


Ecological crisis and the church: A proposal for biblical stewardship as a nexus for environmental protection

**Author:**Christopher Magezi¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Missiology,
Faculty of Theology,
North-West University,
Mahikeng, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Christopher Magezi,
magezichristopher@gmail.
com

Dates:

Received: 04 Mar. 2024

Accepted: 17 May 2024

Published: 14 June 2024

How to cite this article:

Magezi, C., 2024, 'Ecological
crisis and the church: A
proposal for biblical
stewardship as a nexus for
environmental protection',
Verbum et Ecclesia
45(1), a3140. [https://doi.
org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3140](https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3140)

Copyright:

© 2024. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work
is licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution License.

There is a growing global concern for environmental issues, and stakeholders, including governments, are trying to address the situation in various ways. However, not many churches are involved in climate change endeavours, regardless of the prevalence of eco-theologies that challenge them to act as responsible custodians of God's creation. Given this, the aim of this article was to propose and discuss biblical stewardship as a nexus for environmental protection. This literature-based study reviewed existing studies on the current ecological concerns. The study investigated how various stakeholders, including the World Council of Churches (WCC), as a representative voice of many churches, were combating environmental degradation. Further, the article discussed stewardship from a biblical redemptive historical approach, so as to challenge the Church and, consequently, Christians to start partaking in environmental protection initiatives, or continue to do so. The article concluded by advancing that if the Church adheres to its holistic mission, instead of solely focussing on evangelism, it would be possible for society to practise sustainable environmental management.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article focussed on current ecological crisis and Church responses. It discussed the concept of biblical stewardship from systematic and missional theological perspectives, so as to stimulate the Church to join other stakeholders in seeking ways to address the pervasive environmental concerns. The article contributed to environmental discourse by examining the existing literature on the current ecological concerns and evaluating various stakeholders' efforts in combating related disaster.

Keywords: God; ecosystem; environment; biblical stewardship; global warming; climate change; climate-related disasters; World Council of Churches; Church responses to environmental concerns; Christocentric ethics.

Introduction and study background: Terrain sketch and problem identification

There is no doubt that some faith communities across the world are contributing to the local, national and global efforts to address the current ecological crisis. The Church is viewed as an integral part of the society that cannot afford to ignore multi-layered effects of climate change and global warming. For instance, in a document titled *Climate change: A challenge to the churches in South Africa*, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) (2009:16–17) recognises the existing global Christian responses to climate change. Firstly, it states that some congregations in South Africa and other parts of the world have introduced earth keeping concerns in their services (i.e., the World Environment Day on 05 June) and other diverse facets of worship. Secondly, the idea of an 'eco-congregation', which began in some United Kingdom (UK) churches, is now being adopted by certain congregations in South Africa and other parts of the world. Thirdly, some of these churches have introduced earth keeping projects, such as tree planting, water harvesting, organic vegetable gardens, recycling, indigenous church gardens and graveyard campaigns. The projects include the following (SACC 2009):

[O]utdoor youth and family activities to promote the love of nature, nature conservation projects focusing on habitat, wildlife or indigenous plants, job creation projects in the field of appropriate technology, the development of teaching material and networks to communicate such work to others. (pp. 16–17)

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned responses, it is apparent that many churches are not doing much to combat climate change and global warming. This point is validated by the SACC (2009), which affirms that:

There may be some who suppose that climate change is scarcely on the agenda of the church, that Christians are 'silent' on climate change and that virtually nothing is being done in this regard. In many

Read online:

Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

respects such assumptions are probably valid, also in South Africa. (p. 16)

The above assertion is echoed by Cock (1992:174), who bemoaned that churches were not practically contributing towards alleviating the ecological crisis. Even at that material time, this was a worrisome development, since the Church had a robust and well-organised grassroots presence, which had the potential to promote environmental literacy, but not much came from it (Cock 1992:174).

The fact that Christians are the best-placed grassroots stakeholders, who can make a significant impact on ecological care, is now substantiated by the Pew Research Centre, which is a think tank on demographics and world religions (Pew Research Centre 2017). In respective order, Christianity and Islam are projected to remain as the dominant world religions in the next four decades (Pew Research Centre 2017). Hence, the collective efforts of the entire Church can be used as a leverage for combatting environmental crisis. Kabongo and Stork's (2022:1) empirical study reveals that many members of African Independent and Pentecostal Churches in Limpopo province acknowledged the effects of climate change in their immediate surroundings; however, they did not know of any pro-environmental communal activities. Moreover, their respective churches themselves did not have any eco-theological doctrines or programmes.

In the context of Kenya, Kiariei (2020:1ff) reports that churches are not actively involved in addressing ecological crisis, in spite of having made significant social, economic and political contributions to society since independence in 1963 and in the 1990s. This is rather worrisome, especially when one considers environmental care as a divine mandate and core mission of the Church.

Zaleha and Szasz (2015) conducted a research in the United States of America (USA) and its findings mirror the Kenyan experience, which was described by Kabongo and Stork (2022). In terms of climate change-related issues, American Christians had split voices (Zaleha & Szasz 2015). The study established that mainline protestants and Roman Catholics clearly supported the efforts to curb climate change and global warming, while some prominent Southern Baptist and Evangelical Protestants harboured anti-environmental sentiments (Zaleha & Szasz 2015). Zaleha and Szasz (2015) capture these divergent views as follows:

American Christians have become increasingly polarized on issues of climate change and environmental regulation. In recent years, mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church have made explicit declarations of support for global climate action. Prominent Southern Baptists and other evangelical Protestants, on the other hand, have issued statements that are strikingly similar to the talking points of secular climate skeptics, and have attempted to stamp out 'green' efforts within their own ranks. An analysis of resolutions and campaigns by evangelicals over the past 40 years shows that anti-environmentalism within conservative Christianity stems from fears that 'stewardship' of God's creation is drifting toward

neo-pagan nature worship, and from apocalyptic beliefs about 'end times' that make it pointless to worry about global warming. (p. 19)

Based on the above quotation, one can argue that American congregations and denominations definitely have polarised views on environmental issues. This shows that the American Church even still plays a peripheral role in related public discussions and debates. Thus, the lack of Church involvement in environmental protection discourse, as observed by the SACC (2009), Cock (1992), Kabongo and Stork (2022), Kiariei (2020), and Zaleha and Szasz (2015) may be indicative of the fact that congregations across the globe are experiencing similar challenges in this respect. Regrettably, this is worrisome, especially when one is cognisant of the existence of various eco-theologies that were developed by various theologians and scholars, such as Van Schalkwyk (2013), Mpofu (2021), Orr (n.d.), Balcomb (2019), Resane (2021), Kavunga (2022), and many others.

At this juncture, one major question that can be asked is: *why does the Church show such little concern to environmental issues if there is extant literature on eco-theology?* In response, one may argue that although there are many issues that cause the Church to seem uninterested in issues related to environmental care and protection, there is an urgent need for an unambiguous theological thrust in this regard (cf. Balcomb 2019:1; Kabongo & Stork 2022:1; McKnight 2020; SACC 2009:16). There are very few churches that have adopted eco-theology as a dominant topic, either in doctrine or practice (Kabongo & Stork 2022). For instance, in reference to the American context, McKnight (2020) helpfully observes that some congregations and denominations in the US show very little concern for environmental issues, because of the lack of proper theology to stimulate participation in that endeavour. McKnight (2020) further notes that:

Most churches seemingly show very little regard for environmental issues as a concern for serious thinking Christians. Environment is not found in most books about the Christian life or discipleship studies. It's not part of our 'introduction' to what Christians believe. (n.p.)

In the South African context, the above observation is echoed by Kabongo and Stork (2022:1) in their article titled *African-initiated churches and environmental care in Limpopo, South Africa: A missional enquiry*. The study discovered that many members of the African Independent and Pentecostal Churches in Limpopo province had knowledge about the effects of climate change in their immediate surroundings, but they did not know of any related communal activities, since none of their ministries had adopted eco-theology. Likewise, Balcomb (2019) avows that:

There has been a hot debate around Christianity's complicity in environmental destruction for some fifty years. The reasons are mainly to do with the so-called dominion mandate in the book of Genesis and the propensity for Christianity to 'disenchant' the environment, that is rid it of spiritual agency. ...In the African context there are signs that the Christian mission continues to

have negative effects on the environment, and this raises the question of what would constitute an appropriate African Christian theology of the environment. (p. 1)

Indeed, the above citation clearly demonstrates that the lack of church-driven environmental activism needs to be scripturally interrogated consistently. Regardless of the prevailing status quo, Christians have the potential to offer significant contributions to environmental care, since they constitute the majority of the global population (cf. Pew Research Centre 2017).

Thus, in corroboration with extant eco-theologies that stimulate faith communities to respond to the current ecological crisis, this article proposes and discusses biblical stewardship as a nexus for environmental protection. Thus, the first section reviews pertinent literature that provides a global overview of the underlying issues that cause climate-related disasters, which have far-reaching consequences for humanity and the ecosystem. The second section establishes the Church's response to ecological crisis by reviewing the World Council of Churches' (WCC) responses to environmental issues. The ecumenical body comprises 352 ministries that have a joint membership of 580 million Christians in more than 120 countries (WCC 2023b). Although the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and some Independent and Pentecostal Churches are not members of the WCC (Brunn 2001:70; Cloud 2013; Raiser 1997:92–93; Tulun 2020:1), the organisation is still the largest international body of churches (cf. Cloud 2013; Tulun 2020:1). In support of the foregoing argument, Tulun (2020) advances that the WCC is:

[T]he most extensive and inclusive ecumenical movement [organisation] in the world; a movement that calls for Christian unity. Christian unity, according to the WCC, should not be understood as the creation of a world church above all other churches. For the WCC, Christian unity is about cooperation and solidarity amongst Christians in issues relevant to Christians around the world. (pp. 1, 7 cf. Oxley 2010)

In light of the foregoing assertion, this article provides a global overview of how different WCC-affiliated churches and their members respond to the unfolding global ecological crisis. In the third section, the article utilises a biblical redemptive historical approach¹ to examine Scripture and, subsequently, proposes and discusses the concept of biblical stewardship, which is grounded in the gospel of Christ, as a nexus for Christian-centred environmental protection (cf. Padgett 2021). The concept of biblical stewardship challenges the entire body of Christ to start or continue getting involved in environmental protection initiatives. The paper concludes by advancing that if the Church adheres to its holistic mission, instead of solely focussing on evangelism, sustainable environmental management would be a possibility.

1.The biblical redemptive historical approach will be defined in section 'Overview of World Council of Churches' responses to ecological crises' of this paper, which provides a review of Church responses to ecological crisis. This is done by examining the response of the WCC, which is the largest body of churches; thus, it mirrors the efforts of many ministries.

An overview of the current environmental crisis and challenges

Defining ecosystem

In the term ecosystem, the prefix *eco* means part of the world, while *system* refers to coordinating units (Balasubramanian 2008:1). Thus, an ecosystem is an operational unit of environment that comprises all living organisms and their products, which interact among themselves, as well as with their surrounding physical environment (Balasubramanian 2008). The preceding explanation denotes that an ecosystem consists of living and non-living things. The ecosystem of living things includes animals, microorganisms, plants, bacteria, fungi and their waste products, like fallen leaves or branches or excreta, while non-living things include ponds, dams, rivers, seas, forests, and grasslands (Balasubramanian 2008:2).

Many environmentalists regard the whole biosphere as a global ecosystem that consists of all the local ecological units on earth; therefore, it is too diverse and complex to understand. Because of this, some scholars find it convenient to divide the biosphere into two basic categories namely, the *terrestrial* and the *aquatic* (Samadhiya 2024; Brutus n.d.; cf. Balasubramanian 2008:2). Grasslands, deserts and forests are good examples of terrestrial ecosystems, while ponds, lakes, wetlands and estuaries are examples of aquatic ecosystems (cf. Samadhiya 2024). According to Samadhiya (2024), an aquatic ecosystem exists in water, while a terrestrial one exists on land. Dams, croplands, gardens, parks or aquariums are considered as man-made ecosystems (Balasubramanian 2008:1). Given this, one would concur with Balasubramanian (2008:1) and Samadhiya's (2024) affirmations that ecosystems can be broadly categorised as natural or artificial, which can either be land or water-based.

A global overview of the causes and consequences of climate change

Having defined an ecosystem as a functional unit of organisms and their physical environment that are mutually interactive and dependent on each other, it follows that the term refers to 'the environment of life that is self-sustaining, structural and functional unit of biosphere' (Balasubramanian 2008:1; Green Infrastructure-Austin n.d.). However, although an ecosystem can be self-existent, it is important to acknowledge that it has potential benefits for humankind (Green Infrastructure-Austin n.d.:1). Thus, when people 'directly or indirectly use the environment and products from it', it is clear that they are receiving essential services from the ecosystem (Green Infrastructure-Austin n.d.). Examples of ecosystem products include food, lumber, minerals, clean water and fibre (Green Infrastructure-Austin n.d.). On the other hand, non-product services include: 'water purification, waste treatment and intangible elements, such as oxygen from the trees, recreation and beauty, thus, an ecosystem benefit is the human valuation of its service' (Green Infrastructure-Austin n.d.). The fact that humankind benefits from the ecosystem in various ways, as indicated

above, is a clear indication that humans have the responsibility to care for the ecosystem, so that they can realise the full potential of the benefits and services that emanate from the environment.

Nonetheless, while human beings derive product and non-product benefits from the ecosystem services, they evidently pose serious threats to it (Green Infrastructure-Austin n.d.:1–25). This paradox is amplified by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2024), which notes that human actions trigger environmental degradation, as highlighted by the following examples:

- Humans use an equivalent of 1.6 earths to maintain their current way of life and ecosystems cannot keep up with our demands.
- One million of the world's estimated 8 million species of plants and animals are threatened with extinction.
- Seventy-five per cent of the earth's land surface, including 85% of wetland areas, have been significantly altered by human actions.
- Sixty-six per cent of ocean area is impacted by human activities, such as fishing and pollution.
- Close to 90% of the world's marine fish stocks are fully exploited, over-exploited or depleted.
- Our global food system is the primary driver of biodiversity loss, with agriculture alone putting 24 000 of the 28 000 species at risk of extinction.
- Agricultural expansion accounts for 70% of the projected loss of terrestrial biodiversity.

United Nations Environment Programme (2024) further indicates the impact of environmental degradation because of the abovementioned human activities, which worsen climate change, and consequently undermine food security, thereby subjecting many people and communities to famine. The below-mentioned aspects demonstrate the far-reaching negative consequences of poor environmental management:

- Around 3.2 billion people, or 40% of the global population, are adversely affected by land degradation.
- Up to \$577b in annual global crop production is at risk of pollinator loss.
- Twenty-five per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions are generated by land clearing, crop production and fertilisation.
- Development is putting animals and humans in closer contact, thereby increasing the risk of diseases like coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). About 60% of human infections are estimated to have originated from animals.
- About 100 to 300m people are at increased risk of floods and hurricanes, because of coastal habitat loss.
- Declines in nature and biodiversity at current trajectories will undermine progress towards 35 out of 44 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets that are related to poverty, hunger, health, water cities, climate, oceans and land (UNEP 2024).

Having established the abovementioned consequences, it is imperative to highlight that each country and local community should look after small and large functional ecosystem units, in order to receive full services and benefits from the ecosystem. Nonetheless, as noted above, instead of looking after these various parts of the ecosystems, human beings are involved in activities that damage the environment, thus, culminating in climate change and associated disasters or events that are catastrophic to both humanity and the ecosystem itself (cf. Earthjustice 2022; Robinson 2024). Robinson (2024) rightly contends that, although UNEP (2024) identifies many causes and consequences of nature loss, it is ostensible that the burning of fossil fuels is the leading cause of climate change and global warming across the globe. In turn, these two phenomena result in extremely high temperatures and rainfall on regular bases. High rainfall causes floods, which wipe away crops and create land degradation.

Climate change is also characterised by tropical storms and hurricanes, which also pose threats to food security. On the other hand, high temperatures bring extreme heat waves and wildfires, as was the case in some European countries (Atmosphere Monitoring Services 2023) and parts of US² in 2023, which was reported as the hottest year on record (Robinson 2024). According to Robinson (2024), global average temperatures were at 1.46C in 2023:

[A]bove pre-industrial levels and 0.13C higher than the eleven-month average for 2016, currently the warmest calendar year on record. The year was marked by six record-breaking months and two record-breaking seasons. This steady annual increase is a 'direct result of human activity', mainly from the burning of fossil fuels for transportation and electricity generation but also from cement manufacturing, deforestation, and agriculture. (n.p.)

It is important to note that Africa is not immune to the consequences of climate change and global warming, such as increased poverty, food insecurity and famine, which many African countries are already experiencing (Feedback Madagascar n.d.). For instance, Madagascar is considered as the third most vulnerable nation, given that a large portion of its population lives on subsistence farming; thus, it faces the devastating realities of climate change daily (Feedback Madagascar n.d.). Although developed countries, including the US, are the largest contributors to climate change, because of transportation and electricity generation (Earthjustice 2022; Robinson 2024), it is unfortunate that the consequences of climate change mostly affect countries like Madagascar, which have the 'tiniest of carbon footprints contributing to global warming' (Feedback Madagascar n.d.). Madagascar is currently prone to the following consequences of climate change:

[I]ncreased temperatures, droughts, cyclones, landslides, deforestation, flooding, devastation of crops, land and infrastructure, increased pests and crop diseases, e.g. locust

2. For more information about global warming and climate change induced veld fires in the US, read 2023 North American wildfires, 2023, viewed 09 January 2024, from https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2023-north-american-wildfires/?gclid=CjwKCAiA-vOsBhAAEiwAIWROTahWuPEny7IOz5mfX2Gee4SUND6sPZ1MV2xc2ilxAbLwPIEF1aPUjBoCZIEQAvD_BwE

plagues, unpredictable and unreliable seasons, leaving farmers unsure when to plant and what to plant, leaving farmers and the people of Madagascar cut off from supplies, markets and communications, resulting in price hikes in basic foodstuffs. (Feedback Madagascar n.d.)

Reliefweb (2023a), in the following citation, paints a vivid picture of the disasters that Madagascar experienced in 2023, because of climate change:

Intense rainfall caused by two different tropical weather systems which have impacted Madagascar over the last week has driven flooding, landslides, destruction of infrastructure and loss of life, particularly affecting the country's capital Antananarivo, and other areas of Analamanga Region, in the centre of the country. The rains were initially driven by an Intertropical Convergence Zone around 17 January and increased when a Tropical Depression made landfall in the east of the country on 22 January and exited the other side of the island on 23 January. (n.p.)

Malawi also experienced devastating floods in 2023 and even prior to that year (Reliefweb 2023b). For example, in 2019, the country was ravaged by Tropical Cyclone Idai, and the Global Climate Risk Index slotted it in the top five global category of nations that were most affected by life-threatening weather events (Reliefweb 2023b). In 2022, the country was hit by Tropical Storm Ana and Tropical Cyclone Gombe, which killed 64 people and displaced 945 934 people, respectively (Reliefweb 2023b). Generally, as indicated above, these climate change induced floods strike poor countries and communities that are already struggling to meet their basic needs or build proper infrastructure, such as health facilities, roads and bridges (Reliefweb 2023b). Reliefweb (2023c) notes that the disasters that hit Malawi continually compel the poverty-stricken country to spend huge sums of money on repairing and replacing infrastructure, thus, diverting scarce resources from other national development needs. Reliefweb (2023b) succinctly sums up the dire climate change induced predicament that befell Malawi as follows:

The 2015 floods resulted in 278 deaths, 638,000 people affected, and physical damages and economic losses of \$335 million (\$422 million when adjusted to 2023 dollars), while the 2019 floods resulted in 60 deaths, 975,000 people affected, and damages and losses of \$220 million (\$257 million in 2023 dollars). ... More recently, Tropical Storm Ana and Tropical Cyclone Gombe (2022) resulted in 64 fatalities and 945,934 people affected. (n.p.)

Further, climate-related disasters in Malawi mostly affect rural areas, where the majority of the nation's population lives (Reliefweb 2023b). In 2021 and 2022, the nation's poverty rate stood at 50.7%, with the rural areas being the most poverty-stricken (Reliefweb 2023b). Thus, climate-related disasters tend to widen the inequality gap between the rich and the poor (Reliefweb 2023b). However, it is unfortunate that the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters in Malawi are likely to increase in the foreseeable future, given that the majority of the citizens continuously engage in activities that cause high rates of deforestation, as well as land and water degradation (Reliefweb 2023b).

It can be contended that the aforesaid disasters in Madagascar and Malawi have far-reaching consequences, which other Southern African countries need to be wary of as well. For example, South Africa has not yet recovered from the floods that resulted from Subtropical Storm Issa, which ravaged some parts of the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province between 08 and 21 April 2022 (Munyati 2022; JBA Risk Management 2022). Apart from the floods, there were also mudslides, which displaced more than 40 000 people and left a trail of severe destruction to homes and infrastructure, thus, prompting President Ramaphosa to declare a state of disaster in the area (JBA Risk Management 2022). JBA Risk Management (2022) notes that the storm killed more than 440 people, while 63 went missing. The storm damaged 13 000 homes, disrupted 80% of the water supply and forced 600 schools to close temporarily (JBA Risk Management 2022). In addition, roads were rendered impassable, and bridges were swept away (JBA Risk Management 2022). Although the storm caused large-scale disruptions, an assessment by JBA Risk Management (2022) also indicated that the damages were worsened by poor drainage and building standards in the affected areas.

At this point, it is imperative to underscore that the South African government allocated 1b rand to assist the KZN province to respond to the destruction and disruptions caused by the floods (JBA Risk Management 2022). Nonetheless, local government officials from the affected areas bemoaned that the money was not enough, therefore it needed to be doubled (JBA Risk Management 2022). Given that KZN was once again hit by severe floods in 2023, there is indeed an imminent need to further increase the disaster fund (JBA Risk Management 2022). Munyati (2022) underscores that the KZN floods mostly affected poor neighbourhoods, which further demonstrates that, as witnessed in Madagascar and Malawi, climate-related disasters can worsen the inequality gap, as the underprivileged communities are not likely to recover from the pain and loss. Munyati (2022) encapsulates these sentiments in the following words:

The impact of the disaster was not equally felt. South Africa is the world's most unequal country, and it was in the poorer regions where the consequences of the extreme weather were most severe. This impact visualises the plea of many African nations: Poor communities contribute the least to global pollution but are suffering the most. (n.p.)

In the wake of the KZN catastrophe, the Western Cape province was also ravaged by floods, which caused many fatalities, damaged houses and infrastructure, and left many homes and business premises without power (Reliefweb 2023c). This put a further strain on the fiscal system, since the national government had to disburse another tranche of unbudgeted disaster relief funds.

Having discussed the underlying issues and causes of climate-related disasters, as well as the far-reaching consequences of the harm that human activities cause to the environment, it should be acknowledged that the WCC

always joins hands with many international organisations, governmental and inter-governmental organisations that seek to strengthen the earth's resilience to climate change. With this in mind, the next section discusses how the WCC responds to ecological crises. The section is not exhaustive, as it only highlights a small fraction of the efforts that the organisation undertook to address environmental disasters globally.

Overview of World Council of Churches' responses to ecological crises

In the introduction, the terrain sketch and problem identification of the subject under consideration were discussed and justified. As established already, although the RCC and some Independent and Pentecostal Churches are not members of the WCC, it is arguably the largest ecumenical body globally. Therefore, its stance on ecological issues reflects the collective position of many churches. This section reviews how the WCC responds to ecological crisis.

In its maiden discussion on the topic, the WCC leaned towards McKnight's (2020) affirmation that there was little interest in environmental issues among Christians, mainly because they argued that the Bible did not fundamentally teach such a subject. For instance, Robinson (2009:2) reports that when the environmental discussions and debates commenced in the 1960s within the WCC, some members expressed concern that the organisation was 'losing its focus from complicated task[s] like justice to some gullible topic[s] like environmental concerns'. However, the aforementioned position shifted with time. In 1966, the African, Asian and Latin American sub-units of the WCC met in Geneva to converse on environmental issues in emerging countries. Among many other things, the conference declared that, because of their commercial and manufacturing activities, developed countries were guilty of destroying the global ecosystem (Robinson 2009).

Subsequent WCC conferences discussed environmental concerns. For instance, the 1974 conference on science and technology for human development, which was held in Bucharest, Romania, conversed about ecological challenges, and the Nairobi conference of 1975 declared that the Church was to strive for 'just, participatory and sustainable' environmental management (Robinson 2009:2). The Nairobi conference noted that, without a healthy environment, the commitment to justice and peace had no meaning; therefore, the Church also had to commit to preserving the integrity of all creation (Robinson 2009). In 1983, the Vancouver conference delegates repeated the same commitment (Robinson 2009), while at the 1988 session, along with scientists, political leaders and environmentalists, the WCC discussed the emerging greenhouse and global warming crises (Robinson 2009:3). After this conference, the WCC continued to hold more conferences in which environmental concerns were raised and discussed. However, the

ecumenical body took very little practical action to curb the far-reaching consequences of the ecological crisis (Robinson 2009:3).

On 28 June 2023, the WCC signed the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, which had been formerly endorsed by hundreds of other faith institutions, the World Health Organization (WHO), European Parliament, 3000 scientists and academics, 700 parliamentarians from 84 countries, 101 Nobel Laureates and more than 2000 civil society organisations (WCC 2023b). At its core, this treaty undergirds that, although some measures are being taken to strengthen earth's resilience to climate change, the issue of emissions from the burning of fossil fuels is barely addressed, as some companies continue to use such forms of energy, with no clear plan of transitioning to cleaner alternatives (WCC 2023b). Thus, the treaty was proposed to manage a fast, fair and just global transition from coal, oil and gas, which produce large amounts of emissions that cause global warming and, consequently, the current ecological crisis (WCC 2023b). Many members of the WCC, including Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, the moderator of the WCC Central Committee, wholeheartedly endorsed the initiative for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and welcomed its ratification by the WCC. In Bishop Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm's own words:

The fact that the World Council of Churches central committee has endorsed it at its recent meeting may be a big backwind for a world which takes seriously that it is God's creation given to us not for indiscriminate exploitation but for good care. Humans can only lead a good life together with nonhuman creation, not against it! (n.p.)

Although the WCC has shown much concern and commitment to environmental issues, it is extremely worrisome that it has put in much less practical action to the cause (cf. Robinson 2009). This is regrettable, because the Bible sanctions the Church to lead the ecological discourse (Kiarie 2020:1ff). Now, the underlying question is: *which biblical theological concept can convince Christians to be involved in environmental care?* To address the aforesaid question, this paper proposes biblical stewardship and discusses it utilising the biblical redemptive historical approach. The intention of adopting this trajectory is to persuade the Church to play a significant role in the global efforts to protect the environment. However, Baker (2010) and Kessler (2013) criticise the biblical redemptive historical approach in examining Scripture mainly because of its claim that the Old Testament should be understood in light of Christ. For instance, in his book titled, *Two Testaments, one Bible*, Baker (2010:277–228) lampoons this position because it reduces the Old Testament to a secondary position, which is not compatible with mainstream theological positions.

Regardless of the abovementioned criticism, this paper submits that the biblical redemptive historical approach is theologically constructive because it views the Bible as a single story that finds its fulfilment in Jesus Christ (Gaffin 2012:92). The approach also pays closer attention to the

pivotal biblical storyline and doctrines namely, *creation narrative, fall, redemption, and consummation* (Gaffin 2012).³ That is, regardless of the weaknesses indicated by Kessler (2013) and Baker (2010), the biblical redemptive approach is one of the best methodologies for understanding Scripture because:

[I]t helps to bring out the relationship of anything that the Bible touches on with its central message or the so-called bigger picture. In other words, the redemptive historical approach helps to mainstream anything that the Bible teaches on, whereas other approaches tend to allow for many of the things to be studied as if they are peripheral to the central message of the Bible. (Magezi 2018:28)

Using the abovementioned methodological approach spawns a constructive and sound theology. Magezi and Magezi (2018:1) define this as practical theology, given that it answers to people's needs. In this case, such needs stem from the current ecological crisis. That is, as the climate crisis worsens, the biblical concept of stewardship and the biblical redemptive historical perspective, from which it will be discussed, might challenge Christians' moral authority 'to play a decisive role in swaying public policy toward ... action to mitigate global warming' (Zaleha & Szasz 2015:19). In this way, the Church, as 'the conscience of society' should have proper theologies that drive it to accomplish its divine mandate to save the world, including the ecosystem (Kiarie 2020:6). In Kiarie's (2020:6) view, 'the first step to consciousness of this is to condemn the environmental destruction of Mother Earth'. However, the Church's actions to the proposed matter must be embedded in proper theology, such as the biblical concept of stewardship, which is discussed in detail below.

The concept of biblical stewardship as a nexus for environmental protection

Defining biblical stewardship

Le Roux (2017:206), Esler (1998:223–224) and Horrell, Hunt and Southgate (2008:223–224) opine that, although the Bible fundamentally deals with the doctrines of creation, sin, redemption and consummation of salvation in the Parousia, it also speaks about the beauty and significance of the creation of God and stipulates some environmental management and conservation principles (cf. Ps 8:3–8; I Chr 16:7, 30–34; Job 9:5–10; Rm 1:20; 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9, 13). For instance, Le Roux (2017:205) notes that the Church and, consequently, Christians are the stewards of God's creation, thus they are responsible for taking care of the environment.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), the term steward refers to one hired 'in a large household or estate to manage domestic concerns'. Supervision steward also supervises servants, collects debt or rent and manages

³Please read Richard Gaffin's work cited in this article for a detailed understanding of the biblical redemptive historical approach.

accounts (Merriam Webster Dictionary n.d.). Stewardship refers to 'conducting, supervising, or managing of something' on behalf of someone (Merriam Webster Dictionary n.d.). The word stewardship initially featured in English in the Middle Ages, and it operated as a job description in reference to the office of a steward, or a manager of a large household (Merriam Webster Dictionary n.d.). It should be noted that, from a management perspective, the term progressively acquired more positive connotations namely, a person's 'careful and responsible management' of something entrusted to him or her, such as business, the environment and many other things. Van der Walt (2012:3) defines stewardship as an act of taking 'care of something entrusted to one, to manage another's estate or property, the charge committed to one'. This is the working definition that will be adopted in this paper.

Scholars like Boloje and Groenewald (2014), Van der Walt (2012) and Venter (2022), rightly support the biblical perspective that God entrusted human beings to be the stewards of his creation. Boloje and Groenewald (2014:1) note that people often associate the term stewardship with money, yet it is 'only a fraction of our total Christian stewardship', which can be viewed from different viewpoints. The comprehensiveness of Christian stewardship, which includes ecosystem management and all that it comprises, is rooted in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15. It should be noted that, in the wider context of Genesis, the epitome of God's creation is human. God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and he explicitly sanctioned them to take good care of his environment, which comprises living and non-living creation (cf. Gn 2:4–3:24). This can be interpreted as God's charge for human beings to order and rule his precious creation without abusing it for their personal gain. In so doing, creation will flourish in many ways, some of which are discussed below.

First of all, good stewardship allows creation to be fruitful and reflect the glory of God, while also benefiting humankind (Hyneman 2013:12). As attested by Psalms 19:1–4, creation glorifies God in the goodness and splendour of its own existence and order (Hyneman 2013). This is in sharp contrast to the ancient Near East world, where the sun was widely viewed as an object of worship (Hyneman 2013). A closer look at Psalms 19:1–4 shows that God forbids the worshipping of creation, and this simply affirms he has uncontested sovereignty over the entire universe (Hyneman 2013). In other words, the universe was designed to instruct humanity about the rule of God (Hyneman 2013). In light of Psalms 19:1–4, which attests that 'creation glorifies, praises, exalts and celebrates God', one would concur with Hyneman's (2013:12) claim that human beings are stewards of God's creation. As a result, humanity is supposed to care for creation in a manner that backs the aforesaid scripture (Hyneman 2013). In doing so, humanity exhibits proper worship to God, who himself views his creation very highly, as it glorifies him (Hyneman 2013). In corroboration, Le

Roux (2017:206) argues that, as nature sustains living creatures and humanity, it reminds humans of the existence of God.⁴

At this juncture, one can assert that the biblical concept of stewardship, which emerges in Genesis, presents humankind as tenants in the Garden of Eden, and God as the owner, who sets the rules of how his household should be administered (Hyneman 2013:10–11; Muwadzuri 2014:42). This shows that the biblical concept of stewardship does not elevate humankind to the status of the owner of the environment (Hyneman 2013). For instance, after creating Adam and Eve, God commanded them to fill the earth and to have dominion over the living creatures of the land, air and sea (Gn 2:8). Now, if God commanded humankind to have dominion over all other creation, then all the descendants of Adam must safeguard their well-being in order to ensure that the ecosystem functions as a self-existing entity. For example, for the well-being of aquatic and terrestrial creatures (including fellow humanity), the entire environment, including water and air, should be kept clean. This entails maintaining healthy pastures and ensuring land fertility for sustainable agriculture, thus, guaranteeing that both human beings and animals are food secure. If anyone exhibits contrary behaviour and actions, it means that he or she is exploiting the environment in ways that hamper it from reaching its God-intended goals and purposes.

In Genesis 3:1–24, God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as they would certainly die (Muwadzuri 2014:39). Thus, as stewards of God's creation, Adam and Eve had the responsibility to utilise the ecosystem in accordance with God's intended plan (Muwadzuri 2014). God has the ultimate say on matters of life and creation, and this is evidenced by the punishment that he meted out to Adam and Eve when they violated his instruction (Hyneman 2013:11; Muwadzuri 2014:39). That is to say, as Adam's descendants, people are sanctioned to manage the ecosystem in a responsible manner, otherwise they incur God's judgement. There is no doubt that the whole world and all that is in it, including humankind, belong to God (Ps 24; Lv 25:23; Dt. 10:14). Hyneman (2013) sheds more light on the preceding explanation:

Humans have no innate ownership of creation. Rather, the Creator owns creation. Humanity has been given a very important role in the created order, but the Scriptures are clear that God has ownership over creation. Humanity's role with regard to creation must be discerned from the first principle: that God is owner. Humanity inhabits creation, but it is not ours. Since God is the owner of creation, we look to God's Word to determine how we should interact with creation. The

⁴ However, I am conscious of scholars, such as Sennett (2005:313), who use Romans 1:20 to advance a philosophical argument that if the general or natural revelation results in God condemning non-Christians, then it should be logical that it can also save people. However, because of space constraints, this paper will not deal with the issue. It should be noted that Sennett's (2005:313) argument was refuted in Peterson's (2008:192) article, *Inclusivism versus exclusivism on key biblical texts*. Thus, for more information on Sennett's position, one should read the work itself, which is referenced in the bibliography. Further reference can be made to critiques by Peterson (2008), which is also referenced in the bibliography.

Scriptures show that creation – including the earth, its natural systems, plants, animals, people and all other things – is God's. (p. 10)

It is significant to mention that the priestly nation of Israel still venerates the conception that God judges those who mismanage creation. In this case, it should also be observed that, while God is the creator and owner of the universe, Israel is the vehicle of his salvation to the nations. Even in the promised land, the Israelites were compelled to observe certain regulations that reminded them that they were stewards of God's land, whose use is supposed to ensure prosperity for all people, including the landless widows, orphans and aliens. For instance, in Deuteronomy 25:19, the Israelites were reminded that the land they were inhabiting was their gift from God, but it entirely belonged to him. Thus, the Israelites understood that they could not do as they pleased with God's land. In Exodus 23:10–11, God instituted legislation that clearly reminded them of this actuality. In the proposed text, God ordered the Israelites to let his land lie fallow every seventh year, so that it could rest from planting and harvesting. Farmers can understand that God wanted the land to regain fertility, so that it could be fruitful in providing for the needs of all people (Lv 23:22). However, over time, the Israelites violated the sanctioned Sabbath rest of the land and God punished them by sending them into captivity, as shown in 2 Chronicles 36:20–21 (cf. Gowan 1998). This scripture explicitly attributes the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC and the subsequent Babylonian captivity to the violation of the aforesaid law (Gowan 1998).

In light of the foregoing discussion, it can be argued that Christians were saved to advance God's plans and purposes in the world; therefore, they should take environmental concerns seriously, because God's eschatological judgement is real (Jones 2007:130; Hyneman 2013:12; Miller 2009:32ff). This judgement does not only affect Israel, as Revelation 11:18 plainly states that God will destroy those who destroy his precious earth, including Christians and non-Christians (Hyneman 2013). However, González's (2015) exegetical study, titled *Destroyers of the Earth in Revelation 11:18 – Who are they?*, dismisses the notion that this passage encourages environmental protection practices. This conclusion is, nevertheless, refuted by leading Revelation commentators. For example, Miller (2009:32) and Jones (2007:130) did some exegetical work on the proposed passage and concluded that it challenges all humanity to protect the environment. Miller (2009) notes that, according to Revelation 11:18, all those that are destroying the planet will face God's wrath for their actions. Miller (2009) emphatically concludes by declaring that:

[W]e have the capacity to destroy ecosystems on a global scale. Our scientific belief in this horrific potential parallels the biblical judgement that the destroyers of the earth themselves will be destroyed. (p. 32)

Thus, in taking Jones (2007) and Miller's (2009) lines of thought, it can be argued that the judgement in Revelation

11:18 is for all humankind, as all the descendants of Adam and Eve were given the responsibility to take care of the environment. In corroboration, Muwadzuri (2014) states that:

If humankind does not keep, preserve and nurture the earth as mandated by God, they shall be found guilty for destroying the earth and be liable for God's judgment. Therefore, humanity has to make an effort to take care and protect the earth and develop a deep understanding of the fact that the entire human race is a recipient of the stewardship mandate, which comes with accountability. (p. 42)

With the aforesaid in mind, it can be submitted that the fear of God's judgement, with regard to how one treats the ecosystem, should encourage responsible environmental practices. In other words, Christians are custodians of God's creation, and therefore they should avoid God's judgement by managing the environment in a responsible manner.

Further, the fact that God judges people on the basis of how they treat the environment is of utmost significance, as it challenges people with limited understanding of the notion of God's accountability. As Hyneman (2013:12) notes, for Christians, accountability does not only imply defiance of God's direction, instead, it extends to how they treat the environment. At this point in the discussion, this study still acknowledges that the Adamic sin has universal consequences for all creation and their relationship with God and other 'human and non-human species' (Hyneman 2013:12). However, although the Adamic sin in Genesis 3 affected all humankind (Rm 5:12-19), including the entire ecosystem, as Paul attests in Romans 8:22, this does not mean that human sin would cause God to abandon creation, because it is precious to him. The Bible clearly states that the universe was also saved by the redemptive acts of Jesus Christ, and just like humanity, it is waiting for his return to consummate its complete renewal and recreation (Rm 8:22).

Thus, it is clear that God, in the person and saving work of Christ, saved the entire creation. However, with the concept of the overlapping of ages in mind, one can proceed to declare that God, in Christ, is continuously busy renewing or recreating creation until it attains the original goal that he intended and purposed for it before the fall. As captured in the Book of Isaiah 65, the Old Testament looked forward to this recreation, which Jesus Christ accomplishes in the New Testament. This aligns with the views of leading scholars, such as Torrance (1995:84), O'Donovan (2001:11), Bonhoeffer (2009:49) and De Wit (2013:2-3), who advocate for Christocentric ethics that make the person and redemptive work of Christ fundamental to reflection pertaining to Christian ethics, which are intrinsic to what God has done in and through Christ. In this instance, humanity seeks to find principles and guidance from God's self-disclosure in the person and work of Jesus Christ. As a representative voice of Christocentric ethics, Torrance (1995) argues that:

[A]s the arche in this creaturely economic form, Jesus Christ is the Head of all creation, the one source and controlling Principle with reference to whom we are to understand all the ways and works of God. (p. 84)

In support of the above argument, Bonhoeffer (2009) helpfully observes that:

[The] source of a Christian ethic is not the reality of one's own self, not the reality of the world, nor is it the reality of norms and values. It is the reality of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ. (p. 49)

In corroboration with the abovementioned Christocentric Christian ethics scholars, this paper reinforces that in this era of overlapping of ages, all creation, including Christians, continue to look forward to the eschatological consummation of the new earth (Rv 21), which will bring the fullness of life that God had planned and purposed before the fall. In that eschatological life, Christians will be truly at home, where God will physically dwell with them, as they worship him and live by his rule (Rv 22:4). From a missiological perspective, one can argue that Christ's salvation is comprehensive as it involves the entire creation, including the environment. In an article titled, *Environmental change and salvation theology in African Christianity*, Golo (2012:348) agrees that the notion of comprehensive salvation of Jesus Christ involves the entire creation. Nevertheless, Golo (2012) bemoans that African Christians do very little in terms of environmental protection, because they inherited a limited theology of salvation from the early missionaries, who focussed on the salvation of the souls at the expense of the entire creation, which Christ's saving person and work address. Thus, in trying to position African theological thinking on environmental concerns, Golo (2012) argues that:

[F]or African Christians to better configure salvation theology to creation faith there is the need for configuring Jesus Christ through an ecological lens and consequently correlating the implications of the theological claims to salvation wrought through Him to the salvation of creation. (p. 348)

There is a possibility that some Christians may misconceive the foregoing understanding of Christ's salvation as vast and comprehensive in nature, as it encompasses the whole creation, including the environment. This misconception is likely to stem from Revelation 21, which may be misconstrued as implying that this current creation will pass away and make way for a new heaven and earth. Thus, those who subscribe to this school of thought may neglect the environment because they view the current cosmos as transient, therefore, it is needless to care for it. Consequently, such Christians tend to solely focus on evangelising to the lost souls, while ignoring the environmental crisis. It can be argued, however, that an ordinary Christian who pays attention to the benefits and services of the ecosystem to humankind will not entertain the aforementioned misconception and use it as an excuse for ignoring the current ecological crisis. It should be understood that human beings get food, water, oxygen, mineral resources, and many other

things that enhance their welfare, from the environment. With this in mind, it would be myopic to refrain from participating in environmental protection on the pretext of the concept of an eschatological new heaven and earth. Nonetheless, given the aforementioned biblical concept of stewardship and its interrelated aspects, and the possible misconceptions of stewardship, it would be justifiable to conclude that:

The Church is consequently well-positioned to make a significant contribution in addressing the environmental crisis by developing, preaching and practising a holistic spirituality that promotes a custodial ethic towards the natural world. (Le Roux 2017:205)

Conclusion

This article presented the pervasive growing concern for environmental issues by giving a global overview of the issues and causes of climate change and global warming, and their far-reaching consequences for humankind and the world at large. However, irrespective of these magnitudes of climate-related disasters across the globe, the study indicated that although some Churches are involved in combating the environmental crisis, it is apparent that others do not take part in such efforts, regardless of the existence of many eco-theologies. Thus, in response to this challenge, this article proposed and discussed the biblical concept of stewardship as a nexus for environmental protection. This discussion was foregrounded on a biblical redemptive historical approach, from which the biblical concept of stewardship was defined. The approach and concept presented human beings, particularly Christians, as God's agents and earthly representatives, or tenants within God's environment. Thus, God is the owner and creator of the universe, and he sanctions the manner in which the environment should be used. Having clearly established the obligations of Christians from the point of view of biblical stewardship, the paper advanced that they should never have polarised views on environmental concerns, but they should take the lead in championing environmental protection. This implies that obedience to God's word is not simply synonymous with preaching the gospel of salvation, but it also entails involvement in environmental issues. Thus, Christians should lead the environmental protection crusade by engaging in practices that promote, rather than harm, the productivity of the ecosystem.

From a practical perspective, the biblical concept of stewardship was used to challenge the Church and, consequently, Christians to preach and teach environmental awareness in Church and non-Church spaces (community or society at large). The concept was also used to challenge Christians to be vocal against those who abuse the environment. This can be achieved by influencing local, national and international authorities to develop policies that promote the well-being of the environment. Such actions will significantly reduce climate-related disasters. In doing so, the Church would be taking its God-ordained holistic ministry seriously.

This corresponds with the vast and comprehensive mission of Christ's salvation, which involves the entire creation, including the environment. The reality of God's judgement for the manner in which humanity treats the environment was discussed comprehensively. Therefore, the concept of the fear of God's judgement was reinforced as a nexus for encouraging responsible environmental responses among Christians.

Acknowledgements

This submission was part of a conference on ecology and theology that was held at UNISA (University of South Africa) from 23 January 2024 to 25 January 2024.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contribution

C.M. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article complies with the ethical standards of research and does not contain any studies involving human participants performed by the author.

Funding information

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

References

- Atmosphere Monitoring Services, 2023, *2023: A year of intense global wildfire activity*, viewed 09 January 2024, from <https://atmosphere.copernicus.eu/2023-year-intense-global-wildfire-activity>.
- Baker, D.L., 2010, *Two Testaments, one Bible*, InterVarsity, Leicester.
- Balasubramanian, A., 2008, *Ecosystem and its components*, viewed 09 January 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314213426_ECOSYSTEM_AND_ITS_COMPONENTS.
- Balcomb, A.O., 2019, 'African Christianity and the ecological crisis – Tracing the contours of a Conundrum', *Scriptura* 118(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.7833/118-1-1469>
- Boloje, B.O. & Groenewald, A., 2014, 'Hypocrisy in stewardship: An ethical reading of Malachi 3:6–12 in the context of Christian stewardship', *HTS Theological Studies* 70(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2086>
- Bonhoeffer, D., 2009, *Ethics*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, MN.

- Brunn, S.D., 2001, 'World Council of Churches as a global actor: Ecumenical space as geographical space', *Geographica Slovenica* 34(1), 65–78.
- Brutas, C., *Different types of ecosystems*, viewed 09 January 2024, from <https://www.scribd.com/document/253390926/DIFFERENT-TYPES-OF-ECOSYSTEMS-docx>.
- Cloud, D.W., 2013, *The World Council of Churches, Way of Life*, Port Huron.
- Cock, J., 1992, 'Towards the greening of the Church in South Africa: Some problems and possibilities', *Missiologia* 20(3), 174–185.
- De Wit, M.P., 2013, 'Christ-centred ethical behaviour and ecological crisis: What resources do the concepts of order in creation and eschatological hope offer?', *Koers – Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 78(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v78i1.46>
- Earthjustice, 2022, *Electric vehicles are not just the wave of the future, they are saving lives today*, viewed 08 January 2024, from <https://earthjustice.org/feature/electric-vehicles-explainer>.
- Eslar, P.F., 1998, *Christianity for the twenty-first century*, T&T Clark Ltd, Edinburgh.
- Feedback Madagascar. n.d., *Help us fight climate change – Plant a tree this Christmas*, viewed 08 January 2024, from https://www.feedbackmadagascar.org/climate-change?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA1-6sBhAoEiwArqIGPub-wvT4M3kcl1_exOg-FWR3Ks_vBH8BcmTGMTEQsw5cd0rgp-BN9BoCuk0QAvD_BwE.
- Gaffin, R., 2012, 'Redemptive-historical view', in S.E. Porter & B.M. Stovell (eds.), *Biblical hermeneutics: Five views*, pp. 91–109, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL.
- Golo, B.K., 2012, 'Environmental change and salvation theology in African Christianity', *Scriptura* 111(3), 348–361. <https://doi.org/10.7833/111-0-17>
- González, E., 2015, 'Destroyers of the Earth' in Revelation 11,18 – Who are they?', *DavarLogos* 14(1), 91–107, viewed 13 January 2024, from <https://researchers.mq.edu.au/en/publications/the-destroyers-of-the-earth-in-revelation-1118-who-are-they>.
- Gowan, D.E., 1998, *Theology of the prophetic books: The death and resurrection of Israel*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Green Infrastructure- Austin, n.d., *Chapter four – Ecosystem services*, viewed 09 January 2024, from <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~gaustin/pdf/GI%20Chap4.pdf>.
- Horrell, D.G., Hunt, C. & Southgate, C., 2008, 'Appeals to the Bible in ecotheology and environmental ethics: A typology of hermeneutical stances', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21(2), 219–238. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0953946808094343>
- Hyneman, J., 2013, *Why are we stewards of creation? World vision's Biblical understanding of how we relate to creation*, viewed 12 January 2024, from https://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/World%20Vision%E2%80%99s%20Biblical%20Understanding%20of%20How%20we%20Relate%20to%20Creation_Full.pdf.
- JBA Risk Management, 2022, *South Africa: KwaZulu-Natal floods*, viewed 10 January 2024, from <https://www.jbarisk.com/products-services/event-response/south-africa-kwazulu-natal-floods/>.
- Jones, G.E., 2007, *A verse by verse commentary on revelation*, Garners Books, East Sussex.
- Kabongo, K.T.L. & Stork, J., 2022, 'African-initiated churches and environmental care in Limpopo, South Africa: A missional enquiry', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1), a2636. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2636>
- Kavunga, K.J., 2022, 'Sustainable eco-theology for African Churches: Imagine a home-grown hermeneutics of sustainability', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 8(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2022.v8n1.a8>
- Kessler, J., 2013, *Old Testament theology: Divine call and human response*, Baylor University Press, Waco, TX.
- Kiarie, G.K., 2020, *Environmental degradation: What is the role of the church in environmental conservation in Kenya from 1963–2019?*, viewed 12 January 2023, from <https://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/she/v46n2/04.pdf>.
- Le Roux, C.S., 2017, 'How environmental stewardship is viewed and evidenced in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa: An appraisal of students' lecturers' and ministers' perceptions', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3(1), 205–225. <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2017.v3n1.a10>
- Agezi, C., 2018, 'Theological understandings of migration and church ministry model: A quest for holistic ministry to migrants in South Africa', PhD thesis, North-West University, Potchefstroom.
- Agezi, V. & Agezi, C., 2018, 'Migration crisis and Christian response: From Daniel de Groody's image of God theological prism in migration theology to a migration practical theology ministerial approach and operative ecclesiology', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74(1), 4876. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4876>
- McKnight, S., 2020, *Why don't evangelicals care about the environment?*, viewed 05 January 2024, from <https://www.christianitytoday.com/scot-mcknight/2020/june/why-dont-evangelicals-care-about-environment.html>.
- Merriam Webster Dictionary, n.d., *Stewardship*, viewed 12 January 2024, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship>.
- Miller, N., 2009, *Cases in environmental politics: Stakeholders, interests, and policymaking*, Routledge, New York, NY.
- Mpofu, B., 2021, 'Pursuing fullness of life through harmony with nature: Towards an African response to environmental destruction and climate change in Southern Africa', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(4), a6574. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6574>
- Munyati, C., 2022, *How South Africa's recent floods compel climate action*, viewed 08 January 2024, from https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/how-south-africa-recent-floods-compel-climate-action/?gclid=CjwKCAiA1-6sBhAoEiwArqIGPiqIKTKQF6s60PYkpsB6vq8jdDjXekNuc8-Z5Qh1FvXZm6k4dh-BoC-AcQAvD_BwE.
- Muwadzuri, R., 2014, 'Biblical environmental protection: Seven keys for Christians leaders', PhD thesis, Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary, viewed 13 January 2024, from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/58825571.pdf>.
- O'Donovan, O., 2001, *Resurrection and moral order: An outline of evangelical ethics*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.
- Orr, A., n.d., *An introduction to eco-theology*, viewed 29 April 2024, from <https://www.ecocongregationireland.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/An-Introduction-to-Eco-Theology-by-Rev-Andrew-Orr.pdf>.
- Oxley, S.M., 2010, 'The World Council of Churches and "ecumenical consciousness": How the constitutional responsibility of fostering "ecumenical consciousness" has been reflected in the World Council of Churches' educational and formational activities from 1948–2006', PhD thesis in Humanities, University of Manchester, Manchester.
- Padgett, A., 2021, *Ecotheology: Developing new perspective*, viewed 29 April 2024, from <https://biologos.org/articles/ecotheology-developing-new-perspective>.
- Peterson, R., 2008, 'Inclusivism versus exclusivism on key Biblical texts', in C.W. Morgan & R.A. Peterson (eds.), *A response to inclusivism: Faith comes by hearing*, pp. 184–200, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL.
- Pew Research Centre, 2017, *The changing global religious landscape*, viewed 27 March 2024, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>.
- Raiser, K., 1997, *To be the church: Challenges and hopes for the new millennium*, World Council of Churches, Geneva.
- Reliefweb, 2023a, *Madagascar: Floods and Landslides – Jan 2022*, viewed 08 January 2024, from https://reliefweb.int/disaster/st-2022-000138-mdg?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA16sBhAoEiwArqIGPiiZAvXpCDBX2tPvAdlrr6C-FUH8954KvMlexuivCFL5dRwP04pRBoCT6EQAvD_BwE.
- Reliefweb, 2023b, *Malawi 2023 tropical cyclone Freddy post-disaster needs assessment (April 2023)*, viewed 08 January 2024, from https://reliefweb.int/report/malawi-2023-tropical-cyclone-freddy-post-disaster-needs-assessment-april-2023?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA1-6sBhAoEiwArqIGPhVTKH3sEhvP3ucpsY5e61YWCdf7UU1Z-ooUnv56cOT-dq9hQCH4PxoCFFMQAvD_BwE.
- Reliefweb, 2023c, *South Africa: Floods – Sep 2023*, viewed 10 January 2024, from <https://reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2023-000200-zaf>.
- Resane, K.T., 2021, 'Moltmann speaking at the environmentalists conference: Ecology and theology in dialogue', *Scriptura* 120(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.7833/120-1-1988>
- Robinson, D.T., 2024, *15 biggest environmental problems of 2024*, viewed 08 January 2024, from <https://earth.org/the-biggest-environmental-problems-of-our-lifetime/>.
- Robinson, W., 2009, *Environmental concerns of the World Council of Churches*, viewed 12 January 2024, from https://www.academia.edu/2566737/Environmental_Concerns_of_the_World_Council_of_Churches.
- Samadhiya, H., 2024, 'Ecosystem: Structure and Types', viewed 09 January 2024, from <https://www.jiwaji.edu/pdf/ecourse/zoology/Ecosystem%20Structure%20and%20Types%20%20ecosystem.pdf>.
- Sennett, J.F., 2005, 'Bare bones inclusivism and the implications of Romans 1:20', *Evangelical Quarterly* 77(4), 309–319. <https://doi.org/10.1163/27725472-07704002>
- South African Council of Churches (SACC), 2009, *Climate change: A challenge to the churches in South Africa*, South African Council of Churches, Marshalltown, viewed 29 April 2024, from <https://www.smms.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Climate-Change-A-Challenge-to-the-churches-in-South-Africa.pdf>.
- Torrance, T.F., 1995, *The Trinitarian faith*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, New York, NY.
- Tulun, M.O., 2020, 'What is the World Council of Churches? Centre for Eurasian Studies (AVIM)', *Commentary* 2014(34), 1–4, viewed 13 April 2020, from <https://avim.org.tr/en/Yorum/WHAT-IS-THE-WORLD-COUNCIL-OF-CHURCHES>.
- United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP), 2024, *Facts about the nature crisis*, viewed 08 January 2024, from <https://www.unep.org/facts-about-nature-crisis>.
- Van der Walt, J.L., 2012, 'Another look at education from a Christian stewardship perspective', *Koers* 77(2), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/koers.v77i2.428>
- Van Schalkwyk, A., 2013, 'Ecological activism and interreligious dialogue of life – A case study of the Southern African Communities Environmental institute', *Scriptura* 112 (1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.7833/112-0-93>
- Venter, F., 2022, 'Environmental stewardship: Confluence of law and religion', *Pioneer in Peer-Reviewed* 25, 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.17159/1727-3781/2022/v25i0a13879>
- World Council of Churches (WCC), 2023b, *World Council of Churches endorses the Call for a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty*, viewed 30 April 2024, from <https://fossilfuel treaty.org/world-council-churches#:~:text=28%20June%202023%20%E2%80%93%20at%20the,primary%20cause%20of%20the%20climate>.
- Zaleha, B.D. & Szasz, A., 2015, *Why conservative Christians don't believe in climate change*, viewed 06 January 2024, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0096340215599789>.