

## **Rereading Biblical Creation Texts in Light of the African Primal Worldview: Toward an Eco-Theology of Creation Care**

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### **Abstract**

*This study addresses the persistent gap between Christian theological affirmations of creation and the contemporary ecological crisis. In particular, the study focuses on the African context where ecological neglect persists despite a strong religious presence. Thus, the crisis is not only ecological and economic, but also theological and hermeneutical. Interpretive trends such as anthropocentrism, dualism and the marginalisation of indigenous ecological wisdom, among other factors, escalate it. Methodologically, the study employs a comparative and contextual hermeneutical approach that puts selected biblical texts (Gen. 1–2; Ps. 104; Jer. 4:23-28; Mk. 4; Rom. 8:18-25; Col. 1:15-20) into dialogue with the African primal worldview. Furthermore, it adopts a canonical and thematic interpretation to construct a coherent theological account of creation, integrating insights from African primal worldviews' ecological ethics. The findings show that these texts jointly present creation as sacred, unified, yet vulnerable and included in God's redemptive purposes, which echo African primal ecological ethics. By integrating the ecological wisdom from Scripture, African primal worldview's resources and insights from science and technology, the study shows that these domains are complementary resources. Such integration offers a contextual eco-theological framework that can bridge the gap between faith and ecological practice while contributing to sustainable creation care.*

**Keywords:** *Theology, Care, Worldview, Eco-Theology*

### **1.0 Introduction**

The current ecological crisis not only poses a serious threat to ecosystems, human existence, social well-being and progress (Jürgen Moltmann, 1985, p. 20; McFague, 1993, pp. 1-26), but also undermines moral responsibility (UNEP, 2025, para. 3; IEP, 2023, pp. 5-7; UNEP, 2019, pp. 17-19; Jürgen Moltmann, 1985, p. 20; McFague, 1993, pp. 1-26). In Africa, this crisis manifests as droughts, floods, pollution, deforestation, desertification, climate change, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity (Conradie, 2011, pp. 50-52; Mugambi, 2003, pp. 19-21). While often framed within scientific terms, the crisis is also moral, spiritual and theological, thereby revealing a disconnect between theological claims about creation and actual ecological practices.

Scholars such as Santmire (1985, pp. 102-105 and Horrell (2010, pp. 32-34 argue that certain strands of Western biblical interpretation, shaped in part by dominion-oriented readings and dualistic frameworks and tendencies, have historically stressed human salvation in ways that

can obscure the value of creation. Such interpretations reinforce anthropocentric perspectives that largely consider nature as a resource for human use. With other broader socio-economic forces, such as industrial capitalism, uneven consumption and weak ecological governance, such interpretive trends have contributed to patterns of ecological degradation (Klein, 2014, pp. 169-175; Spash, 2012, pp. 36-39; Conradie, 2011, pp. 21-25; Speth, 2008, pp. 48-52; Diamond, 2005, pp. 7-11; White Jr., 1967, pp. 1203-1207). Thus, their interaction contributes to patterns of ecological degradation that threaten both ecological and human well-being. A United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) report has linked ecological degradation to the resurgence of diseases and declining human health (Mbaria, n.d.). Likewise, C. Lang (2007) exposed horrific health problems such as respiratory and dermatological complaints, cancers and impotence related to toxic emissions from Webuye's Pan-Paper Mill in Kenya. Children were born with indeterminate disorders, eccentric reproductive organs and retarded intelligence.

These realities underscore that ecological degradation is not only an ecological issue but also a theological challenge. Although Christian theology affirms stewardship of creation, a gap exists between theological claims and ecclesial practice. As Kasenene (1998, pp. 21-23) and Kanyoro (2001, pp. 158-160) maintain, many churches continue to prioritize human-centred concerns such as salvation, healing and prosperity while giving little attention to ecological responsibility. This gap reflects both hermeneutical (interpretive) and practical challenges as ecological care is affirmed in principle but insufficiently exemplified in practice (Conradie, 2011, pp. 23-25). In response, this study situates selected biblical texts (Gen 1–2, Ps. 104; Jer. 4:11-31; Mk 4; Rom. 8:18-25; Col. 1:15-20) in dialogue with African primal-worldview resources to articulate a coherent theological vision of creation that addresses the ecological crisis. It argues that ecological renewal needs not only scientific and economic interventions, but also a reorientation of theological imagination and practice.

Accordingly, the term “primal” has been variously interpreted within anthropological and theological discourse. Early anthropologists such as Tylor (1871, p. 6), Frazer (1890, p. 1), Lévy-Bruhl (1923, p. 4) and Brunner (1946, p. 58) linked it with notions of the “primitive” to infer a simple or pre-rational stage of religious development. Yet subsequent scholarship has challenged this characterization by offering a more nuanced and appreciative understanding of primal traditions. Several scholars argue that “primal” refers not to primitiveness but to humanity's fundamental and original orientations toward religion and the world, which are

rooted in a rich philosophical and religious legacy. In this sense, primal religion represents the basic and prior religious consciousness that both precedes and informs later religious traditions. As a dynamic category, it incorporates theological insight with empirical inquiry, reflecting a holistic understanding of reality (Taylor, 1963, pp. 3-4; Turner, 1977, p. 7; Walls, 1996, pp. 119-139).

Significantly, Bediako (1999, p. 375; 2009, p. 7) argues that the relationship between primal religion and biblical faith is not just analogical but historically and theologically vital. She argues that the Bible not only echoes a primal religious vision but is also partly shaped by similar religious structures. She maintains that early biblical interpretation, particularly within the history-of-religions framework connected with William Robertson Smith, drew on conceptual patterns akin to those found in primal traditions. Yet she notes that Enlightenment rationalism later camouflaged these links by sharply separating biblical faith from so-called “primitive” religions. She thus concludes that primal religion must not be dismissed as a relic of the past but acknowledged as a living substratum of Christianity that continuously offers valuable theological resources.

Within this framework, the African primal worldview is evaluated as a natural theological system in which the spiritual and physical realms are not separate but intrinsically interconnected. This holistic vision undergirds an ecological awareness in which creation is perceived as sacred, relational, and morally significant. Accordingly, human beings are not regarded as masters or owners of the earth but as stewards, trustees and co-inhabitants within a divinely ordered creation. This ecological alertness is rooted in cultural and religious practices such as taboos, myths and shared rituals that sustain ecological stability and boost moral responsibility. For example, prohibitions against cutting sacred trees or polluting rivers are treated as religious duties. Their violation is held to disrupt communal harmony and invite misfortune or divine retribution (Magesa, 1997, pp. 42-45). Such practices reflect an integrated moral vision in which ecological care is inseparable from spiritual and communal well-being.

This perspective resonates with biblical traditions that link human conduct to the well-being of creation. Accordingly, Deuteronomy 28 associates covenantal faithfulness with the fertility of the land, agricultural productivity and the flourishing of animals. The text underscores that ecological conditions are intimately linked to moral and spiritual life. Both biblical witness and African primal worldview thus affirm an ethic of reverence, responsibility and justice toward

creation, wherein humanity's vocation is fundamentally custodial and relational. From this perspective, the ecological crisis represents not only environmental degradation but also a failure of theological imagination and practice. It calls for a recovery of humanity's original vocation as caretakers of creation and invites a ground-breaking dialogue between biblical interpretation and African primal ecological wisdom. Such an approach provides a foundation for rethinking Christian discipleship in ways that integrate care for creation into the life and mission of the church.

Methodologically, this study employs a contextual and comparative hermeneutical approach that places selected biblical texts in dialogue with African primal worldview resources. It analyses the ecological crisis vis-à-vis biblical interpretation and rereads selected biblical texts to boost responsible stewardship. It then assesses the role of faith, science and technology in ecological care and draws on the African primal worldview to construct ecological-ethical principles for responsible stewardship of creation. Next, it offers theological and ethical challenges, which eco-friendly biblical interpretation conveys to theology. Finally, it articulates an integrated eco-theological framework aimed at transforming Christian engagement with creation. Its aim is to articulate a coherent theological vision of creation that can inform responsible ecological engagement. By drawing on both biblical and African resources, the study contributes to eco-theological reflection that is both contextually grounded and practically relevant.

## **2.0 Ecological Crisis in Relation to Biblical Interpretation**

The relationship between biblical interpretation and the contemporary ecological crisis can be better understood when viewed within its historical development. In earlier sequences of Christian interpretation, particularly in the modern era, some readings of Scripture underlined human dominion over creation in ways that risked subordinating the natural world to human interests. For instance, Genesis 1:28, wherein humanity is instructed to "fill the earth and subdue it," has been interpreted within some strands of the Christian tradition as legitimizing human control over and use of nature primarily for human benefit. Some classical theological readings emphasized human superiority and lordship over creation (Augustine, *City of God*; Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*; Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4). Besides, scholarly observations note that the text has been read to permit limitless human use of the natural world (Bunge, 2011, p. xx). Such readings, especially when combined with dualistic theological tendencies

that privilege the spiritual over the material, contributed to perspectives in which creation is viewed as secondary to human destiny (Merchant, 1980, p. 170; Bauckham, 2010, pp. 3-6).

Yet this reading has been contested and widely critiqued within current biblical scholarship, with many arguing that the text calls for responsible stewardship rather than exploitation. For instance, Middleton (2014, pp. 45-52) maintains that the concept of *imago Dei* should be understood in terms of responsible stewardship that reflects God's care for creation rather than domination. Similarly, Bauckham (2010, pp. 5-7) argues that human beings are members of the wider community of creation, but not rulers detached from it. Habel (2000, pp. 32-34) further proposes that Scripture should be read with creation as a subject rather than merely an object, thereby affirming its intrinsic value and interconnectedness.

In view of this, biblical interpretation plays a decisive role in shaping ecological attitudes and practices. When Scripture is read within a relational and theological framework, creation is recognized as participating in God's purposes (Leopold, 1949, p. 262; Taylor, 1986, p. 97). Conversely, when read in ways that exclusively prioritize human interests, biblical texts can contribute to patterns of ecological neglect (White Jr., 1967, pp. 1205-1206; Santmire, 1985, pp. 102-105; Reuther, 1992, pp. 19-22; Bauckham, 2010, pp. 1-3). Consequently, biblical interpretation reveals two broad trajectories: one supporting exploitative attitudes toward creation through certain interpretations of key texts. The other seeks to recover ecologically sensitive interpretations that affirm the integrity, value and interconnectedness of all creation. Thus, the interpretation and application of Scripture to an extent determines whether creation is regarded as a sacred or disposable resource.

### **3.0 Rereading Selected Biblical Texts for Responsible Stewardship**

According to Balcomb (2019, pp. 1-14) and van Dyk (2009, pp. 186-195), in their separate evaluation of Genesis 1–2 and related creation texts and traditions, certain interpretations have historically contributed to exploitative attitudes toward nature. While these scholars do not necessarily engage all the specific texts examined in this study, their analyses illuminate broader hermeneutical tendencies that are also relevant to texts such as Genesis 1–2, Psalm 104 and Romans 8:18-25. Other scholars (White Jr., 1967, pp. 1205-1206; Santmire, 1985, pp. 102-105; Reuther, 1992, pp. 19-22; Bauckham, 2010, pp. 1-3) maintain that some strands of Christian mission and Western exegetical practice have been linked to interpretive trends such as anthropocentrism (prioritizing human interests above creation), dualism (separating the

spiritual from the material) and dominion-oriented readings that construe human authority over creation in terms of control rather than care. These tendencies have, at times, led to the desacralization of nature and weakening of indigenous ecological practices, including those embedded in the African primal worldview.

In response, this study holds that a contextual rereading of selected biblical texts in dialogue with African primal worldviews' resources can recover relational and stewardship-oriented readings that affirm the integrity of creation and promote responsible ecological engagement. Thus, integrating biblical interpretive traditions and African primal worldview perspectives as hermeneutical resources can enhance responsible stewardship. Yet the section does not seek to perform a historical-critical exegesis of each text. Rather, it provides a theological and contextual reading of selected biblical texts that are representative of key canonical themes of creation, fall and redemption. The aim is to trace ecological motifs within these texts and to bring them into dialogue with the African primal worldview, thereby constructing a coherent theological vision of creation care.

### ***Genesis 1–2: Tilling and Keeping the Earth***

The Genesis 1–2 creation narratives provide the foundation for Christian's view of creation. According to Genesis 1, humanity is created in the image of God and given the mandate to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Nevertheless, as noted above, the text has, in some interpretive traditions, been read to underline human dominance over creation; a reading that has been critiqued for its negative ecological effects (White, 1967, pp. 1205-1206; Santmire, 1985, pp. 102–105). Yet dominion should be read as representative stewardship, imitating God's caring concern. The Hebrew verbs *radah* (rule) and *kabash* (subdue) imply responsible governance rather than unresponsive control. Genesis 2:15 reinforces this view by describing humanity's vocation as "to till and to keep" the garden. Tilling and keeping indicate humanity's active and constant role of safeguarding the integrity of creation (Wibowo, 2025, pp. 12-21; Richter, 2020, pp. 5-14, 29-66).

Furthermore, the dual responsibility of tilling and keeping deters anthropocentric misuse of creation, affirming humanity's role as God's steward in serving creation. Thus, dominion should not be endorsed as power over creation or permission for its misuse, but as a divine mandate of service and care. African primal worldview echoes this vision by underlining that humanity is a tenant on earth and its caretaker. According to the Akan, land belongs to God

and the ancestors, while people serve as trustees for posterity (Opoku, 1978, pp. 25-27). Land for the Agĩkũyũ is sacred since it belongs to God (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 40-42); hence, it is not human property but rather a divine trust that requires reverence and responsibility.

### ***Psalm 104: God's Care for Creation***

Psalm 104 presents a vivid biblical portrait of creation, which depicts the world as full of life. Animals, plants and people depend on God's unending provision since they look to God for food (Ps. 104:27). Moreover, it acclaims the diversity of creation and depicts God's Spirit as the source of rebirth since when God sends forth his Spirit, they are not only created, but also the face of the earth is renewed (Ps. 104:30). This exiles anthropocentric models by affirming that all creation exists for God's glory, not for human misuse (Bauckham, 2010, pp. 12-15). It echoes the African primal worldview, which accepts the interdependence of creation. Rivers, forests and animals are revered not as inactive matter but as participants in the sacred order. Besides, it affirms that all creatures add to the harmony of creation. The Yoruba accept that the earth and skies are integrated in mutual dependence, while the Shona emphasise communal responsibility for caring for land and water (Setiloane, 1986, pp. 22-24; Daneel, 1998, pp. 75-80). Thus, the African primal worldview complements the text in affirming the intrinsic worth of creation and God's intimate care for it.

### ***Jeremiah 4: Ecological Devastation and Human Sin***

Jeremiah 4:23-28 has an upsetting image of ecological devastation caused by human sin. The text portrays a reversal of creation imagery, often described as "de-creation", wherein the ordered world returns to chaos as a result of human sin, thereby linking moral failure with ecological devastation (Brueggemann, 1997, pp. 45-47). The author "looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light" (4: 23). This not only implies reversing creation into chaos, but also discloses the negative result of disobedience. Besides, it shows that ecological degradation is not random, as it directly relates to human violence and idolatry. Yet while human sin has ecological effects, covenantal faithfulness is inseparable from ecological flourishing (Brueggemann, 1997, pp. 45-47). African primal worldview similarly relates moral conduct with ecological stability. Violating taboos, polluting rivers or defiling sacred groves interrupts cosmic harmony, invites disaster, and causes ecological and shared failure (Magesa, 1997, pp. 42-45). Jeremiah 4, therefore, echoes primal insights that ecological health relies on moral and spiritual alertness.

### ***Mark 4: The Kingdom of God and Ecological Cycles***

Mark 4 parables draw heavily from agricultural imagery, reflecting God's kingdom as present in ecological cycles. The parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-9) illustrates seeds falling on various soils, underscoring the importance of favourable conditions for growth. The growing seed (Mark 4:26-29) discloses growth as a mysterious gift of God, which makes "the earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear" (4: 28). This reveals that God's kingdom relates with ecological practices that require patience, humility and respect of natural patterns (Wright, 2010, pp. 122-124). African primal agrarian tradition recognizes agricultural cycles as sacred rhythms sustained through divine blessing. According to Mbiti (1969, pp. 45-47), African rituals of planting and harvest express gratitude to God and strengthen mutual responsibility for the land. Proverbial wisdom underscores patience as crops grow, reflecting an ecological spirituality similar to Jesus' teaching. Mark 4 primarily reveals the mystery of the kingdom of God through agrarian imagery; yet, this imagery presumes attentiveness to the rhythms and integrity of creation, thus offering an indirect ecological insight rather than a direct teaching on ecological crisis.

### ***Romans 8: The Groaning Creation***

Romans 8:18-25 reveals a groaning creation that has been subjected to futility not by its own will, yet anticipating redemption and renewal alongside God's children. The text recognizes that salvation extends beyond humans to all creation. Its cosmic background of redemption challenges narrow soteriology that undercuts the ecological dimension (Moo, 2010, pp. 123-126; Keller, 2015, pp. 210-212). The African primal worldview's hope of renewal that reconciles land, ancestors, and community through divine blessing echoes the text's eschatological hope. Besides, primal rituals of cleansing and renewal echo the text's vision of creation anticipating redemption, thereby inspiring hope of cosmic reconciliation. This echoes primal spirituality that validates creation's participation in the salvation history (Mugambi, 2003, pp. 25-27; Magesa, 1997, pp. 40-42). The text and African primal worldview confirm creation's participation in divine renewal and validate that creation is not an object but a subject, not an inferior partner but an equal participant in God's mission.

***Colossians 1: 15-20: Christ's Reconciliation and Redemption of All Creation***

The text reveals Christ as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” Additionally, in him, through him and for him, “all things were created” and “all things hold together”. The text further discloses that Christ is the Reconciler of all creation and that redemption involves all creation. This stimulates the integration of primal ecological rituals that exemplify Christ’s reconciliation of creation into Christian worship. Additionally, it inspires Christians to view Christ as the reconciler not only of humanity but also of the entire cosmic community. By presenting a cosmic Christology wherein Christ is creator, sustainer and reconciler of all things, it thus provides a theological foundation for understanding ecological restoration as integral to divine reconciliation (Wright, 2013, pp. 60-65). Its cosmic Christology not only defies reductionist theologies that privatise salvation but also encourages the embrace of ecological reconciliation as integral to its mission.

The use of multiple texts in this study is deliberate, as it is intended to reflect a canonical approach that draws on diverse biblical witnesses. These include creation (Gen. 1–2), praise (Psalm 104), judgment (Jer. 4), kingdom (Mark 4), redemption (Rom. 8) and reconciliation (Col. 1), thereby constructing a holistic theological account of creation. This breadth moves beyond a single-text analysis to demonstrate the coherence of ecological themes across the biblical canon. Taken together, the texts reveal a unified vision wherein humanity is entrusted with responsible stewardship, creation is sustained by God, ecological disruption is linked to moral failure, and all creation participates in divine redemption. Read in this way, Scripture affirms the sacredness, interdependence, vulnerability and renewal of creation, thus offering a robust theological foundation for ecological responsibility. Furthermore, when interpreted contextually and relationally, these texts resonate strongly with the African primal worldview, which likewise underlines the sacredness of land, interconnectedness of life and humanity’s role as custodian within a divinely ordered cosmos (Kavusa, 2019, p. 251; Conradie, 2006, pp. 305-314).

In dialogue with the African primal worldview, this canonical theological vision is not merely theoretical as it is exemplified in ecological practices such as rituals, taboos and communal moral structures that sustain harmony between humanity and the natural world. Integrating biblical faith with such primal ecological resources can provide a durable and contextually grounded framework for responsible stewardship and ecological renewal, effectively bridging

the gap between faith and practice. Yet translating this theological vision into concrete and sustainable ecological action requires engagement beyond biblical interpretation alone. While biblical interpretation has sometimes operated in tension with scientific and technological perspectives (Harris, 2024, para. 3; McGrath, 2010, p. 15), the urgency and complexity of the contemporary ecological crisis call for a constructive and interdisciplinary dialogue between faith, science and technology in order to develop a robust and actionable ecological ethic for safeguarding the integrity of creation.

### **3.0 Integrating Faith, Science and Technology for Creation Care**

In some scholarly analyses, faith, science and technology have been perceived as operating in tension vis-à-vis creation care (Barbour, 1997, pp. 3-5; McGrath, 2010, pp. 9-15). However, their integration is recognized as essential for holistic ecological responsibility. Nasr (1996, pp. 83-102) argues that modern materialist roots of science erode the sacredness of nature, while Ellul (1989, pp. 131-145) assert that technology can undercut divine authority. Other scholars caution that uncontrolled scientific and technological progress can contribute to ecological harm and theological distortion (Barbour, 1997, pp. 30-32; Reinke, 2022, pp. 4-6). Yet others underscore that responsibly guided innovation, for instance in renewable energy and sustainable development, can constructively address ecological crises (Moltmann, 2012, pp. 96-100; Francis, 2015, pp. 102-103). This tension highlights the need for a theological framework to guide interaction between faith, science, and technology. In this regard, the Lausanne Movement (2024, paras. 1-3, 96) maintains that technology detached from Christ-centred faith risks fostering idolatrous tendencies that undermine responsible stewardship. Accordingly, faith must critically inform and direct scientific and technological advancement toward sustainable environmental care (Hefner, 1993, pp. 31-39; Barbour, 1990, pp. 7-8).

Yet even faith-based models of stewardship need careful scrutiny as they may inadvertently reinforce forms of human control over creation. Palmer (2006, pp. 63-75) critiques traditional stewardship metaphors for masking exploitative tendencies, while Bauckham (2010, pp. 11-12) and Horrell (2010, pp. 128-137) hold that hierarchical frameworks obscure the vital interdependence of creation. Similarly, Sallie McFague (1993, pp. 95-100) argues that certain symbolic depictions of God can misrepresent divine transcendence and weaken the ethical imperative to care for the earth.

Constructive dialogue among faith, science, and technology can foster ecological ethics that balance empirical insight with moral accountability. While science addresses the empirical mechanisms and processes that govern the natural world, faith provides meaning, purpose and moral orientation for how such knowledge should be applied (Smil, 2017, pp. 3-5; Cribb, 2010, pp. 51-66, 112-118). In this sense, faith does not conflict with science but complements it by providing a metaphysical and ethical framework within which scientific inquiry and technological innovation can be responsibly directed (McGrath, 2010, p. 143; Barbour, 2000, p. 110). This is vital since the ecological crisis is not just a technical problem but also a moral and spiritual one. Conradie (2022, pp. 45-48) and Mugambi (2003, pp. 25-27) hold that the crisis requires values such as restraint, responsibility and reverence for life that science alone cannot offer.

Thus, synchronising faith, science and technology provides a more inclusive framework for addressing ecological challenges by integrating empirical knowledge with ethical duty and theological vision (Mokoena, 2024, pp. 1-8; Agbiji, 2015, pp. 2-6). Furthermore, integrating faith's moral insights with science/technology's empirical data inspires sustainable ecological care (Hayhoe, 2021, pp. 31-35, 82-85; Okoye, 2020, pp. 19-22; Francis, 2015, paras. 62, 79, 199; Harrison, 2010, pp. 3-5, 112-114). Such amalgamation promotes conservation-minded economies and policies that confront exploitative systems and uphold creation's integrity (Magezi, 2024, pp. 5-7; Amanze, 2024, pp. 112-115; Giacomini et al., 2023, pp. 12-14; Owusu et al, 2024, pp. 8-10). Yet several scholars argue that integrating African primal-worldview ecological ethics can deepen the dialogue among faith, science, and technology (Taringa, 2014, pp. 4-5; Girma, 2013, paras. 46-56; Mbiti, 1969, pp. 39-41).

Building on this insight, this study contends that such integration yields a concrete outcome. It reorients scientific and technological practice within a moral and relational framework that underlines restraint, responsibility and respect for life. In this way, the African primal worldview does not replace scientific knowledge but situates it within a broader ethical vision where the natural world is acknowledged as sacred and interconnected. Conradie (2013, pp. 22-25) and Magesa (1997, pp. 40-42) agree that indigenous ecological wisdom provides practical models for sustainable living that can guide contemporary technological development. Accordingly, the dialogue among faith, science, and technology, when supplemented by the African primal worldview, becomes the bedrock on which to build an

integrated ecological ethic that not only informs belief but also shapes tangible practices of environmental care.

#### **4.0 African Primal Worldview's Ecological Ethics**

Some scholars define primal ecological vision via the concept of eco-spirituality, underlining the spiritual aspects of human-earth relationships (McFague, 1993, pp. 105-110; Conradie, 2006, pp. 296-300). Yet others argue that the African primal worldview offers a more inclusive framework that mingles spiritual, moral, communal and cosmological aspects of life (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 1-5, 39-41; Magesa, 1997, pp. 40-45). In this study, "African primal worldview" is used because it more adequately captures the holistic system within which ecological ethics, rituals, taboos, and communal responsibilities are embedded, while eco-spirituality is acknowledged as a related yet narrower interpretive lens.

Within the African primal worldview, ecological ethics is grounded in the sacredness of creation, affirming that the natural world is not merely a resource but a bearer of divine presence. Rivers, forests, mountains and animals are thus approached with reverence, not only for their utility but for their spiritual significance. Among the Yoruba, for instance, rivers are regarded as sacred realities embedded within divine order (Idowu, 1973, pp. 155-157), while among the Agĩkũyũ, Mount Kenya (Kĩrĩnyaga) is regarded as the space of encounter between God, humanity and creation (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 40-42). This sacral vision echoes biblical assertions that "the earth is the Lord's" (Ps. 24:1) and that creation is declared "very good" (Gen. 1:31), thus structuring ecological responsibility within theological and cosmological frameworks.

Additionally, this sense of sacredness is expressed through taboos and prohibitions that regulate human interaction with the environment. These serve as unwritten ecological laws that restrict practices harmful to ecological equilibrium, such as cutting sacred trees, polluting rivers, or overexploiting natural resources. In this way, ecological responsibility is entrenched within the moral and religious fabric of society, reinforcing the understanding that existence is a unified whole infused with divine presence (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 1-5; Idowu, 1973, pp. 155-157). Thus, violating such taboos is not just an ecological offence but also a spiritual disruption that threatens communal well-being and cosmic harmony (Magesa, 1997, pp. 40-42). This view

parallels biblical traditions in which obedience to covenantal responsibilities is linked to the flourishing of the land, animals, and community life.

Furthermore, the African primal worldview sustains ecological balance via rituals of renewal that restore both ecological and spiritual order. Primal practices such as land-cleansing rites, rainmaking ceremonies, and tree-planting rituals are not merely symbolic acts but also embodied expressions of responsibility toward the earth. They reaffirm the covenantal relationship between God, humanity and the land, echoing biblical patterns of renewal in which communities gather to restore right relationships with both God and creation (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 40-42; Setiloane, 1986, pp. 22-24). Thus, ecological care is understood not only as a technical or economic task, but also as a spiritual and shared vocation requiring continual renewal.

Moreover, ecological responsibility within the African primal worldview is innately communal rather than individualistic. The community collectively regulates access to and use of natural resources, ensuring their preservation for future generations (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 45-47). This communal ethic resonates strongly with biblical traditions, wherein covenantal laws govern land use, economic justice and care for the vulnerable (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22). It also echoes the early Christian community that practiced shared responsibility to ensure that “there was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:34). Both texts reveal that ecological ethics is attached to social justice, sustainability and collective well-being. African primal worldview reinforces these ecological practices through cultural narratives that link human beings with animals, trees and the broader environment. Such narratives are not just symbolic literary constructs but also pedagogical frameworks that encode ecological responsibility, nurturing a sense of interdependence among all forms of life (Kanu, 2021, p. ix; Kaoma, 2015, p. 25; Opoku, 1978, pp. 25-27). By shaping moral imagination and communal identity, these stories sustain a holistic vision wherein humanity is integrally linked to the rest of creation.

All in all, the African primal worldview offers a profoundly integrated ecological ethics, which challenges the desacralization of nature and provides practical resources for ecological care. Its emphasis on sacredness, communal responsibility, moral regulation, and ritual renewal offers a holistic framework in which ecological, spiritual, and social well-being are inseparably linked. When brought into dialogue with biblical theology, these resources contribute to a contextual eco-theological vision capable of addressing contemporary ecological challenges while remaining grounded in both faith and lived experience.

## **5.0 Theological and Ethical Challenges**

The theological and ethical challenges confronting ecological responsibility are multifaceted, including anthropocentrism, a dualistic worldview, the desacralization of nature, the marginalisation of primal spirituality, tensions between development and sustainability and the persistent gap between theological avowal and practical action. These challenges are interrelated and must therefore be addressed within a coherent theological framework.

Anthropocentrism is a major concern since certain biblical interpretive traditions prioritizes human salvation and spiritual destiny at the cost of creation's integrity, thereby contributing to anthropocentric orientations (White Jr., 1967, p. 1204; Moltmann, 1985, pp. 20-22; 1993, pp. 114-116). Similarly, some African churches underscore human-centred concerns such as healing, prosperity and salvation with limited attention to ecological care (Stork & Öhlmann, 2025, p. 6; Njeru, 2022, p. 3). Yet rereading Scripture in light of biblical witness and African primal worldview resources can reframe humanity's role as responsible stewardship within the broader community of creation.

Closely related to this is the influence of dualistic frameworks, which tend to separate spirit from matter, heaven from earth and the sacred from the secular. Such views have contributed to the desacralization of nature and the reduction of creation's theological significance. Therefore, some Christian traditions underline spiritual salvation while neglecting ecological well-being (Mbiti, 1969, p. 2; Magesa, 1997, pp. 31-36). Yet, African primal worldview offers a remedy by affirming the interrelatedness and sacredness of life, thereby supportive to a more holistic theological vision that integrates spiritual and ecological concerns.

Yet despite its ecological significance, primal spirituality has often been marginalized within African theology and church practice. This marginalization is partly rooted in colonial and missionary legacies that dismissed African religious traditions as superstitious, leading to the erosion of primal ecological knowledge systems (Mugambi, 2003, pp. 25-27). Yet recovering these resources presents both an opportunity and a challenge. While primal spirituality offers valuable ecological insights, its integration into Christian theology requires critical acumen to avoid uncritical assimilation (Kyomo, 2001, pp. 57-63; Schineller, 1992, pp. 50-53).

At the same time, African societies face the pressing tension between economic development and ecological sustainability. Efforts to address poverty through industrialization, mining and deforestation often exacerbate ecological degradation, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Consequently, ethical reflection on development must balance economic needs with ecological responsibility. In this regard, the African primal worldview, through its emphasis on communal responsibility and long-term sustainability, provides a valuable framework for resisting contemporary challenges such as urbanisation, globalisation, and consumerism. Besides, a persistent gap exists between theological affirmation and practical implementation. While eco-theology is articulated in academic discourse, it is not always translated into the life and practice of the church. Yet ecological responsibility should be alive and embodied in liturgy, discipleship and community engagement. Incorporating ecological themes into worship, preaching and practical initiatives, for instance, tree planting, water conservation and sustainable agriculture, can help bridge this gap and render eco-theology a lived reality.

Even though these theological and ethical challenges are vast, they present an opportunity for regeneration. They necessitate a re-examination of biblical interpretation, recovery of holistic spirituality, analytical interaction with development paradigms and commitment to practical ecological action. Addressing these issues requires an integrated and transformative eco-theological framework capable of sustaining both human and ecological well-being.

## **6.0 Towards an Integrated and Transformative Eco-Theology**

The ecological crisis needs a constructive theological vision shaped by the Bible and the African primal worldview. Each on its own is partial and vulnerable to distortion, hence a genuinely transformative eco-theology should be integrative. By appealing to the strengths of the Bible and African primal worldview, eco-theology can create a holistic structure that is theologically credible, ethically practical and contextually relevant. Rereading Scripture contextually and ecologically using African primal worldview resources would cause ecological renewal rather than dominion, simultaneously affirming creation's sacredness. It would safeguard creation, sustain and renew the life of the earth by rooting ecological ethics within communal life. Unlike modern frameworks that desacralize nature, the primal vision coalesces ecology with spirituality and community, thus offering holistic wisdom that echoes

biblical affirmations. Its efficacy among primal people justifies its assimilation in addressing current realities such as urbanisation and industrialisation, which threaten the ecosystem. Besides, it would challenge efforts to nurture anthropocentrism and to ignore ecological care. Yet, primary resources should not be used uncritically to circumvent the risk of creating superficial integrations that may fail to address modern problems. Nevertheless, their integration can broaden Christological and eschatological horizons by situating ecological hope within God's purposes for all creation. It can offer dependable cultural mechanisms, such as taboos, rituals, and shared responsibility, to embed ecological ethics in daily life.

Their integration can facilitate the formation of an inclusive eco-theology with profound ethical effects. It would first redefine dominion as stewardship and service, demonstrating that the human vocation is no longer to exploit but to reflect God's benign rule by safeguarding creation. It would secondly sacralise ecological responsibility, thereby disclosing that hurting creation is to sin against God, people and posterity. Thirdly, it would boost communal ethics by integrating ecological care into practices of worship, ritual, and daily life. Fourthly, it can challenge current development paradigms, insisting that true development must not only be sustainable, but also unbiased and justifiable. Furthermore, an integrated eco-theology would reframe Christian mission and discipleship by making creation care not an elective restoration but an essential part of the church's calling. The Great Commission would be set alongside the Great Commandment and the original mandate to keep and till the earth. Discipleship would involve not only evangelism but also ecological practices such as tree planting, conservation, and sustainable agriculture. African churches, drawing on both biblical and primal resources, would be uniquely positioned to embody this holistic mission.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

This study has examined the relationship between biblical interpretation and ecological responsibility by putting selected biblical texts in dialogue with the African primal worldview. Read canonically, these texts jointly offer a coherent theological vision where creation is sacred, interconnected, vulnerable to human action and included in God's redemptive purposes. Genesis 1–2 frames humanity's vocation as responsible stewardship. Psalms 104 affirms God's ongoing sustenance of all life, while Jeremiah 4 warns of ecological collapse as a result of moral failure. Mark 4 situates human existence within the rhythms of creation under God's reign. Romans 8 portrays creation as groaning toward renewal while Colossians 1 articulates the reconciliation of all creation in Christ.

In conversation with this biblical vision, the African primal worldview offers a complementary ecological ethic built on the sacredness of creation, communal responsibility, and moral regulation through taboos and rituals of renewal. These resources validate that ecological responsibility is not just a technical concern but also a spiritual and shared vocation rooted in lived practice. The study has thus shown that the ecological crisis is not only environmental or economic, but also theological and hermeneutical. This arises partly from interpretive tendencies like anthropocentrism, dualism and the marginalization of primal ecological wisdom. Besides, the study has argued that addressing this crisis requires an integrated framework that brings biblical theology into constructive dialogue with the African primal worldview, while engaging scientific knowledge and technological innovation. Within such a framework, faith offers moral vision and ethical orientation, science contributes empirical awareness of ecological systems, and technology offers practical tools for sustainable action. When appropriated and implemented together, these domains function not as rivals but as complementary resources for responsible stewardship.

Overall, the study shows that a contextual and integrative eco-theological approach, grounded in Scripture, enriched by the African primal worldview, and informed by science and technology, offers a coherent and actionable vision for safeguarding, sustaining, and renewing the life of the earth.

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