



Creation Care and Climate Change: A Pauline Perspective on Environmental Stewardship in the Context of Romans 8:19–23

Samuel Sunday Alamu ¹  & Babawale Solomon Taiwo ¹

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

Climate change is a serious threat to ecosystems and communities around the world, especially in vulnerable areas like sub-Saharan Africa. The study examined Pauline theology, particularly Romans 8:19-23, to explore the basis for caring for the environment. Using a qualitative approach, the research combined biblical interpretation with ecological and socio-economic insights to show how human actions link to environmental harm. The findings highlight Paul's portrayal of creation in distress and the need for faith-driven environmental responsibility. The study recommends that the Christian idea of caring for creation aligns with climate action, promoting sustainable practices, engaging in policy discussions, and advocating from a faith perspective. Stressing the ethical and theological duty to safeguard the planet, the article calls for a united global effort that blends scriptural wisdom with scientific and policy solutions. It also offers a stewardship model that inspires active Christian involvement in environmental sustainability and the fight for global climate justice.

Keywords: *Climate Change, Creation Care, Environmental Stewardship, Pauline Perspective, Romans 8:19–23.*

Correspondence

Samuel Sunday Alamu

Email:

ssalamu@unilag.edu.ng

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change stands out as one of the biggest challenges faced in the 21st century, putting both ecosystems and human societies at risk. Its effects—like rising global temperatures and extreme weather—are felt all over the globe, but the impact is especially harsh on the most vulnerable areas. Take Sub-Saharan Africa, for example; it's grappling with serious issues such as drought, desertification, and flooding, all of which worsen food insecurity, force people to relocate, and deepen social inequalities. These environmental upheavals make it clear that there is an urgent need for a comprehensive, global strategy for tackling climate change. Recent research has only amplified the seriousness of these issues, showing that the window for taking effective action is closing fast. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has indicated that to keep global warming to 1.5°C, there is a need to make "immediate and deep emissions reductions" across every sector, highlighting the necessity for transformative changes in society. Additionally, new studies are revealing a connection between environmental degradation and social unrest, with evidence suggesting that climate-related disasters can fuel conflict in already fragile regions. These insights not only

emphasize the critical need for climate mitigation and adaptation but also point to the importance of including a variety of perspectives in efforts to tackle this crisis.

Although the climate conversation is dominated by the scientific, the economic, and the political, this paper argues that the religious, in particular Christian theological, perspective is invaluable. “The ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion,” as Pope Francis states in *Laudato Si’*.¹ Likewise, leaders and traditions in other religious traditions have highlighted the moral imperative to care for creation, which is seen as a divine mandate.²

Faith communities possess not only moral authority but also the ability to inspire grassroots and systemic change, as demonstrated by their involvement in initiatives such as reforestation projects, climate advocacy, and disaster relief efforts. However, the integration of faith-based ethics into climate discussions remains underexplored, particularly within the framework of Pauline theology. Romans 8:19-23 stands as a cornerstone text for understanding the relationship between humanity and creation. In this passage, Paul vividly describes creation as “subjected to futility” and “groaning” in anticipation of redemption.³

Moral authority instills individuals to take action, not to be role models for others, but to motivate grassroots change (drive through local lenses) and systemic changes (driving via macro lenses), which can be seen in the faith-based forests, climate advocacy initiatives, and disaster relief efforts. At the same time, such integration has not been explored much in the field of climate, and even less in the Pauline-theological framework. Now Romans 8:19-23 forms a foundational text of godly anthropo-ecology. In this passage, Paul very vividly describes creation as “subject to futility” and “groaning” as it waits for redemption.⁴ This imagery highlights the shared nature of human sin and environmental degradation even as it gestures toward hope for restoration. As Wright notes, Paul’s theology includes the renewal of all creation, which shows the redemptive arc of God’s plan that includes ecological healing.⁵

This study takes a well-rounded approach by blending insights from theology, environmental science, and socio-economics to tackle the issue of deforestation in Nigeria.

recognizes the ethical issues tied to environmental justice, highlighting the roles that individuals, governments, and religious institutions play in tackling deforestation. This research aims to achieve three main objectives:

1. Analyzing Paul’s perspective on creation care: The article looks into how Paul’s portrayal of creation’s groaning can shed light on modern ecological ethics, stressing the theological duty of stewardship.
2. Exploring its relevance to the climate crisis : The study links Pauline theology to urgent environmental issues, particularly those worsened by socio-economic disparities in vulnerable areas like sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.
3. Providing actionable recommendations for faith communities: The article suggests practical strategies for Christians to actively participate in climate action, ensuring their efforts resonate with both theological values and global sustainability goals.⁶

In connecting the dots between theology and environmental science, this article presents a thought-provoking, faith-driven viewpoint on the climate crisis. It encourages readers from around the world, especially those in Christian communities, to recognize their sacred duty as caretakers of the Earth and to take an active role in the worldwide push for climate justice.

¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).

² Katharine Hayhoe, *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist’s Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World* (New York: Atria/One Signal, 2021).

³ Douglas J. Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013). 153.

⁴ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 154.

⁵ N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018). 274.

⁶ “United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals 13.” n.d.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study dives into ecotheology as its main theoretical framework, blending biblical theology with modern ecological ethics to tackle the climate crisis. At its core, ecotheology is based on the belief that faith and ecology go hand in hand, examining how theological ideas can guide and motivate sustainable practices.⁷ The article shines a light on the Apostle Paul's reflections on creation's groaning, as seen in Romans 8:19-23. Paul doesn't just see creation as a mere backdrop for human actions; he views it as an active participant in the redemptive narrative, yearning for freedom from corruption and decay.⁸ This groaning, as described by Paul, serves as a powerful metaphor for the current environmental challenges Christians face. These challenges, stemming from humanity's overexploitation of natural resources and a lack of respect for ecological balance, echo today's climate issues like global warming, deforestation, and the loss of biodiversity. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, reminds believers that creation is both a gift and a responsibility, and caring for it should be a fundamental part of Christian practice.⁹ He stresses that human actions must show gratitude and respect for creation, pointing out that "every act of cruelty towards any creature is contrary to human dignity."¹⁰

Ecotheology serves as a bridge between the teachings of the Bible and the urgent discussions surrounding global climate issues, connecting scriptural guidance with the principles of ecological justice. By weaving the Pauline theology into this narrative, it highlights how human actions are deeply linked to the health of the environment. This viewpoint encourages readers from around the world to see the ecological crisis not merely as a scientific or political hurdle but as a profound moral and spiritual challenge.¹¹ Engaging with global sustainability goals, like the United Nations' SDG 13,¹² the article places its arguments within a wider international framework. It critiques human-centered perspectives and advocates for a shift towards a stewardship ethic that views creation as a vital part of God's redemptive plan.¹³ In doing so, it resonates with the growing movement of faith-based environmental activism, stressing the importance of collaboration among Christian communities, interfaith groups, and secular organizations to tackle the climate crisis. This theoretical approach positions Pauline theology as a driving force for a strong, faith-driven response to climate change, urging Christians everywhere to take up their divine role as caretakers of creation while actively participating in the global dialogue on environmental sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: A qualitative research design that combines descriptive and analytical methods to delve into the theological and ecological impacts of deforestation was used. The analysis drew on biblical exegesis, theological discussions, and real-world environmental studies.

Data Collection: This study drew on a variety of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles that delve into topics like deforestation, climate change, and environmental degradation. It also incorporated theological literature focused on creation care and biblical environmental ethics. Additionally, reports from both governmental and non-governmental organizations—such as the United Nations Environment Programme and World Bank reports addressing Nigeria's deforestation crisis—were included. Biblical texts, especially Romans 8:19-23, offer valuable theological insights into the concept of environmental stewardship. For its analytical framework, the study utilized textual analysis and thematic categorization. This involved a careful exegesis of Romans 8:19-23 and other pertinent scriptures to grasp the theological viewpoints on environmental stewardship. The study also engaged with scholars like Douglas J. Moo, David G. Horrell, and Pope Francis to explore the

⁷ David G Horrell, "The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology," *Interpretation* 65, no. 4 (2011): 438–39.

⁸ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 152.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. 66.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. 92.

¹¹ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010).57.

¹² United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Climate Change and Africa: Addressing the Challenges* (Nairobi: UNEP, 2020).

¹³ Lynn White Jr, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Western Man and Environmental Ethics*, 1973, 18–30.

connection between faith and environmental responsibility. Lastly, it investigated deforestation trends, socio-economic impacts, and policy responses in Nigeria.

A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Pauline Theology and Creation Care in Romans 8:19–23

In Romans 8:19-23, Paul paints a powerful picture of the suffering that creation endures, using it as a deep theological metaphor that really connects with the environmental issues we face today. He emphasizes that “the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed” (Romans 8:19), highlighting how essential creation is to God’s plan for redemption. This passage describes creation as groaning under the burden of human sin, longing to be freed from its “bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:21). As Moo points out, Paul’s choice of words shows just how deeply human wrongdoing affects the natural world, revealing the strong link between our moral failures and the degradation of the environment.¹⁴

The metaphor of creation’s groaning really resonates when we think about today’s environmental issues. Problems like climate change, deforestation, and pollution reflect the “futility” that creation has been forced to endure (Rom. 8:20). This idea provides a theological perspective to better understand the impacts of climate change. John Anderson points out the connection between Paul’s description of creation’s groaning and the real-life consequences of environmental damage.¹⁵ These crises highlight how human sin is intertwined with ecological harm, emphasizing the moral implications of climate change. Richard Bauckham notes that Paul’s vision goes beyond just saving humanity; it encompasses a cosmic view of salvation that aims to restore all of creation.¹⁶ This theological viewpoint pushes back against human-centered worldviews, encouraging Christians to see themselves as caretakers of God’s creation. Moreover, Paul’s hopeful vision for the liberation of creation (Rom. 8:21) calls for a response that combines repentance with active stewardship. As Bauckham points out, this perspective challenges Christians to shift from merely lamenting the situation to taking meaningful action that tackles the root causes of environmental decline.¹⁷ By getting involved in global sustainability initiatives, like the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, faith communities can bring this redemptive vision to life in tangible ways. Paul’s portrayal of creation’s suffering also highlights the hope for the future that is woven into Christian theology.

According to Moo, the groaning of creation isn’t about despair; it’s more like the anticipation of something new—think of it as labor pains that signal the arrival of a renewed creation.¹⁸ This idea resonates with Pope Francis’s message in *Laudato Si’*, where he points out that the degradation of our environment reflects a deeper spiritual crisis that calls for both ecological and moral action.¹⁹ By placing creation within God’s redemptive plan, Paul encourages believers to see environmental stewardship not just as a moral obligation but as a way to take part in divine restoration. Horrell emphasizes that this viewpoint provides a solid theological basis for tackling ecological issues, aligning with global sustainability efforts while staying true to scriptural teachings.²⁰ This call to action becomes even more pressing when we consider how climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, where environmental decline worsens social inequalities. The Pauline theology in Romans 8:19-23 offers a powerful framework for merging faith with ecological concerns. By recognizing the suffering of creation and connecting it to the hope of redemption, this passage motivates Christians to respond thoughtfully and theologically to the environmental challenges we face today.

¹⁴ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 153.

¹⁵ John Anderson, *Climate Justice and the Gospel: A Call to Action* (New York: Routledge, 2022).49.

¹⁶ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. 65.

¹⁷ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. 65.

¹⁸ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 155.

¹⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*. 61.

²⁰ Horrell, “The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology.” 54.

Humanity's Role in Environmental Degradation

The Bible offers a deep insight into how human sin ties into ecological issues, starting right from the fall in Genesis. In Genesis 3:17-19, the ground is cursed as a direct result of Adam's disobedience, leading to hardship and suffering for humanity, is seen. This curse serves as a powerful reminder of how man's rebellion against God has thrown creation out of balance, setting off a cycle of environmental decline that mankind still faces today. As Moo points out, this passage creates a theological connection between human sin and the futility that creation endures, paving the way for Paul's thoughts in Romans 8:20-21.²¹ Nowadays, socio-economic activities have only worsened this ecological imbalance, often fueled by the unsustainable use of natural resources. Salawu emphasizes the detrimental effects of deforestation, industrialization, and urbanization, which not only damage ecosystems but also exacerbate social inequalities, especially in vulnerable areas like sub-Saharan Africa.²² These actions frequently put economic growth ahead of environmental health, showcasing humanity's ongoing neglect of the divine call to care for creation responsibly, as stated in Genesis 1:28.

Paul's take on creation's "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:21) offers a powerful theological critique of how we exploit the world around us. This bondage, stemming from human sin, isn't just a metaphor for feeling spiritually disconnected; it's a real issue that can be seen in things like climate change, loss of biodiversity, and soil degradation. Horrell points out that Paul's imagery of creation groaning under its weight reflects the very real consequences of how humans have mishandled the earth, highlighting the moral duty to tackle these problems.²³ Theologically, Paul pushes back against anthropocentric views that treat creation as just a resource for human benefit. Bauckham critiques this way of thinking, arguing that it overlooks the inherent value of creation as part of God's beautiful design.²⁴ This kind of exploitation throws off the balance that was meant to exist in the divine order, where humanity was meant to exercise dominion through care and stewardship, not through exploitation (Gen. 2:15). Unfortunately, this mismanagement has led to serious ecological crises, like deforestation, water pollution, and the depletion of non-renewable resources. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, echoes this critique, calling the reckless exploitation of our planet a "sin against creation."²⁵ He emphasizes that man's self-centered approach has resulted in the "cry of the earth" and the "cry of the poor," urging the shift towards a more sustainable and compassionate relationship with the environment.²⁶ This viewpoint aligns closely with Paul's message, which connects man's moral responsibilities to the health of the planet.

A closer look at how modern climate science backs up these theological insights. It shows that things like deforestation, industrial emissions, and other human activities are major players in global warming and ecological instability. Salawu highlights that these environmental issues hit the most vulnerable populations the hardest, deepening global inequalities and trapping people in cycles of poverty.²⁷ This reality really drives home the urgent need for an ethic of care that puts environmental justice on the same level as economic development. The Pauline theology, especially in Romans 8:19-23, encourages believers to think about the ecological impact of their actions. Moo points out that Paul's vision of a liberated creation serves as a powerful reminder of man's responsibility to join in God's redemptive work, helping to restore balance to the natural world.²⁸ This call goes beyond just individual actions; it's about collective efforts within faith communities, focusing on sustainable practices and advocating for environmental policies that resonate with biblical values. By connecting creation's struggles to human sin, the Bible offers a deep critique of how humanity has exploited nature. When Christians embrace their role as caretakers of creation, they're not just tackling the

²¹ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 154.

²² Beshiru Salawu, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies," *European Journal of Social Sciences* 13, no. 3 (2010): 348.

²³ Horrell, "The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology."40.

²⁴ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*.63.

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. 67.

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. 49.

²⁷ Salawu, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies." 348.

²⁸ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 156.

immediate environmental crisis; they're also embodying the hope of redemption that Paul envisions for all of creation.

Manifestations of Climate Change in Vulnerable Regions

The effects of climate change are painfully clear in vulnerable areas like Nigeria and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where environmental decline meets socio-economic struggles. Take Nigeria, for example; it showcases the real-life consequences of deforestation, desertification, and flooding—signs of a larger ecological crisis that echoes Paul's description of creation being subjected to futility (Romans). John Anderson, in his book "Climate Justice and the Gospel: A Call to Action," argues that these issues go beyond just environmental concerns; they are also moral and theological crises, highlighting humanity's failure to take care of the world we live in.²⁹

Deforestation

Nigeria is facing a staggering annual loss of forest cover, with estimates of around 350,000 hectares disappearing each year.³⁰ This alarming trend is mainly fueled by agricultural expansion, logging, and urban development. As a result, Nigeria finds itself among the countries with the highest deforestation rates in the world. The impacts of this deforestation are deep and varied. For one, the loss of forests leads to a significant decline in biodiversity, as countless plant and animal species lose their homes. Moreover, cutting down trees speeds up soil erosion, which in turn reduces soil fertility and negatively affects farming productivity. Another serious consequence is the disruption of local water cycles since forests are crucial for maintaining a healthy hydrological balance. These environmental issues can be seen as a reflection of creation's "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:21), highlighting how human actions contribute to the degradation of our planet's resources. Theologian Douglas J. Moo points out that deforestation is a clear example of humanity's exploitation of creation, illustrating the futility that comes with sin.³¹ The Sahel region, which includes northern Nigeria, is particularly struggling with severe desertification, driven by overgrazing, deforestation, and the impacts of climate change.³² The Sahara Desert's expansion is causing serious issues like reduced agricultural output, community displacement, and heightened resource conflicts. This situation is reminiscent of the biblical imagery of creation suffering under the weight of human actions. Scholar David G. Horrell points out that these environmental crises highlight the pressing need for restorative measures, rooted in the understanding that creation holds inherent value.³³ In Nigeria, recurring floods, worsened by rising sea levels and extreme weather, have displaced millions and wreaked havoc on infrastructure. Just in 2022, over 2.8 million people were affected by flooding, leading to devastating losses in both lives and property.³⁴ These floods serve as a stark reminder of the damage creation has endured, as poor management of natural resources—like wetland destruction and inadequate urban planning—exacerbates climate-related risks. Pope Francis emphasizes that these crises reflect humanity's neglect of ecological balance, urging a shift towards more sustainable practices.³⁵

Christian Response to Climate Change

Christians have a unique opportunity to tackle climate change by adopting a theology of environmental stewardship that's deeply rooted in the dominion mandate found in Genesis 1:28. This scripture encourages humanity to "fill the earth and subdue it" and to "have dominion" over all creation. Unfortunately, this mandate has often been twisted to justify exploitation. However, when mankind embraces a more restorative view of dominion, it shifts the focus to caring for, preserving, and nurturing creation instead of abusing it. As Osioma points out in his paper presented at the

²⁹ Anderson, *Climate Justice and the Gospel: A Call to Action*. 42.

³⁰ Anderson, *Climate Justice and the Gospel: A Call to Action*. 45.

³¹ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 97.

³² Salawu, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies."348.

³³ Horrell, "The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology."112.

³⁴ Kennedy Kaumba Mabuku, "Assessing the Impact of Floods on Food Security in the Zambezi Region: A Case Study of the Ikaba Area" (University of Namibia, 2022).

³⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. 89.

Conference of Chancellors, Registrars, and Legal Officers, ethical accountability means that Christians must balance their authority over nature with a genuine commitment to sustainability, viewing creation as a sacred trust.³⁶

Sustainable Practices

Embracing sustainable practices really resonates with the biblical idea of stewardship, which emphasizes the responsible management of the planet's resources. Faith communities have a vital role to play in championing environmental sustainability by: Encouraging the use of renewable energy: Making the switch to renewable energy sources like solar and wind power helps us cut down on fossil fuel dependence and tackle the effects of climate change. This transition shows the dedication to protecting creation for the generations to come.³⁷ Sustainable agriculture: Techniques such as crop rotation, organic farming, and agroforestry not only help maintain soil health but also embody a restorative approach to how to use land. As Horrell points out, these practices align with the biblical vision of flourishing creation and help address food insecurity worsened by environmental damage.³⁸ Waste reduction and recycling: Cutting down on waste and promoting recycling within church communities and beyond is a tangible way to respond to the ethical responsibility highlighted by Osioma.³⁹ These efforts not only show care for the environment but also help ease the burden on ecosystems that are already struggling under human exploitation (Rom. 8:22).

Advocacy for Environmental Justice

When it comes to caring for the planet, Christians are not just encouraged to engage in personal and community efforts; they are also called to champion environmental justice on a larger scale. This means stepping up to work with policymakers, businesses, and international organizations to make sure ecological issues are front and center in their agendas. Pope Francis highlights this moral duty, urging Christians to raise their voices against environmental injustices that hit the poor and marginalized the hardest.⁴⁰

Faith communities can take several impactful steps

Support environmental policies: Christians can back and advocate for laws that promote conservation, cut down on greenhouse gas emissions, and safeguard biodiversity. By joining forces with global initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, faith-based groups can play a significant role in driving real environmental change.

Educate and mobilize: Churches can become hubs for environmental education, helping their members understand climate change and inspiring them to get involved in sustainable practices. As Richard Bauckham points out, an awareness of environmental issues grounded in biblical teachings can deepen commitment to caring for creation.⁴¹ Interfaith collaboration is all about teaming up with different faith traditions and secular groups to really boost the impact of advocacy efforts. Projects that tackle issues like deforestation, desertification, and flooding show how all people share the responsibility of caring for the planet.⁴²

A Restorative Approach to Nature

A restorative approach to nature is rooted in the belief that creation has intrinsic value and plays a crucial role in God's plan for redemption. This perspective encourages mankind to care for the

³⁶ B. C. Osioma, "Accountability in the Church," in *Paper Presented at the Conference of Chancellors, Registrars, and Legal Officers, Church of Nigeria, Basilica of Grace, Diocese of Abuja* (Gudu District, Apo, Abuja, 2013). 5.

³⁷ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 167.

³⁸ Horrell, "The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology." 51.

³⁹ Osioma, "Accountability in the Church." 5.

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. 72.

⁴¹ Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. 77.

⁴² Anderson, *Climate Justice and the Gospel: A Call to Action*. 88.

environment, seeing it as more than just a resource for its use; it's a key part of God's relationship with the world.

Moo, in "Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World," points out that the Apostle Paul's vision of creation's liberation in Romans 8:21 provides a deep theological basis for environmental restoration.⁴³ He explains that Paul's image of a creation that's groaning for redemption isn't just about the end times; it's also a call for Christians to engage in God's ongoing work to heal the environment. Moo argues that this involvement weaves environmental care into the fabric of Christian discipleship, making restoration a vital expression of faith. From an African viewpoint, Benedict C. Osisioma emphasizes the ethical responsibility that comes with being a Christian steward. He describes Christians as "trustees of creation," responsible for ensuring that their actions align with God's intentions for the earth.⁴⁴ This role, he further argues, means that churches should weave environmental care into their spiritual missions, holding believers accountable to both their faith and their responsibilities to society.

There is a need to take a closer look at the valuable contributions of African theologians like Emmanuel Katongole and Celestine Musekura, who delve into the important connections between environmental care, theology, and justice. Katongole, in particular, shines a light on the historical exploitation of African ecosystems, a legacy of colonialism and global capitalism. He advocates for a theology of restoration that is firmly rooted in justice, viewing environmental restoration as a healing process that aligns with the biblical idea of shalom, which embodies peace and wholeness. He emphasizes that restoring creation is intricately linked to restoring human dignity and addressing past injustices.⁴⁵ Nigerian scholar Nimi Wariboko builds on this conversation by pushing for the inclusion of African traditional ecological wisdom within Christian ecological practices. He points out the harmony between indigenous African worldviews, which highlight the interconnectedness of all life, and biblical stewardship principles.⁴⁶ Wariboko believes that by reclaiming and adapting these indigenous practices, African Christians can tackle modern environmental challenges more effectively while staying true to their theological roots. This restorative approach, which blends theological insights with cultural wisdom, calls for actionable steps to confront the global environmental crisis. By adopting sustainable practices, advocating for ecological justice, and pushing for policy changes, Christians can fulfill God's call to stewardship and play a part in healing creation. These efforts embody a comprehensive understanding of the dominion mandate, merging theological beliefs with real-world responses to the urgent issues posed by climate change. This fusion of faith and action resonates deeply with the African perspective, which sees caring for the earth as a sacred duty, a divine gift, and an expression of worship.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on how the idea of creation care is deeply embedded in biblical theology, particularly through Romans 8:19-23, which serves as a key reference point for understanding our role in environmental stewardship. The analysis points out that Paul's message in this passage offers a hopeful vision for the restoration of creation, highlighting our responsibility to combat environmental harm. This perspective aligns with earlier scholarly views that see creation care as a vital part of Christian ethics and eschatology. When a comparison of this study is done with existing literature, a shared understanding is noticed, especially regarding the human-driven environmental crises and the theological call for stewardship. Scholars like Bauckham and Moo & Moo have also stressed the importance of biblical theology in tackling ecological issues. However, this study takes it a step further by applying Pauline theology to the pressing challenges of climate change today, effectively linking scriptural interpretation with real-world environmental action. Additionally, the study points out specific hurdles to creation care in Nigeria, such as deforestation, pollution, and a

⁴³ Moo, *Creation Care: A Biblical Theology of the Natural World*. 170.

⁴⁴ Osisioma, "Accountability in the Church." 10.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011). 114-115.

⁴⁶ Nimi Wariboko, *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion: A Pentecostal Social Ethics of Cosmopolitan Urban Life* (Springer, 2014). 162.

lack of government action. It emphasizes the urgent need for faith-based environmental initiatives, a viewpoint that is backed by previous research on how religious groups contribute to sustainable development. Data from church-led environmental programs further support the idea that faith communities are crucial in fostering ecological conservation.

The findings of this study carry important implications for both theological scholarship and modern environmental practices. Building on existing literature, it strengthens the idea that biblical theology calls for active environmental stewardship. The insights from the Pauline perspective, particularly in Romans 8:19-23, add depth to the ongoing theological conversation about humanity's role in tackling ecological decline. This perspective aligns with earlier works that view eschatological themes as a prompt for action rather than a passive waiting game.⁴⁷ In today's context, the study emphasizes the pressing need for faith-based organizations to step up their environmental advocacy efforts. The results resonate with current ecological movements that highlight the connection between faith and sustainability. Churches and Christian organizations have a unique opportunity to cultivate a culture of environmental responsibility through theological education, community involvement, and policy advocacy. This aligns with Wilkinson's findings, which suggest that religious institutions have the moral authority to shape ecological policies.⁴⁸ Moreover, the study's focus on Nigeria offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for implementing creation care initiatives. While many previous studies have centered on Western viewpoints regarding ecological theology, this research enriches the conversation by introducing a Global South perspective. The findings indicate that addressing climate change in this context necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes theological education, policy reform, and community-led initiatives.

Discussion Summary

In summary, the study discussion highlights the importance of Pauline theology in today's environmental discussions and calls for a renewed dedication to creation care within faith communities. By merging biblical interpretation with practical environmental strategies, stakeholders can adopt a well-rounded approach to combating climate change. The insights gained from theology, must lead to real, actionable solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Faith-based advocacy: Churches have a unique opportunity to weave environmental ethics into their teachings, sermons, and community projects. By highlighting creation care as a form of worship, they can nurture a culture of ecological awareness and responsibility among their congregations.

Policy engagement: Faith communities need to step up and advocate for policies that champion ecological justice. This means pushing for laws that protect our natural resources, cut down on carbon emissions, and ensure that marginalized communities receive fair environmental benefits. **Sustainable practices:** Both individuals and organizations should embrace eco-friendly habits like recycling, conserving energy, and planting trees. Local churches can set a great example by adopting practices such as using solar energy and managing water sustainably.

Education and awareness campaigns: Investing in educational programs focused on environmental stewardship within Christian settings can spark a lasting commitment to sustainable practices. Workshops, seminars, and initiatives aimed at youth can equip believers with the knowledge and tools they need to make a real difference in climate action. **Global networking:** Forming partnerships between faith-based organizations and secular environmental groups allows for resource sharing and the execution of large-scale climate solutions. This collaboration fosters mutual learning and enhances the effectiveness of climate action efforts. Additionally, tackling climate change in vulnerable regions like Nigeria calls for specific, localized strategies, such as the following: Reforestation initiatives:

⁴⁷ David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁴⁸ Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Taking the lead in restoring degraded landscapes through tree planting and sustainable land management practices.

Sustainable agriculture: Let's promote climate-smart farming techniques that not only fight desertification but also boost food security for everyone.

Flood management: We need to set up early warning systems and improve urban planning to lessen the effects of flooding.

Advocacy and education: It's crucial to empower religious leaders to motivate both grassroots movements and policy changes by sharing theological insights on caring for our environment. By embracing Paul's vision of liberating creation, Christians can play an active role in God's plan for redemption, providing a hopeful response to the urgent challenge of climate change. This comprehensive approach blends spiritual commitment with real-world action, paving the way for a sustainable and equitable future for all.

CONCLUSION

The Pauline theology provides a powerful lens through which we can tackle climate change and encourage environmental stewardship. Romans 8:19-23 paints a vivid picture of creation yearning for freedom, reminding Christians that the well-being of the natural world is closely linked to the spiritual and ethical duties of mankind. This theological viewpoint reinterprets the dominion mandate found in Genesis 1:28, shifting the emphasis from exploitation to stewardship—a call to harmonize the use of creation with its preservation and thriving. Paul's vision emphasizes how humanity's redemption is tied to the restoration of creation, framing environmental issues like deforestation, desertification, and flooding as signs of creation's struggle against decay. These problems are especially pressing in vulnerable areas like Nigeria, highlighting the urgent need for restorative practices that align man's actions with God's redemptive plan. These challenges require a fundamental change in how to interact with nature, moving from exploitation to care and respect. In Pauline theology, caring for creation is at the heart of the Christian faith, urging believers to weave ecological responsibility into their spiritual journeys. Confronting climate change is not just a moral obligation; it's a theological calling rooted in the biblical story of redemption and restoration. By embracing this vision, Christians can embody God's love for creation and play a meaningful role in global efforts toward sustainability and justice.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Samuel Sunday Alamu, PhD is a Lecturer (Biblical Studies-New Testament), in the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria. He is also a Postgraduate facilitator at ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja, Kwara State, Nigeria. His area of research focuses on New Testament Christianity, Contextual Theology.

Babawale Solomon Taiwo, PhD is an Associate Professor (Biblical Studies-Old Testament) in the Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State, Nigeria. His research focuses on Religion and Environmental Issues, Old Testament Laws, African Theology.