
Christian Education Response to Malthusian Theory of Population: A Nigerian Christian Perspective

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Abstract

Thomas Malthus postulated that population increases in geometrical progression which is 1,2,4,8,16,23,64,128,256,512, while resources increase in arithmetic ratio as 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. Therefore, if not check the population will destroy the ecosystem out of search for sustenance or overuse the already available resources. This study therefore, is a respond to Malthusian theory of population from Christian education viewpoint, the aim of the research is to analyze the theory in line with Christian education believes and practices. The study will discuss the components of Malthus theory, which includes, preventive and positive check, neo-malthusianism and pro-malthusianism, brief concept of Christian education and consequently, Christian education response to Malthus theory through educating the church, the entire citizen, and government of Nigeria on the need for family planning, birth control, abstinence from pre-marital sex, also the need for Nigerians to plant trees, plant food and restrained from every activities that will destroy the earth.

Introduction

Malthusian theory postulate that population is increasing exponentially above the propensity of the ecosystem to sustain and provide for it. He submits that while population is increasing in geometry progression, sustenance is increasing in arithmetic progression. Therefore, if not check the population

will destroy the ecosystem out of search for sustenance or overuse of already available resource. Checks was recommended as solution to the overblowing population which Malthus called preventive and positive check. The preventive check is to be mounted by man by means of reducing birth rate through delay marriages and abstinence from sexual activity. While positive check is the earth shading herself by earth quake, plague, viruses and other catastrophe to maintain its sustainability.

This study is a respond to Thomas Malthus theory of population from Christian education viewpoint, the aim of the research therefore is to analyze the theory in line with Christian education believes and practices. The study will discuss the components of Malthus theory, which includes, preventive and positive check, neo-malthusianism and pro-malthusianism, brief concept of Christian education and finally the principles that guides Christian living in the ecosystem.

Concept of Malthusianism

Malthusianism is a controversial economic theory that was propounded by Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), was an English clergy, scholar and influential economist in the fields of political economy and demography. The theory sees exponential increase in human population as reasons for increase in prices of commodity, goods and services. Its general idea is that population growth is potentially exponential while the growth of the food supply or other resources linear, which eventually reduces living standards to the point of triggering a population demise.³¹⁸ The theory hypothesizes that the worldwide stagnation in income per-capita during the pre-industrial epoch reflects the counterbalancing effect of population growth on the expansion of resources, in an

³¹⁸ Nathaniel L. Beck and Jonathan N. Katz, "Throwing out the Baby with the Bath Water: A comment on Green, Kim, and Yoon" *American Journal of International Organization* (New York: Harper and Bros, 2001), 55.

environment characterized by diminishing returns. Malthus claims that “the expansion of resources leads to an increase in population growth, reflecting the natural result of the passion between the sexes.”³¹⁹ Therefore, whenever population size grows beyond the capacity sustainable by the available resources, the earth will engineer a reduction mechanism to check the over growing population.

He submits that “the population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio. Taking the population of the world at any number, a thousand millions, for instance, he opines that the species would increase in the ratio of 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, and much more. However, resources would increase in arithmetical ratio as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and progressing. In two centuries and a quarter, the population would be to the means of subsistence as 512 to 10: in three centuries as 4096 to 13, and in two thousand years the difference would be almost incalculable, though the produce in that time would have increased to an immense extent. No limits whatever are placed to the productions of the earth; they may increase for ever and be greater than any assignable quantity.”³²⁰

The social and human implications of the statement above are enormous. An obvious consequence of this theory is that at a point there would not be enough food for everyone. Brian Dolan supporting Malthus claims that as the human populations increase, so does the need to develop more lands, build more structures and create more factory to suits the population. Many ecosystems are destroyed in order to clear land for housing developments and roads, agricultural uses and raising

³¹⁹ Thomas R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, (Oxfordshire, England: Oxford World’s Classics, 1798).

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 12

livestock.³²¹ He added that the earth is rich in natural resources like nutrient-rich soil, water, trees and fossil fuels. Excessive efforts to extract these resources like mining, logging and oil drilling adds to the death of the earth. While animals are vital sources of food and nourishment of the soil and ecosystem. However, animal populations are declining due to overfishing and hunting, for food, skins, plumage, horns and as game.³²² Thus, contributing to the destruction of the ecosystem and in many ways its occupants.

Analysis of Malthusian Theory

Malthus predict saying that since the power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, the earth must device a means to survive. The means therefore is called checks.³²³ In account of this, Malthus proposed two forms of check: Preventive check and Positive check, these checks include the following:

A. Preventive Check

Preventive check is a conscious decision to delay marriage or abstain from procreation based on lack of resources.³²⁴ These include moral restraints or legislative action for example the choice by a private citizen to engage in abstinence and delay marriage until their finances become balanced, or restriction of legal marriage or parenting rights for persons deemed "deficient" or "unfit" by the government. Malthus argued that people are incapable of ignoring the consequences of uncontrolled population growth, and would intentionally avoid

³²¹ Dolan, Brian. *Malthus, Medicine & Morality: Malthusianism after 1798*. Rodopi. 2000. ISBN 978-90-420-0851-

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Thomas R. Malthus, *An essay on the principle of population (1798) and A Summary View of the Principle of Population (1830)*, ed. A. Flew (London: Penguin Books, 1970).

³²⁴ Ester Boserup, *Population and Technology Change: A Study of Long-Term Trends*, (Chicago, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

contributing to it.³²⁵ The preventive check consists of voluntary limitations of population growth. Individuals, before getting married and building a family, make rational decisions based on the income they expect to earn and the quality of life they anticipate to maintain in the future for themselves and their families.

B. Positive Check

Positive check is any event or circumstance that shortens human lifespan. The primary examples of this are war, plague and famine.³²⁶ However, poor health and economic conditions are also considered instances of positive checks. When these lead to high rates of premature death, the result is termed a Malthusian catastrophe. When the population reaches or exceeds the capacity of the shared supply, positive checks are forced to occur, restoring balance. In reality the situation would be significantly more nuanced due to complex regional and individual disparities around access to food, water, and other resources.

Malthus theory may have its weaknesses, yet there are strengths in the proposition. The Malthusian theory may be applicable to Nigeria and Africa at large, with shortage of food leading to high cost of living, high birthrate with low income, over drilling of the soil in search of mineral resources, oil spillage and daily gas flaring and so on.³²⁷ Also visible are several intra-state and intra-country crisis, the Liberia, Serra-Leone, Somalia and Libya civil wars, the Boko Haram insurgency, Biafra agitation, the Niger Delta militancy and so

³²⁵ Stuart A. Bremer, 'Dangerous Dyads. Conditions Affecting the Likelihood of Interstate War, 1816-1965', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, (np. 1992) 36(2): 309-341.

³²⁶ Caldwell, J. C., 1986. 'Routes to Low Mortality in Poor Countries', *Population and development Review*, (np, 1986) 12(2): 171-220

³²⁷ Emmanuel Keshi, "Effect of Gas Flaring on the Environment: Ebedei Community in Perspective" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)*. Ogbomoso, Nigeria: ATLA, 2016. XX1, No. 2.

on in Nigeria and Ester Odulami mentioned during the 18th annual conference of the International Theological Education Conference at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso that “in every hundred years or about that, the world had always experience a global pandemic that will claim so many lives.”³²⁸ Therefore, the occurrence of the Spanish flu of 1918 where 50,000,000 lost their lives to the flu,³²⁹ the HIV/AIDS in 1993 with a death toll of 24.8 to 42.2 million³³⁰ the Ebola outbreak of 2013 with a death toll of 11,323,³³¹ and in 2019 the COVID 19 pandemic with a death toll of 2,715,668 and it is still counting.³³² Thus she encourage the relevant authorities to note the date of the next event with the aim of enlightening the forth coming generation of the dangers ahead.

The positive check to population is a direct consequence of the lack of a preventive check. When society does not limit population growth voluntarily, diseases, famines and wars reduce population size and establish the necessary balance with resources. According to Malthus, the positive check acts more intensively in lower classes, where infant mortality rates are higher and unhealthy conditions are more common. Under this perspective, technological improvements that contribute to the increase in agricultural yields will only produce a temporary increase in living standards, but will be offset in the long run by a correspondent increase in population size that will cancel the temporary relief. Migrations could alleviate the effects of the positive check, but Malthus considers this possibility unfeasible, as general conditions were too harsh in possible

³²⁸ Easter E. Odulami, “Presentation” 18th International Theological Conference, Ogbomoso, (NBTS, Ogbomoso, 2021), 172-180.

³²⁹Rochelle,P.Walensky“Influenza”https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918pande_mich1n1.htmlwl Retrieved 3/4/2021

³³⁰ Rochelle P. Walensky ‘global Report on HIV/Aids 2010” www.unaids.org Retrieved 3/4/2021

³³¹ Rochelle P. Walensky “Ebola” 20/8/2018, www.cdc.gov/vhf. Retrieved 3/4/2021

³³² Rochelle P. Walensky “Covid-19 Statistics 22/12/2020” www.who.int/covid-19 Retrieved 3/4/2021

receiving countries. Malthus gloomy prediction is that in a short period of time, scarce resources will have to be shared among an increasing number of individuals. This prediction creates the Neo-Malthusian school of thoughts.

Malthusian School of Thoughts

Historically, Malthus predictions have been proven right with the high rate of population in Nigeria and Africa, while food production continue to decrease immeasurably. Therefore, two major school of thoughts emerge in a way to enforce or enlighten the general public on the need for preventive check to avoid the positive check. These school of thoughts are Neo-Malthusian and Pro-Malthusian.

A. Neo-Malthusian School of Thought

In a simplistic but highly influential and alluringly manner Malthus assessment of food production and the exponentially nature of birth rate continuous to prove his theory right. As a result, in 1970s a wave of alarmist known now as the Neo-Malthusians, wrote literature and letters, predicting that the rapidly growing world population will soon exceed the world resources.³³³ The Neo-Malthusian claims that population growth in a society leads to scarcity of natural resources, first because more people have to share the limited resource base available and second because when too many people are sharing a resource this increases the risk that the resource will be overused and depleted. Resource scarcities are believed to lead to increased inter-group competition, and under unfavourable economic and political conditions, such competition can take the form of violent conflict. Countering neo-Malthusianism is especially critical now given the recent prominence of such thinking. Jane Goodall opines that, “All these [environmental] things we talk about would not be

³³³ Hanrik Urdal. *The Devil in the Demographics* (International Peace Research Institute, Oslo: PRIO, 2002) 15.

a problem if there was the size of population that there was 500 years ago.”³³⁴ The world population 500 years ago is estimated at 420–540 million people, or around 6.7 billion fewer people than today.

Goodall is far from alone in her belief that population growth is an urgent problem. In August 2019, the United Kingdom’s Prince Harry subtly suggested that children are a burden to the planet and that responsible couples should have “two, maximum.”³³⁵ Wrigley a neo-malthusian supporting Malthus’ theory argues that Britain, before and immediately after the industrial revolution, displayed all the main features of a Malthusian economy, but by the end of the nineteenth century the relationship between population and income was broken. He defines British economy before the industrial revolution as an “Organic Economic System”, characterized by decreasing returns to scale, where population movements set standards of living to the subsistence level.³³⁶ Neo-malthusian fears that the increase of population size could lead to the extinction of man so they philosophize and theories on ways best to sustain humanity and the ecosystem in a dying world. This leads to the formation of a more advance group called the Pro-Malthusianism.

B. Pro-Malthusianism

The pro-malthusians fears that overblown population could lead to a humanitarian and ecological disaster and that combating the so-call overpopulation is thus an urgent problem that has real world consequences. The different between the neo-malthusian and pro-malthusianis is their belief on the “positive check,” the neo-malthusian wait for natural disaster to correct the imbalance, whereas the pro-malthusian create

³³⁴ www.cato.org

³³⁵ Vogue Magazine, “Children” July 30, 2019

³³⁶ Edward A. Wrigley. *Continuity, Chance and Change: The Character of the Industrial Revolution in England*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1988.

the balance. Therefore, the acceptance of bestialism, legalization of abortion, homo-sexualism (gay and lesbian marriage), transsexualism, transgender and so on, to reduce the rate of child birth in the society. Brendan O'Neill argues that "it is all to reduce or control the population of the world." He further says:

Given the social hardships of our era, the benefits of homosexual marriage could be immeasurable. Even America, though its population pales in comparison to that of other nations, is considered overpopulated because the amount of energy each of its citizens expends in a lifetime is enormous. Obviously homosexuals cannot, within the confines of a monogamous relationship, conceive offspring. So, legalizing gay marriage would indirectly limit population growth. Gays celebrated because they don't have children... homosexual relationships culturally affirmed on the basis that their childlessness could help solve a planetary crisis... gay monogamy is been encourage because it doesn't involve conceiving offspring.³³⁷

There writer acknowledge that Malthusian theory is true and the predictions have justifiable prevailing signs. However, homo-sexualism is not the solution to population control, neither is it a preventive measure to Malthus calamity prediction nevertheless, Christian education's response may provide the needed solution to the dim-glow prediction.

Christian Education Response to Malthusian Theory

Christian education is the effort to make available for every generation the accumulated treasures of Christ's life and thought, in such a way that God in Christ may carry on His redemptive work in each human soul and in the common life of

³³⁷ Brendan O'Neill, "Gay marriage and the death of freedom" *The Spectator* (New York, np. 2014).

man.³³⁸ The concept of Christian education is drawn from the book of John 1:4, ‘in [Him] was life and the life [is] the light of men.’ This passage points all men to ‘Him,’ the source of all things and the creator of all, the statement “in Him” which can be interpreted as the source of life and the foundations of light. The consciousness and desire to point all men to “Him” give birth to Christian education. Obaje however, opines that “Christian education is the holistic training of believers in Christ Jesus to the human society at large on the principles of Christian faith as stated in the Holy Scriptures.”³³⁹

The definition of Obaje establish Christian education as a comprehensive and complete tool for world revitalization, it goes beyond the church and “Sunday-Sunday parade.” Thus, creating the understanding that Christian education stands on the platform of consciousness that God is the only source of life and everything revolve around Him. Therefore Christian education is a response to God’s revelation of Himself and His will, which is revealed in righteousness and righteous living. Standing on this truth therefore, Christian education response to Malthus theory with the following:

B. Stewardship

Christians are stewards of God’s creation, responsible in maintaining and using wisely the earth that God has placed in the hands of humans, protecting and carefully establishing it. Draper defines a steward as someone who is kept in control of something for the owner.³⁴⁰ Christian educators as good stewards are to preserved and protect the resources God has

³³⁸ L. Berkhof, *Christian Education*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990.

³³⁹ Yusuf A. Obaje, “The Church and the Challenges of Christian Education in Nigeria” *In Theological Education and Ministerial Training in the Nigerian Baptist Convention*, A Publication of the Baptist College of Theology, Lagos, (2010).

³⁴⁰ Roni Jo Draper, “Every Teacher a Literacy Teacher? An Analysis of the Literacy-related Messages in Secondary Methods Textbooks, *Sage Journals*, (Online, 2002) September 1

placed in her hands by educating the church on the benefit of sustainable earth. Agreeing to this statement Keshi postulate that churches in Nigeria and Africa should embark on educating their members on the need for environmental awareness programmes.³⁴¹ He recommends that there should be Green Sunday, Ecological Week, Environmental Sunday School and Discipleship Programmes that is geared towards enlightening church congregation on the dangers of ecological degradation.

A. Family Planning

Secondly, Christian educators in Nigeria and Africa should cling to the advisory or enlighten role to education the church, would-be couple and young people of the benefit of family planning. Dag Heward-Mills opines that family planning are methods use in preventing unwanted pregnancies and for child spacing.³⁴² Herward-Mills is in concurrence with Malthus preventive check affirms that family planning provides couples with smaller healthier families, with reduce economic and emotional burden. Parents with fewer and healthier children can devote more resources to providing their children with adequate food, clothing, housing, and educational opportunities.

C. Abstinence from Pre-Marital Sex

Thomas Malthus in expressing his burden asserts that anyone who is not yet financially able should abstain from sex or marriage. The Bible prohibits any kind of sex before marriage, the obvious result of sex before marriage is unintended pregnancy. Ezekiel Akano asserts that, an unintended pregnancy can have bad emotional and financial implications for the woman. It may mean leaving school, finding a job and

³⁴¹ Emmanuel Keshi, "Effect of Gas Flaring on the Environment: Ebedei Community in Perspective" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)*, (Ogbomoso, Nigeria: ATLA, 2016), XX1, No. 2.

³⁴² Dag Heward-Mills, *Model Marriage*. (np, Parchment House, 2005) 117.

taking the responsibilities of parenthood.³⁴³ There are also financial and legal implications for the man, who may also have to leave school, find a job, and take the responsibilities of parenthood, which may lead to nuisance to the society.

D. The Need for Farming

Farming is the act or process of cultivating plants or livestock for personal or public consumption, it is the act of planting seeds food, or raising animals for milk and meats. Thomas Malthus feared that the increasing population would cause depletion or scarcity of food. In African perspective, everyone eat what they sow, although this lifestyle has been exchanged with a dependable lifestyle, Ajibade and Olabode is of the opinion that Christian educators should advice the Christians in Africans to go back to the earth and source for her food, this will help in reducing the rate of depletion of resources to manage the population and increase the rate of resources.³⁴⁴

E. Oil Drilling and Gas Flaring

Nonetheless, Malthus predicted that in search of resources to satisfy the needs of the growing population man will end up destroying the earth. This truth has become a fact in Nigeria today with the over-drilling of the soil of Niger Delta in search of oil, daily flaring of gas into the atmosphere and the constant spilling of crude oil into the farmland and rivers, killing fishes, other water bodies and the farmlands destroying the topography of the soil making it impossible for farmers to farm and harvest crops. Keshi is of the opinion that the Christian educator is tasked with the duty to educate the Citizens, Oil Companies and the Government of the dangers pose to the citizens, to the ozone layers and invariably to the whole earth

³⁴³ Ezekiel K. Akano, *Christian Ethics at a Glance*. (Bodija, Ibadan: Ibadan Diocesan Press, 2011) 85.

³⁴⁴ L.T. Ajibade and A.D. Olabode, "Historical Perspectives of Environmental Management in Nigeria" *Sustainable Environmental Management and Planning in Nigeria*, (Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Ladoko Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, 2017).

in the near future if nothing is done.³⁴⁵ He further hypothesizes that the government of Nigeria should promulgate policies prohibiting oil companies from destroying the environment and therefore the little resources.³⁴⁶ In the same vein oil companies should build facilities that will capture, harness and transform the gas into domestic gas for the citizen's home use and consumption.

Conclusion

Thomas Malthus theory of population is an ancient theory that still has its effects today due to its timeless nature and for the disciples of the theory which are the Neo-Malthusian and the Pro-Malthusian who are bent on bringing to pass the ugly prophecy of the theory. However, Christian education responded to the theory with the bible as her foundational source and in the process deduced the weaknesses and strengths of the theory with which Christian education gives it counsels as follows that should be Justice and respect for all. That is, man, plants, animal and the entire ecosystem. This will ensure sustainability and sufficiency for all mankind and in the process protect the ecosystem for generation to come.

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³⁴⁵ Keshi, 2016

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 25.

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