

CREATION THEOLOGY AND CHRSTIAN ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN GENESIS 1:26-28- AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES

Michael Ufok Udoekpo, PhD

Department of Theology

Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria

ufokism@yahoo.com; udoekpom@veritas.edu.ng

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.17689.19041

Abstract

This study addresses Genesis 1-2 and related texts that contain themes of God's gift of creation and humans, particularly Africans' invitation to care for it. Genesis 1-2 discourages abuse, exploitation, inordinate anthropocentric and instrumentalist domination of nature-biodiversity and environment (1:26-28). It exhorts humanity ('adām), including all Africans to continue to harmoniously engage in planet care without inordinate dominion over other creatures (2:15). Although there are some Africans' who make effort towards this direction of planet care, ironically, the current ecological challenges (deforestation, abuse of water resource, extinction of nature, persistent droughts, and declining productivity of agricultural and pastoral lands) orchestrated by humans in Africa and beyond proves that has not been the case that is full planet care. This paper acknowledges efforts some individual, religious groups and communities have made in Africa on the subject of ecology. It also challenges excessive Christian or religious anthropocentrism and broadly engages in a contextual and critical- theological re-evaluation of Genesis creation theology in order to inspire a rethinking in African religious communities as to their response to care for divine creation.

Keywords: African environment, anthropocentrism, biodiversity (*hā'ādāmā*), creation care, humankind ('*adām*'s), responsibility,

Introduction

Genesis 1-2 and Psalm 8, in particular, reveal its inherent beauty, goodness and the biblical theology of humanity's ('*adām*'s) responsibility and identity, in the face of racial discrimination, religious violence, ethnocentrism, as well as ongoing biodiversity crisis in the ground (*hā'ādāmā*), in our lands, Africa in particular. As recounted, particularly in Genesis 1-11, human beings human beings ('*adām*')—including Africans—are beings

known and created by God. They are humans missioned alongside other creatures, particularly land animals, on the sixth day of creation. More importantly, they are social, sexual, moral, spiritual, special, and responsible beings made in God's image (Gen 1:26–28). God's creation of humans and land animals on the same day implies that humans share with non-humans the blessing of fruitfulness—of regenerating and multiplying on the earth. They must therefore engage in fruitfulness without dominating and exploiting creation, and without inordinate anthropocentrism and without sociopolitical and religious insensitivity and indifference toward others.

Genesis account also reveal that humans, like all other living things, are earthy creatures; they are known by God, formed from the dust or soil (*hā'ādāmā*) of the earth, 'adām from the 'ādāmā, making us members of the community of creation. This revelation discourages abuse, exploitation, human segregation, inordinate anthropocentric and instrumentalist domination of natural environment including trees, water and soil (1:26–28; Ps 8:4–8). It exhorts humanity, God's image (*imago dei*), everywhere, in every continent to a communal, inclusive, harmonious dialogue and care for one another, particularly the planet (2:15).

Although some Africans- individuals, churches, organizations and communities-- God's image, make effort towards this direction of planet care and reforestation in particular, there are still lingering ecological challenges such as lack ecological hermeneutical methodology, deforestation, abuse of water resource, extinction of nature, persistent droughts, and declining productivity of agricultural and pastoral lands, all over Africa championed by anthropogenic dominants of creation. This paper acknowledges such challenges as well as contributory efforts some scholars, individuals and religious communities have made in solving these challenges in Africa. Taking Genesis 1:26–28 as an exegetical point of departure this work theologically challenges excessive Christian or religious anthropocentrism. In doing this, it broadly engages in a contextual and critical-theological re-evaluation of Genesis creation theology found in Genesis 1:26–28; 2:15 in order to inspire a rethinking in African religious communities as to their continuous response to care for divine creation.²²

²² As will be discussed later in this paper there are many African Religious Communities, Churches, Individuals, Organization such the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), where some of these ideas have been shared before, Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) with proven record of efforts towards promoting the care for the earth in the spirit of Genesis theology account.

Ecological Challenges Facing Africa

In his article “Doing Ecology with African Creation Wisdom,” Joseph Kiso Masika (2012) mentions among other things the challenge of lack of proper distinctive “ecological hermeneutics” terminology among African scholars to address the issues of the Bible, creation and ecology. Citing Teresa Okure (1993, 77), Masika notes that as a matter of cultural rule, in doing theology, Africans do not start with issue of methodology. Rather, their primary “consciousness is not method, but life and life concerns, their own and those of their own.” It is more about an Africans’ understanding of the human person and humanity’s dependence on God and other aspects of divine creation. In studies like this questions regarding risking over-generalization or homogenization of Africa and her contexts and values are often legitimately raised. When that is the case, there could be no better response than that of Paddy Musana (2018) that, “the concept of the human person is encapsulated in the thoughts, and actions of the African peoples, thereby giving credence to human relationships, shaping and determining the relationships in ways that cherish and value life-supporting and positive transformative efforts in building human societies, irrespective of gender, race and religion” (*Personhood*, 22).

Similarly, and in fact, earlier in his 1970 seminal work on *African Religions and Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti (1999, 256), addressed the concept of the human person in an African context thus:

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbors and the relatives whether dead or alive... The individual can only say: I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am. This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man (cf. Mbiti as cited in Musana “Personhood,” 22-23).²³

Echoes of Mbiti’s understanding of the human person in Africa is heard from Kevin Vanhoozer who said in 1997 that, “The human creature is neither an autonomous individual nor an anonymous unit that has been assimilated into some collectivity, but rather a particular person who achieves a concrete identity in relation to others; Human being is inherently social” (Vanhoozer, 1997, 158). Similarly, David Gushee (2010, 250-

²³ Here, while addressing the human person in question in Africa, irrespective of the regions (East, North, West or South) in relation to religion of which Genesis creation narrative is a part, said: “it is religion, more than anything else, which colors their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon.”

51) wrote passionately, in his “Environmental Ethics,” that, “all human beings, including Africans are dependent not only on their fellow humans, but they also need a “healthy environment.”

In other words, every human being (*‘ādām*) “need clean air to breathe, sufficient clean water to drink, fertile and healthy soil, land to till, healthy neighbor-creatures for clothing, food and medicine, reasonably stable climate systems, and temperature within a livable range” (Gushee, 251). Along this line of thought, an like many other notable African theologians, philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists (Mveng, 1979; Ela, 2009; Bujo, 2009; Magesa, 2013; Tutu, 1999; Kamalu, 1998), Christophère Ngolele, an African sociocultural anthropologist, also affirms that, “An African, traditionally speaking, qualifies for full human identity only insofar as he or she lives in harmonious relationships with fellow humans beings, the ancestors, created nature, and God”(African Wisdom, 2019, 5-19). But, unfortunately, this is not always the case in Africa, despite Africans’ access to the Genesis account of creation. Africa is home to deforestation, persistent droughts, pollution, global warming, diminishing water supplies, and declining productivity from agricultural pastoral lands, worsening food security, heightened levels of poverty and diseases, burning of bushes, and over hunting, which has endangered many animal species. Unequivocally, “ecological crisis is the most urgent concern for Africans as they have come to identify themselves as victims of natural and human-made environmental calamities(Masika, Doing Ecology,1-2).

Anthropocentric Challenges

I saw a deer for the first time in my life in the United States of America because none existed in my native African village, perhaps all hunted out, inordinately for meals by superior human beings. This suggests that other biodiversity crises that are antithetical to both the Genesis account (soon to be fully discussed), and the above discussed African understanding of personhood in relation to other parts of creation include an unethical feeling of superiority, practice of perverse anthropocentrism, and the instrumentalist sense of disorderly abuse of the environment and other members of the community of creation including seas and trees.

It is important to note that Pope Francis discussed such abuse in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’* (“On Care of Our Common Home”). In relation to the human person (*‘ādām*), Francis speaks in this document about the “crisis and effects of modern anthropocentrism,” wherein human beings everywhere place themselves as the center of the world, abuse other parts of creation, and refuse to recognize their true responsibility to protect the dignity of all (*Laudato Si’*, 2015, n.115). This has brought about humanitarian,

ethical, cultural, spiritual, and anthropological crises (*Laudato Si'*, n.119). The effects of anthropocentrism are practical and cultural relativism, which includes extreme biological technologies that may use human embryos for experiments, thereby ignoring that “the inalienable worth of human being transcends his or her degree of development” (*Laudato Si'*, nos.130-136).

The exorbitant anthropocentric environment we live in today has exposed our broken humanity and identity. In Doug Moo’s view “the pervasive anthropocentric understanding of the divine program of redemption needs to be revised” (*Eschatology and Environmental Ethic*, 2010, cf. Block, 2010). Ngolele, like Block, Douglas, Pope Francis, and others, agrees that we need to review our understanding of the human person. Again, for him “The distorted relationships with nature that we are witnessing call us to revisit our identity, since our identity is determined by the quality of our relationships” (*African Wisdom*, 5). We need to ask: What is a man (or human being)? *Che cosa è l'uomo?* Outside of our gender, race, social status, and social responsibility, what makes up our identity? I believe some answers could be found in following exegetical and theological re-reading of Genesis 1:26–28 and related biblical texts (Ps 8:1–10; cf. Ps 114:3; Job 7:17-18).

Analysis of Creation Theology in Genesis 1:26-28

In the text of Genesis 1:26-28 we read:

Verse	Transliteration from MT	My English Adaptation
v.26a	Wəyyo'mer 'ēlōhîm na'ă'seh 'ādām bəšalmēnū kidmūtēnū	Then God said, “let us make human being in our own image, according to our likeness;
v.26b	yəyîrdū bidgath hayyām ūbə'ōph hāššmayîm ūbabbəhēmāūbəkōl hā'āreṣ	And let them rule over the fish of the sea, and birds of the sky (heaven), and over the cattle and all the earth;
v.26c	Ūbəkōl hāremes 'al-hā'āreṣ	and all the creeping things that creeps over the earth
v.27a	Wayyîbərā' 'ēlōhîm 'eth- hāādām bəšalmō bəšalem 'ēlōhîm bārā'	And God created mankind (human being) in his own image, in the image of God he created them;
v.27b	'ōtō zākār ūnəqēbāh bārā' 'ōtōm	male and female he created them

v.28a	Wayəbārek ‘ōtôm, ‘ēlōhîm wayyōmer lāhem ‘ēlōhîm pərûūrəbû,	And God blessed them and God said to them be fruitful and multiply,
v.28b	Ūmil’û ‘al-hā’āreṣ wəkibšūhā, ûrədû bidgath hayyām ūbə’ôph haššāmayîm	And fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky
v.28c	Ūbəkôl-hayyâ hārōmešet ‘al- hā’āreṣ. ²⁴	And over everything that moves over the earth.

Genesis 1:26–28 and related texts (Ps. 8) point not only to the anthropological constitution of human beings, but to human beings as special, responsible, social, sexual, moral, and spiritual creatures.

Anthropologically, and within the context of the Genesis creation accounts (Gen 1–2), Genesis 1:26–28 points to the constitution, limitations, and potential of human beings (*‘ādām*). We see this in Genesis 1:26a, “Let us make man (*‘ādām*) in our own image,” when read in connection with Genesis 2:7. Stressing the anthropological element of human beings, Genesis 2:7 says, “then the LORD God formed man (*‘ādām*) from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being”(wayyîṣer ādonai ‘ēlōhîm ‘eth- hāādām ‘āphār min-hā’ādāmâ, wayyîphaḥ bə’appāw nišmath hayyîm, wayəhî hāādām lənepheš hayyâ).²⁵

One of the several commentators on this text, Brian S. Rosner (2017, 66), believes that the “dust” (*‘āphār*) from which we are made is a reminder of our connection with other things, such as trees, land, water, on earth; while the “soul” (*nepheš*) distinguishes us from

²⁴For those who may want to read, follow, compare, or listen to this text in Greek, the LXX version reads: *Kai eipen ho Theos poiēsōmen anthrōpon kat’ eikona hēmeteran ka kath’ homoiōsin, kai archetōsan tōn ichthuōn tēs thalasēs kai tōn peteinōn tou ouranou, kai tōn ktēnōn kai pasēs tēs gēs ka pantōn tōn herpetōv tōn herpontōn epi tēs gēs (v.26). Kai epoiēse ho Theos ton anthrōpon kat’ eikonia theou epoiēsen auton arsen kai thēlu epoiēsen autous (v. 27). Kai ēulogēsēn autous ho Theos legōn auxanesthe ka plēthunesthe ka plērōsate tēn gēn, kai katakurieusate autēs ka archete tōn ichthuōn tēs thalasēs kai tōn peteinōn tou ouranou kai pantōn ktēnōn kai pasēs tēs gēs kai pantōn tōn herpetōn tōn herpontōn epi tēs gēs (v.28).*

²⁵ The Greek/LXX reads: *Kai eplasen ho theos ton anthrōpon choun apo tēs gēs ka enephusēsēn eis to prosōpon autou pnoēn zōēs kai egeneto ho anthrōpos eis phychēn zōsan (Gen 2:7).*

other living creatures. The use of the word “dust” (*‘āphār*), Rosner insists “emphasizes both our physical frailty and the fact that we come from the ‘ground’ and will return to ‘dust’ ” (p.66).

The New Oxford Annotated Bible edited by Michael D. Coogan (2007) offers us a perspectival summary of the notion of “dust” in relation to the human being (*‘ādām*):

The wordplay on Heb “*adam*” (human being; here translated “man” [cf. 1.26]) and “*adamah*” (arable land/soil; here *ground*) introduces a motif characteristic of this tradition: the relation of humankind to the soil from which it was *formed*. Human nature is not a duality of body and soul; rather God’s *breath* animates the *dust* and it becomes a single *livingbeing* (Ps 104.29; Job 34.14–15).

Kenneth Matthews (1996, 196) also speaks on the significance of humanity being made from dust. His words seem to cover other relevant biblical passages:

God is depicted as the potter who forms Israel (Isa 64:8; Jer 18: 6; cp. *Sir* 33:13; Rom 9:20). “Dust” as constitutive of human existence anticipates [Gen] 3:19, where the penalty for the man’s sin is his return to “dust” (e.g., Job 34:15). While “dust” may also show that man is fragile physically (e.g., Job 10:8–9; Ps 103:14), the intent of the passage is the association of human life and the basic substance of our making. A second play on the words “man” (*‘ādām*) and “ground” (*‘ādāmâ*) becomes apparent: man is related to the “ground” by his very constitution (3:19), making him perfectly suited for the task of working the “ground,” which is required for cultivation (2:5, 15).

Other than this wordplay on the words “man” (*‘ādām*) and “ground” (*‘ādāmâ*)—and its associate implication that man is related to the ground—this text also brings up the matter of the living soul or living being (*nepheš hāyyâ*). The Hebrew word *nepheš* (LXX *psychē*) is defined in *BDB* as “that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, the inner being of man” and is commonly translated by the words, “soul, living being, life, self or person” (Rosner, 67). *Nepheš* in Genesis 2:7, as observed by Rosner, refers to the “whole person and not to some immaterial part of us” (Rosner, 67). In the Hebrew Bible as well as the New Testament, other terms such as “heart” (*kardia*), “spirit” (*pneuma*, *ruah*), “liver,” “kidneys,” “bowels,” “flesh” (*sarx*), “body” (*sōma*), and “mind” (*nous*) are also used in different contexts to refer to different aspects of human beings.

The biblical anthropological terms we’ve just reviewed shed light on the essence, limitation, potential, and meaning of the human person. Human beings are more than bodies. Human beings are more than flesh. Human beings are beings with a mind and heart, which are capable of the highest thoughts and deepest emotion. And as souls and

spirits, human beings are alive and have the capacity to connect with the living God. Human beings are also special in that they are defined by relationship, as attested in the Genesis account (Rosner, 74).

Created in the Image and Likeness of God (Genesis 1:26)

In Genesis 1:26a we read: “let us make human being in our own image, according to our likeness.” This text, as well as other biblical texts, helps us understand better the meaning of the human person invited to care for God’s other creation. In the past, scholars have offered various theological and philosophical speculations as to the meaning of “image” (*šelem*) and “likeness” (*děmût*) of God in this passage. A few texts in the initial chapters of Genesis offer some clues as to the meaning of the “image” (*šelem*) and “likeness” (*děmût*) of God.

A good example is Genesis 5:3, where we read that Adam’s son Seth is “in his likeness, in his image” (NRSV). Read in connection with Genesis 1:26, this text suggests that the divine likeness was continued in Adam and in his son Seth, and was transmitted to the succeeding generation in spite of the fall. The passing on of the “image of God” is more explicit in Genesis 9:6, where we read, “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind” (NRSV). This text, like Genesis 1, is a reminder that human beings (*’ādām*) of all colors, cultures, tribes, nationalities and genders are special. Other creatures—every moving thing—may be killed and eaten, but not humans, since their blood is sacred (Gen 9:3) and they have a special place with God, from whose image and likeness they were created (Moo, Creation Care, 2018, 74).

Many have observed that the terms “image” (*šelem*) and “likeness” (*děmût*) of God are used interchangeably or synonymously in Genesis 1:26 (Sarna, 1989, 12; Block, “To Serve and to Keep,” 127). It is argued that this may point to a bifold nature of human relationships. As the “likeness” of God, humans stand before him dependent and petitionary, while before the world they function as theophanies, imitating God in perpetuity and registering “his everlasting presence in the world” (Garr, 2003, 118-23, cf. Block, “To Serve and to Keep,” 127). As the “image” (*šelem*) of God, human beings (male and female, black and white, Africans and non-Africans, young and old) stand before God as his vice regents, through whom he administers divine lordship and justice in the world (Garr, 132-135; Block, 127-28).

In other words, since he made human beings in his image, “God authorizes human beings to serve as his deputies and his representatives, commissioning them to care for the world as he would were he physically present”(Block, “To Serve and to Keep,”128). Moo observes that Christians have usually read the plural that suddenly occurs in verse 26, “*naă’seh ’ādām bəşalmēnū kidmūtēnū*” (“let us make human being in our own image and likeness”), as “a signal of Trinitarianism, a hint of God’s existence in three persons as Father, Sons, and Holy Spirit” (Moo, *Creation Care*, 74). The reading also “has some resonance with the common ancient Near Eastern conception of deity with his divine council, whom God may be considered to be addressing here” (Moo, *Creation Care*, 74). However, this plural expression could be looked at as the portrayal of a God whose life-giving Spirit (breath) is at work. His Word hints at the later biblical theme of the Spirit, who gives life to God’s people, and Christ, the Word through whom the universe came into being (Moo, *Creation Care*, 74). The singular pronouns return in the very next verse (Genesis 1:27, “*bəşalmô bəşelem ’ēlōhîm bārā*” [“in his own image, in the image of God he created them”]), suggesting that “whomever God is addressing in verse 26 is not outside of God (*’ēlōhîm*) himself” (Moo, *Creation Care*, 75). It has nothing to do with color (black, brown, and white, yellow), culture, or gender (male, female). It is antithetical to the ongoing racism and gender discrimination in our society today.

He Created Them “Male and Female” (Genesis 1:27).

Another intriguing exegetical observation in Genesis 1:26–27 is that the plural pronoun appears here, and only here, at the creation of human beings (*’ādām*). An additional observation is that “In Genesis 1 the creation of humanity is the longest section and the apex of the account. The important verb *bārā’*, ‘create’ is repeated three times (v. 27; cf. vv. 1, 21), and is the only instance when God blesses his creation” (Johnson, “humanity,”2000, 564). In fact, it is only God who can *bārā’* (“create”). That is to say, uniquely, “male and female he created them” (*zākār ûnəqēbāh bārā’ ’ōtôm*). Noticeable and significant is the plural pronoun “them” (*’ōtôm/autous*) used in the end of verse 27. That is to say, “male and female he created *them*.”

In this plural pronoun is found a profound sense of African communal theology of living and personhood emphasized by Mbiti and others. It is antithetical to racism, ethnocentrism, inordinate anthropocentrism and all kinds of segregation. According to Moo, it bears a sense of the “irreducible relationality of human beings made in God’s image, created for community and intended to reflect in our relationships the unifying love that is at the center of the being of the triune God”(*Creation Care*, 75).

In Genesis 1:27, to be human—male or female, black or white, young or old, rich or poor—is to be known and loved by God as his image bearer. African scholar Gesela Nneka Uzukwu(2015) fittingly cites Genesis 1:27c in her work *The Unity of Male and Female in Jesus Christ: An exegetical Study of Galatians 3.28c in Light of Paul's Theology of Promise*. Uzukwu's primary focus is to highlight how Paul's expression "there is not among you male and female" (*ouk eni arsen kai thēlu*) in Galatian 3:28c explains the nature of the promise God made to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 17 and how the Christian believers in Galatian might benefit from that promise in order to foster Christian unity. Using the thematic-epistological approach, Uzukwu suggests other sources that might have influenced Galatians 3:28, including: the three expressions of gratitude found in Greek sources, the three blessings of gratitude found in rabbinic texts, and Genesis 1:27c LXX (Uzukwu, 202-204; cf. Udoekpo, 2016, 227-228). Every human person—white, black, and brown, male and female, young and old—is intended to reflect God's promise of love, unity, as we reflect his image and rule in the community of his creation. This is especially true in Africa and Nigeria in particular, where tribalism and ethnocentrism, all forms of injustices have become endemic and detrimental to all sectors of life (Udoekpo, *Day of YHWH*, 2010, 293-295; Udoekpo, *Worship in Amos*, 2017, 117-126; Udoekpo, *Limits*, 2020, 2-4; Udoekpo, "Ecumenical," 2023, 108-116). There is no better way to sum up the analysis of Genesis 1:26–27 than with these words from Douglas and Jonathan Moo:

We bear God's image not by virtue of our wisdom, our reason, our stature, our strength, or even our capacity for moral judgment (and I would add color, tribe, continent, age, wealth, or gender). A baby bears God's image just as you or I do, and as do the physically and mentally infirm. The stress in Scripture on the universality of the image of God demands that we recognize the image of God in all human beings. In fact, it is often especially through children and the apparently weak that God reveals his purposes (*Creation Care*, 75).

"Fill the Earth and Subdue it" (Genesis 1:28)

God's purpose in creating human beings (*'ādām*) in his own "image" is not only that they may "rule over other creatures" (Gen 1:26), but also that they would be "fruitful and multiply" (*pārūūrābū*), "fill the earth" (*ūmil'ū 'al-hā'āreṣ*), and "subdue it" (*wākibšūhā*, Gen 1:28). This is not to say that God did not give other creatures their own space. The sea creatures, for instance, are to "fill the waters in the seas" (Gen 1:22). Other creatures, like fish, birds, trees and land animals, also have their appropriate places to experience the shared and generous blessings of God. But human beings are specifically given the unique

role to subdue and rule the earth, land, and other creatures (Creation Care, 76). But what does subdue or rule the earth mean?

In Garr's view, the words "to subdue" (*kābaš*) and "to rule" or "to exercise dominion" (*rādā*) are very strong words that may connote some type of "aggressive style of royal leadership" (Image, 132-65; Block, "To Serve and to Keep," 128). Interestingly, the LXX translation of "to rule" or "to have dominion over" and "to lord over" is "*katakyrieuō*." This verb, stressed again by Moo (Creation Care, 76), is used in the Gospels and in other New Testament texts to refer to how followers of Christ are not meant to exercise exploitative leadership and dominion over one another (Matt 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45; 1 Pet 5:3).

Moo (Creation Care, 77) insists, there are other passages in the Old Testament where "land" or "earth" is the object of the subduing. These passages often relate to the conquest of the land of Canaan, "when the land is subdued [*wāhā'āreš nikbbašā*] before the LORD" (Num 32:22, 29; Josh 18:1; 1 Chr 22:18). This indicates a link "between the creation and exodus/conquest stories in the Old Testament, which among other things, suggest that Israel's place on the land can be seen as a microcosm of humanity's place on earth" (Moo, Creation Care, 77). It captures the constant struggle and politicking undertaken to subdue and dominate others that humanity continues to witness today in different parts of the world. Block and other scholars would call this type of world "a fallen world." In a fallen world, leadership often turns into exploitation, as if those who are led exist for the sake of their leaders (Block, "To Serve and to Keep," 128). Some leaders are even portrayed this way in the Old Testament, such as kings like Rehoboam (1 Kgs 12:6–15) or David (2 Sam 12:1–7), or the heads of the households like Abraham (Gen 12:10-20; 20:17). The biblical account, however, insists that leaders exist for the sake of the citizens rather than vice versa (Block, To Serve and to Keep, 129).

In addition, Moo (Creation Care, 78) stresses that our "*ādāmic* vocation"—the vocation of all human beings, whether male or female, young or old, black, brown, or white—is "to work and take care of the place where God has planted us, to serve him in our rule of creation as priests in the temple." Taking care of the earth and one another is central to human beings' identity as God's image. Importantly, the ruling and subduing called for in Genesis 1:28 must be done with reference to Genesis 2:15.

To subdue and rule the land and the earth ("*wāhā'āreš nikbbašā*") as images of God means that human beings (*ādām*) all over the world, people of every status, kings and non-kings—including those in African countries—are to pattern their style of governing the world according to the model of the divine Shepherd in Psalm 23 (cf. Jer 23; Ezek 34;

John 10:10). A good shepherd lives with the smells of the sheep, provides for them, protects them, knows them, and stands by *all* the sheep, irrespective of their color (cf. Udoeko, Review, *Shepherd*, 2013).

In the broader context of Genesis 2 and the entire Genesis narrative, we find spelled out very clearly a better way of analyzing Genesis 1:28 or God's purpose of creating humankind (*'ādām*). Genesis 2:15 reads: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (*wayyiqqâ ādōnay 'ēlōhîm 'eth-hā'ādām wayyaniḥēhû bəgan 'ēden lə'ābādāh ūlšāmarāh*). Many (Block, "to Serve and to Keep, 130; Moo, *Creation Care*, 78; Beale, 2004,66-70; Walton, 2001, 192-193) have observed that the verbs *'ābad* ("to serve") and *šāmar* ("to keep, till, work, guard") have different meanings in different contexts and can even be used to describe different services Levites render in the tabernacle (Num 3:7; 8:26; 18:7).

Block sees the priests and Levites' service in the tabernacle and temple, through which they maintained the covenant relationship between Israel and God, as "a microcosm of the world so that the man was charged to serve and guard the garden, thereby ensuring the operation of Yahweh's covenant with the world in general and living things in the garden in particular" ("To Serve and to Keep," 130). Although, many translations render *'ābad* as "till" or "cultivate" when used of cultivation, the object of the verb is usually, according to Block (p.130) "the ground" (*hā' ādāmâ*).

The verb *šāmar* sheds light on the meaning of Genesis 1:28 as well. Although it is usually used to refer to "keeping" God's commandments, according to Moo (*Creation Care*, 78) in the Genesis account, "*šāmar*" equally refers to "keeping watch over," "guarding," "preserving," and "protecting" people (of all races), animals trees (of all kinds), or places (of all cultures and regions). As the image (*šelem*) and likeness (*dēmût*) of God, our care, our sense of unity and our love for and protection of the earth and one another "is thus a reflection of the care and protection that God shows to us" (Moo, *Creation Care*, 78).

Moo's sentiment regarding the identity of the human person in Genesis 1:26–28 is reflected in Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*. In it, Francis points to humanity's failure to recognize that Genesis 1:28 does not encourage the exploitation of nature, the abuse of nature, or inordinate dominion over others. Francis calls for a proper contextual hermeneutic of faith that is sensitive to Genesis 2:15, as suggested earlier in this paper. He stresses and exhorts humanity (*'ādām*) to till, cultivate, plough, keep, protect, preserve, and care for the planet. For him, these are all verbs of faith, which illuminate the mutual and responsible relationship between human beings (*'ādām*),

nature, mountains, streams, seas, trees and their neighbors (*Laudato Si'*, nos. 67-68; Udoekpo, *Israel's Prophets*, 2018,91-93).

Africans' Positive Responses to Genesis Creation Theology

There are many African Religious Communities, Churches, individuals, publications and organization such as the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), Association of African Earth-keeping Church (AAEC), the Baptist church Brackenhurst Environmental Program (BEP), and Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) with proven record of promoting the care for the earth in the spirit of the above discussed Genesis theology account.

In 2020 the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria held her *Zoom Cloud Meeting Conference* from 3rd to 5th November on “The Bible on Human Beings, Race and Land.” Although the conference was not primarily on ecology most of the conversation and paper contribution as captured in the Communiqué and in the proceedings of that conference touched on the importance of preserving the land and the human race. The earth and land, CABAN emphasized “belongs to God” Exod 19:5; Deut 10:14; Ps 24:1-2); who gives it to human being for their use...the land is for benefits of earth's creature, human created in God's image and likeness have the mandate to take care of it as their “common home”(Cf. Okure and Ijezie, 2020).

Similarly, Masika (African Creation Wisdom, 2) has observed that “in an attempt to halt deforestation, desertification, and soil degradation, some African churches have adopted a reforestation/tree-planting Eucharist as a way of celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ.” In the celebrations an appeal is made to Mathew 28:18 which says, “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” This text is understood by them (some African Earth-keeping Churches) as mandating Christian, the body of Christ, to build unity amongst themselves and the entire creation so as to “avoid destruction and preserve life for all creatures” (Daneel, Ecotheology, 1994, 250). For members of this church community tree planting Eucharist is an attempt to integrate creation into the Body of Christ. In other words, for them, as strongly noted by Daneel, Ecotheology, 1994, 248-263; Daneel, Earth Keeping, 2000, 531-558), members of African Independent Church, the Body of Christ embraces other creatures like trees, as well, for by him all things were created and in him all things hold together (Col 1:16-20).

As a way of Africanizing the sacrament members of this church regards Christ, through his death and resurrection, as the real guardian of the land. They identify deforestation, desertification, and other related abuse of the land, trees and other creatures with Christ's

innocent trials, sufferings and death, as recorded in the Gospel passion narratives (Cf. Masika, African Creation Wisdom, 3-4).

Similarly, the African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe, notably, are making great contribution in the area of applied environmental ethics:

They are not in the first place producing environmental literature, but they are proclaiming a widening message of salvation which encompasses all of creation, and in their services of worship they are dancing out a new rhythm which, in its footwork, spells hope for the ravage earth. They have not worked out their new ethic on paper, but they are ‘clothing the earth’ (*Kufukidza nyika*) with new trees to cover its human-induced nakedness. In so doing they have introduced a new ministry of compassion; they live an earth keeper’s ethic (Daneel, Ecotheology, 248).

So also is the Baptist mission of Kenya who, appealing to Romans 8:19-22 has come to wrestle with the ecological crisis of the rapid disappearance of indigenous trees and forests as an opportunity for them to develop a tree planting culture across Kenya; and to bring a Christian perspective to environmental concerns in East Africa (Masika, African Creation Wisdom, 4). In pursuit of their Christian perspective, the Baptist church started the Brackenhurst Environmental Program (BEP). In Masika’s description, BEP’s mission has been to pursue a God-centered response to the environmental crisis in Africa for the glory of God, advances the cause of Christ, and leads to a transformation of the people and the land that sustains them. Their mission is a form of Christ’s—exalting ministry that motivates all kinds of mission agencies to embrace the crisis (Masika, African Creation Wisdom, 5-7).

Additionally, in their 2019 *Pastoral Exhortation of the Symposium of Episcopal conference of Africa and Madagascar* (SECAM), the Bishops took to heart the current ecological challenges facing Africa. They observed that “the ecological crisis is all about the relationship between humans and their natural environment”(SECAM. 2019, no.98). Africans have resorted to exploiting nature for economic and selfish ends, forgetting that nature, like humans is a gift from God, the Creator and sovereign of all creation. Of course, African culture of communal living is consistent with our invitation to rethink the need to harmoniously co-exist with all God’s creatures. The Bishops advised the Church-Family of God in Africa to listen to the suffering voices of ‘our sister, our mother Earth,” since environmental ethic and justice. We must not keep silence over the questions of confiscation of lands, excessive exploitation of the lakes, rivers, gardens, pollution, deforestation and desertification and burning of bushes (SECAM, nos.99-103). There are

many other contributions of African scholars bearing on ecological crisis beyond the scope of this work.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion we have inexhaustibly analyzed and commented broadly on Genesis 1-2 and related texts that contain themes of God's gift of creation and humans, particularly Africans' invitation to care for it. Genesis 1-2 discourages abuse, exploitation, inordinate anthropocentric and instrumentalist domination of nature-biodiversity and environment (1:26-28). While analyzing Genesis 1:26-28, in particular, the paper exhorts humanity ('*ādām*'), including all Africans to continue to harmoniously engage in planet care without inordinate dominion over other creatures (2:15). Although there are some Africans, as pointed out, who make effort towards this direction of responsible and ethical care for the planet, ironically, the current ecological challenges (deforestation, abuse of water resource, extinction of nature, persistent droughts, confiscation of lands, pollution of the air, and declining productivity of agricultural and pastoral lands) orchestrated by humans in Africa and beyond proves that has not been the case. Not enough care has been given to our sister and mother, the Earth.

Those acknowledged efforts of individuals, associations, churches, religious groups and communities made in Africa on the subject of ecology with scriptural emphasize on the relationship between humans and their natural environment included: (a) the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), (b) Association of African Earth-keeping Church (AAEC), (c) African Independent Churches(AIC) in Zimbabwe and Kenya, for instance, the Baptist Church's Brackenhurst Environmental Program (BEP), and (d) the work of the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), also known as the "Kampala Document."

By engaging in such contextual, critical and theological re-reading of Genesis creation theology, we hope to contribute and inspire a rethinking in African religious communities of the need for continuous responsible care for divine creation. It reminds us that the earth is part of our being that we carry within us and which sustains us in daily life and in communion with God and all creatures. Above all by caring for God's creation we bring him glory who in Genesis 1:26-28 created us in his own image and likeness (*bəšalmô bəšelem 'ēlōhîm bārā*). He commissioned and missioned us alongside other biodiverse creatures, to love, care responsibly for one another, especially the poor and the planet, our common home.

References

- Balch, David L. (2012). "Jesus' Creation Theology and Multiethnic Practice." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 39, no. 4 (August 2012): 279–89.
- Blowers, Paul M. (2016). "Beauty, Tragedy and New Creation: Theology and Contemplation in Cappadocian Cosmology." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 1 (January 2016): 7–29.
- Bock, Nelson. (2013). "An Eco-Theology: Toward a Spirituality of Creation and Eco-Justice." *Crosscurrents* 63 (December 2013): 433–46.
- Daneel, M. L. (1994). "African Independent Churches face the Challenge of Environmental Ethics" in D. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*. Maryknoll; Geneva and Orbis: WCC Publications.
- Daneel, M. L. (2000). M.L. DANEEL, "Earth-keeping churches at the African grassroots" in D. Hassel and R. Radford Reuther (eds.), *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-being of Earth and Human*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Edwards, L. Clifton. (2012). "Artful Creation and Aesthetic Rationality: Toward a Creational Theology of Revelatory Beauty." *Theology Today* 69, no. 1 (2012): 56–72.
- Estes Daniel J. (2014). "Creation Theology in Psalm 148." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171 (January-March 2014): 30–41.
- Gabriel, Andrew K. (2009). "Beyond Anthropocentrism in Barth's Doctrine of Creation: Searching for a Theology of Nature." *Religious Studies and Theology* 28, no. 2 (2009): 175–87.
- Gushee, David. (2010). "Environmental Ethics: Bringing Creation Care Down to Earth." In *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective*, edited by Noah J. Toly and Daniel I. Block, 245–65. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.
- Kariatlis, Philip. (2016). "An Examination of the Theological-Ethical Contributions of Archbishop Stylianos (Harkianakia) of Australia to Creation Theology and Environmental Issues." *Phronema* 31, no. 2 (2016): 23–40.
- Keller, Catherine. (2012). "'Be This Fish': A Theology of Creation out of Chaos." *Word & World* 32, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 15–20.
- Marvin, Jonathan. (2017). "Creation and Interpretation: Hermeneutics and the Theology of Creation." *EJT* 26, no. 1 (2017): 43–54.
- Masika, Joseph Kisoi. (2012). "Doing Ecology with African Creation Wisdom." *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 12, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 1–8.
- Moo, Douglas, J. , Jonathan, A. Moo. (2018). *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. Edited by Jonathan Lunde. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Moses, Robert. (2012). "'The Satan' in Light of the Creation Theology of Job." *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34 (2012): 19–34.
- Musana, Paddy. (2018). "The African Concept of Personhood and its Relevance to Respect to Human Life and Dignity in Africa and the Global Context." *African Study Monography* 56 (March 2018): 21–32.
- Myers, Ched. (2014). "From 'Creation Care' to 'Watershed Disciple': Re-Placing Ecological Theology and Practice." *The Conrad Grebel Review* 32, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 250–75.

- Ngolele, Christophere. (2019). "African Wisdom in Dialogue with *Laudato si'*: an Environmental ethics Based on the Paradigm of Recognition and Sacred Care." *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 16, no. 1 (2019): 5–19.
- Novak, Michael. (2012). "'Creation Theology' in Economics Several Catholic Traditions." *ACTA Philosophica* 1, no. 21 (2012): 63–76.
- Okure, Tersa; Luke Ijezie. (2020). "Communiqué Issued by the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN) at the end of its 13th Annual Conference Held through Zoom Cloud, 3rd-5th November.
- Schwanke, Johannes. (2016). "Martin Luther's Theology of Creation." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 4 (2016): 400–13.
- SECAM, *Pastoral Exhortation of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) Kampala Document*, Kampala, 2019
- Sievers, Mira. (2017). "A Study in Qura'nic Theology Tracing the Development of Concept of Creation Based on the Root H-L-Q." *IslamoChristiana* 43 (2017): 43–58.
- Rosner, Brian S. (2017). *Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity*. Edited by Jonathan Lunde. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.
- Takamizawa, Eiko. (2003). "Significance of Creation Theology for Contemporary Mission in Japan." A revised version of the paper presented at the 4th International Conference of Korea Evangelical Theological Society Seoul, Korea.
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok. (2010). *Re-thinking the Day of YHWH and Restoration of Fortunes in the Prophet Zephaniah: An Exegetical and Theological Study of 1:14-18; 3:14-20*. Das Alte Testament im Dialog—an outline of an old testament in dialogue, vol.2. Bern: Peter Lang,
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok. (2013). review of "*I Shall Feed Them with Good Pasture*" (Ezek 34:14): *The Shepherd Motif in Ezekiel 34: Its Theological Import and Socio-political Implications*, by Ignatius M.C. Obinwa, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 3 (2013): 561–63
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok. (2016). Review *The Unity of Male and Female In Jesus Christ: An Exegetical Study of Galatians 3.28c in the Light of Paul's Theology of Promise* by N. Uzuoku, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015 in *Theological Book Review* 27, no. 1 (2016): 227–28.
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok (2017). *Rethinking the Prophetic Critique of Worship in Amos 5 For Contemporary Nigeria and the USA*. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publication.
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok.(2018). *Israel's Prophets and the Prophetic Effect of Pope of Francis: A Pastoral Companion*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok. (2020). *The Limits of a Divided Nation with Perspectives from the Bible*. Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications.
- Udoekpo, Michael Ufok.(2023). "Ecumenical, Ecclesiological and Interreligious Implications of the Prophecy of Zephaniah 1-3." in IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol 9. No.2, www.igwebuikeresearchinstitute.org/igwebuikejournals.php.
- Vander kooi, Cornlis, (2016). "Calvin's Theology of Creation and Providence: God's Care and Human Fragility." *International Journal of SystematicTheology* 18, no. 1 (January 2016): 47–65.
- Weis, Richard D. (2011). "We Are All Connected: Toward A Biblical Theology of Creation." Keynote address at the Spring Convocation, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities.