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Biblical stewardship and environmental sustainability: A scriptural study

Authors:
Peggy S. Tewu[1]
Joni K. Kampilong[2]

Affiliations:
[1]Department of Protestant Christology, Faculty of Theology, Indonesian Christian University in Tomohon, Tomohon, Indonesia

[2]Department of Environmental Science, Faculty of Engineering, Indonesian Christian University in Tomohon, Tomohon, Indonesia

Corresponding author:
Peggy Tewu,
peggysandratewu@gmail.com

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Religious communities are faced with significant ethical issues as a result of to the accelerating environmental crisis. This paper reveals biblical principles of environmental stewardship and shows their applicability in modern ecological ethics. Investigating the scriptural corpus of Genesis 1–2, Leviticus 25, Psalm 24, Romans 8:18–25 and Colossians 1:15–20, the study resorted to historical-grammatical exegesis and ecological hermeneutics; thus, it is in a position to identify five related principles: creation has intrinsic value as a gift from God, human beings are responsible stewards and not independent proprietors, and the Sabbath rest establishes the ecological boundaries that are required. These biblical principles are stimulating in their challenge to modern environmental philosophy, in their challenge of growth-focused economics by imaginative Sabbath wisdom, in their insistence on the value of biodiversity in the worth of creation, and in the rejection of an ecological ethic in the name of social and environmental justice. Concrete actions are necessary to change the individual, congregational, and systemic consumption habits, and prophetic advocacy to change economic systems and political policies that continue to degrade the environment. Therefore, this study provides theological materials to Christian leadership in environmental issues on how to address the current ecological emergencies facing societies across the globe.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article adds theological material to Christian environmental leadership in response to the ecological emergencies that affect communities worldwide.

Keywords: biblical stewardship; environmental ethics; creation care; sustainability; Genesis dominion; Sabbath ecology; creation renewal; climate change; ecological hermeneutics.

Introduction

The world is currently experiencing an unprecedented environmental crisis. Global weather is becoming unstable due to climate change, food production is destabilised, and species are being pushed to extinction levels never seen before (IPCC 2021, AR6 WGI SPM: 8–10, 14–16). The rate of biodiversity loss is growing at an alarming rate and scientists have warned that we are going through a sixth mass extinction caused by habitat loss, pollution and climate change (Cowie, Bouchet & Fontaine 2022:642). Adding to these dangers are deforestation, acidification of the oceans, soil erosion and freshwater loss, which raise serious questions about our relationship with nature and whether we can continue to live a sustainable life on a finite planet (Bernhard, Shapiro & Hunt 2024:1–2).

Religions have considerable moral and practical power to respond to these issues through lessons, movement mobilisation and social policy (Schliesser 2024:10). Theological education is very critical in preparing Christian organisations to handle massive resources, mould ethical practices, and have an impact on the discourse. Nevertheless, the history of ecology in Christianity is still disputable, and critics as well as supporters use Scripture to prove their points of view on environmental responsibility. Theological education should develop innovative sustainability leadership, which is a type of leadership that carries personal discipleship into political, religious and structural responses to the reality of climate change and ecological degradation (Kampilong et al. 2025; Kaurov et al. 2025). Anything less than that is not adequate to the biblical vision, which links human flourishing with that of creation (Freiling & Cacciatore 2025:4–5; Ross 2023:4–5).

This line of thought can be followed to Lynn White and his extremely successful 1967 essay, The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis, which contended that the dominion imperative of Genesis 1:28 encouraged exploitative relations towards nature and helped to cause environmental

destruction in the Western world conditioned by Christian theology (White 1967). White claimed that the tradition of the Bible, and particularly its interpretation through the domination lens, is very anthropocentric, where humans are superior to other creatures in a matter that has taken the instrumental approach of nature as a way of legitimising the use of nature (White 1967:1207). However, later scholarship has criticised the thesis as a simplistic historical and theologically reductionist thesis of White (Whitney 1993:160). It is still actively discussed whether biblical faith is the main source of environmental degradation or whether it could also become an important resource for environmental stewardship (Kerber 2015:388; Petrescu-Mag et al. 2020:430).

However, in recent decades, Christian interest in environmental issues has increased. This can be seen in papal encyclicals such as *Laudato Si'* (2015) and the statements of major Christian denominations on climate change, as well as the development of Christian environmental organisations (Francesco 2015:1). Christian environmental ethics have become centred on the concept of stewardship, which is based on biblical texts describing humanity as caretakers of God's creation (Francesco 2015:1). However, this stewardship theology should be thoroughly based on Scripture to prevent proof-texting, eisegesis, and the exercise of selectivity that tends to ignore the wider canonical testimony (Tolbert 2023:5).

This article focuses on three interrelated research questions that inform our exegetical research and modern practices. Firstly, what are the theological roots of creation care based on a close reading of the appropriate Old and New Testament passages? This involves considering the historical context, genre of literature and linguistic and canonical relations. Secondly, what do these biblical principles teach us about modern sustainability ethics in the recent literature on climate change, biodiversity and environmental justice? This requires consultation of contemporary scientific, ethical and theological literature. Thirdly, what are the practical implications of biblical stewardship theology for dealing with current environmental issues: personal, ecclesiological and societal? This question links theological reflections to actual actions.

Historical-grammatical exegesis, thematic analysis and ecological hermeneutics are the three approaches used to study the selected biblical passages. Historical-grammatical exegesis interprets texts in their historical, cultural and literary contexts, with a specific emphasis on Hebrew and Greek terminologies and syntactical forms and backgrounds of the ancient Near East (Frey, Kim & Meren 2025:1–23). Thematic analysis reveals biblical motifs across varied texts in the Bible that can be seen as themes of creation, stewardship, Sabbath and redemption. The interpretation principles are offered by the Earth Bible Project (Habel 2000:24–36). Ecological hermeneutics offers a clear focus on environmental issues, such as awareness of the voice of the earth. Earth in Scripture and the criticism of anthropocentric interpretations of Scripture that relegate creation to human needs (Canete, Daton & Ching 2025:10; Magezi 2024:4; Masengwe 2025:3).

The choice of texts emphasises passages that explicitly describe creation, the relationship that humanity has had with nature, and the redemption of the cosmos: Genesis 1–2 (creation stories that define the role of humanity), Leviticus 25 (sabbatical laws that decline rest to land), Psalm 24 (God owning the creation), Romans 8:18–25 (creation groaning and redemption) and Colossians 1:15–20 (cosmic Christology and reconciliation). These texts are of various genres (narrative, law, poetry, epistle), times (before the exile, during the exile, the first century) and theological schools of thought, offering the breadth of the canons for thorough analysis (Jähnichen 2015:4; Lala & Lala 2025:6; Vliet 2024:4).

The importance of this study is that it has shown that environmental responsibility is part of Christian discipleship and not an extra or marginal peripheral issue that is not a core part of Christian faith. This study adds to the existing debate on biblical studies, systematic theology and environmental ethics by making ecological ethics based on critical biblical exegesis and the use of contemporary scholarship. The modern ecological crisis requires immediate action from every layer of society, including the religious. Theological means of dealing with climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental injustice as components of Christian mission and witness are found in the Scripture, appropriately understood and applied.

Research methods and design

This study merges three multi-layered forms of hermeneutics: historical-grammatical exegesis, thematic analysis and ecological hermeneutics, which study Hebrew and Greek terminology, syntactical units and the historical contexts of the Near East (Frey et al. 2025:4–7). Genre, rhetorical and canonical attention ensure that the interpretation respects textual integrity.

Thematic analysis refers to motifs in the Bible that are common in creation, stewardship, Sabbath and redemption in the canonical texts. This style acknowledges that biblical theology evolves, with subsequent writings extending and redefining older traditions and occasionally criticising them as well. The identification of common themes in different writings shows the continuity and progression of the biblical views on creation and human accountability. Thematic analysis also represents tensions and the existence of other voices in Scripture, without harmonising the text, which hides its complexity (Faigenbaum-Golovin et al. 2025:11; Tolbert 2023:6).

The Earth Bible Project has developed ecological hermeneutics, which offer interpretive principles that are sensitive to environmental issues (Habel 2000:24–25). These values are viewing Earth as a subject rather than an object or resource; hearing the voice of the Earth in biblical books; recognising the intrinsic value of all creation and criticising

anthropocentric interpretations that treat creation as a servant to human needs. Ecological hermeneutics does not force alien categories on biblical texts but instead points out aspects that have been disregarded in the classical interpretation (Leese 2019:10).

Each biblical passage is analysed in four steps: firstly, a literary reading, which makes a statement of attention to genre, structure and rhetorical texture; secondly, a lexical exploration of important Hebrew and Greek words and their semantic space; thirdly, a theological reflection on major themes and their location within the larger biblical witness; and fourthly, a movement towards contemporary application, that is, by asking about the possible ways in which these ancient texts can be used to speak to present ecological disasters. This sequenced method protects against two pitfalls in most cases: Scripture is in a museum, not connected with the pressing realities of today, and bending verses out of context to make them fit modern needs (Frey et al. 2025:6–8).

Findings

Old Testament foundations

Genesis 1:26–28 has been a significant focus of enquiry into the place of humankind in creation, due in part to two Hebrew words: רָדָה [*radah*, to have dominion] and כָּבַשׁ [*kabash*, to conquer]. Critics tend to view it as a God-given authority to own and exploit. However, a more detailed examination revealed a grainy appearance. Radah is not in any space; rather, it exists in the context of צֶלֶם [*tselem*], the image of God, as discussed below. This language in the ancient Near East was royal, as kings were regarded as earthly embodiments of divinity who ruled not by brute power but by justice and order. Similarly, humanity, being the image of God, rules not as conquerors but as a kind of steward, a governor who rules as God himself.

It is not an ontological statement about sharing the essence of God but rather a functional statement regarding the fulfilment of a role. To be a carrier of the image of God is to be a ruler in the way God would rule, that is, through wisdom, restraint and care for the prosperity of the entirety. In contrast, the dominion mandate of Genesis 1 is limited by the nature of the One whose image we are created.

The latest eco-theological texts have viewed the imago Dei as not about domination but about relationship responsibility. Magezi (2024:5) claims that creation in the image of God is a commission from God to represent his caring sovereignty over creation (Magezi 2024:5). This perception is enhanced by Afro-ecofeminist interpretations of Genesis 2:4–24. African eco-spiritualities exhibit that the human role is considered highly relational in nature, based on the notion of interdependence with the earth, community and the divine (Juma 2025:6–8). To this end, the servitude [*abad*] and protection [*shamar*] of the garden are kinship (but not domination) (Lala & Lala 2025:3), include the fact that stewardship is a derivative of becoming representatives of God, not owners of creation. These views combined question interpretations that support exploitation. Instead, they recover Genesis 2 as an invitation to one another in the web of God.

Genesis 1 reinforces the concept and indeed, the use of intrinsic values without having to do with utility, through the repetition of the term creation good [*tov*]. God refers to creation as good even before the emergence of humans (Gn 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), which implies that the value of creation is a divine assessment, not a human application. In Genesis 1:31, the very good [מְאֹד טוֹב = *tov meod*] is a totality of the order created, the totality of humanity in the larger ecological system. This is a direct defiance of anthropocentric readings in which the value of creation is diminished for the benefit of people.

In Genesis 2:15, we have a counterpart point of view: The LORD God brought human into the Garden of Eden and tilled and managed it. The Hebrew words עָבַד = *abad* [serve, till] and שָׁמַר = *shamar* [guard, preserve] can be used to elucidate the vocation of humankind. Abad, which may also be translated as serve, implies that human beings should serve the garden and not merely exploit it. The term Shamar, often used to describe priestly care for sacred space (Nm 3:778; 18:7), suggests that Eden is a sanctuary that must be carefully managed. This image describes human as a gardener who works in the temple garden of God as a priest, taking care of God's Garden.

Recent scholarship on this journal confirms that *abad* [to serve] and *shamar* [to guard] verbs represent a priestly profession, not just farming, as previously thought. Regarding the practice of taking care of a garden and maintaining it, Magezi (2024:5) argues that it ought to be viewed as a form of liturgical stewardship, a form of worship in a sacred space. This is reinforced by Dames (2024:5), who says that Eden is the first temple where mining is not done but devoted service. This interpretation is furthered by Juma (2025:6–8), who provides an African eco-spiritual interpretation of the meaning of abad and shamar, which are not the bosses of the earth but its kin. In this perception, stewardship is relational, based on the view that the land is a gift of life and is given to the people. Collectively, these visions validate that Genesis 2:15 redeems humanity, and that his perspectives are not dominated by God, but are to be revered in the sanctuary of God.

Theology is furthered in Leviticus 25 with the Sabbath and Jubilee laws. Agricultural land should take a rest every seventh year: But in the seventh year, there shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath of the LORD (Lv 25:4). It is because of this that ecological restrictions on productivity are a must to pop the bubble of infinite exploitation. Better still, verse 23: The land belongs to me, and you are nothing but a stranger and a tenant to me. This assertion makes three strings of truth: firstly, that the land ultimately belongs to God; secondly, that humans are only a provisional tenant;

and thirdly, that those in charge of this provisional tenure bring with them a heavy burden. It is not a scramble to the statute but an earthquake in theology, shaking proprietary rights to absolute possession.

Modern eco-theological thought believes that Leviticus 25 breaks the myth of absolute human ownership of land. Dames (2024:7) advocate the claim that the statement of land is mine (Lv 25:23) is also resistance to commodification by God, that is, the earth turns from being a possession into being a blessed trust. Conradie (2024:8) also notes that the Sabbath year and Jubilee are not spiritual ones but structural interventions, a plan made by God to avoid inequality and ecological depletion. Pakpahan (2025:4–6) supports this reading by equating Jubilee and the Dayak tradition of Gawai and proves that the two stress the sacred relationship between human beings, the land and God (Pakpahan 2025:4–6). According to Fernández (2023:8–10), Jubilee is also described as the ecology of wholeness; it breaks the systems of accumulation and perceives creation as home (Fernández 2023:8–10). Such attitudes taken collectively affirm that Leviticus 25 is in the business of providing an alternative to extractive economic modes: divine property makes human ownership relative and ecological ethics cannot be considered apart from the notion of distributive justice.

The connotations are even more than individualistic. Jubilee and sabbatical beats transcend individual holiness. This is because the Earth rests every 7 years. It cancels debts after every 50th year, frees enslaved people and gives back the land of an estate to natural families. These are not charities but restructurings, God-designed revolutions, which are to be made to see that poverty and power are not established. Notably, ecological and social justice cannot be distinguished in this context. In cases where the landlords are not cultivating the land, the land rejuvenates its soil, and low-income people harvest the wild crops. He is the one who heals the earth and keeps the weak alive.

This all-encompassing approach stands in sharp contrast to contemporary paradigms that perceive environmental concerns and social justice as two aspects of existence (Messias 2024:68; Ngwena 2024:3–4). The scripture has not been split this way. It is the same God who owns the earth (Ps 24:1); the world is the Lord's, and all in it, who heals the groan of the landless and enslaved people. However, to tend to creation is never merely a matter of trees or rivers, but a matter of justice, memory and the power not to allow that piling up to obscure compassion. This statement contextualises the notions of worship (Ps 24:3–6) and divine kingship (Ps 24:7–10), showing that awareness of God as the owner of creation is a prerequisite for appropriate worship and recognition of divine sovereignty. Claims to hold land by human beings are relative to the ultimate divine ownership, which creates a theological foundation for environmental stewardship as an act of responsibility towards the Creator.

It is a significant break with a few present-day paradigms that tend to separate environmental protection and social justice into two different entities. Schlosberg (2013) noted that mainstream environmentalism has been known to favour conservation of the wilderness to the disadvantage of the voices of the poor, a dualistic nature that Leviticus 25 directly questions (Schlosberg 2013:42). In contrast, Messias (2024) endorses the fact that ecological care circulated in the statement of the Laudato si does not separate care of the earth from care of the marginalised, but finds a common home in which the idea of ecological justice cannot be segregated and similarly social justice (Messias 2024:68). Another incorporation, according to Ngwena (2024), like in African indigenous epistemologies, is land, community and divine sovereignty as one (Ngwena 2024:3–4).

However, the Biblical scripture does not represent such a bifurcation. It recognises the same God as that who possesses the earth (Ps 24:1); the Lord is the Lord of the world, and there is nothing in it and listens to the groan of the landless and the slave. Therefore, working on creation can never be just a process of taking care of trees and rivers; it is the question of justice, memory and denying the accretion of compassion. Such a vision puts current conceptions of biblical worship (Ps 24:3–6) and biblical god-Kingship (Ps 24:7–10) into context, which shows that the mindfulness of God as the sole owner of creation is a preconditioning factor for true worship and trustworthy management.

Instances of humans claiming the rule of the land are temporary, since they are vested under divine property. This value is what environmental responsibility stands on as a covenantal duty to the Creator.

New Testament foundations

Romans 8:18–25 introduces the topic of creation [κτίσις = *ktisis*] as a subject of suffering and anticipation of freedom. According to Paul, creation anxiously anticipates the revelation of the children of God (Rm 8:19). This humanist figure transfers agency and expectation to the creation of places and opposes more strictly instrumental perspectives. The subjection of creation to futility [ματαιότης = *mataiotes*] did not happen of its own will but on the part of the one who subjected it, presumably the outcome of human sin in Genesis 3. This confirms that ecological degradation is caused by human defiance, not divine will.

The culmination of the passage attests to this: the creation itself will loosen the chains of corruption and receive the freedom of the praise of the children of God (Rm 8:21). This connects the liberation of creation with the glorification of humanity, and the redemption of human beings and healing ecology are inseparable. The created order is also meant by redemption, not just the souls of humans. The imagery of groaning and labour pains (Rm 8:22) reflects the suffering at hand, along with the hope of new birth, the reality of the new present environmental crisis, and the hope of change that will come in the future.

Paul incorporates adherents of the moaning of creation: we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, moan inwardly as we wait for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies (Rm 8:23). This unity of humanity and the world challenges dualistic spirituality, which undermines the material world. Not escapism with physicality, but the inclusion of bodily resurrection and cosmic renewal is contained in the concept of redemption in the novel. The presence of the Spirit as first fruits [ἀπαρχή = *aparche*] assures future consummation and encourages current environmental interaction as being involved in God's redemptive work.

Recent eco-theological literature ascertains that Paul did not have an escapist vision in Romans 8 but an earth-affirming one. Masengwe (2025:7) also claims that creation itself is an object of redemption, which groans in sporadic expectation of redemption with the rest of humanity. Dames (2024:6) state that the first fruits of the Spirit enable believers to enter into the redemptive work of God in the present world. This eschatological hope is associated with green responsibility, and groaning is the motivation behind being a steward and not a despairer. Cinjee, Schaap-Jonker and Smit (2025) also stress that the desire to create is the foundation of Christian climate care, whereas Ibita (2025:7) relates it to eco-anxiety and ecopedagogy, pointing to its contribution to ecological conversion (Cinjee et al. 2025:229–231; Ibita 2025:7). Together, all these voices bring in Romans 8 cosmic solidarity: creation, humankind, will fall into bondage along with futility, will be freed along with Christ. Redemption should not be theorised as a process of retracting, but as an actual process of genuinely co-suffering with an ecologically inappropriate planet, thus redefining discipline as the healing process and the expression of environmental justice.

Colossians 1:15–20 explains cosmic Christology that endorses the work of Christ in creation and reconciliation. He is the personification of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creation; in him everything in heaven and earth was created (Col 1:15–16). The combination of the words all things [τὰ πάντα = *ta panta*] means the whole cosmos, establishing Christ's universal importance. The fact that everything was created in his name and around him (Col 1:16) suggests that the cosmos exists not to benefit humanity but to glorify Jesus Christ.

The climax of the vision is in verse 20: God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things on earth or in heaven by the blood of his cross, making peace. The phrase all things [*ta panta*] is not a figure of speech; it is an intentional repetition of verse 16, which speaks of the same all things having been created in Christ and in his name. There is no difference in the scope of creation and reconciliation: that which is not under the redemptive arc of Christ does not exist. This is because ecological healing is not an appendix to the gospel; instead, it is embedded in the gospel itself. The cross, however, is not just about the guilt of human beings but also about a more profound discontinuity at the very centre of creation, what Paul elsewhere refers to as bondage to decay (Rm 8:21).

Redemption is cosmic before it is personal

More importantly, this reconciliation is realised through peacemaking [εἰρηνοποιέω = *eirenopoiesis*]. This is, in the Hebrew imagination, no less than shalom: a state of overall well-being in which justice, ecological wholeness, and proper relations to God and neighbour are brought back to oneness. It is not peace that is spiritualised, leaving the rivers polluted and the people displaced without being touched. In contrast, Shalom rejects the contemporary trend of dividing salvation into soul, soil, spirit, worship and watersheds.

Thus, Colossians 1:15–20 does not just provide us with a lofty Christology; it provides us with a mandate. Once one cares about creation, one is already involved in the work of the cross. In contrast, corrupting the earth is to disobey the peace that Christ has already created (see Table 1). In a fragmented age, this second passage asserts that there can be no separation in God's saving purpose. Everything [*ta panta*] is concentrated in him.

Recent ecogeological literature in this journal confirms that Colossians 1:15–20 depicts a cosmic vision whereby Christ is not just a creator of everything but also a reconciler of all things. Olajide (2025:8) asserts that the constant line prata *ta panta* [all things] is a precision of theology, and not a rhetorical extravagance, the phrase that includes not only heaven and earth but also visible and invisible, human or non-human, etc. Such universalism makes anthropocentric interpretations unstable, which impose the salvation of human souls on a small threshold. Okoh and Majimre (2024:9) elaborate on this by pointing out that the reconciliation through the cross is not specifically spiritual but in addition ecological: the blood of Christ reconciles not only God and human beings but humanity with the offended earth as well. In this system, ecological restoration is not a welcome discovery of the Christian ethic, but a necessary element of the gospel reconciling work.

Together, these points of view confirm that the book of Colossians 1 presents a drastic environmental command: the

TABLE 1: Summary of biblical passages and key insights.

Passage	Main finding	Key insight 1	Key insight 2	Key insight 3
Genesis 1–2	Mandate of stewardship	*Imago Dei* as a moral basis for care	*Radah*: responsible dominion, not exploitation	*Abad* and *Shamar*: serve and protect creation
Leviticus 25	Sabbath Year for the Land	Land has intrinsic value beyond utility	God is the ultimate owner, humans are tenants	Rest as ecological and social justice
Psalm 24:1	Divine ownership of creation	Earth belongs to the Lord	Human stewardship is delegated authority	Accountability to the Creator for earth care
Romans 8:18–25	Cosmic groaning and Hope	Creation groans alongside humanity	Redemption includes all creation [*ktisis]*	Eschatological hope for material renewal
Colossians 1:15–20	Cosmic Christology	Christ is the agent of creation and redemption	Reconciliation extends to all things [*ta panta*]	Peace-making includes ecological restoration

stewardship of the created world is an act of helping in the work of Christ *eirēnopoieō*, that is, bringing peace to the broken universe. This leads to the conception of redemption as not being about escaping from the world, but as a restoration of the world, which focuses on the cross and is geared towards a cosmic shalom.

Discussion

The exegetical foundation established in the preceding section shows that creation care is not a contemporary appendix to Christianity but a thread that runs through the fabric of Scripture. The focus of the discussion is on how these ancient beliefs are relevant to the most urgent ecological catastrophes of modern times: climate disruption, biodiversity loss and widening environmental inequity. Instead of looking at biblical texts as fixed proof texts, this dialogue reads the Bible thematically, as an effort to hear in biblical texts where Scripture is convergent with contemporary thought, where Scripture is confronted by modern thought, and where Scripture raises new questions.

Climate theology and eschatological hope

An increasing number of theologians insist that faithful ecological responses can no longer be limited to personal practices such as recycling, driving less or even eating less. According to Jenkins (2013), the systemic causes of planetary destruction that Christian ethics must address are economies based on unlimited extraction, political systems that postpone justice and cultural myths that present consumption as a guarantee of prosperity (Jenkins 2013:52). Antal and McKibben (2023) amplifies this, asserting that genuine climate ethics would be impossible without destroying institutional frameworks that prioritise profit over people and the planet (Antal & McKibben 2023:20).

Remarkably, this vision resonates in Leviticus 25. Sabbath and Jubilee are not personal spiritual practices but collective new structural practices ordered by God: land rest, debt relief and emancipation of enslaved relatives. They are not charity but measures intended to prevent the entrenchment of inequalities and ecological degradation, which are immediate threats to the dogma of the unrestrained expansion of capitalism.

This study adds to this discussion by making the Sabbath deep-rooted in the doctrine of the imago Dei. When human is made in the image of God, we ought to ask ourselves, what does God do? The answer is so deep in Genesis 2:23: God rests. Divine identity is characterised by termination, pleasure and faith in the goodness of creation. Therefore, bearing God's image is not about maximum output at whatever cost, but being a part of the work and rest rhythms that respect the boundaries of creation.

In this way, the Sabbath becomes a form of theological resistance: it denies the myth of the Earth as an endless warehouse and the value of human beings as connected to productivity. Thus, climate action requires not policy adjustment or technological transformation, but cultural transformation. We need to know how to view sufficiency as grace, rest as faithfulness, and limits not as failure but as Godly wisdom in a finite world.

Horrell (2015) and Lowe et al. (2023) confirm that eschatological hope, including the one Paul saw in Romans 8 of liberation of creation, drives current action and is not related to escapism (Horrell 2015:170; Lowe et al. 2023:7). Where Horrell emphasises solidarity with the groaning of creation (empathy as motivation), this study focuses on responsibility (stewardship as accountability). They work together: one of them gives an emotional push, another a theological foundation.

Northcott (2013) is critical of technological optimism as an idol, arguing that innovation is not the solution to crises caused by overconsumption and addiction to growth (Northcott 2013:32,125). He resorts to the Sabbath as a counter-witness, which is repeated in Leviticus 25:23: The land is mine. If the planet is in the hands of God, then no amount of green technology warrants infinite mining.

This is supported by Lynch et al. (2025), who insist on change not only in behaviour but also in spiritual, social and structural principles (Lynch et al. 2025:6,11,14). Technology exists, but it must be the servant of life and nothing more so. The new world revives this world; hence, it is theologically imperative to look after it.

Biodiversity depletion and the intrinsic value of creation

Biodiversity ethics emphasise the value of non-human animals as objects to be treasured, not as mere resources, but as species that transcend utilitarian paradigms. Bauckham (2009) argues that creation theology, as presented in the Bible, reflects a community of creation in which every creature has theological meaning to God, regardless of its usefulness (Bauckham 2009:30). Based on Imago Dei (Gn 1:26–28), the imperative of stewardship aligns with the character of God, not his dominion, when considered in the context of God taking care of animals (Gn 1:22) and his joy at the presence of wild animals (Job 3:4; Ps 104) (Pasaribu, Sipahutar & Hutabarat 2008:152; Putri, Sembodo & Prabowo 2022:11).

This study builds on Bauckham's argument that intrinsic value is based on cosmic Christology (Col 1:1520). All things are created through Christ and to serve Christ, which makes the purpose of creation Christological and not anthropocentric. The loss of biodiversity is not only a form of ecological deprivation but also a hindrance to Christ's reconciling mission (Col 1:20). Therefore, the conservation of biodiversity is a theological requirement that overrides practical interests (Okoh & Majimre 2024:6,10; Olajide 2025:8).

Van Wolde (2017) supports this view by showing that the Hebrew word for create, namely, the verb 'bara', is used only in the form Hebrew God as the subject of the action, which highlights the fact that creation is a gift of God and not an object of human ownership (Van Wolde 2017:8,13). This linguistic argument is underpinned by a stewardship ethic based on humility and places humanity in the role of recipients, but not owners.

Conradie (2024) highlights the Noah story (Gn 69) as a covenant with the entire living creation, stating that God is committed to biodiversity in itself, not just to provide humanity with an opportunity to survive (Conradie 2024:7,10).

Today, this call is urgent. According to scientists, we are experiencing the sixth mass extinction, and species are dying 100–1000 times more rapidly than the natural extinction background (Ceballos, Ehrlich & Raven 2020:13597). Scripture, in its turn, provides a solid theological rationale of biodiversity ethics founded on three interrelated pillars: first, the inherent goodness of creation proclaimed by God in Genesis 1, when the world had not yet manifested itself; second, the Christological telos of all things, which Colossians 1:16 holds when it states that creation is created through and by Christ, not just to serve human needs; third, the inclusion of all living creatures in the covenant made by God, which is evidenced in Genesis 9, when God forms (Lewis 2025:8).

The combination of these pillars is that anthropocentric utilitarianism is deconstructed, and the Church is forced to adopt a theologically oriented, emphatic ethic of biodiversity, that is, considering each species as witnessing the glory of God and part of the redemption narrative.

Environmental justice and the prophetic voice

The issues of creation are directly related to the concerns of humanity. The academic literature on environmental justice has confirmed that the phenomenon of ecological injustice, as shown by marginalised groups, particularly low-income individuals and people of colour, is a systemic effect rather than an accident (Carmichael 2023:107; Furio 2025:8). This can be compared to the teachings of the prophets of the Bible, who warn of the need to tread on the needy (Am 8:4) and emphasise imperative justice, mercy and humility (Mi 6:8). These teachings also integrate ecological, social and indivisible levels.

This integration is also demonstrated by Leviticus 25: the required rest of the land and the right of the poor to harvest are the elements that do not recognise the modern divide between the so-called environmental and social issues. According to the text, the earth is not owned by human but by God (Lv 25:23), and the jubilee disrupts this accumulation process. Thus, the entire text criticises the uncontrolled accumulation and extraction methods that contribute to worsening climate change and inequality in the region.

The conceptual framework of the climate crisis proposed by Moe-Lobeda (2016) is that of climate debt, stating that historical emissions by the Global North create a moral duty that goes beyond the scope of emissions reduction and encompasses reparative justice through the use of finance, technology transfer and support for adaptation (Moe-Lobeda 2016:125,132,185). This view is in line with the structural overhaul of the Jubilee and the limits of ownership imposed by God.

African theological structures also improve this paradigm. Mokoena (2022) and Terblanché-Greeff (2019) view Ubuntu as an alternative epistemology to Western individualism and consumerism, emphasising the superiority of the group over the individual, along with sufficiency and relationality as its principles (Mokoena 2022:6,8; Terblanché-Greeff 2019:4,6;). This perception is like Acts 2:44–45 and Leviticus 25:23, in which the assets are communised to the sovereignty of God.

Romans goes further and gets deeper into the theological stakes; creation is not a passive thing but rather is groaning in unity with humanity and awaits redemption for both (8:19–22). In turn, ecological and human well-being are enclosed in each other; therefore, environmental degradation is a theological but not a policy failure.

While critics such as Holden (2020) suggest that the Bible is unaware of contemporary frameworks such as global capitalism, this paper argues that the Biblical framework of some of the core concepts of the Bible, such as divine property, Sabbath laws, prophetic justice and cosmic reconciliation, offers open theological advice (Holden 2020:218). Their revolutionary quality is achieved not in the abstract but via application in context, based on local knowledge, such as Indigenous and African wisdom, and sensitivity to particular ecological and structural forms of injustice.

Hence, true environmental justice must be globally solid and rooted in the locality, driven by Scripture, contextually constructed and morally urgent.

Putting biblical stewardship into practice

Putting biblical convictions into practice requires careful navigation of the various waterways of personal practice, church practice and public advocacy. Personal: Individual consumption and sustainable choice. Ecclesial: lamentations and liturgy about the loss of biodiversity, sermons linking justice and climate, and renewable energy in churches. People's: taking a more community-based approach to climate policies, standing up for Indigenous peoples and taking on corporations.

This study agrees with Hayhoe's 'Creation care is part and parcel of Christian discipleship, far from foreign ideology'. Genesis 1–2 summons human stewardship, Leviticus 25 commands rest for the soil, Psalm 104 praises biodiversity, Colossians 1 makes creation Christocentric, and Romans 8

ties human and ecological redemptions together. This is not peripheral but central to the biblical faith.

The transition from principle to practice is complex. The scripture provides a vision, not a blueprint. The hermeneutical task is not to look for a correspondence between the old and the new but to discover the principles of the former in the latter (Hays 1997:4,6,118). Leviticus 25 does not prescribe climate policy. However, the principles of the Book of Leviticus – limits on accumulation, mandatory rest and divine possession of the land – challenge systems that regard creation as an infinite resource.

Akoto (2025) and Dames (2024) are of great significance. Akoto believes that a transformation is needed that changes worldviews and economic systems, rather than just individual behaviour, to tackle the climate crisis (Akoto 2025:6; Dames 2024:8,11). Extractive and unequal systems are such that recycling and meatless Mondays are not enough. Discipleship is personal, political, spiritual and structural. Anything less is not consistent with the biblical vision of binding human flourishing to the flourishing of creation (Clemence 2015:152).

The Bible first states the idea of a Sabbath for land rest using Leviticus 25 (Lv 25:4–5). This puts limits on the limitless exploitation of the land and treats the land as a covenant partner, not a commodity to be extracted to the fullest. Proper engagement implies system participation. This means engaging in a struggle against making renewable energy changes, supporting climate reparations in countries of the Global South, and challenging an economic system that is profit-driven and does not focus on the welfare of the planet.

The church's role is not automatic but irreplaceable. When it comes to congregations, they have a specially designed place to lead worship, teaching and institutional life. Among others, liturgies of lament and creation resilience, sermons about how the weeping heart of Amos is reflected in modern climate refugees, churches powered by renewable energy, fossil fuel-divested investment portfolios, and land as a sacred trust and not real estate. These are not peripheral; they are manifestations of discipleship.

This is a challenging task

Churches have lean budgets, conflicting priorities and theological differences. There are people in the church who do not desire the politicisation of faith, and others who lack confidence in climate science. These are practical impediments that must be met with patience, teaching and prudence.

Christians go to the marketplace; it is not that doctrine imposed is on them, but rather that they have a just cause. This includes the promotion of climate policy in favour of vulnerable populations, supporting Indigenous communities struggling to defend their territory, and holding corporations responsible for the destruction of the environment. The church is not an isolated haven of refuge but a healing place. However, this requires going beyond rhetoric to actual action, which is difficult but must be done.

Questions are raised as to whether religious communities can participate in environmental issue resolution in the case of historical complicity. In this study, we agree with Conradie (2024) that it is not a question of the failure of faith communities but rather the availability of resources for renewal, which can be found in biblical theology (Conradie 2024:3204). The answer is yes.

Practical contributions

Modern research on biblical cosmology shows the pressing topicality of biblical teachings for ecological ethics. With its articulation of eschatological hope in Romans 8:22 that creation is 'groaning and will be restored', eschatological hope is a strong motivator towards action, making each act of healing meaningful. Sabbath wisdom interrogates the ubiquitous idolisation of free market growth. Therefore, it is a question of ecological crisis as well as theological transgression that the loss of biodiversity erodes the intrinsic worth of creation that is recognised in Genesis, Job, Psalm 104, and the teachings of Christ. Prophetic literature explicitly links environmental decay to systemic injustice, thus setting the interrelations of polluted air, poverty, deforestation and displacement. In this Biblical paradigm, there is neither a clear-cut environmental problem that exists in isolation from human dignity nor a clear-cut human dignity that exists in isolation from environmental issues.

Such principles must be adopted at different levels

There are three levels for principle adoption, namely:

- **Personally:** Reimagining eating, transportation, consumption and rest habits based on gratitude rather than guilt in an inherited and stewardship world made by God.
- **Ecologically:** Institutionalising ecological discipleship: By creating ecological incubators through building ecclesial communities, ecological care should be a significant component of worship, catechesis and institutional practice.
- **Integration:** Elaborating on the service of the marginalised and the stewardship of creation in a more integrated manner, making ecological care a central part of the Christian mission.

The numerically strong Church of the world, with 2.4 billion practising believers, as demonstrated in the encyclical of Pope Francis, Laudato Si, has extensive moral and practical influence. Whether Scripture is pro-creation care or not is the focal point, but will modern believers revive this vision with a sense of urgency and boldness? It is not an add-on task but one of the core responsibilities that needs to be truly faithful to Christ in a world that is groaning without recession.

Future research

Future scholarship will be interested in the context of intelligibility of Proverbs, the enclaves of morals outlined in the prophetic books of Isaiah, Hosea and Jeremiah, and the vision of restoration in the book of Revelation.

A palpable outcry of voices emerges from the Global South as Christian groups implement ecological doctrine in the face of compounded climate crises and socioeconomic deprivation. These movements involve Indigenous congregations in the Amazon, Pacific Island assemblies, and African theologians who combine Ubuntu philosophy and Sabbath practices as resilience strategies. These stakeholders must provide information for the development of global ecological theology in a participatory manner, as opposed to documentary depiction.

What is also necessary is the operationalisation of scriptural vision, which is operationalised in the form of lament and gratitude liturgies, ecologically oriented hymnal compositions, pedagogical curricula of Sunday schools, and visually compelling prophetic artefacts, which enable ecclesiastical organisations to speak the truth to authority at the municipal and international negotiation tiers. This means that theological praxis must involve the translation of text into embodied action in the environment as a form of scholarship.

Conclusion

This study began with three research questions, and an exegetical survey of the Scripture yielded clear and compelling answers.

Firstly, on theological foundations: Care for creation is not an add-on of the last several decades, nor a peculiar concern that falls categorically to believers with committed green leanings. Instead, it is part of the fabric of biblical faith. From Genesis 1 introduction of the world as 'perfect', to the priestly injunction to 'serve and keep' the garden (Gn 2:15); from Leviticus 25 declarative assertion – 'the land is mine' – that enclosure and disbelief in exclusive human ownership is not a human product, to the chorus of song in the psalms praising of non-human creation (Ps 104); from Job's wonder before the wildness of creation (Job 38–41), to Paul's vision of a groaning world awaiting liberation (Rm 8:19). Taken together these texts offer a unified vision: the earth is not a stockpile that can be utilised for its resources, but it is a precious gift of God, entrusted to humanity to be considered lovingly and responsibly.

Secondly, ancient beliefs are relevant to the present situation. Eschatological hope does not promote passivity but rather action because the world is affirmed as being pertinent to God. Sabbath wisdom is a radical alternative to economies based on perpetual growth. The intrinsic value of God's creation, confirmed in creation and consummated in Christ, makes biodiversity loss an ecological tragedy and a theological outrage. Moreover, the prophets' continual calls for justice do not allow the dissociation of poor air from poor people or the deforestation of landscapes from the displacement of people. Thus, Scripture presupposes that no environmental issue is independent of a matching human problem and that human dignity cannot exist on a dying planet.

Thirdly, imperatives are practical and urgent. Biblical stewardship requires change, not for some future time but in the present, in terms of personal behaviour, church practice and social organisation. This involves reconfiguring consumption patterns, liturgical expressions, investment choices and civic participation. It requires solidarity with the vulnerable, challenging unjust systems and envisioning economies that respect limits while sharing the abundance. The church is not just an ark getting 'out of' a sinking world but is a foretaste of the new creation – of living in the now of the rhythms of rest, justice and care that Christ brought when he came.

This work is not focused on preserving the planet for the benefit of humankind alone but on joining God in redeeming all things. This is in no way a diversion from the gospel but is the gospel in its entirety and cosmic reach.

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