

Islamic Environmental Ethics and Environmental Problems in Nigeria

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Abstract

Islam is a global religion and religious philosophy that should not be neglected in the environmental debate. It has embedded in it environmental values. Very often some adherents of Islam are ignorant of these values and so their lives are not informed by these values. Environmental values in Islam include the acknowledgment that creation belongs to the Sovereign God, humans are not the owners of the earth, humans are God's vice-regent on earth and are to protect the earth from pollution. The paper uses a critical analytic method to examine Islamic environmental values. What Islam teaches on humans and the environment is clearly examined and analyzed. Some environmental problems in Nigeria are also examined. It concludes that Islamic environmental values can be helpful in solving Nigeria's environmental problems.

Introduction

There is no place in the world that is not affected by various environmental problems. The complexity of environmental problems has produced an environmental crisis. Environmental problems include soil erosion, desertification, deforestation, flooding, poor disposal of both rural and urban waste, gas flaring, oil pollution of land and streams, domestic and industrial noise, poor hygiene, violence against and abuse of domestic and wild animals, socioeconomic and environmental injustice, maritime insecurity, ethno-religious violence, and many other problems that affect both humans and the natural environment.

The environmental crisis has necessitated philosophy, religious thoughts, and socio-cultural worldviews to rethink their past for ecological insights to overcome the crisis. Among the systems of thought that has rethought its heritage for ecological gems is Islam. Islam as a way of life of peace has a contribution to make in protecting the earth. This paper uses an analytic method to examine the eco-heritage of Islamic thought. It is concern with analysis. It will break open aspects of Islamic teachings and their import for environmental preservation in Nigeria. Does the human person have obligation to the earth or his obligations are to only human persons? The objective or goal of the paper is to show that Islam and Islamic thought is environmentally friendly. And so it can serve environmental protection. It is in the light of this that the paper concludes that Islamic thought has a contribution to make to environmental preservation.

It ought to be realized that no one solution can solve the myriads of problems that humans and natural disasters have produced in the Nigerian

environment. It is required by the fact of eco-pragmatism that only a combination of various wisdom systems and solutions from them can abate the environmental crisis. This fact is clearly acknowledged by many authors. One of such authors is Francis (2015) who enunciates that:

Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality. If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. p. 38

The central thesis of this paper is that Islam and Islamic thought obligate Muslims and others to act and function for environmental preservation and protection. This implies that environmental preservation and protection is not an optional duty or responsibility on the part of human persons. The human person does not have an option in the matter. The paper argues that it should not even be subject to debate. Whether directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, there are indicative principles in the Qur'an that serve ecological harmony and stewardship. In recent years, Muslim writers such as Foltz (2006) have affirmed that Islam is an ecologically oriented religion. It is true that traditionally when legal scholars and philosophers addressed issues of the natural world their central concern was with issues of social justice, but this has shifted. For example the Iranian American philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr as cited by Foltz (2006) thinks there is a connection between western spiritual and environmental crisis that begun since the 1950s and even anticipated Lynn White's arguments in 1967 that the environmental crisis is a moral crisis of moral deprivation.

Conceptual Clarifications

Islam is a global religion that emerged from the sandy desert of western Arabia in the seventh century. According to Islamic sources, in the year 610 the prophet Muhammad at the age of forty began to receive messages from God through the angel Gabriel. The revelations that Muhammad received until his death are gathered and collected into the holy book of Muslims, called the Qur'an. It is generally understood that the word, Islam comes from the Arabic term meaning *salaam* which means peace and well-being (Stoutzenberger 2011). Stoutzenberger (2011) notes further that this peace comes from total surrender to God and God's will. Islam can be considered to be the oldest and at the same time the youngest religion according to adherents of the religion depending on how this is understood (Stoutzenberger 2011). The first person to surrender to God is Adam and Eve and that makes it the oldest religion; but yet at same time the total story had either being corrupted or not fully received by the earlier messengers (Stoutzenberger 2011). Muslims say that this is why God decided to finally speak to Muhammad the final prophet and from the revelations God gave him emerged Islam (Stoutzenberger

2011). The religion of Islam formally began in 622 CE in Medina (Stoutzenberger 2011). The Qu'ran which is believed by Muslims to have been revealed to Muhammad by God is the foundation of Islam (Stoutzenberger 2011). Together with the Qu'ran is the *Hadith*, the sayings of the prophet. There are teachings revealed in all these that form the basis of Islamic environmental ethics.

The phrase Islamic environmental ethics is used here to refer to environmental ethics that is informed by Koranic teachings. But before one can understand Islamic environmental ethics, it is important to understand environmental ethics. It is imperative here to decipher the meaning of the environment. The environment as defined by Micheals (2004) is “the sum of all external conditions and influences affecting the development and life of organisms” (p. 71). Environment is whatever surrounds a thing or entity. You can speak of the home environment, the family environment, the business environment, the school environment, etc. This is the context or situations in which those entities are located and situated. The natural environment refers to the air, the water, the soil, plants, trees, mountains, oceans, seas, human beings, etc. The understanding of environment here is not limited to nature or the natural world. Humans are part of the environment and constitute the social environment. The environmental ethics presented here includes human to human ethics, and human to earth ethics. The way that humans treat themselves is also important in environmental ethics as it also affects or can degrade the earthsphere. Environmental ethics deals with issues of right and wrong with regard to human behaviours to other humans and the non-human world. The way humans treat their fellow humans and the natural world is a question of ethics and morality. While it is true that the non-human world cannot be held accountable and responsible, yet humans can be held accountable for their behaviours. Maltreatments of animals, abuse of natural resources such as water, air, mountains or polluting the environment is unethical and unacceptable. Environmental ethics deals with these issues. When it comes to the way that humans treat their fellow humans and the natural world, what does Islamic religion and philosophy require of human persons? This is what Islamic environmental ethics concerns itself with.

Islamic environmental ethics is aimed also at combating environmental problems in Nigeria and elsewhere. Some environmental problems have been enumerated in this paper. Whatever constitutes an obstacle or impede human-earth flourishing can be considered to be an environmental problem. Humans are to live in friendly relationship with nature. They are to be concerned about the well-being of the natural world. Whatever causes destruction and damage to humans and the natural environment such as pollution, gas flaring, misuse of energy sources, unsustainable depletion of natural resources are all environmental problems and immoral.

The Environmental Problems in Nigeria

There is hardly any region or area in Nigeria that is unaffected by environmental problems. The northern part of Nigeria is adversely affected by desertification. It is recorded that the Sahara Desert is encroaching every year deeper into the country. There where areas in the North that were once filled with grassland or some other forms of vegetation that are now totally barren. This not

only produces health hazards, people's farmlands and cattle have been covered with sands or no grass for the cattle to graze. The search and the struggle for pasture for cattle have often caused conflicts between farmers and cattle headers.

Another serious environmental problem that Nigeria has faced is soil erosion especially in the eastern part of the country. Soil erosion have taken away villages, destroyed roads, endangered people's livelihood, and destroyed the habitations of animals and other species. While soil erosion in the beginning may be due to nature, it is at times as a result of human activities. It can come from human construction of roads and buildings or other facilities.

Nigeria's Niger Delta also is not free from environmental problems. This is one of the regions that have experienced more devastating environmental problems than others. More than fifty years of oil exploration in the region has polluted and destroyed the environment. Gas flaring is a constant daily occurrence in many places in the region. The land has been polluted with oil from oil spillage and other oil related activities. The Niger Delta is one of the most polluted regions in the whole world. The United Nations Environment Programme (2011) found that oil exploration and drilling activities have polluted the lands, streams, and livelihood sources of the people of Ogoni land. The report also affirms that it will take more than 25 years to remediate the environmental harm that has been caused in the region. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria (2006) noted that among the environmental problems in the Niger Delta are gas flaring, oil spillage, oil pollution and all these have destroyed people's farmland, economic crops, soil fertility and people's means of subsistence and livelihood together with precipitating criminal forces.

Industrialization, rural-urban drift, and urbanization have also produced their own set of environmental problems in the western region of the country. Cities like Ibadan, Ilorin, and Lagos are highly congested. In these cities and many others in Nigeria people live in slums, ghettos, and even under bridges and public places. The noise pollution coming from factories and vehicles in these cities is horrible. The mental and physical health of many people is in danger. These cities are equally filled with crime and violence. There are also the problems of urban waste and disposal.

It should be noted that in a short paper such as this one that entire environmental problems in Nigeria cannot be enumerated for want of space. The above suffice as a highlight of some of the environmental problems in the country. The various environmental problems that have bedeviled the country ranging from air pollution in the Nigeria city, climate change, noise pollution, the problem of solid waste, poverty, water pollution and many others have been clearly documented by such authors as Uchegbu (2002), Oyeshola (2008), Okaba (2015), Akporhonor (2014) and Adewusi (2011).

Islamic Environmental Ethics

The origin and history of Islam will not be the pre-occupation here. A central place to enter into the heart of Islam is to examine its Five Pillars. The Five Pillars of Islam are: (1) the "profession of faith" ("there is no god, but God; Muhammad is God's prophet"), (2) "prayer five times a day", (3) "giving alms to the poor", (4) "month-long fasting during daylight hours of Ramadan," and (5)

“Pilgrimage to Mecca once a lifetime” (Stoutzenberger 2011, p. 124). Without the Five Pillars there is no Islam and there is no Islamic ethics.

Each of the pillars on surface level may seem to carry no ecological implications for human behaviour with regard to the environment. But when they are examined in depth it will be clearly established that they have important ecological implications. Three of the above among the others are very important to consider here. They are the one on the unity of God, giving alms and fasting. In Islamic thought, God is one and undivided. Surah 2: 163 proclaims that: “And your God is one God, There is no God but him, the most Gracious, the most Merciful.” Hill and Madges (2002) write of the oneness of Allah that:

The oneness of Allah grounds the oneness of humanity. All humankind constitutes by calling if not by achieved fact, one single *Ummah*, one human community....Islam radically affirms the equal value and rights of all. Racism is for Islam a sin that offends the unity of humanity and the unity of God. p. 240

As God is acknowledged, he is acknowledged as the creator of humans and the entire universe. Creation and all creatures are God’s handiwork. He brought them into being and keeps them in being through his providential care. Creation is not purposeless. Islam affirms nature or the natural world which it sees as not corrupt or depraved (Coward 2010). Citing Al Faruqi, Coward (2010) notes that the world is not evil rather it is the people who abuse it who are evil. Humans have been placed here on earth to be fruitful, to make use of the things of nature but in accordance with God’s will and purpose (Coward 2010). There are many things that could be said of nature. Nature worships God and reveals his “potentialities and attributes”, nature is a revelator of God’s goodness and majesty, nature has been given for human persons to guard and protect not devastate (Coward 2010). An Islamic word that clearly reveals the role of humans on earth is that the human is a “Khalifa,” steward and caretaker (Coward 2010). Whatever causes harm to humans and other creatures is unacceptable. This includes all the environmental problems and the things that precipitate the environmental problems that have been tersely outlined above.

As noted above, the foundational belief in Islam is that God is the Creator of all that exists. The implication of this is that nature is not self-existent. Nature was created by Allah. The universe is an organized, purposeful and ordered universe. Allah created a harmonious, balanced and peaceful universe. Among God’s creatures the human person has a high place of honour and endowed with ability to know the creator. Take a critical look at the statement below:

Islam’s approach to nature is conditioned by the fact that Islam is life affirming and world affirming. The world was created by God as the place within which humans can function as faithful servants. The human role is to work to shape the world into the pattern that God reveals in the Qur’an. In contrast to some ascetic religious traditions, Islam does not see nature as corrupted or discontinuous with God’s purpose”. (Coward 2010, p. 101)

Nature is something good and the world is not an evil place to be shunned and avoided. A closer look at some verses from the Qur'an reveals how nature or creation is perceived. Below are some verses from the Qur'an:

Our Lord! You have created all this not for nothing! Glory to you!
(3:19)

Our Lord is He who gave to each thing its form and nature and further gave it guidance. (20:50)

To God belong the East and the West; whithersoever you turn there is the presence of God. For God is All-pervading, All-Knowing. (2:115).

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are indeed signs for men of understanding. (3:190)

And the earth has He spread out for all living beings, with fruits thereon, and palm trees with sheathed clusters (of dates) and grain growing tall on its stalks, and sweet-smelling plants. (6:99)

We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within their own souls, until it is clear to them that He is the Real. (41:53)

And verily in cattle will you find an instructive Sign. For what is within their bodies, between excretions and blood, we produce, for your drink, milk, pure and agreeable to those who drink it. (16:66)

The sun and the moon follow courses exactly computed. And the herbs and the trees-both alike bow in adoration. And the firmament has he raised high and He has set up the balance of justice. In order that you may not transgress due balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance. (41:11)

The above shows that creation comes from God. The creator has a purpose and creation is ordered. Creation is not dysfunctional or in disarray. There is an order in the universe that human persons need to follow and respect. It is when human persons do not respect this order that there are bound to be environmental problems. The idea that nature is ordered and purposeful is also deeply embedded in Catholic philosophical thought following the Thomistic tradition.

Another important point to note is that through nature, God is revealed. The idea that nature reveals God and God can be seen through nature is prominent idea in scholastic and medieval philosophy. God did not leave human persons without aid to know him. As it is:

Nature and the Qur'an are placed before humans as twin acts of God's self-revelation. But for Islam the relationship between the two "books" is not equal. It is only through the revelation of the Qur'an that humans can learn to "read" the revelation present in themselves and in nature. Those who abuse nature to serve their own selfish desires misunderstand themselves, nature, and the mutual relationship between humans and nature, because they

have not heard and accepted the words of the Qur'an. (Coward 2010, p. 102)

It is also significant to note that while Qur'anic verses could be used to argue for healthy stewardship of nature before God, some scholars says they could also be used to exploit the earth. Fazlur Raman as cited by Callicott (1994) opines that: "Nature exists for man to exploit for his own ends, while the end of man himself is nothing else but to serve God, to be grateful to him, and to worship him alone. The utility, serviceability, and exploitability of nature are spoken of in many verses" (p. 30). Callicott (1994) cites a consortium of Saudi Arabian scholars who confirms Raman's observation that: "the relation between man and universe, as defined and clarified in the 'Glorious Quran'; is A relationship of utilization, development, and subjugation for man's benefit and for the fulfillment of his interests" (p. 30).

Like other religions and systems of thought that emerged from the Middle East, such as Judaism and Christianity, there is an ambivalent and ambiguous heritage in Islam. The Judeo-Christian tradition often cites Genesis 1:28 that states man is given power to subdue or have dominion over the earth. This has been interpreted to mean domination. Today, many contemporary biblical scholars have called for a new scriptural hermeneutics that is ecologically friendly. Both philosophers and religious scholars need to do a new hermeneutics of sacred texts. Commenting on these ideas he rightly notes that: "Man's role as viceroy or regent does not warrant his ruthless tyranny over an enslaved nature world –at least, not necessarily. Man's dominion over the earth might be benign, rather than wantonly destructive" (Callicott 1994, p. 31). He cites the Pakistani geographer and first contemporary Islamic scholar, Iqtidar H Zaidi who argued that man has an obligation of stewardship towards nature not one of mastery. According to Zaidi:

There are a number of verses in the Quran which make it abundantly clear that God has created the earth for the service of man, but at the same time man is also constantly reminded that the earth, whatsoever is on its surface, in its interior, and in its atmosphere, belongs to Almighty Allah, so that He gives all the individual human beings (as his vice-regents), without any distinction or discrimination, the right of ownership of the natural resources for the purpose of their utilization and development. For example, 'Unto Allah (belongeth) whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; and whether ye make known what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will bring you to account for it. He will forgive whom He will and He will punish whom He will. Allah is able to do all things.' (Callicott 1994, 31)

The fact that Islam calls for benevolent stewardship is corroborated by the Saudi environmental philosopher Mawil Y Izzi Deen. Deen as cited by Callicott says that: "the duty of vice-regency [is] so onerous and burdensome that no other creature would accept it: 'Lo We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. and man assumes it' (Surah 33:72)" (Callicott 1994, 31). Very often, Islam's otherworldly nature influences people's attitude to the earth. The earth is essentially seen as a temporary place as this is not our true home.

Islam here seems to have been influenced by the Greco-Christian, not the older, earthier Hebrew alternative. Like Christianity, Islam is definitely an otherworldly religion. The earth is a temporary abode for man. After death, individuals will be judged. Those who have believed in Allah and the Quran as His word, and who have kept His laws and done good deeds will be sent to paradise—equated with the Garden(s) of Eden. Those who have not submitted (Islam means “submission”)—that is, believed in the truth of Quran, which constantly declares itself to be the true word of God and insists that it must be believed – and those who have not lived according to quranic dictates and behaved justly and generously will be consigned to Hell. (Callicott 1994, 33)

The point that is being made here is that the earth is seen as a temporary place by Muslims. But this does not imply it can be abused, misused, and degraded. Human responsibility is to protect the earth and without humans living well here on earth they cannot achieve paradise. The above and the following statement of Callicott should not be construed to mean that Islam does not emphasize environmental responsibility.

The picture of paradise in the Quran is quite detailed. It is a lush green garden, with flowing streams of water, honey, and milk, and shade trees laden with fruit. After death, the faithful and righteous will dwell there eternally, finely attired, ornamented with bracelets and jewels, lounging on brocade pillows and fine carpets, served by good-looking boys, and serviced by beautiful dark-eyed virgins. Hell, by contrast, is full of fire and brimstone, and the damned are tormented incessantly by devils and demons. Lost in the millennium between the sixth century B.C.E and the seventh century C.E. is the Pythagorean-platonic-Christian idea that it is an unphysical psyche that lives on after death and enjoys an afterlife of spiritual and/or intellectual bliss. In the Quran, life after death is consistently portrayed in a physical, sensual fashion. (Callicott 1994, 33)

This attitude as in Christianity is often a perilous attitude. Like in Christianity, its understanding in some circles as teaching rapture often makes the Christian to be in haste to abandon this world. It is important for religious people to understand that the Creator made the world so that human persons would inhabit the earth and make it a better place. Callicott is right in affirming that: “Even though the earth is only a temporary abode for man, and all things are created for man’s sake and subjected to man, man is very much a creature of Allah and therefore shares the lot of other creatures-at last, while living on earth” (Callicott 1994, 33). Man is related to the earth and has a role on the earth.

The following verses from the Qur’an are helpful in understanding the place of the human person in the environment:

Thus have We made animals subject to you, that ye may be grateful. (22:36)

He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for His Guidance to you and proclaim the good news to all who do right. (22:37)

... and that We have subjected them to men's will, so that some of them they may use for riding and some of them they may eat. And they have (other) profits from them (besides), and they get (milk) to drink. Will they not then be grateful? (36:72-3)

Seest thou not that Allah has made subject to you (men) all that is on the earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky (rain) from falling on the earth except by His leave: for Allah is Most Kind and Most Merciful to man. (22:65)

It is He Who hath made you (His) agents, inheritors of the earth: He hath raised you in ranks, some above others: that He may try you in the gifts He hath given you: for thy Lord is quick in punishment: yet He is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (6:165)

O ye people! Adore your Guardian-Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that ye may have the chance to learn righteousness; Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from the heavens; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; then set not up rivals unto Allah when ye know (the truth). (2:21-22)

The human person is part of the environment. It is important then to discuss the place of the human person in the environment. You cannot speak of the environment without speaking of the human person. The natural environment is incomplete without the socio-cultural and economic-political environment. It makes no sense to belittle the place of the human person in the environment, for it is the human person that will take responsibility to keep and care for the environment. Not even a great eco-centric philosopher, Holmes Rolston III will deny that humans have a unique place in the cosmos. The origin of human life is something unique and Homo sapiens are a wise and ethical being for responsibility is placed on the human persons to care for the earth (Rolston 1995, 2-3).

The human person was placed on the earth for a particular purpose. Even when the purpose of the human person is viewed from an anthropocentric perspective, the moral and ethical life of the human person can either have a positive or negative impact on the environment. Ahmad (2010) argues that: "realization of ethical and moral behaviour, according to Islamic scripture, is the core issue for which the ultimate Creator of humankind sent messengers," "so that human beings should act virtuously and fight against evil ways of doing things" (p.93). When human beings live uprightly, justly, and generously the resources of the earth will be equitably shared, it will put an end to hunger, and reduce the human pressure on the earth. There will be less destruction of the oceans, forests, wilderness, and defenseless peoples. A life of sharing will put less pressure on the resources of the earth. Imagine the enormous amount of resources hoarded by wealthy citizens of the world while at the same time many are suffering from

starvation. Islamic teaching and practice discourages the use of drugs and alcohol. Alcohol and drugs do not only harm human life they indirectly harm the natural environment. Alcohol and drugs primordially come from trees and plants, and so the more alcohol and drugs are taken the more trees and plants are brought down. Financial crimes deprive people of their due and right benefits and put those financial resources into the hands of a few people while the majority of people are suffering. The Qur'an clearly identifies that human persons are the highest of God's creature. They have been given responsibility to take care of the earth. They are earth keepers. Wise and prudent use of the resources of the earth is an obligation that has been placed upon human persons. It is right to argue that:

Environmental balance and purity are linked directly, in the Islamic world view, with the people's way of living. Honest and fair behaviour of individuals lead to a healthy environment, ecological balance, and moderation in their lifestyles. Misuse of resources and the practice of injustice and inequity invite ecological and environmental crises and catastrophes. (Ahmad 2010, 93)

Economic behaviour of human persons and capitalist corporations certainly has an impact on the environment. Ahmad notes for instance that the developing world is encouraged to double their exports, yet this will not make an enormous impact on their economies (Ahmad 2010, p.94). Their poverty level remains drastically the same as their products are priced very low and they are compelled to damage their environment in order to produce more raw materials for the developed world (Ahmad 2010, p.94), for instance Brazil is facing an environmental crisis thanks to the globalization of her economy, in Madagascar the forest there is vanishing rapidly, the amount of office materials thrown away in the developed world every year end up doing great damage to the environment (Ahmad 2010, p.94).

The place of the human person in the environment should not be neglected. Most environmental problems apart from natural ones are offshoots of social and cultural problems. Permit a long statement from Ahmad which is quite helpful here:

The human being remains the key player and central actor in the contemporary environmental discourse. It reinforces the view that not only our material needs but also our ethical and moral vision have direct relevance in one's encountering the environment. A human's physical, mental, emotional, cultural, and social needs are directly related to ethical values. Since the capitalist society and economy has its philosophical foundations in individualism, utilitarianism, and materialism, its business ethics is also a reflection of these principles. Their application in society consequently causes imbalance and inequalities.

Ethics and morality, in the context of the Islamic world view, remain the basic and primary categories. The human being, in the Islamic scheme of life, is not a mere social animal; "human being" is an ethically and morally responsible being. For instance, Islam requires that uprightness, fairness, and truthfulness be observed by the individual, not only in personal matters, but in

his or her socio-economic conduct, irrespective of space and time. (Ahmad 2010, p.96-97)

The just mentioned writer avers further that:

Referring to the observable environmental phenomenon with which humans, whether in deserts or in cosmopolitan cities, are familiar, the Qur'an invites 'human beings' to reflect and to use tools of reasons in finding out how wind carries clouds with massive amounts of water to far-off places in order to give new life to barren lands. Frequent references to the environment including water, air, and land, motivates the human mind to understand and analyze the ecological systems in the universe. It also leads the human imagination to draw lessons from the observable effects of rain on dead land, and to visualize how humankind will be resurrected one day to face a moral and ethical judgment. (Ahmad 2010, 97)

The fact is that humankind is called to be philosophic in living in the world. Human persons should think critically and use their rationality in appreciating and valuing the beauty in the world. In the Qur'an humankind is called to show love, care and kindness towards creation. Commenting on Qur'an *al-An'am* 6:100 that encourages humans to see and reflect on the creator's work in sending down the rain, making things grow, and making things to produce fruits, Ahmad is of the view that there is an environmental message here that implies that the response of humankind to the Creator's work is to be responsible, reflect and have a "pro-active attitude with ecological consciousness" (Ahmad 2010, p.98). Human persons are also encouraged to prudently enjoy God's creation and they should not be excessive or extravagant for humankind should be balanced and moderate in all things (Ahmad 2010, p.98). Humankind is to receive creation in thankfulness and gratitude and it should be understood that "lavish and extravagant use of resources is regarded as unthankful attitude" and so the Qur'an discourages lavish and wasteful use of natural resources (Ahmad 2010, p.98).

The Islamic position is that humankind has been entrusted with creation by the Creator. Ahmad argues that from the Qur'an inequitable and unjust distribution of resources is part of what is responsible for the environmental crisis. It is in the light of this that humankind is to have an ethical and responsible attitude in consumption (Ahmad 2010, p.98). It is noteworthy that the prophet Mohammad enunciated that when one makes an ablution by the bank of a river, the person is not to wash face, hands, and other parts of the body more than three times. The implication of this is that access to abundant resources does not mean they should be wasted rather humanity should act with responsibility, moral constraint and austerity (Ahmad 2010, 99). The human person has an obligation and responsibility to preserve and care for the environment. The prophets encouraged his followers to plant trees even when the world is coming to an end. It is of note that when sending out troops the prophets mandated them not to cut down trees, burn orchards, or plunder farmlands. One of the sayings of the prophet is that believers should not pollute streams, lakes, and water bodies. They are not expected to throw human waste and other impurities into water bodies. Ahmad cites a saying (*hadith*) of the

prophet that affirms that “if a person kills a sparrow unnecessarily, he will be questioned for it on the day of judgement.” (Ahmad 2010, p.99). To say or write that Islam is not environmentally friendly will not be valid. Islam could be considered one of the most ecologically and environmentally benign religion.

Combating Nigerian Environmental Problems through Islamic Environmental Ethics

Perhaps the place to begin applying the eco-ethical values of Islam to Nigeria is to note right away that Islam requires total surrender to the almighty and is equally a total way of life (Ferguson 2010). As Ferguson (2010) and many other authors know the sacred and the secular intermingle in Islam and so Islamic values ought to inform all aspects of life and worldviews. How can the environmental ethics of Islam contribute to resolving the environmental crisis in Nigeria? Nigerians of all walks of life, not just Muslims need to come to the vital recognition that the entire Nigerian environment and its resources comes from the creator. The natural resources that exist in the land of Nigeria were not put there by any human person. They were put there by the creator. They are gifts of nature. Since they gifts of nature they are gifts to everyone not just a few people. These natural resources have to be used for the betterment of all Nigerians. All may certainly not belong to the same economic strata in the land, but all are enjoined to a life of sharing of resources as demanded by Islamic ethics. If at least many Nigerians will accept this challenge of sharing it will help to ameliorate the problem of poverty and hunger in the land. It is not just sharing that is called for but people should use their wealth to empower others who in turn will become economically viable and empower others. As people are empowered they will learn sustainable ways to make use of the resources of the earth. Through the Islamic act of fasting they will learn prudence management skills and moderation in making use of the things of nature.

In a land like Nigeria, the message of stewardship can never be over-estimated. Nigerians cannot use the resources of the country be they manmade or natural as they like. They are stewards over these resources. Nature is not to be abused but to be protected. This is why Nigerians must shun all that pollutes and degrades the land. Many of these have been mentioned above.

Islamic environmental ethics is important to resolving the Nigerian environmental crisis. If the values mentioned above that are equally shared by other religious philosophies, are thoroughly practiced, they can help in protecting the environment. Nigerians need to imbibe the perspective that they are stewards not controllers or owners of the Nigerian landmark and its resources. The implication of this is that they must subject themselves to discipline. This is one of the things that the Ramadan fast teaches. Nigerians are not to make use of the Nigerian environment to the extent of depleting it and endangering other creatures in the environment. They are to shun a consumerist lifestyle that encourages more consumption of resources in the name of enjoying God’s creatures. There is also a lesson to be learnt from the mandate of giving to others. The goods and resources in the Nigerian land space are the common heritage of all Nigerians. No matter how wealthy you are, you should not see the riches and wealth you have as solely yours or simply your handiwork. They were given to you by the almighty Allah so that you will share his goodness especially with the poor, the disadvantaged and the

oppressed. There are thousands of Nigerians who are homeless without a habitation. There are thousands of Nigerians who have no source of daily livelihood. Rich and wealthy Nigerians are to come to their succor and comfort. Kemmerer (2012) notes that people need to recognize the communal ownership of all resources and that *Zakat* requires tending and serving all who are in need including animals, plants and other things in the environment. The responsibility of *zakat* then is not just a question of giving money to the poor. The money should be used to uplift and upgrade their condition. Money is equally to be used to protect the earth from exploitation and damage.

Concluding Reflection

In Nigeria, if these Islamic principles outlined thus far are put into place, it should help Muslims and others to walk in solidarity, collaboration and cooperation to foster every form of activity such as environmental sanitation, hygiene, resolution of conflict, planting of trees, environmental education, fostering of a communalistic lifestyle, sharing of resources, conquering greed, gluttony and avarice, etc. that protect humans and the earth.

All religions and philosophical systems have a role to play in abating the environmental crisis. It is in this vain that insights from Islam have been presented above. It is hoped and believed that if these ecological insights are sincerely pursued, it will help in ameliorating the environmental problems in Nigeria. It should be realized that unless action is taken, no problem or environmental problem can be solved. The goal of this paper was not to provide technical or scientific solution to the environmental problems in Nigeria. The goal was to argue that environmental insights from Islam in dialogue with other religious philosophies can be a driving force that can inspire in working for a better environment.

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