

Review

Genesis 1:26 in Times of Environmental Crisis in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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Abstract

This article examines the environmental crisis at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in the light of Genesis 1:26 of the Old Testament. The environmental crisis is seen in the indiscriminate disposing of refuse by staff and students, the poor maintenance culture of the toilet environment in the students' hostel, the pollution of the air caused by the burning of refuse by staff in residential areas, and the indiscriminate urination and defecation in some parts of the university by students and visitors. This study adopted content analysis. The findings reveal that this has an immense impact on the physical, psychological, and mental state of members of the university community. Having observed this anomaly, this research proposes that Genesis 1:26 serves as a formidable solution to this escalating crisis. This Biblical pericope calls on man to maintain diligence and discipline in managing and maintaining the environment. It is believed that the solutions given will strongly speak to the increasing environmental crisis in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Keywords: Genesis 1:26, environmental crisis, UNN, pollution, university community

Introduction

A clean environment makes life peaceful and healthy. The environment provides the air man breathes, the water human drinks, the food human eats and other sundry needs [1]. Unfortunately, human activities have an adverse effect on the environment by polluting the water people drink, the air people breathe, and the soil in which plants grow [2]. During the climate talks hosted by the United Nations in Scotland, which ended on 12 November 2021, most world nations signed the treaty to combat dangerous human interference with

the climate system. This interference has affected the environment of man. At home, Nigeria has struggled to manage its environmental challenges. These challenges cover air, water, and land pollution. In this article, the environmental crisis viewed from the perspective of what is happening in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The environmental crisis in Nigeria is seen in many ways. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka is not an exception to this deteriorating phenomenon. It is one of the first generation universities in Nigeria, having been established in 1960 running both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes [3]. These first generation universities are the oldest universities in Nigeria which include University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ahmadu Bello University, among others. The committee in charge of the environment

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at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, has been taking steps to solve the negative development, but unfortunately, all these steps have not yielded many meaningful results. This made a theological response to this crisis very important.

Some of the environmental crisis observable includes indiscriminate dumping of refuse, burning of refuse of public places and spaces and dumping of refuse in drainages. When waste are not appropriately disposed it leads to unhealthy environment and epidemics. This happens due to lack of control and management of human resources and material resources.

The book of Genesis records the creation of the earth, which is comprised mostly of water and land. Genesis 1:26 reveals that God had given man the dominion to take care of the environment including the waters and land. The pericope is a binding law on humans to critically consider the environment and take measures to ensure proper care and support. It projects human being as the *imago dei*. Human as the image of God consists in spiritual endowments such as memory, self-awareness, rationality, intelligence, spirituality, even an immortal soul, manifested in human ability to make moral decisions, which presupposes free will and a knowledge of good and evil and is displayed when the human being serves as God's deputy on earth, an idea often expressed in royal ideology [4]. It is only human being that are created in God's image and likeness of God and thus the Christian tradition sought the basis of personal dignity in our creation in the image of God [5]. It's also crucial to note that, although while Genesis 1:26-28 shows that humans play a unique function in creation, this does not imply that they this does not imply that they are to be destroying...the rest of creation. It is the responsibility of man to ensure justice for the environment (air, water, and land).

This article examines the role of man in his environment in Genesis 1:26 and its relevance to the environmental crisis at the University of Nigeria. First, this article examines environmental crisis in the University of Nigeria and its causes and impacts. Second, this article studied man's duty to his environment in Genesis 1:26; and a hermeneutical study was carried out on the implications of Genesis 1:26 for staff, students, and visitors at the University of Nigeria. A phenomenological analysis was used to study the situation.

Results and Discussions

Understanding the Environmental Crisis at the University of Nigeria

Just like in any public environment, the University of Nigeria Nsukka is made up of staff, students and also visitors. At the University of Nigeria, student hostels and staff accommodation could be found at different strategic corners of the University of Nigeria, properly

planned. Three categories of the environment would be studied. There is the student, staff, and general category of environmental impact. First, a study of the environment of the students' hostel shows that the University management has tried its best to sanitize the environment. Dust bins are provided by the management. Dustbins occupy a critical position in any narrative of waste management and being situated at the interface of private lives and household practices, on the one hand, and public health and environmental management on the other, dustbin technologies provide a revealing indicator of waste relationships within society [6]. Students are expected to throw away their waste into the dust bin. Unfortunately, students are not interested in throwing away the waste from the hostels into the dust bins. They throw dirty things from their hostel windows onto the floor notwithstanding its impact on the environment. In fact, some students bring the dirt they have collected from their rooms to the waste cans, but they throw this dirt on the floor instead of the dust bin. Second, look at the environment of the hostels, students find it difficult to effectively manage the toilets and bathrooms. A visit by the researcher to the hostel shows that students find it difficult to flush the toilets. All they do is continually accuse the university administration of neglect, and to maintain the facilities they have is difficult for them. The framework of accountability is a double-edged sword, but students tend to focus all their grievances on the University administration. For better understanding, accountability is frequently employed as a normative notion, as a set of criteria for assessing how public actors behave. Accountability, or more specifically "being accountable," is regarded as a virtue, a desirable trait in organisations or officials [7]. Thus, students and administration are accountable for any crisis. When one is passing through the toilets, a terrible smell oozes out. So terrible is the situation that some students go as far as defecating in the bathrooms. It shows that the students are not really concerned about their environment. Also worthy of mention is the fact that these hostels have a hall governor and other officials. It is alleged by some of the students that the hostel students officials are more interested in sharing the finances of the hostel rather than organizing the students for a neat environment. This situation cuts across the male and female hostels.

Second, students in the school environment, after leaving their hostels, still find it difficult to dispose of waste properly. When they finish drinking their sachet water, they throw it on the floor, inside the classroom, and also on the pathways. Furthermore, the university management and other concerned individuals and societies provided dust bins at different corners of Departments, Faculties, Institutes and other offices, but these students find it difficult to drop the waste they have in the dust bins. It is sad to note that some students have turned this dust bins into seats. They throw the waste in these dust bins on the floor. They sit on the dust bins and chat amongst themselves. It is indeed a gory

state of affairs perpetrated by students at the University of Nigeria.

The second category, which is the staff category, also portends a sad development. One would have expected that the situation with staff would be different, but it seems like it is normal among staff. Some staff also find it difficult to properly dispose of their refuse from their homes. Some of them create open dump sites in their compounds, and some of them create dump sites outside their compound. It is sad to say that these dump sites are open, and portend health and other environmental hazards. These wastes cause “the spread of diseases, flood when drainages are blocked and an unpleasant smell after undergoing the process of decomposition” [8]. Also, the wastes in these dump sites are burnt at various intervals and this greatly leads to environmental pollution. The air is made unsafe for the neighbours and passersby. Also, there are dump sites with waste cans at strategic corners in the University environment. Unfortunately, instead of staff disposing of their waste into these dust bins, they throw their waste on the floor while the students are there watching. Maybe this is the culture that students see practiced among some members of staff that has sustained their neglect of the environment at the University of Nigeria. It is worthy of mention that some staff do not cut the grass around their houses. These grasses grow so tall that snakes begin to inhabit them. What is seen is a snake basking in the sun on the path ahead or nearly hidden in the grass alongside [9]. There have been various cases where staff members have reported killing snakes in their rooms. This is because snakes are more active most times in the morning and also in the evening in bushes.

Also, it is observable that some staff members, when they are in the school environment, do not care whatsoever about what happens to the environment. A staff member will send a student to throw away dirt without emphatically mentioning to the student to ensure that the waste is dumped in the waste bin. Some of these students carry the dirt and throw it on the staircase; the so called smart ones throw the waste under the staircase. There have also been cases where a staff member eats groundnuts and throws away the chaff in the classroom while the students are watching. Maybe, these students get their encouragement partly from this action. Leaders persuade their followers through their actions. Staffers are supposed to lead by example, manage efficiently and effectively environmental issues [10]. Indeed, staff members find it difficult to rebuke any student they find littering the environment. If rebuking students had been the norm, it is certain that the environmental crisis at the University of Nigeria would not have gotten to this level.

On a general platform, students, staff, and visitors urinate in public places, and at night, students defecate in open spaces. Going through different corners, people urinate in close proximity to a hidden corner they can find. Women suffer the most, because they need to look for a more enclosed place to urinate. Female

hygiene is grossly threatened by this sad development. Feminine hygiene practices “include the bathing and drying of the entire body, cleansing associated with posturination/defecation, cleansing the genitourinary area during menses, and replacing and disposing of used menses management products” [11]. Feminine hygiene practices comprise health behavior that is based on the physiological necessity for the management of elimination products, including urine, feces, and menstrual discharge [12]. Functionally, urine, feces, and menstrual waste disposal usually takes place at a toilet site [13], especially for women. Water and sanitation provision have a direct impact on women’s life experiences, their potential and opportunities [14]. Females (students and staff) most of the time, when pressed to the marrow, do not mind who is around, they urinate in the open.

It was discovered that most toilets in faculty and institute buildings have been converted to business centers. These were originally built for defecation and urination, but departments gave it out to business centres, which it is alleged is a source of internally generated revenue for the department. Also, it was observed that some of these rest rooms were coveted by departmental students unions for administrative purposes. This has left staff and students with nothing to survive on when they want to urinate or defecate. Unfortunately, it seems that the latrines built by the university administration are sometimes locked up, and it has made life uncomfortable for staff, students and visitors to the university.

Some departments and faculties allow grass to grow to a dangerous state in some parts of the university before it is cut. High humidity due to standing water and high temperatures, the presence of feed, especially pollen grains from maize plantations, and the use of ammonia-based fertilisers that act as attractants are all factors that contribute to the growth of huge mosquito populations in irrigated fields. The bulk of the local population uses permanent settlements that are built from locally available materials like grass and mud, which mosquitoes frequently prefer [15]. Tall grasses breed snakes and rodents. Research has shown that mosquitoes lay their eggs in standing water and grass-like (graminoid) plants that often dominate wetlands associated with high *Anopheles* larval densities. Some graminoid plants, similar to lowland rice (*Oryza sativa*), are well adapted to wetlands [16]. This may also breeds mosquitoes which may have long and short term consequences on the lives of students and staff.

The Impacts of this Crisis

The impact of this crisis on the lives of the students, staff, and visitors to the university cannot be overemphasized. It tends to rub the name of the university in the mud, and it has far reaching health implications and also threatens the realization of sustainable development goal.

First, the activities of students and staff of the University of Nigeria affect the name of the university internally and externally. This has the effect of embarrassing or tarnishing the good name of, or bringing into ridicule of the University [17]. Visitors to the university will term the University as an untidy place due to this environmental crisis. Significant others in the life of the student as well as the student's own desire for personal development are strong influences that lead the student to consider reputation of the University [18]. Also, students will see the university as a place where they can condone filthy things. Second, the health of students and staff members is threatened. It may be a breeding ground for mosquitoes that may cause malaria, which may eventually make students unfit to attend lectures, take their exams, and eventually make them stay extra years at the University. Furthermore, staff will fall sick due to mosquitoes bites and food poisoning from insects. Also, students and staff may be bitten by snakes that grow in the tall bushes that seem to be around in some areas of the University. Third, the target of attaining the sustainable development goals by 2030 is strongly affected. In the traditional '3 pillars' approach, the environment was one pillar of sustainable development, alongside the economic and social pillars [19]. Also, SDGs "address the global challenges (...) poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice" [20]. If University of Nigeria continues to overlook her environment, SDGs cannot be realized here.

Also, the air in the environment is polluted due to the bad smell of the refuse dumps. Some of the wastes are remains of perishable goods and the smell a lot making the air inconducive for normal human beings. There is an "association between individual lifetime measures of mean exposure to air pollution and postneonatal respiratory deaths" [21]. Also, "there are associations between particulate air pollution and total and adult mortality" [22]. When the air is polluted it leads to diseases such as heart disease, lungs malfunctioning, liver and even kidney diseases which most times increases the fatality rate of adults.

Students and staff are financially affected because money that should have been used for other purposes is channeled to the treatment of malaria, snakebites, infections from dirty toilets and bathrooms, treatment of snake bites and other sundry issues. Sometimes, even after the financial implications of these illnesses, the student or staff member dies.

Man and His Environment in Genesis 1:26

Genesis 1: 26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

The Old Testament contains passages that speak to the present environmental needs and challenges

of the University of Nigeria. A more suitable verse is Genesis 1:26 which gives a narrative about how God decided that they should make man in their own image, so that man could have dominion, control, and power over his environment. Humans are "seen as a kind of living statue, representing God in the territory of the earth" [23]. Human are imagebearer of God and humanity has the responsibility of reflecting God. Humans are created beings designed for relationship with others, they are interdependent, God is concerned for justice and right relationships among people, and finally material and environmental resources should be shared because they do not "belong" to any one person or group. Stewardship is the human responsibility to share resources fairly [24].

Genesis 1:26 also reveals that man is to control waters, air, and land, and the word 'earth' was used in verse 26 to harmonize how air, land and water comprise the earth. People are first created and later renewed according to that image and image involves connection and reflection. Creation in God's image involves a special and cordial connection with God and an intended reflection of God [25]. God put man here to have dominion in place of Satan. The earth is the theater for God's ultimate victory over Satan and the fallen angels. Satan wants to defy God by ruling the earth. In fact, in one's interpretation of the "image" and "likeness" of God, one would have to recognize that the biblical text makes explicit that in our resemblance to the Divinity and in our dominion over the earth and animals, men and women share a common human dignity [26]. Man does not rule over the animal kingdom because he is God's image because he rules over the animal kingdom sharing God's universal dominion [27].

The pericope also shows that man is to have dominion. This does not entail that man is to treat the environment with disdain. Instead, it implies that man is to take charge of his environment to ensure that his activities are in harmony with environmental friendliness. It is certain that part of this worship of nature involves caring for it at all costs. Much of the environmental movement today focuses on humans as parasites and plagues upon the beautiful earth. The weather, plants, and animals are all part of the environment God created on the Earth. The Bible says that they are as much a part of God's creation as mankind itself.

Genesis 1:26 and the Environmental Crisis

In Genesis 1:26 there are lessons that staff and students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka could learn in times of contemporary environmental crisis in the University of Nigeria. First, with regards to water, students in hostels should ensure that they fetch water to the latrines. No matter how pressed they may be, they should not just use the latrine without flushing with water because they feel no one is watching them. Furthermore, the hall government, which includes

the student hall officials, should ensure that water is made available at close range for the students to fetch from to the toilet. Their interests should not always be on how to maximize money from hostel dues without doing the needful.

Second, the indiscriminate disposition of refuse by students and staff should be seen as an act of immorality. Refuse should be properly disposed in waste cans. Also, the burning of refuse in residential buildings should be strongly discouraged. Staff and students in the houses and hostels within the university should avoid burning refuse inside or in-front of their compound. This is to reduce the air pollution in their area.

Third, the university management should, as a matter of urgency, build public toilets in the university, where students and staff can run to when they are pressed anywhere in the university. Also, this will help visitors to the university find somewhere to urinate or defecate.

Fourth, students, staff and visitors should see the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as part of what God placed in trust in their hands.. The University gives certificates to students only found worthy in character and learning. Cleanliness is part of character, and when one attitude comes under pressure, the person's character shows. So, when one throws dirt on the floor instead of in the waste bins, it shows that the person is not found worthy in character – whether a staff member or student.

Fifth, there is a need for each faculty in the university to set up an environmental monitoring team. This team will ensure that anyone that drops dirt or waste on the floor will pick them up. Also, the team will ensure that grasses around faculties, departments, and institutes are cut down by ad voc staff or by selfless individuals.

Conclusion

The environment affects one's physical and mental health. There will be better output when the environment is comfortable for students and staff. All hands should be on deck to ensure that the environment is neat at all times. Beginning from the students' hostels, to school premises, and to staff houses, the environment should be made clean. There should be caution in the disposal of waste, and regular clearing of bushes to prevent snakes from inhabiting the environment and mosquitoes from gaining from breeding and eventually causing malaria.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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