

The interrelatedness between wisdom literature, creation theology and ecological responsibility

**Author:**Ananda Geyser-Fouché¹ **Affiliation:**¹Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Ananda Geyser-Fouché,
ananda@up.ac.za**Dates:**

Received: 17 Feb. 2026

Accepted: 02 May 2026

Published: 10 June 2026

How to cite this article:Geyser-Fouché, A., 2026, 'The interrelatedness between wisdom literature, creation theology and ecological responsibility', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 47(1), a3793. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v47i1.3793>**Copyright:**© 2026. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).**Read online:**

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

This article explores how Old Testament wisdom literature, rooted in creation theology, offers profound insights into ecological responsibility. It argues that wisdom traditions – especially those found in Proverbs, Job and Psalms – reflect a worldview grounded in divine order, natural observation and ethical engagement with creation. Wisdom literature is distinguished by its focus on creation as a source of divine revelation, with ancient sages discerning regularity in nature that reflected God's sustaining presence. Concepts like *ma'at* in Egyptian thought and *tzedek* and/or *tzedakah* in Hebrew wisdom underscore a theological order that informs ethical living, a framework scholars call 'order-thinking'. Texts like Job 12 and Psalm 19 illustrate that creation speaks non-verbally but meaningfully to those who listen, with Lady Wisdom portrayed as both a participant in creation and a divine communicator. The article integrates evolutionary science with theology, viewing evolution as continuous divine creation rather than a threat to faith. Ecological responsibility emerges from gratitude and reverence, with wisdom literature promoting stewardship through humility and ethical responsiveness. The 'fear of the Lord' becomes the ethical cornerstone linking wisdom, theology and ecological care, offering a holistic framework for addressing contemporary ecological crises.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This research bridges theology and science by demonstrating how evolutionary biology and creation theology can engage in constructive dialogue, with evolutionary processes understood as expressions of divine creativity. It connects ancient wisdom traditions with contemporary environmental ethics, offering religiously grounded responses to ecological crises. It integrates biblical scholarship with natural sciences and environmental philosophy, providing theological resources for ecotheology and faith-based environmental activism, while positioning humans as distinct yet interdependent participants in creation.

Keywords: wisdom literature; creation order; ecological responsibility; environmental ethics; evolution; stewardship; cosmic ecology.

Introduction

Due to human exploitation and carelessness, planet Earth is currently experiencing an ecological crisis (Caldicott 2009; Goudie 2013; Johnson 2014; Johnston et al. 2024; Spangenberg 2014), stressing the importance of human responsibility for the environment.

Firstly, this article contributes to the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 and SDG 15 by establishing a theologically grounded ethical basis for caring for the environment and protecting ecosystems. In the Southern African context, these goals are particularly urgent given the region's vulnerability to climate change impacts, including prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall patterns and biodiversity loss affecting both communal and conservation lands (Ziervogel et al. 2014:605–620). In this article, the emphasis falls on creation theology as the foundation for ecological responsibility. It supports SDG 13 directly by offering faith-based motivation for climate action, which is crucial in a region where religious communities play significant roles in shaping environmental attitudes and practices. The article's investigation of wisdom literature's portrayal of creation's intrinsic value and interconnectedness provides theological grounding for protecting Southern Africa's rich biodiversity, including unique ecosystems such as the Cape Floral Kingdom, the Okavango Delta and the Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere. This is where SDG 15 is addressed primarily. The concept of 'fear of the Lord' as reverence extending to all creation offers a corrective to exploitative approaches that have historically threatened these ecosystems.

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Ecotheology in Southern Africa' under the expert guidance of guest editors Prof. Johannes J. Knoetze, Prof. Kenneth R. Ross and Dr Gertrude A. Kapuma.

Secondly, this article also contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education) through its interdisciplinary integration of theology and science, modelling the kind of holistic education needed in Southern African theological institutions and universities. By demonstrating how evolutionary biology and creation theology can engage constructively, it provides pedagogical resources for tertiary institutions that seek to equip students for environmental leadership.

Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) is also addressed, as the article promotes gratitude-based ethics over exploitation, challenging consumerist paradigms that increasingly characterise urban centres across Southern Africa. The wisdom literature's emphasis on sufficiency and contentment (Ec 2:24; 3:13) offers counter-cultural resources for communities facing pressure towards unsustainable consumption patterns. Finally, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) is touched upon in the article's support for collaborative dialogue across diverse disciplines. It demonstrates the kind of partnership approach needed to address Southern Africa's complex sustainability challenges.

In the Southern African context, this conversation is predominantly crucial given the region's statistics. Ziervogel et al. (2014:605) had already stated in 2014, 'annual temperatures have increased by at least 1.5 times the observed global average of 0.65°C over the past five decades, and extreme rainfall events have increased in frequency'. This situation has not improved since then; on the contrary!

In 2024, the African continent experienced unprecedented warming; temperatures across the continent rose to roughly 0.86°C beyond the reference average recorded between 1991 and 2020. This marked it as either the warmest or second warmest year on record since 1900 (World Meteorological Organization [WMO] 2025:2). This trend has been accompanied by increasingly severe conditions across the continent. Extreme precipitation events and catastrophic flooding struck numerous parts of the continent. Across West and Central Africa, destructive rains left millions of people in nations including Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and the Central African Republic severely affected (WMO 2025:ii). Extended drought conditions throughout Southern Africa caused extensive agricultural losses and deepened food insecurity across the region. Both the El Niño event and the Indian Ocean Dipole that emerged in 2023 – each persisting into the early months of 2024 – were major drivers of these intensified weather extremes (WMO 2025:ii, 8). The impacts of these climate extremes have been profound, with sea-surface temperatures reaching record highs and coastal sea levels along much of Africa rising at a pace comparable to or exceeding the worldwide average. This amplified challenges related to water scarcity, food insecurity and ecosystem stress (WMO 2025:ii, 6–7).

Southern Africa has emerged as one of the regions most severely affected by climate-driven drought. This region experienced damaging conditions that led both Zambia and

Malawi to declare national disasters after enduring their worst drought in at least two decades (WMO 2025:8). Drought conditions intensified by El Niño, caused a dramatic decline in grain production across much of the region in 2024. Aggregate cereal yields fell 16% below the 5-year average, and countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe experienced production declines of 43% and 50% (WMO 2025:13). These agricultural failures have had severe humanitarian consequences, with severely depleted water reserves in Lake Kariba, a reservoir that holds the distinction of being the largest artificial lake on earth. This caused significant electricity shortages in Zambia and Zimbabwe, drastically reduced hydroelectric power generation and triggered prolonged blackouts and economic disruptions (WMO 2025:ii, 10). The variances in drought severity indicate that the regions bearing the heaviest burden of drought conditions in 2024 were concentrated in Southern Africa and portions of Central Africa. Widespread crop failures threaten food security for millions of people and pose severe humanitarian and environmental challenges that extend beyond immediate agricultural impacts (WMO 2025:10).

Our own country's (South Africa's) temperatures are rising by around 0.2°C every 10 years, with consequences ranging from intensified heat events and prolonged dry spells to coastal inundation and increased flood risk. Human-caused climate change has contributed to an increase in the frequency and intensity of hot extremes in recent decades (Johnston et al. 2024:13). The country faces a particularly acute challenge, given that only approximately 12% of South Africa's total land surface is suitable for agricultural cultivation. This makes domestic food security and exports, especially in these critical production areas, vulnerable to climate change (Johnston et al. 2024:12). Climate change has intensified extreme weather events in South Africa. Human-induced climate change caused the rainfall deficit that drove the severe 2015–2017 Cape Town drought, and doubled the likelihood of the intense rain that hit parts of South Africa in April 2022, which led to 400 people being killed and many thousands being forced to flee their homes (Johnston et al. 2024:13). Looking forward, even in projections where global temperature rise is constrained to 2°C, the country can expect heatwaves to grow both more intense and more frequent, droughts to occur with greater regularity and heavier rainfall events in the eastern regions – all of which will heighten the risk of flooding across this area, with cascading effects threatening lives and livelihoods. It impacts agriculture, water security and the natural biodiversity that supports the tourism sector (Johnston et al. 2024:3–4, 13–14).

Ecology has historically been a branch of biology that examines the interactions between living things and their surroundings, as well as the consequences of these interactions for all life (Oberholzer 1989:2). An ecological issue arises when the order of creation is disrupted. The relationship between Old Testament Wisdom literature and creation theology offers profound insights into humanity's ecological responsibility and the interconnectedness of cosmology, ecology and human ethics. As contemporary

scholarship increasingly recognises, wisdom literature is fundamentally grounded in creation theology, offering essential perspectives that extend beyond traditional salvation history to address pressing environmental and social justice concerns (Perdue 1994:23). This paper explores the integral connections between these theological domains, examining how wisdom traditions provide frameworks for understanding our contemporary ecological crisis and human responsibilities.

The roots of wisdom literature in creation theology

The foundational connection

Walther Zimmerli's influential (1964) characterisation of wisdom theology as 'creation theology' has established a crucial foundation for understanding this relationship (Murphy & Carm 1985:4). This connection is anchored in Genesis 1:28, where divine authorisation establishes human responsibility for a harmonious relationship with creation rather than mere dominion over it. The wisdom tradition stands apart from other Old Testament literature through its distinctive theological lens – one that centres on God as creator, draws deeply on attentive observation of the natural order and prioritises the dynamic between humanity and both the divine and the created worlds (Dell 2010:57; Geysers-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:3).

The ancient sages recognised a foundational regularity or order in their observations of the natural world. In the sages' understanding, the created order served as a medium through which aspects of God's character and activity could be discerned. Rather than perceiving God directly through sensory experience, they encountered the divine indirectly – through what creation itself revealed, through inherited communal memory, and through lived religious encounter (Perdue 1994:56). Von Rad (1965:418) mentions that the wisdom of Israel stemmed from experience.

The notion of a divinely established cosmic order has been extensively discussed by scholars. For example, in Egypt, where a more pronounced doctrine of order was developed, the creator was believed to have brought *ma'at* into existence to replace chaos (Perdue 1994:38). Similarly, Hebrew wisdom recognised *צדק* [the right order] and *צדקה* [correct action according to the order] as fundamental principles (Loader 2014:23; Perdue 1994:39). Wisdom literature is deeply rooted in creation theology. It highlights the importance of moving beyond a focus on salvation history to engage with environmental concerns and social justice.

The order and regularity of creation

According to Perdue (1994:39), wisdom theology was also acknowledged by Preuss (1970, 1987) as 'thoughts about order' [*Ordnungsdenken*]. These order ideas, which are the foundation of retribution theology, are the result of human observation, experience and tradition. The foundational

regularity observed by the sages reflects their understanding of an underlying order in creation that can be discerned through careful observation and experience.

Hans-Jürgen Hermissen's approach to wisdom theology through cosmology provides valuable insights into this understanding. According to his analysis, the ordering principle embedded in creation is not simply a product of wisdom reflection – it is more fundamental, undergirding wisdom rather than being produced by it. (Geysers-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:3). From its earliest expressions, wisdom teaching has been anchored in the reverential acknowledgement of God based on the 'fear of God' [יראת יהוה], an orientation that encompasses both devotional worship and the steadfast conviction that God stands as the originator and ongoing sustainer of all that exists.

There is a dual aspect of creation. Murphy's presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature identifies two crucial aspects of creation that warrant attention: creation as the story of 'beginnings' and creation as the arena of human experience where people live out their lives (Murphy & Carm 1985:5). While considerable attention has traditionally been given to creation as the doctrine of beginnings, the role of creation in ongoing human experience has been somewhat overlooked.

Creation, understood biblically, encompasses the entire range of existing things, from humans to ants, including even the abyss and Leviathan (Murphy & Carm 1985:6). This represents the world open to human experience and imagination. Significantly, this created world was not silent – it possessed a voice that spoke to those willing to listen.

The voice of creation

The book of Job provides compelling examples of creation's communicative capacity. The author of Job recognises the agency of God in everything by having him tell Job's friends to learn from the beasts, birds, plants and the fish (Job 12:7–8) (Murphy & Carm 1985:6). Similarly, the sage draws upon the animal world to illuminate important lessons (Pr 6:6–8; 30:15–31). This creative communication, while not verbal, maintains a steady presence that can be heard by those attentive to its message (Ps 19:2).

Both Barth and Von Rad concur that in Job 38–41, God chose to let creation speak for him, where creation itself becomes the divine voice addressing Job's situation (cf. Murphy & Carm 1985:6). This suggests that creation possesses a unique language that can speak differently to human experience than conventional wisdom or theological discourse.

The wisdom experience as ecological engagement

As creation is addressing humans, wisdom is also a dialogue with creation (Pr 3:19; 8:22–31). The wisdom experience extends far beyond a mere collection of rules or an optimistic

doctrine of retribution. Rather, wisdom represents both 'an attitude, an [ongoing] dialogue with the created world' (Murphy & Carm 1985:6–7). This approach constitutes an orientation towards life itself – a way of inhabiting the world that receives existence as a gracious gift from God.

Von Rad (1972:301) characterised this style as involving a belief that humans 'stand in a quite specific, highly dynamic, existential relationship with ... [one's] environment'. This relationship extended far beyond specific events in Israel's salvation history to encompass the full range of human experience with well-being and suffering, life and death, as portrayed throughout the Psalms. Creation is seen not only as the beginning of everything but also as the place where human experiences occur. On the other hand, in wisdom literature, we find how sages reflect on human experiences. The interconnectedness is clearly shown in how one aspect feeds on the other.

Dell (2010:58) identifies three essential ecological principles for evaluating biblical texts that are particularly relevant to wisdom literature. Dell's first principle directs attention to the intricate web of relationships between natural processes, human beings and divine activity – with each strand informing a theologically sensitive reading. The second principle is concerned with the thriving of all life, both human and non-human, in its full breadth and variety. This encompasses ideas about the essential goodness of creation (Gn 1) and awe at the wonder of the created world (Ps 104) (Dell 2010:59). The third principle focuses on the preservation of life, emphasising that in Old Testament thought, God's role is equally one of sustainer – actively upholding a world of which God remains the source but he is not a constituent part of it.

Wisdom literature concretely expresses this first principle of interrelation through its pervasive engagement with natural imagery and sustained curiosity about the workings of the created world. In Proverbs, human life is repeatedly illuminated through pithy sayings that liken aspects of human character to observations from the natural world (Pr 25:23; 6:6; 11:28; 15:17, 19). While the approach in Proverbs maintains an anthropocentric perspective, seeking to illuminate human character, it simultaneously reveals a profound understanding of the non-human world through detailed observation. The sages employed these techniques to perceive and impose 'order on the world', enabling 'human behaviour to be understood as part of a wider order' linking 'the natural world and the divine realm' (Dell 2010:60; Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:5).

An important aspect often overlooked in wisdom literature is the uncertainty and tentativeness that characterise human wisdom and the sages' observations. Far from being simplistic, wisdom acknowledges that experience frequently speaks with an ambiguous voice (Murphy & Carm 1985:7). The sages recognised that appearances could be deceptive: bitter things might prove sweet (Pr 27:7), and soft words could accomplish what force could not (Pr 25:15).

Most significantly, the greatest limitation on human wisdom was understood to be the Lord himself (Pr 16:9; 21:30) (Murphy & Carm 1985:7). This appreciation of divine mystery, of God's being beyond human wisdom, underlies the entire wisdom enterprise. The most confident expressions of wisdom's triumph should be understood more as matters of trust and hope than as guaranteed experiences.

God created with wisdom – The divine–creation interface

The personification of wisdom in biblical literature represents a sophisticated theological development that illuminates the relationship between divine activity and created order. While the precise role of Lady Wisdom in creation remains debated due to translation uncertainties regarding '*amon*' ['artisan'] in Proverbs 8:30 (Murphy & Carm 1985:5), her divine origin and association with creation are undeniable.¹

Lady Wisdom's specific role in the created world is explicitly stated: her delight is to be with human beings (Pr 8:31). Her interaction with humans through teaching, cajoling and promising life identified with divine favour reveals her function as a bridge between divine activity and human experience (cf. Murphy & Carm 1985:8).

Von Rad's (1972:148) interpretation of Lady Wisdom as the 'self-revelation of creation' provides a possibility for understanding her identity. However, Murphy suggests that this conceptualisation may not go far enough. Rather than merely representing created order, Lady Wisdom should be understood as the revelation of God – the divine summons issued in and through creation, sounding throughout the created world and heard on the level of human experience (Murphy & Carm 1985:9–10).

This understanding has significant implications for systematic theology, particularly regarding the traditional distinction between rational knowledge of God and revealed knowledge. The biblical experience suggests that Israel did not distinguish between faith and reason as later theological traditions would develop (Murphy & Carm 1985:10).

Evolution as continuous creation

Contemporary theological reflection increasingly recognises 'evolution as a harmonious way of creating', representing 'God's continued care for creation' (Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:7). This perspective challenges the traditional opposition between evolutionary science and theological understanding, suggesting instead that evolutionary processes represent divine creative activity operating through natural mechanisms. The concept of evolution (Pannenberg 1993:11) as continuous creation is seen as God's care for creation. Even if the world has already been created, God's work in it

¹According to Loader, while God created, she can be seen playing as a nursing and 'He was delighted' with her, See Loader's argument (2014:356–360) for translation options of מְנוּחָה.

is still ongoing (cf. Pannenberg 1993:11). The conservation of creation is intimately related to its beginning.

Buitendag's approach, which argues for a 'theology of nature' that embraces evolutionary science rather than opposes it, suggests that Protestant theology should overcome its aversion to natural theology (Buitendag 2009). This theological renewal enables contemporary dialogue with the sciences and allows for a qualified natural theology appropriate to our current understanding of creation.

Buitendag's position supports Darwin's prediction that 'psychology will be based on a new foundation', recognising that human cognition developed through natural selection as 'a small part of a far wider spectrum of information gathering' (Buitendag 2009:5). Knowledge itself becomes understood as 'the result of the Darwinian algorithm of variation, selection and replication' (Buitendag 2009:5).

This evolutionary perspective emphasises the embodied, evolutionary nature of humans: 'Human beings are embodied, and human minds are embrained', rejecting mind-body dualism as 'incommensurate with any picture of the world that is consistent with scientific observation' (Buitendag 2009:7). This understanding emphasises the 'co-evolution of genes and culture' as fundamental to human development (Buitendag 2009:7; cf. Haught 2003:109).

The dialogue between science and theology

The relationship between science and theology need not remain characterised by conflict or mutual avoidance (cf. Van Huyssteen 1998). As Johnson (2014:9) argues, Christian theology must express itself in ways consistent with contemporary understanding of the world to maintain plausibility and integrity. Genuine theological integrity requires that reflection on God's creation remains attentive to the best available understanding of how that creation actually operates.

A dialogue framework allows science and theology to acknowledge their differences while approaching each other with respect and mutual enrichment. Both disciplines address the same world, albeit in different ways. Where science investigates the world as an ordered system governed by discoverable natural regularities, theology approaches that very same world from the perspective of its relationship to God (Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:7).

Evolutionary biology demonstrates that life's emergence has followed no predetermined blueprint but is characterised by surprise and creativity (Johnson 2014:116). This understanding undermines the idea of a detailed, unfolding plan according to which the world was designed and operates. Instead, the created world possesses innate creativity through which new forms continuously emerge through the interplay of law and chance.

When Darwin's insights are situated within the expansive sweep of cosmic history, it becomes clear that biological life is a phenomenon of remarkable significance – one that is continuously engaged with forces within cosmic time and space. Life on earth arises in harmony with dynamics present throughout the universe (Johnson 2014:117).

Ecological responsibility as wisdom ethics

Ottati's (2013:196) concept of creation as a 'cosmic ecology' provides a valuable framework for understanding ecological responsibility. This cosmic ecology constitutes a complex and ever-active totality – an expansive, finely ordered system within which human existence unfolds in relation to the patterns, forces and structures of the wider creation.

This framework helps shape and express understanding of 'the distinctive role of humans' without falling into anthropocentrism (Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:8). While the vastness of the cosmos cannot be said to revolve around humanity or even around our own solar system, human beings possess distinct value and a position as stewards or 'distinctively equipped participants'. Possibility as well as responsibility are stimulated within human consciousness by recognition of this role.

Gratitude and obedience are ecological responses. A recurring emphasis in wisdom literature is the understanding that human responsibility flows from gratitude. Throughout Ecclesiastes, the persistent refrain is that all good things come to humanity as gifts from God rather than as earned entitlements (Ec 2:24; 3:13; 5:17–19; 9:7–9), emphasising human dependence upon divine provision (Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:8).

This perspective transforms ecological responsibility from a matter of earning divine favour into a spontaneous act of gratitude. Following Brueggemann's analysis, wisdom obedience represents not unthinking compliance but a thoughtful and ongoing response to a God who ultimately exceeds human comprehension (Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:8). When obedience is reframed as a grateful response to God, care for the environment follows naturally as an expression of that same disposition.

The 'fear of the Lord' [יראָת יהוה], as reverence for God, is not only the foundation of wisdom but also the foundational principle that connects wisdom, creation theology and ecological responsibility. This concept unites two inseparable dimensions: the devotional reverence owed to God in worship, and the theological conviction that God is both the origin and the ongoing ground of all living things (Geyser-Fouché & Serfontein 2019:3). This reverential relationship with the divine provides the ethical foundation for responsible engagement with creation.

Throughout its history, from its earliest formulations, wisdom has been conceived as a body of teaching, grounded in this reverential relationship with God. This theological foundation transforms ecological engagement from mere pragmatic necessity into religious responsibility rooted in a proper relationship with the creator of all life.

Applying wisdom ethics in Southern Africa

The ethical framework of the wisdom tradition offers relevant options to address the ecological challenges of Southern Africa. The concept of ecological responsibility that emerges from gratitude rather than legalistic obligation resonates with African communal ethics, where reciprocity and thanksgiving constitute fundamental social values. When applied to Southern African contexts, the wisdom literature's emphasis on observing creation's patterns and learning from nature (Job 12:7-9; Pr 6:6-8) validates traditional ecological knowledge systems that have sustained African communities for generations.

For example, the wisdom tradition's recognition of God's supremacy and the limits of human knowledge and control (Pr 16:9; 21:30) provides a theological corrective to technological optimism that assumes human engineering can solve all environmental problems without fundamental changes to consumption patterns and economic systems. This is particularly relevant in Southern African contexts where large-scale interventions – from dam construction to mining operations – have often proceeded without adequate consideration of long-term ecological and social consequences. The wisdom tradition's humility before creation's complexity encourages more cautious, adaptive approaches that honour both scientific understanding and local knowledge.

Besides, the 'fear of the Lord' as the foundation of wisdom offers a framework for challenging the exploitation of both people and land that has characterised much of Southern Africa's colonial and post-colonial history. When reverence for God is understood as extending to all creation and to all people as bearers of God's image, it provides theological grounds for critiquing economic systems that treat creation as mere resource and people as expendable labour. This theological vision supports movements for environmental justice that recognise the inseparability of ecological health from human dignity and social equity.

The wisdom tradition's emphasis on the sustaining, ongoing nature of creation (as explored in the 'Evolution as Continuous Creation' section) also offers resources for Southern African communities navigating rapid environmental and social change. Rather than viewing change as threatening or viewing a return to an idealised past as the solution, this theological framework enables communities to recognise adaptation and resilience as part of God's creative work while maintaining accountability to enduring principles of justice, stewardship and care for creation.

Concluding remarks: The integral connection

The integral connection between Old Testament wisdom literature, creation theology and ecological responsibility offers profound resources for addressing contemporary environmental challenges. The wisdom tradition's emphasis on careful observation of natural processes, recognition of divine presence within creation and understanding of human responsibility as a form of grateful stewardship provides theological foundations for this endeavour. These foundations move beyond salvation to engage meaningfully with environmental concerns and social justice.

The relational aspect of creation – everything existing in relationship with everything else – parallels exactly how ecosystems function. The profound passages in Job in which nature speaks on God's behalf demonstrate that all creation has intrinsic value and a voice. The recognition that creation possesses its own voice, speaking through natural processes and relationships, challenges purely anthropocentric approaches to environmental issues. Lady Wisdom's role as divine self-revelation through creation suggests that ecological engagement constitutes a form of theological encounter rather than merely pragmatic necessity, and it links the wisdom legacy most personally to God.

The integration of evolutionary understanding with creation theology, as advocated by contemporary scholars, offers the possibility of more sophisticated theological responses to the ecological crisis. Understanding evolution as ongoing creation allows us to see God's continuous creative action in the development and adaptation of the world. It enables appreciation of both the dynamic nature of created systems and human responsibility for their flourishing.

Ultimately, the wisdom tradition's foundational principle – the fear of the Lord – provides the ethical and spiritual basis necessary for genuine ecological responsibility. This reverential relationship with the creator of all life transforms environmental concern from an optional addition to a core religious obligation, grounded in a proper understanding of humanity's place within the cosmic community of creation. It recognises that ecological responsibility emerges as a natural expression of wisdom, not from duty alone, but from gratitude for God's ongoing creative care and from recognition of our distinctive role as stewards within the cosmic ecology.

Wisdom literature's emphasis on interconnectedness, careful observation and humble recognition of human limitations offers essential resources for navigating the complexities of contemporary ecological challenges. As we face an unprecedented environmental crisis, the ancient wisdom tradition's integration of theological insight with practical ecological awareness provides both foundation and direction for a faithful response to our ecological calling. The question is not whether humanity bears an obligation

to care for the created world, but how that obligation will be fulfilled responsibly.

Acknowledgement

This article is based on a conference paper originally presented (in absentia) at the Ecotheology Conference, held at Kutchire Lodge, Liwonde National Park, Malawi, on 12–15 August 2025. The conference paper titled ‘The Interrelatedness between Wisdom Literature, Creation Theology and Ecological Responsibility’, was subsequently expanded and revised for this journal publication. This republication is done with permission from the conference organisers.

During the preparation of this work, the author used artificial intelligence-powered tools by means of Grammarly for language editing suggestions and revision. The content was reviewed and edited by the author, who takes full responsibility for its accuracy.

Competing interests

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

CRediT authorship contribution

Ananda Geyser-Fouché: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Visualisation, 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.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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 this study and its findings are available within the article and its listed references.

Disclaimer

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

References

- Buitendag, J., 2009, ‘Nature as creation from an eco-hermeneutical perspective: From a “natural theology” to a “theology of nature”’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 65(1), a272. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v65i1.272>
- Caldicott, H., 2009, *If you love this planet: A plan to save the earth*, Norton, New York, NY.
- Dell, K.J., 2010, ‘The significance of the wisdom tradition in the ecological debate’, in D.G. Horrell, et al. (eds.), *Ecological hermeneutics: Biblical, historical and theological perspectives*, T&T Clark, New York.
- Geyser-Fouché, A. & Serfontein, B., 2019, ‘Creation order in sapiential theology: An ecological-evolutionary perspective on cosmological responsibility’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(3), a5157. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5157>
- Goudie, A., 2013, *The human impact on the natural environment: Past, present and future*, 7th edn., Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester.
- Haight, J.F., 2003, *Deeper than Darwin*, Westview Press, Oxford.
- Johnson, E.A., 2014, *Ask the beasts: Darwin and the god of love*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Johnston, P., Egbebiyi, T.S., Zvobgo, L., Abba Omar, S., Cartwright, A. & Hewitson, B., 2024, *Climate change impacts in South Africa: What climate change means for a country and its people*, University of Cape Town, Cape Town.
- Loader, J.A., 2014, *Proverbs 1–9*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament, Peeters, Leuven.
- Murphy, R.E. & Carm, O., 1985, ‘Wisdom and creation’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104(1), 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260589>
- Oberholzer, J.P., 1989, ‘Teologie as wetenskap: Aantekeninge van buite die sistematiese Teologie [Theology as science: Notes from outside systematic Theology]’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 45(2), a2286. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v45i2.2286>
- Ottati, D.F., 2013, *Theology for liberal protestants: God the creator*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Pannenberg, W., 1993, *Toward a theology of nature: Essays on science and faith*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY.
- Perdue, L.G. [1994] 2014, *Wisdom and creation*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN.
- Preuss, H.D., 1970, ‘Erwägungen zum theologischen Ort alttestamentlicher Weisheitsliteratur’, *EvTh* 30, 393–417.
- Preuss, H.D., 1987, *Einführung in die alttestamentliche Weisheitsliteratur*, (Urban-Taschbücher 383), Kohlhammer, Stuttgart.
- Spangenberg, I.J.J., 2014, ‘Die “vergroening” van die Christelike godsdiens: Charles Darwin, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin en Lloyd Geering [The “greening” of Christianity: Charles Darwin, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Lloyd Geering]’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70(1). <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2712>
- Van Huyssteen, J.W., 1998, *Duet or duel: Theology and science in a postmodern world*, SCM Press Ltd, London.
- Von Rad, G., 1965, *Old testament theology: Volume I: The theology of Israel's historical traditions*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Von Rad, G., 1972, *Wisdom in Israel*, 3rd edn., SCM Press, London.
- World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2025, *State of the climate in Africa 2024*, WMO-No. 1370, World Meteorological Organization, Geneva.
- Zimmerli, W., 1964, ‘The place and limit of the wisdom in the framework of the old testament theology’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17(2), 146–158. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930600005780>
- Ziervogel, G., New, M., Archer van Garderen, E., Midgley, G., Taylor, A., Hamann, R. et al., 2014, ‘Climate change impacts and adaptation in South Africa’, *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 5(5), 605–620. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.295>