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AN ANALYSIS OF GOD’S INJUNCTION “BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY” AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

God gave the first man and wife instructions to procreate and populate the globe once He had finished creating everything else (Genesis 1:28). In certain Christian churches, this heavenly instruction is known as the "cultural mandate" and it assigned humans the responsibility of populating, subduing, and ruling the planet. It includes both the mandate to multiply and the need to advance cultural growth in order to improve living circumstances. This requirement is inherently based on the human capacity for productive interaction with the environment. The notion of cultural mandate, as expounded in Neo-Calvinism in the Western world, explores the ramifications for contemporary culture and highlights the need of progress within a pluralistic framework. This discourse argues that while Nigeria has effectively executed the procreation component of the mission, it has often overlooked the developmental portion. In addition to reproduction for continuity, development involves knowing natural laws (science), using this knowledge to make instruments for improved living circumstances, and making sure that resources are distributed fairly. This paper's main goal is to use an ecological viewpoint to analyze the complex link that exists between the natural environment and humanity's ability to use its resources.

Keywords: God’s Injunction “Be Fruitful and Multiply”, Development, Ecological Perspective.

INTRODUCTION

The Bible asserts that Jehovah, God's name, is profoundly intelligent, being the creator of the universe and the source of all cosmic power (Psalm 92:5, 83:18). The initial chapter of the Bible depicts God as the creator of both the world and the heavens. After fashioning man "in His image," meaning with qualities resembling His own, God directed humanity to propagate and inhabit the Earth (Genesis 1:1, 26, 28; Awake 209). Does this imply that God fashioned the entire universe, including Earth and its myriad of life forms, solely for the purpose of accommodating humans? Are our sole objectives in life limited to a few decades of pleasure, sustenance, and reproduction?

The divine directive, known as the "cultural mandate" or the call to "be fruitful and multiply," entrusts humanity with the task of proliferating, subduing, and governing the Earth. Interpreting this command involves both the necessity of human reproduction and a cultural imperative to progress and enrich living conditions. This directive inherently grants humans the capability to engage with the environment constructively. Neo-Calvinism, which explores the ramifications of this Calvinistic assertion for

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contemporary society, particularly in the West, has extensively developed the concept of the cultural mandate.

This thesis contends that one aspect of God's command to humanity during creation—procreation, or the propagation of offspring—aims to ensure generational continuity. Nigeria has notably and heedlessly fulfilled this aspect of the command, often at the expense of neglecting development. The path to development begins with comprehending natural laws (science). Subsequently, it involves utilizing this knowledge to advance technology—creating tools and innovations that enhance living and working conditions—and ensuring equitable social structures, including fair labor practices and distribution of rewards (Rodney, 1982). Development, in essence, entails progressively eradicating societal conditions that lead to worker alienation. These conditions stem from a complex interplay between the natural environment (such as environmental scarcity and ecological breakdowns) and the social environment (including labor organization, access to resources, and distribution of incentives—Rodney, 1982; Efemini, 2019). The main objectives of the paper are to analyze God's injunction to be fruitful and multiply” and the complex interplay of the natural environment and the human capacity to access the environmental resources for development in Nigeria.

The Problematic

God's message to humans in Genesis 1:28 to "be fruitful and multiply" is not limited to the advice to procreate. God's larger purpose, which calls for populating, subduing, and ruling the Earth, must also be accomplished. People need to understand that these directives were about being creative agents who actively shape and develop the natural environment for more productive and joyful life, in addition to just growing the Earth's population.

The creation Mandate, sometimes called the dominating mandate or the cultural mandate is given to mankind and reaches through time and space to all people. The long time of impressive civilizations throughout history with all their remarkable achievements, technological advancements and beautiful artworks are evidence of God's power and kindness to all humanity (Megan 2021).

The understanding of the creative mandate is key to national transformation and development, this has been effectively demonstrated by the advanced Western countries of the World.

As was previously said, development entails comprehending the laws of nature (science) and using this comprehension to create tools and other implements that enhance man's living and working circumstances (technology). The productive utilization of the environmental and natural resources of the world as created by God underscores the ecological process especially by man.

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Is Genesis 1:28's command to multiply and bear fruit limited to producing an excessive number of children and populating the planet? Without a doubt, no, given how intricate the problem of human population growth is. It is evident that the regions of the globe with the lowest standards of life are also those where the human population is expanding at the fastest rate. The developed world's nations—Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—are rich beyond measure, yet their populations are expanding quite slowly. Africa, Latin America, and Asia are among the less developed continents with the highest rates of population increase and overall poverty. Poverty, large birthrates, ill health, and a lack of education seem to be associated, despite the fact that no two instances are the same Enger and Smith (2002).

In Nigeria population growth is becoming a problem especially with a dysfunctional economy and attendant consequences. Currently the world population projection as at 2023 is 8 billion, it is projected to peak around 10.4 billion in 2086 (UN 2022).

According to projections from the UN, the majority of the global population increase from 2020 to 2050 will occur in less developed nations, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than half of the increase is expected (UN, 2023). Notably, just eight countries, with five in Africa, will contribute to half of this increase (UN, 2022). Sub-Saharan Africa's population is projected to quadruple by 2050, with Africa expected to account for half of global births by 2100, according to the Pew Research Center (Cilluffo and Ruiz, 2019).

Some groups anticipate slower population growth in Africa due to advancements in women's education and the effective use of family planning (Kaneda et al., 2021). However, other nations will experience varying degrees of population growth or decline throughout the century. For example, UN projections suggest that China's population will decrease by half, while Nigeria's population is forecasted to increase by over 340 million people, surpassing the current population of the US and becoming the third most populous nation (UN, 2022).

Unfortunately, Nigeria has faced significant challenges in recent years, as indicated by Foresight Africa 2023 research. The country experienced two economic recessions between 2015 and 2021, with an average GDP growth of only 1.1 percent. Unemployment and underemployment rates reached a record high of 56.1 percent in 2020, pushing 133 million Nigerians into multidimensional poverty (Erumebor, 2023).

Economic development in Nigeria has been uneven, with issues such as reduced productivity and sluggish growth in labor-intensive industries. Over the past seven years, there has been a notable shift towards agriculture, while the industrial sector has declined. Despite the increase in agriculture's contribution to

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GDP, the manufacturing sector's share has decreased, leading to a low proportion of manufactured goods in exports and a reliance on imports. This lack of a strong manufacturing base has resulted in foreign exchange shortages, insufficient job creation, and an unsustainable import bill (Erumebor, 2023).

Moreover, a significant portion of Nigeria's workforce is engaged in non-tradable services and agriculture, both of which have low productivity levels. This highlights the insufficient employment opportunities to increase income and lift many Nigerians out of poverty.

Natural Resources, Technology and Development

The environment and all the natural resources were created for man to survive. The creative mandate given to mankind was simply to interact with the environment to produce the material needs for survival. The ecological process involves interactions of organisms, in this case human beings interacting with others and the surroundings. Matter and energy are involved in these exchanges. For living organisms to survive, there must be a steady flow of matter and energy. (Smith and Enger, 2002).

The ecological process is a function of the ecological resources available in one's environment, i.e., the structure and function of the ecological system, the understanding of the laws of nature (science), the use of technology to effectively interact with the environment. The capacity by nations to interact with the environment defined here as the creative mandate – defines the level of development and advanced a society is, and also the level of living standards of that society.

Technology defines a spectrum of human potential in relation to the natural world. In this sense, through the practice of technology we place under our control a realm that was once beyond it, "the environment" (David, eds 2010)

According to David Rothenberg, humankind transforms itself through transforming nature (Rothenberg 1993). The process begins with the intention of transforming capricious nature into something manipulable (from "man", meaning "human"). Such a metamorphosis calls for an apparatus. The definition of "human" is changed as a result of the tool's creation and use, which broadens the scope of conceivable human action. New intents follow from this reframing, and the process starts again. The circular process of intentionality, technological innovation, realization of the goal, and redefinition of humanness is "progress" (David eds, 2010). On this philosophy of technology, the genesis of the practice of technology begins with the human intention to transform nature. This intention is in the most profound sense of value-laden because the use of technology increases the range and scale of human power, and the range and scale of human power affect natural process.

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In short, technology at its very core reflects the values of the human beings who engage in the enterprise of innovation and transformation within the context of nature. The range of natural process that we have the power to control is the environment. The human-built environment is the product of technology (David eds 2010).

Nigeria and indeed the less developed nations of the world had not developed the intention for innovation and transformation. The reason our nations are underdeveloped. This corroborates Claude Ake's argument that African leaders have not conceived the idea of development within themselves not to talk of practicing it in their countries (Ake 1996, 2001, Udisi and Udisi 2022)

The Ecological Perspective

The science of ecology deals with understanding and describing interrelationships among and between organisms and their surroundings. This involves the basic ecological principles, which are an important foundation for understanding the broader social, political and economic contexts of societal development and attendant environment issues. Ecology is the study of how organisms utilize and are shaped by their environment, as well as how the existence and actions of species change a given region. Human life depends on the composition and operation of ecological systems (Enger and Smith, David, eds., 2010).

Development Challenges in Nigeria

Nigeria has a myriad of development challenges. These include a weak agricultural base, unfavorable terms of trade with the west; domination of the critical sectors of the economy by multinational enterprises; self-centered, nepotistic and ineffective leadership which controls the Nigerian state, dependence on oil as the main source of revenue for the economy; a weak industrial sector, poor indigenous technological and managerial advancement (Ifeanacho 2012).

The development challenges as stated above are further aggravated by the decline of the agricultural sector starting in 1965. The main indicators of the agricultural decline include its reduced total and per capita growth rates, decreased sectoral share in GDP, the proletarianization of the peasantry, reduced acreage, declining yields, falling exports, growing scarcity and import of food as well as inflationary food prices (Onimode, 1983, Ifeahacho 2012. All these culminated into the agrarian crisis which has become a permanent feature of the Nigerian economy. The decline has continued despite efforts to arrest it.

The consequences of the agrarian crisis have been grievous for Nigeria, particularly since the 1980s. Agriculture would have been a major alternative to industry especially in times of depression, but this is not the case in Nigeria. The growth – rate of the agricultural sector continue to decline from the 1980s. For

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instance, the GDP by agriculture remained at 23.26 percent between 1977 and 1979 and even fell to 21.95 percent in 1980. More recent statistics show stagnation rather than growth. For instance, the GDP by agriculture remained 21 percent in the second quarter of 2023. The largest contribution was from crop production, which covered nearly 19 percent of the GDP, Onimode, 1983, Sasu, 2023.

The agrarian crisis could be merged to the socio-political and economic problems Nigeria is facing today. Equally disturbing was the mounting import bill that Nigeria is facing. In example, imports of food hit a record high in 1981. The country imported food for N2.198.3 million. An estimated N2 billion would be spent on the bill each year. The nation's oil boom helped to maintain this condition, which hasn't gotten any better since. Nigeria, often referred to as the "food basket of Africa," has imported food at a cost of more than N7.8 trillion over the last six years. According to Ekugbe, the startling amount in 2023 is evidence, according to experts, that the Nigerian government has not yet set the country on the correct course to end hunger by 2030 as required by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In contrast to the N2 trillion spent on food importation in 2021, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports that over N1.9 trillion worth of food import business transactions were completed in 2022 (Ekugbe 2023).

The nation imported about N959 billion worth of food items in 2019 and N1.2 trillion worth of agricultural products in 2020. Additionally, Nigeria imported food items worth N886.8 billion in 2017 and N857.6 billion in 2018, respectively. In order to solve this issue, the Anchor Borrower Program was introduced in 2015 by Muhammadu Buhari, the former president of Nigeria. Its goal is to provide farmers with capital and necessary inputs to increase their output.

Nigeria's import bill for food has increased concurrently. In the last several years, Food goods worth N1.9 trillion were imported into the nation in 2022. Comparing the value of food imports to the previous quarter's record, the second quarter of 2022 saw a rise to 464.45 billion.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) reported that in only a single year, Nigeria's food import cost increased by 45% to \$2.71 billion (N1.12 trillion). Ekugbe, 2023.

Nigeria's plans for economic and human resource development have been hampered by the disregard for agriculture and the adoption of flimsy, contract-ridden measures to revive the industry.

Conclusion and Way Forward

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The discuss particularly centered on the agricultural sector simply because agricultural production is directly linked to the ecological perspective. The neglect of agriculture and the consequences of the agrarian crisis can be discussed further in relation to population growth in Nigeria. While agriculture production is declining, population growth is increasing.

Kareem (2022) claims that from 2020, Nigeria's agricultural output has been steadily declining, according per Dataphyte's study in 2022. Crop productivity fell by 47.2% in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the first quarter of 2020. The agricultural sector's major subsector, crop production, is responsible for 92.5% of Nigeria's nominal GDP growth in the first quarter of 2022. Crop output and food inflation have been shown to be adversely correlated by research; when crop production declines, food inflation increases and vice versa. Over the last two years, agricultural output has decreased in Nigeria, which has resulted in an increase in food inflation (Kareem 2022). Crop output declines have been mostly attributed to national instability, which includes ethnic conflicts, kidnappings for ransom, farmer-herder conflicts, and the Boko Haram insurgency.

Beyond food insecurity, Nigeria's food production has also been influenced by Nigerian farmers' reluctance to embrace cutting-edge technologies and processes. Farmers still use antiquated agricultural tools like hoes and cutlasses, and they preserve farm food locally. This antiquated technique wastes agricultural products before it reaches the ultimate customer and produces a poor and sluggish yield.

Lack of funding is another factor contributing to Nigeria's declining agricultural output growth; farmers lack the resources necessary to industrialize crop production, purchase fertilizers, and store harvested goods.

The most tangible consequence of Nigeria's poor agricultural yield is the long-term decline in availability and high costs, which inevitably cause food inflation. Additionally, it can result in a shift in the means of subsistence for farmers, particularly those in rural areas. In Nigeria, 14.4 million people—including those displaced by the many security issues around the nation—are presently experiencing a food crisis. Reduced agricultural yields may also contribute to poverty, which in turn can cause other issues including malnourishment and ill health.

With high projected future estimates, Nigeria's food inflation increased from 18.37% in 2022 to 35.41% in January 2024. Given Nigeria's present level of food inflation, more individuals would likely experience food crises and insecurity in the near future (Kareem 2022, Dada, 2024).

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The decrease in agricultural yield also leads to decreased exports, which lowers overall export and creates trade imbalances that harm the nation's economic expansion.

Nigeria must create an environment that is conducive to achieving food security, which includes improved policies and a solution to the insecurity issue. These measures will include opening up financial resources, encouraging and growing mechanized agriculture, and optimizing the agricultural value chain overall (Kareem, 2022).

Nigeria's population is growing but agricultural productivity is falling. Nigeria is thought to have a population of about 222 million people, with a median age of 18.1 years, or the age at which the population is halfway reached. Although there is a dearth of precise statistics, the nation's 2.4% population growth rate is maintained by high fertility—5.2 children per woman, as opposed to 3.6 in Ghana and 3.3 in Kenya. The majority of these deliveries are undesired, unplanned, and difficult for the moms to handle. The majority of these unintended pregnancies often result from young, single teenagers. There are severe repercussions in terms of low quality materials, unsafe abortions, and health effects (Akinyemi 2023).

With a median age of 18.1 years, the nation boasts the biggest population of youth in the world. Of the population, 42% is under the age of 15, and almost 70% is under 30.

There are concerns about the population's general quality of life. Poverty, unemployment, and insecurity regarding food, life, and property are all at high levels. Based on a poverty level of USD 1.90 per day, Nigeria is home to over 12% of the world's population living in severe poverty (Akinyemi 2023).

Young people find migration appealing due to the social and economic circumstances; this phenomenon is known as the "Japa Syndrome" (derived from the Yoruba word for "escape"). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs estimated that there were 1,256,114 Nigerian expatriates abroad in 2015. By 2019, this had increased to 1,438,331.

The International Migration Organization reports that between 1990 and 2013, the number of emigrants more than doubled, rising from 465,932 to 1,030,322 (Akinyemi 2023).

Political expediency rather than evidence is used to dictate policies and planning when there is a lack of precise data. Aligning government planning with the intricate interplay of individual, community, and society requirements becomes almost impossible in the absence of precise data. What determines the placement and configuration of educational and medical facilities? Sometimes housing developments that

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are in the wrong location result in isolation and abandonment. Development is directed correctly by data. Without planning, data is not available.

Excessive population expansion in the absence of infrastructure and socioeconomic support severely strains the nation's meager resources. The results manifest as a variety of societal problems and upheavals.

Numerous dangers are associated with a high birth rate. First of all, having too many kids makes one more vulnerable and impoverished.

Second, a high birth rate is dangerous since every birth puts the mother, child, family, and community at danger. In addition, the young woman's and the child's life are in grave danger during an early pregnancy and delivery. High health risks can arise from closely spaced or older births.

It's concerning that young people are fleeing the nation due to the Japa Syndrome. Of the migrant population, 51% are Nigerians with a tertiary education. Over half of the 72,000 physicians registered with the Nigerian Medical and Dental Council are not Nigerian residents.

The majority of the youth departing are highly educated and competent individuals. This might have long-term consequences, including the risk of a vacuum in important economic areas. In the near future, the repercussions for development can be quite difficult unless there is an immediate intervention.

Even though the Nigerian diaspora community travels widely and has a high remittance profile, the government's strategy for optimizing the advantages of emigration is not at its best, and Nigerians living abroad are not effectively included into plans for national development (Akinyemi 2023).

A large population may promote economic growth if the proper resources are invested in health and education. Together with rural-urban migration, population expansion raises density and intensifies urban agglomeration. This may assist businesses in manufacturing things more cheaply and in greater quantities, therefore catering to a greater number of low-income clients. However, precise data would be required to direct the execution of government plans and programs.

Prioritizing data- and evidence-based policies and programs is crucial for the government. The government must revive the administrative and civil registration data and conduct an accurate census.

All levels of government should place a high priority on funding family planning and high-quality education, especially for female children. These will enable women to decide rationally when, how, and how many children they want.

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Nigeria has enormous potential to become a more significant regional and international economic powerhouse for Africa because of its size and young population. Because population growth and urbanization go hand in hand and there is a strong correlation between urbanization and economic development, a big and youthful population may be advantageous to the economy.

To establish an atmosphere where these human resources are exploited as efficiently as possible, leaders must enact strong policies and make investments in health and education. Policies for young people's socioeconomic and political empowerment must to be well-thought-out and organized.

Finally, there is no doubt Nigeria has done creditably well in fulfilling God's injunction of fruitfulness and multiplication in the area of giving birth, it has not fared well in the creative mandate of development. It is a given that a country's population growth or decline may have profound effects on society's social, economic, and political institutions.

In emerging nations like Nigeria, where the population is growing rapidly, there are negative consequences to this. Concerns regarding the country's poor well-being have been raised due to the country's excessive population. Overpopulation causes poverty, and Nigeria's current political, economic, and social problems make it impossible to reach the 2030 deadline for the UN's sustainable development objectives. Reduced population growth is consequently required in Nigeria (Udisi & Imbazi, 2023)

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