

The *Eco-Deigloriacentric* Reading of Gen 2:16-17 and Gen 3:17-19 for the Formation of African Environmental Ethics

By

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Abstract

The abuse, misuse, destruction, dilapidation and exploitation of the environment in the present ethos have summoned both Christian theologians and ethicists to come out with several hermeneutical approaches in reading Gen. 1-2 and without considering Gen. 3 because they inappropriately envisage Gen. 3 to be an anthropocentric text as if there is no ecological dilemma in the text. The reformers and the rest of the evangelicals see the text Gen. 3 as singularly and squarely about the fall of man without concern about the fall of creation. This anthropocentric hermeneutics, characterized by a one-sided interpretation of Genesis 3 has led to an eschatological perspective of redemption from creation instead of redemption with creation and such an eschatological mindset of redemption from creation has fueled environmental exploitation and dilapidation. The paper uses the hermeneutics of *eco-deigloriacentric* and the exegetical approach to give an adequate interpretation of Gen. 2:16-17 and Gen. 3:17-

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19 for appropriate application to our contemporary environmental ethics. The paper submits that the appropriate environmental ethics that is rooted in Gen. 2:16-17 and Gen.3:17-19 has a formation that man is not the telos of God's creation, God's glory is the *telos* and God wants humanity (God's tenant in God's creation) to understand that all things are created for the consummation of His glory, not for the consumption of humanity. Hence, God restricted the usability of creation by not giving man *carte blanche* to use creation anyhow and the African church must be guided on this principle of *eco-deiglocentric* hermeneutics of reading scripture for African environmental ethics.

Keywords: Genesis, hermeneutics, environmental care, God and humanity, *eco-deigloriacentric*

Introduction

The proper navigation for this discussion and ardent scrutiny of *eco-deigloriacentric* reading of Gen. 2:16-17 and Gen. 3:17-19 needs some adequate clarification of terms. The term ecology simply means the total relations of the creation, both its organic and inorganic, human and non-human living things and the usage of the term "eco-theology" means a study of a proper way of viewing God's creation for God's glorification. It is on these two perspectives' explanation and definition of the terms that we are employing in this paper, to read and understand the violation of God's creation by self-gratified human beings in Genesis 3 that refused divine restriction of their accessibility of creation for their survival in Genesis 1-2. The serpent's deception is rooted in the fact of convincing humanity that creation is primarily meant for their consumption and therefore, they should reject any kind of restriction from the Creator that is limiting their

consumption of all things. Serpent injects the mentality of consumption of all things without a concern of divine restriction in the heart of humanity and it has become the main reason why we are facing a lot of environmental abuse today. In his book, *Text, Church, World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective*, Francis Watson calls our attention to this consumption ideology that has led to the abuse of creation and the need for this *eco-deigloriacentric* reading of Genesis 2 and 3, when he says, “Human acts which treat the non-human creation simply as the sphere of use-value or market-value, refusing the acknowledgement of its autonomous goodness, are *acts of terrorism* in direct opposition to the intention of the creator.”² Humanity must understand that “the Earth’s ecosystem is to be valued for its own sake and not for mere human benefit.”³

Some have read the texts of Genesis 2 and 3 with such a mentality of use-value and market-value view of creation because they cite Gen. 1-3 without a proper exegetical exposition of human role in creation, some do thorough exegesis with a view of hermeneutic of resistance, so they deny the texts for having something to do with our present environmental crisis and they blame God for giving man the role of dominion and rule of creation which has created the mentality of consumption of ideology instead of care-responsibility. This work calls us to a different approach after the proper observation of the weaknesses of other approaches and the work argues that the text of Gen.1-3 is rooted in God’s glorification as the climax of creation through

² Francis Watson. *Text, Church, World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 146-147.

³ Ken Gnanakan, “Creation, Christians and Environmental Stewardship.” *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 30, Issue 2, (2006), 117.

the dominion and rule of man in his service and preservation of creation which is *eco-deiglioriacentric*.

There is currently an urgent call for “eco-deiglioricentric”⁴ reading of Gen.1-3 and other eco-theological passages of the scripture that will help humanity rethink the purpose of creation. It drives us from anthropocentric gratification to theocentric glorification. It kills our pride and promotes humility within us to care and see the universe as a partner in reflecting the glorification of the creator, not just a property for our consumption and destruction. This is the main reason why Genesis 3 makes more sense to us because it shows how man misbehaved because of self-gratification in his abuse and destruction of the universe which this paper aims to point out. It takes time and careful consideration to understand the *deiglioriacentric* argument of the paper. It reflects the historical background of longtime inquiries into the eco-theological reflection of Genesis 1-2 without a proper reflection of the fall of creation and the concern of redemption that is rooted and grounded in Genesis 3. It is Genesis 3 that shows us so glaringly that the creation is meant for the divine, not for humanity and the step against the rule of the divine is a disaster against the survival of creation and humanity. Therefore, the sin of Adam and Eve should not only be read in the sense that they were separated from God and that is all that matters but it should be read in the sense that all creation is affected and that is all that matters in retrieving and redeeming the image of creation and humanity all together.

⁴ See the next section on hermeneutics and methodology for an understanding of *eco-deiglioriacentric* reading of eco-theological passages of the scripture.

Church. The goal of establishing hermeneutical tools and exegetical methods is to uncover the text's meaning and relevance in the contemporary context.⁸ The paper uses thematic exposition of the periscope, with theological and practical implications made within the environmental ethics suitable for the African Church, especially in relationship to the issue of eco-theology and scripture, approaches to Christian eco-theology, and *eco-deigloricentric* reading of Genesis 2 and 3 for proper significance in Africa context.

The Fundamental Problem of Eco-Theology and Biblical Text

The accusation of the scripture as a root of environmental abuse is based on the anthropocentric reading of God's given great commission of man's dominion and rule of creation in Genesis 1-3. The biblical eco-theologians are aware of the article of Lynn White that summoned and accused Christianity of anthropocentric orientation that has resulted in environmental destruction and crisis.⁹ It is necessary to have the doctrinal templates and components of eco-theology for proper reflection of eco-theological studies and the scholarly response to the accusation of Lynn White, such doctrinal templates and components that eco-theologians cannot avoid are the doctrine of creation, anthropology and environmental ethics.¹⁰ The issues of eco-theology and the biblical doctrines from the biblical perspective

⁸ Kevin G. Smith, *Academic Writing and Theological Research: A Guide for Students* (Johannesburg, South Africa: South African Theological Seminary Press, 2008), 169.

⁹ Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our ecological crisis". *Science* 155 (1967), 1203-1207.

¹⁰ Conradie, "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology: Revisiting The Current Debate". *Scriptura* 119 (2020), 2.

have become problematic and salvific issues of creation through the lens that we read the text. The reading of the biblical text can, on the one hand, support the accusation of White's thesis and others who feel the biblical presentation of creation and divine speeches about creation are problems to ecological care; or, on the other hand, we can read the text in such a way that it rightly reflects ecological care for the glorification of God.

The worldview of scholars in reading the text is the rudimental issues that have different perspectives that we now term ecocentric, anthropocentric, theocentric, biocentric and all other "centric". A serious theologian or biblical scholar knows that "ecological concerns are rooted in the Christian tradition, its sacred texts, doctrines, moral codes and forms of praxis. If so, it is not Christianity that is at fault but how the Christian gospel has been appropriated to legitimise domination because the command in Gen.1:27 has been gravely misunderstood."¹¹

The misinterpretation of the texts or biblical assertions about ecology is the main problem. There is a lot of ecological wisdom in the Bible, and scholars think that such ecological wisdom is foolishness to the care of creation. On this, the following issues have been raised by the scholars as problematic issues that are facing the eco-theologians regarding the linkage between ecology and the Old Testament, especially the account of creation in Gen. 1-3. The perplexed issues are: 1. There is a direct discussion about the issue of ecology and conservation and just a few biblical texts that eco-theologians are using to give a positive spin on issues that are related to ecological crisis; 2. The Old Testament and the history of its interpretation have negative anthropocentric tendencies on the conservation and preservation

¹¹ Conradie, "The Four Tasks", 4.

of the environment; 3. The negative view of the wilderness that is rooted in the Old Testament (e.g. a hostile place, undesirable place, evil place and so on); 4. The ancient cultural concepts of patriarchy and the view of land as a commodity may wrongly affect the issue of ecological hermeneutics; 5. The neglect of creation theology in favour of salvation history is anthropocentric.¹²

In the interpretation of Genesis apart from the problem listed above, the scholars have responded to the text of Genesis and any other texts of the scripture with two distinctive perspectives that Ernest Conradie restates for us in the order of two critiques and two constructive tasks; 1. An ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological crisis; and 2. A constructive contribution to Christian authenticity and the multi-disciplinary discourse on ecological concerns in the public sphere (Conradie, 1). This problem is a fundamental problem that needs to be properly investigated and rightly explained for a responsible theology of creation and biblical interpretation of eco-theological texts. This can be done when we rightly give appropriate approaches that have been employed by scholars to scrutinize the eco-theological texts through several hermeneutical lenses. This is the reason why mottled approaches to this issue call for adequate explanation.

The Mottled Approaches in Response to Bible and Eco-Theology

There are different approaches created by scholars to respond to biblical relevance on ecological issues and to unveil the

¹² Van Dyk, Peet J. “Ecotheology: Transforming Biblical Metaphors—A Response to Gunther Wittengerg’s Transformation of the Dominion Metaphor”. *OTE* 25/2, (2012), 406-407.

perspective of the scripture and defend it. These approaches have a lot to do with the issue of “dominion” and “subduing” of creation that has served as a fundamental reason for the degradation, abuse and deformation of creation. The text of Genesis and the great commission that God has given to man to dominate and subdue has been accused of ecological degradation. In response to these accusations and for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the scripture, stewardship and apologetic responses to the accusation have been promulgated and promoted. The proponents of this response are Joseph Sittler, Jürgen Moltmann, Robin Attfield, Douglas Hall, Paul Santmire, Felix Wilfred, Laurel Kearns, Willis Jenkins, John Haught, Ernst Conradie, and others. White’s accusation of Christianity is the birth of this stewardship and apologetics approach. These scholars, in responding to White, argue that the interpretation of Genesis and other biblical texts about ecosystems should be blamed and not the texts themselves, because the blame is being given to the misinterpretation of the text by enlightenment and anthropocentrism of the West, which fostered some sense of disenchantment with nature as a sign of progress and secular humanism.¹³

On the other hand, we have revisionist (recovery hermeneutics) and Reconstructionist (resistance hermeneutics) to the response to ecological crisis and biblical texts. Scholars who are proponents and promoters of this view are John Cobb, Norman Faramelli, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie Mcfague, Leonardo Boff, Marthinus Daneel, Ben-Willie, Kwaku Golo, Maathai Wangari

¹³ Felix Wilfred, *From the dusty soil: Contextual reinterpretation of Christianity* (Chinnakadai St. Trichy: Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, 1995), 209.

and other few eco-theologians, who tried a reinterpretation of the text, the creation, and the reliable theology of nature-contextualization; and this falls into the liberal mindset of hermeneutics that is rooted in suspicion in reading both the Bible and Christian traditions.¹⁴ This present work is rooted in the recovery hermeneutics that draws the ethical prescription from the biblical text for creation care. This means we are going to draw the ethical wisdom of creation care from Genesis 2 and 3 for adequate eco-*degloriacentric* reading of the biblical text.

The Eco-*Degloriacentric* Reading of Gen 2:15-17

Before we make sense of Genesis 3 and its eco-theological implication, we have to make sense of Genesis 2:15-17 and its restrictive freedom to humanity. God specified the role of humanity in Chapter 2 regarding his creation for the prevention of man's destruction of creation. That is why Gen. 2:15 says, "The Yahweh Elohim took the human and put him into the Garden of Eden to tend it and guard it. There is a need for proper reflection of the two terms "abad" and "shamar" which are the governing terms of the text for appropriate interpretation. "The term *abad* often refers to serving God or other gods (Exod. 3:12; Deut. 7:4)... Moreover, the coupling of *abad* and *shamar* (keep/preserve) in Gen. 2:15 suggests that this combination of verbs means something like "serve and preserve" or care for and conserve."¹⁵

It is on this ground explanation of these two terms here that other scholars feel that the first action of Yahweh Elohim is to form *adam* and the singular reason for forming *adam* from

¹⁴ Conradie, "The Four Tasks of Christian Ecotheology," 204.

¹⁵ Norman Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of the Earth* (T&T Clark: Sheffield Academic Press, 2011), 49.

adamah is for *adam* to “serve” and “keep” *adamah* and it seems like *adamah* is the source and the reason for the existence of *adam* (2:7) (Habel, 50). While God is the source of *adam* not *adamah* because the text is not in any divinizing *adamah* as the source of *adam*. After all, it is obvious within the text that both *adamah* and *adam* are God’s creatures for God’s purpose through the reflection of God’s glory. So the text makes it clear that God owns both *adam* and *adamah*. Meanwhile, God created *adam* in His image and likeness to be his animated representative to serve and keep His creation for His glorification.

When we carefully look at the larger message of these accounts, it is clear for us to understand without any confusion that the garden *belongs* to Yahweh Elohim, but *'adam* (a collective term meaning “humanity”) was given the privilege to serve and the responsibility to keep this garden under the sovereignty of their creator in making sure that Eden reflects the glory of the Creator under the direction and authority of the Creator.¹⁶ As Pope Francis pointed out, “When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures.”¹⁷ God can only be reflected when man rightly takes his God’s given responsibility by serving and preserving God’s creation for God’s glorification. It is misreading to think that the verbs that are employed in Gen. 1:26-28 and Gen. 2:15 are diametric opposites because it is not so.

The mandate to have dominion over creation is not encouraging any ecological destruction, but it is encouraging responsible preservation for God’s glorification. The two

¹⁶ Sandra Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Lisle, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2008), 69.

¹⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitors, 2015), 87.

traditions are mutually inclusive despite the efforts of some scholars to disconnect the two because both Genesis 1:26-28 and Gen. 2:15 give us a picture of *adam* as a companion or caretaker who serves and preserves God's glorious abode in *adamah*, the primordial forest of Eden.¹⁸ And it seems like "Genesis 2 reminds us that we are indeed Earth beings with all creatures, and dependent on Earth for our being. The mission of Gen. 2.15 is a call to return home and care for the very source of our being: Earth."¹⁹ Meanwhile, *adam* must care for God's Eden knowing fully well that he has been given a restriction in his consumption of whatever he is caring for in creation which is fully stated in Gen. 2:16-17: "And the Lord God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

The command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the only negative stipulation of God's covenant with *adam*, such a negative stipulation "seems like a simple, even silly rule. But in reality, this one edict encompasses the singular law of Eden—God is God and we are not. If humanity would simply acknowledge the innate authority of the Creator, they would recognize that they were tenants and stewards in God's garden²⁰ or God's environment. And that simply means that if they wanted to be more than just tenants and stewards in God's garden, they had to seek *carte blanche* to choose their own rules and decide for themselves what was "good and evil", by seeking autonomy instead of theonomy, then they would die.

¹⁸ Habel, *The Birth*, 53.

¹⁹ Habel, *The Birth*, 57.

²⁰ Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 133.

Unfortunately, humanity's choice was autonomy instead of theonomy. The covenant was broken and the curse was enacted on the innocent environment because of disobedient humanity.²¹

This is God's restriction of man's abuse of creation in consumption because the entire creation is for God's glorification but not for the self-gratification and consumption of man. God did not give man a *carte blanche* to use creation the way he wanted but to use it by serving and caring for it under his supervision and authority. God created all things for the consummation of his glorification and not for the consumption of man's satisfaction. This is the main reason the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil makes powerful sense because it glorifies God but is harmful to humans. Therefore, the availability of resources in Eden is guided by God's restriction. The only reason for the care of everything in the Garden, including the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is because it reflects the glory of the creator but it is the limit of man's consumption.

On this issue, Lynn White as he winds down his troubling essay against Christianity, rightly reiterates for our sober reflection that "we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man."²² Meanwhile, the problem with White's assertion is the assumption that such an axiom is a Christian axiom. It is an anti-Christian axiom which the author of Genesis 3 is polemically attacking. The Christian axiom is the fact that creation is primarily meant to glorify the Creator and so humanity must use creation in respect for its primary purpose.

²¹ Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 133.

²² White, "The Historical Roots," 1207.

We can see very clearly that Yahweh Elohim places limits on the resources we can consume from the Earth, to sin is to overstep those limits because it is a divine glorious limitation that may not give man any self-gratification but it gives God all forms of glorification. It would be a serious form of arrogance and disrespect for man to not respect and value the limitation for him under the authoritative restriction of the creator.

Ecological Crises and The Fall of Creation in The Fall of Man in Genesis 3

It is very important to begin this eco-deigloriacentric exposition of Genesis 3 with John Stott's thought. In his book, *The Radical Discipleship: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling*, John Stott properly and rightly asserts that "the Bible tells us that in creation God established for human beings three fundamental relationships: first to him, for he made them in his image; second to each other, for the human race was plural from the beginning; and third, to the good earth and its creatures over which he set them. Moreover, all three relationships were skewed by the Fall....and the good earth was cursed on account of their disobedience."²³

But before then we see the connection between Gen. 3 and our previous eco-deigloriacentric analysis of Gen. 2 reveals to us that humanity fails to do their God's given duty of serving and preserving creation. Consequently, humanity abuses God's creation in their greed. Man disobeys God's given restriction because of the mentality of consumption of all things in God's creation. This disobedience of God's given restriction of not

²³ John R. W. Stott, *The Radical Discipleship: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 49-50.

eating from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil led to the curse of creation. Gen 3:17-19 rightly asserts, “Cursed is the ground because of you (Adam and Eve), through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field.” Our relationship with the earth is distorted by sin. We are no longer in harmony with the Earth as in the Garden of Eden. Since its inception, humanity has been the root of environmental problems. Genesis 3 gives us a picture of creation that was perfectly created by God and was terribly affected by the fall of man. Man has been a bad neighbour to creation both in the fall and the mismanagement of the creation after the fall.

The conversation between the Serpent and Eve is rooted in the mindset of consumption and restriction. Our interpretation of Chapter 2 gives us an understanding that restriction is God’s will and consumption of all things is the serpent’s will. This means that man sided with the serpent when he followed the way of consumption instead of restriction to the glory of God. So Genesis 3 gives us an understanding that without divine restriction creation is liable to every form of abuse and destruction in the hands of humanity. For this reason, a careful analysis and interpretation of divine restriction and serpent’s consumption in Genesis 3 guides us to understand the abuse of creation in the disobedience of humanity.

The misinterpretation of Genesis 3 has affected the proper picture of creation in the divine grand plan. As long as we view Genesis 3 as the fall of man instead of the fall of creation, we shall continue to abuse creation in promoting our anthropocentric perspective of human election, salvation and redemption. This is the main reason why we talk about lost souls every day without considering a lost creation in a day. The fall of man is a fall of

creation, and redemption is not rooted in God trying to redeem humanity alone but in God redeeming creation including humanity. Any redemption that is not grounded in the inclusive sense of the entire creation is not redemption at all and if we are going to properly appropriate God's creation we must first and foremost have a complete dementalization and rementalization or conceptualization and reconceptualization of our minds from viewing Genesis 3 as a fall of humanity to the fall of creation in its entirety. The fall of humanity in Genesis 3 if properly read affects the "intrinsic goodness of God's creation in Genesis 1-2. Before delegating Adam and Eve with the care of his creation, God determined that it was all good. Regrettably, humans chose to defy him and ruin the earth.²⁴ The fall generated a mismatch in the creation's equilibrium. The issue shifted from a damaged connection with God to a damaged relationship with nature.²⁵ Gen. 3 gives us an understanding that sin within creation is a threat to the survival of creation, and a threat to the environment is a threat to humanity.

The violation of God's instructions by *adam* in Genesis 3 implies that the destruction of the environment is the destruction of humanity. Man is not just interrelated to the environment; man is integrated into the environment in his formation and glorification of God. This is the main reason why God cursed the environment which has direct consequences for the survival of humanity. The curse of the environment is a direct punishment to humanity. Any environment in which humanity is not restricted in

²⁴ K. Mwambazambi, "A Theological View of Environmental Protection in Africa". In *die Skriflig* 45(4), (2011), 853.

²⁵ G. Fihavango, "Quest for Ecotheology In A Situation of Ecological Disaster". In Mugambi, J.N.K. & Mika, V. (eds.), *Christian Theology And Environmental Responsibility* (Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 93

its mentality of consumption will become a scattered environment. Just like the tree of knowledge of good and evil that is not meant for consumption, man was affected by consuming it. Consequently, creation is not meant to satisfy the greed of the creatures but to primarily reflect the goodness of the creator even in the assignment given to them to dominate and subdue creation for the creator.

The author of Genesis certainly did not understand God's words "dominion", and "subduing" of creation to be a *carte blanche* for exploitation because he gives them restrictions not to consume everything (especially the tree of knowledge of good and evil) and he gives them a prescriptive assignment to cultivate and protect the guiding which they disobeyed and that led to a cursed creation that we have today). "Humanity was created and commanded to serve and to protect, yet humanity has instead ravaged the garden. And like the results of 'Adam's choice in the arena of human relationships, in the arena of our relationship with creation, the results are all around us."²⁶ This means that "our fallen race has instead chosen to use its superior gifts to exploit and to abuse. In our greed, we have taken what we wanted with no concern (often no thought) as to what the consequences of our behaviour might be upon God's good gift."²⁷ The greed is rooted in our misunderstanding that all things in creation are created for our corruption, even the things that bear the mark of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we are insisting on consuming all without a second thought of their primary purpose (God's glorification).

²⁶ Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 74.

²⁷ Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 74.

The Formation of African Environmental Ethics from Eco-Deigloriacentric Reading of Genesis 1-3

Africans must understand that the fall of man opened doors for God to reach us either with his justice and punishment or mercy and grace. It is obvious that in Christ, God made His decision known, that he desired and decided to reach man with his mercy and grace which resulted in action toward the care for his creation too, that man has stubbornly affected through the fall. This means that God's plan of restoration of all things to their original state is not limited to humanity but expanded to the entire creation. God's redemptive plan is not only to save our souls but to redeem the entirety of his creation, especially all the ways sin has marred creation – spiritually, psychologically, socially, culturally and physically. Notably, the *telos* of creation and redemption are the same: to create a perfect material world with souls who love everyone and everything God created through their care and concern for the well-being of the holistic creation.²⁸

If there is going to be proper ethics then there must be a proper teaching of the intrinsic value of creation beyond the consumption of man and we have to give a proper disorientation, orientation and reorientation about redemption through an understanding that redemption is not an anthropocentric (man-centred) but holistic (man and entire creation). Feuerbach, for example, comments: "Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the

²⁸ See Mogomme Alpheus Masoga, "The interface between ecotheology and practical theology: An African indigenous knowledge systems perspective", *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* Vol 9, No. 2 (2023): 1-20.

salvation of his soul.”²⁹ This must be discarded and Christians must be guided to see Jesus Christ as the Lord of creation, not just the Lord of humanity; or as the saviour of the entire creation, not just the saviour of Christians. Christocentric view of redemption is holistic and humanity must live in expectation of God taking pleasure in redeeming his entire creation from sin. Richter rightly posits, “God takes pleasure in His creation. He has designed it, and provided for it, and he expects that His people will respect and protect it. If I were to summarize the message of the Old Testament regarding creation care into a single proverb it would be this: The earth is the Lord's and all it contains; you can make use of it in your need, but you shall not abuse it in your greed.”³⁰

The curse that we (humanity) brought upon creation in Gen 3 keeps creation in expectation of her total freedom for her adequate glorification of God. That is why the question in Romans 8 is, “Why does creation anxiously long for the revealing of the sons of God? Because at the parousia creation will at last be freed from the chaos of *Adam*’s rebellion, it too will be **healed from the effects of sin.**”³¹ This means that God made all things for Himself, not for us. This must be the climax of Christian environmental ethics: the primary purpose of creation is to glorify the creator because “the garden and its creatures are not ours, they are His. At the dawn of creation, 'Adam was appointed to care for the garden, specifically to tend it (serve and to defend it Gen 2:15).”³² Christian environmental ethicists should understand that our theological belief and ethical behaviour toward creation must be

²⁹ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 287.

³⁰ Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 73.

³¹ Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 73.

³² Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 74.

rooted in the sense that all things are primarily created for God's glorification and we must never divorce ethical behaviour (orthopraxy) from theological belief (orthodoxy).

The most important points that African ethicists should note for proper environmental ethics in Gen. 2-3 are the following:

1. The environment is a product of the good God and it reflects the character of that God (Psalm 50:6;104; Act 14:17).³³
2. The goodness of creation is before human observation both chronologically and theologically. The goodness of creation is rooted in the divine proclaiming in its every phase, from creation of light (1:4) to the emergence of continents from the oceans (1:10), to the growth of vegetation (1:13), to the function of sun and moon to mark the days and seasons (1:18), to the emergence of fish and birds (1:21), and of land animals (1:25). All these and more were declared good before the arrival of the caretakers (humanity). So the value of the environment is the reflection of the creator, not the value we humans place on the environment,³⁴ the goodness of the environment or creation is rooted in the purpose of the Creator which involves development, growth and change in "natural history" as well as human history.³⁵
3. The glory of God is the teleological affirmation of the whole creation including humanity in it. The creation

³³Christopher J. H.Wright, *Old Testament Ethic for People of God* (Nottingham: Inter Varsity Press, 2004),106.

³⁴ Wright, *Old Testament Ethic*, 107.

³⁵ Wright, *Old Testament Ethic*, 107.

exists for the praise and glory of its creator God. As creatures, we humans share in that reason for existence - our “chief end” is to bring glory to God.... so we share with the rest of creation - the purpose of glorifying God (Psalm 145:10; 21;148; 104:27-28;96:10-13; 98:7-9).³⁶ Therefore, we are ethically commanded by the creator not to only exist to praise and glorify God ourselves but to facilitate the rest of creation in doing so.³⁷

Conclusion

An African Christian who truly understands the responsibility and commitment to care for God’s creation will show concern for the environment because it bears the signature and stamp of God’s ownership for the reflection of God’s glory. God has given us responsibility to care for the creation but he does not give us liberty to abuse and misuse God’s creation for our self-gratification. The responsibility that God gives man is the main reason why the Bible says on the one hand that “The earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 24:1) and on the other hand, “The earth he has given to humankind” (Psalm 115:16). It is not a contradiction.

Eco-theologically, Psalms 24:1 is navigating the fact that the earth belongs to God in the sense of creation and ownership and the earth's primary purpose is to glorify God, but Psalms 115: 16 in complementing Psalms 24:1 insinuates God has given the earth to humankind in the sense of them being created in God’s image with the serious responsibility to care for the earth by serving and preserving it in such a way that the earth reflects its primary purpose: glorifying its Creator. Now the relationship

³⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethic*, 114.

³⁷ Wright, *Old Testament Ethic*, 116.

between humanity and the environment is that of kinship,³⁸ not kingship. Man is not a king to God's environment, he is a partner and a neighbour.

Therefore, we constantly learn to relate to the earth as a gift from the creator and note that the earth has an intrinsic value, not as a resource to be exploited and used for our egocentric pleasures. This is the main reason why Francis of Assisi referred to the Earth as our sister and mother in his Cantic of Creatures, but we are maltreating this sister and mother, therefore, creatures of all kinds including humans, cry out against our destructive actions, causing climate crisis, loss of biodiversity, and human suffering as well as creations suffering and all these things will not come to an end until our environmental ethics and theological perspectives take the intrinsic value of the earth or environment serious. Meanwhile, if there is going to be a proper and responsible way of faithfully living and accountably caring for God's creation, then we must read eco-theologically texts *eco-deigloriacentrically*, instead of *anthropocentrically*. This is a better hermeneutical perspective that will save creation from man's greediness to God's glorification. This concept would help Africans to avoid the wrong perspective of handling environmental problems.

³⁸ See the work of Emmanuel Twumasi-Ankrah, et al., "Re-Examining the Christian Ecological Models Twumasi-Ankrah, et al., "Re-Examining the Christian Ecological Models in Light of Eco-Theology and the Old Testament", *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Vol.4 No.7 (2023)*. Twumasi-Ankrah, et al's paper "has proposed the "kinship model" to drive home the idea that humans and the earth are relatives or kinsmen. Humans who are kinsmen are expected to seek the well-being of one another and every form of oppression is frowned upon in such a relationship." Twumasi-Ankrah, et al., "Re-Examining the Christian Ecological Models", 890.