

Review

Religion, environment, and climate change in Kolo Creek Clan

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This study examines the impact of religion, specifically African traditional religious practices, on the environment and climate change in Africa. It employs empirical, expository, and analytical methods. The objectives of this work are to critically analyze and evaluate the role of African traditional religious practices in comparison to Christianity concerning their impact on the environment and climate change in Kolo Creek Clan, Ogbia, Bayelsa State. The study's findings revealed that African traditional religious practices, such as the worship of divinities, spirits, totems, and ancestral worship, contribute to the enhancement of the environment and climatic conditions by promoting the conservation of forests, fish, animals, and other natural resources. Therefore, the study concludes that African traditional religious practices, along with the worship of divinities and spirits, play a role in improving the natural environment and reducing ozone layer depletion, ultimately benefiting climate change conditions and human survival.

Key words: Climate change, divinities, environment, religion, spirits.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is such a diffused word that means different things to different people, and that is why religion is a fluid concept. Religion can be used positively or negatively; religion could be used to build the character of people and society either positively or negatively in form of dogmas or indoctrination. Religion brings growth and development to the society and in another perspective; it brings retardation and underdevelopment to the society. Religion is closely related to growth and maturation of the individual and his passage through the various ages grading which are recognized or identified by the society (Nabofa, 1992). Psychologists have said that individual development goes through a series of encounters from infancy to death. Also, religion may also provide a standard of values in terms of which the established norms, rules, and values may be critically examined and

found seriously wanting or lacking. This is especially likely to be true in respect of religions which emphasize the transcendence of God and His consequent superiority over and independent of the established authorities in the society (Nabofa, 1988). That apart, religion helps man to identify himself. And when individuals accept religious values and the beliefs about human nature and destiny associated with them, they develop important aspects of their own self-understanding and self-definition. Secondly, as they participate in religious rituals and worship, they openly dramatize the significant elements of their own identity.

Further, religion gives sacred backing or support to the customs, norms, and values of an established society and maintaining or upholding the dominance of group goals or values or needs of the generality of the society

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over individual wishes and needs and thereby suppressing the individual impulses for the general good of the society (Nabofa, 1988).

Religion by its dealing with the divine beings which are concerned with human destiny and welfare, and to whom men may respond and relate themselves, provides support, consolation, and reconciliation. Every man needs moral and spiritual support in the face of uncertainty, he needs consolation when he is disappointed and reconciliation with society when he is alienated from its goals and norms. Thus, religion provides important spiritual and emotional comfort and consolation in the face of failures and disappointment in life. And in addition, religion makes relationship between man and the divine possible through cult and the ceremonial ritual and thereby gives man assurance for a new security and feels more confident in the midst of the uncertainties and impossibilities of the vicissitudes of life. Through authoritative teaching in beliefs and values or dogmas, it also provides solutions to conflicts and ambiguities of human opinions and points of views. The functions of the priests and dogmatic theologians contribute to stability, order, peace, and harmony in the society and thereby help to maintain the status quo (Nabofa, 1988).

Despite all the aforementioned views about religion, some of the contrary views are that which deal with biased comparison for other people's religion with one's religion as well as the misconception between appearance and reality. That apart, it also deals with the relationship between culture and religion.

The environment of Kolo Creek Clan

Kolo Creek Clan is in Bayelsa State of Nigeria within latitudes 4° 15' North and 15° 23' South and longitude 5° 22' West and 6° 45' East. Kolo Creek is one of the oil and gas producing areas well known in Bayelsa State and Nigeria at large. It houses oil well at Itokopiri, Otabagi near Oloibiri where oil was first discovered in commercial quantities in 1956 by Shell B. P. It is in the South East of Bayelsa State which is the southernmost state in the country and the Southern shores are less than five degrees of latitude north of the Equator. Kolo Creek is criss-crossed by several lakes, rivers, and creeks in addition to the swampy that constitutes about 75% land mass covering an area of about 11,109 km².

Kolo Creek is located in the South East of Bayelsa State, Nigeria in the Niger Delta. It has fresh water habitat. It has an equatorial climate with more of rainy season than dry season. It is covered with swamps with thick forests and greenish vegetation all through the year. It is criss-crossed with rivers, creeks, streams, and rivulets. During the flood period, inhabitants can transport into the hinterlands and the bushes with canoes. The main means of transportation is dugout canoes to farms and the interior of the forests. Kolo Creek is bounded in the

East by Akani, Ogboloman, and Emago communities in Rivers State, North East with Amirikpoko, also in Rivers State. In the North, it shares boundaries with Okarki in Rivers State, in the North West with Agudama-Epie, Edepie, Opolo, and Kpansia communities all in Yenagoa Local Government Area, in the West with Azikoro and Agbura communities also in Yenagoa Local Government Area. Kolo Creek shares boundaries with Otuokpoti, Otuogori, and Onuebum, along the Ekole River. Kolo Creek also shares boundaries with Otuoke, Otuaba, and Akoloman communities. In the South, it shares with Ogbia town, Otuabo, Opume, and Iduma communities. This area is swampy with thick forest and equatorial region. And it is largely fresh water but the Southern part of the creek is salt water with mangrove swamps.

Etymology of religion

However, not to digress from our main discourse on the topic, it is necessary for us to first delve into the etymology of religion. What is religion in the first case? Religion originated from the Latin word *Religio* which is a European word. It has come to embrace a reference to the transcendental reality of faith, the inner reality of faith as well as the rituals ceremonies which basically are means of communion and communication with deity (Nabofa, 1992). Thus, it carries the unmistakable reference to faith and "the way of worship" which may aptly be described as divine service. Religion in Latin is known as *Religare*, which means to link man with God; literally, it means to bind. The term religion as implying "a great objective something" is phenomenological. It is a working handle for taking hold of a universal phenomenon which however different its forms may be, gives a more or less commonly recognized structure and identity of elements. Religion is a human activity; the tendencies of human spirit to express and manifest it, which give rise to different faiths and belief systems, which came into being within a strong cultural area are usually influenced by their environments.

The English word religion or its Latin root *Religio* or *Religare* may not appeal so much to our mind as much as the word used for such acts in our own mother tongue.

Religion and African traditional practices

This study focuses on African traditional religion (ATR). ATR plays an important role in the afforestation and improvement of the climatic condition of the environment. It does this by reducing the depletion of the ozone layer and maintaining the ecology of the habitat for the good of man as well as his survival and continued existence. Man's life is based on the interdependence of man and his natural environment, especially in his belief in divinities and spirits. In a traditional African society, it is strongly believed that the wellbeing of the community depends upon the goodwill of God, divinities, spirits, and ancestors.

Therefore, before any venture is embarked upon in the society, these spiritual powers are first consulted and taken into confidence. At the beginning of the farming, hunting, and fishing seasons, the divine forces are called upon to assist for successful ventures and at harvest seasons they are also given the first fruit of the harvest. They are also not left out during festivals, and when serious decisions are to be taken. These same spiritual beings are also consulted for divine guidance. In fact, religion is involved in everything done by an African man, including child bearing, marriage, farming, trading, fishing, hunting, travelling, holding of meetings or conferences, learning, examinations, looking for employment, eating, drinking, partying, jubilating, and mourning. Hence, it is often said that in every African community, religion permeates life. Africans believe that everything in the world is dual; it has both spiritual and physical parts, and it is the spiritual that controls the physical (Nabofa, 1988). Therefore, to fully enjoy the benefits of this life, Africans take the spiritual into consideration. This is one of the reasons why religion is not all an individual affair; rather it is a communal activity in which man takes part as a segment of the community.

Traditional believers in Africa have the feeling that religion inculcates a strong sense of oneness with common destiny in a group of people who are divided into distinct small groups so that they can always work together primarily for the realization of their ultimate goals which binds them together into a nation, while at the same time they pursue their individual and discrete group goals. This is one of the reasons why everybody in the traditional society is required to take active part in religious acts meant to bring peace and harmony into the society, this also partly explains why there are no atheists in traditional Africa. The African view of the universe is one that is physical and metaphysical, visible, and invisible to them in Aristotle's metaphysics, the world is matter and spiritual, the world of matter and that of ideas, the profane and the sacred. To the African, life is realized only if the division between the sacred and the profane is removed. In other words, to them matter per se is not real but it is the sacred that is real. Therefore, the profane must always seek union with it is to have meaning at all. Hence, in the various African communities, it is the sacred that is always controlling the profane. Every traditional society is governed by selected personalities and the selections of these rulers are usually religiously and ritually sanctioned. The belief is that without such religious backing such leader or leaders may not be regarded as the true sacred head of the people. The society would be plagued because of a leader not sanctioned by the spiritual guardians of the society (Nabofa, 1988).

LITERATURE REVIEW

For Africans, religion cuts across all aspects of its

existence, and that is the foundation of all philosophical and ethical considerations in Africa. Wherever an African is, there is his religion. Mbiti states that religion is by far the richest part of the African heritage. Religion is found in all areas of human life. It has dominated the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations, and economic activities (Mbiti, 1975).

That is, Africans are very religious people and religion constitutes the fabric of their way of life, touching their physical, maternal, social, political, and ethical. All the activities of the individuals and groups in Africa are religiously determined including its environment and its relations with nature and its surroundings. Kasenene (1998) following the foot path of Mbiti states, the religious and secular interpenetrate, to a greater or lesser degree, at all points of existence. In whatever an African does or experiences, there is a simultaneous working of spiritual and worldly forces.

So, religion cannot be separated from morality because religion is the foundation of African world views and ethics too derives from it. While some African philosophers, notably Sitoto and More (2002), have expressed counter views, alleging that the romantic view of African religiosity fails to acknowledge both the intellectual capabilities of Africans and the prevalence of secularism on the African continent, they further argue that moral values do not solely originate from religion but are rooted in Africans' fundamental existential conditions and considerations of people's well-being. However, it is generally acknowledged that Africans, as a whole, exhibit strong religious inclinations, with religion permeating all aspects of their lives. Taringa (2006) trying to state the environmental friendliness of the Africans in the practice of African Traditional Religion in particular in Zimbabwe (Shona), people's attitudes to nature: animals, trees, forests and mountains forests, the land, and water bodies/wetlands says:

Owing to strong beliefs in ancestral spirits (midzimu), pan-vitalism, kingship, totems and taboos, "African Traditional Religion", he says, and Shona religion in particular, is generally regarded to be intrinsically (animal-friendly and) environmentally friendly.

Interestingly, the perception is that the attributed environmental friendliness was stronger before the coming of colonialism with Christianity and Western ideas (Taringa, 2006). These ties with the observation that traditional community taboos agricultural practices and the like may have already supplied the social norms of conservation advocates of deep ecology (Naes, 1973) or desired, but they have been marginalized by modernization and industrialization (Forbes et al., 2014).

Most Africans share the belief that the land is sacred and ancestral: it contains the remains of the ancestors, especially in the form of the burial sites of the traditional leaders and (or chiefs), it is therefore "the abode of the

dead" (Taringa, 2006). Yet it also contains natural resources for use by the living, especially the traditional leaders. The problem is not only that the fundamental religious attitude to nature is based on fear of ancestral or divine reprisal, of mystical sanction by the ancestors or spirits, but also that each social or religious community or chiefdom has its own restrictions on the land particularly animals, forests, trees, and water bodies or wetland according to its common history and social development (Hocsthemke, 2001). In other words, people outside of the particular social group or religious community may not (and, more often, do not) share its beliefs about the sacredness of a certain stretch of land and certain natural resources (Hocsthemke, 2001). An additional problem is that restrictions need not apply even equally or uniformly within a particular community or chiefdom traditional leaders and their families often claim privileged access to these resources. That is, they may protect even some animals of religious significance for consumption only. For Taringa, this is an indication of "a discriminative attitude" (Hocsthemke, 2001). There is clearly a lot of room for arbitrary and inconsistent decisions. For instance, certain trees are considered sacred either because they belong to the ancestors or because of their significance in certain rituals. They can be felled only with the express ritual permission by the traditional leader. If one fails to seek permission for felling such a tree, one provokes the anger of both the chief and the ancestors. Rather inimically, the resultant penalty the chief may impose could be the sacrificial slaughter of a goat, sheep or cow, in order to bring about reconciliation with the ancestors (Hocsthemke, 2001). Taringa draw attention to three kinds of attitude to nature which he used to conclude his views which include maintaining nature, obey nature, and act in nature. The first two are related to sacred aspects of nature and are primarily based on fear of reprisal from powerful ancestral spirits. Taringa notes that the aspects of preservation and obedience involve reverence and respect within a system of moral obligations. Yet although they are morally significant in that they involve moral consequences (that is, reward and punishment meted out by the spirits and ancestors and often also by traditional leaders), the reverence and respect in question derive more from fear than from genuine environmental awareness or love of nature and natural life. The third kind of attitude relates to aspects of nature that are not sacred, to organisms and aspects of nature that are not imbued with spirits. This means that "they are removed from the realm of religious ethics and morality"; there is no need for restraints in dealing with them" (Taringa, 2006). People are free to destroy, despoil, hunt, maim and kill members of these unreserved species without fear or sanction or reprisal.

Taringa (2006) is correct but since different communities and families, have different beliefs, ancestors, taboos, totems, etc., there is bound to be discrimination in its belief systems, ancestral worships,

and attitudes towards nature. But what is noteworthy and important in this discourse is that the great variety of belief systems, world-views, cults, and cultures in the African continent nonetheless permits these generalizations about the putative environmental friendliness and animal-friendliness of African religion, religious ethics, and Africans; thereby, unconsciously preserving the habitat and maintaining climate change.

In virtually all cultures and religious traditions, one can find creation myths. It is this varied creation myths that gave rise to different religious belief systems, traditions, cultures, attitude towards the environment and natures creation in general, the world over. It is the different religious traditions that gave rise to the belief systems and worships.

In the Judeo-Christian story, some found a vindication of the value of nature, while others have seen a mandate for human dominance (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). We are told that before creating Adam, God surveyed non-human nature and "saw that it was good", He blessed the animals and commanded them to be 'fruitful and multiply'. In the peaceful kingdom before Adam's sin, both humans and animals ate only vegetables (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). But after violence, corruption swept the earth, God decided to "make an end to flesh". Before the flood, however, God commanded Noah to take into his ark two of each animal. After the water has receded, God gave the animals to Noah for food, but he promised both Noah and the animals that he would never again send a flood to destroy the earth (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). Here, it is very clear that from the Judeo-Christian creation and history of the earth that pervades the whole of Western culture and religious belief system, it has an exploitative and explorative attitude towards nature and what is thereof. All of nature is meant for man's use. Gruen and Jamieson (1994) states thus:

It may be that there is no single attitude towards nature that is expressed in the Bible. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that for most of its history, Western culture has been characterized by a highly exploitative attitude towards nature, often justified by appeals to God's plan (The Holy Bible).

Building upon the previous quotation, Western culture and history have significantly influenced Western philosophers' views on nature. One such ancient philosopher was Aristotle from Greece, who believed in the concept of 'natural teleology.' Natural teleology posits that everything in nature exists to serve a purpose; for example, rain falls from the sky to facilitate the growth of crops (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). According to Aristotle, there is a hierarchical order in nature, with plants existing to serve animals and animals existing to serve humans. In short, to Aristotle all of nature is at the disposal of man for exploration and exploitation for its own use and benefit. Nature is subject to man for its

survival and existence. For Aristotle, destruction and construction of nature is determined by man and man alone. Aristotle would say:

--- If then, nature does nothing without an end and nothing in vain, it is necessary that nature made all these on account of men. Hence, the craft of war will be by nature a sort of art of acquisition (for huntry is a part of this) which one ought to use against wild beasts and those men who, those naturally ruled, do not submit, since this sort of war is just by nature (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994).

Further, the view that humans are of the pinnacle of nature and that they exist for their sake has been an important influence on Western, Political, and legal thought. John Locke developed a theory of property and acquisition of private property that is often appealed till date. According to Locke, God gave all of nature, including the "inferior creations" to mankind to hold in common. But land was left idle, a waste, and without value. By mixing his labor with land – tilling, cultivating, planting, and so on – a man improved the land and thereby came to own it (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). For Locke, man can exploit and explore nature for its survival and existence. The view that nature was created to man's survival and everything was created to serve man's purposes received a serious setback from Charles Darwin.

Darwin showed how purposeless biological processes operating over geological time could have produced the diversity of life that seems so miraculous. Rather than God creating distinct, immutable species arranged in hierarchical order with humans at the top, Darwin argued for community of all life. In his view, humans are not so much fallen angels as risen apes (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). It is interesting to contemplate a tangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flirting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent upon each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994).

These laws taken in the largest sense, being growth with reproduction; inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; variability from the indirect and direct action of the conditions of life, and as a consequence to natural selection, entailing divergence of character and the extinction of less improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the creator into a few forms or into one: and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed laws of gravity, from so

simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994).

Moving further, Mill believed in the preservation and conservation of the environment and the habitat. A world, from which solitude is extirpated, is a very poor ideal (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). Solitude, in the sense of being often alone is essential to any depth of meditation of character, and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur, is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could it do without. Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature: rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings: every flowery waste or natural pasture ploughed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are all domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rival food, every superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994). The earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the undiluted increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger but not a better or a happier population and for the sake of posterity that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it (Gruen and Jamieson, 1994).

Some environmental thinkers do recognize this depth dimension and explore its implications for human relationship to nature. Eco psychologists are a notable example. They often see a deeper or wider notion of self as a prime resource for environmental healing, for they claim that within the less conscious reaches of self we find and feel the connection to nature that modern industrial culture has repressed. Roszak (1992), a central figure in this field, states, for example, that "the goal of eco psychology is to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious.

While this attention is applauded to the unconscious, and while this inherent sense of reciprocity may well lie there, the psychoanalytic eco psychology seeks to develop lessons that are perhaps less utopian about human ambivalence and about the centrality of love and hate. Thus, even when environmental thought incorporates a depth perspective, as in eco psychology, it may dangerously downplay the reality of human destructiveness. For the depths contain not only loving and reparative impulses but also deep-rooted tendencies to destruction and disconnection (as part II will explore).

A parallel point is made by Christian theology, which has likewise always been aware of, and even anguished by, this depth riddle of human experience. Theologians talk about it in terms of dividedness or irrationality, as in the "divided heart" or the "irrational will". This point strikes

as a curiously underdeveloped yet foundational one for eco theology. St. Paul perhaps inaugurated this tradition of painful awareness in Christian thought with his tortured cry: "I cannot even understand my own actions. I do not do what I want to do but what I hate" (Romans 7:15). A strong theological tradition, then, runs from Paul through Augustine, Duns Scotus, Jacob Boehme, Luther, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Dostoyevsky, all testifying to what theologian Tillich (1951) calls "the unconscious, irrational will". This tradition is less obvious and acknowledged in theology than in psychoanalysis, for an alternate tradition within Christianity downplays or denies the unconscious to emphasize instead what Meissner (1984) calls a "more rationalistic, controlled, and idealistic view of human psychology". Tillich (1951) labels this alternate tradition, the "philosophy of consciousness" and sees it as triumphing in the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and industrial society. He counts among its advocates Aquinas, Erasmus, Calvin, Zwingli, Descartes, and Hegel. Meissner (1984) even maintains that Christian theology has no real tradition of speaking about that which psychoanalysis calls the unconscious: "The psychology implicit in a theological anthropology is essentially a psychology of the ego and the superego, with their functions". Yet along with Tillich (1951) maintain a notion of the unconscious has always existed in theology. Tillich (1951) even credits Freud with helping Christian theology to rediscover this tradition within itself: the "immense depth psychological material which we find in the religious literature of the last two thousand years".

To offer a couple of examples, it certainly reflects a deep sense of the complexity and mystery of the inner world, the unknowableness of our motivations, and the 'profound and permanent dislocation' (Saint Augustine, 1961) and tension that characterize our inner selves. He writes in his confessions: "There is in me a lamentable darkness in which my latent possibilities are hidden from myself, so that my mind, questioning itself upon its own powers, feels that it cannot rightly trust its own report". On the problem of human motivation and the will, his biographer Brown (1967) explains how Augustine becomes convinced that delight is the "mainspring of human action".

However, the processes that prepare the heart to take delight are "unconscious and beyond (one's) control", such that conscious actions are "merely the final outgrowth of hidden processes ... by which the 'heart' is 'stirred', is 'massaged and set' by the hand of God" (Brown, 1967). Willing the good is thus a difficult proposition, as attested by Augustine's brilliantly equivocal prayer: "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet" (Brown, 1967).

Even Kant (1967), taken by many as the arch-rationalist of the enlightenment, has in his theological writings on "radical evil" a sense of our inscrutable deeps. In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* he writes, "Not even does a man's inner experience with regard to himself

enable him to fathom the depths of his own heart as to obtain, through self-observation, quite certain knowledge of the basis of the maxims which he professes, or of their purity and stability" (Kant, 1967). This lineage of Christian theological writing, then, is painfully aware that we humans do not always know why we act as we do and that we cannot always act as we wish.

Here is the crux of the problem and the site of a key joint insight for eco theology and eco psychology, because of the influence of this "lamentable darkness" (James, 1897, 1956), attested to by both psychoanalytic and theological discourse, the ways people understand and respond to nature are not shaped exclusively by the rational will at the conscious level alone and are therefore not necessarily responsive to the adoption of new or better models of nature.

Environmental thought needs to effect change at a deeper level for real change in world view and behavior to occur for as Kierkegaard notes; an unconscious relationship is more powerful than a conscious one (James, 1897, 1956). On this point James (1897, 1956) stated that great champion of the unseen and the nonrational, argues that rational consciousness "will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions The truth is that in the metaphysical and religious sphere, articulate reasons are cogent for us only when our inarticulate feelings of reality have already been impressed in favor of the same conclusion" (James, 1897, 1956). I am interested in our "dumb intuitions" and "inarticulate feelings" about nature as revealed in popular imagery and slogans. It is precisely in them that we find clues to shy; we do not love the earth, to what complicates this project of love, to how nature beneficent and benign becomes persecutory and vilified when tornadoes blow across the land (James, 1897, 1956). It is not easy to alter such habits of thought and action, for their deep roots complicate the translation of new imagery or ideas into sound practice.

Such is the problem, for example, when Naess (1973), eco philosopher and founding figure of deep ecology, writes about "the supremacy of environmental ontology and realism over environmental ethics". He is claiming that with the right understanding of which we truly are, ethics become unnecessary, since caring action flows naturally and spontaneously from the realization that self and ecosphere are one. "Just as we need no morals to make us breathe (So) if your 'self' in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral exhortation to show care" (Naes, 1973), who continues. "You care for yourself without feeling any moral pressure to do it – provided you have not succumbed to a neurosis of some kind, developing self-destructive tendencies, or hating yourself" (Naes, 1973).

But this last provision is quite a big one. We do recognize ambivalences in ourselves or neuroses of various kinds, and we found that we often act in self-

destructive ways. We see such self-destruction in addictions, eating disorders, suicide, and the repetition of abuse, as victim or victimizer, by those who survive childhood abuse. Surely this approach in environmental thought obscures the painful problem that behavior does not automatically follow from attitude and that we do not always act in our own or our loved ones' best interests. In fact, we often act contrary to our conscious beliefs, values, and desires; or without being fully able to explain why; or without being fully aware that we are so acting. Or we find ourselves unable to change ingrained behaviors and ideas, despite strong desire to change. This is what psychoanalysis describes as the action of the unconscious, or what theology explains in terms of the irrational will. As has long been recognized, to know the good does not necessarily entail that one will do it. To a pronouncement such as that by eco theologian Sallie Mc Fague in *Body of God* that "Christians have a mandate to love the earth", we may agree, but having a mandate to love does not mean that we will. Despite the intellectual knowledge that all life on earth is interrelated in bonds of mutual dependence, and even despite the love of nature that many people do feel or can be awakened to feel by books such as Mc Fague's, environmental destruction still moves forward. As Elliot (1909-1950) writes, "Between the idea/and the reality Between the conception/and the creation Falls the Shadow".

Divinities and spirits

In Africa, religion particularly African Traditional Religion contributes immensely to the improvement of climate change through largely to afforestation encouraged by belief in divinities and spirits, though divinities and spirits are of different categories.

For divinities we have the primordial divinities, they are the ones referred to as the divinities of heaven. These are the spiritual beings that were in existence and living with God in the spiritual realm or heaven before the creation of the universe and the physical world.

The second category of divinities consists of deified personalities or ancestors. These individuals were once ordinary human beings who lived and made significant contributions to their communities, bringing enlightenment, fame, and greatness to their people (Nabofa, 1992). The next category of divinities is the one that originated from the personification of natural forces and phenomena. There are many divinities under this category in Africa. Some of these divinities are associated with or related to hills, rivers, rocks, seas, oceans, lagoons, caves, trees, brooks or thick forests.

Whatever and wherever people believe to be the abode of a spirit is usually set apart as a holy place and their people offer worship and sacrifices to that particular spirit of their realization.

The other one is the one that result from the practice of magic or medicine. Africans have the knowledge of compounding herbs with other natural elements and backed their productivity, medicine are also prepared to ensure victories in wars. Such medicines could be prepared by individuals, family units, wards and jointly by the community. Each divinity has a name and appellations which are sometimes descriptive of its functions, nature, origin and characteristics.

Further, on the area of belief in spirits, Africans acknowledge many kinds of spirits. Spirits are apparitional entities and ancestors which could be described as "domesticated spirits". Spirits in this category are the common spiritual beings that are below the status of divinities and above the status of men (Nabofa, 1992); they are the common group of spiritual beings. It should be realized that divinities and ancestors or living dead are also spirits but they are spirits with difference because they have shrines or temples set aside for them. Once a shrine with a temple or a permanent place of worship is set aside for a particular spirit, it will become enshrined and domesticated and it could be regarded as a divinity or an ancestor.

Spirits are also believed to be invisible but may make themselves visible to human beings. In view of the facts that spirits are invisible, they are thought to be ubiquitous, so that a person is never sure of where they are or are not. The general belief is that spirits are more powerful than men. They could be so regarded because as they are invisible, men cannot assess their power; yet, in many ways human beings especially ritual specialists can manipulate or control the spirits as they like. Men paradoxically may fear or dread the spirits, yet they can drive the same spirit away or use them to human advantage (Mbiti, 1969). Although spirits are said to be ubiquitous, people still designate different places as their places of abode. Some people think that spirits dwell in the underground, neither world nor the subterranean regions. Mbiti (1969) says:

The idea of the subterranean region is suggested, obviously by the fact that the bodies of the dead are buried and the ground points to or symbolizes the new human land of the departed.

Some groups of Africans believe that abode of the spirits is above the earth, in the air, the sun, the moon or stars. In many African communities, it is strongly believed that spirits and divinities lived in the forests, trees, rivers, oceans, streams, etc. This is attested to by Nabofa (1992) when he says:

In many African communities, it is strongly held that spirits dwell in the woods, bush, forest, rivers, lakes, streams, oceans, mountains in lonely places in and just around the towns and villages. That is, the spirits are believed to be in the same geographical regions as men.

As spirits live around men and in designated abode accessible to them, human beings seek self-protection from their evil machinations by means of magic with specially designed sacrifices and cultic activities. In many places of Africa, it is strongly believed that the world of the spirits, wherever it might be situated is very much like the carbon copy of the countries where they live in this life. It has rivers, valleys, mountains, forests, and deserts. The activities of the spirits are similar to those of the human life here; in addition to whatever other activities of which men may not know anything (Mbiti, 1969).

Nevertheless, there are certain aspects of the spiritual world that differ from the human world. Spirit world is invisible to the eyes of the ordinary men. People only know or believe that it is here, but not actually “see” it with their physical eyes. More importantly, spirits are nearer to God not ethnically, but in terms of communication with him, it is believed that whereas men use or require intermediaries who convey human sacrifices and prayers to God and they relay his reply to men. The ontological transcendence of God is bridged by the spirit mode of existence. Mbiti (1969) says:

Man is forever a creature, but he does not remain forever man and these are his polarities of existence. Individual spirits may or may not remain forever, but the class of spirits is an essential and integral part of African ontology. Again, spirits are also of various categories like divinities. The major categories of spirits are the ghosts, spirits of born-to-die children, nature spirits, spirits of witchcraft and guardian spirits or man’s double.

Ghosts

These are spirits of the dead human beings which have not been reposed for one reason or the other. They feel very disgruntled against the living because as they have not been reposed, they are very restless and go about causing havoc among the living.

Spirits of born-to-die children

Such children are known as Abiku among the Yoruba, Ogbanje among the Igbo, and Otibra-oru among the Agholo people, etc. The traditional explanation is that there is a company of spirits whose members are under an agreement to undertake in turn this errand of mischief. Before those who are thus assigned such job leave the group temporarily, they enter into an agreement that they will return, that is, die at certain named dates and times, and when such time comes something will happen which will make them die.

Spirits of witchcraft

These are spirits of witches; the witch with her perverted

strong will power always operates psychological and psychically to cause, first psychical and then physical disaster to human beings.

Nature spirits

These are spirits that are associated with trees, flowers, hills, mountains, valleys, and portions of water, wind and animals.

In addition to divinities and spirits, the worship of animals, birds, trees, etc., which is to either protect, guard, etc., on the people of a particular area in Africa is viewed as a god. However, we will now x-ray into the main crux of our discussion which is “Religion, Environment, and Climate Change in Kolo Creek Clan”.

RELIGION, ENVIRONMENT, AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN KOLO CREEK CLAN

Here, we have come to the main crux of the matter in this study. In looking at religion, focus is mainly on spirits and divinities as well as totems that dwell in trees, forests, bushes, creeks, streams, oceans, mountains, rivers, rocks, valleys, lakes, lagoons, islands, etc. The belief and worship of divinities and spirits as well as animals and plants in Africa is of tremendous significance to the people and the environment thereby improving the climate change. The main religions practiced in Kolo Creek Clan are African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Christianity. With the advent of Christianity, thick and virgin forests and juju shrines that were highly forbidden which unknown to the inhabitants are those that conserve and preserve the habitat and improve the climate for the survival of man were destroyed. Christian faithfuls were bold and brave to clear the thick virgin forests in the land. Related to this is the deforestation of these virgin forests for commercial purposes thereby encouraging erosion. Wild animals inhabiting in these areas are killed for consumption and others migrated to unknown areas. With these practices, animals become extinct, e.g. “A vast virgin forest called *Eghalaghala* forbidden from time immemorial covered with wild mango trees called *Omir Edum* in Agholo language – *Omir Edum* is used for preparing soup”. This plant has nutritional, medicinal, and economic values. During its season, everybody was free to go and pick it for sale. Little do the people realize that this vast virgin thick forest was for the conservation and preservation of the habitat thereby improving the climate for man since man has interdependence with the environment? With the clearing of this vast land not considering the nutritional, medicinal, and economic values of the plants but only taking into consideration that the virgin land is detrimental to the people spiritually, it now made the environment vulnerable to erosion, unfavorable climate change, disappearance of animals and birds and other creatures of different species. All

these creatures now become extinct and endangered species. Again, ponds, rivers, and streams that are navigable but the fishes in them are forbidden to be consumed by man as a result of some ancient beliefs were desecrated and eating by the people as a result of the need found religion. That apart, the African Traditional Religion which is the African Religion and inherent in our lifestyle was seen by Christianity as devilish, harmful, and inimical to the life of the individuals and the community at large. With this orientation, all forbidden forests, virgin forests, rivers, creeks, streams, and mounts were frowned against and the target to the converts was to deforest the forests, eat the fishes in the streams, etc., so they could be liberated. But African Traditional Religion is a religion that is geared towards preserving and conserving the habitat. It encourages the continuity of the various animal and plant species and above all the improvement of the life span of man through improvement of the environment and the climate thereby reducing the depletion of the ozone layer that adversely affects man. African Traditional Religion has high respect and value for nature. It treats nature with respect just as it does to its God. African Traditional Religion treats the environment, its surroundings and what it contains therein as partners in survival. Without the environment, man would never live a fruitful and meaningful life because his survival and existence depend on it. Man and religion are naturally for the good of the environment and Africans generally. The African man and his religion have been responsible for the pro-improvement and maintenance of climate changes from time immemorial, and this is inherent in African people. So in the area of discourse, the religion of Christianity encourages the destruction of the ecosystem, habitat, forbidden virgin forests, rivers, creeks, streams and ponds thereby encouraging the depletion of the ozone layer etc. which is tantamount to tilting the environmental and climate change balance against man and its survival. African Traditional Religion is a religion that brings faith, the environment and the supernatural (God) and the survival and wellbeing of man together. African Traditional Religion is metaphysical, environmentalistic, God fearing, utilitarianistic and pragmatic in nature. African Traditional Religion is environmental friendly. The worship of divinities like war god, the god of protection, the god of harvests, the god of love, and the god of rain located in a particular abode. That abode, if it is a forest is forbidden; the trees in the whole forest are forbidden for anyone to cut down thereby encouraging afforestation. If the spirit is a fish in the river, the fish is forbidden by the people from consuming it. This restriction leads to an increase in the population of that species of fish or fishes. All the various shrines located in the bush, that particular bush become sacred thereby making the bush a reserved forest. When a particular forest or bush, river, ocean, stream, lagoon, creek, etc., is forbidden because a divinity or spirit is believed to reside there by the people, the place

becomes a sacred place. If it is a bush or a forest, it becomes a reserved forest or bush. If it is a creek, river, ocean, lake, and lagoon, it becomes sacred and it becomes a reserved area. The reservation and conservation of these areas as a result of the belief that the people's gods reside there makes the habitat undisturbed. This habitat has a complete ecosystem and the food chain is maintained naturally. Since man depends on the environment for survival and existence, the belief in divinities and spirits as well as totem worship preserves the habitat and makes man enjoy the continued ecological benefits created by nature. The belief in spirits and divinities in Africa encourages the preservation of forests and the habitat thereby improving climate change for the betterment of man. African belief and worship of divinities and spirits brings the natural environment back thereby reducing the depletion of the ozone layer by man in the exploitation of nature. These reserved forests, creeks, lagoons, oceans, lakes, etc., through African belief and worship in divinities and spirits serves as a means to improving the depletion of the ozone layer and improving climate change for the survival and existence of man. This practice by Africans is in line with the United Nations policy on the improvement of climate change by encouraging afforestation and preservation of animals of different species that are going to extinctions.

CONCLUSION

African belief and worship in divinities and spirits make man to conserve and preserve the natural habitat and the environment thereby maintaining the depletion of the ozone layer. This indirectly improves climate change for the survival of man. African myths, religious system in taboos, totems and spirituality in plants and animals, which form African environmental ethics have given rise to the conservation and preservation of the its habitat. This helps to maintain climate change and reduce the depletion of the ozone layer. African Traditional Religion is ecocentric and biocentric in nature. It is an environmentally-friendly and climate change maintenance friendly religious system. The religious belief systems form the culture and tradition of the African people and in this context, the Kolo Creek people.

The African belief and worship of divinities and spirits encourages man in afforestation and the preservation of animal and plant species which is the main goals of the United Nations Organization. The United Nations is preaching loud and clear that man should encourage afforestation and preservation of the ozone layer, preservation of animals and plants which almost all of the species are becoming extinct due to man's activities and exploitation.

Though some scholars see African traditional religious practices as devilish and archaic, this study is of the view

that they, especially beliefs in divinities and spirits preserve the life of man and improves climate change.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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