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The Implications of the Immanence of God in Genesis 1:1-2 for Rectification of Environmental Crises in Owerri West Local Government Area

Victor Umaru [α] & Ngozi Maduagwu [σ]

Abstract- Several authors claim that Christians are responsible for the developing ecological problems because they have used the idea of being made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26-27) as an excuse to justify exploiting the planet's resources. Given the changes, Owerri-West is experiencing concerning seasons like rain, harmattan, and dry seasons, the issue of environmental crises is clear. In response to the environmental difficulties in Owerri-West, the article examines God's presence, also known as the "Immanence of God." The data for the study was gathered through a literature review done through an analytical-critical discursive approach. The acquired data were examined and synthesized. The article looks at Christian concern for environmental issues in Nigeria and highlights the necessity to accept God's immanence in nature as a solution for environmental sustainability. It also calls attention to the essential need for environmental protection and sustainability among decision-makers and environmental activists. In light of the preceding, the researchers suggest that it is now time for the residents of Owerri West Local Government Area to focus entirely on the theological implications of environmental issues. The traditional rulers in Owerri-West put the necessary mechanisms in place to ensure that funds provided by governments or other agencies reach the affected areas.

I. Introduction

One of the most serious environmental problems our planet is currently facing is climate change. To stop the damage it poses to the world, various animal species, and people's livelihoods, immediate action is required. Climate change is being caused by an increase in cars, industry, and power plants, etc.[1] The world that humans treasured gained more attention in the latter half of the 20th century. Many arguments have been developed on who is to be blamed regarding climate change, global warming, and the devastation of so many natural resources. Some writers have argued that the exploitative attitude to nature, typical of the twentieth century, directly results from the Christian doctrine of creation. Others argued that the Judeo-Christian idea of humanity having dominion or authority over creation has led to the view that nature exists to serve human needs, thus legitimating a highly exploitative attitude. Christianity thus bears a substantial burden of guilt for the current ecological crisis.[2] In particular, Lynn White Jr. argues that Christianity was to blame for the emerging ecological crisis because of using the concept, the "Image of God," found in the creation account (Gen. 1: 26-27), as a pretext for justifying human exploitation of the world's resources. He argues that the book of Genesis legitimates the notion of human dominion over creation, leading to its exploitation.[3]

While others believe that a closer reading of the Genesis text indicates that such themes as "humanity as the steward of creation" and "humanity as the partner of God" are implied by the text rather than that "humanity as the lord of creation." Far from being the enemy of ecology, the doctrine of creation affirms the importance of human responsibility towards the environment. The biblical concept of "dominion" was to be understood primarily in terms of "stewardship," no matter what interpretation might be placed on the word in a secular context. To put it simply: the Old Testament sees God's creatures as the possession of humanity; it is to be seen as entrusted to humanity, who is responsible for its safekeeping and tending[4].

The human relationship with the environment depicts an understanding of God's manifestation in His creation. Unfortunately, the environment has been abused by human activities. These activities include gas flaring, littering of the environment, improper waste management, and the building of irrelevant structures on waterways. Others are indiscriminate felling of trees and burning of bushes. The world is going through ecological crises such as global warming, climate change, ozone layer depletion, acid rain, and food and water shortage, which may not be unconnected to the ignorance of humans of their responsible stewardship role over creation and as well as the misconception and

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[1] IPCC, "Climate Change 2001: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability", Working Group II Contribution to the Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "Chapter 18: Adaptation to Climate Change in the Context of Sustainable Development and Equity", (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 877-912.

[2] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 122-3.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: BlackWell Publishers, 2001), 303.

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misinterpretation of God's injunction in Genesis 1:1-2 and 1:26, 2:15, among other places in the Bible. The scripture echoes man's responsibility to his environment. This misconception and misinterpretation have led to the widespread exploitation and destructive use of natural resources, the detriment and the demise of several habitats and their life forms. Instead of destruction, Christians are mandated by God to care, which means going to the extreme to prevent environmental crises to show appreciation to God for creation.

Practices such as improper waste management, deforestation, large-scale urbanization, environmental degradation, and pollution in various forms are significant ecological crises. The subject of global warming is no longer unfamiliar in local and global discussions of environmental and ecological concerns. It is seriously threatening the world as the entire globe is experiencing an abnormal temperature increase due to deforestation from various agricultural and industrial activities. One of the concerns of this article and the motivating factors is how some plants in existence many years ago, which would have been beneficial to man and his health, are gradually phasing out of existence. Such plans include: '*ukazi,' 'uziza,''uha'* etc., a side that rivers are no longer safe for swimming and drinking because they have been tampered with and defaced by man. Erosion has its effect on all parts of the nation Nigeria, with the man doing little or nothing about it even when they are the primary cause of it. Many have suggested ways out, but few implementations are being made, and less attention is being given to teaching it.

II. Biblical View of God's Immanence in Creation

Understanding God's reality and how He interacts with the created world depends heavily on God's immanence. It also involves His involvement in history, human nature, and natural phenomena.[5] From Genesis through Revelation, the Bible provides numerous examples of God's interactions and activities with His creation. God makes certain aspects of Himself known to humans in all His interactions with His creation. God's immanence is demonstrated in the creation story in Genesis 1:2 when the divine Spirit appears to hover above the water.[6] God is immanence in the creation through His Spirit.

According to Genesis 3:8–9, Adam and Eve's association with God in the Garden of Eden represents another facet of God's immanence. God would visit the garden in the cool of the day for a stroll in the evening to converse with and fellowship with them. God is shown to be a relational being who interacts with His creation. [7] All things are seen to be sustained by Him, and they all rely on Him to survive. In chapter 104: 29–30, the Psalmist emphasized the natural world's reliance on God. All living things depend on God for survival and are under his whim. The key to all life's physical existence is God's breath.[8] If God turns away from them, all living creatures will feel the loss immediately. Every living thing depends on God's favour because he is the one who gives it to them and keeps it alive.[9]

The incarnation of the person of Christ is another way that God's divine presence is depicted in the New Testament.[10] He came as Immanuel, but He also came to live among His people for all eternity. He set up His tent close to His followers.[11] In the person of Christ, God has chosen to reside among His creation permanently. John's claim that the word became flesh and lived among humans is another example of the incarnation of Jesus (1:14).[12] Paul described Jesus as the representation of God (Col. 1:15). Other allusions state that everything in creation is the work of God and is under His direction, including the bringing of rain and sunshine.

The sun's brightness is not considered to be a natural occurrence. God is the one who creates the sun. God provides for all He has made, not just one specific group of people. Regardless of who they are, he randomly offers gifts to everyone (Matthew 5:45).[13] Therefore, God must be a God of provision. Dressing the grasses in the fields and providing food for the avian birds are both works of God (Matt. 6: 25-30, 10: 29-30). The strength of God can be seen in His concern for even the smallest of His creations; He is attentive to even the most minute aspects of those He has created in His image. Given this, Jesus emphasized the futility of worry and the good reasons for trusting God, who is actively involved in caring for and maintaining His creation.[14] Paul further stated in his theological treatise to the philosophers at Mars Hill that God is not remote from anybody and that humans are created in God (Acts 17: 27-28). Paul's argument for God was that He provides life, breath, and everything else, but also the sum and substance of everything else. He is the one

[5] Millard j. Erickson, *Christian Theology, second edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1985), 325.
[6] Tokunboh Adeyemo, *African Bible Commentary,* (Kenya: Word Alive Publication, 2006), 13.
[7] Samuel Rolles Driver and George Bughanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T & T lark, 1921), 283.
[8] Leslie C. Allen, *World Bible Commentary Vol. 21, Psalms 101-150* (Waco, Texas: World Book Publisher, 1983), 34.
[9] Spence and Excell, 399.
[10] Leon Morris, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 31.
[11] Wintle, 1802-1803.
[12] Buist M. Fanning, "Word", in Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 852-853.
[13] Morris, 132.
[14] Ibid, 159-160.

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who guides people toward knowledge of Himself and provides the tools necessary for doing so. Even though God is far from everyone, He is close to everyone on the planet.[15]

III. Theological Viewpoint on God's Immanence

God is first and foremost in charge of the universe. Because of His sovereignty, He has the right to rule the universe He made for His glory in the manner that pleases Him. God's omnipotence indicates that He can act; however, He pleases without being held responsible or accountable to anybody. This was confirmed by the Psalmist when he said that God lives in the skies and does whatever He pleases (Ps. 115:3). He also said that He works following His own will (Dan. 4:35). The idea of God's sovereignty also suggests that He is autonomous, not depending on any other entity or force than Himself (Acts 17:25). God is self-sufficient. He created the world out of His own volition (Rev. 4:11).[16]

The creation demonstrates God's omnipotence. The sovereignty of God is demonstrated in the book of Genesis story of creation, and throughout the Bible. Without seeking advice or requesting an architectural design from anyone, He produced what He desired and how He wanted it to be. The world was formed by Him alone; when He spoke, it materialized (Gen. 1:3). He decided to construct the universe in six days, with a day of rest. He produced a variety of species, including oversized, short, petite, tiny, crawling, walking, swimming, and flying. He put each creature in its appropriate habitat. He created people in His likeness and entrusted the guardianship of everything He had formed to them out of the sovereign will. He instructed Adam and Eve to refrain from eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). His authority is also demonstrated in condemning and judging offenses (Gen. 3:14-15). He chose Abraham so that He might use him to create a powerful country (Gen. 12:2). He chose Joseph to maintain the nation He had created and carry out His purpose. He gave Moses a purpose: to free His people from slavery in Egypt. The Old and New Testaments reflect His preference for selecting people for particular roles and objectives. Everything that He does is for His benefit (Romans 8: 28).[17]

God is in charge of providence as well. He is in charge of all He has made, trying to make things happen the way He pleases. The sovereignty of God is manifestly global from the perspective of the Bible. It is unchangeable and unalterable. God's sovereignty is manifested in several ways, including the creation of the laws that govern all things, the determination of the nature and abilities of each created order, the placement of each creature in its suitable habitat, and the distribution of His favour. Although it is the sovereignty of "knowledge, holiness, and love," God's sovereignty is global and absolute.

Given that God is the author of all creation, it relies on God's omnipotent power for upkeep, sustenance, and preservation. God maintains the creation and continually rules over it in a sovereign manner. If God were to leave creation, it would cease to be.[18] God, who created the universe and the planet, is in charge of and controls every event. The ongoing execution of His divine will is necessary for the continued existence of creation.[19]

God maintains the world to establish His reign and bring creation back to life. This suggests that God interacts with His creation in a way that ensures the accomplishment of both His will and His purposes. According to Henry, nothing escapes God's intent and concern. God works out His plan not simply in life's generalities but in the details and intricacies.[20] This implies that God has a purpose for everything He has made and carries that purpose out following His will. Because He created the earth, God has dominion over it, and the earth is subject to His will. As noted by Packer, God nonetheless sustains the universe by managing its affairs even if He is separate from it and independent of it. This is because the universe depends on God for survival. After all, it cannot sustain itself.[21]

All things are sustained and preserved by God, who directs them to maintain and behave following their outward appearance. He makes creation reliant on Him alone for existence. In order to maintain the earth, God directs the stars in heaven (Job 38:32), causes the sun to rise (Ps. 104:10), and causes the grass to grow for people and animals (Job 38:12, Matt. 5:45). He looks after the field grasses and the avian population (Matt. 6:26, 18:29).[22] According to Berkouwer, God's divine nourishment is directly related to Him and is the source of all that exists in the world. God stills the storm, and the sea waves are quiet (Ps. 107:29).[23] According to Packer, God is actively involved in the creation and in redeeming actions. The world is shaped and controlled

[15] Francis Martin (ed), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scriptures, New Testament, Acts* (Illinois: Inter-Vasity Press, 2012), 219.
[16] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1998), 162-163.
[17] Swindoll and Zuck, 172-173.
[18] G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1952), 57.
[19] Andrew S. Kulikovsky, Creation, Preservation and Dominion: Part 1-God, humanity and the created order. *http://creation.com* accessed 21st November 2018.
[20] Carl F. H. Henry, *God's Revelation and Authority,* 6 vol. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 457.
[21] Packer, 277.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Berkouwer, 60.

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in such a way by God's influence that the cosmos continues on its intended course.[24] The fact that God maintains the universe He created is quite apparent. The universe depends on God for survival because it cannot support itself. God is still with His creation, revealing and tending to it. He has never abandoned the earth to run its course on its own. Though separate from it, God is constantly present.[25] God has revealed His existence and might in nature through the immanence of His creation. In Isaiah 55:12, the trees clap their hands in worship as the hills and mountains praise God. According to Boyce, God's presence causes the planet to be filled with His essence. The infinite deity is exclusively, undividedly present at each point of creation and at every instant of time, filling the entire world, not just parts of it.[26] This implies that God is comparatively close to His creation. He resides in and beside His creation.

In order to make known His intent and purpose, He engages with and interacts with His creation at all times. The deistic viewpoint, which holds that "God is present in creation only by His force, not in His being or nature," stands in opposition to this one.[27] According to deism, the universe is governed by natural laws that God created and imbued with specific characteristics in His created beings before allowing them to fulfill their purposes. He made the universe to serve His purposes, to manifest His glory, and to carry out His will. He is present to reveal a specific facet of His grandeur, and the creation reflects God's majesty. Although separate from the world, God is immanent in it. He differs from the rest of the world. Everything is under His authority, and nothing takes place against His will. He will preserve and protect the creation that He has made to display His splendor. In order to properly care for the earth that the Creator has entrusted to them, humanity must consequently take the essential steps.

IV. Environmental Crises in Owerri-West L.G.A.

The threats that climate change poses to ecology are severe. There are unmistakable indications that environmental threats caused by climate change are on the rise and constantly work against Owerri's natural security. Most nations around the world are affected in terms of socioeconomic security. Today, dry spells, flooding, persistent droughts, and off-season rainfall are too typical. For instance, in Owerri-West, the effects of the environmental disaster may be felt everywhere due to the heat stress, lack of harmattan, irregular rainfall patterns, higher rains, gully erosion, flooding, and landslides. These risks have impacted agricultural lands, water and forest resources, settlement infrastructure, soil fertility, and other considerations.

Because God is present in all creation, Owerri residents West must protect the environment. This is so that God's beauty and splendor can be seen in His created world. God put people on the planet to take care of His creation and made it for His glory (Isa. 43:7). (Gen. 2:8). The preservation of creation is the preservation of God's honour. Ecological problems include flooding, deforestation, climate change, all types of pollution, and improper waste management; Owerri-west, one of Imo State's most populated places, needs to step up to the plate and take care of God's creation. This would be accomplished by informing the residents of Owerri-West of the importance of protecting God's creation. People in Owerri-West should also be aware that God created humans and other animals to live on the land. God gave humans and other animals the world as a place to live. Humans are assigned the duty to take care of creation since they are the pinnacle of God's creation and were made in his likeness (Ps. 8). Humans are therefore not to see themselves as Lord over creation but to have a sense of responsible stewardship for the care of creation.

V. Exegetical Analysis of the Passage (Gen 1:1-2)

a) The Summary of the Book of Genesis

In terms of prominence in announcing or confessing "the will and mind of God," the book of Genesis is unsurpassed. The entire body of the canonical scriptures' literary and theological foundation is presented. Without Genesis, the Bible would lack a solid foundation and could not exist. In other words, Genesis serves as the cornerstone for the entire Bible. The Greek term used for the book of Genesis can be translated as "source" or "generation," but the original Hebrew title is simply בְּרֵאשִׁית, which means "in the beginning" and is the first word in the book.

This book of introduction lays out at the outset what people learn, observe, and confirm across the entire body of Holy writing. The book of creation and blessing contains a microcosm of what is said about God, human nature, the world, and salvation history. There is "nothing new under the sun," according to the precursory light of Genesis, yet those volumes do not identify, confirm, or clarify facts that can be explained.[28]

In a technical sense, the author of the book was unknown. However, the consensus among Jews and early Christians is that Moses wrote the first five books

[24] Packer, 276-277.
[25] Geister, 527.
[26] Boyce, *Abstract on Systematic Theology,* pdf.
[27] The belief that God exists and is a transcendent being who created the cosmos was known as deism, which emerged due to the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. He has nothing to do with creation and is far from it. Gyang D. Pam, *A Compendium of Theology* (Jos: mSele Printing and Publishing House, 2012), 306.

[28] Kenneth A. Mathias,*The New American Commentary*, vol.1, Genesis 1-11:26 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996).

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of the Bible, collectively known as the Torah (Hebrew) and Pentateuch (Greek), or the law (English). In other terms, Moses is said to have written the book. Although they do not dispute Mosaic authorship, most contemporary authors attribute the Torah, including Genesis, to the sources J, E, D, and P. The writing of Genesis dates to around 1445 BCE.[29]

b) The Text of the Passage

Hebrew Text of Genesis 1:1-2

1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ

2 וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם

English Translation of Genesis 1:1-2

1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
2. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

c) Interpretation of the Passage/Words Analysis

1) *In the Beginning (1:1a):* The phrase "in the beginning" (בְּרֵאשִׁית) announces a new beginning while also hinting at the "end" of the cosmos and human history. In the Old Testament, "beginning" (*résit*) and its antonym "end" (*'acharit*) are frequently used to denote an inclusive period (Job 8:7; 42:12; Eccl 7:8; Isa 46:10).[30] "Beginning" (*ré'sit*) appears in 1:1, which shows that it was chosen because of its relationship to "end" *('acharit*). If this is the case, the author has already established that the "beginnings" of creation were started with an eschatological purpose in mind. As a result, the apostles and prophets might refer to the new heavens and earth as the beginning of the end (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1). The text states that God, who is Sovereign, understands and is in control of the "end from the beginning" at the beginning of the creation account (Isa 46:10).[31]

2) *God Created…(1:1b):* The word "created" (bara') is frequently used in the Old Testament to describe a new activity. With the prior "in the beginning," it creates a good play because the first three letters are the same: br'sytbr'. The term's derivation is contested and of little use, but because it occurs so frequently in the Old Testament, we can define its meaning reasonably. The word's defining characteristic is that God is always its subject. As a result, it suggests that a unique task carried out by a deity alone results in something fresh or renewed. Bara' refers to the finished item rather than the substance used to make it. Because of these factors, commentators have usually understood the word as a technical term for creatio ex nihilo (literary "creation out of nothing"). It is sometimes contrasted with the verb 'asa, which means "to make" or "do," and which may have human action as its subject (as well as divine). Asa is specifically utilized when "creating" with preexisting materials. -' Therefore, "asa" can describe human action in which preexisting material is altered, while "bara" is only used to describe God's activity in which preexisting material is not there.[32]

The word "created" appears twenty times in Isaiah (chapters 40–66), where the prophet identifies Israel's God as the actual Creator and Lord of history. Isaiah praised Yahweh as the Creator who acts in history, creating Israel for himself (42:5; 43:1,7,15) and carrying out a "new thing" by delivering his people in the backdrop of Babylon's religious practices of astrology and idolatry (Isa. 40:26; 43:15-19; 48:6-8). Consequently, God starts history at creation and continues to "create" history through his absolute sovereignty over all peoples. God is the Creator of everything that exists; thus, he is prior to it, separate from it, and yet intimately associated with it. In ancient Near Eastern mythology, the powers of land and water were controlled by gods, who were numerous in heaven. Israel claims that the universe is nothing more than a creature, in contrast to the earlier mythology, which did not adequately distinguish between the Maker and the creation. This view liberated the sky and the earth from superstition and gave modern science its ideological foundation. The phrase "the heavens and the earth" refers to the entirety of the cosmos.[33]

3) *"Now the Earth" (1:2a):* Before it is altered to become a fit home for human life, the "earth" is initially described in its pure state at the beginning of creation. The description is from the terrestrial viewpoint of a human seeing the transformation throughout the six "days" of creation. Additionally, in verse 1, the words "earth" and "heavens" together allude to the universe, while the word "*erets"* is used in verse 2 to imply the "land" of Israel's abode. "*erets*" denotes "land," which typically refers to a territorial holding. The themes of "land" and "blessing," first mentioned in 1:1-2:3, are recurrent themes throughout the patriarchal narratives and Pentateuch. The country was God's excellent gift to Israel, which he had prepared for their possession. God's good "land/earth" was prepared via creation

[29] *Holman Illustrated Pocket Bible Handbook* (Pocket Reference Edition (Nashville, Holman Bible Publisher, 2004).

[30] Kenneth A. Mathews, *The American Commentary,* Vol. 1A (USA: Broadman and Holman Publisher, 1996), 126.

[31] David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11* (Leicester: Inter-Vasity Press, 1990), 26.

[32] H. D. M Spence and Joseph S. Excell, *The Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 1, Genesis – Exodus* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 356.

[33] Mathews, 135.

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for man to enjoy (1:10,12,31) and for Israel to possess.

According to Matthew, verse 2's three parallel clauses explain the earth's initial conditions:

"Now the earth was formless and empty (*tohuwabohu*)."
"The surface of the deep was covered in darkness" (*téhom*)
"The Spirit of God was over the waves" (*mayim*).

The term "*tohuwabohu*" has been interpreted by some as a negative emptiness, a dark abyss, similar to the Greek concept of primordial chaos, or, alternately, as a disorganized mass, a sort of watery mass that opposes creation. The LXX's use of the words "unseen" and "unformed" may have contributed to the current notion of "chaos" as an indistinct mass or empty nonentity. It turns out that *tohuandbohu* refers to an "empty" and "wasteland" land. *Bohu* is only found in *tohuwabohu*, where it appears in Jeremiah 4:23 and 1:2. Isaiah 34:11 also uses the phrases in parallel. The meaning of *tohu* is all left to help one understand the couplet's meaning since the word's etymology is still a mystery.[34]

Although *tohu's* derivation is likewise ambiguous, the word appears enough (20 times) in the Old Testament to give away its meaning. It carries a sense of futility and nonexistence and refers to unproductive, desolate land. In the Song of Moses (Deut 32:10), it is encountered once more in the Pentateuch, where *tohu* mirrors "desert" (*midbar*), denoting a "desert place." The next verse of the Song (32:11) compares God to an eagle that "hovers" over its young and uses the same word "hover" (*rchp*) that appears in Gen 1:2. Deuteronomy 32:10–11 is likely a deliberate repeat of Genesis 1:2 because the word "*rchp*" only appears in one other place, where it means "tremble." Moses' Song recounts how God provided for and cared for his people throughout their desert trip, where they would not have survived without him (32:10-14). In Genesis 1, the word *tohuwabohu* has the same meaning, describing the earth as uninhabitable and hostile to human life. Despite the dangerous desert, God preserves and develops Israel during its trying times. Similar to how the world could not support terrestrial life as it existed, God, whose "Spirit" controlled it, was unaffected by this fact. *Tohu* did not interfere with God's objectives because "he did not form it (earth) to be *tohu* (inhabited)" (Isa 45:18; cf. Job 26:7). Additionally, "hovering" (*rchp)* carries a hint of motion. The movement of God's "Spirit" suggests that the forces for change that are creative begin when God is present.

The couplet *tohuwabohu* also appears once other than in 1:2 of the book of Jeremiah. The prophet's account of Judah's destruction at the hands of God's wrath serves as its background. Similarly, Isaiah 34:11 predicts divine judgment over Edom and uses both phrases (in parallel lines). The creation language of Genesis 1 is strongly reflected in Jeremiah 4:23–26, and the prophecy has traditionally been interpreted as a figurative "reversal" of creation that results in primordial "chaos." As a result of God's judgment, Judah would be "uncreated," according to Jeremiah. Jeremiah announced that the "land" of Judah would turn into a "desolate" location, much as the "earth" (*'erets*) was before it was created, that is, a land lifeless without the blessing of God, rather than a primordial "chaos." The subsequent oracle (Jer. 4:27–29), which states that the "whole land (*kol-ha'erets*) will be devastated," explains this. Isaiah 34:11 similarly depicts Edom as "desolate" (*tohu*) and "empty" (*bohu*), a land that is unsuited for habitation and so devoid of life, save for that of the desert fowl.

Furthermore, we are not required to infer from the prophets' usage of *tohuwabohu* that the earth in 1:2, as a first creation, is under God's wrath.[35] Instead, Jeremiah used creation imagery to declare that God would destroy the country. God placed Judah in the land alive and prosperous, just as God made the earth habitable and alive. However, God would drive out Judah's inhabitants in his fury, making the region as dark and lifeless as the world at its creation, with no birds flying above.[36]

4) *"Darkness was over the surface of the deep…"(1:2b):* "over the surface of the deep" is analogous to the following clause's phrase "over the waves." It is best to view the "depth" (*tehom*) as a component of the "earth" *('erets*) rather than a separate entity. These waters gradually separated from the expanse and land masses on the second and third days, referred to as "seas" (Vv. 6-10). Deep may refer to "depth" (Ps 71:20), underground oceans (Gen 7:11; 8:2), or seas, which are frequently seen in parallel with "water/waters" (*yam*/*mayim*). Genesis describes the waters merely as what they are, God's creations under his supervision.[37]

5) *"The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters…" (1:2c):* God's "Spirit (*ruach)* was hovering" over the planet, governing it and preparing it for the creative word that would come next. Only the "Spirit" is alive and moving, while the inert elements of the lifeless earth are still waiting for their order. This text, *ruach,* may refer to either a spirit or a breeze. Although

[34] Thomas Hale, *The Applied Old Testament Commentary* (Great Britain: David C, Cook, 2007) 239.

[35] Samuel Rolles Driver and George Bughanan Gray,*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (Edinburgh: T & T lark, 1921), 283.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Philip W. Comfort, *Cornerstone Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Lamentation* (Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Illinois, 2005), 418.

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traditionally translated as "Spirit," denoting the heavenly Spirit, "wind" is another potential reading that lexically makes sense and also fits the context of verse 2. (cf. 8: 1).[38] Another critical issue centers on whether *ruach* or God's Spirit, is a person or an impersonal force acting under God's authority. Due to its apparent allusion to 2:7, Job 33:4 is not helpful; however, Psalm 104:30 resonates with a unique interpretation ("your Spirit"). Psalm 104:30 shows that the poet confirmed God's Spirit's personal participation in the creation.

However, because of Israel's experience at the Red Sea, where God sent a mighty "wind" to separate the waters and free Israel from the Egyptians, the Mosaic society may have regarded *ruach* as having a dual meaning, with "wind" serving as the prototype of the "Spirit" (Exod. 14:21; 15:10; cp. Exod. 10:19; Num. 11:31). Since God was also at work in creation, where his "wind" (1:2) encircled the mighty waters of the earth as he prepared to convert them, they understood that God was also their God of salvation. The "wind" (*ruach*) in the flood story also blows across the "earth" (*'erets)* under God's command, taming the floodwaters (8:1a), ready for the return of the dry earth-creation anew. The Hebrews could understand the idea, whether it is translated as "wind" or "Spirit": God was sovereignly overseeing the state of the planet and paving the way for his creative word. The divine presence ensures the earth's continued existence "by the covert efficacy of the Spirit" despite its vulnerable position and static state, making it ready for God's activity to make it productive and bloom with beauty and life.

Despite its vulnerable position and static state, the divine presence secures the earth's continuous existence "by the covert effectiveness of the Spirit," preparing it for God's activity to make it productive and bloom with beauty and life. There is no reason to worry that deified entities, like runaway prisoners, are wreaking havoc on the environment and civilization throughout the universe. According to the biblical account of creation, the barren land is turned productive by the almighty royal word, which gives and ensures productivity and life.

VI. Implications for Rectification of Environmental Crises in Owerri West LGA

4.1 God Will Require Accountability from Humankind In Their Care Of The Universe/Earth. The People of Owerri-West have a duty to protect the environment because God is interested in how the environment is treated and because God is immanent in His creation. (Deut. 23:12-14). According to Ajibade, God anticipates that people will make an effort to ensure the environment's cleanliness. This is so because a clean atmosphere suggests a reverent attitude.[39] They are in the environment to worship, praise God, and take care of the ecosystem. In a significant part, human survival is reliant on environmental preservation. Protecting the environment is also protecting human lives. The residents of Owerri-West will be healthy if the environment is. As a result, they are accountable to the environment. Additionally, God has provided them with the world as a place to live and a source of livelihood. Humans are to benefit from the earth's bounty as they take care of it, as it is meant to be a blessing for both them and the rest of creation. This God-given vocation must be carried out with a sense of duty to the environment.

4.2 God Assigned Care of the Universe/ Earth/Environment to Humankind (Gen. 1:2). Humans were put in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:15 "to tend it and care for it." This order comes across as being protective rather than exploitative. It implies that everything in creation must be worked at and that people were made to be labourers. It is not necessary to destroy the earth in order to use it. It must be cared for with the understanding that God is its Owner and that people are the earth's stewards. As a result, acts that are contrary to the preservation of the earth, such as deforestation, incorrect waste disposal, unhealthy farming methods, indiscriminate bush and tree cutting, and pollution in all its forms, should be avoided because they lead to environmental deterioration. Additionally, God designed everything with a purpose in mind. Everything in God's creation has a function and is valuable in and of itself. These principles demand that nothing in God's creation under human control be destroyed. Humans owe it to the rest of creation to respect all living things, mindful that God is the one who created, sustains, and provides for all living things, including nonhumans. Humans must live within their means, conserving and preserving resources by exerting self-control and living modestly.[40]

4.3 Realization that God is Present/Immanent in His Universe (Gen. 1:2). God is active and present throughout the entire creative process. He is deeply interested in the world he has made and has

[38] Buist M. Fanning, "Word", in Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter Varsity Press, 2000), 852-853.

[39] Ezekiel A. Ajibade, *The Culture of Environmental Care and Sustainability*, (An Environmental Discourse presented to the NBTS community on 24th October 2018), 2.

[40] Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 153.

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complete control over it. He never abandoned the planet after creating it. God is immanent in and through creation. Without God, there is no creation. The planet's complexity reflects and shows God's splendor, strength, might, and divine essence (Psalm 19:1). (Romans 1:20). Additionally, the continued life of creation is entirely dependent upon the sustaining will and strength of God. A close examination of creation reveals its order, purpose, and design. The precise organization of the various stages of creative activity in Genesis 1 demonstrates order. The design may be recognized in the beautiful and original structure of the world. The utility of what God has created reveals its purpose. Everything was created for God's glory; nothing is meaningless (Isaiah 43: 7), everything has a function.

4.4 Human Being Owe God's Appreciation for Creating the Universe/Earth. Additionally, the creation shows how God manifests himself in it. The heavens display God's majesty, and the skies declare his creative efforts in plain sight. They speak out every day, and every night they share their wisdom. Every language and dialect can hear them. Their voice is audible worldwide, even at the farthest reaches (Psalm 19: 1-4, N.I.V.). God declared everything he created good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31). He also described it as precious and holy (Exodus 3:5). He handed authority over the earth to man and woman when he created them. God blessed them and gave them the mandate to multiply and populate the land, as well as to exercise dominion over all other living things, including fish in the sea, birds in the sky, and other animals (Genesis 1: 28). Humans have regenerated, multiplied, and ruled over the earth ever since they were first created. God is intimately present and active in his creation; therefore, this charge to rule is to be a steward of it.

4.5 Acknowledge that God is the Maker and the Universe/Earth/Environment Owner. God made them prosperous and gave them the command to populate the earth and to reproduce, as well as to rule over all other living creatures, such as fish in the water, birds in the sky, and other animals (Genesis 1: 28). Since the beginning of time, humans have grown, proliferated, and dominated over the planet. Man must obey this mandate by eating fruits, herbs, and animal flesh. This mandate to reign is to steward God's creation, which is profoundly present and active.[41] The history of life's beginning is clearly described in the Bible. Only the book of Genesis provides a vivid narrative of creation, although there are many theories about the origin of life, such as Darwin's Big Bang Theory. According to Darwin's idea, a "whirling mass of material" expanded by drawing in nearby solid objects, possibly minor planets. The earth's size changed, which increased gravity and produced heat from a compressed inner core.[42] This idea in no way explains the origin of the mass of substances or the creation of other solid particles. A being must have been behind its creation because this swirling mass of matter did not arise by accident.

The creation story found in the Bible details the process of creation and identifies God as the universe's Creator. The Bible explains the cosmos as the creation of God, who spoke into existence out of nothing that had never existed in any shape or form before.[43] As declared by Ojo, "The world was created; it did not evolve."[44] This is seen through the manifestation of God's power and will in bringing all things into existence.[45] God is the ungenerated, initial cause of the existence, continuation, and destiny of all creatures, according to Oden. According to Swinburne, who agrees with Oden, the assertion that there is a single person who is the source of all things must be understood with the qualifier "apart from himself" or, more specifically, "separate from whatever the existence of which is implied by his existence."[46] Every created object owes its life and existence to God, the wellspring of all creation.

VII. Conclusion

Three things are offered in this piece. First, it serves as a reminder that the locals must take a far more active part if Owerri-West Local Government Area is to build any defense against environmental crises. This is because faith is also required by physics and chemistry and is the most significant challenge to social justice the world has ever faced. Second, practical biblical interpretation and a wealth of real-world knowledge about what each individual and collective effort can and should accomplish form the foundation of defense against environmental calamity. Thirdly, as the most pertinent of reminders, this article is primarily written from a biblical perspective on this crucial problem. It has imparted valuable knowledge about how humans fit into the larger scheme of things and the roles played by the environment and animals. Particular

[41] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 13.

[42] Cora A. Reno, *Evolution, Fact or Theory?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1952), 91.

[43] Henry M. Morris, (ed), *Scientific Creationism* (California, Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), 206.

[44] John A. Ojo, "God, Man and the Creation," in *Jounal of Creation and Environmental Care,* Vol. 3, 2016, 148.

[45] Wayne Fair and P. Williams Davis, *The Case for Creation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 80-81.

[46] Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 126.

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residents of the Owerri-West Local Government Area are guilty of taking their privileged status as God's children for granted. Even worse, they frequently misuse their position by utilizing it for their gain.

The article concludes by offering recommendations for raising life quality. Among these is the education of ecological norms to the residents of Owerri-West. However, in a time like this, when the populace's well-being is sacrificed for minority interest, Owerri-West intellectuals have to act as the leader and conscience of communities. Therefore, efforts must be made to stop environmental contamination by Christian faith communities and other interests. Solidarity can assist the populace in managing the world's environment in a spirit of responsibility and collaboration with God in managing the creation that he has provided for people in the face of humanity's careless and irresponsible activities against God's creation. It is crucial to motivate people to estimate their carbon footprints and take action to lower them. The purpose of environmental protection is to promote the health and welfare of people as well as the other creatures of nature and their environments.

VIII. Recommendations

The following suggestions are made to encourage Owerri-West to feel committed to the mission of addressing the environmental catastrophe in light of the research findings as stated above from the review of the biblical exegesis of the presence or immanence of God in nature and care:

- In the past, Owerri-West Local Government Area residents took part in various initiatives to lessen suffering and encourage more sustainable living. They should focus on the religious implications of environmental issues this time.
- The Church should develop a biblical theology of ecological protection with which they can inform people through public education that the earth is the theatre of God's grace and that, as a result, since humanity is a part of creation, they must also be actors in this theatre of grace because they are among the recipients of this grace. They are also called to exhibit this grace in and towards creation by protecting and maintaining the environment. Government at all levels should ensure that policies to combat climate change are balanced with those to reduce poverty, create jobs, and build infrastructure, which will necessitate investigating connections between trade and finance policies.
- Traditional leaders in Owerri-West can also set up the required systems to ensure that cash donated by governments or other organizations reaches those who are negatively impacted by climate change and are not diverted elsewhere.
- In terms of establishing public education programs on climate change to inform rural and urban inhabitants of the adverse effects of climate change, Christian organizations like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) can play a significant role. They can educate the populace on what can be done to reduce or remove the risk that climate change poses to property and human life. In other words, Christians should actively educate the populace about coping mechanisms for the effects of climate change.
- It is advised that to accomplish this, laws against environmental degradation and other environmental vices resulting from the practice of religion should be passed and enforced by the government at all levels. Educational institutions at all levels are also advised to adopt and integrate eco-ethical studies into their curricula.
- As a religious organization, the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) should urgently guarantee that all government policies regarding the practice of religion within the context of sustainable ecosystems are implemented positively.
- Finally, since religious beliefs are at the root of environmental issues, religion is necessary to find a solution. Humans must therefore employ their many religions to protect and sustain the environment because they are creative beings.

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