Exploring Matthew 6:10b Towards Solving Ecological Issues In Africa

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Abstract

The quest to have a global community that would be environmentally friendly to human beings, plants and other living organism has been a major concern to humanity. Thus, renowned experts in the fields of religion, sciences, journalism, ethics, theology, biblical studies among others have been deeply concerned and committed with solving global ecological issues which constitute a great threat to the existence of humanity, plants and other living organism on the biospheres. Against this back drop, this paper explores Matthew 6:10b towards solving ecological issues in Africa. The paper seeks to interpret the text in a way that reveals the desire of God for man on the ecological sphere. What are

the perplexing global ecological issues? What are the effects of ecological issues to man and his environment? How has man contributed to the present global ecological crisis? Moreover, how can the prayer of Jesus in this text be appropriated in the contemporary time in order to preserve and conserve the environmental spheres for man's continued existence and sustenance? These issues are germane in this paper. The paper employs a contextualized reading and phenomenological methods and maintains that although man has been identified as the primary agent of destruction of the ecological spheres, the will of God for man towards the ecological spheres can be comprehended in the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6:10b. The paper recommends the need for man to respect, regard, care for nature and also obey divine will as prayed by Jesus for sustained ecological spheres.

Key Words: Contextualized Reading, Ecological Issues, Jesus's Prayer, Matthew 10:6, Theology.

Introduction

Ecological issues are among the prominent issues confronting humanity in Africa and indeed the rest of the world. Similarly, ecological issues with its adverse effects on humanity, the environment and the global community have prompted all fields of inquiries by scientists, biochemists, microbiologists, eco-political scientists, climatologists, agriculturists, religious/ biblical scholars and many others experts to delve into the search for solutions to redeem the scourging effects of environmental degradation in Africa and the world at large (Abe, 2008:28). Against this back drop, this paper centres on the exploration of Matthew 6:10b towards solving ecological issues in Africa. Does Matthew 6:10b which centres on the prayer of Jesus "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" have any relevance to ecological conservation and preservation? How can ecological degradation in the African society and the world over be curtailed using the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6:10b? Moreover, what are the causes and damaging effects of the ecological spheres to man and his environment? These issues and many more are germane to this paper. The paper explores the perplexing global ecological issues in Africa, and Nigeria in particular and the effects of ecological issues to man and his environment. Likewise, the paper seeks to interpret Matthew 6:10b "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" in a way that reveals the desire of

God for man on the ecological spheres especially for the conservation and preservation of the environment for man's continued existence and sustenance in the biosphere.

Ecological Issues in Africa

Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is blessed with abundance of rich natural resources which is supposed to make life more meaningful to the people and their society however some repugnant activities perpetuated by man in the African soil are said to be detrimental to humanity, plants and other living organisms in the ecological spheres. Thus, Nigeria and the African continent is bedevilled with lots of ecological issues which impinge on the socio-economic and sustained infrastructural development of the African cosmos. Ecological issues such as deforestation, desertification, flood, fire outbreak, oil spillage, black sooth, erosion, overpopulation, poverty, earth quake, open defecation, disposal of harmful substances into the air, water ways, canals and many others are major environmental issues threatening the continued existence of man, plants and other living organisms in the African biosphere. Prince et al (2021:202-205) adds that land degradation, pollution, oil spillage, overpopulation, landfills, deforestation, erosion, ozone layer depletion, global warning are major ecological issues in Africa and these have caused wanton extinction of plants, animal species and death of human beings in the African soil.

Olanisebe (2008:93-95) on his own part identifies improper refuse disposal, improper defecation, deforestation, erosion, earthquakes, volcanic eruption, fire, floods, storms, air pollution, oil spillage, as part of the ecological issues in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. He maintains that most of these ecological issues enumerated above are the direct resultant effect of man's misuse and abuse of the environment. Igboanusi (2012:69-70) avers that global warming and the greenhouse effect; ozone depletion; deforestation and desertification; biodiversity and overpopulation; the production and disposal hazardous wastes; solid waste disposal; chemical and nuclear spill and accidents are issues that we need to comprehend to be environmentally literate.

Ango (2008) from his own perspective sees "climate change as one of the most prominent ecological issues confronting Africa and the world in general and its

adverse effects on the environment are posing great challenges both to humanity and living species in the environment" (p. 64). From these expressions, the discourse portends that ecological issues with its attendant effects are real not only in the African spheres but in the global community, Nigeria inclusive. Similarly, as previously stated, these foremost environmental issues in the African clime and the world at large has strongly contributed to the contamination of the air, sea and land, all to the detriment of the people and other living organism within the African biosphere. What could be the likely cause or causes of this ecological degradation is the subject of the next sub theme.

Causes of Ecological Degradation in Africa

Abogunrin (2008:2-3) has identified several causes of ecological degradation in Africa to include: poverty; exploration of oil and other mineral resources; lack of basic amenities; overpopulation; emission of toxic wastes by factories, electric plants and automobiles; dumping of toxic substances on land, water and sea; desertification and deforestation among others. With emphasis on the Nigerian clime, it is avowed that due to the high cost of livelihood in the urban areas, most Nigerian in the coastal areas tend to live in shanties with less internal facilities to carter for their waste, hence they dispose their waste into the body of the water thus, causing ecological degradation of the area. Moreover, the consistent unlawful felling of economic trees which serves as wind breakers and protection to the soil, and the constant burning of the bushes by hunters and farmers, in addition to the excessive use of the land and other natural habitat for the meeting of human basic needs are some of the causative factors to ecological degradation in Africa.

Osunkwo (2014:110) on his part remarks that although God has blessed the Nigerian nation with the least natural disasters in the world, however the cause of ecological degradation being suffered in the Nigerian society and the world at large is due to the evil of most people on the natural environment such as disposal of chemical and other toxic wastes into the soil, water, and air; lack of effective safety standards, mentality and ideology on the area of domestic wastes, air, water and noise pollution; poor management of energy resources and even inadequate management of domestic wastes. Jaja (2016:198-200) notes that the causes of environmental degradation include land disturbance, pollution which includes

water, land and noise pollution and deforestation. Other causes are natural occurrences such as tidal waves, avalanches, quakes, storms and wildfire which affects and contributes to the extinction of animals and plants. On the other hand, Manus (2008) avers that "the flaring of gas from oil wells, the constant pipeline vandalism, the concomitant inferno and the linkage of toxic gas in addition to the volume of vehicular traffic jam which increases the level of carbon monoxide emission" are instrumental to ecological depletion in Africa and its surrounding (16-17).

Ordinioha on his apart remarks that improper disposal of human waste is one of the causes of environmental degradation in Africa. He notes that about one million tons of human faeces are produced daily in the global community, and the WHO expects every home to have a sanitation facility within 50 meters of their abode, to ensure the proper containment and disposal of this dangerous waste. However, he opines that through rigorous studies, it is revealed that three billion people are without a proper sanitation facility, including several people in Africa. Thus, posing a threat to human being and other living organisms. He further reveals that improper management of solid waste is another potential cause of ecological degradation in Africa. He notes that an average urban resident produces 0.2-3kg worth of waste daily; a total of between 200 and 3,000 tons for a city of one million dwellers and so, the improper management and disposal of the solid waste is known to cause the spread of vectors and pests, with the possible epidemic of disease they transmit, such as plague and yellow fever. This is in addition to toxic fumes that do not only irritate, but is also able to resonate and sustain health issues such as asthma, respiratory disorder among others. He maintains that poor disposal of human waste is directly or indirectly responsible for at least two million deaths annually (85-86).

Effects of Ecological Issues in Africa

The effects of ecological degradation in Africa are enormous. However, for the sake of space this work will highlight some of the effects of ecological degradation in relation to humanity, plants and other living organisms. Strada (1999:321) notes that the effects of feeling of trees in the global community leads to loss of tress and biodiversity loss. Moreover, pollution of the land by the use of chemical and irrigation for agricultural purposes leads to soil degradation, soil erosion, and

destruction of wild life habitat, salts the land and creates water logging. Similarly, the exploration of oil and gas and other ecological degradation in the Africa soil like Nigeria have resulted in poverty, crisis (Odi/Ogoni crisis) and displacement of thousands of people from their natal lands and homes as a result of the unresponsive attitude of the past and present government to the plight of the people especially in providing them with basic social amenities. Most of the rivers and streams where the local people in the African cosmos visit for fishing and fetching of drinking waters are oftentimes polluted and infested with toxic chemicals thus posing a health challenge to the people. The pollution of the rivers and streams have contributed and occasioned the spread of diseases such as typhoid, hook worm, dysentery, diarrhoea, cancer, respiratory tract diseases, pneumonia, asthma, hypertension, heart attack and even death of loved ones in the area and these also have resonated the formation of various movements such as the movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP), the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force among other.

Adelakun (2008:223) writing on the activities of multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta observes that the presence of multinational oil companies like Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited (SPDC), Elf, Mobil, Chevron, Agip among others in the Niger Delta region has raised a lot of concerns and criticisms. He notes that these companies employ inadequate environmental standards, public health standards, human rights standards as well as relations with the affected communities. With reference to the Ogoni people and their land, he infers that the place is in a mess as the sources of drinkable water have become polluted as a result of oil spillages. This has also made the peasant farmers and fishermen who survive from farming and fishing to struggle for survival in order to fend for their families. Amazingly, the ugly scenario witnessed in the ecological path of the Ogoni axis where farming and fishing which are the basic occupation of the people are hampered and life made unbearable because of environmental degradation of the area is just a tip of the iceberg of the experiences of the people and places of the Niger Delta region and the African globe.

Okai (2008:6) affirming this thought avers that the history of the Niger Delta region up to the present time is characterized by the dynamics of external exploitation together with a blatant disregard for the basic rights and needs of this rich

resource-rich community. He maintains that the long-term disregard of the people and their land by government and oil companies in supporting crucial human capital development and infrastructure, including the provision of basic social amenities has heightened the conflict in the region. Jaja (2016:201-202) remarks that the effects of ecological degradation in Africa includes the loss of biodiversity, ozone layer depletion, loss of tourism attraction, human and animal extinction. Okon (2010:6-7) sheds light on this thought when he attests that over 40 million acres of tropical rainforest are loss annually worldwide and biologist have made a conservative estimate of biodiversity loss at the range of 30,000 species disappearing annually. He further states that scientist have attributed global warming to the burning of fossil fuels and emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and that the effect has led to rising sea levels, which threatens the coastal regions.

Olanisebe (2008:95) with respect to the Niger Delta regions maintains that the activities of multinational oil companies in the area have created lots of environmental problems, especially the problem of pollution. He also notes that due to high toxicity of oil the fertility of the Niger Delta soil is damaged, wildlife is extinct, and water is rendered undrinkable. The consequences here are that the people are impoverished, their land and vegetation destroyed. Lawrence-Hart (2022:127-128) on her part adds that the depletion of the ecological spheres in Africa has provoked the mother earth, thus humanity now suffers a lot of social vices for desecrating the land. Besides, different forms of diseases and untimely deaths, destruction of lives and properties and displacement of people from the society due to flood and other natural occurrences has ensured in the global community as a direct consequence of man's wilful destruction of the ecological habitat. She further opines that ecological degradation in Africa has led to the progression of global warning/climate change which has adversely affected humanity, plants and other animals. Accordingly, Faniran (2008:45-46) high lighting several rationales for forest conservation notes that deforestation leads to loss of bio diversity and poses a great hazard to the natural ecosystem. He maintains that felling of trees prevents forests from acting as checks on runoff and flooding and that deforestation reduces evapotranspiration with serious implication for or rainfall and other climatic elements. This is in addition to denying scientist details of valuable forest components for the purposes of

research. However, he attests that forest is an important source of revenue from tourism, particularly ecotourism and that forest constitute the only supplier of timber and other raw materials, which deforestation is impairing gravely.

Manus (2008:316) on his own part notes that in Africa, the tropical forest is ruined each year as a result of ecological degradation in Africa. He remarks that Nigeria alone losses 75% of her virgin forest to logging and bush burning and the unending activities of deforestation leads to the extinction of plants and animal species. Besides, the use of fluorocarbons in the cities contributes to global depletion of vital ozone layers thus forming a menace on the life of millions of human beings in Africa. He maintains that due to unethical misconduct, chemical wastes have entered the food chain and are now deposited in the human body fat. He recounts that in the cocoa rich countries like Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, and Ivory Coast; the tea farmlands of Kenya, Uganda among others and the wine-fields of South-Africa, 15-20,000 persons die annually from pesticides poisoning and associated sicknesses. All these are some of the effects of ecological degradation in Africa. Having discussed extensively the effects of ecological issues in Africa, the focus of the next sections is on the biblical perspective to ecological issues and on how the prayer of Jesus in Matthew 6:10 can be appropriated in the contemporary time in order to preserve and conserve the environmental spheres for man's continued existence and sustenance.

Biblical Perspective on Ecological Issues

Does the Judeo-Christian religious text have any provision as regards the containment of ecological issues? What are the stand point and perspective of the Old and New Testament of the Bible in relation to ecological matters? Similarly, what statement were issued in the scriptures for the conservation, preservation and continued existence of human beings, plants and other animals in their natural habitat during biblical times? This is the focus of this section thereafter, a contextualized reading of the selected New Testament text, Matthew 6:10b will be examined. The section depends wholly on the scriptural references made in the Bible which is geared towards the conservation, preservation of the biospheres and natural resources for the existence of man and other living organism. In this line of thought, Faniran, (2008) citing Areola remarks that:

> … The Bible is the foundation of fundamental ecological principles that have so far dominated the management of the natural environment and resources. The account of creation… clearly establishes the principles of the earth being an ecological system… Genesis chapter 2 establishes the role of human as managers of the earth and its resources… other passages in the bible emphasize the principles of sustainability and careful husbandry of the land (soil), the plants, the livestock and the water resources. Finally, the importance of trees… in general to land conservation and sustenance of the human race is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 20:19 (p.55).

In the same vain, Deuteronomy 23:12-13 which reads "Also you shall have a place outside the camp, where you may go out; and you shall have an implement among your equipment, and when you sit down outside, you shall dig with it and turn and cover your refuse" (NKJV) concerns the conservation, preservation and sustenance of the ecological habitat through proper disposal of human waste. The text further shows that God is repulsive to ecological disorderliness, thus God instructed His children the Israelites "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you and give your enemies over to you; therefore your camp shall be holy, that He may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you" (NKJV). On the other hand, to improve the ecological habitat and sustain the natural ecosystem, God in Leviticus 25:2-5 initiated a period of rest to enable the conservation, resuscitation, regeneration, rehabilitation and preservation of the ecological habitation. Thus, God declared "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: when you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land" (Lev. 25:2-5 NKJV).

Contextualized Reading of Matthew 6:10b towards Solving Ecological Issues in Africa

The gospel according to Saint Matthew chapter 6 is among the account which reveals the teachings of Jesus to His disciples during His earthly ministry. The teaching is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitude. The sermon on the mount as expressed by Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 lays emphasis on giving (6:1-4), prayer (6:5-8, 9-15), fasting (6:16-18), treasures in heaven (6:19-21), the Light (6:22-24), worry and anxiety (6:25-34). Matthew 6:10b is a section of the prayer which is popularly known as the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew chapter 6:10, Jesus taught His disciples to pray that the Kingdom of God should come. And later added the focus of our text which reads "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (6:10b). Biblical scholars like Stagg (1969:115) believe that the former prayer "that the Kingdom of God should come" is related to the latter petition "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Adelakun (2008:224-225) citing Albert Barnes notes that the will of God is that man should obey God's law on earth as it is obeyed in heaven, and be holy. He asserts that *quelhma* which implies thy will has reference to His law, and to what would be pleasing to Him; that is, uprightness, integrity and good works. He further remarks that just as God's perfect laws are totally obeyed in heaven, thus making heaven an orderly, peaceful and suitable place for habitation, God wants His children to obey His laws on earth so that the earth can be peaceful, and suitable for the existence of human beings, plants and other living organism.

Wesley (2023:2) succinctly notes that "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b) is a call for all the inhabitants of the earth to do the will of God cheerfully without compulsion. He remarks that as the angels in heaven willingly obey God's instruction without interruption or interjection, thus making heaven a habitable place, humanity is required to obey God's laws and principles in order to enjoy the earth space. In relation to ecological matters, humanity is called upon to observe the guiding principles as it concerns the environment as stated in the scriptures (Deut. 20:19; 23:12-14; 23:13-14; Lev. 25:1-13) for the conservation and preservation of the earth for man's continued sustenance and for the preservation of other plants and animals. It must be stated clearly that man's existence on the biosphere is not a guarantee to destroy, pollute, exploit or degrade the environment rather to think of ways and means to sustain the environment.

Barclay (2006:210-213) writing on Matthew 6:10a&b which reads "Let your kingdom come: Let your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" opines that Jesus used one of the commonest literary features in the Old Testament known as parallelism. Although there are many types of parallelism such as synonymous; antithetic; synthetic; parabolic; introverted/chiastic parallelisms, the main point in parallelism is that the thought or ideas expressed in words or parts are interpreted in another form in words or parts to mean the same thing. Barclay avers that the Hebrews had the habit of saying everything twice just to make emphasis, repeat, amplify or explain the first expression that was made. To prove this fact, he reveals that a look at the psalms and other text of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures shows that they are almost divided into two in the middle; and the second half amplifies or makes emphasis or explains the first half (for instance Psalm 46:1; 46:7; 23:1-2; 6:1; 29:1-2; 103; Isai. 1:3, Prov. 14:34 etc).

In relation to Matthew 6:10a&b, Barclays asides that the Kingdom of God is a society upon earth where God's will is absolutely done as it is in heaven. He stresses that any person at any period in history who obeyed and carried out God's will was within the kingdom; any man who perfectly does God's will is within the Kingdom; however, since the world is very far from being a place where God's will is completely and totally done, the consummation of the Kingdom is still in the future and Christians must pray about it. In other word, to be in the Kingdom is to obey the will of God and the will of God for humanity is to do the right thing on the earth. God in a nutshell expects His creatures to live in peace with themselves; one another and other living organism. Conversely, just as there is peace and tranquillity in the heavenly realms through the wilful obedience of the celestial beings, such peace and tranquillity must be reflected on the earth by man's obedience of God's laws especially laws pertaining to the conservation and preservation of the earth habitat. Man must guard against destruction of the earth and the ecological spheres created by God since it is enshrined in God's law (Leviticus 25:1-13; Jeremiah 2:7).

The earth and ecological spheres must not be polluted, degraded or desecrated rather man's activities on the earth and the ecological spheres must be geared towards ecological conservation and preservation. Consequently, frequent deforestation as witnessed in the African clime which causes loss of bio diversity

or constitute a threat to the natural ecosystem and other ecological depletions must be discouraged, this is because plants, including tress and animals serve very useful purposes to mankind and to the environment and very importantly because it is against the will of God as opined in His word. As typified by Abogunrin (2008:8) humanity needs to accept the fact that God, rather than him, is the Creator, Owner and Supreme Ruler of the entire universe. Similarly, humanity need to realize that they do not possess absolute power or authority over nature rather stands as God's moral agent on earth and God's own trustee on planet earth. Therefore, humanity is to explore and exploit the ecological sphere responsibly as God's own steward, who will one day give account before God the creator of the universe (Psalm 24:1).

Moreover, towards solving ecological issues in Africa, humanity must respect nature and control the high level of deforestation and desertification witnessed in the global community. Rather than encourage the felling down of trees and the use of firewood's and charcoals, government and the authorities in charge of petroleum resources can subsidize the cost of cooking gas and kerosene for the common man to afford. This will go a long way in reducing the burning of bushes and restore the unique habitat created by God. Also, it will forestall the menace of erosion caused by frequent flooding since a thick bush serves as control measure to flooding and erosion. Furthermore, Government at all levels must endeavour to provide the basic amenities needed by humanity such as good roads, hospital, electricity, education and also create an enabling environment for the creation of job opportunities to the people they govern in order to ameliorate poverty which has been identified as one of the major causes of ecological degradation. This is in addition to emphasizing on the decongestion of the city and map out plans for rural development. On the other hand, multinational oil companies must be proactive and active in curbing the menace of environmental disasters such as oil spillages, black soot among others which makes water undrinkable, air poisonous and the land unsafe for human habitation especially in the areas they are located when these occur. This is to save the lives of the people; to ensure healthy living of humans and other organism and the continued sustenance of their land.

Conclusion

This concise paper which centres on "Exploring Matthew 6:10b towards solving ecological issues in Africa" identified salient ecological issues ravaging Africa and the global community. Moreover, the paper examined the causes and effects of ecological issues in Africa and the wider society and thereafter highlighted the biblical perspective on ecological issues before undertaking a contextualized reading of Matthew 6:10b towards solving ecological issues in Africa. The paper maintains that the essence of Jesus's prayer in Matthew 6:10b which has been appropriated towards solving ecological issues in Africa is that the earth be made serene; fit to live in, and suitable for living like heaven. Consequently, for this to be achieved, man who is the prime of God's creation must be willing to obey God's laws, including laws governing the environment as enshrined in the Holy Scriptures. In other words, humanity must seize from abusing the environment in any form, but do everything at their reach to make the environment a safe place for habitation by so doing the prayer of Jesus Christ in Matthew 6:10b has been properly appropriated.

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