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A RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE TO NATURAL DISASTER AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Prof Ayantayo Jacob Kehinde
&
Ayantayo, Njideka Gloria

Introduction

Beyond the viewpoints of sociologist, environmentalist, geologist and humanist about natural disaster, the paper posits that there is a religious dimension to the disaster given its mysterious nature. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is the exploration of religious dimension to natural disaster with emphasis placed on its possible cause(s), its implications for the survivors of the crisis and their sympathizers.

This is in reference to invocation of humanitarian assistance, prevention of possible disaster in the future and the need for institutionalization of a veritable but also religiously provoked disaster management strategy in Nigeria which as at present does not have concrete mechanism for management of humanitarian crisis. Bringing religious dimension to the understanding and interpretation of the natural disaster makes one to ask the following questions. Can Natural disaster, which has been more or less geological issue, have religious undertone? What kinds of religious interpretation can one associate with natural disaster, which will not undermine the benevolence of God, placed in high esteem by religious adherents? What implication(s) does religion have in the occurrence of disaster? What exact role can religion play in prevention and management of disaster of whatever magnitude? And, how and where do we place religion in the management of humanitarian cases in Nigeria?

As a way of answering the above questions, this paper shall focus the following topical issues: definition of terms, theoretical framework of natural disaster, Religious perspective to natural disaster, Religions implications of the disaster to all stake holders, the place of religion in management of disaster and Humanitarian crisis in Nigeria, and towards veritable disaster management in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

We are mainly interested in defining three key terms in this essay for the purpose of understanding the context in which they are used. These are: disaster, natural disaster and Humanitarian assistance. Without going into too much detail, natural disaster can simply be defined as an unexpected occurrence inflicting widespread destruction and distress on people and properties. In short, it is an unforeseen and often sudden event that causes great damage, destruction and human suffering. Disaster can manifest in building collapse, blizzard, drought, epidemic, earthquake, explosion, fire, flood, hazardous material or transportation incident (such as a chemical spill), hurricane, nudes incident, tornado, or volcano[1]. There are two things we need to emphasize about disaster. One, disaster could be caused by nature and by human being. The latter happens when people are not careful, observant and ignorant of its cause. But in most cases, it is caused by nature for it is not common for people to inflict disaster on themselves. Second, disaster is always an unforeseen or an unexpected occurrence. This therefore suggests two things, which have implications for management of human crisis in Nigeria. Being an unforeseen thing, it implies that one should take precautionary measure to cushion its effect whenever it rears its ugly head. Again, taking precaution is one thing; the nature of disaster requires taken immediate action(s) by sympathizers and relations of the victims of disaster to relieve them of the consequences always associated with the disaster. The fact that disaster always results in grief, agony,

[1]www.disasterrelief.org/library/Dictionary, 2005

trauma and burden for its victims necessitates the need for humanitarian assistance.

Regarding tsunami disaster as an example, in Japanese word, which means "habour wave". It is so named because of the devastating effects these waves have had in low-lying Japanese coastal communities. Natural disasters are ocean waves produced by earthquakes or underwater landslides. In other words, natural disaster is actually a series of waves that can travel at speeds averaging 450 (and up to 600) miles per hour in the open ocean. According to geologists and geographers, earthquake – induced movement of the ocean floor most often generates disasters. Besides, landslides, volcanic eruptions and even meteorites can also generate a disaster. Risks associated with natural disaster whenever it occurs are drowning, flooding, and contamination of drinking water, fires from ruptured tanks or gas lines, and the loss of vital community infrastructure (police, fire and medical facilities)[2].

In human history, natural disaster has destroyed many lives and properties, which suggests that it is a dreadful disaster. A few examples in recent times earthquake in Pakistan, 2005; Chiapas, Port au Prince, 2010; Pakistan, 2013; China, 2014; Nepal, 2015; Chile, 2015; Ecuador, 2016; Mexico, 2017; and so many in 2018 such as California Fires, Greece Wildfires, Papua New Guinea Earthquake, North Korea Floods, Pakistan Heat Wave, Nigeria Floods, Japan Floods, India Floods and Indonesia Earthquake.[3]It has engulfed the lives of many people; killing them, maiming them, destroying their homes and property, wrecking businesses and taking away jobs. This calls for humanitarian assistance.

One fearful thing about natural disaster, which is worth noting by Nigerian, is that it can occur during any season of the year, and at any time, day or night. Humanitarian assistance in the context of our discussion deals essentially with relief measure put

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[2] Dillon, J. C. (1982). *The Waters Above*. Chicago: II. Moody.

[3] U.S. News & World Report | @usnews November 26, 2018 9:00 am

in place to cushion the effect of disaster on victims of disaster. Individual, group of individuals, could place the measure on humanitarian ground. This is based on the facts that human beings have common origin, nature and attributes. All these have religious undertones. More importantly, the act of helping the needy like victims of disaster is taken as moral obligation on the part of religious adherents. We shall discuss this fully later. Meanwhile, the positive response of various religious organs to the victims of natural disaster was manifested in the millions of pounds of charity donated, the tons of food delivered and the arrival of aid workers from many parts of the world. This has been inspiring and reassuring us of the great bonds of sympathy which join us all in one common ancestor - Adam.

Theoretical Framework

Giving the nature of disaster, we can argue that it has religious interpretation, which emerges from two schools of thought. The first one reduces disaster of any magnitude to act of God on the premise that nothing happens without the knowledge of God because God is regarded as all knowing. The other school of thought popularized by the humanists posits that God has no hand in disaster. They reduce natural disaster to event caused by nature. They add that bringing God to the cause of disaster would serve no purpose than belittling people's belief about the bigness and powerfulness of God.

Writing in the light of the first school of thought, Steve Singleton posits that what we call disaster is just a part of God's organization of nature[4]. He argues further that humans are merely in the wrong place at the wrong time. Illustrating this fact, he quotes Ecclesiastes, which says:

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[4] Singleton, S. (2005) Tsunami! Where was God (http://RzineArticles.com/ Retrieved April 8th, 2019

> I have seen something else under the sun; the race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come. As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. (Ecclesiastes 9:11 NIV)

The above, therefore presupposes that natural disaster falls into the category of disaster caused by nature. According to the passage, some disasters just happen not because God has no control but because He has constructed the universe in such a way that an unbroken chain of causes and effects will take place according to the physical law He has established unless He intervenes. However, what Singleton has not highlighted in his thesis is what purpose disaster serves God as many people were killed with no discrimination with regard to race, creed, class or religion. He does not explain why God does not intervene in natural disaster.

Contrary to Singleton's position, Woodrow Kroll ascertain that God is not directly responsible for disaster; it t is what men did at the Garden of Eden that made God to restructure the nature of the earth, which makes it possible for disaster to occur. For instance, on the question: "why does the earth experience natural disaster", Kroll says disaster occurs not because God wanted it, but He only put the law of nature into place while the violation of such laws by human being can result into natural disasters. Apparently Kroll disassociates God from causes of disaster as he writes:

> Insurance companies often blame things on an act of God, but God has nothing to do with it. Today we inhabit a once perfect-but-now-flawed earth. Now, because of Adam's sin, earthquake produces Natural disaster, which produces deadly devastation[5].

He ends with a warning note that we should not blame God for natural disaster for there were no disasters in His world. Disaster occurs as a result of human disobedience and now we see the consequences of that disobedience.

While we appreciate Kroll's position on the need to apportion blame on man as the enemy of himself, we are yet to understand while God who is all-powerful and all-loving could not avert the natural disaster. What is intriguing in the whole matter is that if the Bible is correct, how then can God allow natural disaster to occur; even if He is not the cause? For Norman Geiser, like Kroll, people should not blame God but nature for disaster. His argument is that the same laws of nature that produce good for us also can produce great tragedy as in the natural disaster. Putting this in noticeable perspective, he notes:

> In a physical world where there is water for boating and swimming, some will drown. If there are cars to drive, collisions can also occur. It may be said that tornadoes, lightning, hurricanes, and other natural disasters are likewise by-products of a good physical world. For instance, the purpose of rain is not to flood or drown, but the result of rain may include these disasters[6]

The picture the above portrays is that God's world was a world of order while the natural laws that God created were for our good. For instance, natural laws allow us to produce fire, but the

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[5] Ibid

[6] Norman L. Geisler. (200). *The Roots of Evil*. Wipf & Stock Publishers

same laws that enable us to cook our food could also destroy entire forest. In the instances cited above, we can hardly apportion blame on God. To our mind, Geiser position that disasters are product of natural laws still does not explain why God could not restructure the natural disaster law to produce good results.

Les Reid takes a radical approach to explain God's relationship or association with disaster from the perspective of humanist philosophy. His position is that natural disaster should not have occurred if God actually exists[7]. On the question: where was God in the natural disaster, Reid simply answers that He was nowhere. He did not act to save thousands of lives because he does not exist. This thesis may not hold water of analyzed from the perspective of religious teaching and tradition about God and His attributes. We believe that to say that God does not exist is an aberration and such statement will not in anyway be acceptable to religious believers who believe that God moves in mysterious ways. Doubt should not be allowed to undermine faith.

Religious Interpretation of Natural disaster

Beyond the purview of scientists and environmentalists, about the causes of disaster, religion qua religion has much to offer about the possible causes of disaster. This is evident in religious scriptures and traditions. We shall provide information regarding this thesis from the perspectives of two major religions practiced in Nigeria – Christianity and Islam.

From religious point of view, natural disaster could be traced to three factors such as sin, environmental mismanagement and possible test of people's faith. Sin is a transgression against the will of God. In religious tradition, sin is always accompanied with

[7]Les Reid, Santa Lives?: The Challenge for Philosophy, https://philosophy now.org/issues/7/Santa_Lives_The_Challenge_for_Philosophy Retrieved April 2019

punishment[8]. The implication of this is that natural disaster could be taken as God's punishment against the communities that experienced the disasters. But the question is: what were their sins? Are their sins worst that the sins committed by other nations especially Nigeria? What has been the ways of life of the South-East Asia people during the tsunami disaster that caused God to inflict disaster on them? Practically, we may not have empirical and experiential indicators showing the possible sins the people had committed or we may not say with precision whether the people actually committed a sin/ sins or not. However, we have an example of how sin led to disaster as exemplified in the Biblical flood episode. The inference one can draw from this story is that by nature, the flood has much in common with the natural disaster noting its sources. The Bible indicates that the waters which caused the flood came from two sources; (a) the fountains of the great deep; and (b) the windows of heavens (Gen. 7:11). God, having noted the wickedness and evil-heartedness of man caused them to be wiped away by water which was occasioned by the rain; it lasted for forty days with water which flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days (Gen. 7: 17; 24). Only Noah, his family, a few animals, and birds that were with him survived the storm. Like the natural disaster, its cause was an extremely powerful undersea earthquake, which in turn was propelled by the shifting of tectonic plates.

Based on the comparison above, we can readily submit that God's purpose for causing the tsunami disaster is only to punish the wickedness of South/East Asia as the case of the flood, the great flood (Gen. 6: 13, 17), and the great hail God rained down on the Ammonites (Joshua 10:11). Qur'an equally notes that calamites and disaster are requitals and punishment from God as a result of man's disobedience to certain divine injunction. Another important argument related to the flood saga has to do with the position of

[8] Ayantayo, J.K. (2000). Common Themes in Christian and Islamic Theology: Published by Centre for External Programme, University of Ibadan, Ibadan

some scholars like Rehwinkel[9], John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris that natural disaster disasters we experience today are as a result of the environmental havoc caused by the flood[10]. The substance of their argument is that the global flood of Genesis 6 – 8 not only radically altered the face of the earth, but also created the circumstances that are responsible for many disasters, experienced since that time.

While this could be a possibility, we must not lose sight of the fact that there is no consensus among Old Testament theologians on whether or not the flood was a global experience or that it was limited to the people of Ancient Near East as evident in the epic of Gilgamesh. To say that the flood is a global phenomenon may not win the favour of the people of religious traditions different from Christianity. However, one thing we need to consider in accepting the validity of the thesis that sin caused natural disaster is how to reconcile with it the fact that some righteous might have been affected. The possible righteous people are infants and a few religiously inclined people. For throughout the Biblical tradition, we are aware that when such punishing disasters take place, the righteous ones are sometimes spared as in the case of several plagues against Egypt (Ex. 8: 22 – 23; 9: 3 – 7; 23 – 26; 10:22 – 23; 11: 4 – 7; 12: 12 – 13; 28 – 30). Even this at it may, we do not have statistical record showing whether or not the righteous were spared in the natural disaster. In all, it is a mystery that the righteous suffers right along with the wicked. It is difficult to harmonize this with the religious doctrine of righteousness and benevolence of God. Apart from the inferences one could draw from the flood, our understanding of Christian tradition is that natural disasters or ordinary disasters are extension of the consequences of the fall of man at the Garden of Eden (Gen. 6 - 8 and Qur'an. 2: 35 – 39; 7: 19 – 25). The impression here as

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[9]Alfred M. Rehwinkel, The Flood, Imprint Concordia Publishing House, Louis, United States, 2000

[10]John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris, *Genesis flood narrative*, USA, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 1961

exemplified in the Christian and Islamic tradition is that catastrophes are part of nature's participation in the fall. As a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, the ground began to bear torn instead of abundant produce, the pain of child bearing increased, work became toil, and death became the constant companion of humanity.

Corroborating this, Paul emphatically says in Roman 8:20 "Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it". From the foregoing, we can say that typhoons and tornadoes, mudslides and avalanches, earthquakes, and other forms of natural disasters are all the result of the fall. No wonder why Singleton submits that the moral rebellion of the first couple fractured the pre-fall cosmic harming.[11]

In addition to the above, God does not only use disaster to punish; he also uses it to motivate the wicked people to repent. For instance, in Amos 4: 6–13, the Lord explains the purpose of inflicting one disaster after another upon Israel; the Lord explains His purpose in releasing one disaster after another upon Israel. This is stated as follows:

> I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me." Declares the Lord. "I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. "Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards; I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your

[11] Singleton, S. (2005) Tsumani! Where was God (http://RzineArticles.com/

> men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord. .I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord.

Similar idea echoes in the Qur'an 46: 15 – 19 as follows:

> Let him beware; if he persists not, we will
> Drag him by the forelock, a lying sinful forelock,
> Then let him call (for help) to his council of comrades we will call on the angels of punishment (To deal with them)
> May heed him not but bow down in adoration and bring thyself to the closet (to God)

In the same vein God could cause disaster to test people's faith as we have in the Bible and Qur'an. A given example is the case of Job who was afflicted with sores and many disasters manifested in loss of children and properties. But the danger associated with this strategy is that disaster that should draw people to God could end up hardening their heart. (See Ex. 8:15, 32; Rev. 9: 20–21). On another note, if disasters overtake one, one would only despair (Ps. 73: 18 – 20; Is. 57: 20–21). And if people survive it, their grief over their losses can prove inconsolable (1 Thes. 4: 13). Therefore, we can conclude that God could use miracle or any other tool rather than disaster to test people's faith. Thus, God's use of disaster for any purpose be it punishment for sin, testing of people's faith or motivating people to repent of their sinful deed may not be appropriate to explain what led to any disaster including the natural disaster. Such thesis may not win the mind of many religious people who believe in the benevolence of God. It is difficult to convince those who believe in the power of God and His mercifulness to say that natural disaster were purposely caused by God or it is due to God's vengeance. To the best of our

knowledge, God would not send the earthquake or the natural disaster or caused people to be killed or hundreds of thousands to be left in danger.

From the above, and given the two sides we have looked as regards possible religious interpretation of natural disasters one fact remains; this is that we cannot say with certitude whether or not natural disaster is the act of God for reasons only known to Him. Nobody can statistically calculate or analyze what factors actually were responsible for the disaster because as we know, disaster of the magnitude which gave us much concerns could be assessed from sociological, geological, geographical, environmental, political, economical and religious perspectives. On these, opinions differ. However, we cannot speak for God, as we do not know His ways. God works in mysterious way.

Religious Interpretation of Disaster and Implications for Humanitarian assistance

Whether we agree or not as to the relevance and sanctity of religious interpretation of natural disaster, religion plays vital role in provoking humanitarian assistance for the survivors of disaster. This is evident in the theology of giving or almsgiving demonstrated in African oral tradition, the Bible and the Qur'an. The theology of charity presupposes two things: (a) showing sympathy and concern for the victims of disaster (b) noting the fact that nobody is above disasters that people should not laugh at the turning or somersaulting boat. All these have positive implications for humanitarian assistance during crisis of any magnitude. It is important to mention that act of giving alms or coming to the assistance of victims of disaster in religion is taken as obligation. Charity on this account implies the gift of money or other donation to the needy. This is a practical demonstration of affection, love, mercy, compassion and kindness to the needy.

In African traditional setting, which has religion as its foundation, charity is exemplified in mutual aid. This is expressed in popular Yoruba maxim – *Gbàmí lójo, kí n gbà ọ́ lẹ́ẹ̀rùn* – save me from destruction during the rainy season, why I save you in the

dry season. The impression here is that human life is characterized by endless interrelationship. So when trouble comes to one, perhaps in form of disaster, the other would come to one's rescue. As far as Africans are concerns, the most satisfactory way of dealing with this continuous drama of struggling of successes, failures and frustration, is to think life also as a continuous drama of mutual aid[12]; this is so because nothing is self-suffices while nobody can also live independent of others.

In Christian tradition, giving humanitarian assistance to the needy – like victim of natural disaster is accompanied with a promise of blessing. For instance, the Bible instructively says: blessed is he who is kind to the needy (Prov. 14:21). Kindness to the needy, which goes with sharing food, giving money and defending their rights, are taken as honouring God. Therefore the reward for one giving to the needy will lack nothing (Prov. 28:8; 31:9; 28:27, and Psalm 41: 1). Also in Islam, giving to the needy is obligatory as a way of improving the life of the needy. In fact, true charity remembers not only those in needs who ask, but also those who are prevented by some reason from asking. (Qur'an 51: 19). Summarily, charity in the high sense includes all help, from one better endowed to one less well endowed.

Over time, the religious teaching and obligation regarding charity and kindness to the needy has helped to strengthen in practical terms the principles of brotherliness, hospitality, altruism, welfarism, and responsibility on the part of religious practitioners. Putting in perspectives, the principle of hospitality brings about helping the needy, while principle of responsibility presupposes that every man is bound to help the needy failure to do so makes one being regarded as irresponsible. The principle of altruism is suggestive of showing regards for others as a principle of action as against selfishness or egoism. The idea of common brotherhood is intrinsically linked to our common humanity that all human beings

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[12] G. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An introduction.* ACCRA: Sankofa Publishing Co., 2002, p46.

belong to one species. The idea of brotherhood in Africa is stated in the Akan maxim - man's brother is man[13]. This concept is practically demonstrated in moral virtues such as hospitality, generosity, altruism and communal feeling. All the above have positive implication for provision of humanitarian assistance to the victims of natural disaster. It pointedly shows that religion could be a tool of invoking humanitarian assistance to the victim of disaster.

It is on this note that one appreciates the humanitarian assistance rendered by many faith-based institutions in alleviating the plight of the victims of natural disaster. Notable among these at international level is the Church World Service (CWS). The CWS is a ministry of the National Council of the Christ in the USA, It seeks to make U.S policies responsive to human needs in practical ways, advocates the redesigning of U.S policies to increase funding for reduction of global hunger and poverty through people-centred development programme. With respect to natural disaster, the CWS put in place the following humanitarian action:(i) delivered trauma care in Ache (ii) established community-based counseling (iii) assisted Sri Lanka natural disaster survivors (iv) provided psychological support for traumatized Banda Ache survivors (v) gave disaster relief such as tools and blankets to victims of natural disaster. (vi) raised natural disaster Appeal to $5million (viii) deployed regional teams, sends $900.00 in emerging supplies to Aid natural disaster survivors (ix) holds special prayer and worship session for the victim of the natural disaster. We must say that the efforts of CWS so far towards assisting the victims of natural disaster has being complemented by many other religious organization in Nigeria such as Catholic relief Agency .

Positioning Religion in Management of Humanitarian Crisis

We believe that Nigeria faith-based organizations too like CWS should come together and form several association geared towards provision of humanitarian assistance to victim of disaster.

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[13] G.Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An introduction.* ACCRA: Sankofa Publishing Co., 2002,p-46.

We do not by this statement suggest that, as at present there is no religious organization rendering humanitarian assistance. We just need to emphasize that concerted effort should be made by organization like Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), which forms an umbrella over many other church denominations. The same could be arranged in respect of the Islamic faith under the auspices of Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs in Nigeria (SCIAN). But honestly speaking, we can say Nigerian religious organizations are yet to develop more oriented humanitarian assistance programme like the CWS. Today, they are much concerned with tithe, environmental and evangelical offerings with little attention to humanitarian offering. On this, we propose the articulation of honesty and accountability.

Apart from generating offering towards managing of humanitarian crisis, there should be Counseling and Guidance department which will counsel victims of disasters on the one hand and the relations of those who lost their precious loved ones on the other hand. This is important because disaster traumatizes their survivors.

The above justifies the need for the establishment of a department for counseling of disaster victim. Workers in this department must be trained spiritually and academically. Such department should work with another department, which could be called Disaster Relief Department (DRD). They should separate offering from religious organization to provide financial basis for such department. This department should work hand in hand with counseling department. In addition to this, it is important to have prayer department essentially designed to take care of disasters victim. This department would help meet the spiritual need of the victim who understandably would be in agony in thought and in action. As we have these departments, at the level of every religious organization, there should be a central one that would look like the CWS while the ones at the level of each religious organization should take care of disaster at local level, the one at

the central would take care of the disaster of national and international status.

On the account of the above suggestions, we believe this particular period which we are is an opportunity for conservatives, and liberals, Catholic and Protestants, Jews and Muslims, blacks and whites, Asians and Latinos to all come together to have institutional disaster relief package as one of the ways of solving humanitarian crisis.

Ironically, one of the positive (amidst tears) aspects of the natural disaster is that many religious organizations rallied around the victim of the disaster without minding their religious differences. This is a good development. It is suggestive of the need for Nigeria religions organization to assist generously victims of disaster irrespectiveof their age, religion and ethnic background. It is in the light of this, that the observation of Clinton regarding the interaction among religious organizations and victims of natural disaster is apposite:

> I am grateful for the opportunity that this terrible tragedy gives for religious reconciliation in the world as the people around the world were reaching out for the Muslims of Indonesia, for the Hindus and the Buddhists and the Christians in Sri Lanka to reconcile[14].

Such interaction by implication has tendency to stabilize the situation in the West Asia, reduces the likelihood of terror, and creates a climate in which the peace process can resume. From this, Nigeria, which is religously pluralistic, would learn lesson.

General Recommendation

To avert disaste especially preventable ones, it is important for Nigerian to be conscious of our environment. Nigeria attitude to environmental management is below the world standard. Exploration of oil among other mineral resources has damaged our

[14] CNN, 2004

environment. Since, earthquake, and natural disaster are traceable to poor environmental management, there is urgent need to make the dream of Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) realizable as it is empowered by FEPA Decrees, 1988, 1992 to:

i. establish programmes for the prevention, reduction and elimination of pollution of the nation's air, land and inter-state waters, as well as national programmes for restoration and enhancement of the nation's environment.
ii. establish such environmental criteria, guidelines, specifications or standards for the protection of the nation's air and inter-state waters as may be necessary to protect the health and welfare of the population from environmental degradation.
iii. establish such procedures for industrial or agricultural activities in order to minimize damage to the environment from such activities.
iv. maintain a programme of implementation of environmental criteria, guidelines, regulations and standards and monitoring enforcement of the regulation and standards thereof etc.[15].)

Religions organizations need to complement the work of FEPA. This could be done through theological teaching and practical environmental management by religious centers. Bible schools, Seminaries, Arabic Schools and other theological institutions could articulate this awareness. There are a lot to learn from the scriptures of the Christian and Muslim – about morality of environmental management. For instance, the Bible instructively asks man to nurse and nurture his environment; he is to guard it jealously so that no harm shall befall it. Perhaps, it is on this ground that the World Council of Churches rules that:

[15] FEPA Decrees, 1988, 1992

> All elements of the God's earth are his creation. All of God's creation has value and is to be treated with reverence for the sake of its maker who accounted it good. We are commanded to be good steward of God's world. We are held responsible for it. It is not ours to do with things we please; rather we are to do what pleases the Lord[16].

To achieve the above, there is need to give room for justice in the use of the environment. Thus Religious Centres are duty bound to follow their scriptures to the letter in order to do what is right and just for this is what is acceptable to God and Humanity (Prov. 21:3, Isa. 56:1; Q2: 282; 4:58; 4:65, 105). To our mind, the environment is God's property which religious people should not impair in the course of pursuing their selfish desires as related to their attitude to the environment. There must be strict obedience to God commandment so that everybody will be at peace in every given environment. Any action contrary to the above is tantamount to mischief, which from Islamic point of view is *Haram*. This is the reason why Allah after completing the work of creation instructs that: "And make no mischief in the earth after its reformation and all on Him fearing and hoping. Surely, the mercy of Allah is nigh to the doers of good (Q7: 56).

As in the case in central and Southern Philippines, there is need for religious organization in Nigeria to form a Christian Aid. Christian Aid at the national level runs tailored disaster management training for partners (in disaster management). The partners could be disaster relief units of religious organizations in the country. Such would help orientate religious adherents on the need to take up practices that reduce the risk of disaster. By so doing, they would learn to:

[16] World: Christian Aid's Response to Emergencies: Making Decision (WCC 1979:68)

- Consider which disasters their communities are most at threat from
- Prepare their response for any potential disasters before they happen
- Respond effectively when disaster strikes
- Develop a good working knowledge of the Humanitarian Charter and the Red Cross Code of Conduct as well as the Sphere Project minimum standards for disaster response
- Ensure rehabilitation programmes following disasters including measures to reduce the risk of future disasters.

With all the above proposals put in place, Nigerians would make disaster management part of development; such would strengthen communal ability to withstand disaster.

Conclusion

From the discussion about the relationship between religious belief and disaster, it is obvious that religion has significant role to play in terms of how people interpret disaster, accommodate pains and agony associated with it, and the responsibility before the sympathizers of victims of disaster. At each point, religious belief, sentiment, liturgy and bias are significantly relevant. This is so because religious teachings help to soothe the pain, heal agonizing heart, provide succor in time of need, it also makes individuals – (this time, the victims of disaster) to adjust, on matters of psychiatric impairment, emotional and physical instability. Finally, it helps people to face bitter crises and especially death of beloved ones or loss of valuable properties. Whether we like it or not, the role of religion in the interpretation of disaster and management is indispensable as evident in many prayers people have said consciously or unconsciously in respect of natural disaster. For instance, many people said: "God, we thank you that natural disaster did not occur in my continent". Another one says, may God forbid natural disaster from occurring in our land while the

sympathizers of the victims of the disaster say may God provide the victims and their relations the fortitude to bear the loss while God prevent such occurrence again. In these prayers, God is the central key point as He is also central to every religious belief. Therefore, there is religious dimension to disaster, which Nigerians should take seriously.

From the foregoing, we need to say that instead of blaming God when natural disaster strikes, we must turn to him for strength and let the earthquakes and disaster remind us of the need to check our character, deed and action because they are consequential. As sinful act could attract God's punishment manifesting in disaster of any magnitude, so also poor management of our environment may lead to hazard. But whenever disaster comes, we must play our part in relieving the victims of the burden such might have put on them.