Pantheists believe that nature is a living organism. This means that, nature is not just manifestation of God, but it is alive. Living species are regarded as manifestations of God and when one of them is extinct, one of the manifestations of God is lost³⁵.

Pantheistic view of the environment from Christian perspective is idolatry.³⁶ Although, the argument that nature is a manifestation of God agrees with Christian position that God is seen in creation and creation should worship God not creation being worshipped. The Psalmist affirms this by saying that:

¹Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD
from the heavens; praise him in the
heights! ²Praise him all his angels, praise
him, all his host! ³Praise him, sun and

³³ Stern, P. (2000). “Toward a coherent theory of environmentally significant behavior.” *Journal of Social Issues*, 56.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Geisler, N. (1989).

³⁶ Ibid.

moon, all you shining stars! ⁴Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! ⁵Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created (Psalm 148:1-5).

God Himself forbids anyone from worshipping other gods or any other thing besides Him (Exodus 20:3-5). Pantheistic view of nature as the manifestation of God helps to preserve nature. It is a view that promotes ecological preservation and conservation and should be embraced by Christians. “In the early Church and always in the Greek East, nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to human beings.”³⁷ Christian should therefore see nature as an act of divine revelation and the need to care for it should be taught in the Church. The study of nature for better understanding of God is known as natural theology.³⁸

3. Feminist View of the Environment

Early positions of “feminist environmental philosophy” focused mostly on ethical perspectives on the interconnections among women, nonhuman animals, and nature³⁹. As it matured, references to feminist environmental philosophy became what it is now an

³⁷ White, L. (1967). “The historical roots of our ecological crisis.” *Science* 155 (3767), pp.1205-1207. <http://inters.org/files/white1967.pdf>. Accessed October 2, 2020.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Warren, K. (1987). “Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections.” *Environmental Ethics*, 9.

umbrella term for a variety of, sometimes incompatible, philosophical perspectives on interconnections among women of diverse races/ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, and geographic locations, on the one hand, and nonhuman animals and nature, on the other⁴⁰.

The feminist view nature as a feminine and thereby sees environmental problem as a feminist issue⁴¹. This helps to provides ways of understanding and eliminating the unjustified domination or exploitation of environment ⁴². Feminist view of the environment argues that women and children are the most vulnerable when it comes to environmental challenges. According to Gaard⁴³ data shows that women, especially poor, rural women in less developed countries who are heads of households suffer disproportionate harms caused by such environmental problems as deforestation, water pollution, environmental toxins, and overcrowding. The connection of women to contemporary environmental issues makes deforestation, water pollution, environmental toxins and overcrowding a feminist issue. This interconnectivity makes feminists to talk about eco-feminism which emphasises the proper treatment of nature.

Emphasis on land being feminine by feminists does not have any biblical support but since land is productive, producing most of the things that are consumed by man

⁴⁰ Adams, C. & Donovan, J. (2008). *The Feminist Care Tradition in Animal Ethics: A Reader*, New York: Columbia University.

⁴¹ Adams, C. (1996). "Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals," in *Ecological Feminist Philosophies*. Bloomington: Indiana University.

⁴² Cheney, J. (1987). "Eco-Feminism and Deep Ecology." *Environmental Ethics*, 9(2).

⁴³ Gaard, G. (1993). *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University.

and animals, it should therefore not be degraded. God created land and everything in it and placed human beings as stewards over it. (Genesis 1:9-12, 28; Psalm 24:1). Stewardship of environment requires that human beings should upgrade environment and not downgrade it.

Government Response to Environmental Challenges in Nigeria

There have been several attempts by the Federal Government of Nigeria including State Governments to control environmental challenges. In the past, the Federal government used the defunct Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) “to control the Nigerian environment, its resources exploitation and management”⁴⁴. The issue of environmental control is topmost in the heart of the Federal Government of Nigeria to have instituted more environmental agencies. For example, Federal and State Government are making frantic efforts to control the destruction of the environment through environmental agencies such as National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), National Bio-safety Management Agency (NBMA), Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN)⁴⁵. All these agencies are saddled with the responsibility of environmental sustainable development.

⁴⁴ Dairo, A. (2012). “Challenges of Environmental Problems in Nigeria: The Role of the Church.” In *Orisun: Journal of Religion and Human Values*, 11(11).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Presently, there has been environmental pollution from telecommunication industries. That is why the National Environmental Standard and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) is concerned about the likely negative environmental and safety impacts of telecom operations if environmental impact assessments (EIAs) were not properly carried out before the citing of base stations. This concern necessitated a synergy between the National Environmental Standard and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) whose duty is to see to pollution control and ecosystem conservation and Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) whose duty is to ensure the provision of quality service to all Nigerians. The synergy is to ensure environmental and sustainable development in the telecoms sector⁴⁶.

Different States in Nigeria are seen to be complementing the effort of the Federal Government in protecting the environment from misuse, abuse, exploitation and destruction. One of such State is Lagos State. Lagos State government instituted Lagos State Environmental Protection Agency (LASEPA) as the environmental regulator for Lagos State. LASEPA was instituted in accordance with the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section II, 20 which states that, "The State shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wild life of Nigeria"⁴⁷. The main thrust of LASEPA is to protect and improve the environment. It safeguards environmental quality that is consistent with the social and economic needs

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Konya, R. (2018).

of the State, so as to protect health, welfare, property and quality of life. Other functions of the agency include:

1. It assists public and private organisations to achieve compliance by providing environment friendly solutions to varied environmental challenges.
2. It warehouses and interprets the data of all water bodies in the State as well as the regular monitoring of the quality of underground water.
3. It ensures portable water from the package water industry is of good quality.
4. It conducts studies on the air quality of the State such as air quality sampling and monitoring in designated grids and develop air quality management database for the State.
5. It encourages all organisations that impact significantly on the environment to make use of Best Available Technology (BAT) while providing training and relevant networking that will assist them to meet regulatory standards at a business friendly cost.

The government is making effort in different ways to address environmental challenges, in similar vein the Church needs to contribute significantly to reduce environmental degradation by reaching out to its numerous members through “Green Gospel,” the good news about God’s will to preserve all His creations, human and non-human alike. Thus, the need to examine the concept of “Green Gospel.”

Green Gospel as a Panacea

The term “Green Gospel” was used by Chris Manus⁴⁸ in 2008 in his commissioned paper presented at the conference of the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies. “Green Gospel” is Christian response to environmental challenges. It grows out of doctrine of creation. In Christianity, both the Old and New Testaments assert that the physical universe is good and it reflects the glory of God, the Creator (Psalm. 19:1; 1Timothy 4:4). The two important aspects of “green gospel” are: divine ownership and human stewardship. That is, the concept of “green gospel” teaches that:

1. The world was created and owned by God. The world God created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) is very good (Genesis 1:1-2, 31). He owns it. God reminds Job that everything under heaven belongs to Him (Job 41:11). The Psalmist attests to this, “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). God owns all the land, the animals, the trees and the minerals (Leviticus 25:23; Psalm 50:10, 12). God’s ownership is the basis for humans’ stewardship.
2. Human beings are the keepers of environment. After God created humans, He commanded them to, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1:28). Also, God “took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it”

⁴⁸ Manus, C. (2008). “Towards a Biblical Theology of the Environment: A Re-reading of Gen. 1:27-28.” In C.U. Manus (ed), *Biblical Studies and Environmental Issues in Africa*, a Publication of the Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies, Western Zone.

(Genesis 2:15). These verses emphasise three obligations of human beings to their environment.

- a. To multiply and fill it: This is an obligation to propagate and fill the earth. The command to propagate and fill the earth is not to overfill. The imperative is to populate not to overpopulate the earth. That is why human beings should embrace family planning measures for birth control. Even while plants and animals are reproducing, it is the responsibility of mankind not to let them overrun the other, so as to have a balanced ecosystem among plants, animals and mankind.
- b. To subdue it and rule over it: The command to subdue and rule over other creation simply means mankind should have dominion. This command has been largely misunderstood and misapplied as heartless exploitation and wanton destruction of the earth’s resources⁴⁹. To have dominion is not to exploit other creation but to lead and manage it in such a way that it does not go out of hand. The Church through the preaching of “green gospel” should debunk the negative interpretation of dominion theology which make people including Christians to exploit the environment.⁵⁰ As the Church preaches the doctrine of “green gospel” it should take some practical steps like placing boxes at

⁴⁹ Enyinnaya, J. (2016). “Theology and Ecology: Foundations for an Appropriate Christian Attitude to the Environment.” In *Journal of Creation and Environmental Care*. 3-131-140.

⁵⁰ Faniran, A. & Nihinlola, E. (2017). “The Environment and Christian Theological Education and Ministry in Nigeria.” In *Journal of Creation and Environmental Care*. 4- 60-79.

strategic locations in the Church auditorium and premises to collect bulletin as parishioners exit the Church. By so doing, members' consciousness will be drawn to God-centred environmentalism.

- c. To work in it and take care of it: The imperative to work and take care of the earth is a command to protect, preserve and promote it. Christians as "salt" and "light" have the obligation to preserve the earth (Matthew 5:13-16). Jesus expects Christians "to be instruments through which God purifies the society and preserve the world from putrefaction and destruction"⁵¹. Christians' relationship with environment is based on stewardship and trusteeship rather than domination, tyrannical control and oppression. Stewardship involves looking after something and taking care of it without necessarily owning it. A trustee looks after something on behalf of its owner and the relationship based on the trust the owner places on the trustee to look after his possession. The steward is to use it creatively in a sustainable manner and be ready to render account to the owner always. In this context, human beings are accountable to God daily on how they use His environment entrusted to them. The Church is guilty of its role as steward of the environment because no emphasis is placed on creating and sustaining eco-friendly community.

⁵¹ Oderinde, O. (2014). "Workers of Miracles and Workers of Iniquity (Matt. 7:20-24): The Paradox of Character Among Ministers of the Gospel in Nigeria." In Akanni, A., Dairo, A., Oderinde, O., Obasola, K (eds) *Religion, Peace and Development in Nigeria*. Ago-Iwoye: Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, pp. 70-75.

- d. Rest of human beings, animals and land: The Sabbath law requires humans, animals, land and materials to rest weekly. According to Exodus 23:12, humans are expected to work for six days and rest on the seventh day, so that the animals used for farming can also rest. This will invariably make the land and other materials used during the six days of work to rest. This rest will bring about productivity for humans, animals, plants and land because their strength would have been rejuvenated. Christian farmers can observe the law of Sabbath for land. Not only were human beings to set aside one day out of seven days for rest, they are to also allow the land to rest at the seventh year so that it could rejuvenate (Exodus 23:10-11). Green gospel encourages Christian farmer to observe the law by doing shifting cultivation which will prevent the land from being ripped-off and allows land nutrients to build up again. The law assures that the land would not be overused and there would be plenty food for both human beings and animals.
- e. Green gospel teaches that Christian farmers should observe the law of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-55). God establishes the law of jubilee through which every fifty years the land would return to its original owner. This law prevents the concentration of land possession and exploitation.
- f. Green gospel encourages Christian farmers to operate the law of harvesting. The law says, “when you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of

your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:9-10). The law of harvesting prevents human beings from robbing the land of all its resources. It creates avenue for the less privileged to be provided for. All aforementioned laws present to us some practical procedure for preserving environment.

It is high time that the Church started to emphasise the need for Christians to develop and sustain the environment. Green gospel should be preached and taught in the Church with emphasis on God's ownership of environment and human's stewardship of it.

Conclusion

The issue of environmental management has assumed international dimension such that leaders of Governments and International agencies have become ambassadors for creation of awareness for man's healthy living. Therefore, Nigeria must key into the environmental protection plan to safeguard the environment. While the nation is ensuring environmental protection, Christians must also ensure that the environment is protected. The Church should place more emphasis on "green gospel." It should deliberately call members' attention to God as the owner of environment and humans as steward of God saddled with the responsibility of taking care of the environment. The earth is an independent creation of God that is entrusted to

human beings as trustees of a creation that possesses a deep worth reflecting God's glory and creation impulse. Nature is not to be worshipped but to be used wisely and carefully as a gift from God. It is not to be squandered or plundered. It is to be used thoughtfully and creatively in the way that honours God the Creator.

Ecological system will not be transformed until human beings' ethical system is transformed. Since it is people who are abusing and exploiting the environment, people must therefore be transformed before their environment can be transformed. Christians being people who have been transformed by Jesus to new creation (2 Cor. 5:20) and who are now salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16), should champion the campaign to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain its development. Christians should emphasise “Green Gospel”.

Recommendations

In a bid to use “green gospel” as a panacea to environmental challenges in Nigeria, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. The Church should consciously raise environment-friendly members for the sustainability of the ecosystem and environment through its teaching, preaching and evangelistic ministry.
2. Church with mission schools should educate its pupils and students on the need to appreciate environment and take care of it properly. They should train students not to be destructive but constructive. The role of education

in reducing environmental degradation is very important.

3. Church and Government should create awareness on the importance of sustainability of the environment in primary, secondary and tertiary schools. This can be done by forming 'Environmental Protection', 'Environment and Scouts' and 'Consumer' student clubs, Events like 'World Environment Day', 'Environmental Protection Week' and 'Tree Planting Week' to be included in the educational activities. These are Eco-Schools Programmes which offer a guiding environmental education curriculum to schools. The Church should reduce the volume of Carbon monoxide emitted into the environment from usage of generator by using eco-friendly devices such solar energy and energy saving gadgets like energy saving bulbs.
4. Eco-Label of Green Flag, symbolising environmental-friendly people should be erected in Churches, homes, schools, work places, garages and other places where human beings exist.
5. Parents and guardians should teach children to care and protect the environment. This will raise environmental consciousness, environmental management and sustainable development in children right from their childhood.
6. Government at all levels should intensify on tree planting campaign programme and provide alternative energy to firewood that is affordable.
7. Federal and State Governments should come up with appropriate guidelines that will help in environmental management. Oil companies that are responsible for oil

spillage should be made to clean up the oil from the land and water. Defaulter should be penalised.

8. Nigerian academia and researchers should come up with practical approach of providing solutions to environmental problems. Religion and science should synergise to solve environmental crisis.