

From primordial curse to eschatological restoration: Ecological challenges from Genesis 3:14–20 and Romans 8:18–25

Author:George O. Folarin¹**Affiliation:**¹Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria**Correspondence to:**

George Folarin

Email:

gfolarin@oauife.edu.ng

Postal address:

Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 220282, Osun State, Nigeria

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This work employs a comparative study of the theologies of Genesis 3:14–20 and Romans 8:18–25 as it relates to the problem of ecological imbalance. It attempts to re-interpret from a Christian theological point of view the primary and the secondary causes of decay from Genesis and the implications of those for the ecosystem, identifies Paul's eschatological theology of restoration, and then re-reads the import of his eschatological hope in Romans for the restoration of the creation. By inter-acting the curse theology of Genesis 3 with the restorative theology of Romans 8, the work shows the drift of the 'very good' world from its initial, harmonious state to its present state of chaos and the challenge to redress the contemporary ecological imbalance.

Introduction

Recently the human race woke to the danger confronting the environment and the need for humans to arrest, and to possibly reverse, this trend. Because people generally only blame humanity for the danger, they leave God out of the solutions they proffer to it. And because there are ample scientific materials on the causes of and the possible solutions to ecological problems, I did not delve into this aspect in his work. Religious interpretation of the situation through the lens of Christianity is the interest of this study. Whilst scholars like Oderinde (2009) may be right in that some churches pollute streams through ritual bathing and others by pollute the air through their abusive use of loud-speakers and/or profuse use of incense, most churches in Nigeria do not belong to this category.

For several reasons, it is now acknowledged that religion, and especially Christianity, has a vital role to play in redressing the ecological imbalance of the earth. The first reason is that religious leaders have access to an unparalleled number of people across the social ladder. Secondly, these leaders are authority figures that many are willing to follow. Finally, religion is a very powerful motivation for action. These reasons may explain why several main academic associations of religions in Nigeria recently held conferences on religion and environment in succession: the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (Western Zone 2008), the Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (National 2009) and the African Association for the Study of Religions (2010).

But there remains the problem of the methodology that religious scholars should adopt for such work. Application of purely social sciences methods that exclude religious paradigm in the study is inadequate for such research. In fact, theological discussions on the environment should include the human beings' subjective reflection on the nature of God and his claims. This research is a comparative study of the theologies of Genesis 3 and Romans 8 to unravel the mystery of environmental dilapidation and provide encouragement for Christians to tackle the problem. This article does not intend to displace or contradict the scientific findings on environmental degradation and what humanity as a whole could do about it. Rather, whilst the contributions of scientists to solving the problem are acknowledged, this article examines impetus of Christian religion to solving it.

Several justifications for engaging in such a study exist. Although the two texts, Genesis 3 and Romans 8, belong to different testaments and are separated by many years, the two texts still belong to the same Christian Scriptures. Furthermore, God is the greatest actor in the two texts: whilst the Yahweh God [אלהים יהוה] took six verses to pronounce curses on humanity and the snake in Genesis 3:14–19, Adam's [אדם] comment only covered one verse (Gn 3:20). The two paragraphs compared in this article are creation stories, although some scholars dispute that Genesis 3 is a creation story. Genesis 3 describes the bondage of the creation, and Romans 8, the deliverance of that creation. Finally, the curse–blessing theme is common to the two contexts.

Tillich (1969:3) holds that theology should 'move back and forth between two poles, the eternal truth of its foundation and the temporal situation in which the eternal truth must be received'. This definition has found widespread support from many scholars of African religions, including Imasogie (1983:20), Ehusani (1995:1–2) and Ikenga-Metuh (1996:91). This means that the core teachings of the Bible need to be applied to the temporal situation of the interpreters in such a way that the application would be faithful to the Christian Scriptures and relevant to the contemporary situation. Whilst it is not all the African scholars of religions that subscribe to Tillich's approach of doing theology, his approach is adopted in this study because it allows the Christian sacred book to speak to the challenges of the environmental problems in the world today.

Primordial curse and environmental decay (Gn 3:14–20)

Critical Old Testament scholars maintain that Genesis 1:1–2:4a belong to the Priestly Source whilst Genesis 2:4b–5:32 belong to the Yahwist Source. This makes Genesis 3:14–20 part of the Yahwist's creation account. Critical scholarship has also seen two different stories of punishment in Genesis 3: the one that has to do with Yahweh's pronouncement of punishment of expulsion (Gn 3:1–13 & Gn 3:20–21) and the other that has to do with his pronouncement of punishment of curses (Gn 3:14–19; cf. Westermann 1994:256–258). In such instances, the exegete could dump the pronouncement of curses in Genesis 3 as an interpolation and only concentrate on the pronouncement of expulsion in the passage. Another approach is to overlook this critical observation and just interpret the work of the final editor of Genesis as John H. Sailhamer does (1994:9–11). Conservative scholarship generally adopts this second approach. The focus of this article with regard to Genesis 2 and Genesis 3 is on the theology of the final editor of the book.

Seeing that Genesis 1–9 has been referred to as a 'primordial history' (Thompson 1971:198) and the word 'curse' [Heb: אָרַר; LXX: *επικαταρατος*] appears strategically in Genesis 3:14 and Genesis 17, it is legitimate to refer to the curses placed on the creation (or part of it) for humanity's disobedience as 'primordial curses'. These curses are placed on the 'snake' (vs. 14) and the 'ground' (vs. 17). The form of the word for 'curse' used in the two verses is rendered in the *New Living Translation* (2007) as 'You are cursed' (Gn 3:14) and as 'It is cursed' (Gn 3:17). The *God's Word Translation* (1995) follows the same translations in the two verses. Some other versions adopt these same renderings. Many other English versions, however, adopt the translations 'Cursed are you' (vs. 14) and 'Cursed is' (3:17). Versions with these last translations include the *New International Version* (1984), the *New Living Translation* (2007) and the *English Standard Version* (2001). But Yahweh also pronounced curses on the 'woman' and the 'man' in the paragraph without using the word 'curse' [אָרַר] (vv. 16, 18 & 19).

Olugbenro Berekiah (pers. comm., 10 March 2011) of the University of Ibadan, views Genesis 3 as Yahweh's

pronouncement [אָרַר] of punishment for the violation of the 'covenant' which 'he made' with Adam as the representative of the humanity (cf. Gn 2). This is generally called the 'Covenant of Works'. There is comprehensive coverage of this debatable covenant in the writings of Louis Berkhof (1958:211–218; cf. Osterhaven 2001:279). However, it is worthwhile to note that 'Covenant theology' is simply a framework for interpreting the Bible. There are other interpretive frameworks.

According to the Priestly writer, the story before Genesis 3 is that at 'the beginning' God, אֱלֹהִים, saw that his creation was 'good'. The Hebrew word for 'good' [טוֹב] is used in Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 and 31. The LXX translates the word as *καλον*, which means 'beautiful'; טוב refers to something blameless and sound. In Genesis 1:31 God even held that humanity was 'very good' [טוֹב מְאֹד] (cf. Harris, Archer & Waltke 2003). God delegated the management of all other things he created to human beings (cf. Gn 1:28). It is only in Genesis 2:17 that 'Yahweh God' tested human beings when he allegedly forbade them from 'eating' of the fruit of a particular tree. Human beings disobeyed and came under the curse of God. This is the context for the curse–drama of Genesis 3.

Genesis 3 thus, to a certain extent, appears to be a very early explanation of the emergence of decay and suffering in the world. In the light of contemporary environmental crises, the passage is of great interest to the theological study in terms of the problem from a Judeo–Christian point of view. In the story, God pronounced judgement on humankind and the environment; with this pronouncement began decay (cf. Gn 3:19 – 'You are dust and to dust you shall return') and the improper functioning of the cosmos in a way contrary to the initial harmonious design of God (cf. Gn 3:17–18 – 'The ground is cursed ... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth'). The contention here is that because God played a role in the emergence of the problem, his help is needed to fully redress the situation.

The key culprit in the story is the male actor, Adam, rather than the female actress, Eve or Ashar. The Hebrew word sometimes translated as 'Adam' is also translated as 'mankind'. Only when it is translated as a proper noun does it start with a capital letter (e.g. 'Adam'). The Hebrew word, אָדָם, has generic meaning as 'mankind' or 'humanity', for example, in Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 1:27 and is sometimes translated as 'man'. But from Genesis 2:19–3 the contexts require that the Hebrew word refers to the male actor, Adam (cf. Westermann 1994:201–202).

Theologically, the curse to death (Gn 3:19 – 'to dust you shall return') imposed on humanity affects every part of a human's life as his or her health became susceptible to degeneration. Humans' expulsion from God's presence disrupts their relationship with God but this does not mean that with the Fall, humanity is oblivious of God. The curses also made humanity's relationship with the environment hostile, childbirth painful and work stressful.

The Priestly author points out that God gave humanity the power to, amongst other things, 'subdue' the earth and 'dominate' fish, birds, and every other living thing (Gn 1:28). But with humans' Fall and the subsequent curse placed on them by God, human beings began to abuse their God given power. On the other hand, the creation, represented by the snake and the ground, is enabled to rebel against human beings' control by the virtue of the curse also cast on it by God (Ellison 1979:118). The outcome of this is predictable. Humanity began to exploit, drain and destroy the creation.

An etiological interpretation of Genesis 2 and Genesis 3 as the story of the origin of suffering, pain and death should not demean from the theme of blessing found in the prediction of 'the seed' of the woman that would bruise the head of the snake's seed (Gn 3:15). This prediction has been traditionally understood by the church as 'proto-evangelism'. This view explains the battle between the two seeds, the seed of the snake and the seed of the woman, as the fight that finally led to the defeat of Satan by Jesus (Aalders 1981:107; Davis 1975:93). But there are many others who do not accept this interpretation because it reads into the text what is arguably *outside* it.

Because Genesis 2 precedes Genesis 3, God did predict 'death' and woe on human beings for disobedience before the Fall (cf. Gen 2:17). The aforementioned interpretation raises some critical questions. Genesis 3 indicates that the singular act of Adam's disobedience did influence mankind's relationship with God (Hamilton 1997–2001). Even without God pronouncing curses on Adam, humanity was already in for a terrible psychological and/or religious crisis for betraying its benefactor. The following is one of the most serious implications of the story in Genesis 2 and Genesis 3.

One may ask, for academic purposes, if humans would have been able to unilaterally stop further decay and restore the creation to its original level of perfection. In applying enculturation biblical hermeneutics to this passage, we focus on the phenomenon of divine oracular utterance as a key for cultural interpretation of the message in African perspective. The story by Olawale Rotimi, *The Gods are not to blame* (1971), illustrates the problem inherent here. This Nigerian adaptation of the Oedipus Rex tragedy points out that the gods cursed Odewale in the sense that he would kill his father and marry his mother (Rotimi 1971:57–61); this is abominable. His parents tried to prevent the fulfilment of this oracular utterance by attempting to kill Odewale in infancy, but the messenger, Gbonka, sent to kill him did not; instead Gbonka lied that he did. Odewale himself attempted to truncate the 'pronouncement' by running far away from the people he erroneously regarded to be his parents (Rotimi 1971:60). Eventually the pronouncement came to pass. All the attempts of his parents and himself to change the fulfilment of the curse pronounced by the gods failed and Odewale was solely blamed for the crime (Rotimi 1971:66–68). And in this world of religious sentiments, who dares blame the gods or God for any reason and, more importantly, at what

risk? Viewed from this perspective, the curses placed by God in Genesis 3 are seen as potent and beyond the unaided ability of humanity to reverse. This story, although it is of Greek origin, resonates with the African sense of the power of God's utterance as the popular acceptance of Rotimi's adaptation shows.

If, by definition, God is all powerful, then human beings cannot resist him. When God cursed human beings for flouting his instruction, could humans have done anything to thwart those curses? Can human beings successfully contend with God? Put rudely, was God part of the problem and should he be part of the solution? And if God was involved in the emergence of the problem, should he not be involved in its restoration? This appears like a viable opinion although a way out of this rude line of reasoning is to see the curses in Genesis 3 simply as God's prevision of what would result from humanity's wrong choice rather than the release of divine curse. In that case, God would not be seen as attempting to avenge the dishonour done to his name by Adam.

Restorative eschatology (Rm 8:17, 18)

Despite the fall of humanity (Gn 3), Paul's theology of revelation through nature indicates that God continues to communicate with humanity, who in turn constantly misunderstands him (Rm 1). The Human still retains, to an important degree, elements of his or her humanness: he or she is still conscious of God, relatively good, socially and morally responsible, and intelligent. But he or she cannot, without divine help, attain to perfection in either motive or action (cf. Pilch 1992:1089). This thought is conveyed by the word 'futility' in Romans 8:20. But the Fall tradition is not the only source of Paul's information here. Kaylor (1980:152–153); cf. Cranfield 1975:416) rightly holds that Paul in Romans 8 also draws on the Jewish apocalyptic thought found in passages like Isaiah 65, Enoch 45 and 51 for his description of the restoration.

One analysis of Romans 8:18–25 proposed by Talbert (2003:60) and modified by me is presented to guide the discussion:

The leading statement (vs. 18): Transition from suffering to glory.

The explanation (vv. 19–25): The solidarity of humanity with the other creatures.

Verses 19–22 non-human created order

A— creation *waits* for the revealing of God's children (vs. 19)

B— in *hope* (vs. 20)

C—for its salvation (vs. 21)

D—*groaning* (vs. 22)

Verses 23–25 Christians

D'—*groan* whilst waiting (vs. 23)

C'—for our salvation (vs. 23)

B'—in *hope* (vs. 24)

A'—*wait* with patience (vs. 25)

This analysis shows that both creation (Rm 8:19–22) and Christians (Rm 8:23–25) do presently suffer (Rm 22; cf. 23) yet God intends ending the suffering of the creation through the agency of the redeemed humans. The final freedom of the creation is tied to the *revelation* of ‘the sons of God’ (vv. 19 & 21). This indicates a relationship first of suffering and then of freedom; as the creation ‘suffers’ or groans (vs. 22) so the Christians ‘suffer’ or groan (vs. 23), and the deliverance of the creation from this suffering is tied to the *revelation* of ‘the sons of God’ (vv. 19 & 21). Is the suffering of the redeemed in Romans 8:23 a consequence of the suffering of ‘the creation’ in verses 20–22 or a result of their association with Christ (cf. Rm 8:17 & Rm 18)? Whilst the fate of both the creation and humanity in general are undoubtedly related as, for example, global warming and its effects indicate, it can be argued that global warming itself is a result of the abuse of the environment by humans. John Gibbs (1971:276) acknowledges this solidarity caused by the shared suffering of human beings and nature in Romans 8 and points out that the theme of suffering and restoration is ‘prominent in apocalyptic and OT prophecy’. Cranfield (1975:416) notes that the gospel has further sharpened the use of this apocalyptic tradition.

In Greek, Romans 8:22 reads as follows: οἰδαμεν γὰρ ὅτι πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις συστεναίνει καὶ συνῶδινει ἀχρι τοῦ νῦν. The *Weymouth New Testament* translates it as ‘For we know that the whole of creation is groaning together in the pains of childbirth until this hour’. The term συνῶδινει means ‘travails together in pains of childbirth’ as rendered in *Young Literal Translation*. Whilst Black (1989:116–117) believes that the use of this term in Romans is similar to its use in a Qumran document, namely 1 QH 3.17, D.T. Tsumura (1994:620) convincingly argues that there is no better background to the expression, συστεναίνει καὶ συνῶδινει, than Genesis 3:17.

In the summary to his article on the use of the imagery of birth-pangs in the New Testament, Gempf (1994) writes:

It is perhaps surprising that in the patriarchal culture of the first century Palestine, male teachers such as Jesus and Paul should speak or write to ostensibly predominantly male audiences using as an image a pain that has never been felt by males. The reason for this particular image is often presumed to be that birth pangs are a pain that lead to positive result, but, especially given the Old Testament use of the image, this is unlikely to be the primary meaning for the image.

(Gempf 1994:119)

Gempf (1994:122–134) identifies five uses of birth pang imagery in the Old Testament that have been ‘picked up’ by New Testament writers. Firstly, it is sometimes used to make plain the acuteness of the pain and suffering. Secondly, at some other times it is used for the pain which renders the sufferer helpless (cf. 1 Th 5). Thirdly, it is sometimes used for a time of distinct peril. At some other times it is used for the pain that leads to something positive (cf. Jn 16:20–22). Finally, it signifies pain as a process that ‘must’ run its course (cf. Mt 24; Mk 13).

Romans 8 ‘focuses primarily on the present pain and the frustration ... [it] is not forward-looking except in looking to

the end of this pain and frustration (v. 21)’. Gempf (1994:124) states that ‘the message is not “this pain will produce a future good”, but rather “the present agony will not always be with us”’. Allen (1986:1332) holds a different view that the birth pang here is indicative of the labour for the birth of the new creation. I adopt the position of Gempf to avoid the Gnostic error that glorifies suffering for its own sake.

But the restoration of ‘the creation’ in Romans 8:19 is linked with the activity (‘manifestation’) of ‘the sons of God’ who have already been transformed to a certain degree through redemption. Whilst the suffering of the redeemed has not ended (Rm 8:17, 18 & 21), a time is coming when they would fully end. Paul’s understanding of the suffering of the righteous in Romans 8 was probably partially informed by his experience of suffering after redemption (cf. Kasali 2006:1363) but the idea predated him. The time of the ultimate freedom of the creation is the time of the ultimate glory of the redeemed (Rm 8:21; cf. Hendricksen 1980:268). Paul uses eschatology here to motivate hope.

This passage is the most extensive discussion on the future of the created order in Pauline corpus (Kreitzer 1993:268). Kaylor (1980:155) rightly points out that whilst the primary purpose of Paul in this paragraph is not the responsible treatment of the environment, it is a secondary and worthy application. It is this neglected secondary emphasis of the paragraph that is the concern of this article.

Just as with the treatment of Genesis 3, the theology rather than the authorship of Romans 8 is the concern of this section. Again, God, man and deliverance hold the key to understanding the passage. A careful analysis reveals that the primary actor in Romans 8 is ‘God’. The three persons of the godhead are mentioned as actively involved in the transformation of the lives of the Christians who in turn are expected to be God’s agents to transform the world. Romans 8:3 speaks of God the Father [ο θεος]; ‘Son’ [υιον] of God in Romans 8:3, Christ [Χριστο] in Romans 8:17; ‘Spirit of life’ [του πνευματος τη ζωη] in Romans 8:2; and ‘Spirit of God’ [πνευμα θεου] in Romans 8:9 and Romans 14. God the Father commissioned Jesus Christ to be a sacrifice to set humanity free from bondage, corruption and decay. The role of the Holy Spirit on the other hand is to enable humanity to relate redemptively with the environment. The main recipients of divine transforming ability are ‘sons of God’ (cf. Rm 8:14). The Greek phrase for ‘sons of God’ is υιοι θεου in Romans 8:14 and ‘children of God’ is των τεκνων του θεου in Romans 8:21. However, a person needs to look at Romans 8:1–17 for further identification of this God, the main actor; otherwise it would be difficult to make sense of verses 18–20. Note the following things in verses 1–17. The order in which the verses arrange the members of the godhead that are involved in the salvation of the redeemed: Christ (vs. 1), the Holy Spirit (vs. 2), and God the Father (vs. 3). Although briefly mentioned, it is clear from these verses that God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus the Christ, to rescue humans from their sins and degeneration, and the ‘Father’ most likely also sent the Holy

Spirit to those redeemed by his Son to enable them to make the required change and to make them effective change agents. The Holy Spirit is called 'the Spirit of life' [του πνευματος της ζωης] in verse 1; just 'Spirit' [πνευμα without article] in verses 4, 9 and 13, 'the Spirit' with the definite article [το πνευμα] in verses 5, 6, 9, 13 and 16; 'Spirit of God' [πνευμα θεου] in verses 9 and 14; 'the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead' [το πνευμα του εγειραντο τον Ιησουν εκ νεκρων] in verse 11; and 'Spirit of sonship' [πνευμα υιοθεσια] in verse 15. The context of the verses therefore justifies that all the references to the πνευμα are to the Holy Spirit, but Cranfield (1975:371) denies that in two of its occurrences, it does not.

The humans that are focused on in this passage are no longer the cause of curses but agents of blessing and restoration. They are no longer liabilities since they have been set free from the binding power of sin but assets since they have been empowered with the Holy Spirit to do God's will. They are identified in Romans 8 as 'those who are in Christ Jesus' [τοι εν Χριστω Ιησου] in verse 1; those who are 'in step with the Spirit' [τοι ... περιπατουσιν ... κατα πνευμα] in verses 4 and 5; those who are 'led by the Spirit' [πνευματι θεου αγονται]; 'sons of God' [υιοι θεου] in verse 14; 'children of God' [τεκνα θεου] in verse 16; and those 'who have the first fruit of the Spirit' [την απαρχην του πνευματος εχοντε] in verse 23. These are descriptions of the redeemed that have now been empowered to no longer sinfully treat the environment with hostility. And although the redeemed have their share of ongoing suffering, they have the enablement [δυναμις] of the Spirit to bear it until the time of consummation (Rm 8:23–25); cf. Polhill 1976:435).

The phrase, η κτισι ['the creation'] appears thrice in Romans 8:20–22; this phrase is subject to much debate. Whilst it could refer to the activity of creating, it only refers here to what is created. Furthermore, whilst 'creation' in this passage covers more than the serpent and the ground it most likely excludes non-believers, demons and the angels (Morris 1988:320–321; cf. Murray 1968:301–302). Andrzej Gieniusz and Anjrzei Gieniusz (1999:194) comment on the use of πας in Romans 8:22 thus 'the sense of totality ... is plain, independently of whether one agrees or not that Paul always follows the "rule" that the adjective πας ... with an articular noun means "the whole of"'. When Paul uses πας ['every' or 'all'] with η κτισι ['the creation'] in the verse he expands the concept beyond the snake and the ground; he makes it fairly comprehensive.

Support for excluding the redeemed, non-believers, demons and angels from 'the creation' in this passage are as follow. If 'the creation' eagerly awaits the revelation of the redeemed (Rm 8:19 & Rm 8:21), the term cannot at the same time include the 'sons of God' that it is waiting for. The argument of John Ganger (1970:327–329) that the non-believing humans are the primary focus in Paul's use of η κτισι ['the creation'] is not convincing. Susan Eastman's (2002:275) opinion differs from Ganger by not making the disobedient humanity the primary focus but only a part of πασα η κτισι. The only problem with this position is that unbelievers are not unwilling subjects of

futility. According to Paul, in the earlier part of this epistle, they willingly reject God (Rm 1:18–32). Again, demons may not fit into this category because they are not redeemable and angels are not subject to futility.

Five points are made on its state of creation. The first two are that the creation is under subjection (Rm 8:20) and that the subjection is unto futility and decay (Rm 8:21). The Greek word used in Romans 8:20 translated 'futility' in Romans 8:20 as ματαιοτη. In Romans 8:21, φθορα is translated as 'decay'; Φθορα here could be taken as 'ethical' or 'apposition'. If taken as ethical genitive then the bondage would be the one proceeding from man's ethical depravity but if taken as apposition, then it would be non-ethical and would refer to the bondage which consists in corruption (Murray 1968:304). Both situations are frustrating. Dodd's (1957:31) observation on Romans 8:20 and Romans 21 that the universe is a 'slave to decay' as a result of the Fall of humanity is still valid (cf. Meyer 1979:510; Stott 1994:238). Apart from the thought of decay φθορα conveys the thought of death in references to biblical creation stories (cf. Rm 8). From the time of the Fall, all aspects of creation, both human and non-human, began to die, and that this idea runs through the Old Testament. The other three points are that the person or power subjecting the creation is external (Rm 8:20), there is a time limit to the subjection (Rm 8:20), and the restoration of the world is tied up with the future of the redeemed (Rm 8:21). The identity of the person who subjected the creation has revolved around God, Satan and Adam but the most convincing of all is God. What Paul is saying therefore is that humans' redemption through Christ has its cosmic consequences. This supports the notion that because the curse–spell that God placed on the cosmos led the whole creation to misbehave, his help is needed to redress the situation and he has equipped the redeemed to do this. Once humans are set free to think positively and are empowered to do what is good, they would be in a better position to faithfully care for God's creation as good stewards.

If Christians are to take this challenge from the Bible seriously, it would be pertinent for them to re-examine their view of preservation and the role they are expected to play in it in light of Paul's eschatology in Romans 8:19–25. The passage shows that God wants the creation transformed and set free from destructive forces. Integrating fully a protectionist stance of creation and environment within Paul's eschatological perspective is a way to help Christians demonstrate that they are God's children (Rm 8:19; cf. Kreitzer 1993:264). The implications of the aforementioned for the environment are that it is the will of God to totally restore the environment to its original state of perfection, fruitfulness and friendliness, and that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit has equipped the redeemed to better protect the creation and the environment in line with God's concern that the creation itself is worthy of being transformed and liberated.

With the benefit of hindsight one can now ask how legitimate is White's allegation (1967, par. 21, 23 & 32) that Christianity

was responsible for the environmental crisis in the West. He built his allegation on two grounds: the failure of humans to responsibly control nature in line with the authority delegated to them by God, and the church's theological attack on animism that inadvertently left the environment unprotected from rape, exploitation and injustice (cf. Gn 1:26 & Gn 1:28). White (1967) explains further:

In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own genius loci, its guardian spirit. ... Before one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated. By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects. ... The spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated. Man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled.

(White 1967, par. 21 & 22)

Whilst it might be correct to a certain extent that Christianity contributed to devastating American environment many years ago through its theology and the practice of its followers, generalising this to all other geographical and cultural contexts may be problematic. Even in America, many things probably accounted for the situation that White (1967) criticises, including the development of critical mind that in extreme cases is sceptical to the spirits or the spiritual; the church's expectation of the coming apocalyptic end of the 'evil' world and its environment and the subsequent emergence of a new one; the interest of Christian revival movements which focused at that time only on the salvation of the human soul; researches on the degeneration of the ecosystem and the role of humans in rapidly bringing this about are only of recent scientific efforts; and the various formulations of Christian theology to arrive at a more refined and precise understanding of the teaching of the Bible on ecology are still ongoing. Today, several Christian theologians and scholars espouse that religion is related to ecological stability.

Today the church is improving its theology of ecology whilst still retaining its emphasis on the eternal value of the human soul. Neglected passages of the Scriptures on the creation are now being interpreted and at times re-interpreted to bring out their emphases on the protection of the environment:

In 1979 the World Council of Churches sponsored an international conference on 'Faith, Science, and the Future' at MIT. At this meeting ecological concerns were at the center of the debate.

(Cauthen 1997, par. 20)

This has led to a new relationship between the United Nations and the World Council of Churches on climate change (Cauthen 1997:par. 1-3).

In a radical statement, White (1967, par. 27) partly blames the unrestrained application of science and technology for ecological degradation. Whilst claiming that science and technology results are based on God's truth in nature, White opines that neither science nor technology can unilaterally

provide solutions to the degradation of the creation. They need to partner with religion to succeed.

Conclusion

The Genesis 3 story of the Fall has led to the interpretation that Adam's disobedience led God to curse both human and non-human creation. Paul in Romans 8 applies the curse in Genesis 3 to 'the whole creation' which many exegetes understand to exclude only the humans, angels and demons. Put succinctly, the cause of the hostility between humans and the environment was the curse pronounced by God on them for the first disobedience of 'Adam' to God. It is not difficult for a devout African Bible reader or an enculturation biblical interpreter to understand that the curses pronounced by God, could not be broken without his assistance; this is the line of thought developed in Romans 8.

Romans 8 also expatiates on the eschatological restoration of 'the creation' and the main argument of the chapter is that it is God's plan to liberate the oppressed creation. This freedom of the creation from degradation and/or pollution is linked with the manifestation of the glory of 'the sons of God'. The perfection of this freedom is still future. Romans 8 therefore provides a challenge to the redeemed to join hands with all activists to redress the abuse on the environment. Finally, the deliverance of the redeemed from slavery to sin has equipped them to relate positively with probity and accountability with their environment.

Global warming leads to rising sea levels which is threatening aquatic life, terrestrial life and ultimately, mankind, who obviously depend on these components of nature for their daily existence (cf. Markham, 2009, pars. 6-10). Impacts in Nigeria include severe drought caused by an uneven break in rainfall pattern in some parts, floods leading to crop failure, destruction of homes, out-break of diseases, and even death. Whilst climate change is largely caused by a mass emission of Greenhouse gases in industrialised societies, African countries contribute, although in smaller ways to this problem by burning bushes, destroying forests and exterminating bush animals. Challenges can be drawn from Romans 8 because the purpose of God is to liberate the creation from exploitation – Christians are not to abuse it.

The need to enlist the church in the fight against pollution is important in Africa as a whole and in Nigeria in particular. Religious leaders wield great power and authority and most of their members would readily listen to them. A great percentage of African people are illiterate, poor and live in rural areas. Even these people are constantly in touch with their religious leaders. If, for example, church leaders explain the scripture to their members in such a way that they understand God's interest in the well-being of the world and that it is his will that they protect it, more people would change the way they treat nature.

The recommendation here is not that the work of preserving the earth should be left to the church alone; this would not

work. The suggestion is that Christians should be active in all efforts to restore it. If Paul is correct in his thesis in Romans 8 (and Christian communities believe that he is) that all redeemed persons are enabled to do what is good, and that only those who are in step with the Spirit can be effective agents of restoration and transformation, then commitment first to God, and then to responsibilities, are required from Christians to lead or follow the rest of humanity to save the earth. In an effort to achieve this goal, Bible Schools, Seminaries and Theological Colleges where church ministers and leaders are trained should be advised to include courses on environment studies in their curriculum.

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