Religion and the Management of Environmental Problems in the 'Evolved African' System

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Abstract: *The 'evolved African' means the African who has been transformed by the whims of modernity and who equally seems, at the same time, to be caught up in the webs of tradition. The evolved African is seen here as an unhealthy conceptual hybrid of the colonial culture and the traditional African culture. In evaluating this new cultural system, one sees various problems arising in African which are necessarily caused by the actions of the evolved African owing to this cultural alienation upon which he lives. Among these problems are environmental problems which, today, impacts negatively on the African existence. These environmental problems leave the African in a continuous state of underdevelopment since there seems to be no ready solution to these problems. This work focuses on a supposed cause of the African environmental problem – cultural alienation while attempting to showcase the role of religion in solving these environmental problems. The thesis here is that the African in his race towards modernism, occasioned by his colonial mind, becomes a victim of environmental problems which have damaging effects on his development. These problems may be managed through religious principles.*
Key words: *Religion — Environment – Management – Evolved-African.*

I.   Introduction

A deep look into the African culture shows the African as a being who is ontologically religious. This understanding is not by any accident. The African laws, generally, are drawn from the African religion. Little wonder the African sociopolitical life is at most seen to be not very separable from the African's religion. Basically, studying the African culture brings one, immediately, face to face with the religious background of the African. It is therefore clear that the African religion underscores any inquiry into any perspective of the African life.

The basic understanding of the African as a deeply religious being brings to bear the very attitude of the African towards this religion of his. The African religion gives a pragmatic ground to the African existence. This pragmatic ground influences the African thought pattern and the African world view. This pragmatism innate in the African system gives reason for the causal system of the African life. Generally the African does not concur to the fact that events can be so gregarious or causally ineffective. Everything that takes place must have a cause. This causal principle shows in details, the African system and the tenets of the African life. No doubt this system influences every action and every belief of the African.

The African under examination here is not an African of any given time but the African of true African decent. Making this distinction is very necessary as there is a change in the belief system of the traditional African and the African with a colonized mindset. This distinction marks the concentration of this paper – an emphasis on the evolved African. The non- hybrid African presents all things as being owned by God and the human being just acting as a custodian of such property of God. This belief makes him careful about the dealings he must have with nature and the world around him. This practice affects their lives and the lives of the world around them. These Africans so described, seek to find some meaning in life which is vested on the sacred object such as trees, animals, land, and so on. These sacred objects are used as media to communicate with their maker.

This in-depth religiosity of the African allowed this African to take charge of his life and the property and gives him meaning. The African sees God through these intermediaries (trees and other objects). Each object in Africa is laden with meaning and serves as a communication tool either among humans or between humans and the supernatural. Thus in some nations of Africa, one discovers that these objects are not tampered with; even killing specific animals are seen as abomination. All these become, for the African, a method of worshiping and understanding God and therefore making some meaning out of life. The structure of this belief system makes the African reconcile his beingness with his purpose. No doubt, this belief may be extreme with regards to damaging the need for freedom and self absolution but it has helped the African in proper preservation of their cultural heritage through the centuries.

The African system, which holds the African tied to the societal norms and environmental preservation, from the entry of western system suffers a great set back and even a misapplication of its tenets. The African system, for instance, is condemned by the carriers of the western culture as inferior. On the strength of this, most

of the African cultural practices were termed fetish and occultist. The African who has been found in this cross-road of cultures finds it hard to demonstrate fully any of the two cultural values within which he has been captured. Evidently, the African appears to be neither here nor there in demonstrating his culture. This is the lot of the evolved African – an African who is placed between two cultures and who does not hope for proper culture integration. The African as such uses religion as an umbrella and an instrument instead of a foundation of life which plays a great role in his existence in the first place.

The above situation, no doubt, affects the whole aspect of the African existence ranging from the African social life which is no longer very systematic and cordial as before, to the moral life of the African. The social and moral lives of the African so affected impacts on the way Africans perceive things. While many desire to overhaul every tenet of the traditional African culture, others try cleansing the order. This results in many problems facing the African today. Among these problems are environmental problems which bedevil the African society. These environmental problems so faced by the African are as a result of failure to synthesize their traditional religious tenets which are carriers of their culture with the foreign religion. This problem stands out in the African life.

This work attempts at evaluating the relevance of religion in the management of the African environmental problems. This work will proceed through a rigorous evaluation of the concept of environment which the Africans have as given to them by the grounds of their religion and culture with the objective of identifying how this African environment has been destabilized by their contemporary syncretic worldview and further determine how these environmental problems can be addressed using religious synthesis. This goes ahead to prove that religion has a great role in the establishment of a balanced universe especially of the African world.

II.   The African And The Environment

The African concept of environment is anthropocentric. This anthropocentric Environmental system where in values possessed by the non human entities are dependent on the human usefulness, contrasts with the non anthropocentric system where it is believed that non human entities have values intrinsic to them. In trying to state the problem between these thought systems Schmidtz (2006, 12) asked:

> It is often said to be morally wrong for human beings to pollute and destroy parts of the natural environment and to consume a huge proportion of the planet's natural resources. If that is wrong, is it simply because a sustainable environment is essential to (present and future) human well-being? Or is such behavior also wrong because the natural environment and/or its various contents have certain values in their own right so that these values ought to be respected and protected in any case?

It is following the above question by Schmidtz that the inquiry into the African system shows that traditional African society, which is generally believed to have a culture founded on immense religiosity, follows this same culture in relating to his/her environment. Generally, the African sees his/her environment as a gift from God. Okoye (2011,4) emphasizes this as he opines that "the African system welcomes the environment as a supernatural gift which must be harnessed carefully either to please the creator or enhance the relationship with the gods".

Apparently, the African ontology divides its world into: The physical (world of human beings) and the non physical (world of ancestors and the God). The African perceptive mode of environment stems from their respect for their gods/God and the ancestors who are believed to be part of the environmental cycle. The Igbo for instance regard the 'ala or 'ani' (earth /land) as very supreme and powerful, sacred and holy. There may be no need desecrating the earth for the repercussion is capable of destroying an entire generation. Okonkwor (2010) clarifies this in his analysis. He represents the view of the Igbo while describing the uniqueness of the human symbiotic relationship with the land thus:

> The Igbo produces from the land as the land produces from them. While they produce sustenance, from the land, the land produces care, reverence and peace from them. They neither committed evil or an omen without fear of the land. The land never disappointed them or did she starve them. She is their mother...

Okonkwor explains the land as sentient. Being sentient, the land reciprocates any gesture of goodwill shown to her by her dependents. As such the Igbo got food and are not punished by any disaster of the land so long as they fulfilled their responsibility to her. One immediately sees a subtle deep existential attachment to the land. The land knows them and protects them. In fact the land appears as a life- wire of a people.

The African attachment to the land is made clearer when compared with the example of the 'Dine' who shares a similar view. Jenny Manybeads (1989,248) explains the attachment of the Dine to land through the interview with Alice Benally who could not yet come to terms with her relocation from the mountain. Benally, the Dine woman, expresses her worry that the land would not recognize her when she relocates. She insists thus:

> If we are to make our offerings at a new place, the spiritual beings would
> not know us. We would not know the mountains or the significance of them.
> We would not know the land and the land would not know us.

It is worthy of note at this juncture that the African system is traditionally so land possessive that there is a very slim chance of either relocation or transfer of land. As a matter of fact, the traditional African societies regard the land so much that it is almost an abomination advertizing it as an outright commodity to be sold for money. As a matter of fact, the land is fundamental to the explanation of the human identity in African. The view of the 'Maasai' on this, at this juncture, is demonstrated by Wangari (see Bells 2010,78). Here "the land by its nature and position in the world is not a commodity to be traded. The families inhabiting the land belong to it. Each individual that belonged to a family belonged to the land".

A very important idea is raised here in the above excerpt. This point is 'belonging'. Belongingness in the African context is best explained by Pantaleon Iroegbu (1998,6) "as circumstance of assuming a part". This understanding entails the incompleteness of every entity without the other. Beingness, Iroegbu insists, "is well described through belongingness where it is difficult to define any 'being' without the rest". He condemns Martin Heidegger's (see Being and Time, 1962) ontological deconstruction' where 'Dasein' assumes a center stage; and by the ontic and ontological functions, raises the question of "Being". Laurie (2001,7) explains the issue of belonging in relation to the African and his/her environment stating that 'to belong to the land is to be attached or bound to it by birth, by allegiance and dependence". She continues by postulating that the "resulting relationship of belonging may be characterized as one of intimacy, or inherency".

The land and indeed the whole of the natural world form an ontological ground for the existence of the human being in the world. It is on the strength of this understanding that the African perceives his/her environment as that to be respected not damaged or exploited. Jenny Manybeads (1989,239) sums it with Keeshay's statement thus.

> Here on our land we are familiar with the springs, rocks, mountains, hills
> (...) they are familiar with us (...) each day I came to know my relatives here
> little by little.

Africans realize the fact that there is a subtle unity between them and their environment – the world around them. This is why the mystical people or rather people who are believed to be endowed with some extra-sensory powers, are said to have a great understanding of the language of nature. Such people are said to be in constant dialogue with nature (trees, shrubs, grasses, etc) on the various uses they (natural things) can be put to. Strange as this may appear, Odikpo (2011, 27) emphasizes that this mystical union is what cements the African religious and cultural systems.

Odikpo's (2011, 27) idea is that the African cosmological dualism cannot be "possibly described without appeal to a tangible source of interaction between the forces of the sensory and spiritual". Evidently, the interaction of forces' which is at the base of African metaphysics presents itself clearly in the interaction between the people (mystical often) and nature. This accounts for the power of the 'dibia' among the Igbo to heal people through herbs. Egbeke Aja (2000, 67) describes further the functions of this 'dibia ogwu' (his words) as a task of enhancing the human force through nature. For him "these forces are tapped (not exploited), for the improvement of the universal condition". As such humans respect and worship God through nature and God blesses them through nature. The humans are but custodians of nature.

Nature, here, is not limited to land and plants but equally extends to animals. Animals are held sacred among the Africans. It is a fact, though, that in some African communities animals are reared for food but beyond just food they serve equally as protective agents to human life. Little wonder among the Igbo people one hears some idiomatic expressions such as: 'kama ndu ga- efu oku anochie'- instead of life to be lost it is exchanged for a property. This by no means shows animals (that fall under 'oku'-property) as meaningless. However, the African believes in the hierarchy of forces. This hierarchy is found in the African system according to the order of importance. While every animal is important, the human person seems to be more important in the hierarchy based on the role assigned to the humans as a custodian of nature.

This idea condemns the incessant killing of the animals. Animals that are killed must be killed with-respect thus among the 'Isoko' people it is a crime to kill an animal without a reason. Ogbogho (an elder in Isoko community) insists that the people of Isoko have a retributive justice system, dealing with nature. Such that "if a human being kills a baby- animal deliberately, the individual may also be said to have killed his own fecundity or that of his descendants". The Igbo view is equally re-iterated by Okoye (2011, 6). He insists that the Igbo believe that the presence of most animals depicts a manifestation of God". This accounts for the reason why some animals are never harmed in various communities. Furthermore, the distinction between humans and animals are not very pronounced. Thus in most African societies, the human beings are said to be capable of changing to animals and birds. Hogan (1998,27) puts this idea across thus. It is not impossible for humans to become animals, without ceasing to be a person".

In the face of this, it becomes almost risky killing animals incessantly and thus disrespecting their existential rights. This forms the basis of the respect for the environment by the African. It is true that the

African system values environment and respect it, this respect, however does not mean that the value these things have is intrinsic. The value associated with these entities in the world is attached to its usefulness to man. Man, despite his nature as being- with-in-the world, is still a being who stands at the centre of the universe. The world exists because man exists. Though there is a mutual interdependence between man and nature (as Iroegbu's belongingness above tries to demonstrate), the Africans believe that the purpose for which the world is made is man. Metuh (1990, 164) clearly stresses on this thus

> Man is a being or life force in the midst of and interacting with other life- forces
> in the universe. However, man is the focal point of all the life- forces in the
> universe in as much as other thing/ beings are ordained to enhance the well-
> being of man....

There is no gain saying, at this juncture, that the African is anthropocentric in his dealings with the environment. In as much as they have very strong respect for their environment, this respect is based on the usefulness of nature for man in his immediate society and the next generation. The African anthropocentricism, shows the background of the African as being generational, the African life and history is so cyclic that the prior generation is obliged to the following generation to give them the best of everything hence the younger ones existed before them as their parents through ilo uwa[1]. Arinze (2003) states that

> The dignity of the African life and the sacredness of one's attitudes lie in the
> fact that the world in which one lives today is a world that the individual will
> meet later. The child grows to manhood and further joins the ancestors at
> death. The death is no real death but an anticipation of a new life which the
> ancestor steps into by coming to life again from the spirit world.

No doubt, Arinze's explanation which grounds the African view of life, cements the very conceptualization of the African about his/her environment. While the African sees the environment as God- given and thus respectable, they further see it as a source of health and sustenance not only for themselves but of the generation to come. This is akin to what Lyon (in Laurie 2001,10) addresses in his elaborations of land ethics. Lyons comments:

> What about the seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will
> they have? We say that the faces of the coming generations are looking up
> from the earth... if you think in these terms then you will walk a lot more
> carefully, be more respectful of this earth.

This attitude of environmental respect for a generational anthropocentric interest, though played down on by the current views of development, still retains its potency. Agu (2010, 7) emphatically states that the African heritage still shows the identity of the African even when these African attitudes seems to have been lost to the whims of modernism. It is in this problem of modernism which has been wrongly accepted by the African and which has negatively impacted on the African, that the current environmental problem of the contemporary African society hinges.

The contemporary African accepts modernity as that which will free him/her from the shackles of tradition which is construed as slavery. Just as the secular modernity becomes the beginning of the history of the absolved self, modernity is welcomed by the African as the beginning of the history of freedom from the slavery of culture which is peddled usually by the African traditional religion. The African, however, while making a conscious effort to be free finds himself at 'cross-roads' of culture alienation. Having disregarded the religious tenets as fetish, the contemporary African is rejected by the very attempt to achieve any cultural dialectics which would have been a strong foothold towards developing a balanced society

The result here is simple. One finds it hard to define any yardstick for ascertaining right and wrong attitudes; it rather becomes more difficult to place what superior values are and finally, there is a constant rhythmic down play of the societal system. It is in this rhythmic down play that the African becomes an enemy to himself/herself by destroying nature instead of building it hence the serious environmental crises/problems which are found in many African societies today. These problems are difficult to redeem or correct as a result of the current view of the African mind which seems alien to his/her ontological status. Having come this far, it is pertinent to immediately x-ray how the 'evolved African' situates himself/herself in current environmental problem.

III.   The African And The Encounter With Evolution
The evolution of the African begins primarily from the mental destabilization of the African race. This mental destabilization ends up indoctrinating the African into believing that of the African nation is dysfunctional and as such incapable of excellence. This disposition sets upon the mind of the average African, a desire to live above his supposed 'savage system, bedeviled by poverty, backwardness, emotionality,

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[1] The above word is generally translated as reincarnation but this does not fully translate it.

irrationality and fantasy, into a world of freedom, development, assertiveness and rationality. The attempt to achieve this alienates the African from himself/herself.

One does not try to insist, here, that modernity came upon the African as a 'tempest' that seeks to break its foundation. What this work tries to put across is the fact that the mode of condemnation of the tenets of the African cultural, religious and societal system leads to the disillusionment of the average African and this makes the African see himself/herself as backward and good for nothing. One may ask: does the African actually belong in the history of development? Izu Onyeocha (1997, 14) answers to this question insisting, while commenting on Lucas lamentation, that the 'black man's understanding of himself was basically an echo of the white man's portrayal of him".

This observation of Onyeocha without ado is acceptable as the major problem of the evolved African. He/she sees his/her world from the lens of westernization but finds it hard to change that Africanity which is ontological to his/her existence. The African approaches everything about his/her existence from this angle. No wonder, the evolved African encounter with the environment appears to be that of alienation and egocentric anthropocentricism.

The various ways, through which Africans have been defined, sends a picture of a people blinded by fetishism and synonymous with backwardness and incivility. The very consciousness of this puts the African in the tight corner of self-alienation. Oliver killens (1968,137), in his attempt to showcase the concept of inferiority of the African culture states that the greatest respect that is accorded the black/ African American is usually seen in an epitaph of Eulogy given to him in the page of the local periodical. "he is a black man, but he had a white heart" (citation copied from Izu Onyeocha's African: the Question of Identity Washington DC: CRVP pub). Having a white heart connotes nobility of heart and civility.

Primarily the African suffers, defenselessly a psychological defeat which projects him as overtly inferior. It is at the point of the 'education'[2] of the African mind that the African encounters an 'evolution'. Nevertheless, this evolution, unlike a conventional evolution stemming from a dialectical resolution of cultures, crashes the African into a different world of existential and cultural uncertainty. Oliver killens (1968,138) points towards this seeming dramatic stagnation using a racial theme of the utter heartbreak of the 'Mulatto' who rejects his black blood but was rejected by his white blood.

One does not need to go far to discover the very foundation of the African crises which affects every aspect of the African existence. One thing is sure. The developers of the African race (the west) with a certain intention tries to fix the African in certain level by their (western) orientation. This impacted some worth negatively on the African. Izu Onyeocha (1997, 96) brings it out this impact clearly thus:

> To be civilized, he/she must be converted to foreign cultures and tendencies, and change
> his indigenous name for another which is inevitably foreign. He or she must speak one or
> other foreign language and adapt to foreign culture. On the moral plain the African is
> torn between traditional and received values. Any wonder he/she never gets totally
> converted...

This evolution marks the beginning of African separation from himself/ herself. This separation introduced a new African with an evolved nature. The African begins to exist without any background and good moral attitude. Mokwugo Okoye (1964,15) thinks that at a point the western religions put hands in the bastardization of the African moral foundation and culture by "making rogues of the honest men, self-seekers out of unselfish men, liars and perverts and neurotics out of men happily free from these defects". He insists that those who ruled gave "the African peasant a fine training in Chicane and petty fogging so that having rejected his jujus and taboos he can now swear falsely on the Bible, cheat and steal without qualms".

Mokwugo Okoye's contention is apt. The contemporary/evolved African finds it hard to build of himself/herself a great personality who would stand his/her grounds in every circumstance. No wonder one sees apparent syncretism and dishonesty in the contemporary community of the evolved African. The communality disappears. Individuality sets in. No one thinks of the 'Us' but of the 'I'. This is why there is a constant degeneration in values of the contemporary African society. It is in the evaluation of this evolved African that the environmental crises in existence of the evolved African will be examined shortly.

IV.   The Evolved African And Environmental Crises

Evaluating the environmental crises in the evolved African society requires a straight theme on the substance of their environmental conceptualization. The African particularly believes that the environment is there to serve his purpose whether ideological or existential. Thus, the orthodox ethical humanistic argument and humane moralist arguments on the issue of speciesism may not be strictly applicable to the African environmental issues.

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[2] Concept of 'education' here is assumed etymologically- to draw out not just a secular understanding which connotes learning of all sorts.

The African view of environment is anthropocentric. As such it beholds on the African to harness the environment but not carelessly. Nevertheless, the encounter with cultural evolutions, which leave the African at the mercy conflicting cultural systems seem to have a great influence on the African view of their environment, and subsequently great effect on the environment. The evolved African finds himself tied to a new Christian teaching where God hands man over the environment. The Bible states this clearly thus:

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over the earth, and over everything that creepeth upon the earth...

And God blessed them and said upon them, be fruitful, multiply, and replenishes the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over everything that moveth upon the earth (see Gen. 1:26-28).

The above passage shows a subtle hand-over of the world affairs to mankind. Evidently, this mandate, universally construed is such that one is free to use the environment in any way one deems fit. The new African sees himself/herself in this position as well. While the traditional culture of the African holds nature sacred and, as mentioned earlier, not for commercialization, the evolved African sees nature as property to be used for gratification. This naturally leads the evolved African into lots of environmental problems since the respect given to nature and the mystery which accords it such respect has been laid bare.

Such environmental problems range from climate change, pollution, erosion to flooding. These sampled problems occur as a result of the human careless activities against nature. Sequel to the above, Dwivedi (2001, 40) occludes that "human greed and exploitative tendencies having been the main cause of environmental destruction, inter-religious and inter-cultural conflicts and wars have also contributed to the environmental problems". The African system today is suffused by greed and such exploitative tendencies which Dwivedi commented above. These tendencies lead to an unpleasant tapping of natural resources which often cause pollution, flooding and erosion. Also, following the above tendencies, the African equally sees himself/herself grafted into an uncontrolled and corrupt industrialization process. These underscore the African romance with environmental crises.

Evaluating pollution, among other evolved African environmental problems, one sees that most problems of environments which are encountered in Africa today revolves round it. Pollution, no doubt, has caused an untold problem among the African communities which abandons most African communities to the whims of environmental hazards.

In explaining pollution as "a contamination of earth's environment with materials that interfere with human health, quality of life, or the natural functioning of ecosystems", in relation to Africa, two perspectives come to mind.

i.   Externally induced pollution
ii.   Internally induced pollution

The externally induced pollution is that which is generated from the wrong method of tapping the natural resources like oil and natural gas. It is called external here, not because it is induced by foreigners only but because the purpose for such an activity follows an external tide through international market relations, political economical systems and international demand and supply system. The Africans are not entirely passive since the governments play active roles in the harnessing of these natural resources. This externally induced pollution is often caused by the care-free attitude of the government and even private investors towards the environment. This leads to the current problem of oil spillage and carbon concentration in the atmosphere.

The result is simple. Other areas such as Agriculture suffer as a result of land pollution. Furthermore, the green house effect gets on the increase thus the extreme weather condition recorded in many African communities today. Ogungbemi (1997, 205) decried the wrong use of natural resources in Africa. For him,

[T]he way in which natural resources(....) are currently being used is contrary to the traditional African practice of environmental conservation.... in a bid to catch up with developed countries, the contemporary Africa has exploited some of its essential minerals..., thereby creating ecological imbalances.

The African system, bedeviled by these environmental crises, is seen battling with other environmental problems which generally stem from here. These are internally induced pollution.

The internally induced pollution, are other internal activities which pollute the environment. These are often as a result of lack of information or misinformation of the African populace on common environmental care guidelines. Here one can view issues like sewage disposal (and other biological pollutions) and non degradable pollutants. These internally induced pollution impacts on the lives of the people directly. Poor sewage disposal and poor waste management endanger the economic situation of the lower level African, and promotes poor health condition, which are environmentally oriented. Furthermore, research shows that careless

disposal of non- degradable materials which possess toxic compounds and radioactive material weaken the human life and cause diseases like cancer especially when they are passed unconsciously fed on[3].

The evolved African environmental problem is not limited to pollution. It extends to such problems as erosion, which destroys both life and property especially where these erosion problems are intense. The problem of erosion in Africa generally is blamed on deforestation. This deforestation is often as a result of the effort of the African to de-traditionalize himself/ herself. This 'de-traditionalization' stretches him beyond his/her limits while unconsciously striving towards the limits determined by colonialism. He makes of himself/herself a white man in a black skin".

Deforestation aside the problem of erosion, sees the African environment under siege with flooding, desertification, temperature increase and ecological imbalance. Evidently, the quest for the development of Africa appears to be a far cry since the natural gift which the African continent possesses is fast being destroyed in the name of development little wonder then various forms of diseases which do not even have an African origin seem to thrive more in Africa. This is the fruit of the African encounter with evolution. The evolved African tends to meet up the international standards mindlessly and thus appears to look away from his traditional system. This effort is heralded by the enchantment of globalization. There is, among the 'evolved Africans' a forgetfulness of the background which should have been, instead, the foundation for any globalization experience.

V. Religion, Semiotics: A Solution.

The functionality of religion is seen in the role assigned to it in every culture. For some cultural groups religion is but a people's opinion. For others religion forms a strong fulcrum and a point around which every activity revolve. Africa falls within this second group. The creative power of God, which occupies the central focus of religion, is given great attention to by the African who believes that God created the world and as such sustains it. This religiosity surrounds the African existence and is equally the substance of various African cultural groups.

The first general impression of religion in relation to the secular sphere is that of mythology and irrationality as such a lot of thinkers find it more convenient dismissing religious tenets as unserious and dogmatic. This berated understanding short-cuts the potency of religion in the quest to solve many secular problems. Mendietta (2011, 1) emphatically attempts at bridging this gap between the secular and the sacred against a lot of people's position thus:

> Religion is neither merely private, for instance, nor purely irrational. And the public sphere is neither a realm of straight forward natural deliberation nor a smooth space of unforced assent. Yet these understandings of both religion and public life have long been pervasive, perhaps especially within academic circles.

The above shows the seriousness of the role of religion in trying to rectify certain problematic areas in the secular world and thus calls for a re-assessment of the views about religion in relation to the public sphere. This re-assessment begins from the very fundamental understanding of 'man' as a being within culture. It connotes, according to Okoye Chuka (2011, 4) a system of "forming the seed of an individual's character and life into the societal structure". Man is molded with culture "through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history". (see George Simmuel 1998, 23).

The culture and the history with which an individual(s) is identified evidently is determined often by the norms of the people which is (norms) traced to the religious system. There is a tendency to dismiss religious roles on the individual following the long term metaphysical dualism especially as championed by Descartes and of late John Rawls. The appellation of man as primarily and ontologically rational accentuates the progressive concurrence with the fact of religious dysfunctionality especially with regards to the public sphere. On the strength of this, morality becomes, not an orchestration from religion, but a proof of rationality as occluded by Immanuel Kant; a social agreement by Hobbes and a functional system of subjectivity by Brian George.

This more religiously independent ideologies about morals and human existence pattern shield the human entity from a direct touch with reality where in man as the only rational entity exists for other things to exist – the owner of nature. Little wonder the problem against nature which is blamed on rationalism. The extolment of rationalism- the soul of secularism- above religion as the solution of other secular problems comes from the claims that secularism, by its various conceptualizations, "can solve the question of how to realize these goals in the domain of timeless principle". The truth is that secularism faces diverse situations which call for agreed general principles. Of course there is expected success in each situation. The implication here is that is need for a reference to higher authority; a need which immediately denies smaller religious communities particularly voice and therefore leaves one apparently confused about the values to follow.

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[3] See Patrick Croft (2009) Basic Issues in Environmental Health Washington: Smithsonian books.

Setting values right and straight which is the core of the religious system, presents religion as competent solution to secular issues generally, and environment particularly. The role which religion is saddled with is such that it is supposed to induce into the minds of people a God- governed environment where in man is obliged to secure the environment for ethical purposes. The ethical grounds here consists of both the responsibility to the generations yet unborn and who will need equally a pretty good environment to exist, and engaging the environment as an entity which, though serves the human purpose or end (happiness) still has to be respected and cared for.

In the African religious context, it becomes clear that the re-direction of the African minds back to their roots through their traditional religious tenets can help sustain the African environment. The point here is not a defeatist urging of the Africans to face their traditional religion which they have long been alienated from. The point is that the African should be re-orientated into his culture. This re-orientation comes through a dialectical adaptation of the current African cultural situation.

The African religious norms and other African cultural practices which has been proved, earlier in this section, to be very relevant in the solution of secular problems should be readopted into the African pedagogical activities both of the younger and older generation. Here, there is a functional system in which nature is symbolic. Objects in nature are necessarily technical ways in which the people communicate either with each other or with the supernatural. One finds meaning and reason in the things of nature and thus there is less desire to destroy these objects as they give meaning to the human existence as far as the African is concerned. Ogbodo (2007:4) clearly explains the take of the Africans on nature as a symbol of communication thus:

> The African communicates with the other, he is able to interpret and give meanings to things and event through nature. For instance, in most African communities, some animals represent messengers who come to pass pieces of information. As such the presence of such animals in the immediate human environment entails… a further search into the purpose for their visit [….] some trees are communicative tools. They behavior of such trees at some point determines the situation, the demand and so on of the community.

Evidently, African religious practices hold a lot of things in nature sacred and thus preserved life through nature. Thus "nature saved man as man saved nature" (Okoye 2011, 22). This accounts for the longevity of the previous generation of the Africans who emphasized on the symbiotic relationship between the man and the environment.

The norms which protected nature and which succeeded as a result of the religious strength of the African traditional religion needs to be-appropriated into the African contemporary system. Here primarily, nature is seen as the image of God and as such beyond human comprehension. This sacred position that nature assumes in African traditional religion seems to be lost since the contemporary religion has been taken rather unsystematically to place nature under man. As such many argue that God himself, through Christ, showed the superiority of man over animals by commanding evil spirit into a herd of pigs which got drowned into river. Thus saving just one man (see Mk. 5:1-24). The above reading from the Christian scripture among others seem to have gradually inculcated into the mind of the African an insight into the denigration of environment for which he pays dearly for.

African communities generally are seen to be exposed to very dangerous environmental crises. And worse crises lurks should these environmental mismanagement continue. Ogugbemi (1997) states vividly that the traditional Africans have regarded nature with awe. In our traditional relationship with nature, men and women recognize the importance of nature. To our traditional communities the ethics of not taking more than you need from nature is a moral code. Perhaps this explains why earth, forests, rivers and wind...., are traditionally believed to be both natural and divine.... The ethics of care is essential to traditional understanding of environmental protection and conservation. As future of this environmental health and preservation becomes bleak, the future Africans society becomes more endangered as more fewer environmental hazards lurks.

The above clearly shows that there is need to re-examine the Africans' structure of existence and relationship with the environment. This will be more effective by re- introducing the Africans to their culture and ethics which is borne more from their religion.

VI.   Conclusion

The African environmental problem is largely blamed not on nature per se but on the human factor. The activities which are carried out in most African societies and the mode through which these activities are carried out result in various environmental damages. The African of the modern era seem to be bewildered by the pace of global development but apparently startled by his conceptual backwardness in following the developmental trend. Culture mix does not as well spare the African a chance to see himself as relevant in the developmental order. This conceptual backwardness thus brings in the mind of the contemporary African a sort of desperation to meet up with the pace of global development. With this there is a massive crusade for change which usually comes with it a mindless exploration of natural, economic, social and even cultural resources to

achieve development. It is in a bid to follow this global trend that most African societies fall victim of several damage especially environmental damages.

The environment appears to be most vulnerable to the dangers of such conceptual backwardness since every attempt by the African to pull out from this backwardness gets back to it. Some societies in Africa, for instance, in a bid to harness natural resources cause untold havoc to the environment through pollution, erosion and green house problems. These problems are made more intensive by the flow of international political economy which African states are systematically and technically shut off.

The developmental process would have been better managed if the African system maintained a statuesque in which their life style and culture, serve as a mode for going about this developmental process. The thesis here is that the culture alienation which bedevils the contemporary African drives him into thinking that the process of development must be measured by western acceptability. To achieve this he pulls down his traditional wall and embraces a western wall which may never become his. This is why this work tries to project religion as a route through which the African environmental problems can be managed. Since the African system is religiously grounded and even promoted, it can be harnessed as a route through which the consciousness of environmental care is achieved.

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