



A Contextual Reading of Genesis 1: 28 in the Light of Environmental Care

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Abstract

This paper titled, "A Contextual reading of Genesis 1: 28 in the Light of Environmental Care" explores the Old Testament biblical imperative for an integral care of the environment. This is against the backdrop that misconstrued idea exists among some biblical scholars on the interpretation of Gen 1:28 with regard to the current neglect, disfigurement and destruction of nature and environment by human beings. This dangerous ideology is anchored on Christian anthropocentrism which allows for a ruthless exploitation of nature that supported western science and technology. For some scholars, the Bible in its insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in human beings. These and other related views by scholars seem to have approached the text of Gen 1:28 in total disconnect from other complementary passages like Gen 2: 5, 15 and 3:17. However, God assigns man/woman a value that is far greater than that of other creatures (see Gen 1:26; 2: Ps 8). But this kingly position of human beings in the midst of all creature places on them the responsibility of stewardship and not of callous exploitation. Employing critical analysis, this paper argues that the divine mandate in Gen 1:28 "to subdue" and "have domination, rule over" is not responsible for the current ecological crisis and environmental degradation by human beings. It strongly recommends that the answer to the present ecological crisis lies in a re-awakening of ecological consciousness and a conscious appreciation of the inter-connection between people's lifestyle and their environment.

Keywords: *Environment, Care, Reading, Ecology, Stewardship*

Introduction

The Old Testament account is the primary and basic source book for understanding God's design for the care of the environment. If one takes it as an authoritative document for Christian belief and practice, a proper reading and interpretation of it will help Christians in forming their opinion regarding what God said on environmental care. The misconstrued idea by some Old Testament biblical scholars that Gen 1:28 informs the current man's ruthless dealings with nature and environment is considered taken too far and out of place. As Lynn White maintains, the

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present ecological crisis finds its roots in Christian anthropocentrism which, according to the author, “allows for a ruthless exploitation of nature that supported western science and technology” (Quoted in Collard, 2011, p. 123). McHarg (2011) articulates the same view when the author states that the Bible in its insistence upon dominion and subjugation of nature encourages the most exploitative and destructive instincts in human beings (McHarg, p. 123). These and other similar views by scholars seem to have approached the text of Gen 1:28 in total disconnect from other complementary passages like Gen 2: 5, 15 and 3:17.

Yet there is no gainsaying the fact that God assigns humanity a value that is far greater than that of other creatures (see Gen 1:26; 2: Ps 8). This kingly position of human beings in the midst of all creature places on them the responsibility of stewardship and not of callous exploitation. This paper examines the Old Testament divine mandate in Gen 1:28 “to subdue” , “have domination, and rule over every creature of God.” It argues that it is not responsible for the current ecological crisis and environmental degradation by man/woman; and that the answer to the present ecological crisis lies in proper ethical, cultural and spiritual reorientation (adequate anthropology) and not in a selfish, misguided anthropology (Pope Francis, 2015, nos. 118-119).

Meaning of Environmental Care

Environment is the totality of the places and surroundings in which we live, work and interact with other people in our cultural, religious and socio-economic activities for self-fulfilment and advancement of our communities, societies or nations. It is within this environment that both natural and man-made things are found. Hence, ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they live. When we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. It simply refers to the symbiotic relationship between man/woman and the physical world. The environmentalist/Green Movement sees ecology as “understanding ourselves

and our environment as part of nature” (Programme of the German Green Party, 2011, p. 124-125).

Environmental degradation is largely the product of human choices. Hence, it is termed as a moral problem since it involves human beings having to live in congruity with its God-designed ecological vocation of stewardship of all creation or to live in abnegation of it. Human activities are significantly uttering the face of the environment negatively and if this trend is sustained over time, irreparable damage will be inflicted upon the earth. Consequently, it may not be able to sustain human and nonhuman life. Environmental care is the appropriate use of nature to only sustainable stewardship. Though creation in its entirety is bigger than man/woman, yet man occupies a special privileged position in the midst of creation (see Gen 1:26, 28). It is equally a consensus opinion that the present ecological crisis is as a result a human activity. Environmental care, therefore, underpins attention, concern and interest that should underscore the intrinsic relationship between ecology and human beings as well as the centrality of human activities in resolving the present ecological crisis.

A Critical Analysis of the Old Testament Imperative for Environmental Care in Gen 1: 28

Over the years, Old Testament biblical scholars have engaged in debates on the right interpretation of Gen 1:28. The text reads,

“God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (NRSV).

This paper focuses attention on the fourth and fifth imperatives: ‘to subdue’ (*kabas*) and ‘to have dominion/rule over’ (*radah*). Here in addition to the first three imperatives “to increase and multiply and fill the earth” that are equally communicated to other living creatures before man in v. 22, man receives further injunction to ‘subdue’ and to ‘rule over/have dominion’ over other

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creatures. As Nwaoru, (2011) rightly points out, there is a relationship of complementarity between the first three and the last two injunctions. “What has filled the earth must be brought to order for it is not of divine will to allow chaos to rule over creation” (Nwaoru, 2011, 123-132).

The crux of contentious argument centres on *kabas* (subdue) and *radah* (rule over). Many scholars tend to see this text as informing brutal exploitation of nature and the environment by human beings. Westermann, (1994) like many authors, admits that *kabas*, like *radah*, belongs to the context of subordination or domination. In the *Qal* it is used of slaves (Jer 34:11; 16; Neh 5:51 2 Chron 28:10), in the *Niphal* it is used of a land which has been brought into subjection (Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1; 1 Chron 22:18). Westermann however stressed that here the earth is the object of *kabas*. (Westermann, 1994, p.161). Nwarou (2011) agrees with Oswalt (1980) that an overall study of the word’s usage indicates that *kabas* assumes that “the party being subdued is hostile to the subduer, necessitating some sort of coercion if the subduing is to take place” (Oswalt, 1980, p.127). The prevalent negative interpretation of *kabas* and *radah* has made many authors to trace the roots of the present day ecological problems to Gen 1:28. White,(1997) for instance, places the blame for the abuse of the world ecosystems partly on God who wills that human beings exploit nature and partly on human arrogance towards nature (White, 1967, pp. 1203-1207).

But the crucial question here is: Are *kabas* and *radah* negatively intended? Do they imply justification of the use of violence and force by human beings over the earth and other creatures? Are they meant to be weapons of exploitation by human beings? For Hamilton, (1990) it appears unlikely that we need to transfer the nuance of force and dictatorship into the use of *kabas* in Gen 1:28. Probably what is designated here is settlement and agriculture.” the author therefore reads “subdue the land” in Gen 1:28 as a semantic parallel to “till and keep the land” in Gen 2: 5, 15 (Hamilton, 1990, pp.139-140). However, the injunction to “till and keep the earth” here meets with crisis in Gen 3:17 when the ground is cursed because of man/woman. The curse on the ground in 3:17 will be effective in the thorns and thistles that will grow and diminish the output

and make the harvest difficult. This connects with Oswalt's (1980) view earlier that *kabas* assumes that the party being subdued is hostile to the subduer, necessitating some sort of coercion if the subduing is to take place. Undoubtedly, the author of Gen 1: 28 was not unaware of the threatening menace of natural disasters like flood, erosion, earthquake, harsh weather, oil spillage, oil bunkering, etc. Therefore, *kabas* in relation to the cursed ground (3:17) could be positively interpreted as 'taming', 'bring under useful control,' etc.

A parallel of *radah* in Gen 1:28 is attested in God's blessing and command to Noah in Gen 9:1-2 which begs the question of its implication for the interpretation of *radah* in Gen 1:28.

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth,' The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered (Gen 9:1-2).

Like *radah*, the idiomatic expression *natan beyad* (into your hand) normally depicts one's authority, power or domination over something. Accordingly, discerning the striking similarity between the use of *radah* in Gen 1: 28 and *natan beyad* in Gen 9:2 will help to illuminate the type of authority granted to humankind over other creatures. In both texts, the command to humankind to exercise authority over creatures occurs in the context of divine blessing. Such an order given within a positive circumstances of God blessing humanity is a duty and a responsibility. Admittedly, it will be a contradiction for humankind to see it as an opportunity to oppress and subjugate other creatures. God does not bless humanity as empowerment to oppress other living creatures. By giving humankind *radah* over other living creatures, God is elevating humanity over other creatures in a positive and caring sense. Humankind, therefore, is accountable to God, his source of authority. This responsibility for God's earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria

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existing between the creatures of this world. God, by creating humanity in his own image and likeness, blessed them and made them his vicegerent. Humankind is only invested by God with a delegated authority over other creatures for which each person will be held accountable. Humankind's 'dominion' over creatures must only be exercised for the sake of God and according to the will of God.

The interconnectivity between human and nonhuman creatures is expressed often in several Old Testament texts especially in the Prophetic Literature. In a bid to stress this connectivity, nonhuman creatures are poetically personified. The Prophet Jeremiah asks, "How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither? For the wickedness of those who dwell in it, the beasts and the birds are swept away" (Jer 12:4). The whole land mourns for being laid waste, and no one cares (Jer 12:11). Prophet Isaiah repeatedly makes a connection between human redemption and the joy of nonhuman creatures. He exclaims, "Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has done it; shout, O depths of the earth; break forth into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, and will be glorified in Israel (Isa 44:23). The heavens and the earth are to sing and exult because the Lord has shown compassion to his people and comforted the afflicted (Isa 49: 13). At the restoration time, the exilic remnants "shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace"; and the mountains and the hills "shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa 55: 12). In the messianic age, the whole earth would be filled with the knowledge of God (Isa 11:9; see Hab 2:14). There are some other indications of this thought-pattern among the prophets (Isa 43: 19-21; Ezek 34:25-31; Hos 2:18; Zech 8:12).

In Wisdom Literature, there are also traces of the joy of nature in redemption. In Psalm 96:12, the fields and woods with their contents are to exult. Likewise in Psalm 98:7-8, the sea with its contents and the earth with its inhabitants are to roar; the floods are to clap their hands, and the hills sing for joy. In the *haggadic* midrash of the book of Wisdom, the sage personifies the elements of the earth, which worked favourably for the godly and unfavourably for the

wicked (Wis 16:18-19, 22-24), “for creation, serving thee who hast made it, exerts itself to punish the unrighteous, and in kindness relaxes on behalf of those who trust in thee” (Wis 16: 24). The sage gives a conspicuous example, “For the whole creation in its nature was fashioned anew, complying with thy commands, that thy children might be kept unharmed. The cloud was seen overshadowing the camp, and dry land emerging where water had stood before, an unhindered way out of the Red Sea, and a new grassy plain out of the raging waves” (Wis 19:6-7).

Besides, it is unlikely that man/woman who is created in the image and likeness of God will be commanded by the same God to act in a manner that is contrary to the God he/she represents. Various biblical evidence attests to the fact that God’s attitude to his creatures is that of protective care and providence (cf. Gen 8: 21; 9: 11-15; Ps 136: 25; 145: 15-16; 147: 9; Wis 11: 24-26). Could it happen then that God would be relating to his creatures one way and order his representative among creatures (man/woman) to relate with them in another way? Could God be using double standard? This paper, therefore, is of the opinion that the negative interpretation of *kabas* and *radah* in Gen 1: 28 as catalyst text for exploitation and callous destruction of the ecosystem by human beings is uncalled for. The solution to ecological problems cannot be located in the two-fold attitudes of indifference and shifting blames. Admittedly, all human beings, in one way or another, are involved in degrading the ecosystems. The survival of the ecosystems depends largely on our preparedness to interpret, understand, and execute the divine mandates in Gen 1:28 in their overall biblical context. This is because God, by giving humanity the function of dominion over other creatures, wants ‘boots-on-the-ground’ managers, who will oversee other creatures with love and selflessness. It presupposes that the ‘dominion’ in question here should be ‘redemptive’ – for the well-being of all God’s creatures (Abasili, 2016, p. 44). We now turn to reading Gen 1: 28 in the context of Niger Delta region.

A Reading of Gen 1: 28 in the Context of Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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From the foregoing discussion, the authority in question here in Gen 1: 28 is a kind of caring dominion and power. In this regard, each person is God's vicegerent among other creatures and the environment and accountable to Him for his/her duty of ruling over them. Niger Delta region is our case study. According to the official definition of the Nigerian Government, the Niger Delta covers a land mass of approximately 70,000 square kilometres and occupies 7.5% of the total land mass of Nigeria. Historically and cartographically, it comprises the three states of Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta. However, in the year 2000, six more states were added by the government as part of the Niger Delta. These include Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross Rivers, Edo, Imo and Ondo. The Niger Delta is host to about five thousand communities, fifty ethnic groups and about two hundred and fifty dialects. The language groups in this region among others include Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Isoko, Igbo, Calabari, Ikwerre and Ogoni, and many others. Senator Ede Dafinone in an interview noted that it has a population of about twenty-seven million people and located in the central part of Southern Nigeria (Arise Television, 13/12/23). It is particularly renowned for its rich deposit of oil and gas which has remained till date the hub of the Nigerian economy. It is also rich in other natural resources like water, timber and other forest resources, wildlife, and sharp sand. It is the third largest wetland in the world formed from "alluvial sediments transported southwards (downstream) as the Rivers Niger and Benue unite into a single system in search of exits into the Atlantic Ocean" (Monsi, 2006, p.9).

Unfortunately, today, Niger Delta region of Nigeria is having its fair share of natural disaster. Some families, farmlands and communities have been sent parking by environmental disaster. Communities in the Niger Delta regions are constantly exposed to the devastating menace of environmental crises. The Niger Delta is blessed with rich deposits of oil and gas. These have made it the economic hob of Nigeria. Though it occupies only about 7.5% of the total land mass of Nigeria yet it is the propelling force of Nigeria's economic development fortunes. It provides about 90% of Nigeria's total export earnings and 80% of its total revenue largely from the benefits of oil and gas resources of the area (Monsi, 2006, p.9). While providing revenue for

the development of other parts of the country, it bears the horrid marks of abandonment; while providing wealth for the nation, it languishes in poverty. Resources from its land are carted away and their land left underdeveloped yet it is left to bear the huge burdens and hazards of environmental degradation which cause untold suffering to many indigenes and reduce their quality of life. “There is no gainsaying that the Niger Delta which produces the oil from which Nigeria derives more than eighty per cent of government revenue has suffered many years of neglect, economic exploitation, impoverishment, ecological degradation and under-development” (Opera-nadi, 2006, p.23).

This paradoxical situation has given birth to both peaceful and violent activism, advocating resource control and sustainable development of the region with environmental protection as a key component. Many activists have died in the struggle. This has turned the region into a battle ground and crisis ridden territory. The government is often accused of complicity and condemned for their lack of sensitivity to the plight of the region. Being beneficiaries of the oil wealth, it is often accused of “essentially looking the other way while valuable ecosystem (on which the ordinary people depend for their livelihood) are devastated, until the situation degenerates into violence, which then draws a disproportionate reaction that deepens the people’s resentment and their alienation” (Onosode, 2003, p.95). It is remarkable to note that government has taken some initiative and enacted laudable collections of laws and decrees to safeguard the environment, but these have become sterile due to poor enforcement.

Due to its strategic economic posture, the Niger Delta has attracted companies and people from the various parts of the country who take position to exploit the benefits of the oil and gas industry. Many of the urban centres such as Port Harcourt, Warri, Yenagoa, and Sapele are overpopulated. This has great consequences for the population in the area and concomitantly, on the limited habitable land space, social amenities such as roads, housing, electricity, water, educational and communication facilities. The implication of the population pressure for

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environmental sustainability can be glimpsed in the report of a study of the Niger Delta conducted by the World Bank in 1995. It states:

Population growth rate ... of about 3 per cent annually, population pressure will require that agricultural output doubles to meet subsistence requirements. Intensification if not increased to match increasing food demands, agricultural land degradation from unsustainable agricultural practices, as well as deforestation from agricultural expansion, will lead to rural economic decline and poorer diets. The trend indicates that reduced fisheries and forests resources will no longer be able to support the thousands of households that rely on them for subsistence and income (World Bank Report, 2005, pp. 35-36).

A large percentage of the population live in rural communities with farming and fishing being their major sources of livelihood. These are increasingly under pressure from the unsustainable human activities such as urban developmental projects, constructions leading to declining land availability for farming purposes. Also, over-fishing for commercial purposes and the unsafe methods sometimes employed add pressure and disrupt the balance in the aquatic ecosystem. Majority of the population are poor with low income levels that support meagre diets which are supplemented with a variety of forestry products. Activities of oil exploration and exploitation have destroyed many farmlands and polluted many rivers, thereby, aggravating the plight of the rural dwellers. Over 80% of people in the rural communities depend on firewood for their domestic energy needs and in so doing, they mount pressure on the forest reserves resulting in deforestation and its aftermaths. In general, the Niger Delta is underdeveloped, and its poverty level is high with a GNP per capita which is lower than the national average of \$300 (Monsi, 2006, p.10). These challenges have negative impacts on the environment.

The implication here is that a contextual reading of Gen 1: 28 would maintain that the present callous attitude to nature and the environment by human beings is attributable to oil pillage and bunkering, erosion, and loss of values. Today, individualism and selfishness have taken over the psyche of the modern generation. Community/people-oriented activities have totally vanished, no more communal effort towards road maintenance. Funds mapped out for road projects in the communities threatened by flood and oil spillage are embezzled by the members of the same community and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) workers. Military forces such as army, navy, community leaders and members of the works committee appointed to supervise oil pollution, illegal mining in their community connive with the contractors to deliver poor quality job and divert of the funds to their personal use. The same lack of consideration for common welfare informs the gruesome attitude of people dumping refuse inside drainages and water ways. The economic and social consequences of such lifestyle are too obvious to see. It would imply that when human beings place themselves at the centre and give absolute priority to immediate convenience, when man/woman sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one's own immediate interests, it leads to environmental neglect, degradation as well as social decay. Boff, (1997) rightly laments: "The human being-called to be earth's guardian angel and watchful tiller-may be earth's Satan. Humans have shown that they can commit not only homicide and ethnocide but biocide and genocide as well" (1997, p. xi).

Recommendations Towards Responsible Environmental Care

The Old Testament text understudied prepares the foundation for the actualization of the saving plan of God in human history and an effective enterprise of curtailing the exploitation of the earth as a tragic consequence of unchecked harmful human activities and irresponsible use of created order and not just as a mere aspiration that some consider it to be. After all, the eschatological destination of all creation gradually unfolds in history. Salvation history begins with God entering relationship with the world by creating it, evidenced in the opening chapters of

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Genesis (Gen 1 and 2). All God created, human and nonhuman creation, was declared “very good” (Gen 1:31). The dominion over creation given to human beings in Genesis 1:28 was an invitation to share in the authority and power of God. Jesus Christ makes clear what the authentic expression of divine power and authority consists in service, care, and stewardship. Properly understood, stewardship enjoins mutual and reciprocal manner from the human person to nature, and from nature back to the sustenance and enhancement of the lives of the human person. This reciprocity and mutuality cannot be limited only to the physical environment (Obi, 2020, p.375). Stewardship in creation theology flows from the divine mandate to increase, multiply and care for the creation. This care does not imply negative domination of the environment as wrongly applied today. Creation stewardship demands that humanity possesses a great sense of availability and aesthetics; sensitivity and nourishment; nurture and preservation; care and concern; replacement and replenishment; equality, development, and social justice. This contradicts the “Am I my brother's keeper?”, that dominates our activities on the mother earth (Gen 4: 9-10). Creation has suffered so many casualties of abuses, deterioration, distortion and injustice of various kinds and magnitude. Right from the Old Testament, there has been a subversive memory that haunted the best of Jewish religious consciousness. Edwards, (2008) observes that humanity should acknowledge that the God of redemption is the God of creation. Hence, man has the responsibility to explore the ecological meaning of Christianity and in this way to contribute to an ecological ethos and commitment (2008, p. 5).

Waste management is one factor that impacts the environment. There is the urgent need for eco-sensitive living style in the environment and space. In the four Gospels, Christ was clear after feeding 5,000 and 4,000 men, with women and children excluded, which he enjoined his disciples to gather the remnants so there will be no waste (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:31; Luke 9:10; John 6:5-15; Matt 15: 32-16:10; Mark 8:1-9). This is to drive home the Gospel message on waste management. In the spirit of Gen 1:28, it advocates for an education in ecological responsibility centered on "ecological conversion" which evokes a genuine conversion in ways of thought and

behaviour. Universities, theological schools and colleges, religious departments of universities and seminaries in Nigeria could join hands together by intentionally inspiring and equipping students to become more earth-friendly, justice seeking, community-sustaining religious leaders. This will make eco-theology a central focus of faith commitment of scholarly work of learning and of ethically coherent action at individual and community levels.

Traditionally, Nigerians have a traditional system of environmental preservation because the people have good religious sensitivity. Ndigbo (a tribe in Nigeria), for instance, have *Omenala* and *Nsoala* as the moral structure of traditional Igbo to maintain religious affairs. Okeke (2015) rightly notes, "the Christian is necessarily a citizen of two worlds, the world of human beings who follow human cultures (*omenala*) and the world of the Spirit, the spiritual world, the world of "*omenelu*"!" (2015, p. 9). So, arriving at the ecological conversion based on Christian and traditional values will respond adequately to the environmental deterioration and will receive good acceptance among the people. This is a good omen in the spirit of Christian evangelization as it will help the people to respond to their environment in the light of the Gospel. Accordingly, Osunkwo, (2014) encourages that: "The Church must continue to enlighten the civic and environmental conscience of the people to the social exigencies of the Gospel" .

Admittedly, human beings should not be involved in the degradation or abuse of creation. The degradation and abuse of creation are summed up as land degradation, deforestation, species extinction, water pollution, global toxification and alteration of atmosphere, human and cultural degradation. Hence, the purpose of God in Christ is to heal and bring to fullness not only human being but the entire created order (Col 1:19-20) (Ogunduyilemi, 2010, p. 255). Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's sight (CCC, no. 2416). The law in the Bible dwelling on relationship is not only among individuals but also with other living beings. If you are chance to come upon a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or the egg you shall not take the mother with the young (Deut 22:4.6).

When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in our land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered. Our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice, and faithfulness with others. The common good applies to each human community, but its most complete realization occurs in the political community where the state's role is "to defend and promote the common good of civil society, its citizens, and intermediate bodies"

Conclusion

This paper has been a wonderful and stimulating on environmental care in the light of Gen 1:28. The present ecological crisis in the world is because of irresponsible activities towards nature and environment by human beings. The divine injunction to 'subdue' and 'rule over' other creatures in Gen 1:28 entrust upon man the role of responsible stewardship and not of callous exploitation. Therefore, the blame for the ecological disaster ravaging the Niger Delta belongs to the domain of human beings and not on any divine biblical injunction. The Niger Delta region is the resource base driving the economy of this country. But the unconscionable conduct of individuals and firms who go about their exploration and production disregarding the guidelines on international best standards has turned the docile, receptive region into a hostile one. Thus, producing such environmental crises which ripple effects transcend the region, the nation and beyond. This paper, therefore, enjoins human beings to retrace their steps and return to the role of redemptive and responsible stewardship assigned to them. It also calls for a re-awakening of the ecological consciousness among the Niger Deltans of Nigeria and a conscious appreciation of the inter-connection between people's lifestyle and their environment.

In conclusion, our critical analysis affirms that God, by giving humanity the function of dominion over other creatures, wants 'boots-on-the-ground' managers, who will oversee other creatures with love and selflessness. The 'dominion' in question is 'redemptive' – for the well-being of all God's creatures. The discussion extemporized the need to promote collective goodwill to our environmental care. This task of collaboration, from the hindsight of Gen 1:28, imposes on the human person, the responsibility of environmental care and participation. We

must ensure that the benefits and burdens of the environment are shared equitably. The earth's resources are the common patrimony of all. No individual or group of people should use the earth's resources in a way that others are deprived of the use of these resources. No individual or group of people should be made to suffer the consequences of environmental degradation or resource depletion more than others. Since ignorance of the law is not an excuse, we must adhere to the precautionary principle of forestalling any possible negative effects of human activities on the environment whether the full impacts of these actions are fully known in the present or not. When the environment is degraded, efforts must be made to repair the damage and restore its health and wholeness. Victims of environmental pollution must be adequately compensated and their land rehabilitated, just as the polluters must be accountable.

Recommendations for policy directions

The multinational firms involved in whatever capacity and activities in the region should by now have appraised themselves of the fact that one is better protected and one's interest flourishes better when conducted within the provisions of the law than when conducted *extra legem* (outside the law). The local legislation on gas flaring such as the Association Gas Re-injection Act of 1990 should be compiled with. The guidelines on international best practices are not strange to them including the safeguards and remedial measures. The multinational firms involved in whatever capacity in the region should rise to their corporate social responsibilities by joining hands with the government of the day to provide basic amenities and employment opportunities and other welfare packages to the people.

Also, it is my candid view that the greater part of the problem of oil bunkering, illegal mining, and indiscriminate dumping of refuse/wastes in our society is attributable to ignorance and lack of awareness. Here, the role of the church towards the social welfare of the people comes into play. As we hope and wait for the government to rise to the challenges of waste

management, the church in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria can launch *Operation Keep Your Environment Clean* through the Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) or any other relevant body in the church and society. The JDPC can be empowered to embark on aggressive campaign against indiscriminate dumping of refuse in the markets and public places. Pastors, Priests, and other preachers of the Gospel can do much to sensitize the people's conscience and consciousness in this direction using the veritable tool of the Word of God. The church can prove far more effective in creating awareness than the government due to the prevailing burden of deficit of trust on the latter.

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