

Stewardship and sustainability: An assessment of Christian and secular responses to the environmental crisis

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The concepts of sustainability and stewardship are both associated with societal responses towards the global environmental crisis. A comparison is drawn between responses towards the environmental crisis from Christian and global perspectives, with reference to multifaith, conservation and economic perspectives. Selected documents are analysed to find evidence pointing towards the underlying environmental attitude of the authors, making use of ecocritical images, dark green religion principles and expressions of ecojustice. Conclusions are drawn about whether a shallow or sincere environmental outlook forms part of the ecosophies espoused by the documents. The discussion is based on analyses of the *Laudato si* (2015) and the UN Sustainable Development Agenda (2015), with added insights from selected documents to provide different perspectives.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This study focuses on the analysis of documents originating from both the religious and secular sectors, using methodology consisting of concepts derived from different disciplines. It can therefore be considered as an interdisciplinary study.

Keywords: document analysis; global environmental crisis; religious stakeholders; secular stakeholders; societal response; stewardship; sustainability.

Introduction

Motivation for the study

Human society is unable to exist on earth without impacting the environment; however, the increasing destructive impact on the environment has aroused concern for a long time (White 1967:49–50). Scholars such as White (1967) and Carson (1962) initiated the discourse, with more voices contributing over time (Pope Francis 2015; eds. Veldman, Szasz & Haluza-DeLay 2014:3).

A study conducted during and shortly after the global coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic (from 2020 to 2024) focused on responses to the environmental crisis by two major stakeholders from human society (Du Toit 2024). Selected documents from either religious or secular organisations were analysed, using a framework consisting of three principles of dark green religion, ecocritical images and the concept of ecojustice. The Sustainable Development Agenda (released by the UN in 2015) was selected as anchoring document for the analysis of documents from secular organisations, while the *Laudato si*, an encyclical by Pope Francis (2015), anchored the analysis of documents from the religious sector.

From the study of selected documents, it was deduced that stewardship and sustainability, two responses with similar motivations and goals, were the primary responses from the religious and secular organisations that were investigated. In this article, these main conclusions are discussed and compared, with the view of contributing to future societal response to the environmental crisis.

Research methods and design

To compare responses from both the religious and secular sectors of society, concepts not traditionally associated with the analysis of religious documents were chosen to develop a framework for analysis that can be useful in the comparison of documents across disciplines.

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Echoes of eco-discourses' under the expert guidance of guest editor Prof. Wessel Bentley.

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This decision was partly justified by the interdisciplinary nature of the environmental crisis facing human society. Research undertaken from various perspectives sometimes results in similar concepts developing as part of the discourse (Du Toit 2023:3).

A reason for selecting a theoretical framework, as well as concepts from other disciplines, is the prejudice towards Christianity from non-Christian sectors, based on the historic association of Christianity with colonialism and an anthropocentric and utilitarian outlook (White 1967:52).

Outline of the methodology used in the analysis of selected documents

The following steps were taken during the analysis of documents:

- Selection of a suitable section from selected documents (in most cases, the complete document was not analysed – excerpts were selected to represent the full document).
- Reading to pinpoint the dark green religion principles of belonging, interconnectedness and/or sacredness in the text.
- Reading to identify ecocritical images in the text: namely, pastoral, wilderness, pollution, human habitation, apocalyptic and possible futures.
- Reading to find evidence of ecojustice in the text.
- Evaluation of identified images and concepts in relation to the framework.
- Assigning a possible environmental attitude (ecosophy) espoused by the author of the document, either sincere (adhering to dark green religion [DGR] principles) or shallow environmentalism (focusing primarily on human well-being, Du Toit 2024:115).

Selection of documents

Documents were selected to represent Christian, multifaith, global and local organisations. Time and capacity constraints made it impossible to study a wider range of documents.

Christian perspective

This article initially focuses on the *Laudato si* (Pope Francis 2015)¹ to represent the view of a Christian religious leader on the desired societal response towards the environmental crisis. This document is an official letter released by Pope Francis, head of the global Catholic Church, on 24 May 2015. It is titled 'Praise be to you', after a document by St Francis of Assisi (The Holy See 2024), also called the 'patron saint of ecologists' (White 1967:1207). His name was adopted by the Pope at the start of his tenure (Taylor, Van Wieren & Zaleha 2016:307). The document reflects Pope Francis' comments on human society's relationship with Earth and how it can be changed from its current destructive course. It has aroused great interest and been studied extensively by academic scholars and by organisations that are active in the environmental discourse (Annett et al. 2017; SAFCEI Weekly News 2023).

1. For the full document, see Pope Francis (2015).

It is a lengthy document (184 pages), and for the purposes of this article, only the first few paragraphs are discussed.

Global perspective

The next document, chosen to represent a non-religious organisation, is the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, developed by the United Nations (UN 2015).² It was published in 2015 after global consultations with leaders to introduce the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were formulated to initiate a united global response towards the environmental crisis (UN 2023). Since 2015, countries worldwide have been organising national initiatives to reach the stated goals by 2030. The preamble to the 2030 Agenda is studied to evaluate the attitude of these leaders towards the Earth and our environment.

Multifaith, conservation and economical perspectives

To add to the findings from these two documents, reference is made to findings from the analyses of other documents that were also studied. From the religious sector, this includes an article by the Ethics in Action Initiative, consisting of leaders representing different religions (Annett et al. 2017),³ as well as a document by a South African multifaith organisation, SAFCEI (2018).⁴ To provide a perspective on the motivation for environmental action from a secular perspective, findings from the executive summary of the Living Planet Report (2020),⁵ compiled on behalf of the WWF, are added to the comparison, with some references to the preface of the 16th Global Risks Report released by the World Economic Forum in 2021.⁶ These last two documents were published during the COVID-19 pandemic and were studied to provide some information about the impact of the pandemic on global responses by human society towards the environmental crisis.

Theoretical framework

The framework used in this study is based on a dark green religious perspective. Dark green religion is a term reflecting a nature-focused spirituality, originating from various sectors of society that are not aligned with traditional religious practices (Taylor 2010:14–15; Taylor, Wright & LeVasseur 2020:46). It attempts to avoid the anthropocentric focus often encountered from religions such as Christianity and has close tangencies with 'deep ecology', another concept from environmental discourse.⁷

Dark green basis for the analysis

Dark green spirituality is characterised by principles such as interconnectedness, belonging and sacredness, the last

2. For the full document, see UN (2015).

3. For more information about the Ethics in Action Initiative (EIA), refer to Sachs and Flanagan (2022).

4. For more information about SAFCEI, refer to SAFCEI (2024) and Davies (2013).

5. For the full report (see eds. Almond et al. 2020).

6. For the full report (see World Economic Forum [WEF] 2021).

7. For background information on deep ecology relative to DGR, refer to Taylor (2010:8); Drengson and Devall (eds. 2008:4) and Naess (1973:95–98).

providing a link with religious experience (Taylor 2010:13). In this study, the presence of these principles in selected documents is interpreted as evidence of a nature-centred attitude, representing a DGR perspective.

Ecocritical images used in the analysis

To enhance the lens of DGR, ecocritical images or figures of speech are included in the analysis framework to assist in identifying the presence of the above-mentioned DGR principles. Ecocriticism is a technique used in literary analysis to uncover the attitude of the author towards the environment by depicting human relationships with the environment (Garrard 2004:6).

The images used in this study are briefly described as follows:

- A *pastoral* image evokes feelings of peace and belonging, while a *wilderness* image can arouse feelings of awe and reverence for nature, an emotion that can be linked to the experience of sacredness (Garrard 2004:40, 59–60).
- The concept or image of *pollution* relates to negative human impact on the environment that can result in experiencing feelings of destruction and degradation. It reflects the threat posed by human impact on the environment (Garrard 2004:8).

The concept of *human habitation* forms an integral part of human society's existence on Earth and is an important image to include in discussions about human relationships with the environment. This image is linked to the image of *possible futures* for human society and plays a role in the development of strategies for future human societies (Du Toit 2024:73).

Apocalyptic scenarios provide a contrast to images of a possible future and the continued existence of humans on the Earth (Garrard 2004:93). They relate to negative (terminal) outcomes of the current environmental crisis and add a sense of urgency to societal response to the environmental crisis.

The role of ecojustice in the analysis

Besides these ecocritical images, the concept of ecojustice is also considered an important aspect of societal response towards the environmental crisis. Ecojustice is found in the eco-theological evaluation of biblical texts (Habel 2009:xix, 61) and has close links with ecofeminism (Hobgood-Oster 2005:533). In this study, ecojustice is viewed as an antecedent of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism focuses particularly on justice towards women as primary caretakers of the environment (Hobgood-Oster 2005:533; Nhanenge 2007:41), while ecojustice is applied on a broader basis. The two concepts both focus on intergenerational justice, adding a future perspective to societal responses, as well as justice towards minorities and diverse groups in society. Lastly, it considers nature and the Earth herself as deserving of justice (Du Toit 2024:144–145).

Ecosophy as the goal of the analysis

The end goal of the analysis of documents in this study is to assign a possible ecosophy to the author or organisation responsible for the text, using a DGR perspective (Du Toit 2024:84).

The term 'ecosophy' refers to a holistic philosophy or attitude to the environment by a particular person (or community or organisation) that is specific for the context in which they function (eds. Drengson & Duvall 2008:viii, 3; Stibbe 2014:118). This ecosophy may be based on religious and/or ethical considerations, which can overlap (Du Toit 2024:46).

An environmentally beneficial ecosophy is accepted as evidence of a personal ecological conversion, a term used to describe the adoption of an alternative worldview that is aligned with the principles of DGR (as described in the methodology). The concept of an ecological conversion originates from religious discourse, and this alternative worldview was introduced by successive Popes from the Catholic Church,⁸ most recently emphasised by Pope Francis (2015:5–6).

During the analysis, the various elements (images and concepts) that are identified in the text from selected documents are evaluated in combination to decide whether the attitude towards the environment that is reflected by the author of the document can be aligned with a shallow or sincere environmental position or ecosophy.

Findings

Christian perspective: The *Laudato si*

The title of this document, 'On care for our common home' (Pope Francis 2015:1) already introduces the DGR principles of *interconnectedness* ('our common') and *belonging* ('home'). The Earth is the only place humanity can truly call 'home'. This phrase also introduces the image of 'home', reflecting *human habitation*, a suitable place to live in. Because the author is a religious leader, it is not unsubstantiated to also read into this phrase an implied reference to the creator of the Earth as the home of humanity.

The author continues by describing the grievous harm inflicted on the Earth by personifying the Earth as a sister (is she therefore considered as a member of the human family?), reflecting *ecojustice* linked with ecofeminism. He states that, '[t]his sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her' (par 2:3). In this quote, Francis links human society, Earth and God as one *interconnected* family. The Earth is specifically identified as a woman. He also assigns ownership of the Earth's resources to 'her', not to humanity, which is an interesting observation in light of the anthropocentric nature of some of his other statements.

⁸John Paul II Cf. Catechesis (17 January 2001), 4: Insegnamenti 41/1 (2001), 179. Benedict XVII, Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate (29 June 2009), 51: AAS 101 (2009), 687.

The paragraph continues with an image of *pollution* when he says that the violence inflicted on the Earth originates in human sin, which results in 'the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life' (par 2:3). It is followed by a powerful supporting statement for *ecojustice*, explaining, '[t]his is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor' (par 2:3), linking it with Romans 8:22⁹ as supporting evidence. In this statement, the Earth is personified as one of 'our poor', a fellow member of human society that is suffering with others.

These quotes from the opening paragraphs of the encyclical demonstrate that the DGR principles and images mentioned in the methodology, as well as the concept of *ecojustice*, are present in abundance in this document. The encyclical continues along this vein, with language reflecting the Pope's personal ecological conversion clearly. His heart for humanity is present throughout the document, but he links this directly with the idea of stewardship, saying that 'God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement ...' (par 5:5). This interest in human well-being gives an anthropocentric focus to his argument, even while strongly linked with a mandate to care for creation – as introduced in the heading.

Findings from the analysis of the *Laudato si*

Despite the anthropocentric focus revealed through a reading of the document, the *ecosophy* espoused by the Pope can be considered as sincere, as opposed to shallow. He displays real concern, and the elements listed in the methodology and theoretical framework can be clearly discerned in the text.

The encyclical provides an abundance of material for discussion and study and has, since its release, resulted in numerous studies and comments by scholars. The introduction is further analysed in a previous article (Du Toit 2024:79–110). For the purposes of this article, I will proceed to compare the *ecosophy* demonstrated by Pope Francis with that which was found in the other documents.

Global perspective: Transforming our world – The 2030 agenda for sustainable development

This document forms the basis of the global sustainable development response formulated as a plan of action by the United Nations to combat the environmental crisis (UN 2015). Similar to the encyclical by Pope Francis, in which the response of stewardship is implied in the title, the response of sustainability is firmly established by the title of the document. It is linked to the 'transformation' or change of 'our world' (UN 2015:1), reflecting that a common interest exists and a common goal is being formulated, to be achieved at a specific time. It may also imply that the actions to be proposed are for the good of all and will be accepted and implemented (?) by all those that are addressed by the document.

9. Romans 8:22: 'For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now' (King James authorised online version).

Another similarity with the *Laudato si* is the use of the word 'our'. While the *Laudato si* refers to 'our common home', the *Agenda* refers to 'our world' (UN 2015:1). It is not clear to what extent the word 'our' can be viewed as reflecting the DGR principle of interconnectedness in this phrase. Whereas both these documents are aimed at a global audience with the aim of achieving a change in behaviour, the tone of address of the *Laudato si* is intimate, reflecting interconnectedness and belonging (and accountability), while the tone of the title of the *Agenda* seems to be more formal and distant.

The first paragraph of the preamble states that the *Agenda* is 'a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity' (UN 2015:1). These three areas are the targets of the SDGs. The goal of the first SDG is to eradicate poverty, emphasising how important it is in the overall context of the *Agenda*. This eradication is to be achieved through global 'prosperity' (UN 2015:1). It is seen as a requirement for sustainable development to take place.

Of course, the logical question is whether this is at all possible, but that is not addressed.

Instead, the paragraph continues with statements emphasising that this will be done by the people making this claim, promising 'that no one will be left behind' (UN 2015:1). It indicates that the leaders making this declaration take upon themselves the task of eradicating poverty throughout the world. This is a weighty undertaking, but the gravity of the statement is diminished by the common knowledge that world leaders are often replaced, and they are capable of drastic changes in behaviour, depending on the pressures of circumstances.

These quotes reflect further differences between this document and the previous one. In the *Agenda*, a group of political leaders addresses readers, delivering statements without asking for participation or agreement. The *Laudato si* delivers an appeal to the individual to change to a life less harmful to the Earth to bring healing. The UN *Agenda* seems to focus on human prosperity, although it is reasonable to assume that the 'prosperity' referred to here is not the same as the human well-being longed for by the Pope.

The *Agenda* continues by focusing on human well-being as reflected by the quote, 'people, planet and prosperity ...' (UN 2015:1), adding that the SDGs are envisioned as being 'integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental' (UN 2015:1). Somehow the environment is mentioned last in this list.

Findings from the analysis of the sustainable development agenda

From these statements and others that are further elaborated upon in a previous study (Du Toit 2024:135–140), the

conclusion can be drawn that the Earth is not considered as an important partner in the process of achieving sustainability and that the focus is more on solving social problems related to human society. While Francis puts the blame for the deteriorating state of the Earth on human greed and sin, referring also to Patriarch Bartholomew (Pope Francis 2015; par 2:3 and par 8:8; 9:8), such accountability is not mentioned in the Agenda. The focus seems to be more on maintaining the current economic system while changing it to be more sustainable.

The Agenda considers the importance of the Earth in the process of developing a sustainable human society while achieving the SDGs, but human ownership and authority seem to be more important. The need to maintain a peaceful society to achieve these goals is acknowledged ('There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development', UN 2015:2), as is the need for a unified response ('If we realize our ambitions across the full extent of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better', UN 2015:2). This is an indication of human *interconnectedness* but is not extended to interconnectivity with the rest of creation.

Some evidence of *social justice* is found in the document, as the SDGs 'seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls' (UN 2015:1), while being 'focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable' (UN 2015:2); but it does not necessarily translate into ecojustice. The Earth (or 'the planet') is considered as a partner in the process of sustainable development 'so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations' (UN 2015:2).

These observations provide evidence for assigning an ecosophy based on a shallow environmental outlook, not based on the principles of belonging and interconnectedness or sacredness. It also does not envision a process of ecological conversion or the implementation of ecojustice.

Multifaith, conservation and economical perspectives

Multifaith perspective

The *Ethics in Action Initiative* (EIA) is a multifaith coalition formed in response to the encyclical by Pope Francis. A group of religious leaders attempted to address the moral cause of the environmental crisis, as pointed out by the Pope, through finding common ground among various religions, using shared moral foundations (Sachs & Flanagan 2022:6). The article referred to here contains the conclusions from a series of meetings held in the Vatican (Annett et al. 2017).

In concurrence with Pope Francis, the leaders acknowledge the current predicament of human society as caused by human ethical failings by stating that 'it is the human

spirit – the essential question of ethics ... that will determine our success or failure' (Annett et al. 2017:1), and they consider religion as having the moral foundation to address this.

They further point to the current economic system and resulting materialism in society as drivers for greed and personal enrichment, in turn leading to poverty and social inequality. Therefore, situations 'such as extreme poverty, hunger, lack of access to education, and deaths caused by preventable and treatable disease, are anachronisms. Worse, they are choices' (Annett et al. 2017:1).

They conclude that to 'achieve sustainable development – meaning a world economy that is at once prosperous, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable – the world needs a fundamental reorientation toward the common good' (Annett et al. 2017:1). They are of the opinion that the rule of considering what is best for the 'common good' represents the 'shared vision of the world's great religious and secular ethical traditions developed and honed over the past 2500 years' (Annett et al. 2017:1).

The conclusion by EIA regarding the contribution of religion in society, as well as the principle of common good as motivation for the response to the environmental crisis, provides a strong link with the argument for human stewardship put forward by Pope Francis in the *Laudato si*.

However, it falls short of including the Earth as part of the relationship, denying the kinship the rest of nature shares with humans since the time of creation. Therefore, the content of this document does not show evidence of the principles of DGR or of the images considered to support the presence of a sincere environmental ecosophy. The outlook of the authors remains primarily anthropocentric despite acknowledging human failings in caring for our common home.

A multifaith organisation, the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), was established in 2004 to encourage cooperation between different faith communities in responding to the environmental crisis (Davies 2013:88). Similar to the Ethics in Action Initiative, the Institute believes that focusing on commonalities between different religions can assist in engendering a unified societal response towards the environmental crisis. They celebrated May 2023 as 'Laudato si month', 'Hope for the Earth, hope for Humanity' (SAFCEI Weekly News 2023).

The focus is on aiding faith leaders in guiding their congregants towards environmentally beneficial lifestyle choices, based on ecological knowledge (SAFCEI 2024). A booklet was published for this purpose, and its introduction is analysed for this study. The 'ECO-AUDIT User Guide for Faith Communities' (2018) aims to promote eco-literacy through conducting an 'eco-audit' of how much resources

you use and how much waste you produce, guiding people on how to implement more sustainable living in their own context.

In the introduction to the booklet (2018:3), human society is admonished to 'care for creation' (recalling the title of the *Laudato si*), because 'our wellbeing is dependent on the health of our planet' (2018:3 par 1). The booklet is described as a guide on 'learning to live lightly' (2018:3, par 1). This 'journey' (2018:3, par 1) could be viewed as part of an individual *ecological conversion*. The introduction further refers to 'modern lifestyles' and how they impact on the 'finite resources' (2018:3, par 2) of the Earth, with the resulting climate change caused by human uses of fossil fuel as well as the impacts of pollution.

The authors of the booklet make a statement relating to ecojustice, saying that they consider 'the impact of climate change and fair access to resources' as 'moral issues' (2018:3, par 2), from a faith-based perspective, once again aligning with Pope Francis' opinions.

The images and concepts found in the text provide indications of interconnectedness and ecojustice, leading to the conclusion that it reflects a sincere environmental attitude, instead of a shallow, purely anthropocentric outlook.

Conservation perspective

The 'Living Planet Report: Bending the curve of biodiversity loss' was published in 2020, on behalf of the *Worldwide Fund for Nature* (WWF). The WWF is declared on their website as the 'world's leading conservation organization' (WWF 2023). It was established in 1961 and, through expanding its focus beyond conservation over the years, it now aims to 'keep the planet in balance for people, wildlife, and the planet' (WWF 2023).

As an influential organisation with considerable financial resources, the WWF has been criticised for overriding local concerns regarding conservation projects. They have been accused of influencing public media to present a favourable image and of tailoring projects to attract wealthy donors, resulting in projects viewed as eco-colonialism in developing countries (Luke 1997:32–42).

The Living Planet Report (LPR) is a comprehensive report, compiling global data on the state of the planet and the species inhabiting nature. The main theme is that wildlife has declined by almost 70% in the period since 1970, mostly because of habitat encroachment and the exploitation of natural resources by human society (eds. Almond, Grooten & Petersen 2020).

At the start of the executive summary of the report (pp. 6–8), the use of words such as 'decline', 'fall' and 'decrease' (2020:6) emphasises the reduction in the populations of wild animals detected worldwide. The seriousness and urgency of the

situation have apocalyptic connotations. The apocalyptic undercurrent is strengthened further by referring to the extinction of species, 'destroyed by us at a rate unprecedented', as well as the loss of natural habitats, for example, 'increasingly destroyed and degraded forests' (2020:6). The outlook from the results of the comprehensive survey is extremely bleak; however, the report concludes that the trajectory of the 'curve' (2020:8) can be flattened and that a sustainable human society is possible. Unfortunately, the precise mechanism of how this can be achieved is not discussed in detail; however, that may not have been the purpose of the report. The reader is left with a feeling of discrepancy between the seriousness of the results and the optimism of the conclusions.

Besides evidence of the principles of interconnectedness and belonging ('perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic will spur us on to embrace this unexpected opportunity and revolutionise how we take care of our home', 2020:8), and the apocalyptic sentiments referred to above, the overall focus of the report is on human welfare ('our economic prosperity', 2020:7) and does not provide convincing signs of a sincere approach to the environment. It can therefore be assumed to be based on a shallow, or primarily anthropocentric, environmental ecosophy.

Economical perspective

The World Economic Forum (WEF) is an independent, non-profit group founded to promote global economic cooperation (WEF 2023). It released a report in 2021 that reflects some main conclusions about the impact of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on world economies (WEF 2021). As part of this study, the preface was analysed.

An important statement from the report is that a previous WEF report predicted in 2006 that 'the risk of a global pandemic' (WEF 2021:5) as a result of increasing global interconnectedness would have serious impacts on human society. The lack of preparedness to face this threat is exacerbated by the increasing 'existential threat' (WEF 2021:5) of the environmental crisis. The report, therefore, links the COVID-19 pandemic with the global interconnectedness of human society and the environmental crisis.

These threats increase the 'need for global collaboration' (WEF 2021:5) to protect the future of the next generation – referring to intergenerational justice – while also using words with apocalyptic implications ('alarm', 'lethal', 'acute threat', 'severe' and 'longer term harms', 2021:5), indicating a deterioration in global stability. Evidence of this deterioration has been evident in the years after the pandemic in an escalation of global conflicts, a rise in social unrest in various countries and growing food shortages because of climate change (Denzin & Giardina 2021:8).

This report contains some evidence of apocalyptic sentiments (used to emphasise the seriousness of the statements), and it underlines the results of increased human interconnectedness.

It also highlights the responsibility of the current generation towards future generations (intergenerational justice) and the obligations of global leaders to take decisive action in light of the environmental crisis. While it exclusively focuses on human society and not on the Earth, it still provides an alternative perspective and useful evidence to support the conclusions gained from the excerpts of the other documents that were studied.

Conclusion

The aim of this study is to compare the underpinning environmental ecosophies of documents obtained from various sources to provide an indication of the sincerity of these approaches.

Whereas documents from the environmental discourse can be assumed to be eco- or nature-friendly, it is found through a closer, ecocritical reading of the selected documents that human well-being is the priority in most cases. The expectation might also be that documents originating from the religious sector would reflect a commitment to proper stewardship of a creation divinely bestowed on humanity. However, the underlying motivation is found to be human well-being, in other words, anthropocentric. This correlates with the anthropocentric motivation found in the documents with a secular origin.

This conclusion leads to the question of whether such an anthropocentric focus would yield a sufficient commitment to the personal, lifestyle, economic and political changes that will be required to enable human society to survive the environmental crisis, and what the shape of this future human society will be.

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The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

CRediT authorship contribution

Louisa J. du Toit: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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The author confirms that the data supporting this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

Disclaimer

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