

ECO-THEOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF STEWARDSHIP VERSUS EXPLOITATION IN THE PURSUIT OF SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract

Research Problem: *This paper investigates the complex intersection between Christian theology and environmental ethics in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the theological tension between stewardship and exploitation of nature. Despite rich theological traditions, African Christian engagement with ecological sustainability remains inconsistent and underdeveloped.*

Methods: *The study adopts a qualitative research design, employing content analysis of key theological and pastoral texts alongside semi-structured interviews with selected church leaders and environmental advocates across Sub-Saharan Africa. The theoretical framework draws from Creation Theology, Liberation Theology, and Postcolonial Ecological Hermeneutics.*

Results: *Findings indicate that African Christian traditions contain deep theological resources supportive of ecological care. However, these are frequently underutilized due to misinterpretations of scripture, lingering colonial theological legacies, and economic constraints. In contrast, churches that incorporate indigenous ecological knowledge with biblical stewardship principles exhibit stronger engagement in environmental activities such as afforestation, ecological education, and land restoration.*

Conclusion: *The study concludes that meaningful environmental transformation requires a reimagining of theology that affirms the sacredness of creation and emphasizes collective responsibility. Churches that embrace such a contextual theology are better positioned to respond to Africa's ecological challenges.*

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This research contributes a novel contextual framework for African eco-theology that integrates indigenous wisdom with Christian theological ethics, offering a model for sustainable faith-based ecological engagement.*

Recommendation: *The paper recommends the reformation of theological curricula, intensified advocacy by church institutions, and grassroots*

mobilization to empower African churches as transformative agents in the movement for environmental sustainability.

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with an escalating ecological crisis characterized by deforestation, pollution, desertification, and climate instability, challenges that are further intensified by poverty, fragile institutions, and extractive economic systems (UNEP, 2021). Within this fragile context, Christianity stands as a powerful cultural and moral force, capable of shaping community values and influencing ecological behavior. Yet, scholarship identifies a paradox: although biblical texts affirm stewardship of creation, certain interpretations particularly of Genesis 1:28 have historically reinforced anthropocentric and exploitative attitudes toward nature (Conradie, 2006; Boff, 1995). Such theological misreadings have inadvertently legitimized unsustainable practices that exacerbate environmental decline.

In response, eco-theology has emerged, advocating a re-reading of scripture through ecological and ethical perspectives. Recent scholarship highlights constructive engagements that draw from Creation Theology, Liberation Theology, and African indigenous ecological wisdom (Chitando & Conradie, 2011; Kumalo, 2014). Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven, especially within Protestant and evangelical traditions across the region. Indigenous African cosmologies, which traditionally stress ecological harmony, have often been sidelined in theological education and church praxis (Mwambazambi & Banza, 2014). Although eco-theology offers rich conceptual resources, many churches continue to lack contextual tools, liturgical resources, and institutional commitment to translate ecological concern into concrete, sustained action (Habel, 2006; Conradie, 2011).

Despite growing awareness of environmental degradation across Sub-Saharan Africa, many Christian communities—particularly within Protestant and evangelical traditions—remain both theologically underprepared and practically disengaged from ecological concerns (Kameeta, 2007; Conradie, 2011). Although both Scripture and African traditions provide strong foundations for environmental stewardship, these resources are often misinterpreted or marginalized. For instance, the biblical concept of dominion is frequently construed as legitimizing exploitation rather than stewardship (Habel, 2000), while indigenous ecological wisdom, which emphasizes balance and sustainability, is regularly sidelined in church discourse (Mbiti, 1991). Although eco-theology has gained visibility in academic scholarship, it has not yet been adequately translated into practical frameworks that resonate with African realities (Kaoma, 2013). This disconnect between theology, culture, and environmental responsibility exposes a critical gap in both scholarship and practice.

Accordingly, this study undertakes a contextual exploration of how Christian theology is interpreted, taught, and enacted in response to ecological crises in Sub-Saharan Africa. By reconstructing theological paradigms that move beyond exploitative readings of dominion, it foregrounds faith-based ecological engagement grounded in both biblical teaching and indigenous wisdom. In so doing, it contributes toward a contextual African eco-theology that is theologically credible and socially transformative (Chitando & Conradie, 2016).

This study seeks to critically explore how Christian eco-theology can serve as a

transformative tool in responding to environmental degradation across Sub-Saharan Africa. It focuses on re-examining the theological tension between stewardship and exploitation by investigating how biblical teachings on creation care are interpreted and practiced within Protestant and evangelical churches. Additionally, the study aims to assess the potential of integrating indigenous African ecological wisdom with Christian theology in order to formulate a more contextually grounded and actionable eco-theological framework. The overarching goal is to empower churches as proactive agents of ecological justice and sustainable development within African communities.

Research Objectives

To achieve this purpose, the study sets out to:

- i. Examine how Protestant and evangelical churches in Sub-Saharan Africa interpret and apply biblical teachings on dominion, stewardship, and creation care.
- ii. Identify theological, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder effective Christian engagement with environmental sustainability.
- iii. Explore the role of indigenous African ecological values and how they can be harmonized with Christian theological perspectives.
- iv. Document faith-based environmental practices and initiatives currently undertaken by churches in the region.
- v. Develop a context-specific eco-theological framework that combines biblical and indigenous insights for practical application in church-based environmental action.
- vi. **Research Questions:**

- vii. How do Protestant and evangelical Christian communities in Sub-Saharan Africa interpret and apply biblical teachings related to environmental stewardship?
- viii. What theological and cultural factors contribute to the gap between Christian belief and ecological responsibility in these contexts?
- ix. How can indigenous African ecological wisdom be integrated with Christian eco-theology to promote sustainable environmental practices?
- x. What practical models or initiatives exist within African churches that reflect effective faith-based environmental engagement?
- xi. In what ways can churches be equipped theologically and institutionally to become more active in addressing environmental issues?

The Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study hold significant value for diverse stakeholders across religious, academic, and ecological contexts. For church leaders and theologians, especially within Protestant and evangelical traditions, it provides fresh insight into how Scripture may be interpreted as a resource for ecological responsibility rather than exploitation (Ela, 1986/2019). This perspective can inform the development of contextually relevant sermons, liturgies, and church programs that emphasize environmental stewardship (Kinoti, 1999). Theological institutions and seminaries will also gain a stronger framework for embedding eco-theology within curricula, thereby equipping future clergy to respond meaningfully to environmental challenges (Ngong, 2023). Beyond the academy, environmental advocates and policymakers can find in this research a bridge between faith and ecological action, empowering collaboration

with churches as agents of sustainability (Healey, 1996/2012).

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in three major theoretical frameworks: Creation Theology, Liberation Theology, and Postcolonial Ecological Hermeneutics. These frameworks collectively provide a theological and ethical lens for assessing environmental stewardship and exploitation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Creation Theology emphasizes the intrinsic value of the Earth as God's creation. It suggests that humanity's role is not to dominate destructively but to care for the environment (Genesis 2:15). Scholars such as Bauckham (2010) argue that true biblical stewardship involves humility and service rather than exploitation. This perspective challenges the misuse of dominion theology, which has been misinterpreted to justify environmental degradation.

Liberation Theology, initially developed to address socio-political oppression, has broadened to encompass ecological concerns. Boff (1995) contends that environmental injustice is closely linked to social injustice. In African contexts where communities face both poverty and ecological decline, this theology advocates for justice for both the marginalized and the planet.

Postcolonial Ecological Hermeneutics Critiques Western interpretations of scripture that have facilitated resource exploitation. Habel (2000) notes that many biblical texts have been co-opted to support colonial expansion and extractivism. In contrast, African eco-theologians promote re-reading scripture in ways that honor indigenous ecological wisdom and communal responsibility.

Together, these frameworks establish a strong foundation for critiquing environmental

exploitation and fostering a theology that supports ecological sustainability and justice.

Methodological Approach

This study employs a qualitative, theological-ethical approach that focuses on textual analysis and contextual interpretation. Key biblical texts, such as Genesis 1:26–28 and Romans 8:19–22, are examined to explore the theological foundations of environmental stewardship and human responsibility toward creation. The research also reviews scholarly literature on eco-theology, African ecological ethics, and relevant church teachings to evaluate how Christian theology addresses environmental challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa (Conradie, 2006; Habel, 2011).

In addition, the study incorporates case studies and public statements from African churches involved in environmental advocacy, grounding the discussion in real-life applications. This methodology facilitates a deeper understanding of how Christian belief systems can influence environmental ethics and promote sustainable living within specific cultural contexts (Mugambi, 2001). Overall, the approach integrates scriptural interpretation, ethical reflection, and contextual analysis to provide a comprehensive, faith-based response to ecological degradation.

Understanding Eco-Theology

Definition and Historical Development of Eco-Theology: Eco-theology represents an interdisciplinary dialogue between religion and ecological concerns, particularly within the framework of Christian theology. It examines how faith traditions interpret humanity's moral responsibility toward creation, affirming that the environment is not simply a resource for exploitation but a sacred trust, as emphasized in Genesis 2:15 (Tucker & Grim, 2001; Bouma-Prediger, 2010). The field gained momentum in the late twentieth century amid intensifying ecological crises and ethical debates about

environmental degradation. A pivotal moment was White's (1967) influential critique, which associated Western Christian notions of dominion with ecological exploitation and spurred theologians to reinterpret dominion as stewardship, centered on care and accountability. By the 1970s and 1980s, eco-theology had developed into a distinct academic discipline that combined biblical interpretation with ecological science and ethics (Hessel & Ruether, 2000). Today, it incorporates diverse cultural perspectives, including African indigenous insights, emphasizing creation care as both ecological responsibility and social justice.

Biblical Foundations of Creation Care:

The Bible provides a strong theological basis for environmental responsibility, affirming humanity's vocation to care for creation. In Genesis 1:26–28, the call to exercise dominion is widely understood not as license for exploitation but as a mandate for stewardship, entrusting humans with the role of caretakers who sustain and protect the natural world in harmony with God's design (Tucker, 2010). This theme is reinforced in Genesis 2:15, where Adam is placed in the Garden "to work it and take care of it," highlighting responsibility rather than domination. Yet, throughout history, dominion has often been misinterpreted as justification for unrestrained use of resources, contributing to ecological crises (Horrell, 2010). In response, contemporary eco-theology critiques anthropocentric readings, urging a relational vision that situates humanity within creation's interconnected web (Deane-Drummond, 2012). Such perspectives resonate with biblical texts like Psalm 24:1 and Amos 5:24, which affirm God's ownership of creation and demand justice that embraces ecological well-being.

Stewardship versus Dominion:
Theological Tensions- The theological tension between dominion and stewardship in Christianity arises from competing

interpretations of humanity's role in creation, particularly in Genesis 1:26–28 and Genesis 2:15. The dominion paradigm, highlighted by White (1967), interprets the mandate to "subdue" and "have dominion" as granting humanity unrestricted authority over nature, a view often invoked to justify exploitation and ecological degradation. In contrast, the stewardship model, grounded in Genesis 2:15, emphasizes humanity's duty "to till and keep," thereby underscoring responsibility and service to creation (Hiebert, 1996). Critics of dominion argue that it fosters an anthropocentric worldview that instrumentalizes nature and undermines its intrinsic worth (Bouma-Prediger, 2001). Stewardship is more consistent with eco-theological ethics, portraying humans as accountable caretakers before God. Yet, as Northcott (1996) cautions, stewardship risks paternalism if it implies superiority rather than mutuality with creation. Thus, Christian ecological ethics must balance ruling with servanthood, advancing a relational and theocentric vision of creation care.

The African Environmental Context

Environmental Crises in Sub-Saharan Africa: Sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with an intricate web of environmental challenges that severely threaten its ecosystems, economies, and human well-being. Among the most urgent concerns are deforestation, desertification, water scarcity, and the intensifying impacts of climate change. In countries such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, rapid population growth combined with increasing demand for land and firewood has accelerated deforestation. This process not only eliminates habitats and reduces biodiversity but also exacerbates soil erosion and disrupts rainfall cycles (FAO, 2020). Similarly, desertification in the Sahel continues to diminish arable land, thereby heightening food insecurity. Unsustainable practices such as overgrazing and monocropping further deplete soil quality,

leaving vast areas increasingly unproductive (UNEP, 2019).

Water scarcity has also become a growing crisis. Erratic rainfall patterns, together with excessive extraction of freshwater resources, restrict access to clean water and undermine both public health and agricultural livelihoods (World Bank, 2022). Climate change compounds these pressures by triggering recurrent droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events. Vulnerable groups, especially women and children who rely directly on natural resources, are disproportionately affected (Niang et al., 2014). Yet policy responses remain inconsistent, underfunded, and poorly enforced. Without coordinated action, continuing environmental degradation threatens to derail sustainable development and destabilize the region's long-term future.

The Role of Christianity in Shaping Ecological Attitudes: Christianity has historically shaped human attitudes toward the environment, often in ways that promote ecological care but at times contributing to environmental degradation. Central to the Christian worldview is the conviction that the Earth is God's creation and that humanity bears responsibility for its care (Genesis 2:15). This stewardship ethic calls Christians to protect and preserve the natural world for future generations (White, 1967). Yet, the biblical notion of "dominion" in Genesis 1:28 has frequently been misinterpreted as license for exploitation, fostering utilitarian attitudes that treat nature primarily as a resource rather than a divine gift (Conradie, 2006).

In recent decades, however, a shift has occurred within Christian thought, emphasizing ecological responsibility and justice. Theologians and faith-based organizations increasingly frame environmental care as a moral and spiritual imperative. Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (2015) exemplifies this renewed vision, linking ecological degradation with poverty and inequality while calling for integral

ecological conversion. Similarly, African Christian leaders highlight the inseparability of environmental sustainability and holistic community development, stressing the moral responsibility of churches to safeguard creation (Kumalo, 2020).

Nevertheless, engagement remains uneven. While some congregations participate actively in initiatives such as tree planting, clean-up campaigns, and recycling, others remain hesitant due to limited theological grounding or competing socio-economic concerns. This unevenness underscores the urgency of developing contextual eco-theologies that integrate biblical stewardship with indigenous ecological wisdom. Ultimately, Christianity provides rich theological resources for environmental care, but realizing this potential requires sustained reflection, practical commitment, and contextual sensitivity.

African Traditional Ecological Wisdom: African Traditional Ecological Wisdom captures the deep-seated indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices that shape how many African communities relate to the natural world. This wisdom is not just practical it is spiritual and symbolic, rooted in cultural values, oral traditions, and a profound sense of the sacred. In this worldview, nature is not a lifeless backdrop but a living, interconnected entity worthy of reverence (Chigbo, 2012). Land, rivers, animals, and forests are regarded not simply as resources, but as members of an extended community that includes ancestors and spiritual beings.

In everyday life, traditional African societies expressed this ecological philosophy through concrete ethical practices. These included taboos, seasonal agricultural rhythms, and communal land tenure systems that promoted collective responsibility. For example, sacred groves were preserved not only as sites of worship but also as reservoirs of biodiversity. Taboos often restricted hunting during breeding seasons or harvesting during certain times,

ensuring ecological balance and long-term sustainability (Oyeshile, 2006; Onyike, 2014).

That said, this indigenous wisdom is not without its challenges. One significant limitation lies in its predominantly oral transmission, which makes it vulnerable in the face of modernization. The forces of globalization, urban expansion, and the rise of formal religions have increasingly diluted its influence, particularly among younger generations (Mawere, 2010). Yet, despite these setbacks, African ecological wisdom remains a vital source of insight. Its holistic and relational approach to the environment offers meaningful contributions to contemporary environmental ethics, especially in African eco-theology, where indigenous values and Christian teachings can be thoughtfully integrated.

Theological-Ethical Reflections

Interpreting Human Responsibility Toward Nature: In today's theological and ethical conversations, understanding humanity's responsibility toward nature requires more than just quoting Scripture; it demands a thoughtful balance between biblical teachings and the pressing realities of our environmental crisis. For a long time, Genesis 1:28 was interpreted to mean humans have dominion over the Earth, which often justified the unchecked exploitation of nature. But many modern scholars now point us toward a different biblical vision one grounded in Genesis 2:15, where Adam is placed in the garden "to till it and keep it." This verse speaks not of control, but of care, preservation, and partnership with the Earth (Hiebert, 1996).

This shift moves us from a model of domination to one of stewardship. It challenges believers to see creation not just as a resource for human use, but as something inherently valuable worthy of respect and protection simply because it exists (White, 1967). Theologians like Moltmann (1985) take it further, suggesting that the bond between

humans and nature is covenantal, not contractual. That means God calls us into a relationship with creation marked by mutual responsibility, not exploitation.

On a practical level, this theology demands that Christians and churches become actively involved in environmental issues conservation, climate justice, and sustainable living should be expressions of faith. Yet, despite this biblical and theological grounding, many religious communities remain on the sidelines, unsure of how ecological action fits into spiritual life (Conradie, 2006).

One of the core challenges is re-educating both clergy and laypeople to see environmental care not as an add-on but as central to what it means to follow Christ. Christians are not meant to be conquerors of creation but co-creators and caretakers within God's world. Caring for the Earth, then, is not optional; it is a moral and spiritual calling that should shape our theology, worship, and public witness, especially in the face of our current ecological crisis.

Ethical Implications of Exploitation and Neglect: When we exploit or neglect the environment, the consequences are not just ecological; they are deeply ethical and spiritual. From an eco-theological point of view, exploiting nature for profit, without respecting its integrity, directly violates the stewardship principle found in Genesis 2:15. God's call was to care for creation, not destroy or dominate it. On the other hand, neglect often born from indifference or misplaced priorities reflects a passive form of complicity in environmental harm, and this happens in both secular and religious contexts.

The results are devastating: dwindling natural resources, displacement of vulnerable populations, and the extinction of species. Tragically, these impacts often fall hardest on the poor and marginalized (Conradie, 2011). Such outcomes betray Christian commitments

to justice and sustainability (DeWitt, 1994). Meanwhile, environmental neglect erodes our collective sense of responsibility and weakens the Church's prophetic voice (Habel, 2000). Worse still, it reveals a theological blind spot a failure to recognize creation as a sacred trust, something God calls us to protect and honor.

The ethical takeaway is clear: First, continuing to exploit the environment undermines justice for future generations it robs them of a livable planet. Second, when faith communities neglect creation care, they risk losing credibility and relevance in critical conversations about sustainability. Churches and theologians must take up this responsibility with fresh urgency, not as a side issue, but as a fundamental part of living out the Gospel (Bouma-Prediger, 2010).

The Church's Prophetic Role in Promoting Sustainability: The Church's prophetic role in promoting sustainability is deeply rooted in its responsibility to speak truth to power, challenge systems that damage the environment, and advocate for ethical care of creation. In the Bible, prophets were not just predictors of the future they were reformers who boldly addressed moral failings and called communities to transformation (Brueggemann, 2001). Today, as the world faces pressing issues like climate change, deforestation, pollution, and unchecked resource exploitation, the Church is invited to echo this prophetic tradition by fostering ecological awareness and encouraging sustainable living at both individual and governmental levels.

On a practical level, this means weaving creation care into sermons, discipleship programs, and public advocacy. Churches can become powerful agents of change by influencing environmental policies, modeling eco-conscious behavior such as planting trees or reducing waste and standing in solidarity with communities hardest hit by environmental crises (Conradie, 2011). Yet in many African settings, the Church's prophetic voice has been

subdued. Factors like political entanglements, theological neglect of environmental concerns, and a dominant focus on prosperity theology have often stifled its impact (Ishola, 2020).

Although some churches have taken commendable steps through grassroots environmental initiatives, many still struggle with inadequate theological grounding and limited institutional support to sustain these efforts. A vibrant prophetic voice requires more than passionate advocacy it calls for theological renewal, revitalized worship practices, and a consistent public witness (DeWitt, 1994). The Church must therefore go beyond mere talk. It must act by educating its members, collaborating with civil society groups, and demanding accountability from those in power who contribute to environmental harm.

In sum, the Church's prophetic role in environmental sustainability is vital but often underplayed. Its true strength lies in reclaiming the biblical call to stewardship and stepping forward boldly to challenge ecological injustice with both faith-filled conviction and tangible action.

Toward a Contextual African Eco-Theology

Merging Indigenous and Christian Worldviews: Bringing together Indigenous African ecological wisdom and Christian theology opens up both enriching possibilities and real tensions in developing a truly contextual eco-theology. Indigenous worldviews typically regard the environment as sacred, alive, and intricately linked with all life forms. Nature is not simply a resource to be used but a living system that deserves reverence and harmony (Mbiti, 1991). This stands in contrast to some Western-influenced Christian perspectives that highlight human dominion over creation interpretations that, if misunderstood, can encourage exploitation instead of stewardship (White, 1967).

To merge these worldviews meaningfully, one must recognize the theological richness of African cosmologies without undermining essential Christian doctrines. For instance, the traditional African respect for ancestral lands can enhance biblical understandings of stewardship (Genesis 2:15) and covenantal care for the Earth. Yet, complexities emerge where Indigenous practices such as spiritual mediation or ritual may appear to challenge Christian exclusivity.

Importantly, this process must avoid both idealizing Indigenous traditions and uncritically blending them with Christian theology. As Kalu (2010) emphasizes, genuine integration should focus on shared moral and ecological values like community, sustainability, and respect for life while remaining firmly rooted in a Christ-centered worldview. This kind of approach honors cultural identity and encourages a responsible, faith-based engagement with environmental issues.

Practically, churches in Sub-Saharan Africa can embrace cultural elements like proverbs, rituals, and communal ethics that resonate with biblical teachings. This kind of theological rootedness not only nurtures local identity but equips communities to address ecological challenges in ways that are both ethical and spiritual.

Practical Models of Eco-Theological Engagement: Translating theological insight into real-world environmental action is at the heart of eco-theological engagement. One practical model is *creation care*, where churches actively promote sustainable habits such as conserving energy, reducing waste, and organizing tree planting campaigns. This model echoes the biblical call to “tend and keep” the Earth (Genesis 2:15), inviting believers to live out their faith through everyday ecological responsibility (Bouma-Prediger, 2010).

Another model emphasizes *advocacy and public theology*, where churches engage with broader environmental justice movements. These communities link ecological damage to social injustices, addressing issues like climate change, pollution, and deforestation not just as environmental concerns, but as moral ones (Deane-Drummond, 2012). Through policy advocacy, public education, and grassroots mobilization, churches can help influence both societal values and legislative change.

A third avenue is *liturgical and educational integration*. This includes weaving creation care themes into worship services, theological curricula, and spiritual formation activities. When believers are taught to see ecological responsibility as a core part of their faith, it nurtures a lasting ethic that values creation care deeply (Hitzhusen, 2007).

Still, these models aren't without challenges. Implementation can face theological resistance or be sidelined by more pressing community needs. In some areas, economic hardship makes eco-friendly practices difficult to sustain. For eco-theological engagement to thrive, it must be context-sensitive combining theological conviction with practical, feasible strategies.

Lessons from Faith-Based Environmental Initiatives: Across Sub-Saharan Africa, faith-based environmental initiatives have become key players in ecological advocacy, particularly because religious institutions command significant influence. These efforts typically draw from theological principles of stewardship and creation care to inspire sustainable living (Deane-Drummond, 2017). A major takeaway is the moral authority that faith communities carry they can mobilize grassroots participation effectively, as seen in initiatives like church-led tree planting and local waste management (Jenkins, 2015).

However, these initiatives sometimes struggle to strike a balance between spiritual

mission and environmental science. A notable challenge lies in meaningfully blending Indigenous ecological knowledge with Christian doctrine ensuring both are respected and integrated (Swart & Swart, 2020). This highlights the need for more deeply contextual theological reflections that speak to local realities and environmental priorities.

Sustainability is another concern. While many faith-based programs begin with passion, they risk fizzling out without long-term planning, institutional commitment, and collaboration with secular or governmental bodies (Taylor, 2019). What emerges clearly is the need for strategic partnerships that combine theological insight with environmental expertise.

In conclusion, while faith-based environmental efforts offer powerful models for eco-stewardship, their lasting impact depends on deeper contextual integration and cross-sector collaboration. These initiatives reveal how faith, when rightly guided, can inspire transformative ecological action.

Conclusion

Exploring eco-theology within the Sub-Saharan African context offers profound insights that enrich both theological reflection and environmental ethics. At its core, this study reaffirms the biblical mandate of stewardship an invitation to care for and responsibly manage the Earth as God's creation. This perspective stands in clear contrast to exploitative views rooted in misreadings of dominion theology, which have historically promoted unchecked human control over nature, often at the expense of ecological balance. A careful reexamination of such interpretations brings to light the urgent ethical need to move toward a more relational and respectful interaction with the environment.

A second major insight is the powerful synergy between indigenous African ecological

wisdom and Christian theology. Many traditional African worldviews naturally emphasize harmony, mutual respect, and community responsibility in human nature relationships. This indigenous knowledge base provides a culturally resonant and spiritually meaningful foundation for reimagining eco-theology in ways that are both theologically sound and practically relevant for local communities.

Moreover, the study highlights the church's pivotal role not only as a spiritual authority but also as a catalyst for environmental awareness and action. Faith communities, with their deep-rooted influence, are well-positioned to shape public attitudes and behaviors toward creation care. They can effectively bridge the gap between spiritual beliefs and ecological responsibility. Still, significant hurdles remain, including institutional inertia, economic constraints, and policy shortcomings that limit the broader implementation of sustainable practices.

Finally, the findings point toward a more holistic and actionable form of eco-theology one that moves beyond theoretical formulations to inspire real-world change. It calls for a continuous, context-aware dialogue between scripture, culture, and the pressing environmental realities faced across the continent. The future of African eco-theology lies in its capacity to blend faith and practice in ways that offer meaningful responses to today's ecological crises.

Theological and Practical Recommendations

Theological and practical recommendations within eco-theology call for a fresh and faithful understanding of humanity's role not as exploiters, but as caretakers of God's creation. This perspective is deeply rooted in the biblical call to stewardship rather than dominion. Theologically, many scholars urge a move away from an anthropocentric worldview that

places human needs above the rest of creation. Instead, they advocate for a more relational and holistic approach one that recognizes the intrinsic worth of all living things. This shift challenges long-standing interpretations of Scripture that have, at times, been used to justify environmental degradation. In contrast, eco-theology encourages an ethic of care, justice, and responsibility, drawing from passages like *Genesis 2:15* and *Psalms 24:1*, which remind us that the Earth ultimately belongs to God, and we are merely stewards of it.

On a practical level, these theological convictions translate into a call for action particularly from churches and faith communities. This means embracing sustainable practices within church buildings, educating congregants about environmental issues, and championing policies that protect fragile ecosystems and vulnerable populations. Faith leaders are also encouraged to weave creation care into their preaching, worship, and discipleship efforts, helping believers cultivate a spiritual connection to nature that inspires ethical choices.

However, despite the strength of these recommendations, putting them into practice often proves difficult. In many communities, economic challenges and pressing social needs make environmental concerns seem secondary. Moreover, theological education in some regions still neglects ecological issues, leaving both clergy and laity ill-equipped or unaware. There's also the danger of surface-level engagement where green initiatives are symbolic but lack real impact. For eco-theology to truly make a difference, it must be grounded in the lived realities of people and supported through strong partnerships among churches, governments, and civil society. In essence, eco-theology presents a hopeful and biblically sound vision of stewardship. Yet, its promise can only be fulfilled through sincere

commitment, contextual awareness, and collaborative effort.

Call to Action for African Churches and Theologians

There is an urgent and deeply important call for African churches and theologians to take eco-theology seriously, especially in light of the mounting environmental crises confronting the continent. From deforestation to land degradation and the worsening impacts of climate change, Africa's ecosystems are under immense pressure pressures that fall heaviest on its most vulnerable communities. Churches, as powerful moral voices and trusted community pillars, are uniquely positioned to shape how people understand and act on issues of environmental care. Theologians, for their part, are essential in crafting messages and teachings that are grounded both in Scripture and the lived experiences of African people and landscapes.

In practical terms, this call is a push for churches to go beyond offering verbal support and start weaving ecological consciousness into worship, sermons, and grassroots programs. This involves re-examining and reframing long-held theological concepts like dominion and stewardship shifting from a human centered mindset to a more interconnected, creation-embracing worldview. Theologians are encouraged to dig deep into biblical texts, highlighting recurring themes of care, justice, and renewal that align with sustainable living. Equally important is the inclusion of indigenous ecological knowledge, helping to shape a theology that is not only faithful to Scripture but also rooted in local culture and wisdom.

Of course, this journey is not, without its hurdles. Many churches face challenges like institutional inertia, strict doctrinal traditions, and a general lack of environmental education among clergy. Add to that the broader issues of poverty and political instability, and it becomes

clear why eco-theological engagement is not always a top priority. Still, there are inspiring examples of faith-led environmental projects across the continent that show what is possible when theology meets action. In closing, African churches and theologians are being called to step up bringing together theological depth and practical resolve. In doing so, they can become powerful voices for justice, healing, and sustainability in a world that desperately needs them.

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