

# Some Eco-Destructive Biblical Verses and Post-Colonial Fanaticism: Interpretations and Implications on Climate Change Action

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## Abstract

With a universal conclusion on global climate change and the growing religiosity in post-colonial African societies, some perceptions and reactions to climate change seem to be influenced by religious sentiments instead of scientifically-driven facts and figures. The level of religious fanaticism, especially in post-colonial Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, seems to be obstructing effective climate change actions considering the plethora of eco-destructive Biblical verses that may induce eco-destructive thoughts and actions if not carefully interpreted. Using insights from Van Dijk's (2006) psychological perspective to Critical Discourse Analysis and a corpus-based methodology, this study examined some eco-destructive Biblical verses and their potential effects on contemporary religious fanatics' perceptions of climate change consequences. The findings revealed that a cross section of religious fanatics in some traditional and Pentecostal churches in Cameroon tend to perceive such climate change manifestations as floods, droughts and burning heat as consequences of sins committed by humans against the commandments of their creator – God – not as the results of environmentally-unfriendly activities carried out by humans on earth. This inspired the conclusion that there is the dire need for very specific climate change orientation and awareness activities to be conducted in post-colonial churches in order to educate and encourage the multitude of Christians to embrace scientifically backed climate change actions and solutions.

**Keywords:** Eco-destruction, climate change, Bible verses, post-colonial, religious fanaticism

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## Introduction

Climate change has over the years remained one of the most profound global concerns on the agenda of most nations on the planet. More than ever before, the unprecedented effects of climate change are leaving even the greatest technologically advanced nations worried about the future of the planet. This is so because of the continuous massive injection of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. Recent statistics (IPCC, 2022) suggests that with the current global climate change politics, a possible eco-destruction of the universe is expected by the year 3021 with visible socio-economic damages by 2040. Even at that, there continue to be calls for a more inclusive action plan which aims to provide immediate climate change solutions. Such efforts, if not preceded by broad-based climate change orientation, may not be totally appreciated especially in post-colonial Africa which is now observably flooded with Christian fanatical beliefs.

Broad-based climate change awareness, especially in a religiously-inclined post-colonial Africa, is extremely important for effective and sustainable climate change actions. The plethora of Biblical verses that insinuate celestial authorities over nature seems to leave some diehard Christians with subjective thoughts and uncritical beliefs that such contemporary climate change consequences as floods, droughts and extreme heats are manifestations of God's anger over a sinful population. Scriptures such as Exodus 7 to 11 (on the ten plagues) and 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 may tend to inspire carefree attitudes if not theologically and contextually interpreted. Exodus 7 to 11, for example, explains how God used natural disasters such as water changing its colour, the proliferation of frogs, lice, flies and darkness, to compel Pharaoh to liberate the Israelites who had been enslaved for four hundred years. 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 reads: "*whenever I hold back the rain or send locusts to eat up the crops or send an epidemic on my people, if they pray to me and repent and turn from the evil they have been doing, then I will hear them in heaven, forgive their sins, and make their land prosperous again.*" A superficial interpretation of these chapters and verses may leave one with the feeling that since God controls nature and has once used natural manifestations to punish stubborn tribes and nations, the current and persistent natural disasters such as floods, drought, and extreme heat that are being witness in different parts of the world could simply be another expression of celestial anger. Though some theologians (Jenkins, 2013 and Bube, 2013) have taken turns to argue that even with the multitudes of verses that suggest divine influence of such natural disasters, the Bible still encourages environmental conservation. However, the theological ignorance of some Christian fanatics may leave them with environmentally dangerous opinions which do not pledge their supports to bottom-up scientific

solutions to global environmental problems.

Even as there is an observable indifferent disposition towards climate change among some diehard Christians, the global impacts of climate change continue to inspire top-bottom and bottom-up solution-based knowledge in almost every discipline. In fact, cross-disciplinary studies are now quite popular in this regard and each domain explores specificities that cumulate towards possible climate change solution. A typical example is Ecolinguistics and Ecotheology. While Ecolinguistics, essentially, explores eco-constructive and destructive discourses in order to assess the extent to which they encourage or discourage the destruction of the ecosystem, Ecotheology explores similar concerns in religious discourses. Hoel, et al. (2011) argue that ecotheology anchors on the theoretical conception that there is a nexus between human/religious beliefs and the degradation or restoration and preservation of nature. Indeed, these two approaches to ecological study, in a way, tend to connect. It could be fair enough to classify Ecotheology as an aspect of Ecolinguistics because while Ecotheology is limited to environmental concerns in religious texts, these concerns could also be data for Ecolinguistic investigations. This study coalesce thoughts from these two premises to find out how eco-destructive biblical verses in a post-colonial fanatic era might have an adverse effect on post-colonial fanatics' interpretations of climate change as well as their contributions to a global solution.

Recent studies (Lybarger and Damico, 2023) have shown a significant influence of religious voices on climate change consequences. These scholars report that through sermons on such subjects as “we are in this together”, “together we will make it through” and “confronting challenges can help us become stronger”, their targeted communities were able to collectively deal with a fire disaster. While these stories may articulate ambivalent positions with respect to climate disaster, they do not highlight the preachers' thoughts on the possible causes of such disasters. The focus is rather on how they respond to the crisis as a community. Post-colonial Africa in general and Cameroon in particular is characterised by extremist tendencies especially in religious practices. More and more Cameroonians are increasingly committing to religious beliefs and the churches are progressively hosting crowds of Christians who do not only believe in the Bible as the word of God to humanity, but are constantly reminded of the dire need to practice all what is biblically scripted without any reservation. This, however, poses a somewhat serious concern when it comes to the interpretation of some verses with direct eco-destructive implications. The problem is that if the verses are not accurately interpreted, it may undermine ongoing efforts geared towards mitigating the effects of climate change and combating the menace across the globe. This study is, therefore, designed to highlight and analyse some eco-destructive verses in the Bible, and to find out how some religious fanatics interpret them.

### **Language and Religion**

Language finds a place in every domain of life. Mukherjee (2003) rightly states that through language, the ideologies and beliefs of different peoples and cultures across generations and boundaries are transmitted and understood. While language is an important tool of communication in religion, researchers (Chruszczewski, 2006; Mooney, 2006; Zuckerman, 2006) agree that language greatly influences religion. Zuckerman(2006) argues that whether hostile or receptive to phonosemantic matching, language can always be used to formulate religious identity. This is in fact quite related to Mooney's (2006) conclusion that the language of “marginal religious movements” constitutes identity and community. This may be quite typical of African traditional religion where sects within the same culture have rights of specific prayers in turns. A recent study (Alsohaibani, 2017) reported that in medieval Arabic, some Muslims in Jerusalem designed phono-semantic matching under the auspices of “kanisat alqiyama” (the Church of Resurrection), to express their rejection of Christianity. They used phonetic similarity and semantic dichotomy to replace “alqiyama” (resurrection) with “alqumama” (rubbish), and to create the phrase “kanisat alqumama” (the Church of Rubbish). Muslims are not the only group to have adopted this type of linguistic behaviour. Alsohaibani (Op cit.) also reports that the Jews have used this technique to express their anti-Islamic inclinations. Some Jewish groups would replace the Arabic word “rasul” (the messenger of God: Mohammad) with the Hebrew negative word “pasul” (disqualified or faulty). Zuckerman (2006) adds that tracing the roots of some words and obtaining an in-depth understanding of their derivations could alter prevailing religious concepts.

Arguably, religion influences language just as much as language influences religion. Some scholars (Chruszczewski, 2006 Carrasco and Riegelhaupt, 2006; Bassiouney, 2013) have explored the impact of religious texts on individual and communal actions. Bassiouney (2013), for example, argues that some texts influence human behaviours. The recitation of a particular verse or prayer may require a particular position. This is quite observable in most Christian churches where certain prayers or evocation require kneeling, standing, dancing, holding of hands and even lying on the floor. Also, preaching may cause adherents to shed tears, dress or interact differently in society. Botting (1984) adds that Jehovah Witnesses use a lot of rhetorical questions while discussing with their believers. In typical African societies, speech acts such as swearing, blessing and cursing could have farfetched implications on individuals and communities (Mbiti, 1970). These thoughts, in a way, find expressions in academically established conceptions that celebrate the co-variation between language and religion.

Theolinguistics and ecotheology are two key areas of this study that explore the co-variation between language, religion and the ecology respectively. The term “theolinguistics” was first mentioned by the Belgian linguist, Jean-Pierre Van Noppen and later factored into the Cambridge Encyclopedia in the 1980s (Hoel et al. 2011). Basically, it explores biblical and theological discourses as well as the language of those involved in religious practices (Crystal, 1981:438). To Noppen (1995), the domain seeks to describe how human discourses may be employed to refer to the divine and beyond that, how language operates in ‘religious’ situations in manners which may not meet the narrow standard of direct, univocal reference, but which nevertheless operate with a logic which can be demarcated in terms of known linguistic processes (metaphors, speech acts,...)

The current study, though within the logic of the above conception, rather explores documented evidence in relation to the extent to which they influence attitudes towards the ecosystem. Like psycholinguistics, Ecolinguistics and Ethnolinguistics, Theolinguistics also has its uniqueness and passes as a sub-branch of linguistic analysis.

Over the years, Theolinguistics has moved from relatively biased appellations such as “Christian language,” “religious language” or “language of belief” to an academic and even broader appellation (Kucharska–Dreiss, 2004) even though the foci have remained the same. This is quite logical since limiting it to Christian language exempts linguistic practices in other religious sects. Similarly, “the language of belief” also clearly ignores the linguistic features that suggest the contrary. The term “theolinguistics” has also come under attack since, epistemologically, it seems limited to the language of theologians (Op. Cit.), when in fact, it actually explores the correlation between language and religion in all its diversities. Kucharska–Dreiss (Op Cit.) has also criticized the term “linguistics of religion” on grounds that though it is broad enough, it is too long and includes world religions whereas the Europeans have a culture of monotheism. While the debates on naming persists, it is imperative for the scope to include broad subjects since participants in the discourse are not strictly professionals in the cult but may also include participants with very little or no understanding of the issues. Like most subfields of language study, Theolinguistics analyses all written, spoken or visual texts related to religion. Theolinguistics, in a way, could be considered a sub-domain of Ecolinguistics since religious discourses with ecological insinuations constitute relevant data for corpus linguistic research. Ecotheology stems from the premise that there is a co-variation between religious or spiritual beliefs and environmental conservation. While some religious scholars (Jenkins, 2013 and Bube, 2013) continuously give the impression that Christianity unequivocally encourages eco-conservation, some religious fanatics are observably overtaken by personal spiritual clairvoyance which seems to leave them with opinions that do not applaud national and international climate change solution-based efforts.

### **Theoretical Landscape**

This study builds on the Dijkian socio-cognitive perspective to Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 2006). This theory is partly based on the conjecture that there is a close connection between society and thought, and that the process of text production and consumption reflects the interpretation and comprehension of cognition. Van Dijk (2006) argues that an analysis of the cognitive link between discourse and society does not only offer methodological grounding for many discourse structures but also reveals how discourse is able to exercise power in society. This ideological premise therefore allows for the analyses of different linguistic variables and also explores the force that such variables exert on the society.

### **Methodology**

This study is built on both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to data collection and analysis. Quantitatively, the King James Version of the Bible<sup>1</sup> was served in plaintext format and subjected to the AntConC software for subsequent frequency and concordance plot checks. For systematic purposes, five key climate change registers (flood, drought, heat, rain, and fire) were tested for frequency and a concordance plot built. After each frequency check, only the destructive sense of the above lexemes was considered for analysis. The choice of King James Bible was motivated by three factors. First, it was possible to access and download it online. Second, it is observably used by many Cameroonians. Finally, references to environmental degradation are more ideological than linguistic which means even with some slight linguistic differences, the thoughts more or less express the same concerns. More quantitative and qualitative data came from an interview conducted in four Christian churches: Catholic, Presbyterian, Winners’ Chapel and Mountain of Fire Ministry, all in the city of Yaounde. From these churches, 80 informants –20 Catholics, 20 Presbyterians, 20 Winners’ Chapel and 20 Mountain of Fire Christians were interviewed. While the denominations were consciously selected for purposes of variation<sup>2</sup>, the number of participants was strictly based on visible evidence of diehardism on Biblical issues<sup>3</sup>. Five verses with deep implications on environmental degradation were selected and presented to the informants to interpret them in relation to the current climate change consequences in major cities in the country. The informants’ opinions

<sup>1</sup> Downloaded from [www.holybooks.com](http://www.holybooks.com).

<sup>2</sup> Tradition versus protestants denominations

<sup>3</sup> This was tested through a short preliminary discussion and an observation of the commitment to Biblical evidence and Christian principles

were categorised in terms of whether they consider the phenomenon the effects of environmental degradation or the manifestation of celestial rage. The following table presents the Bible verses that were presented to the informants.

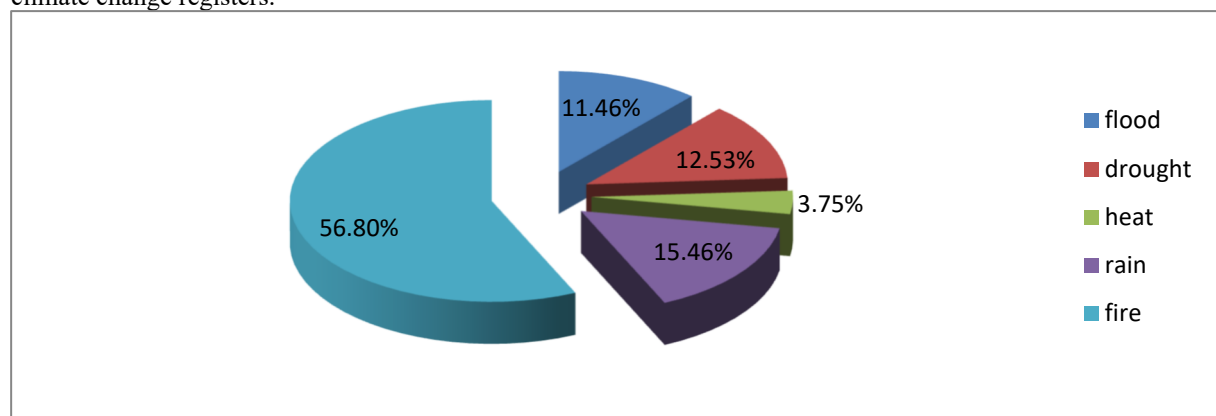
**Table 1: Pre-selected verses**

No.	Verses	Quotations
1	Exodus 7 to 11	The Plagues
2	2 Chronicles 7:13-14	If I shut up heaven <b>that there be no rain</b> , or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; if my people, which are by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.
3	Job 12:15	Behold [God] withholdeth the waters, and they dry up: also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth.
4	Haggai 1:11	And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle and upon all the labour of the hands.
5	Psalms 105:32	[God] gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land.

While the above verses may have theologically charged interpretations in the contexts of their use, they nonetheless superficially have direct destructive implications on climate change solutions. The informants' reactions to these verses, in relation to some current climate change consequences, were categorised and presented in terms of the extent to which they viewed climate change as an environmental problem.

### Results and Discussion

It was first necessary to find out the recurrence of some key climate change registers related to climate change or environmental hazards in the Bible. This was considered quite important because the frequency of a lexical variable in a particular corpus does not only indicate preferences but also the typicality of a discourse genre which in a way could also suggest how often readers are most likely to come across them and the extent to which they can be influenced by them. The following figure, therefore, presents the frequency of the five pre-selected common climate change registers.



**Figure 1: Frequency of some climate change registers in the Bible**

Essentially, though these words occurred in different senses only their eco-destruction senses were considered for analysis here. From the above figure, we observe that some elements of climate change consequences (flood, drought, heat, rain and fire) are quite recurrent in the Bible. The word "fire", for example, occurred 551 times in the King James version of the Bible but only 213 (56.8%) in environmentally destructive sense. The word "rain" occurred 102 times but only 58 (15.46%) times in eco-destructive sense. Furthermore, the word "flood" occurred 43 (11.46%), "drought" 47 (12.53%) and heat 14 (3.75%). Notably, the qualification of destructive and non-destructive senses was based on the presentation of the ideas as the manifestation of divine power. While the fact that "fire" is more recurrent than the other variables may be suggestive of the predominance of retributive justice in the Bible, we are, however, more concerned with how biblical verses with profound implications for environmental degradation influence the beliefs and actions of contemporary Christian fanatics. Interestingly, even with the above frequency of the tested variables, the probability of readers coming across eco-destructive verses

in the Bible is 0.09%<sup>1</sup>. This does not, however, suggest that the verses could not be subject to diverse interpretations especially now that climate change constitutes an important subject matter on the agenda of every nation.

Since the intentions of running a frequency test on these linguistic variables was to find out their recurrence in the corpus in order to have an idea of how often readers could come across the specific texts, it was equally necessary to run a concordance plot test on the King James version of the Bible to see how these variables are distributed across. The following figure captures a concordance test on the five words tested.

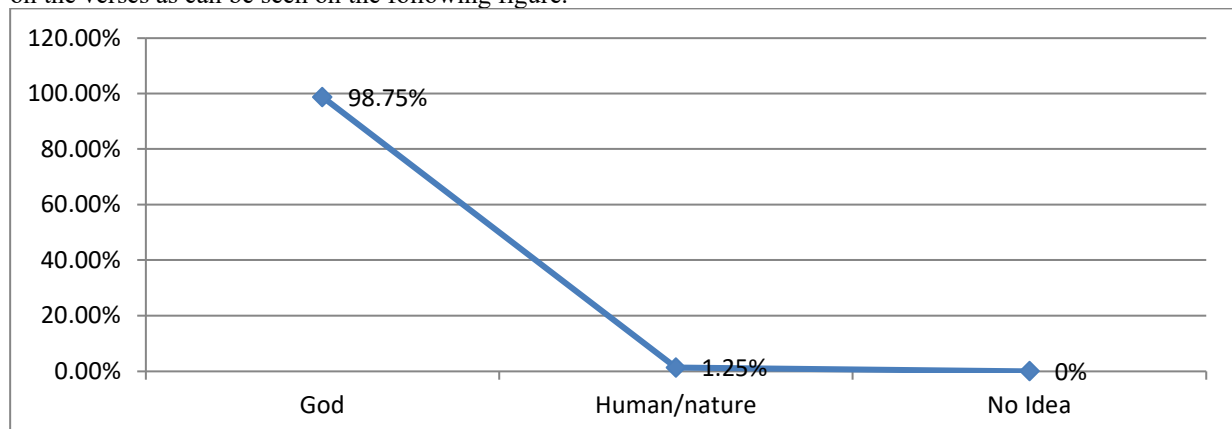


**Figure 2: Concordance Plots of some climate change registers in the King James Bible**

The above concordance test did not exclude usages in the non-eco-destructive sense since references to these climate change consequences may trigger thoughts on contemporary environmental destruction and so inspire positive or negative actions to climate change solutions. From the above figure, therefore, the variables are not only concentrated on specific pages of the books, but spread across the entire text. Arguably, this could have farfetched implications on fanatics’ responses to climate change since readership of the Bible may be more spiritual than academic.

**Fanatical Interpretations of Eco-Destructive Biblical Verses**

The informants’ interpretations of the five biblical verses aligned with earlier predictions. While the above textual examples may have other interpretations, the majority as seen on Figure Three below nonetheless indicated that God is the author of ecological destruction and that he uses diverse destructive outcomes to punish those who do not do as he commands. In example (2), for example, they all agreed that God is the referent who restrains waters and causes flood and that the direct reference shows the power of God over the forces of nature. Their interpretations tilted to the opinion that the only solution to our environmental problems is through a complete supplication to God who can restore the eco-system and make it whole again. The informants all had an opinion on the verses as can be seen on the following figure.



**Figure 3: Fanatical Opinions on the Cause of Climate Change**

From the figure above, 79 (98.75%) of the 80 informants believed that climate change is happening because God wants it to happen and not because of human or natural causes. Though one informant felt that humans’

<sup>1</sup> These words occurred 375 (0.04) times in a text of 837865 words.

actions have a role to play in climate change, he later added that it was only possible because God allowed it which in a way goes back to God. To these fanatics, therefore, if God reigns supreme over the forces of nature and can punish people with floods, droughts or extreme heat, and we are now grappling with these devastating consequences of climate change, it follows that God is using these environmental hazards to punish mankind for their sins. However, the development of science has proven that the mass and uncoordinated exploitation of the forest as well as the consistent injection of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere are greatly affecting the environment. The informants' consistency with the superficial interpretation of the verses is not unexpected especially because a previous study (Angwah, 2020) revealed that some Cameroonians interpret proverbs from its superficial perspective which could also be true of glaring eco-destructive scriptures. Notably, while religious impressions about issues have their places, considering that humanity is naturally a spiritual being, it could be misleading to attribute real life practical problems to spiritual or religious causes rather than factual or real life causes. Logically, if a phenomenon causes another and we do not desire the cause, we simply avoid or condition the phenomenon in a way that produces the required results. This basic understanding of how things work could perhaps guide post-colonial Christian fanatical interpretations of Biblical scriptures in relation to climate change reality and action.

### Conclusion

This paper has explored some eco-destructive verses in the Bible in relation to fanatical interpretations and their implications on global climate change solutions. At a time when religion is seriously threatening free and creative thinking in Africa and people are almost always attributing their difficulties to God instead of finding ways of dealing with them, it was imperative to explore this concern in order to raise awareness on the effects of fanatical scriptural inferences on bottom-up climate change responses. Findings revealed that a cross section of Christian fanatics from both traditional and protestant denominations believe that God is at the centre of ecological degradation and the solution is neither in any scientific breakthrough nor a reorientation of environmental stories but in a total supplication to God for restoration. This position tends to challenge current understanding of climate change as the direct consequences of consistent emission of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. The findings draws to the fact that while human spirituality has its place, preachers must come up with more practical approaches in the preaching of the gospel, especially when it comes to verses that hint on ecological damages. This is so because attributing the damages to God, in a way, undermines humans' responsibility and the possibility of terrestrial solutions.

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