

"Homo Oecologicus and the Priestly Duty of Adam, an Appraisal of Anthropogenic Environmental Degradation in Enugu East LGA",

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Abstract

The ancient command “Man, know thyself” that reportedly confronted Socrates at the entrance to the Oracle of Delphi resonates with renewed tenacity in every age and clime. His dialectics consisted of a filtration of thought that aimed at eliminating ambiguities, clarifying ideas and certifying true knowledge/belief. This remains valid today as the present challenge of environmental degradation has roused a global outcry especially in the more recent times. This paper bothers on a deeper look at deforestation as a window to exploring humankind's self-understanding. Generally, in any form of degradation, human life and history are brought under threat. Though a former prerogative of the sciences, the urgency and vast implications of ecological crisis makes it imperative for philosophy to join the debates and discussions as a competent participant. This paper assumes that whatever concerns mankind, affects or shapes his life falls within the scope of the greater anthropological concern to which the Delphian dictum refers. Against this backdrop, this paper looks at environmental degradation from a philosophical anthropological viewpoint, hence the title. It uses deforestation as a sample case.

Key words:

Homo Oecologicus, Priest of creation, Steward, Degradation, Environment, Anthropogenic factors, Environmental crisis.

Introduction

Environmental crisis has become a global concern, especially in the recent times. In such crisis, every living system in the biosphere is subjected to a constant, accelerated decline. Global warming, for example, is real, destructive and its future impacts defy imagination. Its unprecedented magnitude makes it one of the major markers of the present age. Cases of tsunamis from the Pacific and Oceania, recurrent earthquakes from the Asian bloc, melting ice in the North, flooding in the South, reports of acid rain in parts of China and Russia (Trace Dominguez, 2016) and the recent experience of black soot in the Nigerian southern city of Port Harcourt, are indications that the earth has been undergoing lots of environmental upheavals in the more recent times. As a consequence, every living system in the biosphere is in a constant, accelerated decline. Global warming, for example, is real, destructive and its future impacts defy the imagination. As George Tsiasttikos, the founder of Everything Connects, put it, “the gate and prosperity of humanity is inextricably connected to the health and balance of the natural world”, environmental crisis is a threat to the future of humanity and the world.

Observable evidences and expert studies carried out around Enugu East Local Government Area (LGA) of Enugu State, Nigeria, show how much such anthropogenic activities as deforestation is impacting the environment with destructive influences. According to the report of Muhtari Aminu-Kano, the Director-General, Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), "About 96 per cent of our original forest have been lost", due to deforestation (NCF, 8 September, 2018). One reads: “Enugu loses, on the average, about 2.01 hectares of forest reserve trees per annum” as deforestation affects about 1.2 percent of the total tropical forest area” (Ebo & Ujah, 2018).

Another, Umeanaeto et al. (2019), for instance, highlights the geographical features of Enugu. Together with Umeanaeto et al., 2019; Mba, 2018; Nsa, et al., 2021, many others attest that forest loss is having untoward impacts in Enugu. Their findings feed us with gory pictures of an environment that is dangerously sliding towards collapse, owing to deforestation and its effects. They attest to the disappearance of rainforest vegetation in surrounding communities as a result of urban encroachment and its population and infrastructural pressures. The features of derived savannah, for instance, and the increasing heat wave and climate change in a typical rainforest belt of southern Nigeria discloses the enormity of the matter. These expose the urgency of the matter as an existential threat to humans and other life forms in the area. This whole picture is indicative of the impact of deforestation on the health of the environment.

A vast galaxy of eco-literatures and scientific reports has flooded libraries and bookstands, across the globe, especially since the last quarter of the 20th century. These attest to the causes, risks or danger of such factors as deforestation, how this affects the ecological balance in an area, and how it spells doom for the earth. Among these are a number of publications on how human interference through deforestation has impelled on the once thick forest vegetation for which Enugu, another city in Southern Nigeria, was known.

These pieces of works provide incontrovertible basis for environmental thought. Their expositions reveal three vital facts about deforestation:

- i. that it is a local problem (see, Nsa, et al., 2021);
- ii. that the impact is global (Talukder, 2018);
- iii. that human activity is the catalyst (Arne Naess, 1973).

Following from these lessons, we can say that humans are dragging the earth to a tragic halt. Thus, such factors as deforestation, global warming, biodiversity loss, and sustainability challenges, stem from concrete situations on human relationship with nature (Wanting, 2018).

Many have tried addressing environmental degradation, especially the moral content of the human-nature relationship. Along with that is the value or moral status of the environment and its non-human contents. But many still opine that “resolving controversies requires us to ‘examine the values in conflict and the competing factors that underlie the value’” (Desjardins, 2006). This entails a broader perspective which calls for a more comprehensive approach to environmental crisis than the usual normative ethics, according to Brennan (1995). Given that backdrop, this essay sets to prove that while environmental crisis is so to say, an outcome of human treatment on nature, then environmental debates should cover also an anthropological dimension. It adopts the radical ecological approach by asserting that the origin of environmental problems lies in the human self-understanding, while calling to promote social changes and paradigm shifts (cf., Wanting, 2018). With insights from ethics, philosophical anthropology and religion, it argues that the key to unlocking and resolving the ongoing menace of environmental degradation is the human being. It goes therefore for that vision of humankind that acknowledges at the same time his oneness with nature, his spiritual dimension, and his vocation in nature, stemming from the conviction that a comprehensive look at the human being must be brought into perspective in such environmental debates. This it finds in the concept “priest of creation”.

“*Homo oecologicus*” is a model and a concept that stresses the human’s membership with nature and his responsibility over same. Adam is used figuratively to represent humankind in the generic sense. Man is often used here in this same generic understanding. These tags receive

greater emphasis here considering the centrality of the anthropological factor in environmental issues.

A Hermeneutic of Deforestation

The challenge in discussions of environmental crisis is one of adequate understanding of what this problem entails, especially in developing countries. Though extant environmental laws and regulations abound across the globe. Nigeria, for instance, is signatory to global environmental bodies with regulations and prescribed regulatory agencies. Yet, one witnesses cases of bush burning, conversion of forest lands for other uses, land reclamation, blocking of waterways, indiscriminate siting of infrastructures, and deposition of industrial wastes, without due consideration of their environmental impact factors, either in the short or long term. More interestingly is the equation of development with infrastructural installations, and the argument that environmental regulations are instituted by the developed nations to keep developing ones underdeveloped (Zizioulas, 2016). Deforestation and conversion of forestlands, for example, is foremost in many local or rural communities, especially areas under the pressure of urbanization and population growth. Land lease for real estate becomes competitive in such communities, and many, for economic purposes, with forests and their ecosystems suffering the toll. This is why environmental education is so much needed at the grassroot level. To help discussants, there is need to have a clear view of the problem of environmental crisis and good understanding of the enormity of such anthropogenic activities precipitating them, like deforestation.

The environment is often described as a house or an umbrella (Greek, *oikodôme*), as it shelters diverse ecosystems and ecological populations, with other roles for the earth. Forests, for instance, are called “lungs of the earth” because of their unique roles. Unsustainable treatment of forestlands is therefore considered to be harmful to the earth, just like no one survives damaged lungs. For this reason, such human activities that fan environmental degradation and crisis, like deforestation, can be best understood with the use of metaphors, the best of which is the biblical narrative of the death of Samson. In that narrative, the crashing building fell on him, thereby killing him and any other person inside the building, when he, Samson, pulled down the pillars of the building sheltering him (Judges 16: 29-30). In deforestation, mankind is divesting the earth of the cover that shields it from ultraviolet rays, protects the ozone layer from destruction, sucks the greenhouse gases that fuel global warming, supports the energy chain and guards against flooding (cf., Nwachukwu, 2018). By this, and in similar activities like gas flaring, dumping of industrial wastes, taking place in Enugu East (see Nsa, et als, 2021), mankind (Adam, Samson) is pulling (deforesting) the pillars (the various spheres – lithosphere, atmosphere, biosphere, etc) of the earth (environment, nature), subjecting it to unrestrained pummelling and pillaging (degradation). This made Pope Paul VI to decry the danger of anthropogenic degradation (e.g., deforestation): “...by an ill-considered exploitation of nature he [mankind] risks destroying it and becoming in his turn the victim of this degradation. Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace ... This is a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family” (Paul VI, 1971, nu. 21).

The above hermeneutic employs “Adam in the garden” as another metaphor for human beings’ presence in an environment. Hence, where Adam stands as a synonym for humankind, and the garden an ecosystem community, one may now ask: What is Adam’s role in the garden? A gardener? Why is he destroying the garden? The urgency of finding an answer to these questions is determined by the measure of harm this destruction has brought upon the earth, especially in the present times (as mentioned above). The next concern bothers on what can be done to

address the problem and stop Adam's destructive treatment of the garden, as every radical ecology would ask. Though this has been the concern of scientists, religionists, philosophers, and others; it is still the concern of this paper. However, the nuance of this paper would be the comprehensive understanding of this problematic as a prelude for a sustainable solution to the problem.

Addressing the Issue of Environmental Concerns

Hitherto, environmental concerns have been the prerogative of science and its method. Their research results have attested authoritatively how humankind has and still causes environmental degradation and crises (Talukder, 2018). It is evident that their findings led to the making of environmental policies and regulations towards conserving the earth. However, the persistence and relentlessness of those same activities shows that science alone is inadequate to address the problem or persuade behaviour change towards nature and its environment. The confession by James Gustave Speth justifies the reasonableness and timeliness for a new direction. In his brief in the Huffington Post of 22 August 2014 on climate change, he says:

I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation (Huffington Post, 22 August, 2014).

This realization discloses the need for other forms of addressing the same questions, with "a broader approach" (Talukder, 2018). Xu Wanting uses such hypothetical questions to highlight the sense of these other approaches:

Suppose that Walt Disney was going to build a ski resort in a wilderness area adjacent to a national park, which could produce revenues of millions of dollars and provide hundreds of jobs. Is it acceptable for the government to approve this project at the risk of harming the natural environment? ... If humans have to choose between killing animals or burning plants for their own survival, should they choose to destroy plants, as animals are viewed as superior to plants? (Wanting, 2018).

Besides economic, aesthetic or political considerations, the above questions engender this other question: What is the root cause of environmental degradation/deforestation? Response to this and similar questions is more urgent today, considering the note of urgency environmental crisis compels.

Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), Lynn White's *Historical Root of Our Ecological Crisis* (1967), Pope Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), Peter Singer's *Animal Rights*, and the works of the Routleys, Richard and Eva (later, Eva Plumwood), are notable efforts to address the question in line with this demand for a new, "broad" approach. These authors and many more have so much engaged themselves with the ethical perspective to the extent that environmental philosophy became a synonym for environmental ethics. Hence, one remark reads that "environmental motivations and socioeconomic factors are associated with the expression of different value domains" (Arias-Arevalo, et als., 2017). Another one states how *the relationships of humans and their natural environments have depended so far "on the dominating system of values" and scale of attitudes, ranging from the aggressive to the*

destructive (Wolter, 2013). Over this issue, the history of environmental philosophy portends a tale of criticisms and counter criticisms while the problem continues unabated. For Naess, therefore, previous ecologies failed because they dwelt on the symptoms rather than the root causes of ecological crises (1973).

The quest for the root cause(s) of this problem has drawn philosophers to an interdisciplinary openness. Naess' deep ecology, for example, calls for a return to anthropology since that alone has capacity to induce or change humankind's attitude and treatment of nature. This call tends to suggest that as a piece of artwork discloses an imprint of the artist, activities like deforestation, beyond the mowing down of trees and decapitation of forest vegetation, reveal the agent, his inner conceptions of self, others and relationality. If therefore, as Jean Paul Sartre observes in his *Existentialism as Humanism* (1946), the environment represents man's basic situation, one can infer, then, that deforestation mirrors the human mind, and therefore is a key to unlock humankind's perception of the natural environment and how that perception has impacted humanity's relationship and treatment of this non-human other or self. This perception is the "root cause" of environmental degradation and crisis, which, as Naess observes, has become engrained in human cultures, particularly of Western societies, right from the cradle of civilization (Naess, 1973). Mathews describes environmental crisis within the parameters of this perception while regarding the causal activities as:

...the expression of human chauvinism, the groundless belief, amounting to nothing more than prejudice, that only human beings mattered, morally speaking; to the extent that anything else mattered at all, according to this attitude, it mattered only because it had some kind of utility or instrumental value for us (Freya Mathews, 2014).

Naess' deep ecology sadly turned against itself in its theoretical frame and proposal for resolving the problem, in his egalitarianism and in the demonstration of the principle of ecological health. His egalitarianism is accused of showing insufficient respect to humans (hence, misanthropy), while his push for ecological health led to fascism (*Terence Ball*, 2018; *Encyclopedia.com*, "Deep Ecology"). Having described humans as voracious natural resource consumers, and rising human population as environmental threat, he adopted a depopulation policy that recommends reduction of human population to about one hundred million, in order to reduce humankind's exceeding leaning on the environment (Devall and Sessions 1985, in Freya Matthews, 2014). This attracts the attention of many critics who underscore the proclivity of this principle to draconian population control steps like forced abortion, sterilization, famine, disease, and promotion of criminality, like xenophobia and racism, to enforce this reduction of human population (see, Stern, 2019; 2020; Spanne, 2021; and Blair Taylor, 2019).

Besides the above accusations, an inherent nihilism underlies every egalitarian environmental theory in eliminating anything non-physical in nature. By so doing, they *deny mankind also of his unique traits and reduce him to a part of a universal mechanism*. "If man is nothing but a bundle of chemical and physical reactions, if man is nothing but a complex of neuroscientific linkages and reactions, the value of the human personality, and the respect due to it, are lost" (Segesvary, 2004). Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* earlier on, has a more agreeable conceptualization of the human and his place in nature, from the existentialist perspective. It illustrates three characterizations of *Dasein* (a concept so closely interpreted as man, the window of being): presence, transcendence and intentionality. In analysing these concepts, Heidegger

shows that, despite sharing much with the rest of nature's entities, humans have special status among the comity those entities (see Segesvary, 2004). With the cosmos as a holistic concept for what we otherwise call nature, in which all entities under nature have equal importance, he says that "the world represents the foundation of the inevitable involvement of man in everything that concerns nature (Segesvary, 2004). While man is a being-in-the-world, *Dasein* has the capacity to overcome the limitations of his being and of his world, to grasp beyond what is materially real, the spheres of reality which are as concrete but in a different manner than the world of sensations (Segesvary, 2004). This fact that man is simultaneously being in the world and transcending the same world represents the basic dialectics of human existence. That, too, is "... the justification of our contemporary ecological awareness and our interest in all environmental aspects of our situation" (Segesvary, 2004). Thus, far from robbing him of his unique characteristics, these concepts identify the human's distinctiveness from the rest and yet illustrate his need to live in harmony with one another and with non-human others and stop the destruction of the *oikodome*.

Heidegger's characterization of *Dasein* has two major problems. The first problem is born from his emphasis on the distinctiveness of the *Dasein*. It connotes the idea of some placement on a special pedestal only humans can access as it lend support to Aristotle's hierarchical gradation of beings. There, the rational soul, occupying the peak of the hierarchical structure, has a natural impetus to exploit non-human beings at will since those beings at the lower rungs exist only for the higher. Secondly, his notion of human transcendence, implying surpassing one's "... factual situation, towards his ulterior possibilities", is egocentric. As existentialist thinkers have it, this "factual situation" is no other than the "precarious, alienated, decadent, unauthentic situation, full of deficiencies and miseries" which characterize human existence in the world (Mondin, 2011). Since there is no aperture or ontological sense to which man opens himself, going beyond this factual situation opens one unto nothingness (W. Panneberg, 1974, What is Man?). Implicitly, then, morals, religion, metaphysics, and God are nothing but fetters of inauthenticity which man shatters through self-transcendence. Mondin judges this to be a misrepresentation of human transcendence. According to him, every human movement is a movement into something or somewhere else. So, one rises from the confines of his own being not just to submerge himself in nothingness, but to immerse himself in something bigger than him, the supernatural or God, the ultimate sense of human self-transcendence (Mondin, 2011). Reducing humans' ulterior possibilities to the physical again reflects only a partial view of the human being. Such reductionism has been criticised above as part of the problem.

Anthropological Models

Contrary to the dogmatism inherent in the age-long physicalism upon which modern Western intellectual scientific outlook is constructed, "ecological crisis is such a substantial phenomena [sic] which leads therefore to numerous perceptions and different point of views" (Meinberg). This opens the window to the anthropological perspective which looks at the human being, the seat of the crisis, and key to unlocking the problem. Meinberg (,,,,,,) and Wench (2002) emphasize the indispensability of this perspective against critics who align anthropocentrism to anthropology. As Meinberg notes, every attempt to define humans' relationship to the environment is always guided by human views (Meinberg ,,,,,,,). Wench cites from Desiderot's Encyclopedia to justify this anthropological dimension of ecology and the untenability of nihilist and reductionist levelling: "If man or the thinking, observing being is banished from the surface of the earth, this moving and sublime spectacle of nature is nothing but a sad and silent scene.

The universe is dumb; silence and night overtake it. Everything changes into a vast solitude where unobserved phenomena occur in a manner dark and mute...” (Wolfgang Wench, 2002).

To elaborate this perspective, many scholars subscribe to “the use of various models of speaking about the relation of the human being to nature” (Zizioulas, 2016). One of such models, “*homo oecologicus*”, for instance, was born out of the demand of the environmental movements of the 1980s for “new values” and “new morality”, and a “new image of man” as a perfectly ecologically thinking and acting person (and first introduced in 1989 by Hans Immler, cf., wikipedia. “Human Ecology – *homo oecologicus*). It illustrates the ultimate possibility of this being and his place in the world as a member of the same cosmos in which all entities have equal importance. Yet, more than any other members, he transcends the same world by virtue of some unique characteristics that serve also as bases for his overture beyond himself, and ground of his responsibility over other ontological and ontic entities in the same cosmos. To illustrate this, Christian anthropology, with its religious undertone, offers a number of sub models of this being, two of which, “steward” and “priest” of creation, are elaborated below.

Humankind as Steward of Creation

“Steward of creation” is the most prevailing among the anthropological models employed by environmentalists, secular, or religious. The meaning and vocation of a steward underline two important elements of this model:

- a. The steward does not work for himself. Mankind’s stewardship of the earth goes beyond self-interest.
- b. Humans are not the authors of this stewardship, nor do they have any mandate to exploit and squander the earth, but to manage it (Bartz).

Against the views of lordship and possessorship over the earth found in Modern Western thinkers like Descartes, Bacon, Kant and Calvin (John Zizioulas, 2016), stewardship, as a form of viceregency and trusteeship, was adopted to reemphasize mankind’s original vocation of imaging and re-presenting God in creation. It enables Adam to hold brief for God in the garden (earth) as God’s re-presenter (his image), while reaching out beyond the self to provide governance over it.

Teachings on human stewardship of the earth are widespread among various cultures and religious traditions. It is foremost among Abrahamic traditions where Christian environmentalists emphasize the ecological responsibilities of all Christians as stewards of God’s earth; the Jewish law of *bal taschis* forbids any wanton destruction or unnecessary waste of resources, while contemporary Muslim ecology regards mankind as the *khalifa*, or trustee of God on earth. Other cultures and religious traditions share similar thoughts. In African traditional societies, it is not illogical to hear stories connecting animals, human beings and spirits, all acting together in community, with mankind as caretaker. In this milieu, the universe is understood as a web of interactions in which the inanimate, animate and spiritual beings are locked up in a web of relationship; mankind’s stewardship is interactional (Nwachukwu, 2017, 2011; Ogbonnaya, 1998 and Onwubiko, 1999). All these cultural and religious models emphasize humankind’s place and relationship with the rest of creation. Domination or exploitation and violent use of the earth and its resources are therefore estrangements from this steward. Far from being the measure of governance himself, he must give account of stewardship and governance. It is

“... no authorization to plunder the garden, or to exploit it for selfish purposes, or to destroy it in recreation. God did not authorize Adam to gorge himself with garden products ... The directives were to take care of nature...” (Lee Balzer, 1992)

However, the reality and present rate of ecological degradation indicate that stewardship has become abused. Associated with this malfeasance is the reification of nature and its objects. Once reified, forests and other natural goods become valued as a ‘thing’ and an ‘object’ to be managed, arranged, re-arranged, used etc., as we see in the conversion of forestlands for other purposes (see, *Eboh and Ujah, 2018*). Thus, environmental crisis occurs as a consequence of an abused exercise of office.

Elaborating more on exploitation of a reified nature, Zizioulas puts the blame on the utilitarian mindset behind the exercise of stewardship, where nature and its environments are taken for a repository or resource base and weighed by their utility valuation. As mankind converts these resources to other uses for human gain, he ends up destroying the environment under his care (cf., Dussell, 1988). In the light of this understanding, Adam is presently gorging himself with the garden products. The more he grabs nature for more profit, the more he defaces and divests it of beauty and worth.

Naess, Segesvary, Meinberg, and a host of others, align this environmental model with anthropocentrism which they identify to be the foundation of present environmental blight. Nevertheless, this model underscores his membership, and identifies, in its ideal form, the place of the human being in nature and its environments. However, it appears to be problematic despite its tremendous contributions to the ecological question, especially, in its stress on the human being as a mere dormant caretaker of nature

Adam, the Priest of Creation

The other model, “priest of creation” complements the “steward of nature”. The word ‘Priest’ is a cultic language associated with religious worship. The word is classified as part of religious language, and often treated as an aspect of culture. Essentially, it advances the steward model and incorporates culture and spirituality into environmental and ecological discourse.

The model emerges from an interdisciplinary dialogue between science, philosophy and religion. Whereas each has something different to say about humankind and the physical environment within which humans exist and thrive, yet, each has the same common concern and fear over environmental degradation and crisis. However, religion brings the element of the supernatural to the environmental philosophical discourse by interpreting the constitutive nature of the human being as the overture between the natural and the Supernatural (Zizioulas, 2016). Whereas classical Greek philosophers describe man as a composite of body and spirit, the Judeo-Christian tradition, for whom philosophy simply means *ancilla theologiae*, affirms that the divine breath (logos/nepheš) in mankind transforms the human person from the pristine matter into an inhabited spirit (Panneberg), transforming the human into a composite of body and spirit. Following from that, the human is defined first, as a member of the ecological family, and then, as the “link” and “go-between” between the Supernatural and the natural. Mankind as priest of creation highlights and elaborates this anthropology (Zizioulas, 2006).

Thus, being one with nature, by virtue of the substance it shares with non-human others, he transcends nature, by virtue of this spiritual overture. *This places him on the position of the priest who freely and, as an organic part of the world, takes the world in his hands to refer it to God.* Through this vertical overture, mankind brings nature into communion with God, and transforms it from its subjection to nothingness and futility. This is the essence of priesthood: he unites the world in his hands (being of the same material substance with the rest) in order to refer it to God

in worship, so that it can be united to God and be fulfilled (Zizioulas, 2016). His role as priest is necessary for creation itself. Nature is finite. As scientists attest, the world will die someday. The only way to save the world from the finitude inherent in its nature is by bringing it into relation with God, the infinite aperture that guarantees a conclusive sense for creaturely self-transcendence (Mondin, 2011). In so doing, mankind refers the world beyond its present condition to the Supernatural, with himself as the go-between.

Today's environmental blight consists in a long tradition of arrogating the ultimate point of reference in creation or nature (*ktisis*) to the human. This has been foremost in Nietzsche (for whom the ultimate possibility of man is the Superman) and other atheistic existentialists represented by Heidegger and Sartre. It has led to the elevation of mankind into the measure and yardstick of his own moral behaviour, as both *homo performer*, *homo faber*, *homo creator*, *homo laborans* (Wolter, 2013), the judge of his own action, who sits in judgement over others. This ethical view which is traced to the Sophist, Protagoras, results to a denial of his common brotherhood with, and reification of non-human beings, denying their inner worth, leaving them open to exploitation and abuse. Against its telling environmental implications, Leopold called for an ethic of nature to restrict human abuse of nature. Like Leopold, Naess set to establish a more objective ethic of the environment that would enforce a change of attitude in human behaviour towards nature and its environments. Sadly, their theories still fell under the delimitations of those same wry Western secularist intellectual garbs. Zizioulas highlights the enormity of such delimitations (Zizioulas, 2016) and identifies this manner of doing ecology to be part of the problematic.

Replacing the element of the supernatural (God) with himself, a finite created being, is the bane of environmental degradation and crisis. In so doing, mankind subjects the world to finitude, mortality, decay and death (Zizioulas, 2016). He turns into a predator, feasting sumptuously on the prey, and having made himself the Absolute in creation, he has turned himself away from being a "*homo oecologicus*" and abdicated his role of "priest of creation". Some thinkers often interpret this as environmental sin (see, Nwachukwu, 2017). The logic leads to the conclusion that environmental degradation and crisis are signposts to humankind's loss of vision of who he is, where he is and what he is. Indications that mankind has replaced the element of the supernatural (God) and arrogated to himself the ultimate point of reference in creation or nature abound in the rascality and recklessness exhibited in deforestation. As Naess observes, this has been driven by economy, particularly since the industrial revolution. The case in Enugu East is an instance. But, as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops put it:

Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human (USCCB, 1991).

In this line of thought, environmental crisis can be described as an "... impending 'gigantic cosmic vengeance' threatening to 'exterminate the species homo', loss of environmental friendliness where Terra Mater ceases to be 'Sister Earth', the sun ceases to be 'Brother Sun' as they were for St Francis of Assisi. This is ... thus a consequence of bad workmanship" (Enrique, 1988).

The reassuring theme of "priest" reemphasizes this fellowship, acknowledges his own, and nature's imperfection, yet his duties of care and enhancement towards growth, development and accomplishment, not for any other interest (anthropocentric or instrumental) other than the inner

good of each entity in nature, human and non-human: "...the development of nature through the intermediary of the human hands does not end up with the human being and its interests, but is referred to God" (Zizioulas, 2016). This is the fuller meaning, of and the better understanding, of Adam (humankind) as *homo oecologicus*, a being planted in the middle of the garden to guide the garden and all in it to their fulfilment.

EVALUATION

As a corrective to the more deficient theories, *this last model projects a human agent who does neither oppress, exploit, nor just preserve, conserve, or sustain nature, but as an actively engaged being who is alive to his duty of developing nature and taking care of its fragility, not just for human interests.* Aware of his brotherhood with all non-human entities in nature, and conscious of his overture, he becomes a lead being enabled with special endowments and responsibility to lift, enhance, and refer nature beyond its present state, to their fulfilment, to their summation in the Supernatural. Thus, rather than dwelling on conservation or feasting on or exploiting nature's goods, the priestly model emphasizes their development. In this understanding, as priest, he is now more disposed to see both nature and his relation to it in new lights. Nature ceases to be a mere deposit of usable (resources) or non-usable (non-irrigable heap of *massa damnata*) good, but a home (oikodome) housing him. Mankind, similarly, ceases from being an idle predator. He sees himself now as a being with possibility of transcendence beyond the superman (Mondin, 2011) into an imago dei. The "priest of creation", rather than feed his fantasies as the aesthetic thesis of Meinberg or the egocentrism in anthropocentric theories suggests, labours to enhance nature's goods as a *homo performer*. This counters too the image of humankind as *homo oeconomicus* where nature is conceived as raw material for production and distribution. Instead, mankind, as *homo oecologicus* has "fellowship" with nature, with which he is in need of fulfilment in flight from futility and mortality. This consideration incites a closer examination of an ecological conception of the human person (Adam) as the priest of creation, and the rich imports this portends for environmental thoughts.

Conclusion

The paper sought to establish the rationality behind those humankind's destructive attitudes precipitating environmental degradation and crisis today. This article was motivated by Meinberg's remark that "environmental crisis is a substantial phenomena [sic] leading to numerous perceptions and different point of views" (Meinberg). Consequently, a hermeneutic approach to the question of environmental degradation and crisis was employed to understand why humans are indulging in activities that tend to boomerang against them. The finding led to an interdisciplinary approach where anthropology, religion and philosophy meet. From the discussion one can see that the key to unlocking the problem of anthropogenic environmental degradation is the human person. So the paper found a leeway in philosophical anthropology, in the use of models. So, the paper used the model of priest of creation in this interdisciplinary understanding.

Deforestation is used to instantiate the human factors and activities causing degradation and environmental crisis. Agreeing that this is a local problem with a global impact, Enugu East LGA, Nigeria, is used as an illustration for a nexus point where unrestrained deforestation in a local context is impacting the climate. The paper concludes that environmental crisis confronting the world today is more or less an anthropological problem also, as it is cultural and ethical. It opines that humans are prone to mistreat the environment once they lose sight of their true identity and when they abdicate their responsibility over creation.

It is hoped that this exposition has shed ample light on the problem and that this model, “priest of creation”, would help further research on environmental behaviour, and assist in arresting this human malfeasance of nature, thus reducing today’s threats of environmental crisis. The paper underpins the point that concerns over anthropogenic environmental degradation should adopt a holistic study of the human agent than relying solely on the physicalism of Western philosophy.

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