

## **GROANING CREATION: A THEOLOGICAL COGITATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

There is a global concern about environmental problems arising from human abuse of nature. The Christian response to this problem is complex, involving theological and ethical considerations. Christians believe God created the earth and entrusted human beings with its stewardship. The question is whether one should be worried about ecological abuses and climate change which seem to be the same but have different emphases. Christianity has differing views on how best to respond to environmental challenges, with some advocating for a more activist approach and others emphasizing the importance of individual lifestyle changes. Arguing from a theoretical approach, this paper urges that the Christian view on the debate and action on the environmental debate should depict a sense of humanity's participation in what God is doing on the planet by his providential care. The church in Nigeria has not done enough to develop its theological thought on the global environmental crisis and its immediate context. Drawing from this informed theological position, this research challenges the church in Nigeria to do more in developing its eco-theological response, champion advocacy for environmental protection, and partner with the government to take appropriate actions that can salvage the environment from further degradation that is causing natural destructive reactions.

**Keywords:** groaning, ecological, abuse, ethical, participation, reconciliation

### **Introduction**

It is well known in Christianity that after creating all things good, God placed man at the helm of it all, instructing him to take control of its affairs through procreation and governance (Gen. 1:28). The current global environmental abuse is blamed on the understanding or misunderstanding of the nature of authority that God gave humanity over nature. Both religious and non-religious people have contributed to the environmental crisis that some term it global warming or climate change. How then should we understand the nature of the authority that God placed on humanity? In the Genesis text above, there are two key Hebrew words, וַיְכַבְּשֵׁהָ, וַיִּרְדּוּ [*wekibsuha* and *uredu*], “and subdue it and have dominion” which have been understood by many to confer certain authority or powers that tend to be arbitrary. The words “subdue” and “have dominion” are used in the imperative sense, which carries much force such as to suppress, overwhelm, overpower, or bring into

bondage, especially within a military sense. Similarly, the words “have dominion” imply to reign such as kings do, which reinforces the first word “subdue.” The combination of the two words in the imperative mood seems to add to the authority that was conferred upon humanity. It was conventional to use those terms at that time as was the practice of rulers over nations or people but not necessarily implying exploitation of the earth. This perspective has been blamed for human exacerbating abuse of nature, which has often triggered cosmic reactions with devastating consequences upon human existence. However, the application of the words, “subdue” and “have dominion” in the military sense is only justifiable when the two sides involved are in hostility. Dominionism and stewardship are two contending concepts in the biblical understanding of the cultural mandate that God gave to humanity. Accordingly, “Both concepts are strongly present for religious people, though dominionism wins out in those who are less concerned about climate.” (Reinstra, 2023, para. 12).

The creation is generally not at war with humanity, so the sense might not be for humanity to apply the same force over nature as kings do in conquests. The sense of “subdue” and “have dominion” would rather be to bring the creation under control in such a way that it would destroy humanity (Brown, 2009). Calvin provides a background to understanding the implications of this text, stating that “humanity’s special status within creation comes along with special responsibilities of humanity towards creation” (Gjorgon 2018, p. 301). Similarly, “God cares for creation, and so should humans. He encourages Christians to make sure that the ground is not injured by their negligence, wasted by luxury, “nor [permit] to be ruined by neglect” (Gjorgon 2018, p. 303). And when we look at the wider understanding of the concept of “dominion” especially of kings, it carries the sense of care and protection rather than the military sense (Ps. 72:12-14). On the contrary, God does not condone unruly dominion which suppresses others (Ezek. 34:4). From this perspective, this paper argues that the Christian response to environmental challenges is multifaceted and requires a thoughtful and nuanced approach that takes into account both theological principles and practical considerations that stand on the concept of stewardship.

### **Sinful Human Actions and the Consequences upon the World**

According to Kline (2000), by the fall, human “history would appear to be nothing but vanity” p. 135). Furthermore, the common curse would affect the entire creation, thus turning its blessed relationship with humanity into a hostile one, with a “baneful impact on man” and “turning the elements of nature into a weapon to smite man” (Kline, 2000 p.135). This disruption would also spark a “social discord” and “afflictions in the realm of nature” (Kline, 2000 p. 136). The judgmental curses would create a relational upheaval between nature and humanity. Nature would react against humanity and humanity in its sinful-driven nature would rather seek to exploit nature and its resources, thus provoking natural reactions.

Human abuse of nature is a pressing issue that continues to have devastating effects on our planet, with earthquakes and massive flooding being among the most destructive consequences. The reckless exploitation of natural resources, deforestation, and pollution have all contributed to disruptions in the Earth's delicate balance, leading to an increase in seismic activity and extreme weather events. As human populations continue to grow and industrialization spreads, our harmful impact on the environment only intensifies, further exacerbating the risk of natural disasters. The rise of science and technology has aggravated this development with the support of the biblical view of man's authority over the creation. White blames Christian dogma for the ecological problems, saying: "Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians" (White, 1967 p.5). He further states that this has given rise to the realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful master over, nature.

Also, McGrath is believed to have argued that "the root causes of the environmental crisis can be traced back to the rejection of religion and its basic ethical and moral values" (Gjorgon, 2018 p. 306). This scenario stems from a "deliberate human decision to reject the idea of God in order to promote human freedom. Without God humanity must no longer work under authority and under limits, but is free to do as it pleases" (Gjorgon, 2018 p. 306; cf. McGrath, 2002 p. 16). The biblical testimony avers that human actions have affected cosmic tranquility such that it has been portrayed as being in pain and frustration like humans do. The prophetic writings (Isa. 24:1-13, 19-20; Amos 1:2; Hos. 2: 11; 4:3) have pictured the earth in a devastating state due to the vertical and horizontal misconduct of humanity. The broken covenant of God by humanity has consequences on our moral, social, and natural environments. God has created the cosmos with its natural laws to honor his intelligence, wisdom, and power and to also be either a blessing or a curse to humanity depending on the latter's covenant attitude. Similarly, human actions within society have repercussions on nature. Calvin admits that the changes in nature against humanity "will not be accidental, but that they are the work of God" (Calvin, 135). The failure of nature to bless and even its reaction that consumes humanity owes to "our sins, since we ourselves have reversed the order which God had appointed; otherwise the earth would never deceive us, but would perform her duty" (p. 136).

Like Isaiah, prophet Amos also underscores the cosmic implications of human actions that undermine the vertical and horizontal covenantal mandate. He directs his message on the whole earth but narrows it down to the land. The figurative mourning of the earth is vividly conveyed in human categories to drive home our understanding of the gravity of such actions. As much as the Scripture expresses the emotions of God towards our sinful attitudes and actions, so also does the land mourn by experiencing drought, shrinking and

losing its vegetation (Amos 1:2). The fact that the land is not human does not imply that it does not have a life of its own; it has its way of feeling the impact of human conduct which may not be the same way humans feel. And when the earth mourns, human beings are also forced to mourn because in its mourning the earth reacts in such a devastating way that humanity suffers and mourns.

While the prophetic messages are hammering on injustice in human society, primarily in Israel, which has global consequences they implicate humanity and the cosmic order (Hayes, 2008). And as the exploitation of fellow humanity is a recurring phenomenon in Israel's and our contemporary society, so also does this extend to the land and its resources. Hayes (2008, p. 149) however, tries to disconnect the mourning of the earth and its full implications from "natural disasters." However, such disconnect begs the question as God himself linked the natural cosmic consequences to the Adamic failure (Gen. 3:17; 7:11; Deut. 31:17; Isa. 51:6).

### **Environmental Abuse or Climate Change**

The question here is whether human actions are capable of causing global warming or climate change or is it more appropriate to talk about environmental abuse as the real substantive matter? In America, there is a sharp division on the issue of climate change between Democrats and Republicans, and Evangelical and Reformed scholars tilt more in the direction of the latter and show less interest in supporting the agenda for climate change matters (see DeCelle, 2019). Ackerman also presents the divisive stance of the Christian church and the political class especially in America (2007) as many doubt that human activity can affect God's creation since he is sovereign and can protect his creation from collapse. While the Evangelical and Reformed scholarship does care about environmental stewardship, it does not believe in climate change. Rienstra (2023) explains the general syndrome behind this, which biblical scholars do not accept:

The science is 'unequivocal' and the evidence mounting daily in people's experience around the globe. Yet we avoid dealing with the climate crisis because we fear suffering and loss, or because we perceive the climate crisis as a distant and slow-moving problem, or because we feel small and powerless against gigantic global forces like the fossil fuel industry, or because we are worried we might have to make changes in the affluent lifestyles we feel we deserve. Religious people have all those feelings, too (para. 20).

Whether this claim of fear is real is unclear. However, Evangelical, and especially Reformed writings on this debate are scanty.

Various scientific researchers have shown that human actions have triggered issues like deforestation and desertification, pollution and misuse or overuse of land and its resources, drought and shrinking of arable lands for farming (Fagbohun, 2011; Asaju & Arome, 2015; Wuebbles, et al, 2017; Unite for Change, 2022). Scientists speak of abundant evidence showing that human excessive activities have increased chemical emissions that have affected the temperature of the earth's atmosphere. Many lines of evidence demonstrate that it is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century (Wuebbles et al., 2017, p. 35). Using observable indicators, researchers have established "high confidence" in the increased global climate change that affects the "lower atmosphere" and the ocean (Wuebbles et al., 2017, p.37). These conclusions are based on the hypothesis of others rather than independent scientific findings.

Ackerman (2007) has done an exhaustive analysis and explanation of how human activities affect climate change while admitting the difficulty in accurate climate prediction, yet indicators have helped in analyzing the increase in global warming. He argues: "Based on thermometer records and other indicators, our climate is warming. The last decade or two are warmer than any comparable period in the last millennium. Furthermore, the rate of warming is unprecedented in that same time period (Ackerman, 2007, p. 252 [sic]). This means that the land and water are affected because of the radiation in the atmosphere from the greenhouse emissions. To justify how human action is undeniable in the escalation of climate change, a comparative action shows that "In the absence of human activity, annual average CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are stable on time scales of millennia, as we can determine from ice cores. When CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations do increase, then the atmospheric greenhouse effect increases, the thermal infrared radiation from the atmosphere increases, and surface temperatures increase" (Ackerman, 2007 p. 253). In light of this analysis, the science community has issued its unambiguous message of the possibility of the warming rate hitting 2-4 °C that will affect the ecosystem if no action is taken to abate the situation.

While this analysis appears sound, does it prove the matter of global warming? Is there no deliberate agenda that the scientific community is defending by all means? There are no stated explicit facts that this research has except for a minor observation of water concentration in the atmosphere, which seems to have been the reality of nature before the advent of scientific discoveries. And though human actions have certain consequences on the environment, does this necessarily amount to global warming or climate change? From the theological point of view, can humanity undo what God did by changing the universe into something other than what God intended it to grow into? These questions do not however nullify human responsible actions toward nature.

Piper (2020) raises some fundamental questions. Should we assume that climate change is caused by humans? How do we find a proper balance in ecological concerns when we are faced by so many things that seem like extremes: eliminating plastic straws, demonizing fossil fuels, and the rise of couples who refuse to have children because of the ‘impact on the environment’? It feels like the culture really is worshiping the creation instead of trusting the Creator (para. 1). These are critical questions that may not be dismissed lightly because of certain scientific claims. The material nexus between humanity and the rest of nature is so strong it gives the former a sense of environmental homeliness. However, in his wisdom, God made humanity the head of the creation by handing the latter over to the former for caring, governing, and maintenance (Gen. 2:8, 15, 20). This is a strategic position because God made the earth magnificent primarily for his glory and secondarily as the human abode (Isa. 45:12, 18; Ps. 115:16). In as much as humanity has been given the mandate to have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:6), Piper (2020) has given an excellent analogy for understanding the nature of this authority, drawing from the fact that the human body is as much the earth, a smaller one as the larger earth is:

So, the care of our bodies and the care of the earth are not driven by the worship of the body or the worship of the earth. That care is driven by a divine calling to make our body, our little earth, and to make our earth, our bigger body, both a means of glorifying God. That’s why we have a body, and that’s why we have an earth. By receiving pleasures through them, body and earth, we respond with thankfulness to God, and we respond by making both of them instruments of Christ-exalting righteousness (para.16).

It is this demonstrable intelligence of God that adds to the dignity of the creation, which must be accorded such respect through tender care. Our human acts in the world and towards it must be in consonance with the will and purpose of God. Human culture involves environmental exploration beyond the earth to the orbit (Harris, 1995), which is a given in the divine cultural mandate but in a way that makes humanity a “princely gardener” (Kline, p. 70). This means humanity is to behave towards the environment in a decent manner that is honoring to God.

### **Ecological Problems in Nigeria**

It has been observed that heat waves in Nigeria have been rising over time, which is attributed to human activities. Some of the actions that are affecting climate change in Nigeria include illegal mining, destruction of aquatic life by water pollution, deforestation through bush burning and felling of trees, destruction of grass and trees by open grazing by cattle, oil pollution in the oil-producing environments, emission of gas by companies that are into production, etc. Elusoji (2024), citing Ibrahim, W. A., a meteorologist says,

“We have observed a departure of 2-4C from normal (long-time average temperature, 1991-2020) in February.” It is clear that climate change is bringing more dangerously hot days to Africa. Human-ignited ecological problems in Nigeria are caused mainly by illegal mining of natural minerals. The United Nations Environment Program (2011) has asserted that in the Southern part of Nigeria the oil contamination in the Niger Delta region by destroying mangroves and polluting soil, groundwater and aquatic life, and general human well-being. Bodo, Gimah, and Seomoni (2020) have corroborated the above position as they describe how oil bunkering in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has created a grave incident of environmental degradation and hazards.

Similarly, in Northern Nigeria, solid mineral mining has been illegal in Bukkuyum of Zamfara state with devastating consequences on the economy and public health (Adamu, Jazbhay & Benyera, 2022). However, the research has made some contradictory statements. On the one hand, it says that illegal mining has led to “loss of ecosystems and increased poverty level, especially among peasant farmers who depend solely on environmental resources for a living” and the other, “the paper revealed that illegal gold mining activities lead to increase in revenue generation of Bukkuyum Local Government Area thereby improving the living conditions of the people” (Adamu, Jazbhay & Benyera, 2022 p. 226). Both the hypothesis and the conclusion fail the logical integrity test as both statements are antithetical to each other. The above instances of environmental exploitation are occasioned by the demographic human growth with the survival needs and this has put a lot of stress on the ecosystem. Very clearly stated by Hunter (2019 para. 8), “the earth can no longer cope with the demands humans place on our natural resources. Our waste and pollution are poisoning the air, soil and water.”

### **Framework for Christian Action**

What then is the Christian position on the preservation of the earth? As the creator and custodian of the universe, God has set the paradigm for our participation in governing his world, which he handed over to humanity at the inception of the creation. Therefore, we have no warrant to do beyond what God has done or is doing to keep the world going. Our response to God’s invitation to work the earth should not be understood in terms of God needing our help but out of his love and gracious honor to us as his image bearers to partake in this magnificent project. To be created in God’s image was the moral, intellectual, and spiritual endowment for human qualification to be involved in God’s activities at the highest level above other creatures. One of the key theological considerations for Christians in responding to eco problems is the concept of stewardship. Many Christians believe that human beings have a special responsibility to care for the earth as stewards of God’s creation. This responsibility includes minimizing waste, conserving resources, and protecting biodiversity. Some Christians view environmentalism as a moral imperative rooted in their faith, while others

see it as a practical obligation to ensure the health and well-being of all of God's creatures.

White (1967) castigates the Christian religion as being highly anthropocentric and wrongly introducing a human dominion ideology over nature, which consequently subjects nature's purpose to human purpose. Perhaps, White is too agitated to realize that much of Christian theology is not about humanity and nature but about God and nature, which makes the Christian religion more theo-centric and Christo-centric rather than anthropocentric. In Reformed theology, man is not recognized as the measure of all things or the autonomous being (Bavinck, 2011; Van Til, 2003), as it is in existential philosophy (Sartre, 2007; Charles, 2007) but one who depends entirely on God to realize human purpose in life. Thus humanity is not to abuse nature but in humility to serve God and care for his creation. McGrath's position also deflates this blatant accusation and turns it on the head of Western secularism that removes God from its creation. Rather, "the root causes of the environmental crisis can be traced back to the rejection of religion and its basic ethical and moral values" (Gjorgon, 2018 p. 306, citing McGrath). Gjorgon stresses McGrath's view saying:

McGrath believes that we should not look for the reasons for the environmental crisis in religion, but in the "deliberate human decision to reject the idea of God in order to promote human freedom. Without God humanity must no longer work under authority and under limits, but is free to do as it pleases (Gjorgon, 2018 p. 307).

It is the Christian religion that presupposes that nature is "wonderful and special" to the glory of God as a warrant for its respectful treatment (Gjorgon, 2018, p. 306).

Again, White advocates for an alternative religion or rethinks what is considered to be the norm in Christianity on this subject matter without actually spelling out the foundation of such religion. More stunningly, this alternative is based on the view of Francis of Assisi who, apparently set up a democracy of certain equality of all God's creatures, thus referring to the slogans of "Brother Ant and Sister Ant and Sister Fire, praising the Creator in their own ways as Brother Man does" (White, 1967 p.5). But what is the objectivity for citing Francis alone out of the whole theological mine as the best option? This view is surely a misfire. The question that White probably does not anticipate is why each species does not possess its equal authority and ways of self-preservation like man against man's dangerous exploitation. Why does nature not dictate its world by its authority that is not subject to humanity? The argument of White against the conferred human authority over nature in favor of an implied autonomy of nature begs the question.



Hitting against human authority is by extension hitting against the foundation of that authority, which is the authority of God. Such a position would imply that the universe is answerable to itself. Where then do we locate the source of such a conclusion? Since “we are not autonomous” (Bavinck, 2011, p. 16), neither is the universe and its details; it is only God who gives both humanity and the other natural realities their being and regulations. Therefore, humanity is neither “the end goal” for the creation nor is “creation existing for us” but by scriptural testimony, “God’s will and glory are the only reasons for and goals of creation” (Bavinck, 2011 p. 273). In the absence of any credible view from White, it is rather more rational and justifiable to correct human faulty understanding of the nature of the authority that God vested in humanity over nature which is to nurture it to the glory of God. The Christian view thus opposes the anthropological concept of power that is defined by coercion and hegemony (Howell & Paris, 2011). It is our Christian presupposition that God has given all reality its design nature by “the structural activity of God’s eternal plan” (Van Til, 2003, p. 184).

What we must criticize in Christianity, is that churches in many countries are aloof on the agitation for a better environmental attitude. For instance, in Nigeria, the non-Christian circle seems to be more on this agenda. However, driven by the United Nations, even the non-Christian global community has taken several initiatives to deal with the challenge of climate change, which many advanced nations are piloting it. Planet Energies (2021) has documented numerous international conferences that were held to garner strategies on how to tackle this threat to humanity. More pointedly, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit acknowledged “humanity’s role in global warming” (Planet Energies, 2021 p. 2). Though no significant achievement in terms of the hope of reducing global warming to below 2 °C in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a major decision was reached in the 2015 Paris Agreement for the developed countries to provide financial support and technology transfers to developing countries.

What then does the world's reconciliation to God imply for the creation? (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 8:20-22; Col. 1:15-20). In relating Romans 8:20 to the idea in the Corinthian text, Calvin explains: “I understand the passage to have this meaning — that there is no element and no part of the world which, being touched, as it were, with a sense of its present misery, does not intensely hope for a resurrection” (*Comm.* Romans, p. 272.). And that “all creatures, seized with great anxiety and held in suspense with great desire, look for that day which shall openly exhibit the glory of the children of God” (p.272). This means the animate and inanimate world comprehensively has been subjected to pains, by the wisdom of God, which in his own time of complete redemption will restore all things to their original or ultimate glory. If the personified world is hopefully awaiting the ultimate glory, then our minds should be pricked to higher callings (Calvin, p. 273). This further shows that God “implanted, inwardly, the hope of renovation” in the life of the entire creation, both animate and inanimate (Calvin, p. 273). The comprehensive

nature of the fall of humanity underpins that the condemnation of mankind is imprinted on the heavens, and on the earth, and on all creatures.

Schirmacher and Johnson (2016, p. 45) make an instructive statement: “God’s Word articulates a creational unity of God’s natural physical laws, God’s moral law, and God’s continuing care for his creation, which provides the basis for human creation care, including loving our neighbors environmentally.” Creation ordinances express the regulatory care of God over the non-human creation and this has set a paradigm for our interaction with nature (Schirmacher & Johnson, 2016 p. 46). This view stands within the Calvinistic trajectory as Calvin (1960) holds that God “sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow [cf. Matt. 10:29]” (Bk. I. XVI. 1, p. 197-8). This all-inclusive category covers inanimate realities. Further, he says: “And concerning inanimate objects we ought to hold that, although each one has by nature been endowed with its own property, yet it does not exercise its own power except in so far as it is directed by God’s ever-present hand” (Calvin, 1960, Bk. I.XVI. 2, p. 199). The cultural mandate was part of the human nature that humanity was imbued with in respect of taking the responsibility of the gardener.

The idea of God and the renewal of creation is a central theme in Christianity. This concept is rooted in the belief that God created the world and has the power to renew and restore it. In Christian theology, the renewal of creation is often associated with the concept of redemption and salvation. In Christian theology, God will ultimately renew the entire creation, including the physical world and humanity, through his divine power. The renewal of creation is also linked to the idea of environmental stewardship where humans have a responsibility to care for the earth and its resources, as they are entrusted to us by God. The renewal of creation involves not only the spiritual redemption of humanity but also the restoration of the earth and the environment. This concept is particularly relevant in today's world, as climate change and environmental degradation pose significant threats to the planet and its inhabitants.

The Bible presents a clear view of human responsibility towards nature, emphasizing stewardship and care for creation. Apart from the mandate to govern the earth in Genesis 1:28 and Psalms 24:1 states that the earth belongs to the Lord and everything in it. This implies that humans are merely caretakers of God's creation and should therefore treat it with reverence and respect. Furthermore, God’s renewal of the heavens and the earth as captured in Revelation 21-22 does not leave any part of the creation to futility. All true biblical scholarship must acknowledge that the sovereignty of God is upon the earth, hence “the earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3). The glory of the world was embedded in its display of the invisible qualities of its creator (Rom. 1:20; Heb. 11:3; Ps. 8:1; Ps. 19:1). It thus implies that no one should undermine what bears the glory of God. While humanity bears the image of God, the earth bears his glory. Wright (2006) makes a cogent analogical

argument that God as the creator of the world is the landlord while all humans are tenants, whereas such arrangements require that God holds all humanity accountable for how it treats his property. And in line with Proverbs 14:31, which says: “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker,” “Our treatment of the earth reflects our attitude to its Maker and the seriousness [or otherwise] with which we take what he has said about it” (Wright, 2006 p. 398).

This forms the background for understanding the vast nature of our calling to the ministry of reconciliation (2Cor. 5: 18-20). The logical connection that is possible in the Pauline soteriology is to see all of reality within God’s concern to save and transform on the last day. As his servants, God’s concerns should also be our concerns, even as Christ says that he is doing what he sees his Father doing (Jn. 5:19). We will be rated by our actions in the world, which others will see and glorify God, who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16). God’s comprehensive redemptive agenda encompasses things in heaven and on earth (Col. 1:16, 17), for which nothing is excluded except for Satan and his allies. Christ’s pre-eminence over all the creation means to “bring under control all creatures in heaven and in earth” (Calvin, Comm. Col. 1:17, p. 152). And as much as our bond to God is Christ, so also is the entire creation, using reconciliation. The redemptive action of God in his creation forms the primacy of our knowledge of the world and our actions in it especially how we treat nature. We are not to worship nature but to respectfully nurture it in line with God’s objective.

Furthermore, the Bible also emphasizes the interconnectedness of all creation and the importance of maintaining balance and harmony within it. Romans 8:19-22 speaks of creation eagerly awaiting liberation from bondage to decay, highlighting the impact of human actions on the natural world. In this sense, human responsibility towards nature extends beyond simply using resources sustainably to actively advocating for the well-being of all living creatures and ecosystems. This includes advocating for the protection of endangered species, reducing pollution, and promoting conservation efforts. All humanity, especially believers are graciously invited to be partakers of working God’s reconciliation of all creation. Christ as the head of this reconciliation or renovation is by “right of creation,” “right of redemption,” and “right of future inheritance” (Wright, 2006 p. 403). If we all recognize that our habitation of the earth is more or less like tenants in the property of the landlord, gives us the privilege of renovating it alongside him, which merely qualifies us only as agents, we ought to comply nothing less nor beyond his prescription. Overall, the biblical view of human responsibility towards nature, emphasizes a holistic approach that recognizes the intrinsic value of creation and the interconnectedness of all life. As stewards of God’s creation, humans are called to care for and protect the natural world, ensuring the well-being of all living creatures and ecosystems. This responsibility extends beyond individual actions and requires a collective effort to promote sustainability and preserve the beauty and diversity of

God's creation for future generations. The idea of reconciliation is foundational to the Christian worldview, illustrating the belief that God's love and grace are greater than any sin or transgression humanity commits.

### **The Role of the Nigerian Church**

The church in Nigeria needs to develop a clear, solid biblical perspective that presents a comprehensive overview of the creation from its inception to consummation from the divine framework. From the point of Scripture, all things start “in the Garden and ends in the Eternal City, because the development of civilization is not only a human necessity related to human well-being; it is also God’s plan for the ages” (Schirrmaker & Johnson, 2016 p. 47). The development of human civilization is comprehended in this singular view that places “the human race into a moral position of responsible superiority over nature” (48). While Christian theology does not worship nature, emphasis on the way God regulates it becomes our pattern of conduct and cannot be replaced by our own innovations. The scientific technology that we use should not become weapons of destruction or exploitation of the cosmos but rather enhance our understanding of the world for its better preservation. In advanced countries like America, many Christians have realized the danger of ecological crisis and the consequences thereof and have committed to assuaging the abuse of nature.

God’s perfect purpose in creating the earth before humanity is for human existence and flourishing (Ps. 37:11; 115:16; Isa. 45:12; Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:9-10). However, humanity has abused the earth through exploitation. The negative ecological impact resonates in Africa with voices calling for social action. In Africa, the concern to correct this ethical anomaly occasioned a conference in Botswana in 2019 which its papers were published in 2021. According to the conference, the goal was to investigate and imagine positive perspectives from our religions, philosophies and literatures in reclaiming the Earth as a cradle of our existence and the basis of our continued survival (Berman et al., 2021). This ecological concern draws from the matriarchal concerns of patriarchal subjugation of women, which it argues that “other non-human objects” such as the “environmental issues” “intersect with other systems of oppression” (Berman et al., 2021, p. 22). The conference underscored some important issues that cannot be waived, namely, the exploitation of the environment as much as social oppression of the less privileged in human society is a global phenomenon. Though the conference scholars have portrayed patriarchic as the culprit in the entire injustice system, it is difficult to completely exclude matriarchal involvement in the same offense.

Having established a theological vision and framework for our cosmic behavior, the Nigerian church can contribute significantly to the eco debate by utilizing its vast network and influence to raise awareness and promote sustainable practices. While there may be distinct theological voices from different denominations, the church needs on definite agenda which is to

advocate for environmental justice. With a large following across the country, churches have the potential to reach a wide audience and educate their members on the importance of environmental conservation. By integrating environmental issues into sermons, church programs, and publications, the church can help foster a culture of environmental stewardship and encourage individuals to incorporate eco-friendly habits into their daily lives. Furthermore, the Nigerian church can also take practical steps to reduce its environmental footprint. Churches can introduce recycling programs, energy-efficient lighting systems, and water conservation measures in their buildings and facilities. By leading by example, the church can inspire its members to follow suit and adopt similar environmentally friendly practices in their homes and communities. Additionally, churches can collaborate with local environmental organizations and government agencies to support conservation initiatives and sustainable development projects in the communities they serve.

In addition to raising awareness and implementing eco-friendly practices, the Nigerian church can also advocate for a theological perspective that would undergird environmental policies and legislation that promote sustainable development and protect the natural resources of the country. By leveraging its influence and platform, the church can engage with policymakers, community leaders, and other stakeholders to advocate for policies that address climate change, deforestation, pollution, and other environmental challenges facing Nigeria. By actively engaging in the eco debate and advocating for sustainable solutions, the Nigerian church can make a significant contribution to promoting environmental conservation and fostering a more sustainable future for generations to come.

## **Conclusion**

Human actions have a significant impact on the natural world, and when these actions are destructive and unsustainable, they ultimately turn nature against humanity. Individuals and societies must recognize the importance of preserving and protecting the environment, not only for the planet's sake and its biodiversity but also for the well-being and survival of future generations of humans. By taking responsibility for our actions and making conscious efforts to nurture nature, we can help prevent further environmental harm and create a more sustainable and resilient world for all. By recognizing our role as stewards of the earth, God's principle of reconciliation, and working towards the restoration of creation, we can participate in God's ongoing work of renewal and contribute to a better future for all beings on this planet. In light of the above, the Nigerian church should play a more active role in advocating for ecological protection within the country. As a major influence on the lives of many citizens, the church has the power to educate and inspire individuals to take action toward protecting the environment. By incorporating discussions on environmental stewardship and sustainability into its teachings programs and living practices, the church can help raise

awareness about the critical issues facing Nigeria's natural resources and ecosystems.

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