

Rereading Romans 8:18-23: The Subjection of Creation to Frustration in the Context of the Mandate in Genesis 1:28 & 2:15

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Abstract

Original Research Article

Romans 8:18-23 presents a matrix of vertical and ethical dualism theology that underscores a paradoxical upheaval from the Genesis creation narrative. Here the cosmos created good by God and handed over to man suddenly becomes subjected to frustration (Rom 8:20) because of the fall. The aftermath from humanity's mismanagement and destruction of the universe, creates a dissonance between God's original plan for man and the universe. The study underpins creation's desire for freedom from the attendant decay and hopes in redemption from The Creator, while emphasising cosmic scope of salvation. It explores the significance of creation's subjection to frustration, its implications for the eco-theology and the hope of the restoration of the cosmos. The methodology adopted for the study is canonical criticism and narrative exegesis of the text. Findings reveal that the mandate given to man to "subdue" the earth (Gen 1:28), "work" and to "take care" of the earth (Gen 2:15), has been misunderstood, abused, and misused resulting to the destruction of the ecology. The paper recommends that man should begin the process of restoring the destroyed universe that was beautifully designed and created by the benevolent God before the final restoration from the Creator at the Parousia. The study suggests a rereading and the right exegesis of the Hebrew words שָׁבַד "to subdue" and רָדָה "to have dominion" in Genesis 1:28; and the Hebrew words עָבַד "to tend" and מָרַץ "to keep" in Gen 2:15 so as to align with God's original intent in order to begin the process of redeeming the universe from the destruction of the ecology, while looking forward for the eschatological redemption of the cosmos at the Parousia.

Keywords: Creation, Ecology, Cultural Mandate, Frustration, Vertical Dualism, Ethical Dualism.

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Introduction:

Paul in this narrative makes a profound argument where he highlights the nexus between human existence and the physical world. He does this by bringing to the fore the effect of man's rebellion against God on the erstwhile created good world, beginning from Adamic sin to present sinful nature of man, and the hope for holistic redemption. The

study leverages on the cosmic scope of salvation and the interconnectedness of humanity to the created elements of the universe. It explores the subjection of creation to frustration, weighing in on its implications to humanity and the universe and the promised hope that redemption brings to bear.

It is imperative to observe that varying forms of frustrations suffered by the ecosystem such as water



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pollution, air pollution, land and forest degradation etc. all have damaging consequences on the universe. The attendant global warming caused by rising temperature and unfriendly extreme weather whose impact is felt on flora, fauna and humanity is a case in point. Today, Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular is contending with climatic quagmire such as drought, desertification, and flooding arising from the abuse and the destruction of the ecosystem. In Nigeria the drought witnessed in the far Northern states of the country has birthed the take-over by sand dunes of the erstwhile arable lands. The in-arability of the land in this region has resulted in forced migration to the country's central and southern states for greener pastures by herders, thus there is incessant farmer herder clashes over farmlands for grazing and outright land grabbing by the herders. This worsens food insecurity as farmers no longer are able to access their farms thus destroying the socio-economic conditions of the people. This study is of paramount significance in appreciating the benevolence of the all loving God, who created the world and declared it good, handed it over to man to work it and take care of it, only for man to unleash his malevolence by the destruction of the universe.

In order to present his argument, Paul cleverly navigates the realms of vertical dualism theology where he contrasts the world above and the world below, and ethical dualism theology as he contrasts the divine and humanistic realm. Paul underscores the import of living in the realm of the spirit as living in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:5-9). It is only by observing the precepts, commands and injunctions of God and by keeping to the demands of the cultural mandate that humanity can begin the process of the redemption of the frustrated and battered universe waiting in hope for the total redemption of the universe by the Lord Jesus.

Conceptual Framework

Cultural Mandate

The work underscores the significance of the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28, 31, and Gen 2:15 wherein

God charged Adam to be faithful and to multiply by populating the earth, subduing the earth, exercising dominion over the earth, working and taking care of the earth by extending God's rule through responsible and accountable stewardship. The concept of cultural mandate stands on the tripod of a. *Imago Dei*: that man is created in the image of God. b. Stewardship; the care for the created world, not exploitation nor destruction and c. Cultural development; through the extension of God's rule through work, creativity, and cultural breeding.

Vertical Dualism

Vertical dualism theology is a concept that contrasts the world above from the world below; the spiritual realm from the physical world; the abode of God from the earth, body, material world. It argues that while heaven and its goodness are spiritual and perfect, the physical world is imperfect and corrupt.

Ethical Dualism

Ethical dualism theology sees the world from the prism of a struggle between two opposing forces; good and evil; light and darkness, God and Satan. The major standpoints of ethical dualism are: a. Opposing forces which see the world as battleground between good and evil. b. Moral framework which influences how people perceive morality, choices and responsibility. Both vertical and ethical dualism theologies are well captured by Jesus in Matthew 12:25-30 contrasting the kingdom of God from the kingdom of Satan, and in Jesus teaching to the Jews in John where he declares *ὁμις ἐκ τῶν κάτω ἐστέ, ἐγὼ ἐκ τῶν ἄνω εἰμί*, you are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world, (Joh 8:23).

Ecological Theology

This seeks to explore the nexus between God, man and environment. It attempts to project man's stewardship and care of the created world, protecting the ecosystem for the benefit of humanity, (Gen 2:15, Ps 24:1; Rom 8:19-23).

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the theory of Covenantal theology. A covenant is an unchangeable divinely imposed legal agreement between God and humanity that stipulates the conditions of their relationship (Grudem 515). At its core, Covenantal theology is a framework that seeks to fully grasp God's relationship with man through the instrumentality of covenants, i.e. divine agreements with conditions, promises and signs where God divinely imposes the legal terms of the agreement and man accepts the terms without negotiation. Covenants with God and humanity began with Adam's implicit covenant in Genesis 1:8-30; 2:1-17). There, even though, the term covenant is not explicitly laid out, however, there is an implied covenant to be observed here. The conditions necessary for the satisfaction of covenant are available in the Adamic case. These include the participation of two parties, conditions for the covenant, a promise, rewards and or punishment for observance or the disobedience of the covenant. Other covenants include the Noahic covenant in Gen 9; Abrahamic Covenant in Gen 12,15,17; Mosaic covenant in Exo 19-24; Davidic covenant in 2Sam 7 and the New covenant in Jer 31:31-34, (Berkhoff 13). Aside the Adamic covenant, all the other covenants have 'signs' of the covenant.

Canonical Analysis of Romans 8:19-23

The attempt here is to analyse the place of the text within the broader biblical text. The Bible is replete with narratives about the creation of the universe. Beginning from the Genesis account where the Triune God is involved in the orderly process of creation, this process navigates through the scriptures to Revelation. The creation account begins where God the Father, (Gen 1:1), the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2), and the Son; the speaking Logos, (Gen 1:3) all participate in this creative business on the first five days of creation. On the sixth day, God the Father affirmed the fact that the act of creation was not unilaterally done by any one Godhead, but was a joint effort when he said "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness (Gen 1:26). The phrase "let us" itself being an imperfect cohortative force suggests the unity of the trinity and love for humanity

for whom creation was being made for. Thus on the sixth day of creation, God enjoined the other two co-creators with the words "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness (Gen 1:26).

Many thousand years later, the Psalmist was categorical in affirming that the foundation of the universe was laid by God, such that it could never be moved, (Psa 104:5). Solomon the wisest and wealthiest man of his time made prophetic declarations of the Lord Jesus concerning his credentials in the creation account, (Pro 8:22-29). Prophet Isaiah echoed that God laid the foundations of the earth (51:13, 16), and concludes that at the eschatology, God will create new heavens and a new earth, (Isa 65:17). But more powerful perhaps are the words of Job. After God's lengthy discourse with Job (chapters 38 to 41), in which He clearly established the grandeur of His creation, Job replied very humbly; I heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you in your creation." (Job 42:5-6).

While it may be argued by some scholars that the New Testament corpus does not capture the creation narratives of the universe, it is important to observe that it is the continuity with the Old Testament, where God's eternal and universal rule is expressed unquestionably in the creation of the universe, (Rom 11:36, Col 1:17). In both Testaments, one sees God's continuing order of the physical and heavenly worlds anchored on God's rule. It is instructive to note that several thousand years later, the apostle John in his gospel narrative wrote not only to testify, but to affirm concerning the Genesis creation account saying, ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.... πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν; all things through him came into being; and nothing came into being without Him and that nothing was made that has been made (Joh 1:1-3). Unarguably, John cleared the contention about the created objects by the Logos. John's position is shared by Paul who wrote in his First letter to the Colossians to affirm that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth...., (Col 1:15-17). Thus Jesus is not only the creator and sustainer of all things, but He is also a redeemer. For in Him

all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God was pleased to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:19-20).

The words of the apostle Paul and other founding fathers of the early Christian church clearly identify God's works of creation as a source of understanding and inspiration. The writer of Hebrews declared that one does not need the scientific empirical evidence to know who created the universe, (Heb 11:3). Hebrews' analysis of creation is abundantly very unambiguous as to who created the universe, and therefore one does not need to call for scientific evidence for the hypostatic creation account. John the evangelist graphically presents the picture of the two worlds, i.e. the world above and the world below, in what Ladd refers to vertical dualism (259-272). Evidently, while the world above is good, the world below even though, at creation was good, has now been corrupted since the fall as is full of evil in need of redemption.

The Mandate

The Hebrew verb 'kavash' subdue and 'radah' rule (Gen 1:28)

This is a historical background to the preparation of the covenant in which man is issued instructions with explicit explanations for his purpose and the provisions God made for him. The narrative here is anchored on the covenant with man in Genesis 1:28-30. God made man in his image after their likeness, the plan was for man to produce children to populate the earth and assist in taking care of the universe in the place of God for his own benefits, (Gen 1:26). Herein lies God's cultural mandate to humanity concerning his creation. The mandate also included; subduing and having dominion over all the earth, and their creatures. It is instructive that God began by blessing them (Adan and Eve) way'ba'rek 'otam .tnanevoc eht fo smret eht tuo gnihsid erofeb mihole' It is therefore illogical for God to bless them in one breath only to instruct them to destroy his beautiful creation which he had taken time to put together.

These Hebrew terms subdue קָבַשׁ *kavash* and

dominion רָדָה *radah* in the mandate in Genesis 1:28 have been literally deconstructed and misinterpreted by scholars, exegists, theologians and biblical students to mean what the God did not imply. They ought to be read together with the two verbs in Genesis 2:15; "work" עָבַד *avad* and "protect" שָׁמַר *shamar*, for a better understanding of the text in agreement with Genesis 1:28.

Firstly, the verb קָבַשׁ *kavash* 'subdue' has been literally interpreted negatively to mean; "to bring into bondage," "to tread down." Brown, Driver and Briggs posit that the Hebrew verb *radah* means to "have dominion," "rule," "dominate," to chastise, trample down, to tread, to reign and to supervise, (Strong 7287: 2014: 4774). Other interpretations include "to subjugate," "to violate." However, it is to be noted that the context of this divine imperative takes place before the fall. It must be appreciated that this imperative is not about violent conquest of a hostile earth. The mandate here is about bringing order, cultivating the earth, and harnessing the earth's potential for the benefit of man. The verb קָבַשׁ *kavash* must be read in conjunction with the imperative in Gen 2:15, where man is to "work" and "protect" the earth, and not to exploit it. These words "work" and "protect" are rather suggestive of gardening by a farmer and priestly functions in an ambassadorial capacity given to man as a steward and not to be understood in exploitative tendencies. Thus, God fulfilled all his responsibilities when he made full provisions for man. Man's responsibility demands that he keeps watch over God's creation for his benefit.

The Hebrew verb 'avad' work and 'shamar' protect (Gen 2:15)

The Imperatives in Gen 2:15 are very clear; "to work" עָבַד *avad* and "to protect" שָׁמַר *shamar*. The term *avad* means to serve, work, till, cultivate. This is used as in farming the ground (Gen 3:24), serving a king (Gen 39:4) and the priestly service in the tabernacle (Num 3:7-8) which also implies worship. The implication from the foregoing is that Man is to act in the capacity of a gardener who plants, prunes, irrigates and not to work as a slave. The imperative

“to keep it” :וּלְשׁמְרָהּ (Gen 2:15) presupposes to watch over, to preserve, protect, observe. The verb is originally situated within the context of priests guarding the sanctuary (Num 1:53), the cherubim guarding the garden of Eden after the fall (Gen 3:24), man keeping the covenant (Gen 17:9) and God keeping his people (Num 6:24). Thus the original intent and meanings of all these verbs under study do not in any way suggest that God either covertly or overtly giving imperatives for destruction of the earth’s ecosystem. God cannot contradict himself. For God cannot and would not subjugate, trample down, chastise or violate his beautiful creation that he put together himself for the benefit of man. You cannot destroy and at the same time protect. You only protect what is desirable, valuable and beneficial.

Secondly, the verb “dominion” *radah* literally means to “to rule,” “to govern,” “to manage.” The verb dominion is not to be twisted to mean domination. In ancient Near East, kings had dominion on their subjects. However, Biblical kings were often judged by the manner which they governed the people, most especially the poor. Good dominion meant care for the vulnerable, protection for the poor and justice for the weak. At other times some kings exhibited wicked dominion such as oppressing the weak (Ezek 34:4). As God’s representatives on earth, humans are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and are given dominion (Gen 1:28) to govern the earth as God governs with care, loves his creation and conduct his affairs with order. So in Gen 1:26, 28) הָרָדָה *radah*, given by God himself to man was to drive the management process of the ecosystem established by God. Man was to assume the role of stewardship using his power as steward over creation (Oxford 1997: 434). This power did not in any way presuppose to chastise, trample and to tread upon the ecology of the universe. Neither was it a license to exploit the earth. Man is to serve as a servant kingship with the authority to flourish the earth and not to wreck it. For God did not take six days to create the world which he declared to be very good only to hand it over for destruction. That would amount to God contradicting himself.

Eco Theological Analysis of Romans 8:18-23

God in his Creative work of the universe declared it as very good (Gen 1:31); however, not long after creation, man’s rebellion against God cursed the ground and the whole of creation (Gen 3:17) and thus God’s good creation is today under the heavy yoke of groaning. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, Christians are excruciatingly groaning because of persecutions. There is suffering owing to Christian persecutions and massive deaths just everywhere as noticed with wars in Russia against Ukraine, USA and Israel with Iran, Fulani ethnic jihadists fighting to overthrow the Nigerian government and install their brand of radical Islam, DRC, Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR) and just everywhere. The economies of most countries of the world have crashed, all of these is the result of Adam's sin and not the fault of creation. However, at the Parousia when Christ finally defeats Satan, He will deliver the entire creation from this bondage, and all nature will enjoy with us "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (v. 21). Wiersbe's(1992).

Present Sufferings vs Future Glory: v18

Paul begins the pericope by reckoning that the sufferings of the present age are not to be compared to the future glory, He said: λογίζομαι γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξια τὰ παθήματα τοῦ νῦν καιροῦ πρὸς τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς (Rom 8:18). Observe Paul’s usage of these two nouns, sufferings and glory; παθήματα and δόξα are oxymoron, i.e. as they stand in opposition to each other. Paul’s use of the noun ‘sufferings’ depicts Christians who were going through the persecution, hardship, anguish and pain in the Greco-Roman world as they lack freedom and comfort and thus were in perpetual state of agony. In contrast, Paul uses the noun ‘glory’ which signifies the manifestation of the presence of God in believers’ lives, as he praises and honors God for being a part of his kingdom. Paul gives them the assurance that no matter how great the sufferings of the present time, they are not worthy to be compared with the glory God will reveal to them at the end. One could immediately notice Paul’s engagement with his theology of vertical dualism *didache* here; namely,

while there is suffering on the world below at the present, the world above is a kingdom of glory for the Christian who perseveres the persecution here on earth. Paul's use of the nominative neuter adjective plural οὐκ ἄξια; meaning 'not comparable,' 'not worthy of,' highlights the incomparable nature of the state of "sufferings" to the "glorious" state that longsuffering Christians will attain at the eschatology. Paul affirms that no matter what magnitude of sufferings believers go through, they ought to hold on firmly as the momentous sufferings are not in any way to be compared to the with the glory that will be revealed to believers. Paul uses the adverb παραυτίκα; but for the moment to qualify the adjective ἐλαφρόν; not burdensome, easy, in order to describe the persecution τῆς θλίψεω that believers undergo (2Cor 4:17). It is to be noted that the present sufferings are only going to last for a time and these serve as preparing for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Paul asserts that the glory which is to be revealed to us; δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς, is sure to come, (Rom 8:18). Blomberg observes that compared to eternity of perfect bliss even the worst and most prolonged human calamity pales into insignificance (217). John the evangelist affirms the glory believers will behold at the eschatology. Referring to the New Jerusalem, he said "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp, (Rev 21:22-23; 22:5). The future glory is eternal life spent with Christ in the New Jerusalem, (Carson et al 1140). Paul urges believers not to allow trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword to separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35). The apostle uses heavy metaphors to describe the gloomy picture of creation as follows: suffering (Rom 8:18), frustration ματαιότητι (Rom 8:20), bondage (Rom 8:21), decay (Rom 8:21), and pain (Rom 8:22). He assures that this groaning will not last forever and it is neither worthless as Paul admonishes Christians to fix our minds on the world above whose imperishable state is not to be compared with the world below with perishable materials. Horrell asserts that imageries of creation been subjected to frustration and groaning

are as the result of humanity's wicked acts of abusing, misusing, and degrading the cosmos (40).

Vs 19 Creation eagerly waits for revelation of God's Children

Paul here presents graphic imageries of the fact that the whole creation is eagerly and intensively anticipating with bated breath, the revelation of the children of God; τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεκδέχεται. The noun ἀποκαταδοκία translated as earnest expectation is a compound noun taken from the preposition ἀπο from; κατα head δοκεω (in the sense of watching, intense anticipation). This explains the fact that creation itself is seriously on purpose eagerly awaiting ἀπεκδέχεται the revelation of the children of God. The verb ἀπεκδέχεται is present middle indicative passive as the revelation is to be undertaken by the Creator himself and the creation. This suggests one eagerly waiting with outstretched head, a straining forward in anticipation for the revelation of the children of God to take place. Creation here could be perceived as both animate and inanimate in sync with the human race. It is of course the human race, that is, Christians who are eagerly waiting for the ἀποκάλυψιν τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom 8:19). Moo opines that Paul's choice of words in verse 19 depicts the depth of human sin and its impact on the cosmos. This inadvertently underscores the nexus between humanity's destructive tendencies and the ecosystem as vividly captured in the passage (153).

Vs 20: The Frustration of the Creation

V 20 The creation was placed under, subdued to frustration, vanity, emptiness, τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἢ κτίσις ὑπετάγη, not by its freewill but by the one having subjected it in hope; οὐχ ἑκούσα ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸν ὑποτάξαντα, ἐφ' ἐλπίδι (Rom 8:20). The noun ματαιότητι implies the vanity, frustration and emptiness which the cosmos was subjected to because of man's ignoble acts against creation. This was not God's original plan for creation and man, for God had mandated man to care for the creation for his benefits (Gen 1:28-31;2:15). It is to be observed that it was God who subjected ὑπετάγη, creation to

frustration in order to punish man for his rebellion. The reason why creation waits in intensive anticipation is because it had been subjected to frustration, and emptiness, thus it has been transformed as result of man's sin into something that suffered corruption, decay and death. Rather than been despondent arising from the frustration meted to it by the Creator, creation had hope for redemption. Paul's notes the fact that God's subjection of creation to a worthless temporal state is bearable because of the future promised hope in verse 21 (Keener 430).

Paul echoes this frustration of creation in Rom 8:20-22). Certainly Paul in these verses is referring to God's entire creation, that has been subjected to misuse, abuse and total destruction through lascivious destruction of the eco-system. First, the creation was subjected to frustration because of Adam sin, as a result the ground was cursed because of man's uncharitable acts, with all the creatures cursed by the Creator (Gen 3:17, 5:29). Secondly, beyond Adamic original sin, man has continually raped the universe to total frustration through; the pollution of the seas, destroying marine life, pollution of the air with toxic gasses that deplete the ozone layer, the destruction of forests, the burning of grasses with wild fire, the extinction of wild animals for commercial motif and for meat for food, the use of chemicals and herbicides for to kill grasses by farmers and so on (Sobowale 51-56). This was not God's original intention for man to care for the universe. For God would not spend quality time to create the universe only to hand it over to total destruction. To think so would be preposterous. So, even though, verse 20, talks about the subjection of creation to frustration, there is still hope for creation to be freed at the eschatology.

Vs 21 Hope for Freedom

It is instructive to observe that the hope which creation itself is intensively anticipating to be freed from its bondage of decay is brought to it by the Creator. That freedom began after the fall in Genesis 3:15. With the coming of Christ, the kingdom of God has arrived and thus the manifestation of the hope. However, the coming of the Kingdom has created a

mystery, viz, the already but not yet' puzzle. The mystery is that the kingdom is already present before its future culmination (Palmer 18). This means that creation will still continue to groan until it is brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God and at the eschatology when the kingdom of God is finally consummated.

Observe that verse 21 takes off from v20 ἐφ' ἐλπίδι (Rom 8:20) 'with hope,' that the creation itself will be freed from slavery ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας. The verb ἐλευθερωθήσεται is indicative future passive. This points to the fact that creation will not be able to set itself free from slavery of corruption τῆς φθορᾶς, but that the freedom will be given to creation by another power, the Creator Himself. While the creation is now under the slavery of corruption, it has to wait in eager expectation to be set free at the fullness of time; when Christ returns to relish its eternal freedom. Bauckham is of the view that Paul's reference to freedom for creation is holistic as it applies not only to fallen humanity but the entire universe (62-65). This position is shared by John the evangelist who saw at the eschatology, "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, (Rev 21:1), which had earlier been foretold by prophet Isaiah that the creation will be freed from the bondage of decay (Isa 66:22).

V22 Hopeful Pains of Childbirth

The creation groans together and travails together: ἡ κτίσις συστενάζει καὶ συνωδίνει. Note Paul's engagement of two Present indicatives active third person singular verbs in verse 22; συστενάζει and συνωδίνει (Rom 8:22). Both of these verbs are compound verbs signifying their togetherness. First, the verb συστενάζει, is translated as 'groans together.' This groaning is marked by a low mournful sound uttered in pain or grief and is characterised with frustration, and disapproval. Second, συνωδίνει means 'suffers birth pangs together.' Thus three entities are involved in 'groaning together' and 'suffering birth pangs together.' These entities are the creation ἡ κτίσις (Rom 8:22), ourselves as Christians who are the first fruits (αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν (Rom 8:23), and the Spirit

that intercedes for the children of God (Rom 8:23). This underscores the notion that no single element of creation is exempt from groaning. Blomberg notes that human sin brought discord to the entire cosmos, and the enmity between “nature” and humanity will continue until the final redemption of all things (251). Indeed, humanity and the universe are currently groaning because of the fall.

Paul thus, personifies creation here as groaning like a woman going through birth pains for the ignominy of man to creation. Paul links "groaning" (Rom 8:22, 23, 26) with child-birth pains. Birth pains do not last forever as the pains are soon replaced with the joy of a bouncing baby. The Psalmist echoes the fact that for a believer, “weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning,” (Psa 30:5). This underscores the imperative for suffering for the Christian, whose end result is eternal rejoicing with the Creator. This Psalm often attributed to David here contrasts temporary suffering (weeping in the night) with the certainty of God’s restorative power (joy in the morning). It is metaphoric in nature for hope after hardship. The metaphoric figure of speech used here is suggestive of the anguish, terror, destruction and hardship the universe is subjected to by humanity’s wicked acts towards it. The Lord Jesus shared a similar birth pangs experience with his disciples (Joh 16:20-22).

In Exodus, God's people "groaned," under the Egyptian hard labour, and their groaning was an unintended prayer that hastened God's redemption of them (Exo 2:23). Observe Paul’s play with the word *συστενάζει*, "groans together" from the root *συστενάζω* groan, (8. 22-26); firstly, all creation groans, *συστενάζει* (v. 22), secondly, we the first-fruits of the Spirit, i.e. believers, groan *στενάζομεν* inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons (Rom 8:23), and thirdly, the indwelling Spirit with groaning *στεναγμοῖς*. (Rom 8:26) as He intercedes for believers, v. 26. Some Jewish traditions portrayed the time just before the end as birth pangs (Matt 24:6-8), the great suffering that would bring forth the Messiah and the messianic era. Keener observes that for Paul, the sufferings of the present time are birth pangs, meaningful sufferings that promise a new world to come, just as a mother in labour room

agonizingly labours for hours in intense anticipation for a child (340). The arrival of the child after the labour pains ushers in great joy to the family.

Hall concurs that there is a general outcry of the whole creation against the sin of man (1986). The outcry against the frustration (destruction) of the universe is evident as the stones of the wall cry out, and the beams of the woodwork echo this inhumanity of man to the universe (Hab 2:11). Not done yet, the land loudly cries out, wet with tears, against the abuse and misuse of the universe by man who was supposedly the caretaker of the universe (Job 31:38). So just as humanity rebelled against God at the fall and even continue to rebel now, in the same breath, God’s good creation has been subjected to total abuse, misuse and indeed destruction and therefore it is no longer under the dominion of man as enshrined in the cultural of God to man, but under the dominion of Satan (Joh 14:30). The abuse of the cultural mandate to the universe comes in so many forms; land degradation, desertification, water and air pollution, deforestation of forests.

V23 First Fruits of the Spirit

Verse 23 highlights the argument that believers are:

οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτοὶ τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ πνεύματος ἔχοντες, (Rom 8:23). Paul in this verse expands his discourse to the groaning of Christians whom he calls first fruits of the spirit. His reference the children of God as first fruits builds on the theme of ‘hope’ raised in v 20 ἐφ’ ἐλπίδι (Rom 8:20). The tagging of Christians as first fruits signals the starting point of a harvest of believers and the assurance that bumper harvest lies ahead. Christians already are given the first fruits of the spirit, but they still await the final adoption when their bodies are redeemed and raised from the dead. However, it is noticed that the hope raised here for first fruits is not without daunting challenges as it is pact full of groaning. Paul goes further to explicate on the concept of first fruits in ‘already but not yet’ conundrum. There is thus tension among believers as they await eagerly for the divine adoption as children of God while groaning inwardly; ἡμεῖς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς στενάζομεν υἰοθεσίαν ἀπεκδεχόμενοι, for the redemption

ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν. Paul's reference of redemption ἀπολύτρωσιν must be forward looking as Christ has already paid the ransom for us at the cross. So at the Parousia, He will once and for all redeem our bodies to eternal glory.

Causes for Ecological Abuse

Globally and more specifically in third world countries, inordinate ecological degradation has resulted from population pressure, agricultural expansion, escalating demand for wood products, illegal logging, industrial development and rapid economic growth. Oguntala enumerates the causes for the gruesome frustration of the eco-system to include "the conversion of forest lands for agricultural practices, the felling of forest trees for commercial use, use of planks from trees for shelter, indiscriminate bush burning by herdsmen for fresh grass to graze animals, (262-272). Sobowale et al add the infiltration of forests by Fulani cattle herdsmen for grazing, farming activities within forests and fuel wood for cooking and heating" are other reasons for deforestation, (51-56). The acquisition of wealth from illegal mining activities in Zamfara state, Nasarawa state, and indeed, across the length and breadth of Nigeria by insurgents in collaboration with foreigners, the political class and traditional rulers is a sour case in point. This is because the proceeds from these nefarious activities only serve as funding the Jihadists in the procurement of sophisticated arms and ammunition against the people and the state. The pollution of water for fish and other aquatic crustaceans for food and the pollution of air during exploration and drilling of oil and gas products all go a long way to the destruction of the ecosystem.

Implications on the abuse of the Cultural Mandate

There are humongous consequences for the disobedience of the cultural mandate and of not heeding the call for the restoration of the ecology to its original state. Some of these according to Igboanugu, include, excessive heat waves causing diseases like meningitis, smallpox, chicken pox,

measles, conjunctivitis and malaria (34-38). It is pertinent to add that drought, leading to loss of plants and grass, and the extinction of wild animals are the result of the failure of man of protecting the environment (Oloyede 12-13). Other consequences include crop failure; greenhouse effect is associated with forest degradation (Adedire 270-272). Additionally, there are glaring side effects associated with air pollution on humans such as, irritation of the eye, nose and throat, wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and breathing difficulties, worsening lung and heart problems. Indeed, air pollution can cause other environmental challenges such as acid rain (<http://www.epa.gov/acidrain/>). Effects on wildlife as animals and plants through sustained toxic gasses experience health challenges, death and extinction (<http://www.epa.gov/globalwarming/>). The pollution of water leads to eutrophication. This happens when polluted water contains high concentration of nutrients such as nitrogen thereby stimulating blooms of algae which in turn lead to death of fish and marine life. There is the Ozone layer depletion. In the stratosphere ozone layer forms a layer that protects life on earth from the harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun. Due to massive gaseous emission, ozone depleting substances such as chlorofluorocarbons, hydro-chloro fluorocarbons and halon in the air, destroy the ozone. The effect is the increase in skin cancers, cataracts, and impaired immune systems (<https://www.epa.gov/globalwarming/>). More worrisome is the gruesome fact that proceeds from illegal mining are either channeled into terrorist activities, or are brazenly stolen out by foreigners, thus denying the country of billions of Naira. Besides the challenge of insecurity posed by illegal miners is the humongous problem of land degradation.

Conclusion

The mandate in Genesis 1:28 presents man as a servant kingship with the authority to serve creation's flourishing and not to wreck it. However, the fall in Genesis 3 overturns dominion into domination, but God's original mandate is about wise, creative stewardship. The imageries of creation

been subjected to frustration and groaning are as the result of humanity's wicked acts of abusing, misusing, and degrading the cosmos. These obnoxious acts of destruction must stop for the process of restoration to commence. For the start, the redemption of creation now is to be executed by the children of God through the protection of the environment, awaiting the eschatological redemption at the second coming of the Creator of the universe himself. This demands that humanity and indeed, Christians of the New Testament, God's stewards, begin the process of restoration of the ecosystem. This can be done by protecting the cosmos, and by stemming against the causes and negative consequences of the recent global climate change, expressing an ecological crisis.

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