
THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN COMBATING GLOBAL Warming in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The harmony created by God between mankind and the environment was disrupted as a result of conflicts which arose between man and the environment. Lots of people in different parts of the world are experiencing increased hardship due to global warming because of the negligence and blunt refusal of human being to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment. This research uses phenomenological method to assess the specific practices of man and how it has affected the world through global warming crises which has deterred socio-economic development and inflict untold hardship on man. The paper establishes the role of the church in combating global warming and made recommendations that there is the need for inter- religious co-operation approach strategies in combating global warming.

Introduction

The Christian religion as practised is more than simply a belief in a transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. It is rather an orientation of the cosmos plan and the role of the church. Religion in its broadest sense is a means whereby humans recognized the limitations of phenomenal reality which undertake specific practices to effect self-transformation and community cohesion. This paper assesses these specific practices and how it affected the world through global warming crises which has deterred socio-economic development, inflicted untold hardship on man and has become a topical issue of serious concern the world over. It uses the work of other authors, observations and media report on global warming as a tool. The paper establishes the role of the church in combating global warming and emphasized on the need for all

hands to be on deck in fighting global warming by expressing respect and care for the earth, air, soil and seek justice for biodiversity. The church thus, is referred to those ritual practices, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in the world of meaning and responsibility, transformation and celebration (Grim and Tukker, 2009).

The church is concerned as an expert in humanity to call attention to the relationship between the Creator, humans and the created order of the world. The world is not the product of any necessity; blind fate or chance but proceeds from the free will of God. God made human beings to share in his being, intelligence and goodness.

Then God said, "And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals, domestic and wild, large and small". So, God created human beings making them to be like himself. He created them male and female."I am putting you in charge of all the fish, the birds and all the wild animals .I have provided all kind of grains and all kind of fruits for you to eat.....(Genesis 1:26-29).

This harmony created by God between mankind and the environment was disrupted. Lots of people in different parts of the world are experiencing increased hardship because of this disruption, negligence and the refusal of man to exercise responsible stewardship over the environment. Man misunderstood God putting him in charge and exploited the environment out of his desire to exercise absolute dominion over the earth.

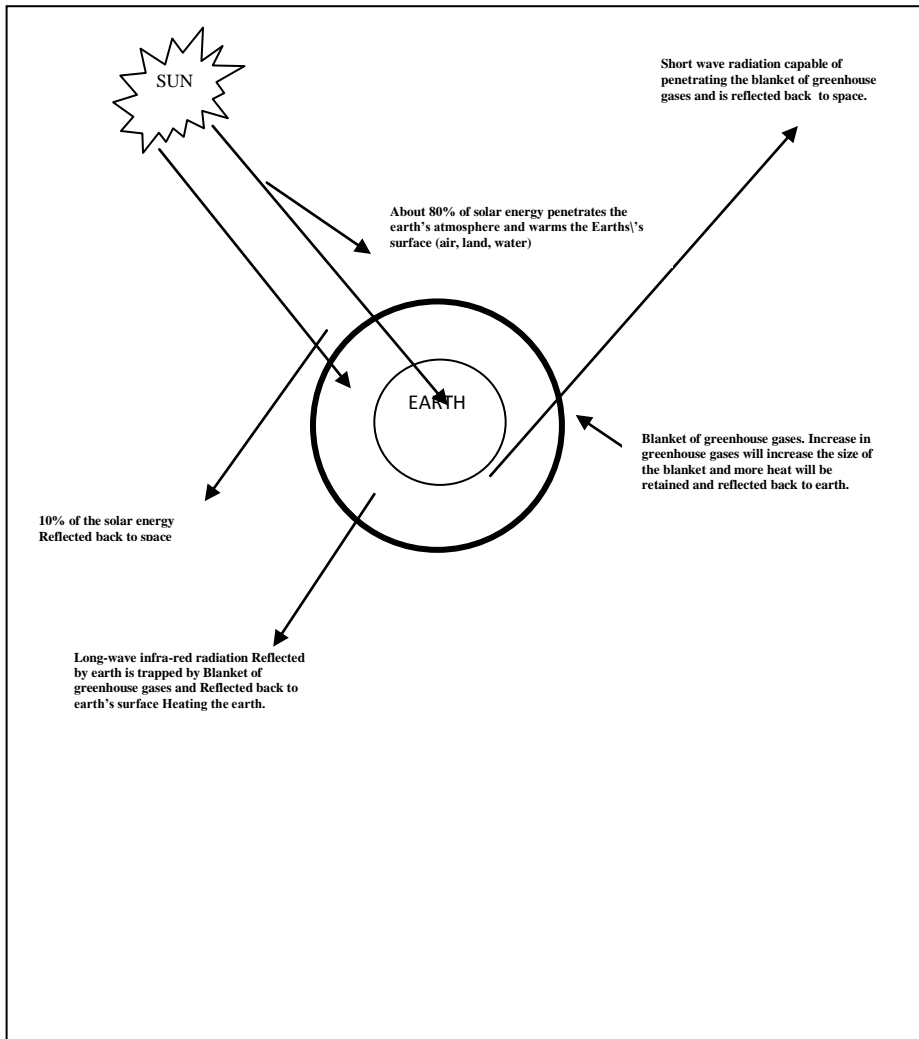
According to Aremu (2008), the earth harbours about 9 billion people, all deriving their basic needs such as air, water, food, clothing and shelter from it. In the process of getting all these daily basic things, human beings create and destroy their environment. This is seen in the way the earth's land is changing, through the air, water, vegetation, the soil and so on to the point that these basic life elements are of great concerned. In the cause of human activities, the earth atmosphere is changing. With modern technology leading to the production of vehicles and the general industrial revolution, other anthropogenic activities and natural occurrence, more carbon dioxide is thrown into the atmosphere. This trap energy and delays it returns to space leading to global warming.

The Concept of Global Warming

One of the most current nagging problems facing human lives is environmental problems and particularly the crises of global warming. These problems have been of topical issues of serious concern the world over, with everyone realizing that the world in which we live is gradually losing its capacity to sustain life. It is not untrue to say that global warming is the greatest crises ever faced

collectively by mankind in both developed and the developing nations of the world.

Global warming is referred to the average increase in the earth's surface temperature due to the release of greenhouse gases (GHG) from the industrial activities of man and the natural depletion of the ozone layer (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2005). Naturally, the earth warms and cools itself. The temperature of the sun is about 6000°C and about 83% of the solar energy penetrates to the earth's atmosphere and warm the earth's surface. About 10% of the solar energy is reflected back to space to prevent overhauling of the earth's surface, while the earth retains some heat energy known as "long wave infra-red" essential for the evolution of life on earth (Elliot, 1997). It has been calculated that without this heat, the average temperatures would have been between 17°C and 23°C and that the actual average temperature of the earth's surface is $+15^{\circ}\text{C}$ (Idodo, 2011). The retention of this heat is caused by oxides of carbon, sulphur, nitrogen, methane, ozone and water vapour. These gases in combination with water vapour form a blanket of gases referred to as "Greenhouse gases" (GHG) which surrounds the earth. These gases absorb and retain heat (long wave infra-red) and reflect the heat back to the earth's surface. The greenhouse effect is therefore, a natural feature of warming the earth's surface to keep the average temperature of the earth at 15°C but when there is a rise in temperature, it results to global warming.



Source: Idodo, 2011

Causes of Global Warming

The global warming crises all started from the Industrial Revolution of the 1800, in Britain when the establishment of industries took centre stage. Rapid rise in industrialization has led to an increase in production of motor vehicles and aeroplanes for transportation, different machines for various purposes,

massive construction of roads and railway lines, large scale farming etc. These all lead to deforestation, bush burning, crude oil exploration and exploitation, combustion of fossil fuels. Each year, according to Rhaji (2012), 120,000 sq km of forest is lost as follows:

- 45% sq km of land to shifting cultivation.
- 15% sq km of forest to commercial farming and grazing.
- 15% sq km of land to road construction and dams.
- 10% sq km of land to forest product for furniture.
- 10% sq km of forest to bush burning.

On the earth, the major natural greenhouse gases (GHG) that causes global warming according to Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC, 2013) include:

- Carbon dioxide (CO_2).
- Carbon monoxide (CO).
- Methane (CH_4).
- Ozone (O_3).
- Sulphur dioxide (SO_2), Nitrogen dioxide and Nitrous oxide.
- Exhaust emission from Vehicles and Air Crafts.
- Water vapour.

The Effect of Global Warming

Greenhouse gases (GHG) restrict the heat from the surface of the earth from reflecting back to space. Since 1900, the global temperature has risen by 0.8°C (Koriecha, 2010). The rise in global temperature according to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, (2005); Lafferriere, (1994); United States National Agency of Sciences, (2009); United Kingdom Environmental Agency, (2012) can lead to the following:

- Rise in sea level.
- Salt water intrusion.
- Heavy rains and flooding.
- Melting of the Ice caps.
- Hurricanes.
- Ill-health in human.
- Thermal inversion.
- Desertification.
- Drying up of Inland and water bodies.

The Church and Global Warming

Many churches, and religious institutions including church leaders, are today engaged in the movement to tackle the problems of global warming and other environmental crises. For instance, the Catholic Church activists have found

support in the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi, who understood he live in a world charged with divine life, in a sacramental world. He celebrated the beauty and diversity of creation through his prayers and preaching. St. Francis preaches in favour of both living and non-living things such as water, rocks, flowers, birds and other creation (Joseph, 2010). The global warming problem is viewed by Pope John Paul II as an environmental moral crisis for all humanity and call for a combined effort with the Orthodox, Protestants and Pentecostal denominations to combat it, and that “the environment is ethically significant in its own right”. Thus, all members and groups in the human family whether they have faith or not, have responsibilities in combating global warming. Pope Benedict XVI while celebrating the World Day of Peace entitled “if you want to cultivate peace, protect creation”, emphasized that the environment must be seen as God’s gift to mankind, and that man, has a moral duty to exercise responsible stewardship over all creation; to care for it, and to cultivate it as commanded in Genesis 1:27-29. Pope Benedict pointed out that one of the ways of combating global warming is to conscientise people to see the need to consider the fact that every economic decision has a moral consequence, and thus, show increased respect for the environment. The Pope call for an urgent moral need for a renewed sense of moral rectitude, inter-generational solidarity and to find institutional and legal means of regulating the exploitation of nature thereby strengthens the linkage between combating global warming, climate change and overcoming poverty.

The Catholic Church have practically taking steps in their effort to combat global warming through tree planting campaign during her season of lent. For instance, most catholic diocese in Nigeria inaugurated a Commission on the Care of the Environment and mandated it to organise tree planting campaign and seminars to create awareness on global warming. Specifically, Catholic Women Organization (C .W. O) of Nigeria, in conjunction with the Commission on Care of the Environment, Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, recently planted Jathrophat trees in ungwana musa , Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, as part of her global warming campaign strategies.

The sacramental understanding of the universe is particularly strong among Eastern Orthodox Christians. The “Green Patriarch” Bartholomew I is renowned for declaring that “crime against the natural world is a sin” (Joseph, 2010). He has organised numerous trips on a ship to convince religious, scientific and political leaders to combat global warming and create environmental protection initiative. The “mainline” or socially engaged protestant denominations have issued numerous statements and resolution all over the world and conducted religious outreach on combating global warming dating back several decades (Joseph, 2010). More recently, the politically influential Evangelical denomination has begun to articulate their understanding

of global warming and environmental ethics, which some of them describe as “creation care”.

The United Methodist church, resolved that all her members should practically reduce human –related outputs of green house gases through driving more fuel efficient cars, less use of energy by turning off light not in use and the use of better insulators in homes to conserve heat and air conditions. It further resolved that members should make an effort to learn about human production and release of greenhouse gases and evaluate their own lifestyles to identify areas where reductions in production and release of greenhouse gases can be made.

The World Council of Churches (W.C.C.), a combination of a worldwide fellowship of 349 churches seeking unity, common witness and Christian service, is not left out in the fight to combat global warming and other environmental crisis (Wotogbe, 2003).The council emphasized that “the church has a responsibility towards creation”, and that the responsibility has to be exercised in the public life, to protect the earth, water and air as a gifts of God creator as instructed in Jeremiah 14: 2-7 and Revelation 22:1-4 .It was meant for everyone above all, to save mankind from the danger of self destruction.

The council acknowledges that as the earth and all its inhabitants face the crises of global warming and other unprecedented ecological crises, there is mass suffering and destruction for many. In a nutshell, to combat global warming, it must begin with decisions on the part of individuals, families and communities, both at national and international level.”We are all responsible for the protection and care of the earth’s environment. This responsibility knows no boundaries”. It calls for communities at her own level, different groups in civil society and Non-governmental organizations which work with determination and generosity to combat global warming by spreading the gospel of ecological responsibility.

The Problems in Combating Global Warming

Despite the effort of the church in preaching that it is morally and ethically unacceptable not to protect the earth, water, soil and air; spreading the gospel of ecological responsibility, combined with the efforts of the world leaders and non-governmental organizations, global warming, continue to remain a threat to the existence of lives in the universe. The Kyoto Protocol Agreement, calls for an average reduction of 5.2% in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emission by 2010 (Cammack, 2012). However, the protocol has virtually failed to address the purpose for which it was signed. This is highly attributed to the fact that as nations emerge from poverty; they build their economic foundations on energy systems like coal, oil or natural gas, which in more ways than one contribute to greenhouse emission.

These countries like Brazil, Russia, India, China and some African countries such as South Africa –the newly industrialized powers, are chafing that a rigid

emission cuts, even that envisaged by the Kyoto protocol will not be feasible. Also, that those asking for emission cuts went through the industrialize process they are going through today. The posture of these nations is that “let us finish developing and then we can start talking about global warming and climate change”. Even though, there is a consensus that the world should try to cut its greenhouse emission by 2050, some countries like India, China and The United States of America have bluntly refused to sign the Kyoto protocol agreement to limit the level of their greenhouse emission (Idodo, 2011).

Recommendations

The paper therefore, wishes to make the following recommendations:

1. That there is the need for an inter-religious co-operation and a multi-dimensional approach and strategies in combating global warming.
2. There is the need to reconstruct affirmation about God, World, soul/body in relations to sin, evil, redemption and death with environmental consciousness.
3. The religions of the world should re-examine the elements of their sacred books, scriptures, and traditions, then, refocuses their affirmations and ethics in environmental alert terms.
4. There is the need to emphasize human obligations in every place and pursued that with express respect and care for the earth, water, air, soil and seek justice for biodiversity and mankind.
5. That religious theology should play a key role in cultural and environmental malformation by giving impetus to the rational scientific conquest of nature.
6. That all religions should preach and teach bio-moral and spiritual responsibilities for places, species and respect the evolutionary wisdom and divine activity embodied in the natural world, with theological pointers and ethical imperatives for the technological and genetic manipulations.

Conclusion

The religions of the world cannot remain indifferent to what is happening, particularly on the global warming crises, for the deterioration of anyone part of the planet affects us all. Therefore, attention should now be given to environmental reformation or an environmentally reformed religious theology. This will reinterpret basic doctrinal

themes in ways that integrate environmental insight, moral and ethical values to conceived faith of a particular religion, environmental ethics to encompass human relationship with other beings in the biosphere to utilize knowledge gained from contemporary biophysical sciences and foster a socio-religious and scientific harmony and sustainable positive responsibility in protecting the human environment, preserving biodiversity, curtailing polluting technologies, urban development, population growth and wants oriented consumerism.

Conclusively, church leaders should also work to make their own congregations more aware of the issue of global warming and create policies and practices which reduce greenhouse gas emissions from congregational infrastructure, (church building, parsonages, vehicles, etc). Finally, the church could engage her members in carrying out periodic environmental awareness campaign, encourage tree planting and discourage deforestation and bush burning.

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